

## Italy and War of Vlora during 1920

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### Abstract

Italy played special attention to the province of Vlora during World War I, because of its great strategic importance in the Adriatic Sea. Italy had deployed in October 1914 in Sazan and had occupied Vlore since December 1914. But for the Albanian people, the liberation of Vlora was a key moment for its survival. It was the victorious War of Vlora in 1920, following the decisions of the Congress of Lushnja which reconfirmed Albania's independence and which put Albania in the course of a normal independent country. The important role of the war in direct confrontation with the Italian political and military forces of the time, are intended to be reflected in this article based on historical arguments and new perspective of our days.

**Keywords:** War of Vlora, Italy, Lushnja Congress, the National Defense Committee.

### Introduction

Italian occupation over Vlora was part of the requirements of Rome to the Adriatic Sea possession. Entente's diplomats approved this request of Rome. As a consequence the statement of this request in the Secret Treaty of London was like "Italy will take full sovereignty over Vlora, Sazan Island and over a vast territory, enough to ensure the protection of these points," it was stated in the VI article of the Treaty of 26 April (Sonnino, 1974, 209).

This request was also accepted by the Russian Empire, with some remarks. Representatives of Russia's related the approval of the application of Rome regarding Vlora, with other Italian territory on the east coast of the Adriatic, especially on the Dalmatian coast. Russian diplomacy was ready to accept the passage of the Vlora region under the sovereignty of Italy, aiming that Rome would give up or would limit its claims to Dalmatia (Çami, 2007, 63). Besides Vlora, Italy asked the secret Treaty of London also the mandate on truncated Albanian state that would emerge from the Peace Conference.

Feelings of anger that seized the broad masses of the people because of the new plans for tearing Albania, was the reason for unleashing a powerful patriotic movement on a high national basis. But the center of the movement for the protection of territorial integrity and national rights became the city of Vlora. Even earlier the people of Vlora had shown a total dissatisfaction and opposition to the Italian occupation, despite the appearing of Italian politics as a protective of Albanian interests.

"On November 28, 1918, on the 6th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, in Vlora was organized an event in commemoration of this event. But the most powerful manifestation was organized a year later, on November 28, 1919, which the Italian army violently suppressed hurting ordinary people. Not only that, but the

occupation authorities teared dozen of Albanian flags and used the pieces to wrap a dog, which then they walked around in the streets of Vlora".<sup>1</sup>

Patriotic circles and the mass of people raised in revolt, not only disagreed with the proitalian policy followed by the temporary government of Durres, but rejected it by all means and ways. The momentum that took the movement against the Italian occupation, against the proitalian orientation of the government of Durres, and against some antialbanian doctrines of several European powers and neighboring countries at the Peace Conference in Paris, led to the organization of the Congress of Lushnja, which was held at the end of January 1920 (Duka, 1997, 70).

Congress of Lushnja in January-February 1920 and the War of Vlora, in June-August 1920 were the highlights of the Albanian national movement. Lushnja's Assembly in January 1920 approved this document that constitutes the essence of patriotic movement: "The National Assembly, setting in Lushnje, protesting against the decision condemning a neutral and known country, and one of the most ancient nations of Europe to pave the way for the imperialist goals of neighboring governments ... national assembly requires a complete independence ... and decided not to accept any foreign mandate or protectorate. Albanians are ready to make any sacrifice until the last drop of their blood against any decision that could jeopardize their independence and national integrity " (Puto, 1965, 24).

Lushnja Congress ousted the government of Durres and chose a new government, which was established in Tirana. During March-May 1920 was assured the union of Shkodra and Korca to Tirana's government. As for the liberation of Vlora, this congress began work with a note directly addressed to the Italian Senate in Rome stating: "Assembly of the Nation organized in Lushnje, declared to the representatives of Italy that in the cells of Albanian people there is still Skanderbeg's blood, so that great-grandchildren, can not be humbled enough to become part of the Italian colony and be used as a reward for feeding the imperialist desires of their neighbors"<sup>2</sup> To the Albanians, Vlora was made as the Achilles heel for the national cause. The press of that time shows clearly the situation created in Albania: "Any protest of ours should have Vlora as a starting point", "good or evil that may come to Albania comes from Vlonë".<sup>3</sup>

Popular consciousness was crystallized and mobilized against the Italian occupation of Vlora. At a rally in Tirana in the summer of 1919 it was declared that: "We do not give up from any inch of land of Vlora, Sazan or Pashaliman".<sup>4</sup> Vlora's release constitutes in "a capital matter on independence" of the Albanian nation.

The direct goal of the armed war that started in June 1920 was the liberation of Vlora by Italian troops. But conquerors of our country were then two other neighboring monarchies, Greece and the Serbs-Croats-Slovenes kingdom. At the end of May 1920, when French forces had left Korca, the Greeks were able to invade several villages at the south of Bilisht, and Serbo-Montenegrins had taken a wide strip of land in the northeast, the right coast of the Black Drin, Highlands of Tropoje, Tarabosh, right side of Buna's spill.

Tirana's government though it was not directly, for diplomatic reasons, leader of

<sup>1</sup> *Albanian people's war for national liberation 1918-1920 (documentary)*, vol. II, Tirana, 1976, dok.322.p.54.

<sup>2</sup> *Albanian people's war* ....., vol. II, dok.47, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> "Populli" newspaper, 11.7.1919, art.: *On the unexpected news*

<sup>4</sup> The Central State Archive of Albania (AQSH), F. L. Skendo, d.12, the letter of the date 27.08.1919.

the War of Vlora had a very critical role in favor of this war: the union of Shkodra with Tirana in March 1920, signing of the Albanian-Greek Protocol of Kapeshtica 28 May 1920, elimination of esadist armed movement of June 1920. Wisely using Italian-Yugoslav contradictions Tirana government sent in April 1920, a representative of its own (Sejfi Vllamasi) with the mission of informing the Serbian government that the Albanians will revolt against Italian occupiers and urged the sympathetic attitude of Belgrade to this war (Milo, 1992, 107).

They are designed and written a lot of works in the field of historiography, within and outside the country about the imperial Italian policy to the issue of Vlora, but in this paper we try to understand and shed more light on the reasons and consequences of this attitude, seen from a balanced perspective, of the present. The novelty of this paper lies in the manner of expression of the related facts, internal and external, current and historical factors that led to Italian goals for the occupation of Vlora, and in the war of liberation of the Albanian people, far from displaying the exclusive patriotic grades, influenced by totalitarian ideology before the '90s of the last century. Analysis of this attitude leads to valid and current conclusions for the Italo-Albanian relations.

For the Realization of this paper it is used the literature selected by Major Institutions on historical sources as the National Library of Albania, Albanian Central State Archive, the Library of the Academy of Sciences of Albania, the Library of the Institute of History of Albania. The literature consists of primary historical sources, Such as Manuscripts and the dailies of that period, memories of historical persons of the respective period, as well as secondary sources, historical publications and the most significant scientific articles about this issue.

### **The military-political situation at the beginning of war**

Progressive and anti invasive circles, established in Vlora a secret committee called the National Defence Committee (KMK), headed by the Prefect of Vlora Osman Haxhiu, into which became part Q. Kocul, too. The main purpose of this committee was to organize the liberation war of Vlora, coordinating work with the government of Tirana, through the deputy S. Koleka. Prime Minister Sulejman Delvina had approved the program of the committee. On her part, the government made efforts to ensure a calm background with neighboring countries, Greece and Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav government gave some promises, which helped the government of Tirana to understand, that in case of an armed conflict with Italy, Tirana had not to worry about the eastern and northern borders. The Albanian government took through semiofficial ways insurance for no interference from Greece, which at this time was preoccupied with the situation in Minor Asia. In addition, Italo – Albanian discussions, which began in Palanca on May 11, 1920, because of the government crisis in Italy, broke down. England seemed that it was not supporting anymore the project on giving Italy a mandate over Albania, because of oil reserves discovered in Albania during the war by the Italian and Austrian experts, which England was aiming for itself. Foreign Affairs Committee of the British Parliament urged the British prime minister to focus on the liberation and territorial integrity of Albania in 1913 and putting it under the protection of the Great Powers.

National Defense Committee developed broad organizational activities in the occupied regions for the armed uprising. Italian occupation authorities, sensing danger, had declared a state of emergency in Vlora, in April and in early May they performed a series of arrests in the town. In an attempt to measure the pulse of the Italians but also showing a maturity of the movement, around the middle of May the governmental authorities in Tirana entered in Tepelenë to take over the city, which was outside the area claimed for annexation by the government of Rome. But the Italian soldiers tore the Albanian, expelled the government commissioner and brutally dispersed the population which was gathered to celebrate the return of the city within the homeland. As a result, Albanian - Italian relations deteriorated even more. KMK alerted the government of Tirana on the readiness to start the uprising. At a rally the people of Shkodra stated: "*Shkodra and Vlora are and have been unallocated forts of the homeland*".<sup>5</sup>

As the population of the province of Vlora was about to outbreak the uprising, the situation in the region of Korca seemed abruptly deteriorated, with the news of the departure of the French military authorities. Patriotic counties of Korca, as well as the Tirana government, worried by the approach of the Greek army to the border with the intent to conquer the city of Korca, immediately organized volunteer forces and on May 26, 1920 raised there the national flag, announced the merger of Korca region with the Tirana government and decided to be organized to defend their region from the Greek invasion. Pogradec and Bilisht followed the example of Korca also. The Athens government, which hoped that the march of Greeks would be without any resistance, was disturbed by the reactions of the Albanians. Not wanting to open a new front in a time when the fight to Asia was still going on, which would be beneficial to Italy and advised by the British government, the Greek army stopped its marching to the Albanian lands. On May 28 in the border village Kapshticë was signed the interim Greek-Albanian protocol, according to which the Greek army would stop its marching "to make easier the agreement between the Greek and the Albanian government". This Protocol shall remain in force until the matter is regulated by the Peace Conference, either by a direct agreement between the Greek and Albanian governments. During this time the Greek armies would hold 26 border villages that were occupied during the marching. Kapeshtica's Protocol had special importance for the Albanian government, after diverting conflict behind their backs with Greece, at a time when it was decided the start of the uprising against the Italian army in Vlore.

The information sent to Rome by the commander of the Italian troops in Albania, General S. Piacentini, about 10 days before the war starts was correct and clear in describing the political situation in Albania: "The idea that if Italy gives up from Vlora, then other nations (Greece, Yugoslavia) would withdraw their respective claims, is taking more and more roots in the Albanian people and this opinion is expressed in the formula: saving Vlora means to save all of Albania" (Montanari, 1978, 365).

But as the events of the war showed, the Italians had not thought very well everything. Not that they were not worried about what was lately happening in Albania but maybe they overlooked the Albanian patriotic factor and the glorious history of wars

<sup>5</sup> "Populli" newspaper, 1.7.1919, p.6.

for freedom of Albanians. Italians wanted to reduce excessive military spending, a purpose which served the redeployment of troops from within the Albanian coast, as well as the readmission of a part of them. Only in the region of Vlora were no troop movements (Çami, 2000, 32).

On one side Italian troops were focused on Vlora and on the other hand they tried to remove the attention of Albanians from Vlore. The beginning of esadist armed anti-government movement in central Albania in early March 1920 is part of these efforts. It is even thought that one of the reasons of the withdrawal of Italian troops from the interior of Albania in Vlora was to rescue these troops from the involvement in the war of Albanians among them.<sup>6</sup> But the movement did not find support and was defeated by government forces commanded by Bajram Curri, before the start of the uprising in the Vlore (Çami, 2000, 28).

Italian forces had not even thought of the possibility of military organization of Albanians in such a way as to endanger the Italian one. The event that happened in Tepelena on 17 May 1920 was in fact the signal of the outbreak of war and it seems that this set in motion General S. Piacantin to require additional military forces, despite the previous strategy which was focused on reducing them. On May 19 the general ordered the change of route of three battalions that were about to be repatriated from Durres to Italy (Gallinari, 1980, 73). Although the uprising of the Albanian people was about to start, the Italian civil authorities in Albania did not share the same view with the military, who had understood the risk of the uprising, although a little bit late. The Italian commissar who was set in Durres, F. Kastoldi, an Italian civilian representative in Albania, but also a confidant of Prime Minister Nitti, considered the event of Tepelena only simple and trivial incident and he did not think that it would be best for Roma to increase troops in Vlora. The main strategy of Kastoldi was to deflect the Albanians from the problem of Vlora and he aimed at reinforcing the "northerners" in the government of Durres. According to this plan, "the Northerners" aimed a war with Serbia over Kosovo's liberation, and "southerners" according to Kastoldi aimed at ensuring and "liberate all of southern Albania and Vlora and thus they are contrary not only to Greece but also to Italy" (Montanari, 1978, 365). Differences that existed between the two main segments of the Italian authorities in Albania have their own importance, showing a political myopia that is part of the total failure of the Italians (Çami, 2000, 36).

Despite being objective factors the contradictions between the Albanian submissive people and invaders, Italian historiography tries to find the real causes of the war of liberation of Vlora in subjective factors, misunderstanding by the Italian government, the descendants of Orlando-Soninnos, Albanian factor, ie., national consciousness that was awakened in the Albanian people, which Soninno could understand.

### **The beginning of the war in Vlora**

The decision to start the armed struggle against the Italian occupiers took final its shape in the Barcallasë meeting on 29 May 1920. The Assembly did not have representatives from across the country, it was represented there only the city of Vlora and most of

<sup>6</sup> The History of Albanian People, vol 3, Tirana: Toena, pp.218-219.

the villages of the province. However, the decision did not reflect the will of a part of the population of Vlora, but that of the Albanian people for liberation of the country from invaders and to ensure full national independence and territorial integrity of the state.<sup>7</sup>

The Assembly elected a National Council composed of 30 members and from its ranks was elected a new committee of "National Defense" of 12 members, which was assigned the direction of the uprising. The head of the committee was elected again Osman Haxhiu. Near the committee was also formed a military committee, composed of officers under the chairmanship of Qazim Koculi, former naval officer. The Commission laid Captain Ahmet Lepenica organize military formations. The Assembly decided to appeal all citizens and peasants of the occupied provinces and especially Laberia to grab their weapons and fight against the enemy. On June 2, 1920 several thousand volunteers stood in Beun and certain points, organized in armed groups, each under the command of a brave farmer who was elected by the volunteers. To this appeal joined the Albanian militia battalion of nearly 300 members, formed in Vlora by the Italian command, which defected joining the rebels. Under the orders of the committee was formed an army of rebels of nearly 4 thousand volunteers patriots.

Bey of KMK addressed an ultimatum to General S. Piacentini: "The Albanians - said the ultimatum - can not accept the division of Albania according to the secret treaty of 1915 ... Today the Albanian people joined more than ever, unable to endure being sold like cattles through the bazaars of Europe as a Italian - Greek - Serbs reward, decided to grab the weapons and demand from Italy the administration of Vlora, Tepelena and Himare, which quickly were submitted to the national government of Tirana". The committee then invited the Italian commander to respond to this request until the evening of June 4; otherwise Albanians would begin an armed uprising.

Italian troops in Albania consisted of a effective of around 20 thousand soldiers under the command of General S. Piacentini. To the Bay was anchored a team of navy, consisting of a dozen of warships and other smaller vessels. Most of the soldiers were concentrated in the city of Vlora, while the rest was out of town, in positions of strategic importance. Strongest garrisons were stationed along the road Vlora - Gjirokaster, especially in Drashovicë, Kote, Gjorm, Vajze e Tepelenë and throughout the coastal road Vlora - Saranda like Dukat, Llogora and Himare. the Italian general S. Piacnetini who took down the ultimatum almost ignored the threat of the rebels. After this ultimatum he sent to general E. Puglieze covering the side of Vlora, some guidelines that showed him more optimistic: "The action of the rebels, whatever it is, and whatever forces its performed with, does not seem very dangerous, because it comes to an amorphous mass, which has no leadership, no irregularity and that there is no setup utility" (Montanari, 1978, 214).

While waiting for the response of the ultimatum, the KMK took quick military actions. The plan at first predicted the beginning of attacks against advanced garrisons of Italian military and blocking of roads to prevent their withdrawal in Vlora. The aim of this attack was to annihilate these garrisons, taking their weapons and ammunition, which were missing to most of the insurgents, and capturing as many officers and soldiers and keeping them as hostages. Once they did not receive a response from

<sup>7</sup> The Academy of Science of Albania, *Congress of Lushnja and War of Vlora*, Tirana, 1974, p. 139.

General Piacentini, the KMK ordered the start of the uprising. On the evening of 5 June 1920 insurgents began attacking from the four corners of the area. Within a few hours they took most of the checkpoints of Carabinieri and small military presidia. But against fortified garrisons were held rough overnight fightings. Especially the fightings that took place against the garrisons of Kota, Gjorm, Llogora and Tepelena. In Kota insurgent peasants showed excellent examples of heroism against the general Enrico Gotti; brave patriots under the command of Ahmet Lepenica forced Italian soldiers and officers who had left many dead, among them the general Goti himself, to surrender.

Italian garrisons could not deal with Albanian attacks in Llogora and Gjorm, and they surrendered. With the fall of Tepelena, where heavy fightings took place for five consecutive days, on June 10 was freed all the occupied region, with the exception of Vlora and Kanina. Encouraged by the rapid successes, the KMK sent to General S. Piacentini on June 9, 1920 another call for the submission of the city without a fight. In this call the Italian general was warned that unless Vlora was not surrendered without a fight, the rebels would attack the city. At the same time the committee charged the military commission, which had established its headquarters in Drashovica, to draft a plan of attack on Vlora. KMK under very strong pressure of insurgents decided to organize an attack with all possible forces. It was also decided that the attack from outside would be coordinated with the armed uprising that citizens would start at the same time in the town (Çami, 2000, 18). Italian command of occupation intensified work to strengthen the defense system of Vlora and on June 10 organized a counterattack to drive insurgents from the city's hills. After the counterattack failed and anticipating the arrival of reinforcements in Vlora, the committee ordered the general attack on the besieged city. The attack began in the late evening hours of June 11, 1920. Thousands of fighters, inviting one - another in the race to enter as soon as possible in the city, were thrown on the enemy positions. But the intense fire of naval and field artillery and blinding lights of floodlights of the battleships prompted insurgents to progress very slowly. Warriors showed heroism in the hills of Babica, in Qafa of Koçiu and Kanina castle. A high example of heroism demonstrated the old farmer from the Salaria of Tepelena, Selam Musaj, commander of his village's fighters, who was martyred in Vlora's olive groves. Fiercely fighting continued throughout the night. Near morning our brave fighters broke the enemy's obstacles and crept into the outer neighborhoods of the city, at a time when Vlora citizens took up weapons and began to attack the Italian army behind. With the penetration of fighters in Vlora, the protection system of the Italian army degenerated. To save his army from destruction Italian command arrested many citizens, among them women and children, and announced that it would retaliate over all the captives, if fighting will not be suspended. Committee leaders hesitated in front of this threat that endangered the lives of 1700 compatriots, among whom were many of their family members. Fighters, affected from human emotions, obeyed to the orders of the committee and withdrew from the city. Albanian forces suffered losses in this battle and Vlora still remained in the hands of Italians.<sup>8</sup> The beginning of uprising liberation and its

<sup>8</sup> The Academy of Science of Albania, *Congress of Lushnja and War of Vlora*, Tirana, 1974, pp.162-163.

first successes sparked a general enthusiasm to the extent of Albania's population. In the big cities of the country with the initiative of the population there were created commissions that would help Patriotic War against Italian offenders. These commissions collected within a few days significant assistance in cash, grain and livestock. More than a thousand volunteers joined together to launch toward Vlora. Tirana's government, as it was decided, was neither in favor nor against the uprising of liberation. In fact it helped the rebels, sent weapons and sent to Vlora material aid and volunteers from different sides of the country. The operation against sadist rebels began on June 4 and within a few days they were completely overwhelmed. At the same time, on June 13, the brave Democrat Avni Rustem with the support of a group of patriots gave Esat Pasha Toptani the deserved punishment, killing him in the streets of Paris.

### **War of Vlora and the support of external factor**

A favorable attitude to the liberation war of Vlora generally held the Italian working class; but also in the progressive Italian press and the parliament of Rome arose powerful voices of protest, demanding from the government of Nitti withdrawal of invasive troops from Vlora. In Trieste, Ancona, Bari, Brindisi, was posted calls of the Italian Socialist Party, which invited the soldiers to refuse departure to Albania. Against the launch of Italian army to Vlora were held also demonstrations of workers, where the bloodiest one was in Trieste on 12 June 1920, which brought together even more Italian soldiers with protesting workers. On the same day a group of Socialist deputies submitted for approval to the Italian Parliament a resolution, through which they required the removal of Italian troops from Albania; but it was not accepted by the majority of MPs. On June 13 the internal political situation of Italy was very irritated. Even the new Italian government of Giovanni Giolitti tried at first to suppress through force the liberation struggle of the Albanian people. Pursuant to the guidelines, General S. Piacentini sent on June 16, 1920 to the KMK an ultimatum, which required the rebels to leave the fighting positions within 24 hours, and if they wouldn't be threatened them with a offensive punishing. On June 19, 1920, given that the Albanian reply to the ultimatum had been negative, selected wards of the Italian army, reinforced by new troops brought by Italy- "Piacenza" brigade, Regiment of the "Ardite", and two battalions who came by Montenegro, under the command of General Puglieze undertook a punitive expedition towards Drashovice, where the committee had its headquarters. Also in the Bay of Vlora docked "San Marco" cruiser. But as two weeks ago and this time the Italian military were wrong in their calculations to "teach a lesson to the Albanians." They suffered many losses and were forced to return defeated to Vlora, from the heroic stance of the Albanian fighters. Italian soldiers morale had fallen significantly below. After 2-3 days from the moment of failure of the Italian counterattack, on June 21, 1920 it surrendered the Italian garrison of Tepelena, too.<sup>9</sup>

J. Giolotti attitude toward the positions of the previous Italian imperialist government fired further protests in Albania. In cities across the country they were held numerous

<sup>9</sup> *Albanian people's war* ....., vol. II, dok.318, p.375.

protests against the Italian occupiers. Numerous protest telegrams were addressed toward Rome by the Albanian exile colonies. Inside and outside the country were also approved resolutions through which the Albanians showed solidarity with the demands of fighters of Vlora.

A new wave of protests also broke in Italy by the workers and the Italian progressive circles, against the colonialist policy of their government. On June 26 the departments in Ancona refused to leave for Albania and clashed with carabinieri. Exactly on this day Xhioliti declared in parliament that he would not send more soldiers in Vlora, but just two days after he declared the Italian claims in Albania: Italy gave up their mandate and fully recognized the independence of Albania, but claimed sovereignty over Vlora. "Vlora is a strategic point that if it was overrun by a non friendly force of Italy, may become a great danger to our country. Albania, the situation it is today - claimed Xhioliti - is unable to protect Vlora from any force that has a few naval forces. ... I will repeat here the words that I said to some Albanians ... Through conquering Vlora, we guarantee Albania of a permanent occupation of this city by another power" (Pastorelli, 1970, 370).

### **Liberation of Vlora and signing of Tirana's Protocol**

The beginning of Vlora's uprising overthrew the Italian diplomacy plans. The prime minister J. Giolotti was convinced that this new factor - *the armed uprising of the Albanians and the echo it found in European public opinion* - there was no chance to provide a view on the annexation of Vlora. The difficult situation of the Italian military in Vlora and rising of the anti-war movement in Italy, as a result of which, as stated J. Giolotti - "had started disintegrating in the state bodies themselves," - forced the government of Rome to start talks with the government in Tirana to end the war in Albania. But at the same time it aimed that, through negotiations, to detach from the Tirana government the right to keep his troops in several strategic points of the Albanian coast. On June 29, 1920 Roma decided to send in Albania as minister the baron Alioti, "to arrange - as officialy read in a statement - Italian interests in Albania and to achieve pacification".

Alioti arrived in Durres in the first days of July and immediately got in touch with the government of Tirana. During talks with the Albanians the Italian diplomat through blackmail and threats tried to persuade the government of S. Delvina to accept the project of Rome. Aliotti sought to ensure Pashaliman, which is a military base, as well as maintaining two strategic positions in Karaburun and Zvërnec (Pastorelli, 1970, 379). But the Albanian Government, part of which was also Spiro Koleka who was an undeclared representative of KMK, as before, rejected these proposals. Recalling that, if the leaders of the Committee of Drashovica obeyed to accept the Italian demands, the government of Tirana would obey too, Baron Alioti temporarily stopped the talks and traveled to Vlora, where he came into contact with leaders of Drashovica. Negotiations continued for another month and Rome sent another negotiator, to a higher diplomatic rank, Gaetano Manzoni. But this attempt failed. Then, the Italian authorities took back open provocations and threats. On July 17, 1920 occupation military command in Vlora announced a day-order, which announced categorically

that the Italian forces would not leave Vlora, and they were unable even to oppress "the Albanian rebellion". "We are and will stand in Vlora" - was the slogan of the Italians on this date (Çami, 2000, 72). The governors of Tirana, nor the Vlora fighters did not give up and this resulted in more negative provocation for the Italians.

Insurgents responded the night of 22 July 1920 with a furious attack against the Italian army in Vlora and after several hours of fighting entered the outskirts of the city, accompanied with losses among the Albanians. Convinced at last that its hopes to stay in Albania had completely failed, and because of these new conditions the agreement of 29 July 1919 with Greece to support the claims of one another in Albania did not serve anymore, on July 22 1920 the government of Giolotti canceled the Titoni - Venizelos agreement. On the other hand, it was forced to end the diplomatic maneuvers. J. Giolotti instructed Gaetano Manzoni to complete the treaty based on the requirements of the Albanian Government, accepting the defeat.

Expressing regret over this defeat, Benito Mussolini, representative of the most reactionary and fascist Italian districts, wrote on July 28: "Albanian Kaporeto is much worse than the other that took place between the Piaves and Isoncos; at that time we lost positions, materials, people and two provinces, but we did not lose the will to restart and recover; this time our defeat a moral one and have already diplomatically sealed as an accepted and performed fact: Few thousand Albanians with no artillery threw us violently in Vlora and to avoid jumping into the sea, we opened talks without any result. While other layers joyfully embraced the news, although the Italian historiography tries to submit the protocol signed only as "the outcome of a series of mistakes in the last two governments of Italy, and that the Giolotti, but especially the government of F. Nitti ", without seriously taking into account the Albanian Liberation factor anyway (Pastorelli, 1970, 404).

Albanian - Italian negotiations ended on August 20, 1920 with the signing of a preliminary protocol in Tirana. It stated that the Italian government respected the Albanian sovereignty and territorial integrity of Albania and, accordingly, it will withdraw its troops from Vlora and other parts of the country, with the exception of the island of Sazan. However the treaty accepted the Italian request to allow the Italian military forces to stay on the island of Sazan (and these forces stayed there until the capitulation of fascist Italy during World War II-September 1943). Maybe this was an important reason for the Italians, keeping military possession of Sazan, scheming for a return to Vlora, and thus accept the current end of the war with the Albanians. For the Albanian government it was almost impossible to cut out militarily Italians from Sazan, when lacking military marine fleet. The Rome government intended to use its presence in Sazan as propaganda for a half retreat or half loss to reduce dissatisfaction and reaction of the Italian expansionist forces, in Parliament and outside it. In addition to their propaganda, the Minister of Foreign Affairs on August 6 declared on the Italian parliament that: "We have withdrawn our troops from Vlora, keeping under our power, of course, equipped with artillery and troops, the island of Sazan, which owns the Bay of Vlora"<sup>10</sup>. Giolitti's government, newly arrived in the leadership in June, took a radical decision. On August 2 in Tirana it was signed a protocol with Italy where they gave up Vlora, while preserving the right of keeping

<sup>10</sup> *Albanian people's war...*, dok. 386, p.437.

control of the Sazan Island. So Italian troops left Albania within 30 days. It was a success of historic proportions of people who had believed in their independence, and this success noted the presence of an Albanian national pronounced sense and the victory of the national Independence. This success would live in albanian's spirit who would set the Italians as invaders and oppressive to their sovereignty for the coming twenty years (Coltrinari, 1970, 44).

## Conclusions

The war in Vlora constitutes one of the most glorious pages in the history of the Albanian nation. This war was as a direct continuation of the Congress of Lushnja, a bold action, which once again confirmed the indomitable will of Albanians to be a determinedly independent nation, as well as their strength to live freely.

This war was very well organized eventhough Albania had a huge backlog of development, showed that the freedom-loving spirit of this people has always prevailed when the homeland needed it. Descendants of old Epirotes, or majestic Skanderbeg, how could this nation tolerate the new invaders while they hadn't enjoyed yet the independence of 1912?

In essence, our nation has been equally as peace and freedom-lover, and that was the reason they accepted for a period of time the Italian presence in their lands. But the Italian state, perhaps neglected or forgot that the Albanians can not be stoped by any force when they come together and fight for their country's destiny. Italian state at the time pursued a more myopic policy rearding Albanians, taking away the sympathy of Albanians against this country that had taken root in centuries of history. The essence of the Italian policy regarding the intentions of possessing Vlora is clearly reflected in the words of Italian diplomat K.Sforca: " This reasoning of Albanians intends to drive us out from Vlora and, however, to accuse us as responsible of a possible disintegration of Albania ... From our part, we should instead insist that 1913 borders already present a mutilated Albania. In fact, about half a million Albanian (i.e. more than half of the Albanians) are annexed to Serbia; also many Albanians, especially in the region of Chameria are annexed to Greece. So the fate of Vlora should be considered in the same manner to that of the provinces that previously have been annexed by Serbia and Greece".<sup>11</sup>

Italians had defeated Austro-Hungarian military, but they could not be able to afford the Albanians in their fight against oppression. The victory of this war once again showed the strength, vitality and Albanian pride that can survive storms of history being an example for all time and generations. War of Vlora sealed Albanian independence and joined Albanians more. Regained freedom showed that homeland can be protected when we are united and we believe and fight for our country.

Although the geopolitical situation looked bleak for Albania, excellent organization of the uprising showed that Albania has never lacked prominent figures, which give the right direction, and do great works in this state. High spirit of fighters once again showed Albanian freedom-loving feeling, feeling imbued in the glorious history.

The broad support of the rebels from all over Albania and emigration, are examples of

<sup>11</sup> *Albanian people's war...*, dok. 198, p.246.

a high national and patriotic consciousness. We must not forget that a right war finds support even beyond the borders as it happened with the solidarity of the working Italian class.

Italian politics, showing the imperialistic goals against Albania, also in the military plan failed completely by reducing the maximum prestige of its own military, consecutive errors, which were complicated by Italian internal conflict situation, where progressive element came out against invading war.

The signature of the Italo-Albanian protocol, beyond the lack of Italian perspective to emerge from the impasse in which they were immersed in this war, came as a result that the Albanian government agreed for tactical reasons, the presence of military forces in Sazan.

Ultimately this presence that neutralized the Vlora Bay from any other invading power could not be liberated by direct war from the Albanian forces that lacked naval fleet. Albanian government did not bend to require Sazan as a "gift", in front of a conqueror who did not spare the blood of Albanians to keep Vlora.

With the victory of the War of Vlora, the Albanian people finally saved the country from more devastation of their territories. This can make feel proud all the people of Vlora and Albania.

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