

Serbia's attitude towards Albania during the period of Wilhelm Wied

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Abstract

This manuscript analyzes a distinctive period of Albanian history, that after the Balkan Wars and Conference of Ambassadors in London, a period of external political influences with many different interests to implement or prevent the development of the newly created Albanian state. In this context the article focuses in the attitude of Serbia towards Albania, with Serbia's aim to disable the consolidation of the Albanian state. It tried to influence in the political circumstances regarding the nomination of the ruler prince or at least it tried to alter the situation in the field through its different exponents, religious or political affiliations, in order to make the longstanding dream possible to cruise through the Albanian lands. The declaration of Albanian Independence evoked great concern to the Balkans neighboring states who had dedicated Albania as war trophy. On the other hand, the Serbian politics tried to find elements which would undermine the act of Independence or to put it on a shade in any form. The interest of Serbian politics towards Albania was consistent. If we want to best understand the attitude of the Serbian politics towards Albanians, during this time, we have to analyze in a comparative manner Serbia's politics in Albania and Kosovo and other occupied territories. While in Albania it committed itself for a Muslim prince, in the occupied Albanian territories it followed a strict anti-Islamic and anti-Albanian policy.

Keywords: Attitude, Albania, Serbia, Prince Wied, Austro-Hungarian.

Introduction

The Declaration of Independence of Albania and the expansionist politics of Balkans neighbors propound the quest of Albania, as a European issue, since November 1912. The disruption of *status quo* in Balkan, which was kept artificially until then, evoked the controversies and the different interests that European powers had between them in general and in Albania's case, in particular. The declaration of Independence of Albania evoked great concerns to the Balkans neighboring states who had dedicated Albania as war trophy. The Great Powers upon recognition of the Albania's Independence faced some very difficult tasks. In one hand, they had to harmonize and keep the balance between each other; on the other hand they had to come to terms with Serbian's, Greek's and Montenegrin's innumerable claims towards the Albanian territories and lastly the confrontation with the Albanian population that claimed the preservation of their ethnic territories. In such a situation these European powers not trusting each other and also to preserve their influence in Albania on behalf of consolidation and country's leadership, decided to nominate a foreign prince on top of the Albanian state.

The appointment of foreign monarchs on top of new states in Balkans was an earlier practiced solution by the Great Powers. Before Albania, the monarchs whether princes or kings that were placed to lead Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, during the XIX

century were progeny of the largest European Empires (Puto, 119). Actually, to appoint a foreign prince to lead Albania, at the end of 1912, was compiled a long list of Princes eager for throne. Vienna and Rome as the most interested centers for Albania discussed and recommended a lot of candidates for the new post. The issue of the head of the throne of the new Albanian state was agreed after a lot of negotiations and diplomatic arrangements. There were more than 17 nominations presented for the throne. By Germans, as nominees were proposed: Duke Von Urach, Prince Karl Von Hohenzelern and Prince Wilhelm Von Wied, by French as a contender was proposed Duke Montpesier while Artur of Connagut was proposed as English nominee. Swedes proposed two nominees; Princes Duke Soedermanland and Duke Westgothland. The Ottomans proposed Burhan Edin and Abdyl Mexhid as well as another Egyptian nominee, Ahmed Fuad. A contender was also Alandro Kastrioti professed as "Skanderbeg successor" and prince Gjika of Rumania and some others (Puto, 1978, 566). It is less known but also interesting the fact that Montenegro, a small state, kept hope to take the Albanian throne. It even kept contacts with some inhabitants of North Albania who visited Cetinje and as a gift for their support they took money and weapons. Nevertheless, the Great Powers wanted an independent Albania controlled by them and not an extended Montenegro. It is obvious that the proposals and the nominations were heterogeneous with Christian and Muslim Princes that expressed the different interests from the religious perspective in Albania. By evidence of German ambassador in Vienna, Çirski, the idea for Wied was first manifested by Fazli Pashë Toptani who announced it to the Romanian ambassador in Vienna since 10th of January 1913. In Bucharest this idea was welcomed since Wied was the nephew of the Queen of Romania (Shala, 2006, 262). However, for the definite arrival of Wied as Prince of Albania in the European and Albanian press was not written until September of 1913. Serbia as one of the most interested parties for the Albanian territories was very active in its politics about the appointing of the ruler Prince in Albania.

In the beginning of November 1913, the minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania made clear to the delegate of Serbia in Bucharest, Ristic, that the case of the appointment of Prince Wied in Albanian's throne was coming to an end (Shala, 2006, 263). On 8th November 1913, the King of Romania was notified regarding the approval that the Great Powers provided for Wied to be nominated as a Ruler in Albania (Rappaportii, 1928, 35). The interest of Serbia for the nomination of the Prince and the flow of events in Albania was so great that the Serbian press, respectively, the newspaper "Trgovinski Glasnik" two days prior the official announcement was given to the King of Romania, published an article with ironic title "First-Head of Tribes" (Trgovinski Glasnik, 07.09.1913), alluding allegedly in the tribal and background character of Albanians. The interest of Serbian politics towards Albania was consistent. The Serbian politics tried in every manner to find elements that would harm the act of Albanian Independence or would put it in any kind of shadow. The act of nomination of the prince represented a chance that should be exploited in the political meaning from the Serbian diplomacy.

Consequently, on 28th November 1913, the Great Powers proclaimed the nomination of prince Wied as the King of Albania, the Serbian representatives from Thessaloniki

and Bucharest announced happily for the selection of Durrës as capital of Wied considering a victory of their exponent Esat Toptani and as a fist for the Government of Ismail Qemali, which had its headquarters in Vlora. The monitoring of European politics for the nomination of the prince in Albania and the possibility to revoke it was a priority of the Serbian diplomacy during the whole time. Prior to having received the power in Albania by Wied, the Serbian diplomacy tried to coordinate the issues between different Albanian exponents to influence the flow of events. On 8 December 1913, the Serbian official Qirkovic reported to Pashic for the arrival of an Albanian group in Belgrade who were sent there by Esat Pasha and Ahmet Myftari of Mat. The Albanians who visited Belgrade in this period were Arif Hiqmeti from Llojan of Kumanova village, Jusuf Beu from Oher, Ali Beu colonel and close friend of Esat Pasha and of Abdurrahman Efendi from Mat (Shala, 2006, 267). This delegation remained in Belgrade for four to five days (approximately until 15 December) with expenses of Qirkovic and Pashic. Returning from Belgrade these missionaries started the action in the favor of nominating Burhan Edin as prince of Albania. Even though Prince Wied had been already appointed as a Ruler of Albania with this act they wanted to prevent the process of taking of the power. Arif Hiqmeti with his mercenaries requested from the Serbian soldier in Dibër; machine guns, rifles, cannonballs and ammunitions to be prepared in fratricidal actions. Regarding the implications of Serbia, there were some writings from the Vienna press, among them there was a writing that the Serbian consul in Vlora, Gavriloviç requested for some time to avoid every contact with Esat Pashë Toptani since even the foreign representatives in Vlora and Durrës had figured out that Serbia was helping Esat Pasha. Seeing the determination of European powers to support Wied, the Serbian Prime Minister Pashiç formally agreed and did not express openly against him or or at least so it seemed.

Considering the actual situation and the Serbian attitude towards the act of Wied's nomination, we think that the Serbian policy acted in secret for the appointment of a Muslim leader in Albania who would somehow be related to its interests. Essentially, Serbia was not for any Prince but in the best case for it, he should have been someone from the Muslims keeping alive the hope for a religious war surging. If we want to best understand the attitude of the Serbian politics towards Albanians, during this time, we have to make comparisons between the politics it made in Albania and the politics it governed in Kosovo and other occupied territories. While in Albania it committed for a Muslim Prince, in the occupied Albanian territories it followed a strict anti-Islamic policy. Thus, the Montenegrin and Serbian armies since the autumn of 1912 had taken extremely repressive measures towards the both Albanian Muslims and Muslims converting them forcibly into orthodoxy and Slavism. The number of Albanians that were forcedly converted under the pressure of the Serbian invading structures reached several hundred. In Gjakova for example 1200 people were forcedly converted, in Peja and the suburbs around 10.200 people, among which an imam and a dervish. Multiple religious conversions followed also in Plava, Gucia, in Rugova, in Berane etc. Those who opposed the conversion into Christianity usually were shot to death (HPSH, 1996, 144).

It is believed that Serbia acted in parallel in two directions. In the diplomatic plan from abroad, it seemed to accept the international proposal, while from inside, in

the deceiving way it acted against this plan in cooperation with Albanian elements being exponents of its politics. However, international politics decided to remain consequential to its actions, during that period, and then Serbia returned to the action plan with Albanians by finding collaborators in the figure of Esat Pashe Toptani, Arfi Hikmeti, etc. Basically, Serbia was consequently intruding against the consolidation of the Albanian State. Pashic himself had declared in the Serbian Parliament that Albanians who fought for the liberation and independence of Albania were people that fought for foreign interest, whilst only Albanian agents who were paid by him were for 'cooperation' and 'friendly relations' (Shala, 2006, 267). According to the British documents who speak for the secrete Serbian actions in Albania, we come to understand that the intentions of Serb-Russians after the appointment of prince Wied, was to come out with the request for a Muslim prince in Albania, as a rivalry of the current ruler, aiming to a civil war in interest of Slavs (Duka, 2012, 530).

The political mechanism which Serbs relied on mostly in ration to Albanians was the religious disunity, which even at a time had started to acquire dangerous path. Serbian press continued to hold forth that the formation of the Albanian State with a protestant ruler heading the Muslim state was something unnatural. The outbreaking of the uprising in the Central Albania gave the possibility to Serbia to act more powerfully in this direction, even more that the patriotic volunteers from Kosova united with governmental forces against the rebellious insurgents. At this time, appears the name of Isa Boletini who headed a Kosovar unit what had come to support the government of Wied. By his shoulder he had Hasan Prishtina and Bajram Curri (Shpuza, 1986, 165). The Serbian politics against Albania, in religious bases, it seems it was understood better by the Austrian politics than by Albanian themselves. Austrian Representative at the International Control Commission, August Kral, addresses the Muslim insurgents at the Hills of Rashbull, who requested the father, i.e. the king, on words: "the father you are seeking was not ousted by Albanians, but he was ousted through war by your enemies, Serbs and Greeks. He was forced by himself to leave Albania. The things which you are committing are foolish, therefore you quit because Serbs will come and will slaughter you all". It is understood that August Kral was aware that Albanians had declared independence by themselves from the sultan, but, even though he had to deal with a group of Muslim fanatics, he declared that the sultan was not expelled by Albanians.

The rebellion of the Central Albania and the implication of Esat Pasha, gave the real possibility to the Serbian politics to be involved in those circumstances. Acting against the government of Prince Wid, it was in the interest of Serbia to ensure its influence to impel Esat Pasha to come to power. Actually, Esat himself had those dilemma concerning to which of the interested government, Italian, Osman or Serbian, will support and keep him in power. According to the Russian counselor in Belgrade, Serbia had an agreement with Esat (Vickers, 2008, 133). In fact, this agreement was done earlier and it consisted in the complete erasure of the works of Ismail Qemali, but now in new circumstances, old ties with Esat Pasha should function again.

As noticed, from the British secret documents, Serbs were extremely terrified by the fact that Muslim Albanians could be accorded with a Christian Prince, hence, they tried to change the situation (Duka, 2012, 532). Although Esat, had accepted Prince

Wied as a ruler, they hoped that their common intrigues will act against his power. Serbs in Albania, were obliged to follow both the actions of Italians and Austrians expressing thus their concerns toward them. Anti-Austrian feelings of Esat were known, until Italy had no eventual reason to suspend Esat. Austro-Hungary wanted to get rid of him, peculiarly for his ties with Serbia (Vickers, 2008, 138). Therefore, they reached to arrest him and send to Italy. Political chaos and consequent rebellions continued even after the alienation of Esat. In the end of July 1914, at the eve of the emerging of the First World War, Albania was in a severe political situation. The power of the Albanian government was limited only in Durrës and Vlorë. In Central Albania, was controlled by the rebels, south territories were under Greek oppression, provinces of northeast under continuous Serbian pressure, while Shkodra was under international forces administration.

Prince Wied made his last attempt to save his government. He also addressed to Great Powers with a request to implement the assurance they were committed to at the London Conference, to commonly guarantee the independence and sovereignty of Albania. Nevertheless, in those circumstances, when the First World War had started, prince Wied was forced to leave Albania, on 3rd of September 1914, after whole 181 unsuccessful ruling days. The departure of the prince did not mean that the Serbian politics towards Albania ceased. In October of the year 1914, when First World War had already started, Esat returned to Albania with the support of Italians and Serbs. He did not have any inconsiderable resistance of the government troops, due to the fact that most of the troops were in the south on the war against Greeks who had reoccupied Southern Albania. Esat used the gap, by the already departure of prince Wied, and he declared himself Head of the Government being depended on Serbs. Even in the following circumstances the main exponent of the Serbian politics remained Esat. He could keep under control parts of Central Albania, only through the support of the Serbian army who spread the war in the land of Albania by eventually transforming Albania in a battlefield for everybody.

But in early October 1914 as a result of Bulgaria's entry into the war Serbia's position was too weak. Faced with a combined offensive of the Austro-Bulgarian, Serbian army made a tragic retreat among mountain trails covered with snow to northern Albania. It is important to note that despite fresh memories of those sides that Albanians had to Serb atrocities they did not attack the Serbian exhausted convoys (Vickers, 2008, 144)& (Helmreich, 1938, 420-421).

During 1916, quickly follow-up a series of events that enabled the Albanian land fragmentation. Esat Pasha without the support of the Serbian forces felt unsafe and was forced to flee to Paris, where with the help of the Serbs was proclaimed head of a government in exile. During spring Austro-Hungarian troops who were in pursuit of Serb forces took control of most of Middle and North Albania and by abandoned the Serbian influence in Albania and opening a new chapter in the survival of Albania in the battle of the new policy that will begin after the end of First World War in diplomatic offices of the Peace Conference in Paris.

Conclusions

The Declaration of Independence of Albania and the expansionist politics of Balkans neighbors propound the quest of Albania, as a European issue, since November 1912. The Great Powers in case of recognition of the independence of Albania they were faced with some very difficult tasks. On one hand, it had to harmonize and to maintain the balance between each other, on the other hand, had bargained with the countless claims of Serbs, Greeks and Montenegrins to the Albanian regions and finally facing the Albanian population claiming the preservation of their ethnic territories.

Appointment of foreign monarchs on the top of the new states in the Balkans was a solution practiced earlier by the Great Powers. Prior to Albania, monarch's, princes or kings, who were put in charge of Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria during the century. XIX were descendants of the great imperial yards of Europe. Competitors to the throne were 17 nominations submitted by Great Power which appointed Wilhelm Von Wid. Serbia as one of the parties most interested in Albanian lands; they were very active in its policy regarding the appointment of the ruling prince in Albania. Serbian politics in any way was trying to find elements that undermine the act of Independence or to put it in the shade in any form. The act of appointment of Prince presented a case that should be used in a political sense by Serbian diplomacy. Seeing the determination of the European powers to support Wied, Prime Serbian government formally agreed and said not openly against him, or at least so it seemed. Actually, we think that Serbia was not for any prince but, in the best case, he had to be someone from Muslims by keeping alive the hope of igniting a religious war between Albanians. We think that Serbia was working in two directions simultaneously. Diplomatically from outside it seemed to accept international proposal while hiding inside in order to act against this plan in cooperation with Albanian elements of its policy exponent.

Serbia turned to their action plan with Albanians finding an collaborator in the image of Esat Pasha Toptani (Vickers, 2008, 144). According to British documents which speak about Serbian secret operations in Albania realize that the Serbian-Russian goal after the appointment of Prince Wilhelm was to come up with a demand for a Muslim Prince in Albania as the current ruler rival the purpose of a civil war that would go in the interest of the Slavs. During the years 1914-1916 followed a series of events that enabled the Albanian land fragmentation. Albania's new political battle will begin after the end of First World War at the diplomatic offices of Peace Conference in Paris.

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