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**RELATIONS BETWEEN ALBANIAN AND BULGARIAN DURING 1912-1914**

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**Abstract:** The history of the Balkans has been and is the story of the peoples who have lived and tried for the relationship of a worthy and peaceful neighborhood on this peninsula. But in a few cases, these relationships are defined by state policies and as such have been conflicting. Referring to political developments, after the First Balkan War Balkan conflicts between the Balkan states conditioned the outbreak of the Second Balkan War. Albania's destiny was directly linked to these Balkan conflicts. The only Balkan state, which had no territorial claims in Albania, resulted to be Bulgaria. In this regard, we point out that Bulgaria's interests after the First Balkan War resonated with the interests of Albanians. The decision of the Ambassadors' Conference in London unduly left outside the borders of the new Albanian state almost half of the country's lands. Did Bulgaria support the new Albanian state at the London Conference of Ambassadors? What was the attitude of the Bulgarian population during the Albanian uprising against the Serbs of 1913? The treatment and analysis of these issues is also the focus of our research in the framework of this scientific paper. In reflecting on such issues, we have relied on the consultation of a broad and contemporary literature, seen in the context of comparability of archival documents, with new approaches and attitudes.

**Keywords:** Conference of Ambassadors in London, Balkan League, Albanian insurgency against Serbs 1913, absconder

**INTRODUCTION**

Albanians declared independence on November 28, 1912. But the political and territorial destiny and future of the Albanian state would be placed at the Conference of Ambassadors in London, convened on December 17, 1912. This conference focused on its decision-making of the new borders in the Balkans, after the end of the First Balkan War (Dervishi, 2005, p. 26). At this conference, the Albanian issue became subject to debate and strong discussions. The essence of the debate was whether Albania's autonomy or independence would be accepted. For this problem, the Great Powers and the Balkan states did not share the same attitude. Initially, they were about recognition of Albania's autonomy under Istanbul's dependence.<sup>121</sup> The same attitude was taken with the Balkan countries with the exception of Bulgaria. The Bulgarian position was reflected in the periodical of the Provisional Government of Vlora, saying: *"It is a special pleasure to note that the first state that expressed sincere friendship to Albania was Bulgaria. In fact, at the time of the 6'th Conference in London, he worked in the interest of the Albanian people. The Albanian people will never forget that he was supported by Bulgaria at a time when the Albanian people needed support"*(The Birthday of Albania, 1913).

**DIPLOMATIC SUPPORT**

The Bulgarian delegation at this conference, represented by Dr. Stojan Danev, in his meetings with Serbian, Greek and Montenegrin representatives, will reflect Bulgaria's position in favour of Albania's independence. The same attitude will present British diplomats and Bulgarian ambassador to London, Mihail Maxharov. Both Bulgarian diplomats in the meeting they had with the head of the Albanian state, Ismail Qemali, would also offer him support for the consolidation of the Albanian administration (Atanosova: 2018). In his memoirs, journalist, politician and renowned diplomat Simeon Radev wrote, *"The issue for Albania and its borders turned into a genuine diplomatic rally."* The conflict was between representatives of the great powers and the Balkan states that depended on them. Especially stronger was the conflict between Austria and Russia. The Bulgarian delegation insisted on resolving the issue, giving independence to Albania and setting its boundaries on the principle of nationality, and not based on the strategic or geographic principle (Atanosova: 2018).

In the summer of 1913, the international situation did not appear favorable to the Albanian state and the Government of Vlora. The final decisions of the Ambassadors Conference in London, left nearly half of the

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<sup>121</sup> After several months of debates, proposals and against proposals at the Albanian borders and the political status of Albania, with the proposal of the Italian and Austro - Hungarian commission, the decision taken on July 29, 1913, declared Albania as "autonomous and hereditary principality under the six – Great Powers".

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Albanian territories outside the borders of the Albanian state. The Albanian population in the conquered lands was placed under a military regime of violence and terror, as it was stated at the time, with the sole purpose of having no one to fight against the Serb.(Jehona: Skopje 1993, p. 40).

The war that Bulgaria proclaimed to Serbia and Greece in 1913, Ismail Qemali the head of the Albanian state, considered existential to Albania and Albanian national interests. His views were also made known to Elbasan Prefecture on June 15, 1913. Ismail Qemali insisted to closely follow the movements of military troops at the border, defining the Albanian position through the words: "... according to the character to be taken works.(AQSH. F. 145).

With the separation of borders from the Ambassadors Conference in London, the two neighboring states that had benefited Albanian territories were Greece and Serbia, while Bulgaria basically had no claims to Albanian territories. Ismail Qemali was interested in the outbreak of this conflict. Moreover, the Vlorë government intended to have its representative at the Albanian border. The foreign policy of the Albanian state basically relies on the principle of non-intervention and neutrality. But why not, if the Serbian or Greek troops were to break, there was a chance to hope to review the unfair decision of the Albanian borders, it is understood by the support of the Bulgarian side.<sup>122</sup>

Thus, the Government of Vlorë would send as its representative to district of Qukës, Selman Blloshmi, also announcing the Elbasan Prefecture for the task with which he was charged. According to this information that was considered confidential, Selman Blloshmi was sent as the most trusted man in Vlorë with the mission to closely follow the developments of military fighting in the front of the war between Bulgarian, Serbian and Greek armies (AQSH. F. 145, Dos. II-27). Ismail Qemali would ask the Mayor of Elbasan to provide clear and accurate instructions, not to obstruct and delay the departure of Selman Blloshmi to Qukës. We emphasize that this act was also the first attempt by the Government of Vlorë to organize an information service at the border (AQSH. F. 145, Dos. II-27).

#### **ALBANIAN UPRISING AGAINST SERBS**

The terror exercised by in Kosovo and other areas annexed by Serbia were repeated all the most barbaric persecutions recognized by world history (AQSH.F.145,Dos.II-27). The population of these areas disconnected from the Albanian trunk, without much time, would strongly respond to such a reality. The first reaction was discovered in the area of Dibrë where, in mid-September 1913, an armed movement broke out, which within a few days took up the size of a mass invasion including Luma, Ohrid, Struga, Tetovo, Gostivar, Kicevo, mountain areas of Gjakovë, the outskirts of Prizren, the villages of Reka, Mavrova and Skopj (Prifti: 2004, p.155 ).

There is an opinion that the outbreak of the anti-Serb uprising of Dibrë is preceded by the activity of the Albanian Chetniks. These groups operated in the area of Dibrë, Skopje, Tetovo and Gostivar since the beginning of 1913. Their activity against the Serbian army came intensifying in the months of April - May of this year (Purrellku:2004, p.45). Throughout the summer of 1913, as a result of Serbian repressive actions, the situation in Western Macedonia was more and more aggravated. Resistance against the Serbs was present through the organization of Kachaki groups in some special areas. While planning and rapid launch of an attack in Macedonia and Kosovo was planned, the most critical situation was presented in the area of Dibrë and Lake Ohrid, where cetaceans and other groups started (Shabani: 1993, p. 77). It was reported that the uprising was neither random nor instantaneous through consultation with the documentation of the Belgrade military archive. This movement was prepared for a relatively long time and was in the continuation of the war for the liberation of occupied Albanian lands during the Balkan Wars. In July 1913, Serbian sources reported on the movements of Bajram Curri and Isa

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<sup>122</sup> Since the spring of 1913, among the Albanian patriotic circles circulated the idea that there were possible premise for the establishment of an alliance between Turkey and Bulgaria, which turned out to be unhappy with the benefits of the Balkan War. Also, on the journey that Ismail Qemali had in Europe in April-July 1913, in order to review the decisions of the Ambassadorial Conference, a considerable deal on his agenda also took place with the talks with Bulgarian diplomats. Using the new conjunctures created in the Balkans, Ismail Qemali hoped to join a potential alliance that could be created in the future between Turkey - Bulgaria and Albania. But, as evidenced, there was nothing concrete about this. In this case, if we refer to the words of Colonel Stefan Milovanovic, it turns out that the position of the prefect of Elbasan appears in the framework of a cooperative approach with the Serbian army commander.

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Boletini for the purpose of organizing an uprising, stating that "*they had bought many weapons and ammunition between them and the balls of war*" (Rushiti: 95, pp.94-95).

Regarding the causes of the beginning of the September uprising, the same opinion with Albanian scholars is also reflected in the information of foreign consuls in Albania. In a report sent by the British consul in Bitola to London, it was noted that the September anticreep uprising was a direct product of fragmentation of Albanian territories and the division of the Albanian border. He considered this act as unjustified by saying that "... *Without any reasonable strategic, ethnographic or economic justification, this boundary would cut off the ties of the people of Mat, Lura, Kalis, Dardha and even a part of the River with the city of Dibra. It would exclude them from accessing the sacred places of Dibra ... sacred places where guild leaders usually resolve conflicts of all kinds without further complaints*".(Duka:2012, British documents, p.126) Moreover, in reports that the British consul in Albania sent to London official, it was not reported about any possible involvement of the Vlora Government in Dibra's against-serbs uprising. It was precisely the problem of the border set in London, which was considered as a cause of the creation of conflict situations in Albanian territories. Such a problem finds a continuous reflection in the report of British Consul Peckham who expressed: "*What I have heard and seen has strengthened and confirmed the belief that the boundary in London, apart from being difficult to be decisive, will to be a constant source of friction and clashes*", giving a series of ethnic, historical and economic arguments in favor of the Albanian population remaining outside the border (Duka: pp. 120-121).

### **SUPPORT OF BULGARIANS TOWARDS ALBANIANS**

Also, through British sources, the fact that, in the fighting of Albanians against Serbian troops, in certain areas were included Austrian and Bulgarian officers. In the report that Lieutenant General Greig's consul sent to London on September 26, 1913, the names of some Bulgarian voivodes, who together with the Bulgarian bands, had crossed to Albania in the Struga region were mentioned. It was about some prominent Bulgarian voivodes, like Petre Culev, Pavlov. Among the Bulgarian Voivodas, mention was also made by Milan Matovi [former inspectors of Bulgarian gangs in the Monastery of Vilave, before the Balkan wars], which was said to have been in the city of Elbasan. Moreover, the British consul claimed that among the Albanians of Bitola was the conviction that the Albanian - Bulgarian action against the Serbs surely had the Turkish support (Duka: 2012). The information reflected on the official press pages of the time, did not exclude the possibility of cooperation between Albanians and Bulgarians. This co-operation was related to the same situation under which both sides were. For this problem was written: "*It is possible that along with the Albanian insurgents there are Bulgarians (Macedonians). Surely those who suffer together, those who have common enemy, they will always cooperate*" (Birthday of Albania: 1913). Such an assertion was reflected in an article published in the Official Gazette of the Provisional Government of Vlora "The Birthday of Albania". In this newspaper under the title "Albanians are with the Bulgarians", among others it was written that: "*This covenant is with Albanian bayraktar : Ali Kaloshi, Maliq Krishna, Kurt Haxha with the Bulgarians Milan Matofin and Petrush Caulefin*" (Birthday of Albania: 1913).

Meanwhile, through the information of the mayor of Qukës to the Prefecture of Elbasan, it was reported about the cooperation of the Albanian forces with the Bulgarian forces through the words: "*Albanian and Bulgarian bands are acting together*" (A.Q.H:1963. p. 2015). In order to justify such a reality, cooperation between the Muslim and Christian population was considered successful not only in Debar, but also in the Derbatsa (north of Struga), Demir-Hissar and Kicevo regions, he majority of the population consisted of the Bulgarian element. Meanwhile, the British vice-consul expressed: "The Albanian movement is something more than a chaotic attack" (Duka: 2012, p. 123). In addition, in the spring of 1913, the possible premise of creating an alliance between Turkey and Bulgaria was created. Bulgaria was disappointed by the benefits of the Balkan War. According to information received from British consuls, it was reported that Bulgaria had left two battalions masked as Chetniks in Macedonia (Duka, British documents: 2012, p.123).

There is evidence that in the journey that Ismail Qemali had in Europe in April-July 1913, he is meeting with Bulgarian diplomats. Using the new conjunctures created in the Balkans, in their meetings Ismail Qemali hoped to join an alliance that could be created in the future between Turkey – Bulgaria, why not and Albania(History: 2012. p. 55). But there was nothing concrete about it. Meanwhile, the existence of Bulgarian - Muslim bands was reported on the locality of Morihova (east of Bitola), where it was said; "*Has arrived a cavalry with about 300 people from Skopje*" (Duka, British documents: 2012, p.126). The involvement of Bulgarian bands alongside Albanian rebels in the anti - Serbian uprising of September 1913, was mostly the support provided to the Albanian population by Bulgarians, a support that was evident even in other critical periods of history as a mutual support

between Balkan peoples who had to face the same concerns and problems. In such a context, the Vlorë government will not lack diplomatic activity and calls to the Great Powers to stop the massacres made by Serbs, while clarifying its position in relation to the insurgents and seeking to determine as much as possible soon the boundary set at the Ambassadors Conference in London (Birthday of Albania: 1913)

The sources of the time spoke in favor of the fact that on October 8, 1913, Serbian troops not only had the Albanians broken but, as expected, had violated strategic positions in the west of the Black Drin. On October 13, 1913, British sources reported on the expected route of the Serbian expedition planned to enter Albania with three units deployed in Struga, Diber and Prizren (Duka, British documents: 2012, p.155).

Regardless of the boundary set at the London Conference and the repeated pressures of Austro-Hungarian and Italian diplomacy, the Serbian army continued to occupy the Albanian territories for weeks. In October 1913, Austro-Hungary's pressures (with Germany's support) to Serbia for the withdrawal of troops from Albania were finalized by sending a strong protest note to the Serbian government, required respect of the border located in London (Duka, British documents: 2012, p.175). In this protest note that the Imperial and Royal Legation of Vienna sent to the royal Serbian government among others, it was stated that: "The imperial and royal government [AH] wants to hope that the Serbian government will not delay to complete the discharge of the Albanian territory within one to eight days"(Puto:1986, p.372). But the suspicion of the Viennese diplomacy on the Serbian government's statement to stop the Serbian army's progress toward the Albanian territory was based on well-known diplomatic reasons. Thus, resolving such a situation, Vienna's diplomats looked mostly at the pressure exerted on Serbia by mobilizing Austrian troops at the border with Bosnia as saying "*as a direct means of pressure on both Serbia and Russia*" (Duka, British documents: 2012, pp. 175-176). But, at the end of 1913, the political situation of the Albanian Government proved to be very difficult as a result of internal political rivalries. Ismail Qemali had entered into secret talks with Young Turks, to establish a Muslim prince in Albania. Thus, in January 1914, the Grebene conspiracy, where the Albanian government was part of it, was revealed (Dervishi: 2006, p. 36). Through this conspiracy, the aim was to create an Ottoman - Bulgarian - Albanian alliance, where the Albanian side hoped to regain the territories left unjustly outside the Albanian border<sup>123</sup>. The discovery of this conspiracy was one of the reasons for the resignation of Ismail Qemali in January 1914, under the pressure of the ICC (International Commission for Control in Albania).

## CONCLUSION

During the years 1912 - 1914, we emphasize that Albania and the Albanians abandoned by Balkan neighbors and European diplomacy had the friendship and cooperation that was offered to them:

- Through the support that Bulgarian diplomacy offered to the new Albanian government for the domestic state organization.
- Through the positions of Bulgarian diplomats at the London Conference of Ambassadors, who declared openly for unconditional independence of Albania.
- Through the direct military support that the Bulgarian population, at the most critical moments, gave the Albanian population of areas that remained outside the Albanian state border in 1913.
- The same situation would be reflected even during World War I when on January 27, 1916 Bulgarians arrived in Elbasan city. After the agreement signed with the local party, through which the Bulgarians agreed to recognize the Albanian national rights, Albanian and Bulgarian flags would waver over the city.

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<sup>123</sup> On January 5-7 1914, hundreds of Turkish fighter disguised as merchants landed at Vlorë harbor. On 8 January, the secret plot leader Beqir Grebeneja was arrested.

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