

DURRES CONGRESS EXPRESSION OF ALBANIA'S POLITICAL MATURITY

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Abstract:-

The paper reflects the political sense of the Albanians who realized that in the conditions of the end of World War I needed political alliances that could not be realized without the formation of a government and the Albanian state on legal and legal grounds, so that to be represented with the proper sovereignty not only in the face of the Great Powers, which would gather at the Peace Conference in Paris in the beginning of 1919, but it was the best opportunity to avoid any representation which did not have the sovereignty of Albanians.

Whereas, the preparatory stages internally for the organization of the Durrës Congress were accompanied by the initiative for the gathering of a congress in the city of Shkodra. This meeting was held in Lezha on December 9, 1918, organized by Catholic clerics and the mayor of Mirdita Bayribs, Preng Bib Doda as a movement, which included only North Albania, had not found extensive support. Another attempt was that of the city of Tirana, which took place on December 19-20, in which only representatives from some parts of Central Albania participated. These political movements gradually fused to the Durrës Congress, the organizers of the who had previously received Italy's political approval.

The Durrës Congress opened on 25 December 1918 with the participation of 53 delegates, who were accompanied by the mandate of the province they represented, although these provinces were under the control of the Italian army. But delegates from the city of Vlora did not attend the congress because the Italian authorities had received instructions from Rome not to be allowed to be delegates from this city. The representatives of the provinces under the Serbian occupation, Peshkopia and Luma, and even those who were under French occupation, such as the city of Korca, were also missing. The delegates initially expressed political trust in the winners of the war, associating this with a special greeting against President Wilson, who had declared the principles of the selfdetermination of peoples.

The Congress also discussed about the policy that should be followed in relations with Italy and the possibility of supporting it, which, from a strategic point of view, could have an interest in supporting Albania's territorial requirements. Through archival sources, it emerges that the most prominent politician of the Albanians, Mehmet Konica, at the Durrës Congress, had presented the Italian proposal for the formation of an "Enforcement Committee", which would try to send an Albanian delegation to the Peace Conference and acted to ensure the national and political life of the Albanian people. But, in turn, the sources reflect the political will of another part of the decalogue, which they expressed, for the creation of a provisional government, which should politically accept Roma as well. Seeking that, before this was announced, a response from Rome was taken, in the hope that it would accept its formation. While some other delegates stated that the government was a wish of the Albanian people and it did not matter whether it would be accepted by Italy. The Government, based on the minutes of the Senate parliamentary work, had two tasks: First, to send an Albanian delegation to the Peace Conference, and second, to ensure the national political life of the Albanian people. While the formation of a council or a committee would no longer be a helpless institution, leaving at the same time a free path to foreign intrigues and create free ground for antagonistic opponent Esad Toptani.

The analysis also reflects the other side of the discussions, which concerned the view that the Albanian people did not have that degree of maturity to act independently, which would lead Albania to the collapse of relations with the only friend Albania had, which was considered Italy.

So the development of discussions in Congress had naturally reflected the formation of two pillar groups, which were different: first, a group of congressmen was of prominent Orienteering who declared that for the decision of the formation of the government the interim was notified and Rome through the Italian command and expected its response; second, while the other group stated that they had not come to the congress to be presented as "puppets" to judge and act upon the orders of others, but to think about the will and political will of the people, who was looking for one sounds self-restraint.

In fact, the critical spirit of the delegates to the London Underground Treaty of 1915 is considerable in material through three fundamental issues related to Albania. First, on the political plane, through the creation of the government, they were opposed to the Italian protectorate of the Albanian state through the representation of this state from Italy in relations with the world, as envisaged in paragraph VII of the Secret Treaty of London on 26 April 1915. This treaty was also struck from a principled point of view. Congress through the majority managed to consider the decisions of 1913 untouched, coupled with the full independence of the Albanian state already formed. Secondly, Congress could not bypass those decisions of the Treaty of London that heavily affected the territory of Albania. The delegates expressed their

sternness about the VIth paragraph of the Treaty through which Italy was recognized sovereignty over Vlora, as well as for Point VII, according to which Italy would not object to the passage of southern Albania to Greece and to the north of Serbia and Montenegro Black, under the conditions that this would require other Treaty firms, such as France and England. Thirdly, Congress reiterated its critical stance on VIth of the Treaty of London, which expressed the existence of a "Muslim" Albanian state in Middle East.

While reflecting on the criticism of Italy's attitude to the obstacles it had created for the representation of Vlora in Congress, which made it possible to sensitize even the question of the city of Vlora, which according to the Secret Treaty of London was in the protectorate of Italy.

By the time the material was refreshed on the morning of December 26th, the main representatives of Congress presented a reminder to Italy's political representative, bringing arguments on the formation of the government to devalue the possible efforts of France and the Balkan states to call delegates of Esad Toptani at the Peace Conference.

The analysis also raises the issue of the Albanian state's legal status and political affiliation to one or the other winning power, for which there were disagreements, they acted silently and in a compromise with each other. While the essence of the subject we are presenting is the political program that underpinned: First, the rights of the Peace Conference by the Government of Durres; Second, the search for Albania's ethnic boundaries; thirdly, maintaining public order and peace in the Albanian political territory.

The material also includes the political support that Albanian Diaspora organizations provided to the congressional work as "Vatra", which saw political compromise with Italy over the formation of the Government of Durres an essential point because it envisioned the anatomic diversity of the Albanian political streams that would be presented at the Peace Conference in Paris. But by making a careful study of the period in which this agreement was reached, this attitude seems to be fair. This agreement came about as a result of the change of Albania's historical circumstances at the end of the war, such as: the collapse of political balances in the Balkans as a result of the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the loss of war from it.

Keywords: - Congress, program, political groupings, political, government, compromise, conference, state.

INTRODUCTION

The occupation of Albania during the First World War and its division into several occupation zones had created difficulties for the Albanian National Movement which failed to create an organizational center and make a unified political program. This situation couldn't prevent Albanians from protesting against the expansionist policy of the neighbors, who violated the national sovereignty of Albania.

Although emerging from a dramatic situation, the Albanian politicians had managed to deal with the new political trends and express their aims into their fundamental documents. They also had a political support by Albanian Diaspora organizations such as "Vatra", the Pan-Albanian Federation of America which used to follow the new political trends during that period of time which aimed in political compromise with Italy about the formation of the Government of Durres as an essential point because it envisioned the anatomic diversity of the Albanian political streams that would be presented at the Peace Conference in Paris. This organization made a resolute¹ by which they asked the Great Powers to support Albania for its legitimate right of having ethnic boundaries and full independence because Albania should be on her own, free and independent.

At the same time, the different political circles had better managed to clarify their practical and theoretical attitudes. It was in Shkoder where a number of people who were dealing with politics and had established a secret committee, offered their help for the organization of Durres congress.

Approaching to a common national program

Many of the Kosovo migrants, who had been politically driven, established the The Committee for the National Defence of Kosovo (Albanian: *Komiteti i Mbrojtjes Kombëtare të Kosovës*) which was an Albanian organization illegally founded in Shkodër at the beginning of November 1918. It was mainly consisted of the political exiles from Kosovo and was led by Hoxha Kadri from Pristina. It existed in looser form since May 1915.

Prominent members of this Committee were Hasan Pristina, Bajram Curri, Bedri Pejani, Sali Nivica, Avni Rustemi, Elez Isufi, Eshref Frashëri, Hysni Curri and Sotir Peçi.

The main objectives of the committee were to: a) campaign against the borders of the Principality of Albania, established on the basis of London Treaty 1913, b) liberate Kosovo unite all Albanian inhabited lands.

In 1919 they published the newspaper *Populli* ("The people") in Shkoder directed by Sali Nivica. It became the unofficial journal of the Committee. It gave a big support to the Committee and propagandized struggle against the Serbian occupation in Kosovo, as well as against Italian's imperialistic politics towards Albania. The newspaper "Populli" expressed the ideas and political views of the Albanian patriots during the period 1918-1920. It also reflected the internal situation of Albania which was further aggravated within the beginning of this war. The outburst of the war put an end to the protection that the Greatest Powers warranted the Albanian government through the law status approved by the Ambassadors Conference of London.

"Populli" said: "Shqipëria pa hall ka me u ba"² (English: Albania is and should be!) A lot of organizations were set up in different parts of Albania. They rejuvenated the old self-governing traditions and as so they were turned into very important decision-taking governing mechanisms.

Moderation Policy followed by Albanians of Italy

There were many Albanian political organizations that were working abroad. One of the most prominent was The Società Nazionale Albanese (Albanian National Society) which was founded in 1895 out of an Arberesh congress held in Corigliano Calabro and was led by scholar Girolamo De Rada. On 18 April 1900, the Società Nazionale Albanese was transformed into Comitato Nazionale Albanese (Albanian National Committee). It managed a newspaper called La Nazione Albanese ("The Albanian Nation") which was a newspaper of the Arbereshe community of Italy during end of 19th-century and early 20th-century. It covered political, socio-cultural, and informative functions toward the Arbereshe community and Albanians in general. It also covered thematic such as the Albanian National Awakening and state-forming, Italian-Albanian relationships, as well as political events of a broader spectrum under the motto: - Shqipëria është vend për shqiptaret. (English: Albania belongs to Albanians.)

- Adriatiku është det italian, por dhe shqiptar.³ (Adriatic sea belongs to Italian as well as to Albanians.)

The newspaper was founded and managed by Italian lawyer and publicist Anselmo Lorecchio, an Arbereshe from Calabria. The newspaper came in a particularly delicate moment for Albania and the wider political equilibrium of Europe in that period. Especially the Albanian issue, which served as battle field of imperialistic interests of Italy and Austro-Hungary. The political essence of Lorecchio's work came into action specifically in this context: it managed to transmit clear and explicit political values to the Arbëreshë Intellectual Movement, and the newspaper that he founded and directed served as the main instrument for translating the cultural aspirations into a political project. The presence of Albanians living in Italy served as a bridge to improve the relations between the two countries: Italy and Albania.

During the World War I, Italy supported independent Albania trying to secure a de jure independent Albania under Italian control until the summer of 1920.

The influence of Italy on Albania was becoming greater because of the strong presence of Albanians in Italy who had come back and settled in Vlora and the historic presence of the Arbëreshë community there. In an effort to secure control,

¹ The resolute was made in 1917

² - Gazeta Populli, nr. 7, 14 nëntor 1919. "A ka me u ba se kishte me u rregullue Shqipëria"

³ - AQSH. Fondi: Anselmo Lorecchio, viti 1897-1918, Dosja nr. 12, f. 243.

Italy became the closest ally of Albania, declaring once again a *de jure* protectorate over the small Kingdom. First, its strategic geographic position provided a perfect bridge to expand Italian influence in the Balkan Peninsula. Secondly, The Italian Dictator wanted to control the Adriatic Completely and having Albania under his protectorate would give him the right to control the Straights of Otranto and thereby secure the entire eastern coast of Italy from an imminent attack. Thirdly, control of these straights also afforded Italy control of the Yugoslav navy and international trade in and out of the Adriatic. Any contributions Italy made to Albania was based on the political interests in the geostrategic positions of the two countries. For Italy Albania offered tremendous mineral wealth and strategic geographical position. Italian government made the Albanians who had been in Italy, make propaganda in Albania. There was cooperation between the Italo-Albanians and the Italian government. They needed each-other. A. Lorecchio wrote that he had begun his efforts to find a way of giving a more vigorous impulse to the commercial relations in the Adriatic Sea between the Albanians in Italy and those of the mother country. He declared that only the society he headed was at the disposal of the government, holding that only the Italian-Albanians were in a position, because of common blood.⁴

“Vatra”, the Pan-Albanian Federation of America which was led by Fan Noli, on the other side, published the newspaper “Dielli” (The Sun) and the magazine ‘The Adriatic Review’. Considering the political vacuum in Albania during the World War I, “Vatra” somehow functioned and was considered a kind of Albanian government in-exile. Vatra sent Noli and Konica in Europe to advocate and defend Albanian national demands. “Vatra” gained influence and “Dielli” newspaper was published daily under Constantin Anastas Chekrezi's supervision. “Vatra” would perform a lobbying campaign during the Paris Peace Conference, 1919 trying to influence mostly the decision of the American delegation. Mehmet Konica was sent in London by “Vatra” and he was very active in negotiating with Albanians regarding the creation of an Albanian Society. His initiative of negotiating with Albanians abroad was expressed in a letter sent to Turtulli on 22nd March 1918 where he says that: “I have already told you about the need of a Council's creation. - Since this hasn't been done, yet; let's do it properly.”⁵ In that letter he also raised the problem of not having the needed funds to afford so many Albanian delegates for a long period of time. He thought that it would be necessary to include two or three other candidates in “Vatra” such as Adhamidhi, Mustafa Kruja, and prof. Orazio Iriani, an Italo-Albanian who lived in Italy, so that he would help Vatra be present in Italy too, and doing that, they would also respect the Italian Government. In 1918, Mihal Turtulli was elected Representative of “Vatra” to establish contacts with the Albanian community of Italy and Italian authorities, in the eve of Congress of Durres.

The Policy followed by the Albanians of Lausanne

Faik Konica thought that another magazine had to be published in Lausanne, Switzerland. The greater the number of the Albanian magazines, the more clarified the Albanians would be. Mihal Turtulli during that time was active in the Albanian patriotic press where he advocated total unity between social and regional communities of Albania. In one of Konica's letters we can read as follows:

As for the magazine, I have stressed that it should come out very soon. Could you, please start publishing it as soon as possible. It depends on you to publish this magazine. I agreed on all points for the sake of good harmony, I accepted all your proposals, meanwhile the brochure must be published as soon as it is ready.

The magazine could be used to make people aware of the memorandums sent to the Peace Conference. In a letter Konica sent to Turtull explained that there could be more than one memorandum, for example one presented by Ismail Qemali and another one by Esad Pashë Toptani. He said: “You will say it is ridiculous to present different and memorandums which are contradictory, but it is possible.”⁶

Turtulli who was living in Lausanne, in 1st December 1918 sent a letter to colonel House in which he wrote that: “The theory that Albanians should be subjected to other foreign states because they have got out from a long lasting slavery and they do not possess all the qualities gained in the terms of a free life doesn't have any sense. Albanians will acquire these qualities as soon as they live in a free country and they will follow education in their native language.”⁶ The neighboring countries believed in theory that Albanians couldn't build their own institutions because they don't belong to the same religion. They believed that This agreement is that there should be an autonomous Albania. We willingly became a party to this, for the Albanians are separate in race, in language and, to a great extent, in religion.

Turtulli refused to believe all this malicious theories towards Albania and Albanians. He explained that the collapse of the Albanian state was not due to internal religious divisions, but it was because of the intrigues made by the states that used to lead the international policy, which didn't treat the Balkan countries equally by favoring one more than the others. Inaccurate arguments and statistics for Balkan countries presented in international congresses such as in Berlin and London were believed to be true. The false arguments caused chaos in Balkan which became the battlefield of the World War I.

The negative consequences of the Italian protectorate over Albania

The Italian protectorate over Albania was established by the Kingdom of Italy during World War I in an effort to secure a *de jure* independent Albania under Italian control. On 15th March 1918 “Vatra” declared that “an Italian protectorate in Albania on one hand would be a source of conflict between Italy and Austria and on the other hand it would be a conflict between Italy and the Balkan states, which would lead to

⁴ Stavro Skendi, The Albanian National Awakening, p.235, 1878-1912, Princeton Library, 1967

⁵ AQSH: F. Faik Konica, v. 1918, d. 6, f. 103. ⁶ AQSH: F. Faik Konica, v. 1918, d. 6, f. 103.

⁶ AQSH:F. 848, V, 1917.D. 6/1, f.108-118, “Dr. Mihal Turtulli, Lozane, 1 December 1917 to colonel House.”

international complications. Although the Austrians had to be driven, an Italian protectorate over Albania would be the most dreaded solution, it would be a distinct violation of the principle of nationality, it would be an annexation. Italy appeared in Balkan politics through her claim to a protectorate over Albania and the possession of Vlora, and dominate the Mediterranean places.⁷

On the light of London tractate, the powers had agreed, in order to avert a European war, that there should be an autonomous Albania. The danger of such a conflict sprang chiefly from the fact that two of the great powers were determined that Serbia, Greece, and Montenegro should not be permitted to divide Albania between them, as they desired and as undoubtedly they would have done if not prevented. Austria-Hungary led the opposition. Its reasons for pursuing that course have already been indicated. Italy supported Austria-Hungary because of Italian ambitions in Albania and in order to prevent the coast opposite Italy from falling under the control of States which in the future might become dependencies of Russia, or possibly of Austria-Hungary. In 1917, In America, the emigrants founded the first political party in emigration from two females, Qirjazi Sisters, with center in Worcester in USA. The chair leader of this party was chosen Sevasti Qiriazhi by marking so the first Albanian woman in leading a political party with a dense national and political activity. A new magazine called "Albania" was published to help Albanians express their own opinions about political situation in Albania, even in Balkan. The newspaper strictly included the dissemination of the basic purposes and the political objectives of the "National Political Party". It "propagated the idea of a political consolidation of all the Albanians, it held an opened attitude against the disintegration of the Albanian territories, it denounced the secret Treaty of London in 1915 and it popularized the outstanding figures of the Renaissance and the Independence of Albania."⁸ Through the newspaper the party developed a wide political and propagandistic activity not only between its own members, but also nourishing and activating the National Movement in the occupied Albanian territories.

The political currents in Albania during the World War I

Political chaos engulfed Albania after the outbreak of World War I. Two political currents appeared in Albania. The first believed that Albania should be an independent county and Albanians had all possibilities to ensure and direct their own independent state, without having to be put under the authority of a foreign state. This grouping was headed by the intellectuals. They believed that the political organizations would promote national consciousness.

In 1918 some intellectuals wrote in the newspaper "Populli" that "the Albanians had to set up their state by their own, nevertheless the difficulties"⁹ The newspaper demonstrated strong mistrust towards the foreign powers. It also reflected the internal situation of Albania which was further aggravated within the beginning of this war they couldn't expect the foreign countries to support them.

When the Great Powers were in search of a monarch for the newly independent Principality of Albania, long and tenacious negotiations followed between the rivals Austria-Hungary and Italy, the two powers most interested in Albania's future. Due to the lack of suitable candidates, the decision was for prince Wied. Western Europeans considered Albania to be a poor, lawless and backward country in 1913, and some foreign opinion was scathing. They were afraid of a feasible struggle in Balkan.

The pro American political current in Albania

The American politics became an important factor of the developments in Europe, when the U.S entered the First World War. U.S President Wilson had a strong position in the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. During the Conference, he constantly refers to the secret Treaty of London of 1915. The Treaty established the partition to Albania, inconsistent with the principles that he had decided to defend in the Peace Conference and to create a new international order Albanian-American Pan-Albanian Federation of America-Vatra started in 1912 by Fan S. Noli and it was politically active during the First World War. While the international community debated over the partition of Albania, President Woodrow Wilson on May 6, 1919 deemed that "Albania ought to be independent."¹⁰ During the German occupation of Albania, the United States supported a common advance of Albanians against their occupiers.

The Congress of Lushnje held in January 1920 was the Congress of the Albanian politicians. There was also an elected lower chamber, which had one deputy for every 12,000 people in Albania and, also one deputy for the large Albanian-American community. The regency council declared: "heartfelt thanks to President Wilson for his defense of the rights of Albanians. They remain convinced that the great American Republic will continue to support their rightful national claims."¹¹ President Woodrow Wilson, after World War I, stood up to the victorious nations of Europe and insisted that Albania, made up of one of the oldest peoples of Europe, was a true nation and that its borders had to be preserved. Back then the so-called victorious Great Powers - Britain, France and Italy - wanted to divide Albania up among its neighbors, as a sort of reward for fighting and defeating the German/Austrian coalition. Serbia was slated for a piece here, Greece a

⁷ AQSH. F. 30, V. 1918, D. nr. 7, f. 2-8 "Deklarata e Vatrës në lidhje me protektoratin italian mbi Shqipërinë. Nënshkruar F.S. Noli, president"

⁸ Albanian Academy of Science, Encyclopedic Albanian Dictionary, 2008.

⁹ Gazeta "Populli", Shkoder, march 1919, p.3. (A ka me u ba e si kishte me u rregullue Shqipnia"

¹⁰ *Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, The Paris Peace Conference, 1919*, Volume V. Washington: Government Printing Office. 1919. p. 483.

¹¹ Nationalism in Eastern Europe. / Edited by Peter F. Sugar and Ivo J. Lederer. - Version details". *Trove*. Retrieved 2017-05-05.

chunk there, and Italy a section of the coast. But for Wilson standing up for Albania, the tiny, poor and defenseless country would have disappeared.

The Pro –Italy Albanian politicians

There existed another group of the Albanian politicians who believed in the policy followed by Italy towards Albania. This group includes: Syrja Vlora, Turhan Pashë Përmeti, Visarion Dodani, Eqerem Bej Libohova, Gaqi Adhamidhi who were developing their political activity in Switzerland. They believed that only Italy could support Albania to be constructed, and Italy was the dominant factor in solving Balkan problems. On 12th October 1918 they wrote a memorandum to the minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy asking Italy to be a protector over Albania. In a letter sent to Sonino explained the political situation of Albania and asked for support.

By the end of World War I, the Italians needed an Albanian government composed of pro-Italian elements. This required, first to create the impression that Albanians demanded a government brought to life with the support of Italy, and second, an official government body established legally, which would be the best option to avoid any other representatives of Albania (claimants) which might show up and be introduced at the Peace Conference.

All the Albanian politicians, nevertheless the group they belonged to, shared the same opinions about the future of Albania, they all were fighting for an independent country, but they didn't agree about the allies they should have. During our research, we haven't found any material to show the existence of a common agreement signed by these different Albanian political groups.

Italy had always tried to make the Adriatic an Italian sea and Albania a bridgehead for her imperialist expansion in the Balkans.

The occupation of a portion of Albania by Italian troops in 1917, the Titoni–Venizelos Agreement of 1919, the decision of 9th November, 1921 by which the Ambassador Conference, under Italian diplomatic pressure acknowledged Italy's privileged position in Albania, all the agreements, arrangements, conventions and treaties of every type imposed by Italy on Albania between 1922 and 1939 reveal Italy's imperialistic designs on our country.¹²

The circulator conducted by the command of the Italian troupe.

At the end of World War I, Italy was concerned about its interests in Albania. The Treaty of London, 1915, was a secret pact between the Triple Entente and the Kingdom of Italy. The treaty was signed in London on 26 April 1915 by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, the French Third Republic, the Russian Empire, and the Kingdom of Italy. Its intent was to gain the alliance of Italy against its former allies, including the German Empire and Austria-Hungary. The main lure was promising large swaths of Austria-Hungary to the north of Italy and to the east across the Adriatic. Britain also promised funding. Italy promised to enter the war the next month.

The alliance with Italy's old enemy Austria had been promoted by some politicians as a real politic move and had never been popular with the public. Also, the Allies could easily outbid Austria-Hungary and thereby won a military alliance with 36 million Italians. The secret provisions were published by the Bolsheviks when they came to power in Russia in late 1917. Italy tried to improve relations with Albania because they had been having problems because of the decisions of London Treaty. That's why on February 21st 1918, the command of the Italian troupe XVI conducted a circular to the civil commissioners of the prefectures asking them to make propaganda in favor of Italy so that to reduce the people anxiety because of the treaty. The circular emphasized:

1. Italy became an important ally when the fate of Albania was compromised between the Great Powers and the Balkan states;
2. The content of London Treaty, which was published in Petrograd was intentionally changed by the Entente members. The Little Entente was an alliance formed in 1920 and 1921 by Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia with the purpose of common defense against Hungarian revanche. The Albanians expressed serious discontent with the lack of consideration of the Albanian territorial claims and fear of the possibility of neighbors claims.
3. These changes were not made known because "the German philosophical Leninists were not interested in publicizing them".¹³ Everything was realised at the moment when Italy Supported the Albanian independence and became protectorate over Albania established by the Kingdom of Italy.
4. Albanians should believe in Italian policy toward Albania because they had been always preoccupied about Albanian faith. "Italy recognizes and undertakes to respect the sovereignty, the independence and the territorial integrity of the State of Albania."¹⁴

Francesco Guzzi officer in the Italian council in Switzerland asked the Albanians to raise their voice to protect their rights. "As promised, Italy will support you but you, too, must help us in this very difficult situation."¹⁶ By the end of World War I, the Italians needed an Albanian government composed of pro-Italian elements. This required, first to create the impression that Albanians demanded a government brought to life with the support of Italy, and second, an official government body established legally, which would be the best option to avoid any other representatives of Albania (claimants) which might show up and be introduced at the Peace Conference.

¹² Memoranda Submitted by the Albanian Government on the Draft Peace Treaty With Italy, 30 gusht 1946.

¹³ Gazeta "Populli", Shkodër, viti II, nr. 59, dt. 4 maj 1920, f. 3

¹⁴ The Memorandum, Arkivi i MJ, Fond ii Konferencës se Paqës, Dosja Nr.9/1, document nr. 25228, f.680. ¹⁶ AQSH. F. K. Lozanë, 7 tetor 1918, f. 32.

The Italian policy pursued to establish public order in Albania

This government would serve as a domestic support, but also to avoid any territorial claims from the Balkan neighbors. Sonnino called Turhan Pasha, Myfid Libohova, and Mihal Turtulli for a summon in Rome on October 22, 1918. They should make contact with the Albanian colonies, and form an interim government where the large Albanian provinces as well as all religions were represented. Turhan Pasha and Myfid Libohova resided still in Italy. Mihal Turtulli had the mandate of Vatra but was still residing in Switzerland. He didn't go to Italy as requested initially, evaluating the danger of Italy's colonialist intentions, but did not succeed to find any support within Albania. Italians managed to replace Turtulli with another delegate from Vatra, which was Mehmet Konica. Konica was called to go to Rome on November 3–4, 1918.

Meanwhile, the Italian government had given up the initial idea of assembling an Albanian government. Albanians leaders, who came from Rome to Albania, were advised to form only a "National Council" or "National Committee" rather than a government. This half-government should not exercise independent politics, neither internally nor internationally, and would depend a lot on Italian decision making. All this was ostensibly made to avoid any diplomatic entanglement. The foreign policy of Italy was focused on the political situation in Albania. Therefore, Sonnino sent a telegram to the supreme commander of Italian Forces in the Balkans, Settimo Piacentini on December 29, 1918, asking to be informed on how the discussions were going, and how the delegates managed to create the Provisional Government in contradiction with Italian expectations. He also advised to carefully consider the factual and legal relations between the occupying military authorities and the newly created governing body. Sonnino later would recognize the authorities and the composition of the Provisional Government created, though fearing any controversy by the Great Powers. The reasons were as follows:

1. The neighboring countries expressed their territorial claims toward Albania regarding the Treaty of London
2. Albanian state had a poor administrator Sonnino's guidance consisted on six important points:
 1. Turhan Pasha, Turtulli e Myfid Libohova should be asked for a summon in Rome. They should make contact with the Albanian colonies, and form an interim government where "the large Albanian provinces as well as all religions were to be represented."¹⁵

Another Albanian politician became prominent at that time. He was Bibe Doda. He was an authoritative person and was respected by all, especially in Shkodra. He belonged to catholic religion.

2. They had given up the initial idea of assembling an Albanian government. Albanians leaders, who came from Rome to Albania, were advised to form only a "National Council" or "National Committee" rather than a government. This half-government should not exercise independent politics, neither internally nor internationally, and would depend a lot on Italian decision making. All this was ostensibly made to avoid any diplomatic entanglement. The government would settle first in Shkoder after they had a meeting in Gjirokastra.¹⁶
3. After the re-establishment of the Albanian independence, the military forces would defend their territory. The sovereignty of Albania was not secure. In the North King Nicholas of Montenegro declared that: "We must have Skutari. Skutari is ours ethnologically, historically and geographically."¹⁹

Esad Pasha Toptani and his opposition

Esad Pasha was a prominent politician in this period of Albanian history. He was in open discord with the progressive politicians of Albania when discussing about Albanian claims. He was adopting an attitude of open defense towards the Albanian leaders. Esad Pasha attempted a fresh bid for power in pursuit of his pretensions to the throne of central Albania. He gathered around him elements who had been active supporters of the Serbs during their occupation of Albania. It was said that was financed by Serbs and supported by them. "He was a good piece of loaf in the hands of Serbian politics against Italy"¹⁷ Esad Pasha was condemned for cooperating with serbs.

Italian policy and the Albanian politician's stance

Italy was being dissatisfied with the Albanian politicians. Things were not going as they expected to be. One of the most prominent Albanian politicians, Mihal Turtulli, who spent most of the period until 1918 in Lausanne, Switzerland, during this time, was very active in the Albanian patriotic press where he advocated total unity between social and regional communities of Albania.¹⁸ While in Switzerland, together with Pandeli Cale and Sotir Kolea, he published the periodical *L'Albanie* where he expressed his non pro-Italian stance.

In 1919, he represented Albania in the Paris Peace Conference. He strongly advocated the unity of Albanian nation against the stance of Alexandros Karapanos who represented the Greeks of Northern Epirus (South Albania). He sent also a letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Italian Government where required to respect the independence and integrity of the Albanian state and thus abolish the other powers the possibility for arbitrary and annexation requests. Mihal Turtulli was pressed by some friends of him to support the Italian actions over Albania.

¹⁵ Galli - Diarli e letere. Firenze, Caza Edit. G.C. Zanzani, 1951, fq. 313: - *Letër e përgjegjësit të zyrës për Shqipërinë dhe Ballkanin, pranë ministrisë italiane të Punëve të Jashtme, F. Kastoldi (italisht).*

¹⁶ Galli - Diarli e letere. Firenze, Caza Edit. G.C. Zanzani, 1951. fq. 317: " *Letër e përgjegjësit të zyrës për Shqipërinë dhe Ballkanin, pranë ministrisë italiane të Punëve të Jashtme, F. Kastoldi*" (italisht). ¹⁹ Albania in the Twentieth Century, A History: Volume I: Albania and King Zog ..., p.122

¹⁷ *Riflessivi e visione della Grande Guerra in Albania* - GUIDO Carni, MCMXXVII, f. 160.

¹⁸ Selim Islami; Kristo Frashëri; Aleks Buda, Historia e popullit shqiptar, Universiteti Shtetëror i Tiranës. Instituti i Historisë dhe i Gjuhësisë. (1968)

Albanian leaders, who came from Rome to Albania, were advised to form only a "National Council" or "National Committee" rather than a government. This half-government should not exercise independent politics, neither internally nor internationally, and would depend a lot on Italian decision making. All this was ostensibly made to avoid any diplomatic entanglement. Turtulli was pro American policy and support to Albania. In 1918, he was elected Representative of Vatra to establish contacts with the Albanian community of Italy and Italian authorities, in the eve of Congress of Durres but due to his non pro-Italian stance, he was substituted by Mehmet Konica who was sent in Switzerland to follow contacts with the Albanians living there. Konica was and promised to be given all the facilities so that he would cooperate with many other Albanians who were in Geneva.

The need for the Italian military presence in Albania

On October 14 the 1918 the Albanians of Switzerland sent a letter to Sonnino, the minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy where they would ask for their support in the Conference of Peace and also for a reasonable number of Italian military troops to be settled in Albania. They asked for the expulsion of foreign troops from Albanian territory and the elimination of all foreign influence in the country. The Albanians wanted to negotiate for the withdrawal of the foreign forces from Albanian soil.¹⁹

A distinguished Albanian politician was Kole Tromara, who due to economic difficulties and political oppression from the Ottomans decided to emigrate in US and was immediately involved in the patriotic circles of the Albanian community there. He supported the idea of the unification of Albania in one state, including Kosovo and Cameria.

The efforts to form an Albanian government had begun with the start of the First World War. The chances of forming an Albanian government became higher by the end of the First World War, when the Albanians were constrained to harmonize all efforts to avoid real threats coming from the war-winning neighbors. The present situation had driven "Vatra", as published later through the newspaper "The Sun" (Albanian: Dielli), to demand to the Italian government to respect the will of all Albanians, allowing them to form in Albania a government of their own. A similar request to the Italian side came also Myfid Libohova, who in October demanded to the Italians the establishment of a provisional government, which would work side by side with the Italian counterpart in fighting against common enemies. The government of Durres, which was created immediately after the end of the war and was under Italian influence, did not duly represent the interests of the Albanian nation, so the well-known personalities sought to hold a national congress. Preparations for the congressional meeting showed that the Government of Durres was increasingly narrowing its internal support.

Preparation for the composition of a new Albanian government

By the end of World War I, the Italians needed an Albanian government composed of pro-Italian elements. This required, first to create the impression that Albanians demanded a government brought to life with the support of Italy, and second, an official government body established legally, which would be the best option to avoid any other representatives of Albania (claimants) which might show up and be introduced at the Peace Conference.

This government would serve as a domestic support, but also to avoid any territorial claims from the Balkan neighbors. Sonnino called Turhan Pasha, Myfid Libohova, and Mihal Turtulli for a summon in Rome on October 22, 1918. They should make contact with the Albanian colonies. Gathering of Albanian leaders had already started by October 1918, with the support of Mehdi

Frashëri and Mustafa Kruja, both pro-Italian at that time. The same were asking Vatra on October 6, 1918 to send the representatives in Italy for discussing the ground of a common political platform, which would be represented at the Peace Conference.²⁰

Meanwhile, the Italian government had given up the initial idea of assembling an Albanian government. Albanian leaders, who came from Rome to Albania, were advised to form only a "National Council" or "National Committee" rather than a government. This half-government should not exercise independent politics, neither internally nor internationally, and would depend a lot on Italian decision making. In late November 1918, the approval of forming the Albanian National Council arrived. The council was pre-designed by Gaetano Manconi and was supposed to be formed as soon as possible in Durrës. Regardless of the factual substantial form, either as a government or as a council, this governing body should come after a national congress. Mehmet Konica, Myfid Libohova, and Mehdi Frashëri were launched in Albania in late December 1918, accompanied by Lieutenant Ettore Lodi, who would perform political tasks during the congress as well as later.²¹ The preparation stage for a Congress in Durrës was accompanied by an initiative to gather a congress or meeting in Shkodra.

The congress was opened on the afternoon of 25 December 1918, with the participation of 53 delegates. They came from most Albanian regions, which were under Italian occupation. The congress discussed regarding the Italian side, which could show interest in supporting the territorial claims of the Albanians. According to Myfid Libohova's memories, it appears that Mehmet Konica submitted an Italian proposal for the formation of an Executive Committee which will try to delegate an Albanian representative body to the Peace Conference and will operate within the country ensuring national and political life of the Albanian people. On the other hand, Mehmet Konica supported the proposal of Namik Delvina and Riza Dani, for the creation of a provisional government, which should be accepted by Rome authorities.

¹⁹ L'Albania, Lausanne-Gare, Nr.7/18, December 25, 1918, p.60.

²⁰ Gazeta "Dielli", Boston, 31 October 1918.

²¹ Myfid Libohova, Politika ime ndaj Shqipërisë Gjyrokastër 1921, p.6-8.

He asked that before this was announced, it was necessary to obtain a response from Rome, hoping that the Italians would finally accept it. While several other delegates stated that the government was the desire of the Albanian people and it did not matter if it would be accepted by Italy or not.

Albanian leaders meet at Durres to discuss presentation of Albania's interests at the Paris Peace Conference. Afterwards, the congress went through the established agenda. The delegates refused the first point on the agenda, which stipulated the formation of a committee that, based on the record, had two tasks: first, send an Albanian delegation at the Peace Conference; and second, to ensure national political life of the Albanian people. The delegates decided the formation of an interim government, which was an independent decision and defiant against the diplomatic positioning of Rome so far.

Regarding this issue there were two positions, which were expressed by Mehmet Konica's words on December 26: "When the delegates, by an absolute majority, agreed on the formation of the interim government after accepting the decisions of the yesterday's meeting, even the Italian command which was given the news, was kind enough to commit to communicating it to its own government. In two or three days the answer from Rome will come, stating that it has been accepted or not

Meanwhile, Hikmet Bey Delvina said that Albanians honored the Italian Command allocated in Albania for the care and kindness showed towards Albanians, but he strongly pointed that it did not matter whether Rome would accept the decision of the congress, what was worth was that Albanian people wanted and declared the Provisional Government through their delegates in the national meeting.

Esad Pasha was expressing the opinion that the delegates did not have the power to form a government. The existence of a committee will give more freedom to Essad Toptani for some reasons:

1. he was a strong and pragmatic opponent more than any other Albanian politician
2. he was one of the most powerful of the feudal class
3. For his military strength and financial means, he and his armies were present and active along the borders at the time of the congress.

Of great importance was the opinion of Vasil Dilo who stated that the congress should not act independently. He supported this approach in several ways: first, the Albanian people were not ready and had not reached that degree of maturity as to shed blood for their country; second, it would be risky for Albania, considering this lack of readiness, to express political stands and operate independently; third, an independent movement will lead to the demolition of Albanian relations with the only friend it had, which was Italy. This attitude is reinforced by a debate he had with Mehdi Frashëri, expressing the opinion "we as delegates do not have the power to form a government"²²

After a lot of debates between pros and cons, the platform of creating an Albanian Government prevailed and was made official.

In addition to establishing the Albanian Provisional Government, the congress defined an initial delegation which would represent Albania in the Peace Conference in Paris. The congress expressed its disapproval and concern regarding the outcome of the Treaty of London (1915), through two basic issues related to Albania.

First, on the political level, through the creation of the government, Albanians rejected the Italian protectorate over Albania with representation by the state of Italy in relations with the world, as was contemplated in section VII of the Treaty. Congress restated that the majority of the decisions of the London Conference were intact, along with the full sovereignty of the Albanian state already formed.

Second, it rejected any decision affecting Albanian territories. The delegates expressed bitterness over this point VI of the Treaty, by which it recognized Italian sovereignty over Valona, as well as to point VII, under which Italy would not oppose the passage of southern and most northern Albania to Greece and Serbia - Montenegro, in case this would have been also required by other signatories of the Treaty, as France and England.

Some cons for the government to be.

The congress rejected point V as well, which accepted the existence of a "Muslim" Albanian state in central Albania. Another critic went to the Italians for creating obstacles for Vlora delegates to be part of the congress. In the same sense also addressed other provinces, which were unable to be represented. It was strongly emphasized that these territories be considered part of the Albanian state.

The composition of government was proposed since the first session of the meetings Government of the Principality of Albania: 28 December 1918 – 28 January 1920:

Turhan Përmeti - Head of State and Prime Minister of Albania

Prênk Bibë Doda - Deputy Prime Minister

Myfid Libohova - Deputy Prime Minister and Minister without portfolio

Monsignor Luigj Bumçi - Minister without portfolio

Mustafa Merlika-Kruja - Minister of Posts and Telegraphs

Mihal Turtulli - Minister without portfolio

Mehmet Konica - Minister of Foreign Affairs

Sami Bey Vrioni - Minister of Agriculture

Mit'hat Frashëri - Minister without portfolio

Luigj Gurakuqi - Minister of Education

²² Haris Silaxhiç, "Shqipëria dhe SHBA në arkivat e Uashingtonit", Tiranë, Dituria, 1996.

Lef Nosi - Minister of National Economy
Mehdi Frashëri - Minister of the Interior
Fejzi Alizoti - Minister of Finances
Petro Poga - Minister of Justice

Governmental programme

The congress drafted a general political programme, which focused in three main directions: maintaining the independence and sovereignty of the Albanian state, the territorial integrity of the state and the revision of the 1913 ethnic borders, and internal order. Regarding the controversial issues related to the legal status of the state and political preferences towards any war-winning force, which had brought up enough disagreements and discussions, an internal silent agreement took place without being officialized. Despite the decisions taken, Albania was still under foreign occupation.

The Congress of Durrës is considered an important step in the Albanian state-forming process. A full assessment on the program of the government is still missing. The Albanian historiography after World War II took a critical attitude towards it, its key leaders, and the pro-Italian spirit that characterized it. Specifically, the critics went to Pan-Albanian Federation of America (Vatra), considered one of the strong pillars of Albanian nationalism, which compromised with Italy regarding the formation of the government of Durrës. The Albanian government that was created was considered "a little more than an Italian puppet"²³.

A retrospective view shows that perhaps that was a right attitude. The agreements that came out were a consequence of historical circumstances that changed at the end of the war, such as disruption of equilibrium in the Balkans as a result of the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Conclusions

Political chaos engulfed Albania after the outbreak of World War I. The country suffered from a debilitating lack of economic and social development, however, and its first years of independence were fraught with political instability. Unable to survive in a predatory world without a foreign protector, Albania became the object of tensions between Italy and the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (Yugoslavia), which were both bent on controlling the country.

Completion of the First World War quashed the political balances between Italy and the Austro-Hungary and enabled Italian diplomacy to enhance its influence on Albanian political elite. The Foreign Minister, Baron Sonino authorized the Director of the Albanian office in Rome, Colonel Vincent, to contact Mehmet Konica and Myfit Libohova to go to Albania with the aim to compose a "Committee Execution" but not a national government.

Albania's political confusion continued in the wake of World War I. The country lacked a single recognized government, and Albanians feared, with justification, that Greece, Yugoslavia, and Italy would succeed in extinguishing Albania's independence and carve up the country. Italian forces controlled Albanian political activity in the areas they occupied. The Serbs, who largely dictated Yugoslavia's foreign policy after World War I, strove to take over northern Albania, and the Greeks sought to control southern Albania.

A delegation sent by a postwar Albanian National Assembly that met at Durres in December 1918 defended Albanian interests at the Paris Peace Conference, but the conference denied Albania official representation. The National Assembly, anxious to keep Albania intact, expressed willingness to accept Italian protection and even an Italian prince as a ruler so long as it would mean Albania did not lose territory. Afterwards, the congress went through the established agenda. In addition to establishing the Albanian Provisional Government, the congress defined an initial delegation which would represent Albania in the Peace Conference in Paris. The head of the delegation would be Turhan Pasha, and as members Luigj Bumçi, Mehmet Konica, Mihal Turtulli, and Mit'hat Frashëri. The Congress of Durrës is considered an important step in the Albanian state-forming process. It was an important event in the history of Albania because:

1. The congress expressed its disapproval and concern regarding the outcome of the Treaty of London (1915), through two basic issues related to Albania.
2. Congress restated that the majority of the decisions of the London Conference of 1912–13 were intact, along with the full sovereignty of the Albanian state already formed.
3. It rejected any decision affecting Albanian territories. The delegates expressed bitterness over this point VI of the Treaty, by which it recognized Italian sovereignty over.
4. Another critic went to the Italians for creating obstacles for Vlora delegates to be part of the congress. In the same sense also addressed other provinces, which were unable to be represented. It was strongly emphasized that these territories be considered part of the Albanian state. Albania achieved real statehood after World War I, in part because of the diplomatic intercession of the United States.

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