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ALBANIA AND GREECE IN THE COURSE OF THE FIRST BALKAN WAR

Greece in support of the Serbian plan

By the end of September 1912, the Balkan states began to demonstrate openly their war preparations. Precisely, the war declaration of October 8th that Montenegro addressed to the Ottoman Empire marked the beginning of the First Balkan War. A few days later, on October 17, this declaration was supported by Serbia and Bulgaria. The anti-Ottoman coalition of the Balkan states was completed with Greece's entry into the war on October 18, 1912.

This course of war already in favor of the Balkan states raised the issue concerning the division of Ottoman Empire's territories, which involved even Albanian territories. Discussions among Allies become more intense by the end of October when the Great Powers declared the change of the status quo in the Balkans. Serbia took a firm stand on its position. Recreating "Old Serbia" constituted the ultimate goal of Serbian policy. Annexation of northern Albanian territories, which were considered as an essential part of the "Serbian historic nation" justified the above mentioned goal. Serbia wanted to obtain these territories in order to access the Adriatic coastline which it considered vital to its own existence. The prime minister, Nikola P. Pašić (Nikola Pašić) stated that without this access, the Serbian state could not breathe and it would boil like a sealed pot. "Depriving it from this right on grounds that those areas are Albanian lands means inhibiting the natural settling of the Balkan issue and forming a new

situation which could be unstable”, he concludes.¹ Access to the Adriatic Sea would enable Serbia’s much desired secession from the Austro-Hungarian economic and trade dependence.

Regarding the possibility of creating an autonomous Albanian mini-state, the Serbian government explicitly rejected it. Instead, it would grant educational and cultural autonomy to the Albanians who would be part of the Serbian state. Wanting to permanently rid of Austro-Hungary’s interference on the Adriatic coast, Serbia claimed to share Albanian territories with Montenegro and Greece. This claim was sanctioned on March 13, 1912, in the secret appendix of the Serbian-Bulgarian Treaty, according to which the Greek-Albanian border line should begin in the north of Valona, near Seman River and end in Manastir² between Lake Ohrid and Prespa³. Following this line, the Greek state should allegedly include within its borders even Valona and Sazan Island.

The Greek government was not very clear about the political future of Albanian territories. In principle, it was not against an autonomous Albanian state, but its southern borders should undoubtedly satisfy the Greek territorial claims in the lower regions of Ioannina Vilayet⁴. In the first moments of the Balkan War, Greece considered it opportune the creation of an autonomous Albania, with territories limited only to Sanjaks of Elbasan and Berat⁵. Athens took this stand because it feared Austro-Hungary’s intervention⁶.

The Dual Kingdom considered the Balkans its own and only area of influence, where it could be measured with other Great Powers. The loss of influence over Slavic states after 1878 and the need to prevent Italy from

¹ Zekeria Cana, *Politika e Serbisë kundrejt çështjes shqiptare 1903-1913* (Prishtinë: Shtypshkronja “KGT”, 2006), 311-312. Pasich’s circular for Serbian Legations, October 25, 1912.

² Manastir an Ottoman-Turkish name of Bitola the city in the Republic of Macedonia.

³ Cana, *Politika e Serbisë kundrejt çështjes shqiptare*, 316.

⁴ *Haus und Hof Staats Archiv, Wien, Politisches Archiv, Albanien* (hereinafter: *HHSt.A.P.A.A*), in *Arkivi i Institutit të Historisë* (hereinafter: *AIH*), Vj. 22-23-2364. Day report on the Greek Minister’s visit to the Austro-Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vienna, 9 November 1912.

⁵ The Sanjak of Elbasan was part of Manastir Vilayet. It comprised Kazas of Elbasan, Çermenikë, Peqin and Gramsh. Sanjak of Berat was part of Ioannina Vilayet and it consisted of Kazas of Berat, Valona, Myzeqe, Mallakastrë, Skrapari and Tomorrica. Both sanjaks had a population of absolute Albanian majority. See: *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, Volume II (Rilindja Kombëtare vitet 30 të shek. XIX-1912), Publication of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Albania, Institute of History, (Tiranë: “Toena”, 2002), 42-44.

⁶ Zef Prela, “Problemi shqiptar dhe politika austro-hungareze (1897-1912)” in: *Mbi Lëvizjen Kombëtare Shqiptare (përmbledhje studimesh kushtuar 50 vjetorit të Shpalljes së Pavarësisë së Shqipërisë)*, (Tiranë: “Mihal Duri”, 1962) 190.

having the best advantage over the whole region, led to a revision of the Austro-Hungarian policies. The Albanian question as well as attempts to successfully settle it had become *Ballhausplatz's* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Austro-Hungary) most important political and strategic program in the Balkan Peninsula. The geographical position of Albanian territories which extended to the eastern Adriatic coast, less than 60 miles off the Italian coast, made them worth in view of Austria-Hungary interests, which did not want a Russian satellite-state established along these coastlines. The creation of an Albanian state hindered expansion of Slav neighbors. Albania, along with Bosnia-Herzegovina and Greece, constituted the Dual Kingdom's so much envied anti-Slavic cord in the Balkans.

Austro-Hungary was also interested in the northern Albanian Catholic population, who was taken under the protection of Vienna Empire due to the *Kultursprotektorat*. On the other hand, by supporting the Albanians, not only had Vienna secured its influence in Albania, but it could balance and avoid Italian influence there. According to the Memorandum of 1907, the Austro-Hungarian political program for Albania and Albanians was summarized in the phrase "Albania for the Albanians"⁷.

The outbreak and course of the First Balkan War bore in itself dangerous consequences for the Dual Kingdom⁸, which felt the need to intervene vigorously by the end of October, when it became evident that it was difficult to maintain the status quo in the Balkans. Ottoman military defeats in war fronts, forced Vienna to abandon Chancellor Andrassy's concept: he associated the absolute Austria-Hungary's ascendancy in Albanian territories with the existence of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans. Under the new circumstances, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs held a series of meetings, to adapt the Austro-Hungarian position. After lengthy discussions, senior officials determined that one of the priorities of Vienna's foreign policy was the creation of the autonomous or independent Albanian state⁹. It had to be created in order to maintain the Balkan balance

⁷ *HHSSt,A,PA,A* in *AIH*, Vj. 17-3-373, Memorandum related to the Albanian Question, Szovalany, October 4, 1907.

⁸ As some of the dangerous consequences for Austro-Hungary, we can list: the expanding and strengthening of Slavic states in the Balkans; an increase in the Russian influence there; the decline of Ottoman Empire; a growth in the liberation war of Slavic peoples comprising Austro-Hungary, a war which was putting at stake the territorial integrity of the Habsburg state besides the revival of Italian aspirations for the Adriatic's east coast. For more information see: Stefanaq Pollo, "Shpallja e Pavarësisë së Shqipërisë", in: *Mbi Lëvizjen Kombëtare Shqiptare* (Përmbledhje studimesh kushtuar 50 vjetorit të Shpalljes së Pavarësisë së Shqipërisë) (Tiranë: "Mihal Duri", 1962), 64-102.

⁹ Karl Kaser, "The Balkan Wars, 1912-13: an Austrian perspective", in: *Crossroads of European Histories* (Council of Europe, December, 2006), 135.

and to prevent the Slavs' unlimited hegemony in the Balkans. Albania was seen as an obstacle to Serbia, which sought access to the Adriatic Sea, independently from Montenegro. Meanwhile, Austria-Hungary was trying to bring other Balkan countries, Greece and Romania in the orbit of the Triple Alliance¹⁰.

Greece's involvement in Triple Alliance direct influence was difficult to achieve. It was a member of the Balkan League and as such it had its own obligations towards it. Alternatively, the Greek position there was quite fragile. Greece was considered a small ally by Bulgaria and less important than Bulgaria by Serbia¹¹. To ensure good and stable relations with Serbia and a satisfactory border agreement with Bulgaria, the Greek government was willing to sacrifice the existence of Albania. Its only concern had to be the fact that, if Athens did not support Serbia's access to the Adriatic Sea, Serbia could achieve it through an alliance with Italy. In the terms of the frequent Italian-Serbian meetings in late October and early November, the Serbian-Italian alliance did not seem impossible¹². Its realization was a step toward legitimizing the Italian influence in southern Albanian territories and controlling the Strait of Otranto, which was in stark contrast with Greek interests there. On the other hand, if Serbia did not obtain support for accessing the Adriatic, it might request access to the Aegean Sea, which was strongly opposed by Greece¹³.

Greece was also concerned about disagreements with Bulgaria over the common border. Bulgarian claims were considered farfetched¹⁴. These concerns aggravated due to the fact that Sofia had not answered Greek efforts to reach a common agreement about the determination of territorial claims. It seemed that Bulgaria did not intend to concede Thrace to Greece.

Under these circumstances, Athens responded positively to Belgrade's invitation for talks on 20th October 1912. Serbian-Greek meetings began in late October and continued until early November. Greece urged Serbia to play an intermediary role for achieving a Greek-Bulgarian

¹⁰ Raymond Poincaré, *Lufta e Parë dhe e Dytë Ballkanike si dhe Konferenca e Londrës (1912-1913)*, trans. Shaqir Shehu (Prishtinë: "Logos", 2006), 288.

¹¹ Michael Llewellyn Smith, "Venizelo's diplomacy, 1910-1913", in: *Eleftherios Venizelos: The trials of Statesmanship*, ed Paschalis M. Kitromilides, (Edinburgh: University Press, 2006) 147.

¹² In relation to the Serbo-Italian meetings see: Cana, *Politika e Serbisë kundrejt çështjes shqiptare*, 305-312.

¹³ *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914*, Vol. 9 (Part II), ed G.P. Gooch and Harold Temperley, (London: 1934), 118, Telegram from the British ambassador in Berlin to the secretary of Foreign Affairs, Berlin, 8 November 1912.

¹⁴ Ch. Fragistas, "The Balkan wars, their meaning in the history of Greece", *Balkan Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2, (1962) 252-253.

border agreement in order to ensure the longevity of the Balkan Alliance. It also responded positively to the proposal to divide between them all Albanian territories. In return, Greece agreed to support Serbian claims of access to the Adriatic Sea, not only through diplomatic channels, but also through armed force¹⁵.

On 8 November 1912, the head of Greek diplomacy, Lambros Coromilas (Koromilas) declared to the representatives of the Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that with the establishment of a common Serbian-Greek border, it would be sacrificed the idea of creating an autonomous Albanian state¹⁶. He reinforced this attitude in the meeting with his Russian counterpart. Thus, the Greek government considered an autonomous Albania as a hazard to Balkan Alliance and an ample opportunity for Austria-Hungary's intervention in the Balkans¹⁷.

In fulfillment of the promises given to Serbia, Prime Minister E. Venizelos and Greek Foreign Minister held meetings with the Austro-Hungarian Minister in Athens. Those meetings served as an incentive for dividing Albanian territories among Balkan allies. Furthermore, Coromilas bravely stated that such a move was in the interest of the Austro-Hungarian policy. This was the only way of eradicating once and for all the complications in the Balkans because these territories would cease being the apple of discord between the two Adriatic powers, Austro-Hungary and Italy¹⁸. As for the Albanians, they would feel happy under the new rulers over the time. For the head of Greek diplomacy, a small Albania was an aborted child, and a Greater Albania was an impossible feat¹⁹. Meanwhile, the meetings did not hide the support the Greek government had decided to give to their Serbian counterpart-- this move was vindicated by the fact that Serbia's access to the Adriatic Sea and the Albanian question were related to Greece's interests.

¹⁵ Lefter S. Stavrianos, *The Balkans since 1453*, (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1958) 510.

¹⁶ Cana, *Politika e Serbisë kundrejt çështjes shqiptare*, 316.

¹⁷ Prela, "Problemi shqiptar dhe politika", 190.

¹⁸ *HHSt.A.P.A.A in AIH*, Vj. 22-24-2414, Telegram from the Austro-Hungarian minister in Athens to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, 14 November 1912. On his meeting with Coromilas; *Ibid.*, Vj. 22-24-2423, Telegram from the Austro-Hungarian minister in Athens to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, 15 November 1912. On his meeting with Coromilas; *Ibid.*, Vj. 22-25-2546, Telegram from the Austro-Hungarian minister in Athens to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 28 November 1912. On the meeting with Venizelos and Coromilas.

¹⁹ *HHSt.A.P.A.A in AIH*, Vj. 22-25-2546, Telegram from the Austro-Hungarian minister in Athens to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 28 November 1912. On his meeting with Venizelos and Coromilas.

In this situation which was becoming increasingly complex and disturbing, the Austro-Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count Berchtold, on 17 November 1912, asked Italy's cooperation regarding the settlement of the Albanian problem. In a telegram addressed to his Italian counterpart, he recognized their common interest in creating an autonomous Albania, which should include within its boundaries "all the territories inhabited exclusively by Albanians or at least provinces with an Albanian majority."²⁰ Austria-Hungary did not support Serbia's access to the Adriatic. However it agreed to give Greece the territory south of the river Calamas²¹.

In contrast to Vienna, Rome was skeptical, especially regarding the maturity of the Albanians to secure and protect their autonomy. Italian Foreign Minister, the San Giuliano did not hesitate to define Albania as "a poor and primitive place which any neighboring country wanted to tear apart"²². He also doubted that Greece would be satisfied with the border up to Calamas river because its aspirations amounted farther in the North²³. Nevertheless, Italy had understood that the future fate of the Albanian territories had special significance for Italy itself since they were closely related to both the rivalry with Austria-Hungary for supremacy in the Adriatic, and all its expansionist policy towards the Balkan Peninsula²⁴. Italian circles could not be inattentive towards the strengthening of Serbia and Greece on the Adriatic and Ionian Seas. Furthermore the old saying: "there were only two options between Italy and Austria-Hungary: either alliance or war" continued to sound actual. To avoid any surprises, the *Consulta* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy) chose the former, i.e. the alliance. Thus, Rome upheld Vienna's stance in favor of the Albanian question, but against Serbian and Greek claims and intervention of the Entente Powers. On November 26, 1912, San Giuliano announced Italy's support of Berchtold's proposal²⁵. Meanwhile, there began discussions on the renewal of the Triple Pact which was declared in early December. The

²⁰ *HHSSt.A.P.A.A* in *AIH*, Vj. 22-7-709, Telegram from the Austro-Hungarian minister of Foreign Affairs to his Italian counterpart (through the Austro-Hungarian ambassador in Rome), Budapest, 17 November 1912.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *HHSSt.A.P.A.A* in *AIH*, Vj. 22-11-1163, Telegram from the Austro-Hungarian ambassador in Rome to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Rome, 19 November 1912. On the meeting with the Italian minister of Foreign Affairs, San Giuliano.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Arben Puto, *Historia diplomatike e çështjes shqiptare, 1878-1926*, (Tiranë: "Albin", 2003) 85.

²⁵ *HHSSt.A.P.A.A* në *AIH*, Vj. 22-14-1424, Italy's response to Austro-Hungary's proposals regarding the issue of Albania's autonomy, Rome, 26 November 1912.

Pact would provide to Italy, Austria-Hungary's support, to block the penetration of other influences on the Adriatic Sea and it would force Austro-Hungary not to take any action in the Balkans without consulting Italy²⁶. In this way, both powers shared their impact on Albania.

The attitude of the two Adriatic Powers and the support they had decided to give to the Albanian question urged Balkan states to accelerate military action. They intended to conquer the claimed territories in the North and South as soon as possible, before reaching a ceasefire agreement with the Ottoman Empire and before the Ambassadors Conference in London.

Southern territories under the Greek army attack: Himara's invasion

In the overall context of military operations, the Balkan states considered Albanian areas as Ottoman territories. Greece made no exception. The main aim of the Greek operations was their "liberation" and then, proper union with the Greek state. If this could not be achieved for all claimed areas, some of them could be used as a means of exchange to annex at least the "intolerable territories"—this is how the Greek government referred to the areas south of Himara (Chimara) - Korça (Korcha) line.

The moment Greece declared its participation in the Balkan Wars, it established the naval blockade. The move was intended to block all Ottoman ports by preventing ships' circulation along coastal areas controlled by the Greek fleet. The blockade affected even the Ionian coastline: from the Gulf of Arta up to the south of Igoumenitsa. It led to the occupation of port-towns by Greek fleet and facilitated the Greek army's military operations on terrain. On November 3, 1912, Greek troops captured Preveza, a city regarded as an advanced position for defending the castle of Ioannina. Later, the Greek navy bombed Igoumenitsa and Saranda. On November 4, 1912, the Greek blockade advanced up to Valona.

The agreement reached with Serbia and the support that Greece had decided to grant, seemed to justify not only the establishment of the naval blockade in Valona, but also the city's occupation. However the plan for the occupation of the coastal city was suspended, by the Italian and Austro-Hungarian notes, which arrived at the Greek Foreign Ministry, on 5 and 6 November 1912²⁷. For Rome and Vienna, blocking the coast up to Valona could never be justified only by military reasons. If the Greek government

²⁶ Puto, *Historia diplomatike e çështjes shqiptare*, 85-86.

²⁷ *HHS.A.P.A.A in AIH*, Vj. 22-18-1839, Telegram from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Legation in Athens, Rome, 5 November 1912; *Ibid.* Vj. 22-23-2343, Notification from the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry for the Legation in Athens, Vienna, 6 November 1912.

would continue to insist, the "political opinion in Austria and Italy would influence at the expense of Greek interests."²⁸ The blocking of Valona's coast directly affected Italian strategic interests and Austrian trade. For the two Adriatic powers, the port of Valona - Mediterranean's gate, just 40 miles from Otranto, was considered the "throat". "If any of us presses on it", stated the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador in Rome, "the other person dies because of suffocation". For this reason, he continued, Valona should not belong to us, neither to Italy, nor to any small Balkan state [i.e. Greece], whose political prospect is not safe"²⁹.

The above interventions forced the Greek government to adjust its attitude. It decided to advance only in Himara. The march further on would depend on the stance that the Italian government would adopt after the landing of troops on Himariote coast. Since the occupation of Himara was more related to foreign policy than to military needs, it was considered appropriate to have the "locals" march in instead of the regular Greek army.

The landing on Himara began with the consent of the government and the General Command of the Greek army³⁰. As head of the military, by order of Athens, was appointed the self-declared "Leader of Himara" Spyros Spyromilios³¹, who was engaged in the Ionian Islands Command based in Corfu. He was born in Himara, but was raised and lived in Greece. As a gendarmerie officer, Major Spiromilios served devotedly to Greek national issues. He was distinguished as a zealous volunteer in Greek bands which had operated in the province of Kastoria and had encouraged Hellenistic spirit in the province's population. Since Himara was an area away from any contact with the Army of Epirus, the General Command of the Greek army made available for Spyromilios the warship "Acheloos", which contained on board Himariote volunteers residing in Greece, as well as 200 Cretan volunteers, sent by the Greek commander of the Army of Epirus³². On November 18, 1912, troops landed on Spille. Shortly after,

²⁸ *HHS.A.P.A.A* in *AIH*, Vj. 22-23-2343, Notification from the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry for the Legation in Athens, Vienna, 6 November 1912.

²⁹ *HHS.A.P.A.A.* in *AIH*, Vj. 22-25-2531, Report of the Austro-Hungarian ambassador in Rome for the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Rome, 26 November 1912.

³⁰ Milton Spyromilios, *Έλλάς και Άλβανία*, (Cairo: 1942). It was utilized the material in *AIH*, A-IV-213, Milto Spiromilo, *Shqipëria dhe Greqia*, 30.

³¹ *Έλληνισμός της Βορείου Ηπείρου και Έλληνοαλβανικές Σχέσεις*, επιμέλεια: Βασίλειος Κόντης, Έγγραφα από το Ιστορικό Αρχείο του Υπουργείου Εξωτερικών, Τόμος I, 1897-1918, (Αθήνα: Εστιας, 2004) 301-302, commander of Himara's invasion, Spiromilios for the Foreign Ministry, Himara, 7/20 September, 1913.

³² *Greek lands in history, Epirus, 4000 years of Greek history and civilization*, ed M.B. Sakellariou, Ekdotike Athenon S.A. (Athens: The Demetrius and Egle Botzaris Foundation, 1997) 367.

were seized Center Himara, Qeparo, Kudhës, Pilur, Vuno, Dhërmi and Palasa. In order not to directly implicate the Greek government and to make the impression of a local revolt, it was not the Greek flag raised in the occupied areas, but the so-called Himariote flag. It had the colors of the Greek flag and 7 stars in the middle, symbolizing the seven villages of the Himara province.

According to the researcher Timo Dilo, the action taken by the "locals" and the raising of the "Himariote flag" were meant to anticipate subsequent developments and the internationals' stance³³. Were the Great Powers to agree that the province of Himara had to remain in Albania, at least it would be granted privileges in the form of Canon Law which Himara enjoyed in the Ottoman Empire³⁴. In this context, it should be considered the order that Spyromilios gave to his troops about occupying only provinces that enjoyed privileges by the Ottoman State and raising the "himariote" flag there. Athens's government reckoned that it would be easier to obtain privileges if the regular Greek army stood away from the province's invasion.

After Spiromilios settled in Himara, Greek ships bombed Valona³⁵. The issue of the city's occupation seemed to have emerged again for the Greek government. Spiromilios felt unsafe in Himara, because, as reported in Athens, he was continuously raided by Albanians. Under the direction of Eqrem Vlora, who was commander of the territorial defense troops of the Ottoman army at that time, Albanians had turned into a constant concern for his forces. In order to cope with their attacks, Spiromilios requested Valona's invasion. Being unable to do it by himself, because he lacked in military forces, he insisted that the Greek army took over the action³⁶.

Valona's occupation was conditioned by Sazan Island's invasion. In contrast to Himara the military action in Sazan was taken over by the Greek fleet, which legitimized it by raising the Greek flag on the island. Sazan's strategic importance was undeniable, since along with Valona Bay, it possessed the Strait of Otranto. But the island's value without Valona, was relative. This is the reason why before the Greek government was raised the issue of the coastal town's invasion³⁷. Owning both the town and the island

³³ Timo Dilo, *Invazionet greke në Shqipërinë e Jugut*, manuscript in *AIH*, A-IV-330, 4.

³⁴ Old privileges for the province of Himara date back to 1510. They were based on the will of Sultan Selim I, recycled in 1570 by Selim III. Privileges accorded to Himariotes were: arms possession, municipal autonomy; special flag only in battles, all direct taxes were limited to a fixed amount of 12,000 Grosh. See: Ledia Dushku, *Kur historia ndau dy popuj fqinj. Shqipëria dhe Greqia 1912-1914*, (Tiranë, "Kristalina KH", 2012) 315

³⁵ Lef Nosi, *Dokumente Historike, 1912-1918*, (Tiranë: "Nënë Tereza", 2007) 52-53.

³⁶ Spyromilios, *Ελλάς και Αλβανία*, (translation in *AIH*, p. 31).

³⁷ *HHS.A.P.A.A* in *AIH*, Vj. 22-18-1839, Prime Minister Venizelos's speech on Sazan's issue at the Greek Parliament.

in front of it, it would be easier for the Greek government to exert pressure on the Great Powers so as to obtain the "intolerable territories". But the Greek government was aware of the difficulties in holding the island for a long time. Due to its strategic importance and their common interest in maintaining peace in Europe, the Great Powers would not leave Sazan in the hands of any maritime power, even if it was a second hand one such as Greece³⁸.

Prime Minister Venizelos remained undecided about attacking Valona. Initially he agreed to start preparations, but several days later, he changed his mind. He did not consider Valona worth undertaking military actions. The reason was related to the fact that he feared Italy. Considering Italy the Greek race's greatest foe, the Prime Minister thought that Valona's invasion by the Greek army would lead to Italian military response. Due to the complex situation Greece was found, due to alienation with Austria-Hungary and frictions with Bulgaria, the head of Greek government did not dare to take on even an open animosity with Italy. The fact that the Italian government had strongly reacted against the deployment in Himara, made him reluctant to take the military action in Valona. But, in diplomatic meetings, Greece did not give up the desire to occupy the coastal town. Koromilas continued to insist that it should definitely be ceded to Greece, whose northern border had to start from Valona Bay, continue in the north of Tepelena and then through Panariti and Dangëllia mountains including the picturesque village of Voskopoja³⁹.

The retreat from Valona was replaced by the Greek government's orientation and later, its decision to deploy in Saranda. Landing there was directly related to the importance of seizing the castle of Ioannina, which was besieged by the Greek army on November 8, 1912. Venizelos assumed that the army's deployment in Saranda would contribute to the occupation of the road connecting Valona with Ioannina. In this way the Greek army blocked the castle on four sides, facilitating the seizing⁴⁰.

In this extremely dangerous situation for the political future of the Albanian territories, is revealed the Albanians' reaction.

Departure for Valona and Greek obstacles

The last days of October, when Ismail Kemal Vlora departed from Istanbul to Bucharest, the First Balkan War was entering the last phase. The broken Ottoman army tried in vain to resist the attack of the Balkan armies.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *HHSSt.A.P.A.A* in *AIH*, Vj. 22-25-2541, Telegram from Berchtold to the Austro-Hungarian ambassador in Rome, Vienna, 27 November 1912. On the meeting with Coromilas.

⁴⁰ Spyromilios, *Ελλάς και Αλβανία* (translation in *AIH*, p. 33).

The defeat in Lule Burgas, a small town 10 km from Istanbul, would enter history as the Great Defeat's Day. The principle of maintaining the status quo, requested by the Great Powers, was a burned card. The "principled" goals of the beginning of the War had given way to the Balkan allies' contradictions regarding the division of Ottoman territorial heritage. The course of the War and the Balkan armies' advance in Albanian areas increased the concern and awareness of the Albanian National Movement. It was absolutely necessary to take immediate and concrete actions in accordance with the movements of the Great Powers which were genuinely concerned about the political future of Albanian territories.

Ismail Kemal Vlora's journey to the Romanian capital was directly linked to the Albanian efforts to respond to the context of the Balkan War. Dhimitër Berati, participant in the meetings in Bucharest, provides testimony on the project Ismail Kemal claimed to carry out⁴¹. The end of the Balkan War would lead to a redefinition of the boundaries in the Balkans. The expansion of the Slavic front was quite evident. In this situation, Ismail Kemal thought that Romania, along with Albania and Greece should give birth to a second group in the Balkans, which would balance the Slavic one, comprising Serbia, Bulgaria and Montenegro. Only through this division, it was possible to achieve a certain kind of balance and peace on the Balkan Peninsula. According to him, the desire to establish this balance was one of the reasons why Austro-Hungary was determined to support the creation of the Albanian state⁴². The implementation of this project necessitated both the support of the dual Kingdom as well as Greece's and Romania's assistance.

On his arrival to Bucharest, Ismail Kemal Vlora met with the Romanian Minister of the Interior, Take Ionescu, who pledged Romania's support to the Albanian question⁴³. Among other things, his interest was also related to the Vlach population, which Romania aimed at detaching from the Greek influence by making it part of the Albanian state. Now, Ismail Kemal needed a confirmation of support from the Triple Alliance powers and Greece.

In the implementation of the Bucharest meeting's decisions, in the first week of November, Ismail Kemal Vlora, accompanied by Luigj Gurakuqi,

⁴¹ *Arkivi Qendror Shtetëror i Republikës së Shqipërisë* (hereinafter: *AQSh*), Fondi (hereinafter: F.) 20, Dosja (hereinafter: D.) 12, fl. 9, Dhimitër Berati for the Independence of Albania.

⁴² *British Documents on the Origins*, Vol. 9 (Part II), 130, Telegram from the British ambassador in Vienna to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs in London, Vienna, 10 November 1912. On the meeting with Ismail Kemal.

⁴³ *AQSH*, F. 20, D. 12, fl. 9. Dhimitër Berati for the Independence of Albania.

left Bucharest and headed towards Budapest and Vienna where he rightfully expected to find support for the political future of the Albanian territories. In the meetings held with Austro-Hungarian and Italian diplomats, he was convinced it was time to leave aside the project of autonomy and move to independence issue. After securing support from the Adriatic powers, the only thing left was to discuss with the Greek government.

Just as it had happened in other important moments for the Albanians, even this time Ismail Kemal did not hesitate to seek Athens's support. He considered that the Greek government would be in favor of the struggle of the Albanian people and would also declare in favor of the common interests of Greece and Albania⁴⁴. In mid-November 1912, through the Greek Minister in Vienna, I. Kemal alerted the Foreign Minister, Koromilas, on the initiative to declare independence and the support that he had managed to secure from Austria-Hungary⁴⁵.

The Albanian provisional government that would be formed would not take part in the Balkan War. By this announcement, Ismail Kemal Vlora seemed, on one hand, to aim at preventing the invasion of Albanian territory by the Greek army and, on the other hand, somehow appeasing Greece about Albanian participation as part of the Ottoman army in the war. Aware of the problems that would be caused due to the borders issue, he asked the Greek government "to recognize the Albanian provisional government with the reservation of the future boundary delimitations, and thus to give proof of their sympathies for Albania,, which could provide for Greece very important services against the Slavic bloc"⁴⁶. One can infer based on this support that Ismail Kemal still continued to believe in the creation of an anti-Slavic bloc in the Balkans, and that he wanted to detach Greece from the existing coalition and make it part of his own.

But was Greece ready to support the Albanians in this very important undertaking for their political future?

Among the Greek statesmen, it was distinguished a group with a promising approach to the Albanian question. It was promoted by the Director of the Office of Political Affairs at the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Arvanite from Hydra, Andonis Sahturis, who was also the political adviser of the commander of Epirus Army⁴⁷. He was quite knowledgeable about the Albanian question and had prepared several comprehensive reports and studies about it for the Greek government. By

⁴⁴ Basil Kondis, *Greece and Albania 1908-1914*, (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1976) 89.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Spyromilios, *Ελλάς και Αλβανία* (translation in *AIH*, p. 32- 33).

supporting Albanians in Declaring their Independence in Valona, Sahturis and his supporters hoped to prevent a possible invasion of the city by Italy and also to show Europe and the majority of Albanians, Greece's good intentions in the establishment of the Albanian state, tolerating nothing with regard to the southern border issue. Helping Albanians, the group expected to detach Albania from the Austro - Hungarian and above all, from the Italian influence. But Sahturis's considerations failed to convince most members of the Greek government. They were upheld only by a minister, all others were against them.

Athens's position regarding the independence of Albanian territories is expressed in the foreign ministers' response of 16 November 1912, conveyed to Ismail Kemal through the general Greek consul in Trieste. "You should tell him - he recommended the consul, - that you have not yet received instructions from your government but you are of the opinion that the Greek government should know the frontiers of the Albania"⁴⁸. At first glance, his words showed apprehension for Ismail Kemal's concern about the frontiers. It gives the impression that the Greek government was not affected by Albania's Declaration of Independence. This is also how the Greek response seemed to have been interpreted by Ismail Kemal himself. In a meeting with the Austro-Hungarian Vice Consul in Durazzo, Rudnay, before heading to Valona, he confirmed the Greek government's promise to support the Declaration of Independence⁴⁹.

Although the Greek government did not appear willing to openly declare its position to Ismail Kemal, it would not support the Albanians' lofty act⁵⁰. Despite mutual sympathy between top Greek officials and Ismail Kemal Vlora, the new circumstances created in the Balkans, the close relationship and common plans with Serbia, significantly determined Athens's real position on Albania's independence. On the other hand, it felt powerless to prevent the Albanians in undertaking such a step, especially after Ismail Kemal had secured Austria- Hungary's and Italy's support. Under these circumstances, the Greek government tried to delay the coronation of their political action, at least until the Conference of Ambassadors. In the absence of this reaction, the Adriatic powers would find it hard to defend the Albanian question on diplomatic tables in London, while neighbors would find it easier to legitimize their claims to the Albanian territories.

⁴⁸ Kondis, *Greece and Albania*, 89.

⁴⁹ *HHSt.A.P.A.* in *AIH*, Vj. 22-6-694, Telegram from the Austro-Hungarian vice consul in Durazzo, Rudnay to Berchtold, Durazzo, 23 November 1912.

⁵⁰ For more information on Ismail Kemal's relations to high Greek political circles see: Dushku, *Kur historia ndau dy popuj fqinj*, 59-84, 94-110.

The obstructive policy was firstly manifested in the non removal of naval blockade off the coast of Valona. This prolonged Ismail Kemal's journey in which he had to go from Trieste to Durazzo and from there travel overland toward Valona. Second, the uncooperative atmosphere reserved to Albanian delegates in Durazzo from the Greek Orthodox Archbishop of the city. Both his views about the Albanian's independence and the city's occupation by the Serbian army were in support of the Serbian and Greek policies. The deployment of Serbian army in the coastal city was regarded by the Greek press as a deterring factor to the Declaration of Independence.⁵¹ Described by most Albanians as an uncouth nationalist with strong Greek patriotic feelings, Jacob, in agreement with the city's Ottoman authorities, came to the old system's defense by openly opposing the raising of the Albanian flag in Durazzo⁵². With the assistance of the Greek Consulate in Durazzo, the orthodox citizens were asked to support the city's occupation by the Serbian army, which in return, would support them. The Orthodox Archbishop of Durazzo and the Greek cruiser's crew were the first to meet the Serbian army at the port⁵³. His loyalists' slogans clearly expressed his satisfaction for the city's invasion.

But circumstances seemed to have arranged a surprise. Although Greece tried to delay Albania's Declaration of Independence, it might have, involuntarily, accelerated it. According to a material found in the Central Archives of the Republic of Albania, in the collection on Ismail Kemal, the Albanian Assembly, which was going to declare the independence, was expected to be held on Monday, December 2, 1912⁵⁴. This date, according to the same material, was related to the arrival of Myfid Libohova from Ioannina, where he had gone to meet the commander of the Ottoman army, Essad Pasha and where he had managed to avoid Ismail Kemal's arrest by Ottoman forces⁵⁵. Trying to cut the Valona-Otranto underwater telegraph link, which was allegedly used by Ottoman officials to send important

⁵¹ Shkelzen Raça, "Shpallja e Pavarësisë dhe shtypi grek" (paper presented at the conference dedicated to the 90th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence of Albania, Tirana, 27 November 2002.

⁵² *AQSH*, F. 20, D. 3, fl. 24, Memory of Mehmet Ndroqi; *AQSH*, F. 1501/3, D. 33, fl. 1-2, Telegram from the Italian vice consul in Durazzo to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome, Durazzo, 28 November 1912.

⁵³ *HHSSt.A.P.A.A.* in *AIH*, Vj. 22-15-1563, Telegram from the Austro-Hungarian vice consul in Durazzo to the Austro-Hungarian ambassador in Constantinople, Durazzo, 3 December 1912.

⁵⁴ *AQSH*, F. 20, D. 3, fl. 33, Memory of Mehmet Ndroqi.

⁵⁵ *HHSSt.A.P.A.A.* in *AIH*, Vj. 22-8-870, Notification from the Austrian consul in Valona to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Valona, 3 December 1912; *AQSh*, F. 20, D. 3, fl. 33, Memory of Mehmet Ndroqi.

military information, Greece must have forced Albanians into holding the Congress, without waiting for the arrival of Myfid Libohova and several Albanian delegates. Having been informed on these Greek attempts which would have eventually detached Valona from the rest of the world and hence prevented to divulge telegraphically the news about the declaration of independence, Albanian delegates proclaimed it three days earlier, on Thursday, November 28, 1912.

Ledia DUSHKU

ALBANIA AND GREECE IN THE COURSE OF THE FIRST BALKAN WAR

– *summary* –

The beginning and the performance of the First Balkan War raised the issue of the division of the Ottoman territories, part of them were and Albanians lands. Serbia was clear in its stand. It was against of an Albanian state, even if it is autonomous. Greece in difference with Serbia it was not very clear in its stand about the future of the Albanian territories. In order to have good and stable relation with Serbia and a borderline with Bulgaria that would justify its own claims it was now ready to sacrifice the existence of Albania. In the beginning of November 1912 the Greek government agreed to divide Albanian territories Greece and the Serbia and to support the Serbian claims for an exit to the sea from Lezha to Durrës.

The outbreak and the future of the First Balkan War created concerns and made consciousness the Albanians who had started the preparations to react. Ismail Qemal Vlora rightly was thinking that the war would bring the enlargement of the Slav front. In order to balance the strengthening of the Slav front he considered Rumania, Albania and Greece as member of the second front in the Balkan. After he obtained the support of Rumania and of the Triple Alliance for the Independence of Albania, he made a meeting with the Greek ambassador in Vienna. Regardless of the reciprocal sympathy that Greece and Ismail Qemali continuously had for each other, the Greek government was not inclined to support the independence of Albania. By not being able to prevent declaration of the independence, the Greek government tried to delay it, at least until when the London Conference was going to be held. With all the delays that were encountered in Durrës, the Albanians declared the independence of Albania in 28 November 1912 in Vlora.