

Austria-Hungary and the Albanians during the years 1912-1913

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Abstract

Through this project, the author presents the role of the Austro-Hungarian Empire for the protection of the Albanian ethnicity in the Balkans during the years 1912-1913. The author also deals with the efforts of the Albanians for a General Albanian Uprising in 1912 as well as the relations of its leaders with the Austro-Hungarian consuls. The independent Albanian state declared on November 28, 1912, and after that the London Conference in 1913, the positions held by Austria-Hungary and Russia.

Keywords: Albania, Austria-Hungary, the First Balkan War, the Austro-Hungarian position at the Conference of Ambassadors in London.

Introduction

Albania won its independence in a difficult moment. The independent Albanian state, proclaimed on November 28, 1912, was definite to be truncated, as a large part of its territories would remain outside its natural borders. The world powers of the time, even though they knew about the danger and the Slavic policies supported by Russia, for the assimilation of the Albanian population and the fragmentation of their lands, at the London Conference did not support the idea of forming an Albanian state within its natural borders. However, an important role in leading the formation of the Albanian state in 1912, undoubtedly had the Austro-Hungarian Empire. (Kocaçi Levanti, 2012, 12-17)

The Albanian national state was being created after the collapse and pulling back of the Ottomans from the Balkans and its borders would be defined in an open conflict with its neighbors, who wanted to apply the principle of the spoils of war. At this moment, the role of Austro-Hungarian diplomacy, as in the preparation of the diplomatic opinion of the great powers for the declaration of independence of Albania, turned out to be very decisive for the determination of the future borders of Albania. The main moments where Austria-Hungary played an indisputable role in demarcation were mainly the demarcation of its northern borders. (Gashi, 2012, 193-208)

From the beginning, in order to avoid a general war, the creation of an autonomous Albanian state was accepted in principle. But the demarcation of the borders of this country remained to be determined after a few months due to dissension between Austria-Hungary and Italy, from one side, Russia and France, on the other side. Therefore, with the mediation of the British Minister of Foreign Affairs Edward Gray, an agreement was reached between Russia and Austria-Hungary on the borders of Northern and Eastern Albania. With this agreement, all of Kosovo, the Dukagjini Plain and Albanian Macedonia remained with Serbia, while the rest of northern Albania was given to Montenegro. And the London Conference determined on the

geographical maps the border line between Albania and Greece. On this occasion, the whole of Çamëria with the coastal cities and Janina as its capital and with a simple Albanian population, remained outside the Albanian territory.

What interested Austria-Hungary, in this period of time, was the non-exit of Serbia to the Adriatic Sea. Italy, on the other side, was interested in securing the Otranto canal and not closing the Corfu canal. Therefore, both these countries insisted on the protection of the Albanian coast. On this occasion, the Albanian state came out halfway, divided in two completely artificially and without any ethnic or geographical criteria, leaving out of the borders more than half of the lands and the Albanian population.

The circumstances at the time of the declaration of Albania's independence

The independent Albanian state was formed under turbulent circumstances, due to the numerous developments that were taking place at that time, in the Balkan region and beyond. The Ottoman Empire was experiencing its last years as one of the great powers. The other great powers each had their own interests in the Balkan region. The situation in the Balkans had already begun to position the warring parties. Therefore, as can be seen, the Albanians were not well organized, and all the effort was scattered, so communication between them was not in step with time. Since the spring of 1910, continuing in 1911 and culminating in the General Anti-Russian Uprising of 1912, the resistance of Kosovo Albanians increasingly took the form of an organized uprising of wider proportions against the Xhonturk regime.¹ The vilayet of Kosovo which was not only the center of those developments, but also the instigator of the outbreak of this uprising in the vilayets and other Albanian areas, this was because the Albanian people who were still under the rule of the Ottoman Empire increasingly expressed much dissatisfaction with the xhonturk government, which was trying to make "changes" to improve the internal situation in the empire. However, these efforts did not show positive results, but rather strengthened the antagonisms of the peoples of the Balkans, which were reflected in the worsening of relations between them and the xhonturks. The first anti-government actions began in March 1912 in the vicinity of Gjakova to extend to the vicinity of Peja, Prizren and from there throughout Kosovo. The Austro-Hungarian consul of Prizren informed Vienna that in the villages between Gjakova and Peja "There has long been a nervousness, which aims to oppose the government with weapons, if it recruits, confiscates weapons or undertakes implementation of new repressive measures". (Cana, 1979, 99)

The political situation in Europe in the early twentieth century was such that two military-political blocs were formed, one being the Entente consisting of England, France and Russia and the other being the Central Bloc, consisting of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy. The Entente supported the Slavs in the Balkans while the Central Bloc, at the insistence of Austria-Hungary, supported the Albanians. Of the six Great Powers, only Austria-Hungary was sincerely interested in creating an Albanian state for geostrategic, historical and cultural reasons. However until the century. of XIX, Northern Albania had not become a special interest for the Habsburg

¹ Arkivi i Institutit të Historisë-Tiranë (më tej AIHT), Vj-22-11-1104, Telegram i konsullit austro-hungarez në Shkup dërguar MPJ në Vjenë, më 8 shkurt 1912.

Monarchy. Almost in 1832, an Austrian consulate was located in Shkodra, the largest city in northern Albania. (Skendi, 2000, 263) The Albanians who were in the Ottoman Parliament saw that it was an opportune moment to think about organizing another uprising, on this occasion they took advantage of the moment to express their views openly in the Ottoman Parliament. "There were no more clubs, communities or schools in Albania. The Bashkimxhit (the name given to the Albanian nationalists by the Turks) were scattered and the whole national organization marked nothing but destruction; This deplorable situation was given to some extent a positive cause by the mountain movement of 1911, the action of the Bulgarian committee in the territories of Macedonia, the conflicts that took place between the Ottoman elements after the founding of the "Agreement of Freedom" party and the Italian war. " And the war of Italy-Turky that exploded for Tarabullusi cese". (Prishtina, 2009, 8)

Austro-Hungarian interest in northern Albania as a barrier against the Slavs had grown around the end of the 19th century after the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1878, when it opposed the Serbs. (Swire, 2005, 59) The Albanian resistance at that time was composed of different groups and did not have any proper organization, and as such was broken for the most part. While in the war zones where the Albanian uprising of 1912 had already taken off, except this Ismail Qemali and the Albanian societies in exile continued their lobbying activities in stable areas of the Balkans and in Europe. Austria-Hungary did not concentrate only on logistical assistance, for which it constantly monitored the insurgent movement², where its consulates in Skopje, Shkodra, Mitrovica and Thessaloniki were constantly active, keeping Vienna informed of the situation on the ground, but it was very active also in the diplomatic field where the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister Count Bertchold requires an appointment with Ismail Qemali and other Albanian representatives in Vienna to discuss and analyze the possibilities for further diplomatic action. After the Uprising of 1912 and the beginning of the First Balkan War, the initial offer was Autonomy, under the authority of the Sultan, but this seems to have been discussed and analyzed that the demand for subjective advancement can be raised, to survive the possibility of existence within a fierce war in the Balkans for territories. The Slavic states were organized to continue dominating and exploiting the real possibilities of the final exit to the Adriatic. (Schurman, 2006, 84-85) Neighboring victorious states in the fight against the Ottoman army and the Albanian volunteer forces, were interested in finalizing the results achieved by seeking the issuance of an act which would declare the establishment. The situation in Albania especially in Lushnje, Durrës, and Berat was almost of complete independence, so autonomy did not make sense to demand as it was established in Bucharest. Meanwhile, the cities of Albania, seeing themselves being occupied by Serbian armies, such as Durrës, Elbasan, Tirana, Kavaja, Peqini, Lushnja, began to declare one after another national independence and raise the red flag with the black double-headed vulture, for to tell foreign armies that Albania had finally severed ties with the Ottoman Emperor and that they were marching on the land of free Albania. (Frashëri, 2008, 230-231) Greece, Bulgaria and especially the Serbs were led by the euphoria of rapid victory and occupation

² AIHT, Vj-22-6-609, Urdhër rezervat drejtuar konsullit të përgjithshëm në Selanik dërguar MPJ në Vjenë, 25 janar 1912.

by their armies and areas long aspired to by them. "On March 13, 1912, the Serbo-Bulgarian agreement was concluded. It contained a secret subsidiary, according to which Bulgaria recognized to Serbia not only the lands with Serbian population, but also the annexation of Albanian lands in the north and west of the Sharr Mountains". (Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, 2000, 502)

In the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Vienna, there were constant reports from all over the Balkans, not only about the break-up of the Ottoman military formations, but also about the advancement and consolidation on the ground of the armies of the Balkan countries³. The Montenegrins were concentrated in Shkodra, Greece aimed at Epirus while Serbia aimed at central and northern Albania, of course targeting the Adriatic⁴. These new military and political circumstances posed a great threat and concern to Austria-Hungary. "Austria-Hungary, for its part, tried to sabotage this alliance that was being formed with the active participation of Russia"⁵. The formation of this alliance posed a major threat to the vital interests of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the Adriatic Sea region. The latter was able to take all necessary measures to prevent the formation and functioning of this alliance, with particular emphasis against its intentions to provide Serbia with access to the waters of the Adriatic Sea.

The attitude of Austria-Hungary

Extent of influence in Albania has been one of the points of the Austro-Hungarian program for its penetration in the Balkan Peninsula⁶. This is best evidenced by the meeting of Hasan Prishtina he had with the Austro-Hungarian consul Kral in Thessaloniki, on January 5, 1912 during his return to Istanbul. In the conversation, he spoke about the current situation that Albanians were facing and that he had noticed a unity of theirs regarding the dissatisfaction they had with the Young Turk government. According to him, only an Albanian uprising could force the Young Turk government to improve the position of Albanians in the Empire. Hasan Prishtina had also spoken about the autonomy of Albania, but regarding this issue he had also asked for the help of Austria-Hungary to support the interests of Albanians. He was assured of the preservation of Albania's integrity by the Austro-Hungarian consul, who had assessed that actions had begun in Albania to organize an uprising.⁷ This support was even confirmed by the Vienna cabinet.⁸

The verbal support that Hasan Prishtina received from the Austro-Hungarian diplomacy encouraged him to deliver the famous speech, known as the declaration and the beginning of the anti-Ottoman uprising for him at the next session of the Ottoman

³ AIHT, Vj-22-20-2095, Raport i konsullit austro-hungarez në Mitrovicë dërguar ambasadës së Austro-Hungarisë në Stamboll, 18 qershor 1912.

⁴ Po aty, f.f.501-502.

⁵ Po aty.

⁶ AIHT, Vj-22-6-609, Urdhër rezervat drejtuar konsullit të përgjithshëm në Selanik dërguar MPJ në Vjenë, 25 janar 1912.

⁷ AIHT, Vj-22-2-235, Raport sekret i konsullit austro-hungarez në Selanik dërguar Ministrisë së Punëve të Jashtme në Vjenë, 31 janar 1912.

⁸ AIHT, Vj-22-6-609, Urdhër rezervat drejtuar konsullit të përgjithshëm në Selanik dërguar MPJ në Vjenë, 25 janar 1912.

parliament, on January 11, 1912, before the deputies and the Ottoman government. national autonomous rights, to then move on to the "Taxation Conspiracy", which formalized this uprising in districts of the Albanian national elite.⁹

The Balkan War and the Declaration of Independence of Albania

The great Albanian uprisings of 1912 and the Italo-Ottoman war weakened the position of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans, creating favorable conditions for the peoples of this area for the formation of their nation states. On the other hand, these events worried the governments of the great powers, because the situation in the Balkans could be used by Austria-Hungary to occupy the sanjak of Novi Pazar, while the Albanian national movement could declare independence, which was in conflict with Serbian, Montenegrin, Bulgarian and Greek expansionist plans, therefore, the Balkan states, despite the deep contradictions they had among themselves, due to the fragmentation of ethnic Albanian territories, they hastened to conclude political alliances and secret military conventions among themselves.

The Balkan Alliance, despite the compromises reached, contained in itself the seed of disunity between the Balkan countries, while on the other hand it posed a very serious threat to the existence of the Albanian nation. The First Balkan War began on October 8, 1912, when the Serbs, having reached these areas gained by luck and shame, not bravely, began to put their projects to work with the system "Albanians must be expelled", the officers of King Peter they had fun shooting people and embarrassing women, who jumped to escape Serbian nails. The Serbian government intended to rid Kosovo of its owners, of the Albanians, e.g. near Gjakova, 72 people were locked in a house, then set on fire; now they destroyed the villages with dynamite so that the traces of their wickedness would not be known: this is how the villages of Fshaj and Uiza suffered, in Gjakova now it is not enough for the Serbs to kill, if they kill them they take them and leave them hanging until the time passes; this is how Pjetër Cali suffered; at this time the Serbian governors ordered the soldiers not to use bullets in vain, but to kill them by hand; this is how two shepherds suffered in Gjakova¹⁰. Also as a result of this occupation, the capital of the Vilajet of Kosovo, Skopje would suffer great demographic changes, as a result of this campaign it was accompanied by mass displacement, looting of property and burning of entire Albanian villages, as well as colonization of Serbo-Montenegrin immigrants¹¹.

The lightning victories of the Balkan states forced the Great Powers to reconsider their decision not to allow the status quo change in the Balkans, in favor of the Balkan allies. Under these conditions, the Albanian patriots who were abroad decided to take a new political action, according to the requirements of the time. The purpose of this action would be to hold an assembly, to save Albania from the total fragmentation of Albanian territories by its Slavic neighbors. The initiative for this new action was taken by Ismail Qemali and Luigj Gurakuqi, who thought they would have

⁹ Hasan Prishtina (Përmbledhje dokumentesh) 1908-1934, Përgatitur nga Kujtim Nuro dhe Nezir Bato, "8 Nëntori", Tiranë: Drejtoria e Përgjithshme e Arkivave të Shtetit, 1982, f. 51-55; Hasan Prishtina, Nji shkurtim kujtimesh mbi kryengritjen shqyptare të vjetit 1912..., f.f.7-12.

¹⁰ Perllindja e Shqipëniës, Vit'i I, Nr. 14, E Shtunë 14/27, Vjeshtë I, 1913, f. 2.

¹¹ AIHT, Fondi: Shkupi qendër kryesore e ShqipërisëVL., dos. E-I-15. f.2.

the support of the Tripartite League. They left Istanbul and arrived in Bucharest, where on November 5, 1912 they organized the meeting of the Albanian colony there. There it was decided to establish a steering committee to take over the government of the country; to establish a commission that would go to Europe to defend before the governments of the Great Powers the national and local rights of the Albanian people and a committee in Bucharest, which would coordinate the activity of other committees inside and outside Albania to help the homeland. "When the First Balkan War broke out in the autumn of 1912, the pace of Albanian independence efforts accelerated. The founder and spokesman of the National Movement, Ismail Qemali, undertook a series of visits to Europe. He met with representatives of Albanians and foreign diplomats, the most important of which was the Austrian Foreign Minister, Bertold". (Puto, 2003, 80)

As the Bucharest meeting did not clearly define the decision, whether autonomy or independence would be required, this would be determined by the further development of events and the attitude that the Great Powers would take towards the Albanian issue. For this purpose, Ismail Qemali with friends went to Vienna, where he talked with Berhtold. Along the way, Ismail Qemali was informed about the movement that had started in Albania for holding a national assembly. For these reasons Ismail Qemali said that he would soon leave for Vlora, to participate in a meeting of Albanian leaders.

The idea of convening an assembly in Albania, which would present to the Great Powers the demands of the Albanian people, at this time were for an autonomous Albania, but autonomy within the Ottoman Empire no longer made sense, as the Ottoman army in The Balkans had been destroyed on all war fronts, and Serbian, Montenegrin and Greek troops had entered deep into Albanian territory. The advance of the Serbian Third Army in Kosovo had begun before the declaration of war by Serbia, on October 16. (Malcolm, 2011, 327) In these conditions, the only fair solution to the Albanian issue was that of the declaration of independence. This was the opinion that predominated in the diplomatic circles of some states of great powers led by Austria-Hungary.

During the return of Ismail Qemali to Vlora, on November 19, 1912, from Trieste, he declared that upon his arrival in Albania he would declare independence and the provisional government would be elected. Accompanied by delegates from Durrës, Shijak, Tirana and Kruja, Ismail Qemali and his friends left for Kavaja, where they met with several delegates from Kosovo, and on November 25 arrived in Vlora. In this city the delegates of the Albanian people were received with special honors. It should be noted that during this time the Serbian army was advancing rapidly on Albanian lands, committing unprecedented crimes and massacres against the Albanian people. (Rizaj, 2011, 130)

The situation after the declaration of independence of Albania

After the Declaration of Independence of Albania on November 28, 1912, the situation in the Balkans was showing no signs of calm, on the contrary it became so tense that it involved the Great Powers in diplomatic conflicts because now the status quo was no longer functioning.

In the new situation in the Balkans, Austria-Hungary saw Albania as a barrier

that would prevent the spread of Slavism in the Balkans. Italy, for its part, saw it in perspective as the "Fifth Coast" ("quinda sponda"), as a catalyst for the belated penetration of Italian imperialism in the East. Russia had its intentions, it tried to extend its influence in the Balkans through the territorial expansion of the Slavic states. The Balkan War was a chance for a new partition of Albanian lands after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire. (Puto, 2009, 53)

It is important to mention that while important decisions were being made, the Government of Vlora was not supported by the Great Powers and especially its decisions, because this was seen as the establishment of the state on a national basis. At the same time, the Provisional Government of Vlora in August 1913 faced the risk of escalating the situation both internationally and domestically. (Duka, 2007, 45-46) The government of Vlora, in front of many difficulties, wavered against the increased activities that were now under its responsibility. The territory and borders of the Albanian state were the product of open compromises of the Great Powers, which still did not have the final version, due to the fragile situation in the Balkans. The year 1913 is the year when local and international roundtables were organized for Albania to determine the dimensions of development as a nation, always oriented to the situation on the ground. (Elsie, 2007, 400) During the Conference of Ambassadors in London, the activity of organizing the Albanian state was seen as an international problem, so in this way two principles were confronted in the work of organizing the Albanian state; national and international principle. The second one won, which shows that the Great Powers had already taken the role in everything regarding the decisions on the Albanian state.

For this Berchtoldi instructed his ambassador in Rome who was trying to win over San Juliano for the full independence of Albania, as the only way to put Albania on an equal plan with other Balkan states. Thus Austria-Hungary, so it also called it that the organization of the Albanian state could not be done without the active participation of all the Great Powers.

On May 31, 1913, an agreement is reached between the great powers that it be a sovereign principality with an hereditary prince at its head. So, the Conference of Ambassadors projected a status of the Albanian state characterized by strong conceptual contradictions (both autonomous and sovereign, both autonomous and neutral, both sovereign and under international control). Above all the notion of principality presupposed a affiliation with European monarchies. The project presented in May 1913 foresaw the election of a prince from the Powers, the organization of the judicial system, the gendarmerie, where foreigners would play a decisive role. In general, the regulation of Albania's status was proceeded on the basis of the international principle, ignoring the national principle.

So, the final status of Albania was approved on July 29, 1913 by the Conference of Ambassadors in London and had the following content: 1. Albania is an autonomous, sovereign principality and inherited in the pre-born order under the guarantee of the six Great Powers. The prince would be overthrown by the six Great Powers; 2. Any suzerainty relationship between Turkey and Albania is excluded; 3. Albania has been neutralized, its neutrality is guaranteed by the six Great Powers; 4. Civil and financial administrative control is entrusted to an international commission consisting of delegates from the six Great Powers and one delegate from Albania; 5. The power of this commission will continue and if necessary it can be repeated; 6. The Prince shall

be appointed within a term of six months; 7. Ensuring public order will be guaranteed by the international organization and the gendarmerie. (Milo, 2013, 121)

In an analysis made by the well-known English magazine "The Economist" for the political events that took place in Albania in 1913, it is said that the ambassadors of the Powers, who met in London, avoided the greatest risk of the outbreak of the War of First World. Cause Albania! Pasic's claim for Serbia's "minimum" claim that 35 miles of the Albanian coast, with an internally that includes a third of Albania, lying between the points of Gjakova, Lezha, Durres and Ohrid, would undoubtedly have been involved in the war. immediately with Austria-Hungary and prolonging the Balkan conflict as a concern for Europe's security. The report now says ambassadors have widely endorsed it as the only possible solution. Serbia's "minimum" requirement has been quietly set aside, or educated almost to the point of convergence of the parallel lines of a neutral commercial railway and a neutral trading port.¹²

Albania's claim to independence as a united state has been recognized by the European Powers. The solution gives Serbia everything that is necessary for its national prosperity and this gives Albania a chance for peace. Two questions remain to be answered: first, defining Albania's border lines. Here all four Allies together will have their say. Greece will surely claim the south of Albanian Epirus, arguing that the inhabitants are mainly Greeks, by religion and culture, and partly by language, although almost all are of Albanian nationality. Greece would like to withdraw its new border from northern Thessaly directly west through Epirus on the opposite north coast of Corfu, to the small port of Saranda, as the port of Ioannina. This will give the castle of Preveza, under full control of the Gulf of Arta and the capital of Ioannina, related so closely to the history of Albania.¹³

Conclusions

The formation of the Albanian state could be argued to be a product of Austro-Hungarian commitments, because it feared that Serbia's expansion and empowerment could threatened official Vienna's position in the Balkans. Austria-Hungary felt the need for an energetic intervention to protect its interests in the last days of October, when it was convinced that it was impossible to maintain the status quo policy, as the Ottoman Empire was losing the war and was leaving towards disintegration and when Serbian, Montenegrin and Greek troops penetrated deep into Albanian territory. The great victories of the Balkan allies hid in themselves dangerous consequences for the Austro-German bloc: the expansion and strengthening of the Slavic states in the Balkans, the increase of Russian and Anglo-French influence in the Balkans, the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the increase of slavs riots for secession from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In this line, the main issue for Austria-Hungary was the Albanian issue. All the attention of the Austro-Hungarian diplomacy was focused on this issue in order to enable the realization of the expansion plans of the Balkan states by creating an independent Albanian state. Vienna tried at all costs to prevent

¹² Kufijtë e Shqipërisë dhe copëtimi në vitin 1913, <http://botasot.info/speciale/329935/kufijte-e-shqiperise-dhe-copetimi-ne-vitin-1913/> 25 11 2014.

¹³ Flamur Maxharri, Kufijtë e Shqipërisë dhe copëtimi në vitin 1913, <http://zeri.info/artikulli/50551/ku-jte-e-shqiperise-dhe-copetimi-ne-vitin-1913> datë 27. 09.2014.

Serbia from gaining a corridor in the Mediterranean, and consequently a port on the Adriatic coast. This port could also be used as a base to make it impassable for Austro-Hungarian ships. Austria-Hungary was the state that, within its real power, made all its efforts against the partition of Albanian territories by the Balkan states and for the recognition of the independence of the Albanian state. Indeed, the Albanian state emerged as a result of the policy of reorganization of the Balkans after the First Balkan War, which led to the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, and the creation of balances on the European continent.

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