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70. THE INDEPENDENCE OF ALBANIA AND THE ALBANIAN-OTTOMAN RELATIONS 1912-1913

(ARNAVUTLUK'UN BAĞIMSIZLIĞI VE 1912-1913
ARNAVUT-OSMANLI İLİŞKİLERİ)

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Abstract

The proclamation of the Albanian independence was one of the important events of the Balkan wars. The national historiographies of the Peninsula have either failed to deal with the history of the Albanian-Ottoman relations during the period of 1912-1913 or only superficially touched upon the subject. Using the Austro-Hungarian archival sources, this paper attempts to conclude our knowledge about the history of the secession from the point of view of the Albanian-Ottoman relations and tries to point out some possible research fields. The first part of the paper approaches the problems of the Albanian participation in the first Balkan war and the proclamation of the independence (28.11.1912). The Albanian role on the battlefield was quite contradictory and that was the reason why the contemporary Turkish public held the Albanians responsible for losing the war. The most obvious sign of "the Albanian treason" was the proclamation of their independent state. One of the most intriguing questions concerning the Albanian-Ottoman relations is who exactly were the proclaimators, who voted for the secession from the Empire. The second part of the paper analyses the events of 1913. The Provisional Government of Vlora had different policies towards the Young Turk government and the imperial troops in Albania. It is also an intriguing question how the Albanian state officials in Istanbul, diplomats and field officers reacted to the news about the proclamation. The Young Turk government did not limit its Albanian policy to the negotiations with İsmail Kemal, the leader of the Provisional Government in Vlora. Till the summer of 1914 the Empire had not given up its territorial claims on Albania. The Ottoman government sent many officers to the West Balkans to prepare a military coup d'état or to organise a general uprising among the peasantry.

I. The Role of the Albanians in the First Balkan War

The problem of the Albanian role in the First Balkan War calls for refined researches. During the investigation it is unavoidable to separate the history of the soldiers who were on duty in the imperial army from the fact, that the civilian population did not put up armed resistance against the Serbian and Montenegrin Armies. The Albanian civilians, mostly Muslims, who had always been ready to spark off an uprising or a revolution against the Young Turk government, despite all contemporary expectations, did not intervene in the military operations in the autumn of 1912.

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Albanians in the imperial army

Of the professional *nizam*-units, which were garrisoned in Albanian territories, only few were composed of ethnic Albanian soldiers. These units, similar to the recruited *redif*-troops organised on territorial basis and composed exclusively by Albanians, had not taken part in regular and efficient trainings, military exercises and were not well armed with weapons and ammunition.¹

As a consequence of the Albanian uprisings between 1910 and 1912 and countless desertations from the Ottoman army, the Albanian officers and soldiers were surrounded by obvious distrust among the imperial troops. To defend themselves and to force the changes of the general conditions the army were under, these officers began to organise secret groups in 1912. One of these groups was „The League of Albanian officers”. The most important target of the league was to overthrow the Ottoman minister of war, Mahmud Şevket Pasha, who was held responsible for all problems within the imperial army.² Due to the similar ambitions of other secret military organisations, the minister resigned on 10th July of 1912.

The general mobilization, ordered by the Ottoman high command, was carried out in the administrative units populated mostly by Albanians between 23th September and 12th October of 1912. The Albanians of Kosovo vilayet however were unwilling to join to the *redif*-troops of the army. They seemed willing to combat at the same time in the vilayet of Monastir, although not in the army but in irregular troops.³ It was Esat Pasha Toptani, who managed to set up the local *redif*-troops in Middle-Albania. He mobilised more than 10.000 men and led them to Shkodra. All in all, there must have been approximately 70.000 soldiers on duty in the imperial army in October of 1912 (both *nizam*- and *redif*-units). The number of irregular troops, composed by Albanians, is unknown.⁴

There is a lack of information about the contemporary role of the Albanians in the army.⁵ The „thesis of the treason” (see below), formulated by the Young Turks and committed by Albanians, is based on the fact that Albanian soldiers continued to desert from the Ottoman divisions in the First Balkan War in mass. The archive sources of Austria-Hungary strongly suggest, for instance, that Albanian soldiers, driven by unknown motives, deserted from their units during the battles of Kumanovo and Monastir in critical moments.⁶ It is however unimaginable that the Albanian soldiers of the imperial army, being stationed in their own home country, did not resist with all their might against the conquerors.⁷

One of the extant contemporary sources was written by a Turkish officer with Ottoman identity. Ahmad Hamdi was an artillery officer, who was fighting the First Balkan War in the XXI. division.⁸

¹ G. Demeter, *A két Balkán-háború hadtörténelme (1912-1913)*, (Budapest, 2007), pp. 49-58. and G. Demeter, *Kisállami törekvések és nagyhatalmi érdekek a balkán-háborúk idején (1912-1913)*, (Debrecen, 2008), pp. 148-149. The research has been funded by the Bolyai János Research Fellowship

² *Kriegsarchiv Wien (KA), Manuscriptensammlung, Allgemeine Reihe: Ernst Wisshaupt, Geschichtliche Entwicklung der Balkanstaaten bis zur eigentlichen Vorgeschichte des Krieges 1912/13*, No.78, 13-14 and 53.

³ *KA Zentralstellen, Generalstab, AOK-Evidenzbureau*, Kt. 3461, Die Mobilisierung im Vilajet Monastir am 14. Oktober 1912, Nr.122.

⁴ *KA Militärkanzlei Erzherzog Franz Ferdinand (KA MKFF)*, Kt. 195/2, Vermutliche Stärke der türkischen Streitkräfte in Albanien. [Oktober?] 1912, T.No.1510.

⁵ Based on Ottoman sources Isa Blumi investigated this question. I. Blumi, *Rethinking the Late Ottoman Empire. A Comparative Social and Political History of Albania and Yemen 1878-1918*, (Istanbul, 2003), pp. 171-191.

⁶ *KA MKFF*, Kt. 192, Tagesbericht Epirus und Albanien 03.03.1913, Evb.No.300/3.

⁷ According to the Albanian historiography approximately 25.000 Albanian civilians were massacred by the Serbian army during October-November of 1912. K. Prifti (ed.), *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar II*, (Tiranë, 2002), p. 507. and Jusuf Bajraktari, „Roli i Kosovës në shpalljen e pavarësisë së Shqipërisë” *Studime Historike*, 40, 2003, H. 1-2, p. 140. This number can be confirmed by the archival sources of Vienna.

⁸ A. Hamdi, *Asbab indihar al-xhajash al-'uthmasi va al-albanijun*, (Al-Kahira [Kairo], 1913). Due to this

In the last years before the war Hamdi had refused to engage in politics, he had judged everything from the point of view of the army. According to Hamdi the very reasons of the military defeat were the underdeveloped armament of the imperial army, the lack of trainings and manoeuvres and the collapse of the military moral. In his book the Turkish officer took the side of the Albanian officers and soldiers. He criticised the government policy of the Young Turks between 1908 and 1912, for instance the brutal disarming operations, and set out a number of examples to rebut the views about the Albanian cowardice.⁹ Against the Serbian army, equipped with modern artillery and arriving with well-organised and trained and motivated soldiers, the imperial divisions, stated Hamdi, simply had had no chance. Of the 1500 soldiers of the Gjilan battalion only 15 men survived the battle of Kumanovo.

It follows from the foregoing that beside the imperial army the Albanian irregular troops proved to be unable to offer resistance, as well.¹⁰ Only the Albanian tribes of Luma could successfully resist the Montenegrin and Serbian units, because they fought in very advantageous geographical conditions.¹¹ Isa Boletini and Bajram Curri, the most well-known commanders of the Kosovar irregular troops, devoted all their efforts to save their men and to retreat towards the coast of Albania in a constant and bitter fight. They were to battle in all cities and fortress on their way from Kosovo to the Adria, but the fast invasion of the conquering armies, followed by a well-prepared plan of military operations, gave them no time to organise an effective resistance. It was Mitrovica where Boletini began to fight with Serbian units on the 18th October of 1912, but after a month his men were driven back to Vlora.¹²

Albanian Civilians and the War

The Young Turk political thinking reacted bitterly to the total military defeat in the First Balkan War and it developed the „thesis of the Albanian treason” in the late autumn of 1912. According to the thesis it was the Albanians, who were to hold responsible for the defeat in the Balkanian theatre of war.¹³ The Muslim civilians of the vilayets of Kosovo and Macedonia, who were always ready to revolt against the government of Istanbul and to fight for the defense of their own ethnic territories earlier, reacted this time apparently with ignorance and inactivity during the first weeks of the war. But why had they refused to be active in the battlefield?

The main reasons should be found in the government policy between 1908-1912, pursued by the Young Turk party against the Albanian population. The disarming operations of Torgut Şevket Pasha, as his army of 40-50.000 men had marched violently across the Albanian administrative units, had brought about serious consequences. It is not known whether he was able to disarm the Muslim and Catholic civilians of the vilayets of Monastir, Kosovo and Shkodra,¹⁴ but his operations resulted by all means in essential distrust against the imperial army. But not only the connections between the

book Hamdi was sentenced to death by the Young Turk government in 1914. About the memoirs of Hamdi see Muhamed Mufaku, „Kujtimet e kapitenit Ahmet Hamdi për luftën ballkanike dhe shqiptarët” *Gjurmime Albanologjike*, 15, 1985, pp. 303-324.

⁹ *ibid*, p. 311.

¹⁰ *KA MKFF*, Kt. 193, reports of Gellinek to the General Staff, 02.12.1912, Belgrad, B.Nr.1600 res., 1-3 and 03.12.1912, [without No.] 1-3.

¹¹ Österreichisches Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Politisches Archiv, XII. Türkei (ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei), Kt. 414/50, telegrams of Heimroth, Üsküb, 22.11.1912, Nr.4632. and 25.11.1912, Nr.5869.

¹² F. Musaj, *Isa Boletini (1864-1916)*. (Tirana, 1987), p. 163.

¹³ Mufaku, „Kujtimet e kapitenit...”, pp. 301-303.

¹⁴ On the one hand the arsenals of Peja and Prizren were robbed by Albanian rebels in Summer of 1912. On the other hand it was the Ottoman leadership of the vilayet of Kosovo that distributed weapons among the Muslim civilians. ÖHHStA PA XXXVIII. *Konsulate*, Prizren, Kt. 405, report of Prochaska, Prizren, 27.08.1912, Nr.86.

army and the civilians could be characterized by distrust. According to Marie Godin, a contemporary traveller in the Balkans, the North-Albanian population, also known as 'gegs', sometimes simply refused to believe the news from Istanbul. On the territory of Luma, for instance, the mobilization order of the Sultan was considered as a trap, set by the Young Turk party.¹⁵

At the beginning of the war, as the Serbian army marched into the vilayet of Kosovo with modern artillery and well-organised soldiers, the Albanian warriors, who had still lived in the world of the individual acts of heroism, would have been powerless by all means. In addition, just after occupying the country the Serbian high command ordered the weapons to be collected from the civilians and to expel the Muslims.¹⁶ The waves of refugees, brought about by the ethnic cleansing policy and the military administration of the Serbian army, made the conditions of resistance even more difficult.¹⁷

There had been a contemporary feature of the Albanian mentality that must be taken into consideration as well. The single tribes, clans and families showed a lack of confidence in the every-day connections with each other. If evidence of resistance was given, each and every irregular troop defended its own local territory and it certainly hindered the idea of a common resistance even further. The lack of solidarity based on national feelings was obvious. The homeland was basically the village or the valley, eventually the administrative unit. Under the conditions of a modern warfare the infrastructurally underdeveloped geographical environment proved to be a significant drawback as well.¹⁸

On the eve of the First Balkan War, Hasan Prishtina, Nexhip Draga, Bajram Curri and Mithat Frashëri, the leaders of the Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia, met in Skopje (Üsküb at that time) to set up the „Black Society for Saving” on the 14th October of 1912.¹⁹ These politicians and commanders drafted a letter, addressed to the governments of the great powers. In the letter, the leader stressed, that the Albanians shall fight against the invaders; not for the Empire, however, but for saving their ethnic territories.²⁰ Due to lack of time the society proved to be unable to prepare the civilians for the war. At the outbreak of the war the commanders moved to their native villages to take up arms against the Serbian troops, while the political leaders, Hasan Prishtina and Nexhip Draga, exactly in that critical moment, were arrested by the occupying army of Serbia. Prishtina and Draga could leave the prison of Belgrade only in May of 1913.²¹

The tribes of the North-Albanian Alps made no attempt to resist the Montenegrin invaders. Those tribes whose territories were located at the borders and those whose territories lied beside the main roads leading into the inner regions of the empire, were forced to support the marching troops of Montenegro. It can be stated, that the majority of the North-Albanian tribes had well assessed the consequences of the eventual resistance and while watching over their tribe-borders they waited for a better time to act.²² As a matter of fact, from the point of view of the war these tribes followed the events with neutrality.²³ Nikita, king of Montenegro kept in touch with the leaders of the tribes dur-

¹⁵ M. A. Godin, *Aus dem neuen Albanien. Politische und historische Skizzen*, (Wien, 1914), p. 12.

¹⁶ ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 414/50, report of Ugron, Belgrad, 30.10.1912, Nr.122C.

¹⁷ ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 414/50, report and telegram of Heimroth, Üsküb, 18.11.1912, Nr.126, 1-2. and 20.12.1912, Nr.4486.

¹⁸ Godin, *Aus dem neuen Albanien*, pp. 12 and 14.

¹⁹ Prifti (ed.), *Historia e Popullit II*, p. 504.

²⁰ Bajraktari, „Roli i Kosovës...”, p. 139.

²¹ K. Csaplár, „Hasan Bej Prishtina, az első koszovói albán politikus”, in: *Kelet-Európa: történelem és sorsközösség. Palotás Emil 70. születésnapjára*. Edited by Tamás Krausz, (Budapest, 2006), pp. 80-82.

²² KA MKFF, Kt. 193, report of Hubka to the General Staff, Cetinje, 02.12.1912, B.Nr.1559.res, Die Haltung der Albanesen.

²³ KA MKFF, Kt. 191, presentation of Urbansky, Wien, 26.12.1912, B.Nr.1930. res, Militärische Si-

ing his campaign. He wanted to gain their trust with subventions and promises of tribal autonomy.²⁴

In November of 1912, however, as there was no possibility for bigger number of hostile troops to march across the territories of the North-Albanian Alps, the chieftains ordered their warriors to launch attacks on reserves transports and smaller garrisons.²⁵

II. The Independence Proclamation of Albania

Hearing the war preparations of the Balkan Alliance at the end of September, one of the Albanian aristocrats, former member of parliament, Syrja Bej Vlora (1860-1940) made attempt to prevent the eventual dismemberment of his country. He convoked a national assembly to Vlora, where he expected delegates from the whole Albania. The delegates, however, without conviction, were only drifting in the port. While organising the assembly Syrja had many difficulties: the behaviour of the delegates could have been best characterised by their constant partiality, envy, narrow-mindedness and passivity. They proved to be unable to deliver decisions. It was simply impossible, for instance, to force the participants to agree with each other on the agenda. After starting off, Syrja Vlora, as a chairman, gave an account of the general situation of the Empire and Albania with regard to the summer events (Albanian uprising). According to him, the empire had fallen; the reforms promised by the government were uncertain: it was simply impossible to realize them. The alliance of the Balkan states did exist, added the Bej, and the Ottoman army shall not be able to save the integrity of the imperium, regarding its broken moral and the lack of inner solidarity. As long as it was possible, the Albanians were forced to make a decision how to rescue themselves 'from the sinking ship'.²⁶ To solve the problems of their nation Syrja Vlora suggested to proclaim the independence and neutrality of the country. The audience however reacted to the exalted evaluation speech with derisive smile, sorry and critic.²⁷ The delegates simply refused to believe the assumption that the Balkan Alliance would dare to launch an attack on the empire on its own initiatives. According to them in such a case the great powers would impede the dismemberment of the peninsula. The assembly proved to be unsuccessful. It was however not just the delegates who hindered the efficiency of the debates. The assembly was further hindered by the local adherents of Ismail Qemal Vlora, the relative and the most significant political opponent of Syrja, as well.

Syrja Vlora was in port Vlora when the First Balkan War broke out. On hearing the first news from the battlefield he decided to travel to Middle- and North-Albania to hold direct negotiations with the local nobles and to organise a new national assembly in one of the cities by the river Shkumbi.²⁸

Via Durrës Syrja Bej arrived to Tirana in the first week of November. The aristocrat wanted the would-be delegates of the assembly, besides proclaiming the independence, to set up a delegation to represent their nation in a general conference that shall be devoted to solving the new problems of the peninsula, that had been posed by the war.²⁹ The idea of a proclamation was welcomed by the majority of the Bej-families in Middle-Albania. Some members of the Great House of Toptani, the most significant landowner family in the region, however refused to advocate the aim of Syrja, similar to the tribes of Malissia (e.g. Mirdita) in the North as well.³⁰ They must have counted with the resistance of the local Muslim population, that demonstrated his affection to the Sultan through

tuation in Montenegro and KA MKFF, Kt. 195/1, report of Hubka to the General Staff, Cetinje, 12.10.1912, B.Nr.881.

²⁴ KA MKFF, Kt. 195/1, report of Hubka to the General Staff, Cetinje, 18.10.1912, B.Nr.1041 vom 23.10.1912.

²⁵ KA MKFF, Kt. 195/1, reports of Hubka to the General Staff, Cetinje, 20.10.1912, B.Nr.1161. and 21.10.1912, B.Nr.1021.

²⁶ E. B. Vlora, *Lebenserinnerungen*, Bd. 1, (München, 1968), p. 253.

²⁷ S.B. Vlora, *Hâtirat ve terâcim-i ahvâl*, See Vlora, *Lebenserinnerungen I*, p. 254.

²⁸ Godin, *Aus dem neuen Albanien*, p. 12.

²⁹ ÖHHSStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 417/6a, telegram of Lejhanec, Valona, 31.10.1912, No.1359.

³⁰ A. G. Krause, *Das Problem der albanischen Unabhängigkeit in den Jahren 1908-14*, (Wien, 1970), p. 269.

countless protests.³¹ All in all, the hardships outlined above made it impossible to organise a national assembly in Middle-Albania.

After the failure in Middle-Albania Syrja Vlora travelled to Shkodra. He wanted Hasan Riza, the Arabian commander of the fortress city, and deputy commander Esat Toptani to raise the Albanian flag and proclaim the independence of Albania in case of an eventual military defeat of the Ottoman Empire. Interestingly enough Hasan Riza reacted to the suggestion with sympathy, while the Albanian Esat Pasha remained somewhat more reserved. After hearing the news that the Montenegrin and Serbian troops crossed the imperial borders, Esat accepted the idea of a national assembly. His answer reassured the Muslim population in Middle-Albania as well (Esat Toptani was the most significant landlord of that region).³² The war events however impeded the convocation of the assembly.

The predictions of Syrja Vlora in September came true at the beginning of November. The allied forces invaded the imperial districts with an irresistible force and the imperial army was not able to prevent the occupation of the Albanian territories. The local nobles and intellectuals of Albania understood with astonishment that it was high time to deliver their decision as to how they imagined the future of their country: with or without the Ottoman Empire?³³

In the territories threatened by the Greek divisions (Ioannina vilayet), the Albanian nobles organised many meetings. In these meetings they decided to support the imperial army to their best and they encouraged 'the geg north' to do the same. The Albanian nobles of the vilayet Ioannina addressed a letter to the Albanian leaders of the Catholic Church in the vilayets of Shkodra, Kosovo and Monastir and to the cities populated mostly by Muslim Albanians. They announced the fact, that „each and every tosk Albanian” took up arms to save their homeland and nation. (It was not defined how they interpreted the concept of 'homeland'). All who refuse to join the imperial army, added the nobles, commit high treason. The secretary and one member of the Albanian national club of Ioannina visited the local Austro-Hungarian consul at the same time. The two delegates informed consul Konstantin Bilinski that in case the dismemberment of the empire may have been unavoidable, the tosk Albanians were ready to ask for the protectorate of Austria-Hungary. This intention was shared by some Bektashi leader as well.³⁴ It was the Bosnian Muslim policy of the Monarchy that served as an attractive example for the majority of the Albanians.

The Muslim nobles and Catholic intellectuals, assembled in port Durrës, tried to seek a way out for their country. They held negotiations with the local deputy consul of Austria-Hungary. The Albanians wanted to know whether the Monarchy was ready to intervene and to occupy Albania in case the Serbian army reached the seashore. On the 12th November 1912 they addressed a letter, drafted mostly by Nikollë Kaçorri and Abdi Bej Toptani, to Emperor and King Franz Josef. In this letter the signatories asked the Austro-Hungarian Emperor to support them to create a united autonomous vilayet (from the vilayets of Shkodra, Kosovo, Monastir and Ioannina) *within the framework of the Ottoman Empire. If it had not been possible*, the emperor shall help the Albanians to establish an independent state from the above-mentioned vilayets. The signatories imagined this new state as neutral as Belgium or Switzerland.³⁵ It is intriguing, that in the shade of the Serbian, Montenegrin and Greek occupations, the different political pressure groups of the Albanians imagined their future basically by creating an autonomous vilayet in the Ottoman Empire. The concept of independence was acceptable for them only in case of a totally military defeat, as a last resort.

It is however important to stress, that the majority of the local Muslim civilians, who refused to

³¹ ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 411/5a, report of Lejhanec, Valona, 04.11.1912, No.59.

³² ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 417/6a, telegram of Rudnay, Durazzo, 15.11.1912, No.2846.

³³ P. Bartl, *Albanien*, (München, 1995), p. 134.

³⁴ ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 417/6a, letters of Bilinski, Janina, 07.11.1912, Nr.86. and No.87.

³⁵ ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 417/6a, letter of Rudnay, Durazzo, 13.11.1912, No.74.

deal with everyday policy until the war, considered the activity of the opposition nobles and intellectuals as high treason. The Muslims opposed the plan of a national assembly, because in their opinion it endangered the power of the Sultan. While holding their demonstration, they demanded from the mutasarrif of Durrës (mayor) to expel the delegates from the city.³⁶

Throughout 1912 Ismail Qemal Bej Vlora, former leader of the 'majority wing' of the Young Turks, was permanently on the road. As the Albanian uprising of Kosovo broke out, he appeared in Cetinje to hold negotiations about the political future of Albania with King Nikita and later with Isa Boletini. He was however not able to intervene directly in the event of the uprising.³⁷

In September he was staying in Istanbul again, as the new grand visier, Kiamil Pasha asked him to be a minister in his government. Qemali refused to accept the request.³⁸ His refusal was by no means accidental: Qemali, who was an experienced politician, did not want to take part in the political life of the Ottoman Empire.

As the Balkan war broke out, Qemali travelled with his loyal secretary, Luigj Gurakuqi to Bukarest to visit one of the greatest Albanian colony of the peninsula. Based on his own initiative a conference was convoked in the Hotel Continental with the purpose to discuss the future of the Albanians. It needs to be remarked, that Qemali Bej saw the solution of the problems of his country at that time, besides the acknowledgement of the Albanian nation and national culture, in the establishment of *an Albanian autonomy within the framework of the Ottoman Empire* as well.³⁹

The local delegates of the Bukarest's colony were not able to agree on what they should prefer: autonomy or independence. The only conclusions they drew were that the dismemberment of the Albanian territories must be prevented and a national assembly needs to be convoked in Albania. They planned to write a letter to the great powers in which they intended to ask them to support the Albanian autonomy in the Ottoman Empire. The assembly of Bukarest ended their negotiations with the following decree on the 5. November 1912: „Since the Ottoman government is unable to run the state administration, the Albanians are forced to gather all their strength and found a leading organisation, that take the country government [sic!] into its hands, and devote all its efforts to avoid that the Albanians be defeated and underprivileged by the Balkanian nations.”⁴⁰

Ismail Qemal Vlora wanted to play a significant role in the future of Albania, therefore he instructed his adherents in South- and Middle-Albania to hinder the endeavours of Syrja Bej. Besides these instructions he began to convoke *his own* national assembly, which increased the general chaos in his homeland even further.⁴¹

While Luigj Gurakuqi and some delegates of Bukarest were travelling to Trieste, Ismail Qemali arrived in Vienne via Budapest. He visited Leopold Berchtold, the joint minister of foreign affairs and the Ballhausplatz officials in charge of the Albanian issues. The Bej informed the Austro-Hungarian diplomats about the Bukarest's events and announced his plan for convoking a national assembly. According to the national historiography of Albania, by that very moment, Qemali had already made

³⁶ ÖHHStA PA XII. Türki, Kt. 417/6a, letter of Rudnay, Durazzo, 13.11.1912, No.74.

³⁷ P. Tako, *Luigj Gurakuqi – jeta dhe vepra*, (Tirana, 1980), p. 178 and A. Puto, *Historia diplomatike e çështjes shqiptare*. (Tirana, 2003), p. 78.

³⁸ I. Kemal, *The Memoirs Ismail Kemal Bey*, [New York, 1920], (Tirana, 1997), p. 370.

³⁹ Letter of Luigj Gurakuqi to the nobles of Elbasan, Istanbul [?], 07.09.1912, D. Kotini (ed.), *Qeveria e Përkohëshme e Vlorës dhe veprimtaria e saj – nëndor 1912 – janar 1914*. (Tirana, 1963), Nr.1, p. 24.

⁴⁰ The minutes of the conference is published in Kotini (ed.), *Qeveria e Përkohëshme...*, Nr.2, p. 26.

⁴¹ ÖHHStA PA XII. Türki, Kt. 417/6a, telegram of Lejhanec, Valona, 06.11.1912, No.61. It was Ismail Qemali who spreaded slanderous stories about Syrja Vlora („Syrja Vlora wants to play Albania into the hands of Austria-Hungary”). Godin, *Aus dem neuen Albanien*, 40–41.

his decision, and worked towards independence.⁴² This statement however could not be confirmed unambiguously based on Austro-Hungarian sources. Minister Berchtold gave account in his memoirs only of what Qemali had asked for in Vienna: support and information. According to the memoirs the Albanian politician wanted to know how Austria-Hungary imagine the would-be state organisation of an *autonomous* Albania, how the Ballhausplatz would react to the idea of a national assembly and to a letter, written by the assembly and sent to the great powers. The leader of the Austro-Hungarian diplomatic corps assured Qemali Bej of his support, but at the same time he refused to go into great details with regard to the war events.⁴³ As a matter of fact the unwilling readiness of Berchtold to hold negotiations with Qemali was posed not by the unknown future of the war. On one hand the Ballhausplatz had supported the Albanian national assembly *organised by Syrja Vlora*. On the other hand the person of Qemali counted as unreliable for Berchtold.⁴⁴

It is hard to decide, whether Ismail Qemal Vlora had made his decision regarding the question of independence before his negotiations in Vienna. It is imaginable, that hearing the war news before 12th November he more and more tended to understand: an idea of an autonomous Albania within the imperial framework was only an illusion. It is however undeniable, that *after* his negotiations in Vienna, he was fully intent on proclaiming the independence of his country.⁴⁵

Qemali and his adherents went on shore undisturbed in the port of Durrës on the 20th November 1912. The Ottoman city administration was run by the Albanian mutesariff Mahmut Mahir Efendi. It was Hamdi Bej Toptani, a significant landlord of the region and leader of the local gendarmerie, who was responsible for the maintenance of public order and who refused to prevent the landing of Qemali.⁴⁶

The Ottoman Empire had practically lost his face in the city and Middle-Albania – and it strengthened the intentions of Qemali. The last believer of the autonomy idea in the country came to understand the illusory nature of their hopes as well. In the last free cities of Middle-Albania – Elbasan, Tirana, Lushnja, Durrës – the local councils, in the shape of the invading Serbian forces, were ready to proclaim the independence.⁴⁷

The Albanians arriving from Triest spent some days in Durrës. They held negotiations with the local city council and the nobles and refugees gathered from Middle-Albania and the Middle-Balkan. As Qemali came to know that his greatest political rival, Syrja Vlora had travelled to Istanbul, he began his journey to Vlora. Durrës was occupied by the Serbian troops the next day, on the 25th November 1912. On the same day the nobles of Elbasan proclaimed the independence. Their example was followed by the city councils of Durrës, Tirana, Kavaja and Lushnja on the 27th November 1912.⁴⁸ These acts, however, were left unechoed.

The group of men that wanted to reach Vlora marched forward under very adverse conditions.⁴⁹ On their way to the south they were forced to interrupt the march for a day, because Kara Said Pasha,

⁴² Prifti (ed.), *Historia e Popullit II*, p. 509.

⁴³ ÖHHStA PA XIX. Nachlässe, Nachlaß Berchtold, Kt. 1, Bd. IV, 13. November 1912, 366–367.

⁴⁴ ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 417/6a, Tagesbericht, Wien, 12.11.1912, [without No.] and i.e. telegram of Berchtold to Mérey (Roma), Wien, 22.11.1912, No.196.

⁴⁵ Tako, *Luigj Gurakuqi*, p. 183 and ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 417/6a, letter of Lejhanec, Valona, 13.11.1912, No.64.

⁴⁶ Vlora, *Lebenserinnerungen I*, p. 271 and Kemal, *The Memoirs*, p. 371.

⁴⁷ Bartl, *Albanien*, p. 134.

⁴⁸ ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 417/6c, telegrams of Rudnay, Durazzo, 26.11.1912, No.6371 and 27.11.1912, No.6501 and No.6645; Kotini (ed.), *Qeveria e Përkohëshme*, Nr.6, 8 and 26; Prifti (ed.), *Historia e Popullit II*, 510.

⁴⁹ Prifti (ed.), *Historia e Popullit II*, pp. 510–511; Tako, *Luigj Gurakuqi*, pp. 187–188 and Vlora, *Lebenserinnerungen I*, p. 271.

the Turkish commander of the Vardar army, whose last troops had retreated into Albania (between Lushnja and Berat), wanted to arrest all the men in the marching column for high treason.⁵⁰ Qemali and his adherents spent the night in Fier, as guests of the Great House Vrioni. Some members of the Great Houses of Draga, Dërralla and Begolli who had escaped from Kosovo and Macedonia joined the marching column in Fier. The number of those marching to Vlora increased by dozens of noble and intellectual refugees from all regions of Albania on the road – and in this manner the number of 'national assembly delegates' increased as well.

The groups of Qemali arrived in Vlora on the 27th November 1912. Vlora was the last free city in Albania. The delegates and refugees held a short meeting on the same day. After the local consuls of the Adriatic powers confirmed, that both Austria-Hungary and Italy were interested in an independent Albania,⁵¹ the gathered decided the proclamation shall take place the next day.

On the 28th November 1912, at 2.00 p.m., when the majority of the Albanian-populated administrative units had been occupied by the Balkan Alliance, and in the presence of the delegates from Middle- and South-Albania, took place the most important moment of the 20th century Albanian history. Ismail Qemal Vlora held a short speech in the house of his relative Xhemal Bej Vlora, in which he told about the warplans of the Balkan Alliance and the helplessness of the Ottoman Empire. He declared that there had been only one way out for the Albanians: Albania must secede from the empire. A provisional government must be formed with the aim to represent the whole nation abroad.⁵² He then stepped out to the balcony and proclaimed: „From today on, under the rule of a provisional government, Albania is free and independent!”⁵³

Qemali informed the great powers, the Balkan states and the local Turkish commanders of the army about the act of proclamation on the same day.⁵⁴ In a different letter of his, addressed to the commander of the invasion armies of Greece, Montenegro and Serbia, he also touched upon an additional important intention of his. According to Qemali, Albania was a neutral state, that wanted to live in peace with his neighbouring countries. It followed from the foregoing that he, as the leader of the new state, shall protest against all military operations of the Balkan Alliance in every possible manner.⁵⁵

After proclaiming the independence a national assembly was formed from the delegates, and Ismail Qemal Vlora became entrusted on the 3rd of December 1912 to be the first Prime Minister of Albania.

To evaluate and interpret the significance of the events on the 28th November 1912 it is important to analyse the list of the proclaimers. However, the list of names is not easy to reconstruct. It is an additional problem, that according to the Albanian national historiography the actors of the proclamation day were the *elected* representatives of the whole Albania. Based on the Austro-Hungarian sources it is undeniable that the majority of them were present not as elected representatives but as refugees. Due to the war conditions one part of the independence supporting votes were provided via telegrams, and it tangled the situation even further. It is simply not clear who and by what right gave his vote.⁵⁶ The Albanian historiography had cut the 'Gordian knot' by giving the following answer: the number of the proclaimers increased to 63 men by 3rd December 1912 – even though some of them had voted *only orally* (like Isa Boletini).

⁵⁰ Vlora, *Lebenserinnerungen I*, p. 272.

⁵¹ ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 417/6b, telegram of Berchtold to Mérey (Roma), Wien, 29.11.1912, Nr.217.

⁵² Kotini (ed.), *Qeveria e Përkohëshme*, Nr.16, 31-34.

⁵³ *ibid*, 34.

⁵⁴ Kotini (ed.), *Qeveria e Përkohëshme*, Nr.18, Nr. 23 and Nr. 33, 34–35, 37 and 42–43.

⁵⁵ ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 417/6c, telegram of Lejhanec, Valona, 28.11.1912, No.7394.

⁵⁶ Prifti (ed.), *Historia e Popullit II*, p. 510 and Kotini (ed.), *Qeveria e Përkohëshme*, Nr.16, pp. 32–33 and ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 417/Jänner-März 1913, telegram of Lejhanec, Valona, 29.11.1912, [without No.]

Since the precise list of the proclaimers so far could not be reconstructed, the analysis of its composition can be carried out only based on estimations.⁵⁷ The number of the proclaimers must have ranged from 40 to 43 person – the number 37 given by the Albanian historiography seems to be too few. According to their territorial origins, North-Albania (Shkodra) was represented by one person, Middle-Albania (Durrës, Tirana, Kruja, Shijak, Elbasan, Berat) by approximately 15, South-Albania (Fier, Lushnja, Vlora, Korça, Gjirokastra, Tepelena, Përmet) by about 15 as well, while from Kosovo and Macedonia delegated roughly 10 persons. It means the tosk Albanians were overrepresented.

Based on the investigated lists the proclaimers were mostly composed by the 10-12 members of the Great Houses (Vlora, Vrioni, Toptani, Kalkandelen, Përmeti) and of those 15 representatives who arrived from the colonies. It means that one-third of the voters were intellectuals and one-fourth were landowners.

According to the names the confessional division was the following: approximately two-third of the voters were Muslims, and one-third were Orthodoxes. The Catholics were represented only by two men.

No doubt, that the national assembly of Vlora simply did not represent the opinion of the majority of the Albanian population. The identity of that majority was deeply rooted in that one of the Ottoman Empire. The vast majority of the proclaimers may have voted for the independence under the intermediate pressure of the war events and may have been forced by desperate necessity! Based on these arguments the proclamation, contrary to the belief of the Albanian national historiography, can not be regarded „as the result of the natural endeavours of the Albanian nation”.⁵⁸

Ismail Qemali Vlora proclaimed the independence basically with the assistance of certain members of the Great Houses⁵⁹ and with the help of the colonial intellectuals.⁶⁰

III. Albania and the Ottoman Empire

On hearing the news about the independence proclamation in Vlora, the leaders of the empire reacted with refusal. The government of Istanbul acknowledged neither the secession nor the independent status of Albania. What is more, it refused to accept the idea of a vassal Albanian state within the imperial framework.⁶¹ That reaction is fully agreeable, because the independence was proclaimed at the very moment when tens of thousands of Albanian and Turkish soldiers were fighting against the allied forces in Ioannina and Shkodra. From the point of view of Istanbul, the initiative of Vlora was absolutely illegal, because there had been a state and a functioning state administration in the Balkans.

The news about the proclamation events of 28th November 1912 reached the Ottoman commanders only in the early days of December. Esat Halasti Pasha, fighting a battle against the Greek divisions in Ioannina probably ordered the arrest and the carrying off of Ismail Qemali Vlora. But

⁵⁷ The analyse is based on Kotini (ed.), *Qeveria e Përkohëshme*, Nr.16, pp. 32–33 and ÖHHSIA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 417/Jänner-März 1913, telegram of Lejhanec, 29.11.1912, Valona [without No.]

⁵⁸ See M. Çami, *Grundaspekte der albanischen nationalen und demokratischen Bewegung in den Jahren 1913 bis 1920*, (Tirana, 1983), p. 13 and Ana Lalaj, „Shpallja e pavarësisë dhe disa aspekte të veprimtarisë së qeverisë e Vlorës” *Studime Historike*, 34, 1997, H. 1-4, p. 100.

⁵⁹ About the role of the Bej families played in the Albanian nationbuilding see N. Clayer, *Në fillimet e nacionalizmit shqiptar – Lindja e një kombit me shumicë myslimane në Evropë*. (Tiranë, 2009), pp. 330, 337, 374, 499, 500-507 and Konrad Clewing, „Identitätspolitik und Loyalitäten: Von der Religion zur Nation”, in: *Geschichte Südosteuropas*. Edited by Konrad Clewing / Oliver Jens Schmitt, (Regensburg, 2011), pp. 505-515, 513.

⁶⁰ Godin, *Aus dem neuen Albanien*, p. 35.

⁶¹ A. Puto, *Pavarësia shqiptare dhe diplomacia e fuqive të mëdha (1912–1914)*, (Tirana, 1978), pp. 135–136.

after a while he changed his intention, accepting the opinion of Myfit Bej Libohova and the kadi of Ioannina. The two Albanian nobles argued, that the commander would have risked the loyalty of the rest of Albanian battalions with the arrest. Esat Halasti sent telegrams to the last functioning administrative units and ordered the officials to cooperate with the government of Qemali.⁶² The commander of Ioannina, presumably on his own initiatives, granted Qemali Bej permission to organise the administration of the autonomous Albania with the restriction that the independence, inspired by Austria-Hungary and Italy remains unacceptable.⁶³

The grand visier was informed about the proclamation by Ismail Qemali Vlora only on 3rd December 1912. The Albanian Prime minister announced in his telegram, that a provisional government had been formed by the delegates of the nation. According to Qemali the new state would maintain the tight connections with the Caliph. „The Albanians – wrote the Premier – want to live free in their own territory and they are determined to reach the status the Macedonian vilayets had aspired to [sic!].” Qemali carefully avoided using the word “independence” in his telegram.⁶⁴

The answer telegram of the grand visier arrived in Vlora on 9th December. Kiamil Pasha expressed his astonishment hearing the news from Albania. According to him, the act of the proclamation was nothing less than a revolt against the empire. Kiamil tried to influence Qemali with a decree that was accepted by the Young Turk government on 23rd October 1912. The decree granted autonomy to whole Albania under the reign of an Ottoman prince. Ismail Qemali thanked for the governmental proposition but he refused to accept it. According to him the proposition arrived too late: independence had been proclaimed and the future of Albania depended on the negotiations, held by the great powers in London.⁶⁵

On 11th of December 200 Turkish cavalry-men were sent from Ioannina to Vlora, to arrest Qemali Bej – the person however, who gave orders for the arrest has so far remained unknown. The Albanian Prime minister sent 50 men to impede the Turkish soldiers in the pass of Lineci.⁶⁶ Finally no armed conflict ensued. Qemali wrote a letter to the grand visier in a conciliatory tone on 18th December 1912. In his writing he reiterated the main reasons of the proclamation: it was the only way to avoid being occupied and dismembered by the allied Balkan states. Istanbul was also interested, added Qemali, in being allied with a friendly Albania against the hostile Balkan states. Besides the above mentioned facts, the establishment of the Albanian state was based on the national principle, agreed and emphasized by the Balkan Allies as well.⁶⁷ It has remained unknown whether the grand visier answered to that letter. It is a fact, that after sending that letter to Istanbul the Turkish authorities impeded the communication channels of Vlora and they contributed to the complete isolation of the port.⁶⁸

The Ottoman Empire signed the peace treaty in London on 30th May 1913. With that act the Young Turk government acknowledged the right of the great powers to make decisions on the future of Albania.⁶⁹

⁶² ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 417/6c, letter of Lejhanec, Valona, 03.12.1912, No.71. It was the mutasarriff of Vlora who was instructed from Istanbul to arrest Qemali as well. ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 417/6a, telegram of Rudnay, Durazzo, 26.11.1912, Nr.5908.

⁶³ ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 417/6c, telegram of Lejhanec, Valona, 04.12.1912, No.753. According to the Albanian historiography Esat Halasti warmly congratulated on the proclamation of the independence on 2nd December 1912. Kotini (ed.), *Qeveria e Përkohëshme*, Nr.49, 54.

⁶⁴ ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 417/6c, telegrams of Lejhanec, Valona, 04.12.1912, No.753 and 06.12.1912, No.1187.

⁶⁵ Vlora, *Lebenserinnerungen II*, 1973, p. 26.

⁶⁶ ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 417/6c, telegram of Lejhanec, Valona, 12.12.1912, No.2552.

⁶⁷ ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 417/6c, telegram of Lejhanec, Valona, 18.12.1912, No.4019.

⁶⁸ ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 417/Jänner-März 1913, telegram of Rudnay, Durazzo, 27.02.1913, No.3772.

⁶⁹ Puto, *Pavarësia shqiptare*, p. 138 and Puto, *Historia diplomatike*, p. 110.

In December of 1912 there were three Ottoman armies and some divisions, fighting alone, cut from the high command, in Middle- and South-Albania. The fortress of Ioannina, as mentioned above, was defended by Esat Halasti Pasha and his brother, Vehib Halasti. They led approximately 30-40.000 men (according to Myfit Libohova 12.000 of them had to be Albanians).⁷⁰ Between the river of Shkumbi and the city of Berat were stationed the V. army-corps and the rest of the Vardar-army.⁷¹

The V. army-corps was led by Kara Said Pasha. He retreated from Kumanovo to Berat. Only 12.000 men were still alive from his troops. These soldiers were disciplined, but they were unable to fight in battle-line. They kept good connections with the local civilian population. Kara Said built up a more or less sufficiently functioning military administration in the region, and he tolerated the presence of the officials of the Vlora government. The Pasha and his last troops were the reason why the Serbian divisions dared not to cross the Shkumbi and occupy South-Albania.⁷²

It was 2.000 demoralised and exhausted men from Anatolia that retreated into Fier. They were in fully lethargy, all they wished was to return home. The Anatolians sold their weapons and ammunition to the civilians. Their officers were unable to restore the discipline.

One division of the Vardar army, which originally was responsible for defending the Sancak of Novipazar, led by Cavid Pasha escaped from the battle-line to Albania as well. The Serbian troops gave chase to that very division as they reached the coast by Durrës. Cavid Pasha commanded 5.000 Turkish soldiers from Anatolia. Until May of 1913, when these troops were transported to Istanbul, they had been garrisoned in the area of Vlora and they had posed a permanent threat to the government of Qemali.⁷³

In Delvino 4-5 battalions were stationed, comprised mostly of Albanians and led by Mehmet Ali Delvino Pasha. The Albanian landowner retreated from Monastir to Delvino, where he built up military administration. The Pasha did not advocate the policy of the provisional government of Vlora, but he also refused to threaten it with an armed assault. What he intended to do was nothing less than to cover the forces of Esat Halasti and to defend the coast in the area of Saranda and his family estate in Delvino.

Under the command of Halil Bej, approximately 12.000 men were garrisoned in Leskovik in the last weeks of December 1912 as well.⁷⁴

Ismail Qemali Vlora sent numerous calls to the Albanian soldiers of the Ottoman troops in the first weeks of December, in which he urged them to desert from the army. That activity made the Ottoman officers naturally hostile toward the government of Vlora. Under the influence of Qemali, thousands of soldiers deserted taking their weapons and ammunition with them. Although after 20th December the Albanian Prime minister ceased his demoralizing propaganda activity, the military moral of the rest Albanian soldiers of the Ottoman army was basically destroyed in the long run.

The Ottoman field-officers proved to be powerless against the general desertation phenomenon: they tried to discipline their soldiers with martial law and amnesty – but in vain.⁷⁵ There had been origi-

⁷⁰ ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 417/6c, telegram of Lejhanec, Valona, 03.12.1912, No.568.

⁷¹ The data about the military events and the Ottoman army stem from: *KA Militärkanzlei Seiner Majestät (KA MKSM)*, 18-1/7 (Kt. 1095.), 18-1/7-5 de 1913, Wien, 27.03.1913, K.Nr.2360. Beilage: Bruno Thomas: Bericht über Albanien. I. Die gegenwärtigen Verhältnisse in Albanien 1913, 2. 10-14 and Johann Hofmann: Bericht über Albanien 1913. 5. 8-10, 28.

⁷² ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 415/5r, telegram of Lejhanec, Valona, 07.01.1913, Nr.3848.

⁷³ Djordje Mikić, „The Albanians and Serbia during the Balkan Wars”, in: *East Central European Society and the Balkan Wars*, Edited by Béla K. Király / Dimitrije Djordjević, (New York, 1987), p. 174 and C. Sax, *Nachtrag zur Geschichte des Machtverfalls der Türkei*. (Wien, 1913), p. 642.

⁷⁴ ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 417/6c, telegram of Lejhanec, Valona, 05.12.1912, No.1171.

⁷⁵ ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 417/6c, telegram of Lejhanec, Valona, 26.12.1912, No.5354.

nally 12 of the Albanian *redif*-battalions in Ioannina. After receiving the calls of Qemali it was only two of them that refused to leave the trenches. The majority of the professional *nizam*-units, comprised of Albanians, continued fighting against the Greek army till the ceasefire of 3rd December 1912. (It must be stressed, that a significant number of the Albanian soldiers who had deserted from Ioannina appeared later in Çamëria, in their home country in order to fight against the irregular Greek units. It was another group of the deserted soldiers that assembled between Gjirokastra and Delvino. They decided to return under the command of Esat Halasti in January of 1913.)⁷⁶

The Ottoman troops garrisoned in Middle-Albania denoted more serious threat to the power of Ismail Qemali than those of Ioannina. They were theoretically able to liquidate the new and rebellious Albanian state administration. The Ottoman field-officers in Berat were hostile toward Qemali, but at the same time they were fully aware of the reality: their troops were unable to fight and they had to survive the rest time of the war in Albania. The Turkish field-officers did not want to risk a military conflict with the government of Vlora.⁷⁷

It was 3-4.000 armed Albanians that deserted from Berat till March of 1913. The rest of the Albanian officers remained under the command of Kara Said and sent several letters to Qemali in which they assured the Prime minister of their loyalty. They showed readiness to inform Qemali of all the news that would come to their knowledge.⁷⁸ The Prime minister did his best to keep the Anatolian soldiers at a distance from Vlora. He attempted to persuade the Turkish commanders of Berat of the general capitulation. At the same time Qemali urged the governments of the Adriatic powers to be ready to transport the Anatolian troops from Albania to Istanbul.⁷⁹

The Young Turk government did not accept the secession of Albania. Since the government of Istanbul refused to negotiate with Qemali, it seemed more effective to mobilize the Muslim population and to elaborate new plans based on their feelings and attitudes. It was in January of 1913 that an idea appeared that held the best hopes for being realized. The grand visier wanted to send Albanian officers and soldiers of the imperial army to Albania. He wanted them to organize irregular troops modelled on the Macedonian VMRO, and to spark off uprisings against the government of Vlora and the allied armies of the Balkan states in the spring.⁸⁰

Probably due to the military actions of winter and early spring there was no time to carry out the plan outlined above. The military operations of the Greek, Montenegrin and Serbian armies forced the Ottoman high command to withdraw their last troops from Albania.⁸¹ But as a matter of fact not until the fall of Shkodra were the military positions of the empire undermined in the West-Balkan.

It was the very moment of the outbreak of the Second Balkan War that the Young Turk government had a gleam of hope to carry out the Albanian plans. Dozens of officers travelled from Istanbul to Albanian territories,⁸² of whom the most well-known was Arif Hikmet. It must be stressed that these officers were able to begin their work with the assistance of Serbia. The influence their activity exercised on the Albanian events of 1913 however, was not significant.

⁷⁶ The accurate strength is unknown. ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 420/6f, report of Bilinski, Janina, 04.03.1913, No.9. 3-4.

⁷⁷ Kotini (ed.), *Qeveria e Përkohëshme*, p. 11.

⁷⁸ ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 417/6c, telegram of Lejhanec, Valona, 18.12.1912, No.4008.

⁷⁹ ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 417/6c, telegrams of Lejhanec, Valona, 01.12.1912, No.204 and 03.12.1912, No.568 and No.598.

⁸⁰ ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 420/6f, telegram of Pallavicini, Pera, 08.02.1913, No.1130. and i.e. Kt. 422/6k, report of Pallavicini, Konstantinopel, 27.02.1913, No.12G.

⁸¹ ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 423/6r, telegram of Pallavicini, Pera, 05.05.1913, No.1409.

⁸² ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 422/6g, telegram of Rudnay, Durazzo, 13.07.1913, No.2430.

The creation of Qemali's Albania put the Albanians, who were on duty either as state officials or as military officers, in an awkward position. The proclamation of independence exposed, for instance, the Albanians dwelling in Anatolia and Syria to serious incidents. The Albanian citizens of vilayets Aydin and Syria were regularly pestered by the local authorities and the Turkish population during 1913.⁸³ It was the local consulates of Austria-Hungary and Italy that protested against the witnessed and proved atrocities (arrests and expels) and mayhems.⁸⁴ From the point of view of the international law and treaties none of the great powers had the right to have their say in the inner policy of Istanbul. Despite this fact they were able to influence the Turkish authorities because it was the navies of the Adriatic powers that transported the Anatolian soldiers home from Albania.⁸⁵

In the first days of December the Albanians living in Istanbul refused to take the fact seriously that the independence of Albania had been proclaimed. They considered the act as an adventurous political step of Ismail Qemali Vlorë on his own initiative. In their opinion the Albanian independence should have been proclaimed only in two cases: when the proclamation would have been forced by a successful general uprising or in case the majority of the Albanians would have wanted to be seceded from the Empire.⁸⁶ After several days however, having rethought the unbelievable alterations of the year 1912, Halil Gjirokastra Pasha, chairman of the Albanian national club in the capital, turned directly to Count János Pallavicini, the ambassador of Austria-Hungary, and asked him whether the proclamation had been inspired or motivated by the Adriatic powers. In case of a confirmatory answer the Albanian club would request advice how to cope with the changed situation. According to Halil the Albanians of Istanbul had advocated the idea of the autonomy but now they showed readiness to accept the independence in case Austria-Hungary would play the role of a protector over Albania.⁸⁷

The Young Turk government and the reactions from the press however forced the leadership of the national club to reconsider its views. Being afraid of the authorities and security forces Halil Pasha reverted to his former point of view and he was fully intent on proving his loyalty to the Empire. He suggested in April 1913 that Albania, remaining under the suzerainty of the Sultan, be ruled by a prince from the Ottoman dynasty. This idea was elaborated on by the leadership of the club and was sent both to the Young Turk government and to the participants of the conference in London as a memorandum.⁸⁸

We are far from being well-informed as to what alterations were exactly caused by the independence proclamation in the everyday life of those Albanians being on duty as public officials or officers of the Empire in Anatolia or Asia.

One of the most intriguing life was undoubtedly led by Ahmet Izzet Pasha, born in Ohrid (1867–1937).⁸⁹ Izzet Pasha belonged to those high commanders whose loyalty was basically connected to their imperial consciousness. (To put it differently they refused to accept the modern national ideas of being an Albanian or a Turkish.) According to the memoirs of Izzet he had opposed the violent policy of

⁸³ The Albanian civilians of the vilayets mentioned above were mostly former soldiers, violently resettled rebels, migrant workers or clerks and officers. The Albanians of Anatolia and Syria dealt mainly with shepherding, handicrafts and grape-growing. According to the esteem of the Austro-Hungarian consuls 1800 Albanians lived in Smyrna, and 3210 in vilayet Aydin without the new immigrants from the Balkans. ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 206, report of Pallavicini, Konstantinopel, 1913.09.23., No.55G., Beilage 2.: Liste der bisher verhafteten resp. ausgewiesenen Albanesen.

⁸⁴ ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 206, report and telegram of Pallavicini, Konstantinopel, 30.07.1913, No. CXXX. and Jeniköj, 21.09.1913, No.3725.

⁸⁵ ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 206, report of Pallavicini, Konstantinopel, 1913.09.23., No.55G.

⁸⁶ ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 417/6c, letter of Pallavicini, Konstantinopel, 03.12.1912, No.91–I.

⁸⁷ ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 417/6c, telegram of Pallavicini, Konstantinopel, 04.12.1912, No.744.

⁸⁸ ÖHHStA PA XII. Türkei, Kt. 421/6f, report of Pallavicini, Konstantinopel, 24.04.1913, No.23.

⁸⁹ Godin, *Aus dem neuen Albanien*, p. 117.

Mahmut Şevket Pasha from 1910 onwards, so he deemed the Albanian uprisings of 1910-1912 *against the Young Turk government* as righteous.⁹⁰ As a consequence of the independence proclamation, due to his Albanian origin, he was considered as a suspicious person in the Istanbul political circles and he was isolated. Since he was loyal to the Empire he went to Jemen as a volunteer to fight against local rebels in the spring of 1913⁹¹ and refused to influence the Albanian-Turkish relations. Due to his origin, rank and his personal prestige Izzet became a suitable pretender of the youngturk government for the Albanian throne later. His coup d'état however proved to be a failure in January of 1914.⁹² Izzet Pasha fought as a high commander of the Ottoman and Turkish Armies during the First World War and in the regional war with Greece after 1918. In the interwar period he lived and died in Anatolia.

The reaction of Ressel Bej from Gjirokastra (?-?), the Ottoman general consul in Sarajevo, was significantly different from that of Izzet Pasha. The general consul was in duty for decades. The archival sources of Vienna strongly suggest that he always sympathised with the Albanian national movement, but at the same time his sympathy did not prevent him from earning his living as a state official.⁹³ The proclamation of independence forced him to take a decision, because his Albanian origin made his position uncertain in the diplomatic corps of the Empire. From the very beginning of the First Balkan War he regularly visited the Austro-Hungarian officials in Sarajevo in order to discuss with them „the Albanian case”. During these discussions it turned out that Ressel Bej was an enthusiastic believer of an independent Albania, led by a dynasty from Europe and being under the protectorate of Austria-Hungary. It must be stressed however, that in case the Empire had proved to be able to protect his territorial integrity, the general consul would absolutely have been ready to continue his career in the Ottoman diplomatic corps.⁹⁴

The connections between the independent Albania and the disintegrating Ottoman Empire were considerably muddled and unclarified in 1913. A significant number of the Albanian politicians had desired and chased the independence since the outbreak of the First Balkan War, while the majority of the Muslim population had got a positive attitude to the empire. The Ottoman state administration did not yet collapse totally in the territory of Albania until June of 1913, on the contrary, it was run by the imperial officials parallel with the new Albanian state administration, built up by the provisional government of Vlora. Both the banners of Albania and the empire waved over the settlements. The last imperial troops were still present and the religious symbols of the empire and the Caliph could have been seen on the rooftops or walls of private houses as well.⁹⁵ The majority of the civil population refused to take the independence proclamation seriously. What is more, they were not aware in general what had been going on the Balkan-peninsula. The Muslim population of the independent Albania first faced with the consequences of the secession from the empire only in the autumn of 1913 and it was partly due to this recognition that the delayed peasant uprising of Middle-Albania broke out in May of 1914.

⁹⁰ A. Izzet, *Denkwürdigkeiten des Marschalls Izzet Pascha*, (Leipzig, 1927), pp. 122–123.

⁹¹ KA MKFF, Kt. 192, report of Pomiankowsky, Konstantinopel, 27.02.1913, Res.Nr.58.

⁹² See the coup d'état of Bekir Grebena on January 1914. *Arkivi i Institutit të Historisë të Akademisë të Shkencave* Fondi i Arkivit të Londrës (FO 320) – A 48, report of Lamb, 10.01.1914, No.8. and Izzet, *Denkwürdigkeiten...*, pp. 231–232.

⁹³ KA MKFF, Hauptreihe (1913), Akt. 97/26, report of Potiorek, Sarajevo, 28.05.1913, Res.Nr.5872.

⁹⁴ KA Nachlässe und Sammlungen, B 1450, Nachlaß Conrad, Akt. 80/10. report of Potiorek to Conrad, Sarajevo, 05.01.1913, Res.Nr.106. „Verhältnisse in Albanien“, Beilage: Aide memoire, 1–5.

⁹⁵ KA MKSM, 18–1/7 (Kt. 1095.), 18–1/7–5 de 1913, Wien, 27.03.1913, K.Nr.2360. Beilage: Thomas: Bericht über Albanien, 2. 16–17.

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