


First World War and Albanians			History
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Mentor Hasani		Faculty of Philosophy, University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina”, Kosova.	
Arsim Sinani		Faculty of Philosophy, University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina” and AAB University. President of the Center for International Relationship and Balkan Study.	
Abstract			
<p>World War came as a result of the inevitable economic and political development Capitalist system. Countries which did not have colonies, spheres of influence, new markets, etc., were trying to divide the world again, in order to realize requirements them. But after all the Great Powers had to order as much as possible to benefit themselves, came to their confrontation. Germany's goals in this period were the acquisition of colonies of Great Britain, France, Belgium, whereas for Russia aimed to take Ukraine, Poland and Baltic regions. Austria also had goals for expansion and its impact. Its main aim was to establish its hegemony over the Balkans. In these circumstances the Albanian people was one that was mostly affected by this event.</p>			

Introduction

In the beginning of the 20th century, Germany had a rapid increase in economy, but it remained without any colonies and sufficient markets to introduce its products, which led to the state becoming more aggressive. On the other hand, countries that had even less colonies were also looking for new and rich markets. At the beginning of World War I, this rivalry caused tension between the contradicting politics of the Great Powers. This aggravation was also incited by the existence of dualities that were quite large, which we will shortly mention. Among them were: the Austro-Russian face-off, countries which were rivals in their attempt at Balkan domination, the French-German confrontation, in which France attempted to avenge itself to Germany, who aspired to have trade and industrial supremacy over the seas in all of Europe, afterwards Slavic nations who were still oppressed and were fighting for the creation of national states.¹

In this period, Albania was immersed in a deep crisis. The reasons were the most diverse, where, among others, we can mention the departure of Prince Vidi on September 3rd, then the lack of Albania's defense against the Great Powers, considering they were fighting amongst each other, even though they had sworn to guarantee the independence over the entire territory of the Albanian state. Seeing the current state of the Albanian state, the neighboring countries tried to take advantage of this situation in order to realize their expansionist aims.²

After signing the Treaty of London, Italy was given the opportunity to expand its territorial invasion in Albania, even though two years prior it had sworn to protect Albania and its inhabitants³. The effects of this treaty, which allowed for a new fragmentation and the elimination of Albania's independence, were rapidly noticeable⁴. The parties that were the most interested in this arrangement were the monarch neighbors; Serbia, Montenegro and Greece. While Greece had invaded Southern Albania, Serbia and Montenegro on the other hand had not gotten consent to invade Albanian territories from The Powers of the Entente, even after numerous attempts. Nonetheless, in June of 1915, the Serbian army had invaded almost all of Central Albania (Elbasan and Tirana)⁵.

On the other hand, Montenegrins had invaded the city of Shkoder, despite Italy's and England's objection⁶. No uprising was organized against the Serbian and Montenegrin invaders, as a result of the lack of a national central authority to undertake the duty. We say this because during the year 1915, the Albanian state was politically separated and under the military control of Greek, Serbian, Montenegrin and Italian armed forces. Only in one part of the Albanian territory, specifically around Durres and Berat, there was the administration of Esat Pasha, which had ties to Serbia⁷.

This way, based on the secret Treaty of London, Italians began to reinforce their positions in Albania. In Vlora, they disembarked 30 thousand soldiers, invading the territory all the way to the border of the Greek-invaded zone. In the year 1916, Italians fortified their military presence in Albania even more, counting circa 100 thousand soldiers⁸ in Albanian territory.

On October 1916, French forces from the Macedonian frontline (Eastern - Thessaloniki), invaded Korça and its periphery, removing the Greeks⁹. From their contacts with Korça's representative figures, the French discovered that the population was against Greeks from Athens (royalists, supporters of the king), Greeks from Thessaloniki (Venizelists) and Italians, as well as against Esad, who had created an Albanian government in exile.¹⁰ The French (Colonel Descoins, the commander of the French

¹ Dërguti, Menduh, Gurakuqi, Romeo, History of the New Age (3), Western Civilization 1871-1918, Librit Universitar, Tirana, 2004, pp. 314-315.

² Mullai, Abaz, History of the Balkans, Shek.XIX -1918, Publishing House Libri Universitar, Tirana 2008, p.279

³ ASHAK, Microfilms Fund, sig. I/17-1 – Albania 1907-1928

⁴ M. Abazi...,op.cit.,p 280

⁵ Malcolm, Noel, Kosovo, a short history, Koha, Prishtina,2001,p.270.

⁶ Milo, Paskal, Albania and Yugoslavia 1918-1927, Publishing House Enciklopedia, Tirana 1992,p.37

⁷ M. Abazi...,op.cit.,p. 281

⁸ Bartl, Peter, Albania from the Middle Ages til Today (titulli i originalit: Albanian. Von Mittelalterbiszur Gegen Wart Verlag Friedrich Pustet), translated from German; Shkumbin Brestovci, Drita, Prizren 1999, p. 174.

⁹ Grup of author's, History of Albania and Albanians,Sprint,Prizren,2001,p.189

¹⁰ Zavalani,Tajar, History of Albania, 2nd edition, Phoenix & Shtëpia e Librit,Tirana,Prishtina,1998,p.252.

troops) made contact with Albanian patriots from Korça; Themistokli Gërmenji, Sali Butka and other representatives and on December 10th 1916, they (an assembly of 14 people) agreed upon a protocol which would serve as the basis of the Autonomous Region of Korça.¹¹ ARK comprised of Korça and the surrounding areas.

The region would be administrated by Albanians, albeit under the protection of the authoritative French military. As the head organ of the autonomous administration, a Council of 14 member was created, which on one hand had to exercise “control over all public services” and on the other hand, had to ensure regular connections with the French command¹².

The Protocol foresaw the creation of a gendarmerie “to protect the inner order”, as well as another troop of gendarmerie called “the mobile Albanian gendarmerie” in charge of protecting the independence of the territory and the freedom of the inhabitants.

From a mere formal viewpoint, the Protocol was the only Act throughout the entire period of World War I, in which the Albanian National Movement was a subject and a party against the combating parties. Concerning its content, the Protocol had an even bigger importance because it contained the bulk of the rights of the Albanian population in times of war and in general it served as a political system, which, after the war’s end, would give more chances for the realization of the right of self-determination and consequently the revival of the Albanian independence.

The Protocol recognized the Albanian ethnic affiliation in Korça and the neighboring region. The profit was two-sided; for Albanians it was political, whereas for the French it was military and keeping the peace. ARK is not only an expression of patriotism from the populace of Korça, but also a good will on behalf of the French military who managed to understand the national and political will of Albanians for autonomy. As a result of this understanding, it was allowed that the Albanian language was to be the official language. Albanian schools were opened, regardless of religion, unlike Greek schools. The national Albanian flag was used as well, along with the flag of Scanderbeg, even though the latter flag was accompanied by three colored bands of the French flag¹³.

It soon became clear that Korça’s autonomy was not just a local autonomy, an expression of provincial separatist tendencies. The Albanian patriots called the Autonomous Region of Korça the “Autonomous Republic of Korça” and considered it the core and the model of the future Albania. The French militants in Korça were more realistic than Paris, who had called the Republic of Korça “an incident”. Marking that Korça’s autonomy had an impact on other invaded areas, such as the Austro-Hungarian and Italian zone, which reacted in competitive ways, but didn’t achieve Korça’s status.

The area under Austro-Hungarian invasion (1916-1918)

In November – December of 1915, Austro-Hungary undertook the offensive against the Serbian forces and drove them out of Albania’s territory through the Adriatic coast. The Austro-Hungarian forces invaded Northern and Central Albania¹⁴ within weeks. On the front page of number 572, dated January 23rd 1916 the newspaper “Dielli” which was published in the USA says in an article: the Austro-Hungarian military forces stopped the Bulgarian army from entering Durres and they were arming Albanians¹⁵.

The following issue of the same daily newspaper (number 574, January 26th 1916) talks about Shkoder, which had voluntarily surrendered to the Austrian army, for which they were enthused and happy about¹⁶. This way, Austro-Hungarians also created the area of Austro-Hungarian invasion (1916-1918). Albanian patriots considered Austro-Hungary as the supporting factor of Albania’s independence, and in this context, they called the Austro-Hungarian invasion as a “lesser evil”. They hoped to find an understanding with the invading Austro-Hungarian authorities and ask permission to create a center of national administration that would serve as the base of the new Albanian state upon its revival after the war’s end, perhaps even with restored ethnic borders, as proved in an article in the daily “Dielli” on its 580 issue¹⁷.

The monthly “Diturija” (May 1928 n. 7), in its article titled “The Problems of the Independent Albania”, also shows that the dual kingdom was a protector of Albania’s independence¹⁸. The Austro-Hungarian authorities themselves didn’t discontinue their declarations saying that they had arrived as “friends” of Albania. This was also said to not put Albanians in the enemy camp. Thus, in Shkoder a Civil Administrative Council was created, consisted of Albanians and run by the Austro-Hungarian representative of KNK. The Austro-Hungarian administration also began to apply a type of passport (Identitats-Karte – Confirmation Evidence) for its inhabitants in that part, in two languages (German and Albanian) that served for traveling outside the area¹⁹.

This council was consisted of several boards, like the board of education (that for three years in a row was led by Luigj Gurakuqi²⁰), of finance and judiciary. It was an organized and based administration and its staff was Albanian officials within the limit of Albania in 1913 and beyond these boundaries. More than 200 albanian elementary schools²¹ were opened, raising the Albanian flag was permitted, “The Literary Commission” was founded, run by Aleksander Xhuvani and Luigj Gurakuqi, which played an important role in the cultivation of the Albanian language, in the educational and cultural advancement in this part of Albania. This way, even while in Albania the Austro-Hungarian monarchy recognized the cultural autonomy of Albanians.

¹¹ Ibid.p.253

¹² Bartl.P.Vep., op.,cit.,p.176.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Jelavich,Charles&Barbara, The Establishment of National Balkan Countries,1804-1920, Dituria, Tirana, 2004, pp. 272, 273

¹⁵ National Library of Tirana, place no. Shg 8/8u, year 1916, Dielli newspaper, Boston 572

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ National Library of Tirana, place no. Shg 8/8u, year 1916, Dielli newspaper, Boston nr.580.

¹⁸ ASHAK.Microfilms Fund,sig.I/17-1, Albania 1908-1928,p.422.

¹⁹ AQSH. F. 34, V 1913, D. 2, page. 1,2,3,4,5.

²⁰ AQSH.F.34,V.1913,D1,page.8.

²¹ Ibid.

The Italian-invaded area

At the end of 1916, the Italian forces expelled the Greek forces from Southern Albania, so the Italian-invaded area extended from Shkumbin all the way to Gjirokaster²². The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs considered the Protocol of December 10th 1916 of Korça's autonomy a one-sided action that was done without the prior consultation with Italy and as a violation of the provisions of the Treaty of London, 1915, according to which Italy and France were parties²³. As a counteraction, Italy took some measures; it allowed the raising of the Albanian flag in several centers of Southern Albania (Gjirokaster, Delvine, Tepelene, Leskovik), allowed education in the Albanian language, built streets, trained Albanian police forces²⁴, etc. In June 3rd 1917, in Gjirokaster, Italian invasion authorities declared a Proclamation for the unity and independence of the entirety of Albania that would be under the support and protection of Italy²⁵.

The Proclamation of Gjirokaster marks the prevalence of those Italian districts that were pro Italian monopole in Albania. The French initiative in Korça's autonomy was seen as an unjustified intervention in an area reserved for Italian interests. The Italian proclamation caused havoc in the Entente's offices, which opposed privately and demanded explanations from the Italian government, since the Proclamation was in disparity to the Treaty of London²⁶. Italy opposed through its Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sonnino, who expressed that this measure was completely justified in reference to the declaration of the Autonomous Region of Korça.²⁷

While in the Balkan there were intensive attempts for creating a unified Yugoslavian state, which put Serbia on the Adriatic, Albania was an exclusive interest for Italy²⁸. The united state of Serbia – Croatia – Slovenia was going to replace Austro-Hungary on the Adriatic and Rome was very nervous.

The Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed many times in the Italian Parliament that the regulation of the Adriatic issue after the war posed a vital interest for Italy, and a component of that issue was Albania. Italy was for Albania's independence, thus, after the war was through, Italy was not going to allow any Balkan partner to prevent that.

Although it represents the most important fruition of the Albanian National Movement, in the dire circumstances of territorial invasion from combating parties, the lifespan of ARK was short. After September 1917, a series of measures were taken that within a few months led to the suppression of the Albanian administration and restored the city and province of Korça under a military regime of traditional French troops.²⁹

Themistokli Germeji, who had played an extraordinarily important role in the organization of the gendarmerie and the administration of the Region, was sent to Thessaloniki for trial and was executed in November 1917.³⁰

Themistokli Germeji's closest associates were imprisoned, fired from their jobs and some of them were exiled.

The autonomy was reduced little by little, until February 1918 when the Protocol was officially annulled and in its stead a decree was introduced in February 16th 1918. According to this decree, the prior administration was to be transformed into a military administration, where the native element was scarcer and its direction was made directly from the French general.³¹

Nonetheless, the French did not behave in a Balkan manner, with extreme violence. They allowed the natives to have certain acquired rights, such as the national flag, the Albanian schools, to which the Albanian populace was particularly sensitive. In any case, what should be noted is that the city and the region were not given away to the Greek authorities like the Athens' government had asked.³² They remained under the French administration until the end of the War, and even some time after that.

During the year 1917-1918 – there was a kind of military status quo between the Italian and French troops from one side and the Austrian troops from the other, though only minor fights over positions. Only in the summer of 1918, the larger-scale operations began. Nonetheless the fate of the wars fought in Albanian territory was decided by the wars fought in other, more important sectors in the Balkans and Europe. From September – October 1918, the Austro-Hungarian army retreated from the Albanian territories to the north.

The Italian forces that were in Southern Albania, with Vlora³³ as their headquarters, invaded and conquered Central and a part of Northern Albania. The French occupying the northeastern Albanian territories handed them over to the Serbian military forces³⁴. International forces commanded by the French general De Fourtou settled in Shkoder.

According to a document of the Second District Command of the Armada number 3034 of July 11th 1919 sent by a commander informing the Serbian Minister of Internal Affairs that Italians have armed around 10 thousand Albanians with Austrian guns, two broadsides of Austrian cannons and several machine guns with the intent of attacking the border Plave-Guci and from Gjakova's side between the Qaf Morine and Qaf Prush³⁵. This was a form of pressure by the Italians to place their interests over Albania's addendum before Serbians or another power did the same.

²² Group Authors, *His., vep., op., cit.*, p.189.

²³ History of the Albanian Nation III, The Period of Independence, November 28th 1912 - April 7th 1939, Science Academy of Albania, Toena, Tirana 2007., p.79.

²⁴ Bartl.P.Vep., *op., cit.*, p174

²⁵ ASHAK. Microfilms Fund, sig.I/17-1, Albania 1908-1928, p.242

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²⁹ Zavalani, Tajar, *vep., op., cit.*, p.253.

³⁰ Group Authors, *His., vep., op., cit.*, p.190.

³¹ Ibid

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³³ Bartl.P. vep., *op., cit.*, p173

³⁴ Milo, Paskal, *vep., op., cit.*, p.45.,

³⁵ ASHAK. F. Archive of the ex Yugoslav Army, V.1914-1916, box number 6.

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