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THE GREAT POWERS, SERBIA AND THE ALBANIAN QUESTION

Abstract — Historical analysis of the conflict of interests by which the Great Powers were guided when intervened in relationships between Serbs and Albanians. All endeavors of Serbia to establish some balance at its borders with Albania failed in confrontation with the idea of Great Albania, successively supported by Austria-Hungary and Italy, those powers which fought to assure domination over the eastern Adriatic.

I

The modern Serbian state, born in the 1804 national revolution, received international recognition insignificantly enlarged after waging two wars with the Turks, at the 1878 Berlin Congress. The other Serbian state, Montenegro, also achieved independence, while extending beyond their borders was a vast area of ethnic Serbian territories: uprising in Herzegovina and Bosnia were crushed, and the military advance into Old Serbia (vilayet of Kosovo) and Macedonia (vilayet of Monastir) was checked.

Serbia and Montenegro, both Slavic and Orthodox states, sought support in their struggle for national liberation from imperial Russia, the official protector of the Christian nations in Ottoman Empire in the first half of the 19th century, and the traditional one in the latter half. Disappointed by the support St. Petersburg lent to Bulgaria in San Stefano Peace Treaty, prince Milan Obrenović of Serbia sought protection from Austria-Hungary, which, having occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina, triumphed at the Berlin Congress with assistance from the European Concert, and announced its aspirations to become a major Balkan power.¹

¹ J. Ristić, *Diplomatska istorija Srbije za vreme srpskih ratova za oslobođenje i nezavisnost 1875—1878*, vol. I—II, Beograd 1896—1898; V.

The rather small and strategically less significant Montenegro remained, without much hindrance from Vienna, truly bound to Russia, while Serbia, overcome by international difficulties and divested of Russia's protection, soon became a semi-independent state, almost a satellite on which Austria-Hungary imposed the terms for international development and set the course for the development of its national policy. Renouncing Bosnia and Herzegovina, the chief objective of its national policy until 1878, Serbia was able, only with permission from Vienna diplomacy, to expand, in the event of disintegration of Turkey, to the south in a specifically restricted direction.²

The 1844 plan of Ilija Garašanin, the *Načertanije* (Program), to create, without relying on the Great Powers, by a simultaneous uprisings of the Balkan Christians in Ottoman Empire, a large Balkan federation around the restored Serbian empire as Piedmont, remained for a long period only a Utopian project without a realistic basis.³ Austria-Hungary, politically and financially supported by Germany, successfully checked Russia's traditional policy of aiding national movements in the Balkans, opening thus the road to German penetration towards East. Financially too weak to compete with heavy German capital in the Southeastern Europe, consumed from within by political turmoil and helpless before the European concert which saw in the preservation of Ottoman Empire a pledge to maintain the balance of power in Europe, Russia was in the defensive, almost until the Balkan wars (1912—1913), striving to preserve the seeming principle of status quo, established in 1897 under an agreement with Austria-Hungary.

The Dual Monarchy decisively stepped into the newly formed vacuum, forming a chain of satellites from Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria, which would against Russia's interests, open the way for its penetration to the Salonika Bay. The chief link in breaking the chain of Serbian settlements in Old Serbia and

Dorđević, *Srbija na Berlinskom kongresu*, Beograd 1890; G. Jakšić, *Bosna i Hercegovina na Berlinskom kongresu 1878*, Beograd 1955; M. S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question 1774—1923*, New York 1966. 178—219; D. McKenzie, *The Serbs and the Russian Pan-Slavism 1875—1878*, New York 1967; N. Ražnatović, *Crna Gora i Berlinski kongres*, Cetinje 1979; M. Ekmečić, *Karakteristike Berlinskog kongresa 1878. godine*, Prilozi, No 18 (1981), 73—99. Russian diplomatic documents in: B. Pavićević, *Rusija i Bosansko-hercegovački ustanak*, Titograd 1985. Various aspects of Eastern Crisis in: B. K. Kiraly and G. Stokes (ed.), *Insurrections, Wars, and the Eastern Crisis in the 1870s*, War and Society in East Central Europe, vol. XVII, Boulder Colorado 1985.

² S. Jovanović, *Vlada Milana Obrenovića, II (1878—1889)*, Beograd 1927, 49—66; V. Popović, *Evropa i srpsko pitanje u periodu oslobođenja 1804—1918*, Beograd s.a., 132—138.

³ D. MacKenzie, *Ilija Garašanin: Balkan Bismarck*, Boulder Colorado 1985; V. Stojančević (ed.), *Ilija Garašanin (1812—1874)*. Međunarodni naučni skup 9. i 10. decembar 1987. SANU. Naučni skupovi, vol. LIV, Odeljenje istorijskih nauka, vol. 16, Beograd 1991.

northwest Macedonia were to be the Albanians, a people who, overdue in national integration, had just stepped onto the historical scene.

The chief obstacle in the plans of the ruling circles in Vienna were the territories their own experts called Serbian: the area stretching from the sandjak of Novi Pazar to sandjaks of Priština and Skopje (Ueskub). Serbia's aspirations, merely stifled, could not be permanently channelled, and any disturbance in the balance in Europe paved the way for a new opening to the Serbian question. The principle of nationality, on which the modern Serbian state rested, posed much more of a threat during the period when Serbia lacked tangible military potential. Revolutionary in origin, incorporated in the slogan "Balkan to the Balkan peoples", it encroached on the very foundations of the legitimist organization of the Dual Monarchy. Opposing Serbian national interests, the Vienna propaganda at the beginning of the 20th century, when the clash with Serbia became increasingly more apparent, projected a slogan on "Great Serbian danger", intimidating, with much success, the neighboring Balkan nations.

II

Waging wars with the Turks from 1876—1878, Serbia, in endeavor to reach the region of sandjak of Niš and northern Macedonia, clashed with the Bulgarians, and found itself confronting the Albanian national movement over the territories of Old Serbia crowded with Albanian refugees from liberated regions. Stating its demands at the meetings of the Albanian League (1878—1881), very Moslem and conservative in the mainstream, the leaders demanded of the Great Powers at the Berlin Congress, remaining within the framework of Ottoman legitimism, that the territories lost in the war be returned to Turkey, marking them as Albanian ethnic territory. Socially diverse, divided by religion and politically immature, the Albanian movement, aided by the Porte, was pushed into border conflicts with the Serbian states, while various factions of its leadership enjoyed, on principle or openly, the support of diplomatic representatives of Austria-Hungary and Italy. Marking the territories of four vilayets — Scutari, Janina, Kosovo and Monastir (Bitolj), as optimal framework of the conceived autonomous unit, the Albanians laid claim to areas in which they had no relative predominance in population (the vilayets of Kosovo and Monastir).⁴ Moreso, those were countries to which Serbia and Montenegro lay claims, due to the compact mass of their fellow countrymen and uninterrupted

⁴ B. Stulli, *Albansko pitanje 1878—1882*, RAD JAZU, No 318 (1959), 321—325; H. D. Schanderl, *Die Albanienpolitik Österreich-Ungarns und Italiens 1877—1908*, Wiesbaden 1971, 9—10.

historical tradition — states whose national ideology rested on the “oath of Kosovo”, on the historical mission to “avenge Kosovo” as a prerequisite for pan-Serbian unity.

The Albanian League was founded in Prizren, at the outskirts of Albanian ethnic territory, in a region where the predominantly Islamized Albanian population was checking the Serbian population more openly. The Serbo-Albanian conflicts until the establishment of the League, framed by religious intolerance between the *raya* and Moslems, the destructors and defenders of the Ottoman theocratic system, gradually grew into a national clash over territories, a clash to which religious affiliation and racial prejudice gave the most powerful drive: “It is true that the Albanians of Kosovo, who were preponderantly Moslem, identified themselves religiously with the Turks, and on that basis were identified with the empire. Christians, being enemies of Turkey, were naturally regarded by them as their own enemy. However, as far as the Slavs were concerned, the hatred of the Kosovars (Albanians from Kosovo) was not founded on religion — although religion intensified it — but on ethnic difference: they fought the foreigner (the *Shkja*) because he coveted their land.”⁵

On its course from pan-Islamic and pro-Turk organization under the umbrella of the Porte, to the autonomous movement which finally raised the issue of national independence, Albanian League lost many followers among the Moslem population and was ultimately crushed by a military intervention ordered by the sultan Abdulhamid II. The rift created among Albanians after the League was curbed, was a result of indecision regarding the bases of further national integration: the Moslem majority led by prominent landowners and conservative tribal chiefs found in the pan-Islamic policy of Abdulhamid II an important foothold for preserving political domination in the heart of Balkans, while the representatives of the national elite from the ranks of the Catholic and Orthodox, helpless to impose on their fellow countrymen of all three confessions European parameters for the creation of a modern nation, and confined to cultural action, sought political backing in Rome and Vienna. The rift, framed by deep social and religious differences, considerably affected the long-lasting instrumentalisation of the Albanian national movement.⁶

Italy, which acquired influence via the mediation of religious missions and trade branch offices along the Albanian coast was a major rival of Austria-Hungary in the struggle for patronage over the Albanian people. Austria-Hungary and Italy made agreement

⁵ “*Shkja* — plural *Shkje* — is the word the Albanians use for the Slavs. The derivation is from Latin *sclavus* in the meaning of Slav”. S. Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening 1878—1912*, Princeton 1967, 202.

⁶ D. T. Bataković, *Ulazak u sferu evropskog interesovanja, in: Kosovo i Metohija u srpskoj istoriji*, Beograd 1989, 228—231.

in 1897 about interests in Albania which did not allow to the third part to interfere in Albanian question. Italy also tried to spread influence among catholic Albanians whose official protector was Austria-Hungary and financed cultural movement among Italo-Albanians.

Significant cultural initiatives sprang from Vienna designed at awakening national consciousness and creating the feelings of togetherness among the Albanians of all three confessions: histories of Albania ("Populare Geschichte der Albanesen" unsigned, written by L. Thaloczy) were printed, translated and spread in Albania and Albanian colonies in Europe and Near East, national coats-of-arms were designed and special grammars written by Albanian and Austrian experts published merging the different dialects into one literary language and a single alphabet. From the scientific cabinets of German scholars arose a theory used in political propaganda about Albanians as the oldest nation in Europe, a mixture of ancient Illyrian and Pelasgian tribes of Aryan swarm (Volksschwarm), as another way to influence the creation of a common national consciousness.⁷

On the political plane, through Catholic missions, consulate networks, with abundant means from secret funds, started the winning over the Muslim majority among Albanians. Pointing to the danger from Slavs — Serbia and Montenegro — behind which stood Russia, met with strong response among Albanians who saw in Moscow a major threat to their interests. Along with encouraging Albanians to permanently rout the Serbs from Kosovo, Metohia and the neighboring regions by persecution, such a policy of Vienna during the period of alliance between Germany and Austria-Hungary with the Porte, did not differ much from the policy of the "bloody sultan" Abdulhamid II, who viewed Christian movements as the source of all troubles in his empire.⁸

Placing itself as the sole power able in the event of Turkish disintegration, to protect the interests of the Albanians, Dual Monarchy gradually managed to win over most of the tribal leaders in Old Serbia, especially in Metohia, and to considerably affect the arrangement of political forces. The major consequence of such aspirations was the flourishing of tribal anarchy in vilayet of Kosovo, accompanied by the declining authority of the local Turkish administration and the increasing persecution of the Serbian people. Significant were Russian and Austro-Hungarian attitudes towards the Kolašin affair: "In May 1901, Albanian bands pillaged and partly set fire to Novi Pazar, Sjenica

⁷ M. Ekmečić, *Stvaranje Jugoslavije 1790—1918*, vol. II, Beograd 1989, 450—455.

⁸ The Kurds of Asia Minor seemed to have the same role as Albanians had in the European vilayets of Ottoman Empire. D. T. Bataković, *Anarhija i genocid nad Srbima*, in: *Kosovo i Metohija u srpskoj istoriji*, 250.

and Prishtine. They attacked the Slavs everywhere. The Serbian population suffered most, because of their proximity to the Albanians. The Albanians occupied Kolašin and massacred a considerable number of Serbs. Following this, Russia intervened and demanded that the Albanian raiders and the Turkish gendarms be punished while the 'Christian' population be permitted to keep the necessary arms for protection. Austria-Hungary, on the other hand, tried to attenuate the effect of the Kolašin massacre, maintaining that the event had been considerably exaggerated."⁹

III

When Serbia, after a period of lethargy in national politics, undertook in the closing decade a more vigorous political action in European provinces in Ottoman empire (through religious and cultural activities), accompanied by the opening of networks of consulates and the establishment of bishopric seats in Prizren (1896) and Skopje (1902), the Vienna diplomacy viewed this as an unequivocal expression of Great Serbian propaganda.¹⁰

Political conditions in Serbia did not allow for any broader action to protect the Serbs in Turkey from persecutions by Albanians. Serbian ambassador in Constantinople, tried with diplomatic pressure on Porte. In May 26, 1898 first of his notes on Albanian violence against Serbs in Old Serbia was given to Turkish minister of foreign affairs. Novaković noticed that "crimes and robberies are daily occurrences, and not only the perpetrators remain unpunished, they are not even pursued by the authorities. The number of fugitives fleeing across the border for their lives is enormous, and increases everyday. According to data the royal government [of Serbia] disposes of, more than four hundred crimes were perpetrated in the Priština, Novi Pazar, Peć and Prizren sandjaks within only a few months, last summer and winter. They were: murder, arson, banditry, desecration of churches, rape, abduction, robbery, raiding of whole herds. This number presents only several instances, one fifth at the most, of what really happened, since most of the crimes are never discovered, since the victims or their families dare not complain."¹¹

⁹ S Skendi, *op. cit.*, 203; See: D. T. Bataković. *Istraga oružja u Ibarskom Kolašinu 1901. godine*, in: *Kosovsko-metohijski zbornik*, vol. 1, SANU, Beograd 1990, 269—284.

¹⁰ V. Stojančević, *Austrougarsko-srpski sukob u Kosovskom vilajetu na početku XX veka* in: *Jugoslovenski narodi pred Prvi svetski rat*, Posebna izdanja SANU, vol. CDXVI, Beograd 1967, 847—876; *Sukob Austro-Ugarske i Srbije u Kosovskom vilajetu 1900—1914*, in: *Velike sile i Srbija pred Prvi svetski rat*, SANU, Naučni skupovi, vol. IV, Odeljenje istorijskih nauka, vol. 1, Beograd 1976, 551—563.

¹¹ D. T. Bataković, *Anarhija i genocid nad Srbima*, in: *Kosovo i Metohija u srpskoj istoriji*, Beograd 1988, 252—253.

Formal investigation didn't give any results. Without support of the Great Powers Serbia accomplished nothing. Serbia's endeavor to internationalize the issue of the protection of the persecuted Serbian population in Old Serbia, and bring it before the 1899 International Peace Conference in the Hague, was obstructed by the Austro-Hungarian diplomacy who sent an energetic protest to King Aleksandar Obrenović.¹²

Reports by Serbian consuls that not only the sultan Abdulhamid II was instigating the Albanians to settle accounts with the Serbs, but also the agents of the Dual Monarchy, indicated the beginning of an open conflict which soon broke out with the dynastic change in Serbia (1903), and its reliance again on Russia in foreign affairs, especially in matters of claims on protection of Serbian population in European vilayets of Ottoman Empire.¹³ But Russia was still very weak. First Russian consul in Mitrovica was killed in April 1903 by Albanian rebels who protested against reforms and "Slavic threat".¹⁴

In long terms political strategy, the territories of Kosovo and Metohia, along with the sandjak of Novi Pazar occupied in 1878 by Austro-Hungarian troops, meant much more for Serbia and Montenegro than the valley of River Vardar, a nodal point at which their national fate would be decided: with Austro-Hungarian domination or Albania under its protectorate, should the Ottoman Empire disintegrate, the two Serbian states would forever be separated and destined to lose independence. Dual Monarchy, taking advantage of Russia's engagement in the Far East, despite agreement in Mürzsteg (1903), succeeded in excluding the northern parts of the vilayet of Kosovo from the reform action of the Great Powers (1903—1908): areas of Kosovo and Metohia were excluded in early 1904: "When Turkey accepted the Mürzsteg Agreement, Austria-Hungary asked that the western part of the vilayet of Kosovo (the sandjaks of Pljevlja, Prishtine, Prizren, Sjenica and Novi Pazar) be excluded from the reform program and that reforms in the eastern part of that vilayet (the districts of Kačanik, Kumanovo, Kratovo, Palanka, and Ueskub) be entrusted exclusively to her gendarmerie officers. The

¹² The Serbian government prepared a "blue book" entitled *Prepiska o arbanaskim nasiljima u Staroj Srbiji 1898—1899* (*Correspondence on Albanian violence in Old Serbia 1898—1899*), in which the most important acts from correspondence with the Porte were published in Serbian and French, but were not submitted to the European public.

¹³ Serbian materials (reports of consuls from Priština and Skoplje) on Albanian violence against Serbs in vilayet of Kosovo are recently published: B. Peruničić (ed.), *Pisma srpskih konzula iz Prištine 1890—1900*, Beograd 1985; *Svedočanstvo o Kosovu 1901—1912*, Beograd 1988; *Zulum i begova u kosovskom vilajetu*, Beograd 1988; *Zadužbine Kosova, Prizren—Beograd 1987*, 607—738; A. Mitrović (ed.) *Milan Rakić, Konzulska pisma 1905—1911*, Beograd 1985.

¹⁴ D. T. Bataković, *Pogibija ruskog konzula G. S. Ščerbine u Mitrovici 1903. godine*, *Istorijski časopis* vol. XXXIV (1987), 312—323.

Serbian effort to extend the reform program to the western part of the vilayet of Kosovo and to prevent Austria-Hungary from acquiring the right to administer reforms in the eastern part failed. Russia, having suffered reverses in the war with Japan, was not in a position to support Serbia's protests energetically. She could only achieve an agreement that in the western part of the vilayet of Kosovo 'reliable' Turkish officers be employed. The victory of Austria-Hungary meant that this power was determined to keep the area free from any other influence."¹⁵

Final result was further persecutions against Serbs in those areas. One of the American travellers wrote: "It would be difficult for the Turks to carry out there the custom of disarming Christians. But the Ottoman Government had secured the loyalty of Christians as well as Mohamedan Ghegs by allowing them to pillage and kill their non-Albanian neighbors to their hearts' content. They are ever pressing forward, burning, looting, and murdering the Servians of the vilayet of Kossovo. The frontier line of Albania has been extended in this way far up into Old Serbia. Even the frontier of Servia proper is not regarded by these lawless mountain men. They often make raids into Bulgaria when quartered as soldiers on the border. The Albanians have overrun all Macedonia. They have found their way in large numbers as far as Constantinople. But beyond their own borders and the section of Kossovo from which the Servians have fled, they are held within certain bounds. In many Albanian districts the Albanians are exempt from military service, but large numbers of them join the Turkish army as volunteers. They enlist for the guns and cartridge."¹⁶

Another traveller, British journalist wrote similar testimony about conditions in Old Serbia: "Of the rest of the Christian Servian population of Old Serbia, for every nine who remain, one has fled in despair to Servia, within recent years. The remainder, unarmed and unprotected, survive only by entering into a species of feudal relationship with some Albanian brave. The Albanian is euphemistically described as their 'protector'. He lives on tolerably friendly terms with his Servian vassal. He is usually ready to shield him from other Albanians, and in return he demands endless blackmail in an infinite variety of forms. (...) They can be compelled to do forced labour for an indefinite number of days. But even so the system is inefficient, and the protector fails at need. There are few Servian villages which are not robbed periodically of all their sheep and cattle — I can give names of typical cases if that would serve any purpose. For two or three years the village remains in a slough of abject poverty, and then by hard work purchases once more

¹⁵ S. Skendi, *op. cit.*, 304.

¹⁶ F. Moore, *The Balkan Trail*, New York 1906, 223—224.

the beginning of the he, only a due course to lose it again. I tried to find out what the system of land tenure was. My question, as a rule, met with smile. The system of land tenure in this country, where the Koran and the raffle are the only law, is what Albanian chiefs of the districts chooses to make it. The Servian peasants, children of the soil, are tenants at will, exposed to every caprice of their domestic conquerors. Year by year the Albanian hillmen encroach upon the plain, and year by year the Servian peasants disappear before them."¹⁷

When the ruling circles in Belgrade realized the danger that Albanian predominance in Kosovo vilayet would permanently threaten Serbian independence,¹⁸ Serbia was already in a custom war with Dual Monarchy (1906—1911), with the 1908 annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina heralding fresh conflicts. Belgrade's endeavors to win over notable Albanian leaders in Old Serbia (Isa Bolletini, Idriz Seferi, Bairam Curri) for a concreted resistance against the Young Turk regime, apparently successful during the 1910—1912 Albanian uprisings and calculated at curbing Austro-Hungarian influence and ending violence against the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohia, failed when the Albanians resolved to defend the Ottoman state, stood by the Porte and the Sultan Mehmed Reshad V. Austro-Hungarian consuls (especially Prohaska in Prizren) and agents encouraged Albanians to resist the Serbian army.¹⁹

IV

In the 1912 Balkan war, after the liberation of Kosovo and Metohia, Serbian troops entered northern Albania and emerged at the Adriatic Sea. The determination of the Serbian government to advance towards the Adriatic coast, to an ethnically Albanian area, was based on the evaluation, which shared the Court, army headquarters, political parties (except socialists) and the public opinion in Serbia, that the Albanians, split by religion and divided by perpetually clashing tribes, had no true national consciousness nor were they constituted as a nation, thus a part of them could fit into a Serbian state in which they would be guaranteed the rights of an ethnic minority. President of

¹⁷ H. N. Brailsford, *Macedonia. Its races and their Future*, London 1905, 275—276.

¹⁸ Serbian government planned in summer of 1905, to protest against Albanian violence against Serbs in vilayet of Kosovo, in similar way as Bulgarian government did against persecutions against Bulgarians in vilayet of Edirne. Materials were collected but never presented to the Great Powers. (Arhiv Srpske akademije nauka i umetnosti, No 14243/4565.)

¹⁹ V. Corović, *Odnosi između Srbije i Austro-Ugarske u XX veku*, Beograd 1936; Đ. Mikić, *Austro-Ugarska i Mladoturci 1908—1912*, Banja Luka 1983.

Serbian government, Nikola Pašić, on the eve of the first Balkan war, offered to Albanian leaders in Old Serbia an "agreement leading to the association of Serbs and Albanians in the vilayet of Kosovo". Pašić was ready to guarantee following rights: freedom of religion, use of Albanian language in schools, courts and local administration, special Albanian assembly which would deal with laws concerning religious, educational and legal matters.²⁰

Although the civil war in Albania (1912—1915), where the religious division was the main problem, proved right Serbia's assessment to a certain degree, with the occupation of Scutari, Tirana, Alessio and Durazzo, the principle of nationality, on which Serbia consistently called, was disrupted, but the true meaning of the Albanian expedition was to secure a port for the transport of Serbian goods to world markets: its economic independence was a prerequisite for preserving political independence.

Austria-Hungary in return induced the proclamation of the independence of Albania in Valona. Provisional government of Ismail Kemal (Qemalli), who proclaimed the independence of Albanian state, was a toy in the hands of Vienna, devoid of any stronger influence with the people. All documents, including the proclamation of independence, were written in the Turkish language and Arabic letters; not one member of his cabinet knew how to write in Albanian language. But before he left capital of Dual Monarchy, Ismail Kemal through viennese press demanded an independent "Greater Albania" — encompassing cities of Monastir, Janina, Skoplje, Priština and Prizren.²¹

Dual Monarchy considered the emergence of the Serbian troops on the Adriatic Sea a serious threat to its vital interests. Belligerent military circles in Vienna headquarters proposed to attack Serbia whose northern borders remained unguarded. During December 1912 all tokens pointed to an upcoming Austro-Hungarian — Serbian war. After conferring with the Russian and Italian diplomacy, the Serbian government pronounced the following statement: "We do not desire to raise the issue of our emergence at the sea ourselves, but rather to let the matter remain within the hands of the Great Powers when war ends and peace is concluded: We should not disapprove of the creation of autonomous Albania if Europe should agree to it. We only believe that Albania will not abide by peace necessary to both the Balkan allies and the whole of Europe. Our desire is to have a port on our territory — yet we leave this issue for the

²⁰ Đ. Mikić, *The Albanians and Serbia during the Balkan Wars*, in: B. Kiraly and D. Đorđević (ed.), *East Central European Society and the Balkan Wars*, Boulder Colorado 1987, 170.

²¹ D. T. Bataković, *Oslobodenje Kosova i Metohije*, in: *Kosovo i Metohija u srpskoj istoriji*, 284.

Great Powers to resolve, when they solve other matters that will unfold from peace."²²

The Austro-Hungarian invasion on Serbia was prevented by a Conference of Ambassadors of the Great Powers in London (1912—1913). Representatives of the Balkan states began peace negotiations with the Ottoman Empire. The Conference of Ambassadors argued the issue of Serbia's emergence at the Adriatic Sea and the status of Albania, which would then enter into regulations of peace with Turkey. While Russia supported Serbian demands for Adriatic ports, Dual Monarchy's intention was to struggle for a larger Albania. France and the Great Britain accepted the formation of Albania but feared Austro-Hungarian and Italian superiority in it.

Thus the very first day the Conference opened, the ambassadors reached the following agreement: "autonomous Albania guaranteed and controlled exclusively by six powers under the sovereignty or suzerainty of the sultan. The exclusion of every Turkish element from the administration is understood". Ensuring the frontiers of Albania and Montenegro which were "neighboring all the way", Serbia was denied emergence to the Adriatic Sea. As compensation, it was given a free and neutral trade port on the Albanian coast, to which Serbian goods would arrive by railway secured by international gendarms under European control. Peace in Europe was saved, but as Raymond Poincare pointed out: "Serbia paid the highest bill".²³

Backed by Italy, Austria-Hungary attempted to assure the largest parts of Old Serbia and northern Macedonia for autonomous Albania. The Dual Monarchy demanded that cities of Đakovica (Djakove), Debar (Dibra), Korca, Janina and Struga belong to Albania, and "in the first round" both Peć (Ipek) and Prizren, as "compensational objects". Russia and France maintained a medial solution by which Albania's frontier towards Serbia should stretch along the watershed of the White and the Black Drim (Drin) Rivers to Ohrid. The Albanian delegation demanded the formation of "ethnic" Albania, inclusive of the towns Peć, Mitrovica, Priština, Skoplje and Monastir.

The standpoint of the Serbian delegation was most wholly revealed by the aide-memoir submitted to the Conference on January 8, 1913. It explicitly stated that Serbia was not opposed to the formation of autonomous Albania, but that its whole centuries-long struggle for national survival against Turkish rule, and subsequently for state independence from 1804 to 1912, would prove to have been senseless if those regions with admixed Serbian-Albanian populaces, where forceful Islamization, Albanization and the routing of Serbian inhabitants had been urged on for

²² D. T. Bataković, *Oslobođenje Kosova i Metohije*, 285.

²³ *Ibid.*, 286. More details in: D. Đorđević, *Izlazak Srbije na Jadransko more i Konferencija ambasadora u Londonu 1912*, Beograd 1956, 133—143.

centuries, were to belong to Albania. Supporting its attitudes with historical, ethnographic, cultural and ethnical rights, the Serbian delegation underscored that Kosovo and Metohia, where the towns Peć and Đakovica and monastery of Dečani lay, were since time immemorial the sacred land of the Serbian people, and that under no condition would any Montenegrin nor Serbian government consent to their belonging to someone else.

The Serbian government was adamant in its defence of Kosovo, Metohia and western Macedonia. The entrance of either of these regions into autonomous Albania would create a new seedbed of conflicts through which Dual Monarchy would exert pressure upon Serbia. Stojan Novaković, the first delegate at the Conference of Ambassadors, believed that by "demanding Prizren, Đakovica, Peć for Albania, Austria-Hungary desired to renew the barrier between Serbia and Montenegro, between Serbia and the sea." Serbian Prime Minister Pašić, kept underscoring that he would never abandon Debar and Đakovica whatever the decision of the Great Powers, and that only a stronger military force could rout the Serbian army from these regions. Pašić underlined bitterly: "The lands and sanctity of Old Serbia are being taken away and given to one who has been devastating them until today."

Serbia was forced to withdraw its troops from the Adriatic coast. Austria-Hungary gave in to Russia's demands, so Debar and Đakovica remained part of Serbia, while its demand to include Scutari in the new Albanian state was accepted, though the city was still besieged by Montenegrin and Serbian troops. The final agreement was reached on April 10, 1913, while the structure of Albania continued to be discussed in the months to come. At the end of July, the Austro-Hungarian—Italian proposition was accepted by which Albania was to become a sovereign state with a hereditary prince. An International Control Committee was formed whose duty was to organize life in the country with the aid of Dutch officers. As the hereditary Albanian prince, among numerous candidates, an Austro-Hungarian was chosen, German Prince Wilhelm von Wied, cousin of the Romanian queen, which was interpreted in Belgrade as another attempt of Austria-Hungary to close the hoop around Serbia by way of Albania, Bulgaria and Romania.²⁴

After withdrawal of the Serbian army from the Albanian coast, Austro-Hungary and Turkey organized several raids into Serbian territory (the biggest one with 10.000 men was in September 1913) while, prior to and during the first years of World War I, financed and armed Albanian troops to fight against Serbia. Heads of armed bands were Albanian chiefs from

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 286—287. Large documentation in: *Dokumenti o spoljnoj politici Kraljevine Srbije*, vol. VI-1, 136—142; doc. No 260, 379, 380.

Kosovo who took high position in provisional government of Ismail Kemal in Valona: Isa Boletini, Bairam Curri, Riza Bey Krieziu and Hasan Prishtina. The Vienna press published elaborate articles on great victories gained by the Albanians and demanded a revision of the borders. Ismail Kemal demanded an exclusion of those regions encircled by the insurrection from the Serbian state and proposed a plebiscite that would be implemented by the Albanian rebels. When the incursion was checked, the Vienna press spread rumors of alleged reprisals committed by Serbian troops upon the innocent Albanian people. Austro-Hungarian diplomacy endeavored to prove that an insurrection had broken out within Serbian territory (Prizren, Debar, Đakovica), subsequently joined by Albanians from the other side of the frontier.²⁵

V

Serbia's endeavors to establish, via alliance with Essad Pasha Toptani, landlord from Tirana region, minister in several governments and ruler of central Albania (1914—1916), a balance on its border with Albania, oust foreign domination from Albania, calm the Albanian population in its territory and assure narrow access to the Adriatic Sea near Scutari, failed before the Great Albanian propaganda which was, after the dissolution of Austria-Hungary, taken by Italy which fought to assure its domination in the eastern Adriatic coast.²⁶

Serbia's clashes with the Albanian national movement and the fixed interests of the big powers were conveyed into the Yugoslav state, though in a somewhat changed form. Serbia brought into Kingdom of Yugoslavia modern political institutions, and endeavored to restore through colonisation of Serbs from undeveloped parts of the country, the disturbed ethnic balance, secure the borderline with Albania and establish a modern and efficient administration.

Unresolved ethnic conflict, encouraged by neighboring countries defeated in the war, was further intensified in Kosovo and Metohia through reflected Islamic forbiddingness. The interference of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia into the internal Albanian affairs, caused by its rivalry with Italy, created fresh tensions in overall Serbo-Albanian relations.

As a heavy legacy from a previous era, common to all Albanian movements against Serbia and Yugoslavia, lay the

²⁵ *Dokumenti o spoljnoj politici Kraljevine Srbije*, vol. VI-3, doc. No 407—410; B. Hrabak, *Arbanaški upadi i pobune na Kosovu i u Makedoniji od kraja 1912. do kraja 1915. godine*. (*Nacionalno nerazvijeni i nejedinstveni Arbanasi kao oruđe u rukama zainteresovanih sila.*), Vranje 1988, 33—61.

²⁶ D. T. Bataković, *Esad-paša Toptani i Srbija 1915*, in: *Srbija 1915. godine*, Beograd 1986, 299—327; *Esad-paša Toptani, Srbija i albansko pitanje (1916—1918)* in: *Srbija 1918. godine*, Beograd 1989, 345—364.

preponderance of retrograde solutions over liberal ones to the Albanian national question: the ascendancy of a policy which had its roots in religious intolerance from the reign of Abdulhamid II and the policy of denying the rights to all Serbs taken from the political heritage of Austria-Hungary.

Out of such a form of exclusiveness in seeking a solution to the ethnic problem, sprang the alliance of Albanians with totalitarian ideologies in Italy and Germany in the inter-war period, and after World War II with the authoritarian regime of Enver Hoxha.

The undevelopment of the Balkan societies, absence of political culture and democratic traditions, religious division and a tribal psychology, along with the different rhythms of national integration, may have had a crucial effect in Serbo-Albanian relations which evolved continually in a closed circle of bitter clashing: within the frame of relations defined long ago by Great powers towards the Serbian people, who, due to their strategic position in the heart of the Balkans were considered, most often with good cause, the bearers of decisive political power in Southeastern Europe.

ВЕЛИКЕ СИЛЕ, СРБИЈА И АЛБАНСКО ПИТАЊЕ

Резиме

Напори Србије да савезом са Есад-пашом Топтанијем, господарем и управљачем централне Албаније и министром у неколико влада (1914—1916), оствари равнотежу на својим границама са Албанијом, ту земљу лиши модерне политичке институције, смири њено становништво и осигура себи приступ до Јадранског мора у близини Скадра, пропали су пред снажним замаха великоалбанске политике. После пропасти Аустро-Угарске сву бригу око таквог решења албанског питања преузела је Италија која је намеравала да себи обезбеди и тај део источне јадранске обале.

Српски конфликти са албанским националним покретом, тиме и са интересима сила које су иза тих стремљења стајале, пренети су и у нову југословенску државу, премада у нешто измењеном облику. Србија је донела модерне политичке институције, а колонизацијом претежно српског становништва у неразвијене делове земље настојала је да васпостави нарушену етничку равнотежу; у том смислу према Албанији је требало осигурати границу и установити ефикасну администрацију.

Нерешен етнички конфликт, охрабрен од суседних земаља поражених у светском рату, на Косову и Метохији нарочито је заоштрен исламском нетрпељивошћу. Државно мешање у унутрашња питања Албаније, у деликатним околностима ривалства са Италијом, покренуло је нове тензије у свеукупним српско-албанским односима.

Као тешко бреме протеклог периода, слично свим албанским националним покретима усмереним против Србије или Југославије, лежи превласт ретроградних решења албанског питања над оним евентуално

либералнијим. Таква политика има своје корене у верској нетрпељивости владавине Абдула Хамида II и аустроугарској политици негирања српских националних права.

Поред таквог вида тражења решења етничког проблема, појавила се коалиција албанске националне идеје с тоталитарним идеологијама Италије и Немачке у међуратном периоду, и после Другог светског рата под ауторитарним режимом Енвера Хоџе.

Неразвијене структуре балканских друштава, недостатак политичке културе и демократских традиција, верске поделе и племенска психологија, заједно с неусклађеним ритмовима националне интеграције, могли су имати одлучујућег ефекта на српско-албанске односе који су се затомили у затвореном кругу оштрих сукобљавања, и у оквирима глобалних односа дефинисаних давно у ставовима великих сила према Србима који су, захваљујући свом стратешком положају у срцу Балкана, сматрани, најчешће исправно, одлучујућим политичким фактором у југоисточној Европи.

