

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: BETWEEN NATION AND STATE:
ALBANIAN ASSOCIATIONS FROM
OTTOMAN ORIGINS TO A COMMUNIST
PARTY, 1880 – 1945

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This dissertation addresses the broader antecedents of the Communist Party of Albania (CPA) as one of a number of associations whose experience was central to Albanian political history. This long experience dates back to the informal national associations formed in the Ottoman Empire of the late nineteenth century. The dissertation examines the role of these associations which, pursuing language rights and political representation through imperial state reforms, set a pattern that struggled to connect nation and state, rather than asserting the territorial demands for a nation-state familiar across the region.

Starting out in the Ottoman Empire, but then maturing in the Albanian diaspora in Romania, Bulgaria, Egypt and the United States, this dissertation shows politically significant processes of longer-term adaptation that created informal associations as institutional structures able to channel collective action. It then traces the reframing of these patterns through their destruction in the Balkan Wars and the

First World War to the emergence of communist associations in the interwar period and beyond.

This dissertation is a sustained study that traces long-term Ottoman imperial political legacies in the Albanian successor state. The story of the associations, based on hitherto unexamined archival documents, shows that the Albanians possessed a far greater capacity for political mobilization than previously acknowledged by historians. Moreover, the dissertation successfully challenges the conventional wisdom that portrays the Albanians as irreparably divided along sectarian and regional faultlines. It finds that Albanian national activism was civic in character rather than ethnic as elsewhere in the Balkans. The Albanians fought to remain within a multinational framework because this afforded them political security, social advancement and potential economic growth. In the late Ottoman period, this political objective was manifested in the acceptance of the supranational imperial order whereas during the Second World War, in the aspiration to become members of the Comintern internationalist movement. Another important find, is the newly-discovered evidence concerning the founding of the CPA and its wartime conduct as an organization created and led by the Albanians themselves, albeit with Yugoslav ideological assistance under the transnational umbrella of the Comintern.

BETWEEN NATION AND STATE: ALBANIAN ASSOCIATIONS FROM
OTTOMAN ORIGINS TO A COMMUNIST PARTY, 1880 -1945

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2016

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Acknowledgements

I am indebted to many individuals for their aid, effort and assistance in completing this dissertation. In the first place, I like to express my deepest thanks to the members of my dissertation committee: Professors John Lampe, Madeline Zilfi, Jon Sumida, Vladimir Tismaneanu and Piotr Kosicki. They all contributed by reading, editing and offering insightful comments thus improving the final version of this dissertation. In particular, my mentor John Lampe, tirelessly and enthusiastically supervised the writing process, reading and editing what seemed an interminable list of drafts.

Without his guidance, I would have never been able to transform this dissertation from a collection of stuffy and lengthy chapters into the infinitely more manageable present manuscript. It was thanks to his enthusiastic support, constant revisions and inspiring suggestions that I was able to find my own voice. I owe him a debt of gratitude that I am afraid I will never be able to repay. I thank Professor Zilfi for reading and improving the final version of this dissertation and for never being short of encouraging words and all manners of support. She is a brilliant scholar and has been a true friend throughout graduate school. A lasting gratitude goes also to Professor Sumida who remains for me a guru of historical scholarship and a dedicated mentor. I thank him for keeping me on as his teaching assistant for a number of years, much longer, I suspect, than any other graduate student at the Department of History, save for his own. His scholarship has influenced my work in many significant ways. Similarly, Professors Kosicki and Tismaneanu offered encouragement, thoughtful readings and insightful comments, which, in the future, will be integral to the book form of this dissertation.

I would have never gone to graduate school had it not been for Dr. Janet Sorrentino of Washington College where, out on a whim, I did my Master's many years ago. She was my first "thread" to professional academic life. She remains, as she once put it, my "original *sensei*:" knowledgeable, kind, patient, passionate and, above all, a true friend. I owe her more than everything. Thanks have to go also to faculty of the Department of History: Professors Marsha Rozenblit, Mikhail Dolbilov, Sabrina Alcorn Baron, Jeffrey Herf, Peter Wien and Saverio Giovacchini, for having contributed in their own specific ways to my intellectual growth. Also, I will be remiss if I did not mention the administrative staff in the department: Jodi Hall, Catalina Toala, Lisa Klein, Cathy Pickles, Paula Barriga-Sanchez for their ever-helpful assistance and support.

In Albania, my most sincere thanks go to the staff of the Central Archive of the State (AQSh) in Tiranë. I thank Dr. Nevila Nika and Gjet Ndoj (directors of that institution respectively in 2013 and 2014) and Kastriot Dervishi, Director of the Archive of the Ministry of the Interior (AMPB), for kindly allowing me to photograph documents with my digital camera, thus greatly facilitating storage and transport not to mention keeping printing costs low. I am also indebted to the entire AQSh staff, but in particular, to Endrit Musaj, Sokol Çunga, Suela Çuçi-Iacono, Isa Xhaferri, Dorina Hasimja, Elena Sallaku, Eralda Biba-Cara, Belinda Beli and Julijana Kondakçi for their friendship and for more than just keeping up with my incessant requests for stacks upon stacks of documents. Without their dedicated assistance and supreme efficiency, this work needless to say, would have been impossible.

In Tiranë, I also benefited greatly from conversation and debate with a number of individuals. In particular, Prof. Dr. Paskal Milo, my Albanian mentor, cleared his schedule often so as we could meet, either at his home or in one of the many excellent local restaurants, to discuss my topic. He was always supportive, offered insightful comments and steered me in the right direction whenever I thought I had lost my way. In addition, Drs. Sonila Boçi-Pepivani, Ledia Dushku and Ana Lalaj offered comments and constructive criticism on various parts of my project and generously shared readings and even their research with me.

Informal talks with Dr. Stefan Papaioannou, Dr. Jill Irvine, Dr. Vince Houghton, Enejda Gurja, Michael and Edlira Stanisich Eno Gaçe, Edion Petriti, Aigest Milo, Orgita Milo, Kristina Terzieva, Gert Brojka, Dr. Alda Benjamen, Klejd Këlliçi, Robert Hutchinson, Dr. Reid Gustafson and others, too numerous to mention, have had much to contribute to this study. I thank them all for their love and friendship.

Although not immediately connected to most of this study, documents about the Albanian associations located at the National Archive and Records Administration (NARA) in College Park, Maryland, were essential to opening up a blindspot in my understanding of their activities and the behavior of their leaders. The help I received there from the research staff was instrumental in strengthening the arguments of this dissertation. I thank them deeply for their assistance.

Possibly without intending to, my family set on this path. Both my grandfathers, Pipi Mitrojorgji and Uran Dino, taught me to love the past and appreciate history for what it was with their intriguing personal experiences during

the Second World War. My two grandmothers, Evanthi Mitrojorgji and Hanushe Dino, did not have much to contribute to that front but they made sure that I did not forget what I was taught. My father, Dr. Nasi Mitrojorgji has been a source of wisdom, patience and a fountain of encyclopedic knowledge assisting in every step of the writing process. My mother, Lejla Mitrojorgji, kind and compassionate, almost to a fault, has been a source of strength and vigor encouraging me to push ahead. Gëzim Agaraj, my father in law, proved from the start a staunch supporter and an attentive and most excellent debater of ideas. Lastly, but more importantly, my wife Juliana Mitrojorgji has been an absolute miracle in life. I thank her for giving me two beautiful daughters who constantly amaze me with their ability to assimilate a wide range of information at such an early age. I have often marveled at my wife's sacrifices, patience and determination, supporting me through thick and thin in so many ways during graduate school, which, lets face it, is a long and arduous process. To her and the rest my family I dedicate this work

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Introduction

This dissertation addresses the broader antecedents of the Communist Party of Albania (CPA) as one of a number of associations whose experience was central to Albanian political and social history. This long experience dates back to the informal national associations formed in the Ottoman Empire of the late nineteenth century. At that time, demands for the modernization of imperial institutions also generated political opposition to Sultan Abdülhamit II that culminated in the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. Historical scholarship on the Albanians in the Ottoman Empire has focused separately on their Ottoman service, religious divisions and nationalist ambitions. It has neglected the framework of associations, domestic and émigré, within which Albanian national politics developed from a small but significant civil society. Initially pursuing language rights and political representation through imperial state reforms, the associations set a pattern that struggled to connect the nation with the state, rather than asserting the territorial demands for an independent nation-state familiar across the rest of the region.

My main argument is two-fold. First, the ongoing structural transformations of Ottoman state institutions and new intellectual currents borrowed from Europe had a formative and lasting political-educational impact on contemporary Ottoman-Albanian activists inside and outside of the Empire. Caught between national assertion and state reform before 1914, this initial ferment facilitated the rise of left-wing activism against an authoritarian native Albanian state regime after the First World War. Second, the pre-1914 period provided a wealth of associational and

conspiratorial experience to draw on during the Second World War. Neglecting these two experiences, the existing historiography has paid little attention to the CPA's formation in 1941 other than as an initiative from the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY), supported in Albania only by Enver Hoxha and a few others coming from an émigré experience in the interwar French left. The argument that follows shows politically significant processes of longer-term adaptation that created informal associations as institutional structures able to channel collective action. These associations linked the evolution of Albanian political activism from the late Ottoman Empire, through the interwar period to political radicalization during the Second World War. Feeding into each other, this dissertation examines the divisions between nation and state that framed the activities of a series of associations whose evolution nonetheless reveals a greater Albanian capacity for political mobilization than previously acknowledged. This division persisted until the CPA was able to combine mass mobilization for wartime resistance with the seizure of state power in 1944.

Limitations of the Existing Historiography

In most accounts concerning the evolution of communist movements in Eastern Europe, Albania has been neglected. The reasons range from an overemphasis on the Yugoslav connection, political bias, mastering a difficult language (i.e. Albanian) and the inaccessibility of archival sources.¹ Noting the CPA's absent connection with European communist parties, tenuous links with the Soviet Union and the Comintern and the virtual absence of a working class in

¹ Tim Kirk, "Albania and the Axis," review of *Albania at War, 1939-1945* by Bernd J. Fischer, HABSBURG, H-Net Reviews, April 2000, <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=4005>

interwar Albania, Western scholarship has ignored its antecedents. As a result, the Communist-led resistance against the Axis is instead reduced to three main sources: 1) administrative “mistakes” made by Italian policy in Albania from 1939 onwards; 2) the intervention of the Yugoslav Communist Party in 1941 and 3) the compromise of the more traditional nationalist elements with the losing Axis side.²

Each of these three approaches has its limitation.³ First, although Italian administrative abuses certainly contributed in strengthening the native resistance, there is no reason to believe that the Albanians would have been content under foreign rule any more than would the other subjugated European peoples during the Second World War. Second, historians have given too much credence to the Yugoslav thesis without ever examining what kind of experience the Yugoslav communists brought to Albania, how those policies were implemented by the Albanians, and how obedient or resistant they proved to them. Third, there is an overemphasis on Enver Hoxha’s own émigré and wartime experiences. There is also controversy representing him as a communist internationalist or as an agent of southern Albanian (i.e. *Tosk*) national exceptionalism.⁴ While Hoxha’s postwar

² Bernd J. Fischer, *Albania at War, 1939-1945* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1999); Misha Glenny, *The Balkans: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers, 1804-2011* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012); L.S. Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 496-512; Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars* Vol. IX (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1974), 357-366; Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans: Twentieth Century* vol. II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 273-276; Tajar Zavalani, “Albanian Nationalism” in *Nationalism in Eastern Europe*, eds. Peter F. Sugar and Ivo John. Lederer (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1974), 90-91; Peter Prifti, “The Party of Labor of Albania,” in *Communist Parties of Eastern Europe* Stephen Fischer-Galați ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 15-17; Bernd J. Fischer, “Albanian Nationalism in the Twentieth Century,” in *Eastern European Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Peter F. Sugar (Washington D.C.: The American University Press, 1995), 40-41.

³ Fischer, *Albania at War*, 121-129.

⁴ Fischer, “Albanian Nationalism,” 53; Thomas Schreiber, *Enver Hodja: le Sultan Rouge* (Paris: J.C. Lattès, 1994); Isa Blumi, “The Politics of Culture and Power: The Roots Hoxha’s Post-War State,” in *East European Quarterly* 31, 3 (1997), 379-398.

regime was heavily staffed by the Tosks of the south, where a plurality if not the majority of the Albanian population was located, communist success in the Second World War cannot be adequately understood without an appreciation of Albania's broader political and social history. After all, the CPA's main rival *Balli Kombëtar* was more exclusively than the CPA, a *Tosk*-based organization.

The foundation of the CPA in existing historiography can be summarized as follows. After the failure of Fan Noli's so-called July revolution in 1924, several young Albanian nationalists were encouraged and financed by the Balkan Bureau of the Comintern to establish a communist party in Albania. Fifteen years and two official Comintern emissaries later, these efforts remained unsuccessful. The few communists in Albania, clustered into three small groups – Shkodër, Korçë and *Zjarri* (Fire) groups – were divided and disagreed on every issue, ranging from ideology to uniting against King Zog. So severe were these disagreements that not even the Italian invasion of April 1939 was able to induce them into mutual collaboration. Following the German invasion of Yugoslavia in April 1941, the CPY stepped in, motivated in part by the need to establish a foothold in Kosovo. Its emissaries, Miladin Popović and Dušan Mugoša, brought the Albanian disputative communists together, founded the CPA and kept a tight rein on the CPA's political leadership and all aspects of civilian and military administration.⁵

Until recently, conducting research on Albanian history was difficult.⁶ Enver Hoxha's communist regime restricted access to the country's archives. As a result, historians had to rely on three other sources, each with its limitations. First, nurtured

⁵ Fischer, *Albania at War*, 123-124; Jelavich, *Balkans*, 273-276.

⁶ Fischer, "Albania at War," 275.

by Yugoslav politicians and historians as early as 1943, the thesis of the Yugoslav-engendered CPA has proved very resilient. Recently the Albanian historian Paskal Milo has traced the Yugoslav thesis to a sudden utterance by Blažo Jovanović at the Labinot Conference in March 1943, where Jovanović exclaimed that the foundation of the CPA was the work of Miladin Popović and Dušan Mugoša.⁷ Jovanović's off the cuff remark took Popović by surprise and he quickly rejected it. Popović, however, died in 1946 and since he more so than the taciturn Mugoša was the only Yugoslav emissary permanently embedded within the CPA's leadership, there was no one else to counter this version of the events. The subsequent paternalistic attitude of the CPY emissaries in Albania, the fact that the Albanian communists themselves sought and obtained Yugoslav assistance, and the poor postwar reputation of Albanian documents aided the wide acceptance of this version. After the war, the Yugoslav thesis was given credibility by a number of Yugoslav politicians and historians such as Svetozar Vukmanović-Tempo and Vladimir Dedijer.⁸ During the Cold War, as Albania itself retreated into self-imposed isolation, Yugoslavia opened up its doors and benefitted greatly from a variety of scholarly exchanges with the West, including a Fulbright program after 1964.⁹ This, in turn, allowed Western scholars to pick up the notion and then repeat it with varying degree of conviction.¹⁰

⁷ Paskal Milo, *Shqiptarët në Luftën e Dytë Botërore, 1939-1943* Vol. I. (Tiranë: Toena, 2014), 266.

⁸ Ibid., 267; Vladimir Dedijer, *Marrëdhënjet Jugosllavo-Shqiptare, 1939-1948* (Beograd: Prosveta, 1949), 10-17. Ali Hadri, "Një Vështrim Kritik mbi Memoaret e Svetozar Vukmanoviq-Tempos," in *Përparimi* No. 7 (1971), 586-606; No. 9, 586-876; No 12, F. 1134-1152; Ali Hadri, *Marrëdhënjet Shqiptaro-Jugosllave* (Prishtinë: Akademia e Shkencave dhe e Arteve e Kosovës, 2003).

⁹ John Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There was a Country* 2nd Ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 292-293.

¹⁰ While not challenging the thesis itself, Fischer allows for the possibility that Yugoslav direct control over the CPA may be an overstatement. See Fischer, *Albania at War*, 124.

The second source comes from British archives and memoirs from Special Operations Executive officers.¹¹ They constitute a treasure trove of primary accounts about the *conduct* of the war, but they are of no value in identifying the antecedents of the communist movement. These Lawrences of the Balkans arrived late and remained unconcerned with Albanian history, politics and the nature of the insurgency. As one of them, David Smiley, a former captain with the Royal Horse Guards (Blues and Royals), freely admitted, “[Albania was] for us a matter of rumor and surmise, muffled by forbidding barriers of mountains.”¹² Moreover, from the moment they landed in Albania in 1943 and throughout their months there, the Britons’ relationship with the communists was one marked by mutual suspicion if not downright hostility. Their Albanian hosts kept them at arms length leading them to develop insufficient knowledge on the nature of the Albanian Communist-led insurgency. Reinforced by the equally insufficient archival evidence in the United States, Italy, and Germany the Yugoslav version of events gained further credibility.

Third, the absence of access into Albania’s archival collections led historians to rely on émigré scholars. Some, like Peter Prifti and Nicholas Pano, strove to remain impartial but had neither first hand knowledge nor received access to Albanian archives. More questionable accounts came from the political activities of the recent exiles, former political rivals of the CPA who left the country before November 1944. Having lost the political war in Albania, many of these exiles

¹¹ For an example see, Reginald Hibbert, *Albania’s National Liberation Struggle: The Bitter Victory*, (London and New York: Pinter Publishers, 1991); Edmund Frank Davies, *Illyrian Venture: The Story of the British Military Mission to Enemy Occupied Albania, 1943-1944* (London: Bodley head, 1952); David Smiley, *Albanian Assignment* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1984); Julian Amery, *Sons of the Eagle: A Study in Guerilla War* (London Macmillan, 2005); Peter Kemp, *No Colours or Crest* (London: Cassell, 1958). See also Fischer’s excellent coverage on these sources in Fischer, “*Albania at War*,” 275-284.

¹² Smiley, *Albanian Assignment*, x.

formed the émigré “Free Albania” National Committee (1949-1992), an independent voluntary association dedicated to the overthrow of the communist regime. It was they who first confirmed the notion of Yugoslav-led communist resistance in Albania in the Western scholarship as an historical truism. The most influential representative of this émigré strand was the noted Albanian-American scholar Stavro Skëndi. During the Second World War, Skëndi was a senior activist of *Balli Kombëtar*, CPA’s main wartime rival, serving on *Balli*’s district committee of Korçë. Following the end of the war he immigrated to the United States and received a PhD in History in 1951 from Columbia University. In one of his first major works, *Albania*, he argued that Popović and Mugoša, having been sent to organize the CPA, then led the party throughout the war.¹³ From London, Tajar Zavalani, one of the co-founders of the Albanian Communist Organization in Moscow in the late 1920s who abandoned the movement in 1938, did not contradict this theory.¹⁴

Following the dissolution of Communist regimes after 1991, conditions were ripe for better-informed accounts. But this did not happen in Albania. The previous monopoly that the CPA held on interpreting its own history was merely replaced by one whose main preoccupation was to reinforce the notion of Yugoslav dominance, now in order to discredit the CPA, its wartime conduct and the legitimacy of the subsequent regime. According to this argument, if the CPA was founded and led by the Yugoslavs, then Great Serbian chauvinism must have lurked behind it. The ongoing wars of Yugoslav dissolution in the 1990s and especially Kosovo in 1999, where Kosovar-Albanian insurgents fought for their civil and national rights against

¹³ Stavro Skëndi, *Albania* (New York: Praeger, 1956), 19.

¹⁴ Zavalani, “Albanian Nationalism,” 92.

Slobodan Milošević's basically Serbian government, lent an informal legitimacy to the notion. An unintended but expected consequence of this reinterpretation was the full rehabilitation, both moral and political, of CPA's former wartime rivals, *Balli Kombëtar* and the monarchist Legality Movement, many of whose members – the Free Albania National Committee during the Cold War – returned to Albania and recreated their wartime organizations into parliamentary political parties.¹⁵ As a result, with the exception of a recent account on the Albanian interwar left by Albanian veteran historian Kristo Frashëri, unknown to Western historians, no published scholarship has progressed beyond the consensus reached earlier on by Nicholas Pano who wrote that “while it is true that it required a world war, foreign occupation and Yugoslav assistance to [found the CPA], it should also be noted that the objective could not have been realized without the existence of a small, hardcore, native communist movement.”¹⁶

But where did this movement come from and attract wartime support beyond this small core? This dissertation explores politically consequential patterns of social and political activism which, first originating in the late Ottoman Empire went through several stages of development, reframing and adapting the context of Albanian national politics to specific contemporary social and political challenges. Albanian national advocates in the late Ottoman Empire and the communists of the Second World War would have agreed on the basic *ideological* necessity of establishing a modern Albanian polity even as they differed over the *strategies*

¹⁵ Vera Stojarová “The Party System of Albania” in *Political Parties in the Western Balkans*, eds. Vera Stojarová and Peter Emerson (New York: Routledge, 2010), 187.

¹⁶ Nicholas Pano, *The People's Republic of Albania* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1968), 43. For Frashëri's account see his *Historia e Lëvizjes së Majtë në Shqipëri dhe e Themelimit të PKSh-së, 1878-1941* (Tiranë: ILAR, 2006).

employed to achieve this common aim. It is here, in the Ottoman Empire, where the same revolutionary impetus of the later CPA can be traced. Indeed, ever since the dissolution of communist regimes after 1989 historians have increasingly paid attention to how imperial continuities have influenced the performance of successor states.¹⁷ Karen Barkey, for instance, poses a set of questions germane to the methodology of the present study:

What are the overall characteristics of nation building in post imperial times? How do people define their nation-hood? What are the differences between nations that emerge from the core and those that emerge from the periphery of an empire? What do nations carry over from empire to nation? Do aspects of imperial structure and political culture endure beyond imperial decline, and if they do *how do they affect the development of the nascent state* [my italics]?¹⁸

But while recent historical scholarship has successfully explored issues of identity formation and institutional continuities in relation to the Habsburg and Russian empires, the Ottoman successor states in the Balkans have fared less well.¹⁹ As Suraiya Faroqhi has argued, Ottoman scholarship, especially in its Balkan context,

¹⁷ Suraiya Faroqhi and Fikret Adanir eds., *The Ottomans and the Balkans: A Discussion of Historiography* (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2002), 1-5; Cemal Kafadar, *Between two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Barkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 20-23; Karen Barkey and Mark von Hagen eds., *After Empire: Multiethnic Societies and Nation-building: The Soviet Union and the Russian, Ottoman and Habsburg Empires* (Boulder Co: Westview Press, 1997); Alexei Miller and Alfred J. Rieber, *Imperial Rule* (Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 2004); Maria Todorova *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) and her edited volume *Balkan Identities: Nation and Memory* (London: Hurst and Company, 2004).

¹⁸ Barkey, "Thinking about Consequences of Empire" in Karen Barkey and Mark von Hagen eds., *After Empire: Multiethnic Societies and Nation-building: The Soviet Union and the Russian, Ottoman and Habsburg Empires* (Boulder Co: Westview Press, 1997), 99-100.

¹⁹ For the Habsburg Empire see for example Gary Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague* (Purdue University Press, 2006); Pieter Judson, *Exclusive Revolutionaries: Liberal Politics, Social Experience and National Identity in the Austrian Empire, 1848-1914* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996) and his *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2006); Andrea Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle: The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe, 1914-1948* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); John Boyer, *Political Radicalism in Late Imperial Vienna, 1848-1897* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1981) and *Culture and Political Crisis in Vienna: Christian-Socialism in Power, 1897-1914* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Mark Cornwall, "The Struggle on the Czech-German Language Border, 1880-1914," in *The English Review* 109 (1994); Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1948* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

has remained until recently narrowly “state-centered.”²⁰ While scholars have now made some progress with respect to other Balkan and even Middle Eastern countries, Albania remains an afterthought. Even a recent work on how Balkan states approached their post-Ottoman state and institution building and beyond has found little, if anything, of substance to say about the Albanian legacy for both Zogu’s and Hoxha’s periods.²¹

This can be explained on the one hand by the tendency to examine the emergence of the modern Balkan nation and its post Ottoman state- and nation-building through the prism of monolithic ethnic nationalisms. If this held true for the Serbs, Greeks and Bulgarians then, *ceteris paribus*, it certainly held true for the Albanians as well. On the other hand, the difficulty of access to Albanian archives during the communist regime led historians to rely on the third strand of the historiography mentioned above. Stavro Skëndi’s, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912* published in 1967 was indeed a comprehensive and beautifully written work on Albanian politics and culture. But the work reflected the author’s own aforementioned wartime experiences in opposition to the communists. In it, Skëndi rightly traced the beginning of an Albanian national question to the League of Prizren in June 1878, but, more importantly for our purposes, he highlighted the emergence of a political class of native middle-class social activists. Skëndi’s narrative linked their commitment to modernization as being transplanted into the Albanian-inhabited

²⁰ Suraiya Faroqhi, *Approaching Ottoman History: An Introduction to the Sources* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 12-13.

²¹ Wim van Meurs and Alina Munghiu-Pippidi, *Ottomans into Europeans: State and Institution-Building in South Eastern Europe* (London: Hurst & Company, 2010). For a critical review of this volume see Isa Blumi, review of *Ottomans into Europeans: State and Institution-Building in South Eastern Europe* by Wim van Meurs and Alina Munghiu-Pippidi eds., in *Slavic Review* 70, 4 (2011), 916-917.

Ottoman provinces by westernized *Arbëresh* (the Albanian diaspora in southern Italy) intellectuals. For him, these Catholic social activists gave both form and substance to Albanian nationalism in the late Ottoman Empire. In collaboration with Austria-Hungary and the local western-oriented liberal intelligentsia, they were instrumental in producing a national consciousness, ensuring independence and saving Albania from the claims of its Balkan neighbors, Serbia and Greece.²² Unfortunately, Skëndi ended his narrative with the Balkan Wars in 1912 and as a result there is no coverage of what happened after that date. Despite this, some of Skëndi's patriots of the late Ottoman period made brief but dramatic reappearances with *Balli Kombëtar* during the Second World War.

Skëndi's decision to stop in 1912 also reinforced the tendency to treat Albanian history as neatly divided into three separate and discreet periods, as Ottoman, interwar and communist not to mention into three discrete religious groups, Muslim, Orthodox and Roman Catholic. This interpretation has led to serious disparities. Of these the first, Ottoman, period has been covered in considerable if selective detail.²³ Only in recent years a number of younger scholars have succeeded in broadening the scope of analytical inquiry into the imperial Ottoman period.²⁴

²² Stavro Skëndi, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 472. In addition Skëndi tends to ignore economic and financial functions of the Albanian diaspora as Traian Stoianovich expertly noted in his Review of *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912* by Stavro Skëndi in *The American Historical Review* 73, 2 (1967), 537-538. These functions are covered in this dissertation.

²³ Some of those works have already been cited here. For a recent example see Nuray Bozborâ's *Shqipëria dhe Nacionalizmi Shqiptar në Perandorinë Osmane* trans: Dritan Egro (Tiranë: Dituria, 2002). For a penetrating review to Bozborâ's analysis see Isa Blumi in his "Recent Studies on Albanian Nationalism at the End of the Ottoman Empire from Turkey and the Arab World." Reviews of Nuray Bozborâ, *Osmanli Yonetiminde Arnavutluk: Arnavut Ulusculugunun Gelisimi* and 'Abd al-Ra'uf Sinnu, *'Al-Naz'aat al-Kiyaaniyyah al-Islaamiyyah fi al-Dawlah al-Uthmaaniyyah, 1877-1881: Bilaad al-Shaam, al-Hijaz, Kurdistaan, Albaaniyaa* ' in *Balkanistica* 14 (Spring 201), 139-44.

²⁴ Isa Blumi, *Reinstating the Ottomans: Alternative Balkan Modernities, 1800-1912* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History* (New York: University of New

Even this growing body of work, however, has yet to trace the importance of Ottoman intellectual and political continuities in the Albanian successor state. Only one work, unpublished dissertation, has endeavored to do so, though by the author's admission, the mechanics of revolutionary change are not its subject.²⁵ As this dissertation will argue, regional and especially religious loyalties were indeed cultural realities but they rarely, if ever, were politically decisive.

In contrast, the interwar period has rarely attracted scholarly interest and remains the least covered period in Albanian history. Beyond Bernd J. Fischer's biography of King Ahmet Zogu, the only two works worthy of note are those by Nicola Guy and Robert C. Austin.²⁶ Nicola Guy traces the emergence of an independent Albanian state from initial independence in 1912/13, its loss in the Balkan Wars and First World War through its reassertion and halting acceptance by the major powers in 1920. Well argued, Guy's work, however, is of lesser importance to the present study. More important is Austin's work, which concentrates, as the title

York, 1999); Nathalie Clayer, *Në Fillimet e Nacionalizmit Shqiptar: Lindja e Një Kombi me Shumicë Myslimane në Evropë* (Tiranë: Përpjekja, 2012); Nathalie Clayer and Robert Pichler eds., *Conflicting Loyalties in the Balkans: The Great Powers, the Ottoman Empire and Nation-Building* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011) and Clayer's "Albanian Students of the Mekteb-i Mülkiye: Social Networks and Trends of Thought" in *Late Ottoman Society: The Intellectual Legacy* Elizabeth Özdalga ed. (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005), 291-343; George Gawrych, *The Crescent and the Eagle: Ottoman Rule, Islam and the Albanians* (London: IB Tauris) 2006; Selçuk Akşin Somel, *The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire, 1839-1908: Islamization, Autocracy and Discipline* (Leiden, Boston and Koln: Brill, 2001), 207-217.

²⁵ Besnik Pula, "State, Law and Revolution: Agrarian Power and the National State in Albania, 1850-1945" (PhD Diss., University of Michigan, 2011), 4.

²⁶ See for an example, Bernd J. Fischer, *King Zog and the Struggle for Stability in Albania* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1984); Jason Tomes, *King Zog of Albania: Europe's Self-Made Muslim King* (New York: New York University Press, 2004); Joseph Swire, *King Zog's Albania* (London: R. Hale & Company, 1937); Neil Rees, *A Royal Exile: King Zog & Queen Geraldine of Albania including their Wartime Exile in the Thames Valley and Chilterns* (Studge Publications, 2010); Gwen Robyns, *Geraldine of the Albanians: The Authorized Biography* (London: Muller, Blond & White, 1987). Nicola Guy, *The Birth of Albania: Ethnic Nationalism, the Great Powers of World War I and the Emergence of Albanian Independence* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012); Robert C. Austin, *Founding a Balkan State: Albania's Experiment with Democracy, 1920-1925* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

suggests, on the short-lived administration of Bishop Fan Noli in 1924. Covering Fan Noli's struggles in detail, Austin has neglected to notice that the aspirations for a democratic government as sought by Noli did not start with him in 1924 but were the result of institutional processes that started in the late Ottoman period and matured in the émigré experiences of the associations' internal administration since the 1880s. In post-1989 Albania, the interwar period has received more attention including attempts to link the CPA to social and intellectual trends of the past. By far the most significant contribution is Kristo Frashëri's aforementioned work which receives due attention in this dissertation.

Scope Structure and Sources

Connecting the social, political and intellectual origins of Albanian social activism from the Ottoman Empire to the Second World War is the major aim of this dissertation. Indeed, the various evolutionary phases in associational activities, Ottoman imperial, Albanian monarchist and wartime, are linked together through the lifespan of the same individuals who first created the independent voluntary associations as agencies of social change and political mobilization. Given the highly informal and unstructured nature of associational politics, an unwieldy number of individuals make their way into the story. While leaders would eventually emerge, as we shall see, this longer list reflects the constant flux needed to form and maintain the organizational framework of the associations.

The organization and activities of these independent voluntary associations remain the best-kept secret of Albanian history from the late Ottoman period forward

to the Second World War. They are routinely acknowledged in various historical accounts and yet remain unexamined as agents of social and political change. So is their commitment to either state or nation but not to the standard Balkan nation-state. The chronologically organized chapters that follow trace the typically informal associations whose national programs and institutional structures connected in Albanian political activism from the late Ottoman period through the Second World War. Their efforts to cohere or represent the Albanian national identity constituted a long-term process that built up a greater capacity for political mobilization, if not political unity, than previously acknowledged. Not until the Second World War was the association that became the Communist Party of Albania in 1941 able to combine nation and state, following the mass mobilization of resistance with the seizure of state power in 1944. Before then, as we shall see, only briefly in 1908, 1912 and 1924 did the associations gain access to state authority. Their dependence on émigré associations and divisions among domestic associations continued as comparable influence in the neighboring Balkan states had vanished with independence and the emergence of domestic political parties. For Albania, its past experience with associations would inform the emigration after 1924, exiled from the authoritarian and Italian-dependent regime of Ahmed Zogu. For the many turning left to the Soviet model and the transnational umbrella of the Comintern, they struggled until the war intervened with the challenge of overcoming the internal divisions that had troubled Albanian associations.

Chapter 1 argues that the reestablished patrimonial rule of the sultans with Abdülhamit II after 1876 was neither able to satisfy nor suppress the previous

Tanzimat optimism for representational politics. With this background, the chapter begins with Albanian efforts to obtain recognition of natural rights and have them protected under Ottoman law. Such efforts concentrated in the development of an Albanian language by the Istanbul Committee, the parent association of the League of Prizren and the Society of Letters. Then the chapter shifts attention to examine three cases studies of the Albanian diaspora in Romania, Egypt and the United States where independent voluntary associations of prosperous Orthodox émigrés created decentralized but flourishing formal organizations that helped fill out an emerging Albanian print culture. These formal émigré societies linked up with the informal associations of Muslim Albanians in the Ottoman-Albanian provinces and the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), thereby producing a transnational political culture to oppose the stifling rule of the Hamidian autocracy. Although geographically removed from the Ottoman Empire, their professional networks were nonetheless the financial engine of the Albanian domestic opposition.

Chapter 2 argues that in the wake of the Young Turk constitutional revolution of 1908, these associations understood the new political principles of liberty and equality primarily as an Albanian-induced indigenous Ottoman development. Their role in the new constitutional processes after the Young Turk revolution supported civic over ethnic nationalism. Informal associations proliferated during this period, often established as branches of their parent émigré organizations but also as local initiatives. As the constitutional optimism faded and the divide between the CUP single-party state and the provincial society grew wider, the Albanian associations remained decentralized and continued to work for greater national empowerment

within a multinational Ottoman state. Only when the Balkans Wars in 1912-1913 made clear that the Empire could no longer offer collective security did the Albanians opt for independence and membership in the European state system. Then, with the start of the First World War, the brief independence of 1912-1914 under European oversight was replaced by a series of foreign occupations still burdening the population and barring local politics until 1919.

Chapter 3 examines the short but eventful period after the First World War ended through the establishment of the presidential dictatorship of Ahmet Zogu in 1925. The legacies left by the Ottoman framework and the prewar associations are weighed. The chapter then explores the postwar role of informal associations in the new state and the challenge of forging stable institutions of government. Special attention is devoted to the efforts to replace informal associations with centralized political parties and the reasons for their failure. The émigré social activists returned to Albania from their European and American locales were without sufficient administrative experience and thus unable to sustain the democratic experiment of 1924. The coming of Ahmet Zogu to power forced many of them again into exile. Both inside and especially outside Albania the response was the first informal stirring of an indigenous movement of the political left.

Chapter 4 explores the post-1925 émigré experience of the old and new informal associations. It focuses its attention especially on a growing number of younger activists, who, though born in the Ottoman Empire, came of age during the massive destructions of the Balkan Wars and First World War. Growing more radical in their political outlook, they increasingly looked toward the Soviet Union. In their

view, the Soviet state had been successful in bringing about the new egalitarian political and social order, which the Ottoman Empire attempted but never achieved. Formal links with the Soviet Union increased and continued throughout the interwar period. They were, however, never successful in overcoming internal divisions among what was by the late 1930s a growing number of radicals who called themselves communists.

Chapter 5 charts the intervention of the new Italian occupation regime in the traditional Albanian associational space. Italian efforts to create new forms of fascist associations compromised many of the older Albanian organizations but pushed others into a resistance movement. Of the several foci of politically active associations, only the communists, now a Communist Party, were able to generate sufficient popular backing and international support. They became in the process the first Albanian movement of mass mobilization ever since such aspirations were articulated in the late Ottoman Empire. The Yugoslav role in the founding the CPA in 1941 and later alleged management is reexamined. The roots of the wider spread of the CPA's base by its assumption of power three short years later in 1944 are then considered. A final question is what the CPA's success in mobilizing mass resistance owed to the Albanian associational legacy and what it did not owe.

This dissertation is based largely on research conducted at the Albanian Central Archives of the State (AQSh). Some thirty-two record groups (fonds) were examined. Chapter 1 relies on the voluminous files of correspondence, statutes, financial records and various inventories of associations and their members in Romania, Egypt, the United States and the Ottoman Empire (the latter filed in AQSh

under “Turkey”). Similarly, the personal files of noted associational leaders such as Fan Noli, Thanas Tashko, Dervish Hima, Daut Boriçi, Şemseddin Sami Frashëri and others were examined. Published primary sources are also consulted especially for the background to the Tanzimat period.

Chapter 2 continues to rely on these sources but expands its scope to examine the somewhat less organized collections on societies, clubs and associations that sprang up in the second Ottoman Constitutional era. Owing to the expansion of associational activities in the United States with the establishment of the association *Vatra*, documents from the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in College Park, Maryland, were also examined. On the challenges of the immediate post-First World War period Chapter 3 draws on a growing Albanian- as well as English-language secondary literature but measures them against personal memoirs of associational leaders and archival records of individual correspondence. Chapter 4 continues to draw on such secondary literature but weighs the evidence of this literature against hitherto unconsulted archival documents on the first communist émigré groups in Geneva, Vienna, Brussels, Moscow, and within Albania. In addition it also uses court (both civil and military) and police records of the Albanian interwar state in order to assess the role of Zogu’s royal dictatorship. Some reports by the Italian Legation in Albania are also examined. The recent work on the Albanian interwar left by Kristo Frashëri is very useful here. Chapter 5 explores the Second World War through wartime accounts from participants. Many are found in the records of the Central Committee of the CPA and its district committees, the General Staff of the National Liberation Army, the General Council of the National Liberation

Movement, *Balli Kombëtar*, propaganda tracts by all politically active organizations and collections of personal files. Archival evidence from the *Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri* in Rome, Italy, generously made available to me by the Albanian historian Sonila Boçi-Pepivani in the summer of 2013, is also utilized. From the growing body of secondary literature, the work of the Albanian historian Paskal Milo deserves special mention.

Chapter 1: Early Associations and the Struggle for Civic Representation in the Hamidian Period, 1878 – 1908

In August 1830, the Ottoman Grand Vizier Mehmet Reşid Pasha arrived in Monastir (Bitola in Macedonia) with orders by the Sultan Mahmud II to extend the authority of the Ottoman state in the region. The Sultan and his Grand Vizier were troubled by the attitude of the local Albanian *ayans* (lords), who, taking advantage of the temporary erosion of imperial authority in the Balkans after 1774 and the more recent of the Greek War of Independence, had established *de-facto* regimes supported by considerable military power. Once there, Mehmet Reşid sent an invitation to these lords, ostensibly to attend a dinner and a military procession ostensibly to receive gifts from the Sultan as tokens of appreciation for their cooperation against the Greek insurrection. By all accounts, the feast was a success and Mehmed Reşid a very gracious host. During the subsequent parade, however, his soldiers suddenly stopped in front of the review stand where the Albanian notables stood, presented arms and opened fire on them. The volley lasted only a few minutes but when the smoke cleared about five hundred lay dead. Those few who survived were finished off with bayonets and swords. Subsequently, the scalps of the dead were removed, salted and triumphantly sent to Istanbul to provide proof that enemies of the state did no longer live.²⁷

²⁷ Henry Fanshaw Tozer, *Researches in the Highlands of Turkey: Including Visits to Mounts Ida, Athos, Olympus and Pelion, to the Mirditë Albanians and other Remote Tribes*, vol. I, (London: John Murray, 1869), 167-69; Albanian historians place the number of dead, beys and retainers alike, between 800 and 1,000 and about 400-500 prisoners. See Kristaq Prifti et al., *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar në Katër Vëllime, Volume II: Rilindja Kombëtare, Vitet 30 të Shek. XIX – 1912* (Tiranë: Toena, 2002), 82.

The Imperial Background

The Massacre of Monastir is virtually absent from the existing scholarship. When Stavro Skëndi, turned in 1967 to address the history of the Albanians in the late Ottoman Empire, he began his still influential book in 1878, thereby passing over an event that played a crucial role in the transformation of the relationship between imperial state and provincial society in the mid 1800s. The Massacre of Monastir was the earliest manifestation of Ottoman attempts to institutionalize a link between central control and provincial administration, preceding the declaration of the Tanzimat reforms by nearly a decade. Yet, what began in Monastir turned out to be a long process that dragged the state into conflict not only with the *ayans*, but also with the highland clans, *esnaf* corporations, peasants and other local strongmen entrusted with maintenance of law and order. Between 1830 and 1847 the Ottoman state faced a series of localized rebellions that opposed what the rebels saw as an arbitrary exercise of power by the central government, the sudden increase of the tax burden to pay for disastrous wars (the Ottoman-Russian war 1828-29 and the Egyptian incursion in Anatolia in 1831-33), the introduction of state-held monopolies over agricultural products, tariff reductions that undermined *esnaf* economies, the corruption of new state-appointed (non-Albanian) administrators who were ignorant of local practices and lastly, the general intrusion of government into the fabric of society.²⁸

²⁸ Petrika Thëngjilli, "Introduction" in *Kryengritjet Popullore ne Vitet 30 të Shekullit XIX: Dokumente Osmane*, ed. Petrika Thëngjilli (Tiranë: Kombinati Poligrafik – Shtypshkronja e Re, 1978), 4. For specific cases see "Rebellion of Vejsel Lusha and Salih Noka in Dibër," 16 February 1833, cf. *Ibid.*, 47-48; "Petition [*Arz-ı Mahzar'lar*] of the people of İşkodra to Mahmud Pasha of Prizren," [14] August 1833; "Mutassarif Mehmet Emin Pasha reports on Zylyftar Poda, Shahin bey Delvina and

When order was restored after 1847, it became apparent that the success of the new policies were mixed. Centralization worked best in the urban areas and the towns of the western lowlands, uplands and river valleys where the population accepted the authority of the state. In contrast, the free tribes and clans of the mountain plains and highlands were not. Gradually a new generation of Albanian elites educated in imperial colleges and universities reshaped the national context and helped usher in new patterns of social activism. This political activism emerged from two different kinds of social experience. One was the traditional administrative decentralization of the empire, which in the past had reinforced local autonomies based on kinship – family, clan, village and professional network – loyalties. With the emergence of a new political vocabulary in the nineteenth century, the phrase “local” autonomy turned into “national” autonomy. Starting from the late 1860s many urban and/or educated Albanians seem to have developed a strong sense of independent cultural identity, one that increasingly distinguished itself from but remained firmly entrenched within the multicultural context of the empire. In 1869, Muslim intellectuals formed what was arguably the first proto-national Albanian association, the *Cemiyet-i Ilmiye-i Arnavudiye* (Albanian Society of Science), following the example of *Cemiyet-i Ilmiye-i Osmaniye* (Ottoman Society of Science).²⁹ Such forays increased in the following years.³⁰

A different kind of social experience emerged after the sons of notables

Abdyl Koka,” 8 March 1833, cf. *Ibid.*, 50-51; “Tayyar bey correspondence with mutassarif of İşkodra,” January 1834, cf. *Ibid.* 30, 128.

²⁹ Frances Trix, “The Stamboul Alphabet of Shemseddin Sami Bey: Precursor to Turkish Script Reform,” in *IJMES* 31 (1999), 255, 258.

³⁰ Gawrych, *The Eagle and the Crescent*, 8-12; M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 99.

subdued during the 1830s and 1840s gradually transformed into a class of civil servants. Commoners also took advantage of an expanding public education system to affect positive changes in their own social status. Both strands found new and, more importantly, legal means to challenge the centralization tendencies of the modern Ottoman state. Men such as the notable Muslim-born Ismail Kemal Bey in Avlonya or the commoner Catholic-born Pashko Vasa (Vaso/Wassa Pasha) in İşkodra owed their subsequent careers to the patronage of eminent reformist statesmen such as Ahmet Midhat Pasha and Ahmet Cevdet Pasha. The fact that most Tanzimat men were Istanbul-born members of old patrician families – often members of the religious institution, *ilmiye* – was a significant factor in opening up new career venues for men of the provinces. Not all could boast such connections but those who did facilitated the rise of other, less connected, Albanians within the ranks of the imperial officialdom. Across the gamut of new Ottoman professions opened to them, a new generation of Albanians challenged centralization policies by calling for the replacement of absolute rule with a representative constitutional government, political and religious freedoms, ending official corruption, and the empowerment of the national group with home rule by staffing public offices with a native bureaucracy.³¹ The implication was clear: obtain official recognition of the Albanians as a national group within the empire, and protection and regulation by a constitution.

Traditional decentralization and the constitutional optimism of the Tanzimat period were therefore the twin roots for the growth of the subsequent national Albanian political culture. Until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, however,

³¹ For an example of early expression of these trends see Pasco Wassa Efendi, *La Bosnie et la Herzegovine pendant la Mission de Cevdet Efendi* (Istanbul: Les Editions ISIS, 1999).

national associational ties and links were minimal and informal. Yet, during and after the Eastern Crisis of 1878, the threat of war, fear of imperial and national territorial dismemberment and the reassertion of the Palace's political power by Sultan Abdülhamit II provided a strong stimulus to the formation of formal national associations.

The Istanbul Committee and Initial Patterns of Associational Activities

The first Albanian political association appeared during the Russo-Ottoman War of 1876-1878 and within the context of the first Ottoman constitutional experiment during the same period. On 18 December 1877, eight days after the Russian armies and their Bulgarian allies broke through the Ottoman resistance in Plevna, a group of Albanian-born Ottoman civil servants and intellectuals gathered in a private setting to discuss what they considered to be catastrophic policies pursued by the government that might spell the end of Ottoman Empire as a state. They ascribed responsibility for the seemingly accelerated pace of the state's decline to the "despotism" of a government filled with sycophants, to the general ignorance of the population and to venal public officials who were too corrupt and ignorant of the law to carry through the Tanzimat reforms.³²

These men formed what became known as the Central Committee for the Defense of the Albanian Rights, also known as the Istanbul Committee or the "Union" Society of Istanbul. It was an informal association, primarily an initiative of Muslim – both Sunni and Bektashi – Albanians, though it included one Catholic and

³² See the context of the speech of Abdyl bey Frashëri, MP of Yanya, held during parliamentary sessions between 14 and 24 January 1877 in Gawrych, *The Eagle and the Crescent*, 41-42.

at least three Eastern Orthodox members. What united these men was their elevated social status as members of the empire's growing liberal-minded middle class with credentials as public officials, members of parliament, freethinking intellectuals, liberal clerics and scions of great Albanian landowning families genuinely concerned about the possible disintegration of the empire. Five were schoolteachers, writers, playwrights, and freethinking liberals. Four were members of great provincial – both Tosk and Geg – landowning families who also occupied important posts in the civil administration. For instance, Mehmet Sermeddin Said Toptani was a member of the secretariat of the Imperial Divan. Vesel Bey Dino was the brother of Abedin Bey Dino, one of the legislators and first signatories of *Kanûn-u Esâsî*, the Ottoman Constitution of 1876. Mustafa Nuri Pasha was the father of the future Grand Vizier Avlonyalı Mehmet Ferid Pasha (in office 1903-1908). The Catholic commoner Pashko Vasa had joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the mid-1850s. At least four members, Ahmet bey Koronica, Ymer bey Prizreni, Mehmet Ali bey Vrioni and Abdyl bey Frashëri were delegates in the first imperial parliament, representing respectively Yakova (Gjakovë), Debar, Berat and Yanya. At least two others had received formal religious training and served in clerical positions. One of them, Hoca Hasan Tahsini (1811-1881) was the religious tutor to the two sons of Hayrullah efendi, the Ottoman Minister of Education and also the first director of the newly established University of Istanbul and author of the first treatise on psychology and the first modern text on astronomical theories in the empire.³³

The Istanbul Committee held its sessions amidst a growing security crisis for

³³ Nikki R. Keddie, *Scholars, Saints and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions since 1500* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), 39.

the Ottoman Empire. After the fall of Plevna, the road south toward Istanbul lay open to the advancing Russians. On 4 January 1878 they captured Sofia. In December, Serbia mobilized its army and within a few weeks captured Niš and its environs. On 21 February, Greece, too, mobilized its army and crossed over into Ottoman territory, but pressured by the Great Powers it withdrew nine days later. On 31 January Sultan Abdülhamit II sued for peace and on 3 March a vanquished Ottoman Empire was forced to acquiesce to Russian terms in the Treaty of San Stefano. The centerpiece of San Stefano provided for the creation of a large Bulgarian state whose western borders included a sliver of what is today southern Kosovo and eastern Albania. In addition it granted to Montenegro (as well as Serbia) its independence and awarded it the Bar region where the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Antivari (a separate *millet* after 1830) was located.

Viewing the capitulation of Istanbul to Russian demands as detrimental to the principle of collective security that the Ottoman order provided to the empire as a whole, the Istanbul Committee reacted energetically. Several politically active members of the committee convened on 10 June 1878 a large gathering of Albanians notables in Prizren in the vilayet of Kosovo. They hoped to signal to the Porte and the European powers the massive opposition to the plans for the partitioning of Ottoman territories. In contrast to the existing historiography that portrays the League of Prizren as the manifestation of Albanian nationalism, a careful analysis of its membership shows that the participants came from those Ottoman territories most endangered by the recent military and diplomatic events. They supported an Ottoman imperial framework not Albanian independence. The leading members came from

provinces most affected by San Stefano: the Monastir and Kosova vilayet. Within Monastir, Debar, Tetovo, Skopje, Gostivar, Kičevo, Prishtina, Mitrovica, Prizren, Gilan (Gjilan), and Vučitrn – areas that San Stefano apportioned to the new Bulgarian state – constituted the majority of the deputies (36 total). Next, areas of the Kosovo vilayet, which were not included into Bulgaria, but lay nonetheless next to the new borders; Yakova (Gjakovë), Lumë district and Īpek brought nine deputies. Similarly, areas in the northern part of the Kosovo vilayet, Tachlidja, Sjenica and Yeni Pazar, which were inhabited by Muslim Bosnians, sent three representatives. A single representative came also from Gusinje but none came from the areas around Podgorica and Bar, which were awarded to Montenegro. These were represented in the Īškodra branch, which was headed for a brief time by Pashko Vasa.

The meeting in Prizren produced two important documents: a set of Resolutions (*Kararname*) and a set of Instructions (*Talimat*) signed by 46 Muslim and one Catholic deputy. In its first three articles, the *Kararname* explicitly recognized the sovereignty of the Sultan and the legality of the Ottoman state and order. In addition, it framed the rationale of the League as an organization formed to defend imperial territorial sovereignty, the dignity of the offices of government as well as the honor, property and security of the Ottoman peoples in accordance with promulgated Ottoman constitutional principles. Articles 4 through 16 portrayed the League as an organization that, acting in accordance with the Sharia holy law sought to defend the honor, life and property of Muslims, but also extending equal protection and “mutual support and understanding” to all non-Muslims loyal to the empire in accordance with the general civic provisions set by Edict of Gülhane in 1839 and

more recently by the Reform Edict (*Islâhat Fermânu*) in 1856. Because the war with Russia had shown the state's inability to defend itself, articles 13 and 14 barred the government from interfering in the League's internal affairs but also limited its own reach in that "the League will not interfere in the administrative affairs of the Government, unless the latter can be shown to have issued orders [contrary to the desires of the people] involving the use of force."³⁴

The nineteen points of the *Talimat*, on the other hand, dealt with the military organization of the League's voluntary forces in preparation for armed conflict with the beneficiaries of the San Stefano order. The *Talimat* envisioned each *kazâ* (district) to function as a recruitment canton, responsible for levying, supplying and training its own troops. Military officers with experience in the regular Ottoman army were put in charge of training and organization of the fighting units but overall administrative supervision and control of supplies and logistics was given to the civilian members of each local branch of the League. Borrowing liberally from recent reforms in the imperial armed forces, the League provided for wages and other requisites to be regulated by the already existing state instructions for the regular army. In the event, the League set down provisions to recruit, arm and administer huge numbers of conscripts reaching 30,000 men in Bosnia, 20,000 in Yeni Pazar, 70,000 in Kosovo, 40,000 in Monastir and 30,000 in İşkodra for an ambitious grand total of 190,000 men divided into 380 battalions.³⁵

With hindsight, these numbers may appear fanciful though the intent of the

³⁴ Texts available in Eqrem Zenelaj, *Çështja Shqiptare nga Këndvështrimi i Diplomacisë dhe Gjeopolitikës së Austro-Hungarisë, 1699-1918* (Prishtinë: Shtëpia Botuese "Faik Konica," 2010), 228-232. See Appendix A for a reproduction.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 232-233.

League should not be summarily dismissed as such. The *Talimat* strongly suggests that the League envisioned its efforts as aiding the state in the mobilization of a pan-Ottoman resistance in the event of a military confrontation. Yet if the empire balked at the prospect, then the League would take over as a parallel provincial government intent on defending imperial territory and dignity in these provinces from foreign encroachments. The subsequent revisions made to San Stefano at the Congress of Berlin, the vanishing of the Bulgarian threat, the Habsburg occupation of Bosnia, and the stationing of Habsburg garrisons in Yeni Pazar nullified such hopes and prospects. Thereafter, the League developed as an informal association of Albanian interests dedicated to the prevention of territorial losses to Montenegro.

The League's military operations began in late October 1879 when Montenegro sought to claim the Muslim-inhabited Plav, Podgorica, and Gusinje. In early November, Montenegro launched several scouting raids in the villages of Rzanica, Murino and Pepice, which were quickly repulsed by the League's forces.³⁶ Following this response, on 4 December 1879 the League military forces composed largely of clansmen and volunteers under the leadership of Ali Pasha, the *kaymakam* of Gusinje (Gucia), scored its first battlefield victory against Montenegro in the Battle of Novšiće (Nokshiq). Prince Nikola I of Montenegro appealed to the Great Powers to intervene with the Porte, which, in turn, sent Ahmet Muhtar Pasha on a mission in Yakova to try and persuade the Albanians to give in. The Albanians declined and military operations resumed. In the first week of January 1880, twenty-five Montenegrin battalions consisting of nearly 9,000 men faced the League's forces of about 7,000 clansmen and volunteers from the Kosovo and Monastir vilayets. In a

³⁶ Prifti et al, *Historia e Popullit Vol. II*, 180-181.

series of clashes in Pepice, Novšiće, Velika, Rzanica and Murino, the League managed to break the cohesion of the larger Montenegrin forces and scored other victories. Faced with successful Albanian resistance, in early April the Great Powers agreed to the new Corti Line, which granted to Montenegro the Catholic regions of Hoti and Gruda instead of the Muslim Plav and Gusinje. In accordance with Great Power instructions, the Ottoman garrisons withdrew on 22 April but in doing so created a power vacuum. It was quickly filled by the League's forces led by Hodo Bey Sokoli, a career officer at the time serving as the commander of the gendarmerie in *İškodra*.³⁷ The Montenegrin forces launched expeditions in Tuz, Grudë and Hoti but were yet again soundly defeated. In June the Great Powers tried once more to settle matters by awarding to Montenegro, Ulcinj, instead of Grudë and Hoti. Although Ulcinj had a strong reputation as a lair of pirates and buccaneers, and thus likely to resist, the decision to award to Montenegro a coastal city was a strategically astute move. In doing so, the powers removed from the equation the mountains, which had provided time and again a strong strategic element for the Albanian defense. In addition, the powers pressured the Sultan, that if his imperial Albanian subjects did not yield than they would occupy Smyrna (*İzmir*).³⁸ This prompted the Sultan to send reinforcements under Riza Pasha tasked with overseeing Ulcinj's surrender. Yet, it was not after a demonstration of naval strength by a combined force of twenty Habsburg, Russian, Italian, English and French warships that Ulcinj was finally handed over to Montenegro on 26 November 1880.

The events with Montenegro and a resurgence of Greek demands for

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 185.

³⁸ Miranda Vickers, *The Albanians: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006) 35.

expansion in what is today Thesprotia further radicalized the attitudes of the Albanian who now began to articulate a program for a unified vilayet that would include Yanya, İşkodra, Monastir and Kosovo.³⁹ The Palace, however, had no intention of entertaining such schemes and consequently sent a punitive expedition led by Dervish Pasha with forty battalions (10,000 men) to quell the Albanian resistance and reestablish imperial authority. Between December 1880 and April 1881 Dervish Pasha marched into Kosovo and occupied Prizren. The Albanians put up a stiff resistance but short of weapons and ammunition were forced to withdraw and submit.⁴⁰

Historical scholarship on the League of Prizren has focused almost exclusively on military and diplomatic developments and has missed important social aspects developed through the Ottoman legal context. Admittedly, military and diplomatic events provided much of the rationale behind the League's existence but its long-term legacy has yet to be addressed. There were three important consequences. First, the events during the lifetime of the League were the first bitter experience, though not last, with international politics. It gave rise to the perception that Albanians were no more than a mere commodity to be traded and exchanged without ever being given a choice to determine their own fate. From the start, the Albanians became resentful of the new regime of Sultan Abdülhamit II resenting the apparent ease with which their government abandoned them to foreign powers. This resentment had two sources. On the one hand, the conservative wing composed of clan chieftains and landowners possessed a long tradition of opposition to foreign encroachments, even those by their

³⁹ Prifti et al., *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, Vol. II, 216.

⁴⁰ Vickers, *The Albanians*, 41-42.

own imperial government. Its members sought to preserve their local autonomies and customary liberties, which until the very recent past were part and parcel of the decentralized Ottoman form of government and which the Tanzimat had not yet eradicated. In this they were supported also by Muslim clerics who resented the planned incorporation of Muslim lands into Christian states. On the other hand, the intellectual and reformist liberals, products of the Tanzimat reforms, sought to attain from Istanbul the same kind of legal national recognition that other peoples within the empire – often under the patronage of a major European power – seemed to achieve with ease.⁴¹ These two major strands coalesced into a broad oppositional current that gradually came to enjoy a significant cross-class and cross-regional support, thus national, albeit on an informal basis.

Second, the League was the first Albanian experiment, however brief, with *de facto* home rule.⁴² The League did not fail because it was unable to articulate a coherent national political program. On the contrary, the League successfully interfered in international diplomacy when it managed to modify the content of the territories granted to Montenegro in three separate occasions: from Plav and Gusinje to Hoti and Gruda and finally to Ulcinj. In addition, the League managed to instill considerable confusion in Istanbul as well. Official Ottoman documents show that, for a brief time, the Porte was not unsympathetic to the Albanian demands.⁴³ For example, after the successful defense of Gruda and Hoti, the Porte began to seriously entertain the idea of creating a single *vilayet*. On 6 May 1880, an assessment by the Porte noted that, “The

⁴¹ Vickers, *The Albanians*, 41

⁴² Malcolm, *Kosovo*, 220-225.

⁴³ Kristaq Prifti, *Lidhja Shqiptare e Prizrenit në Dokumentet Osmane, 1878-1881* (Tiranë: Shtypshkronja e Re, 1978).

dangers to their lands and the empire,” had facilitated the Albanians’ common cause but “because they want to make their union stronger and because they want to preserve their rights of citizenship... they repeatedly request the formation of the *vilayet* under a Vali appointed by the empire.”⁴⁴ Before the vilayet law of 1864, the report went on, Albanian lands were “unified” in a single *eyalet* under the authority of the Vali of Rumelia. In unifying the *vilayets* of Kosovo, İşkodra, Yanya and Monastir, “[the Government] will simply revert them to their original state.”⁴⁵ Interestingly, the Porte decided to go ahead with the *vilayet* idea and suggested to the Palace that the project was promising for two other reasons. First, it ensured the application of long delayed reforms in Albanian territories, and second, it obviated the need for the League to continue to function as an informal parallel institution that subverted the sovereign authority of the state.⁴⁶ The choice fell on Ahmed Eyüb Pasha, a former Vali of Yemen and a hero of the recent war with Russia. The Palace procrastinated, but, finally, in a proclamation issued at the end of June, Abdülhamit II dismissed it as a treasonous idea:

If they [the Albanians], as they claim, love their faith and state, then let them relinquish their lands which We have engaged to the government of Montenegro; for this will cause a split between [the European powers]. If they do not wish to live with the Montenegrins, we will recompense them with funds from Our treasury and will allow them to relocate free of charge ... Their refusal to relinquish [their lands] will put the Ottoman Empire at grave peril and [it will prove] that their loyalty, which they long profess, consists only of empty words for which they will surely incur the wrath of the almighty God and mine.... By the grace of God and the blessed Prophet let them not be the cause for Us to undertake a severe punishment against the Albanian people. If they, on the other hand, submit to Our orders, they will know happiness and salvation in this life and the other.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ “Proposal to unify Albanian vilayets under the name Vilayet of Rumelia,” Istanbul, 6 May 1880, cf., Prifti, *Lidhja Shqiptare e Prizrenit*, 72.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ “Council of Ministers to the Palace,” Istanbul, 23 May 1880, cf., Prifti, *Lidhja Shqiptare e Prizrenit*, 76-78.

⁴⁷ “Proclamation of Sultan Abdülhamit II,” Istanbul, June 1880, cf., Prifti ed., *Lidhja Shqiptare e Prizrenit*, 87-88.

The Four Albanian Vilayets During The Ottoman Empire (Circa 1878)

Map: Courtesy of Mr. Ilir Hamiti, Kosova Information Centre, London.



Map 1.1 Albanian-inhabited Ottoman Provinces

The League failed simply because none of the Powers was willing to recognize an Albanian separate national identity. Ultimately it was the combination of European warships, Ottoman regular troops, Montenegro's skillful portrayal of the Albanians as fanatic "Mohamedan" cutthroats and murderers, and lack of general European public interests in Ottoman and Albanian affairs that doomed the League.⁴⁸ These factors also whetted the appetite of Greece as well, which shed its inactivity and after July 1880 began to press assertively for territorial gains in the *vilayet* of Yanya.⁴⁹

Third, although ultimately the Porte and the Great Powers dismissed the Albanian demands, the brief episode of the League imparted a wealth of political and participatory experience, which later provided the sinews of associational life. It was demonstrably a Muslim initiative where the majority were representatives of the landed interests followed closely by clergymen, officials of the provincial government (mainly the local gendarmerie and the Redif military reserve) and lastly elected members of parliament. It cannot be determined how centralized the League itself was as a political organization for there was neither a previous experience with home rule nor a tradition of associational organizations to emulate. There were, however, several alternative forms of participatory experience practiced before 1878 on which to draw. One was the tradition of decentralization and local notables who, as pillars of their communities, still commanded sufficient social prestige and following. A second source was Tanzimat-erected local councils, or *meclis*, that rose

⁴⁸ For the last two points see Vickers, *The Albanians*, 36-37; Isa Blumi, "The Commodification of Otherness and the Ethnic Unit in the Balkans: How to Think about Albanians," in *East European Politics & Societies* 12, 3 (1998), 527-569.

⁴⁹ Prifti et al, *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, Vol. II, 197

during the reform period and were governing local bodies of elected members overseeing communal affairs.⁵⁰

Drawing on these two experiences, the League consciously strove to portray itself as a broad social reaction of an Ottoman imperial constituency that possessed a legal right of redress. As mentioned above, virtually all members of the League’s political leadership structure consisted of elected officials in the short-lived first parliament (1876-1878) but contemporary witnesses viewed these events with their own nationalist perspective and portrayed nationalism as *the* major political force of the nineteenth century. Consequently, they created a perception – later picked up by historians – about the League as a purely nationalist organization.



Map 1.2 Location of the Albanian vilayets in the Balkans.

⁵⁰ Malcolm, *Kosovo*, 225.

The Society of Letters and the Quest for a National Alphabet

As the more politically active members of the Istanbul Committee were busy in organizing the Albanians in Prizren and framing the political goals of the League, the intellectual members formed in Istanbul, on 12 October 1879, the Society for the Publication of Albanian Letters [henceforth Society of Letters]. Their purpose was to provide the Albanians with a written script of their own and thus prove in international forums that the Albanians did possess a national identity and culture of their own. The question of a unified alphabet was not entirely new. Invariably since the 1830s and early 1840s individual efforts had sought to bridge the cultural Tosk-Geg and Muslim-Christian gap between the Albanians themselves but also the perceived “civilizational” gulf between Albanians and their more “sophisticated” neighbors.⁵¹ Until 1879 these efforts remained too localized to attract the support of like-minded intellectuals on the one hand and spark sufficient public interest on the other.

Efforts to consolidate the various traditional written scripts into a single unified alphabet started in earnest only during the Eastern Crisis. A working group composed of several members of the Istanbul Committee worked throughout 1878 and 1879 examining all efforts of the past. Given the phonetic differences as well as the cultural influences present in the Albanian language from one region to the next, it encountered great difficulties in assigning letters to specific sounds. For this reason the Committee established early on the principle that “one letter for one sound” was needed to reflect these differences. Next, the committee assessed which alphabet

⁵¹ “Kanonizmë e Shoqërisë të Shtypurit Shkronja Shqip” Constantinople, 1879, AQSh. F. 102, D.48, Fl. 66.

would best fit the pattern. Because of its limited number of vowels and a wholly different organization of its consonant structure, the Arabic script was deemed impractical for the phonological realities of the Albanian language, and, at any rate too difficult to learn. The Greek alphabet found considerably more support since it shared certain sounds spoken in what is today the southern half of Albania and northern Greece. In addition, the Greek language represented the high culture of the Patriarchate and was thus the traditional institutional language for the Albanian-speaking Orthodox mass in these territories. Yet, the limited number of letters, the confusion that arose from a direct adaptation of the Greek alphabet into the Albanian spoken language and the fact that the Greek language itself was undergoing significant structural changes from its Demotic to the Katharevousa form made this alphabet just as impractical to adopt.⁵²

For practical as well as symbolic reasons, a conscious choice was made to adopt a Latin-based alphabet. The simplicity of Latin-based characters afforded more opportunities to implement the principle of “one letter one sound” and was in turn easier to learn. Yet it too posed problems since the limited list of twenty-five characters could not fully fulfill the complexity of the phonetic demands of the Albanian language present in disparate and widespread pronunciations marked by nasality, rhotacism, different vowel lengths and the like. To overcome this problem the authors added to the twenty-five Latin characters an additional eleven by borrowing and adapting Greek and even Cyrillic letters to fit Albanian

⁵² For Greek diglossic controversy see Antonis Liakos, “Hellenism and the Making of Modern Greece: Time, Language, Space,” in *Hellenisms: Culture, Identity and Ethnicity from Antiquity to Modernity*, ed. Katerina Zacharia (Burlington VT: Ashgate Publishing House, 2008), 223-225. Ibid., 224.

pronunciations.⁵³ The Latin alphabet had also the added benefit of being easier to print since typesets could be acquired relatively easily and for much cheaper prices in European countries where a successful Orthodox diaspora lived, than the special-purpose Greek or Arabic printing equipment.

The Latin-based script was also laced with a powerful cultural symbolism. By adopting a European civilizational construct the framers of the alphabet created the perception that “Albania is a corner of Europe and the Albanians are one of the nations of Europe; and thus the Albanian language must be written with the [Latin] letters of Europe.”⁵⁴ In doing so, the framers intentionally harked back to Catholic authors of past centuries, such as Marin Barleti, Gjon Buzuku, Pjetër Bogdani and others, who since the late fifteenth century, had written important works in the Albanian vernacular utilizing the Latin alphabet. According to this view, the Albanians already possessed a long heritage of a written culture on a par with all other “civilized” nations thus demonstrating important cultural and ethnic continuities in the lands they inhabited.⁵⁵

Although historians have rightly stressed the contribution of Şemseddin Sami Bey Frashëri, the Istanbul Alphabet was not the brainchild of a single individual but rather the product of long debates and hard work of many individuals who borrowed heavily from previous intellectual influences and initiatives most notably from the *Cemiyet-i Ilmiye-i Arnavudiye* (Albanian Society of Science) formed in 1869. Although pressures for the adoption of an Arabic alphabet certainly existed, the

⁵³ Trix, “The Stamboul Alphabet,” 257-259.

⁵⁴ Şemseddin Sami bey Frashëri quoted in Shaban Demiraj and Kristaq Prifti, *Kongresi i Manastirit* (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, 2008), 23.

⁵⁵ Lumo Skëndo, “History of Albanian Literature,” *Diturija* 1 (1909), 1-7.

choice in 1879 lay between the Latin and Greek alphabets or a mixed original alphabet.⁵⁶ The resulting efforts culminated in a compromise choice between these influences. As if to symbolize the cultural unification of the Albanians as an ethnic group separate from the other peoples within the Empire, the intellectual output behind the Istanbul alphabet was the result of the collective work of three of the most influential members of the Society of Letters, the Muslim Şemseddin Sami Bey Frashëri, the Catholic Pashko Vasa, and the Eastern Orthodox Jani Vreto, a native of Leskovik in the vilayet of Yanya.

The Istanbul Alphabet constituted a landmark in the history of the late Ottoman Empire. Frances Trix has already pointed out the originality of a Latin-based script for a Muslim population which predated Kemal Atatürk's 1928 promulgation of the same for modern Turkish by about fifty years.⁵⁷ In 1879, however, this was not yet clear since the Albanians were hastily reacting to threats of imperial dismemberment. What the Istanbul alphabet really did, was to lay the groundwork for an all-inclusive public sphere, which did not discriminate on the basis of religious affiliation and regional descent. This, too, had to wait for the appearance of an Albanian printed culture by the émigré associations, which, starting from the mid-1880s onward challenged the legitimacy of centralized imperial rule with activities seeking national empowerment and advantage within a constitutionally reformed Ottoman state.

The Society of Letters lobbied actively to have the Albanian language taught in state schools. Modern state schools represented a significant advancement in

⁵⁶ For a sophisticated Albanian Arabic alphabet by Daut Boriçi see "Albanian Primer and Grammar in the Arabic alphabet," 1286 [1869-1870], AQSh, F. 65, D. 21, Fl. 67-77.

⁵⁷ Trix, "Stamboul Alphabet" 255.

Ottoman institutional reform designed to inculcate notions of universal regularity, discipline and efficiency while also increasing the penetration of Ottoman central state institutions into the fabric of society. Under the Tanzimat, it was hoped that the growth of more secular schools sponsoring Western-oriented practical subjects would remedy the insufficient quality of traditional religious education. Called “social disciplining” by one eminent scholar, a more uniform educational system sought to oversee the social engineering of imperial subjects and their transformation into responsible and loyal state citizens.⁵⁸ Following Abdülhamit II’s abrogation of the constitution in February 1878, educational reform reverted instead to synthesizing traditional religious education with the more secular Tanzimat schooling. Schools now assumed a more pronounced political and strategic importance designed to stem both real and perceived threats by internal national secessionist and international colonial threats. Nonetheless, Ottoman advances in educational legislation increased literacy rates, however modestly, and in doing so a new class of literate elites emerged who could think, investigate and articulate for themselves alternative forms of the relationship between state and society. It appears that the Tanzimat-led Porte issued a firman in November 1879 allowing the publication of books, journals and school textbooks in the Istanbul Alphabet.⁵⁹ Strictly speaking this firman was not a constitutional act since Abdülhamit II had abrogated the constitution nearly two years prior. It may have been just a delaying tactic to appease the League of Prizren, whose armed resistance was proving embarrassing to the Ottoman state. Yet, the Society of

⁵⁸ Somel, *The Modernization of Ottoman Public Education System*, xv, 5-9

⁵⁹ I have not been able to examine this declaration. References about it however abound and virtually every association, as we shall later see, cite this law as the main rationale for their subsequent activities. For an example see “Statuti i Shoqërisë Shqiptare ‘Drita,’” F. 99. D. 1, Fl. 2.

Letters took full advantage of the new law and mounted a vigorous campaign of publications intending to disseminate the Istanbul Alphabet among all Albanians. Thenceforth, all Albanian petitions to the government concerning the freedom to learn their language in state schools would be based upon this act. In Istanbul, the Society of Letters published two short-lived periodicals, *Drita* (Light) until 1884 and *Ditura* (Knowledge) until 1885, of which we see more in the Romanian émigré versions. Furthermore, it also sought to organize branches by mobilizing middle class merchants and intellectuals. Since there were only too few of them within the empire, it focused primarily within the Albanian émigré centers, particularly in Romania and Egypt, where a prosperous Orthodox merchant middle class lived and worked.⁶⁰ Such activities soon ran afoul of the Hamidian regime, which declared them illegal.

The Society of Letters grew within the context of the constitutional experiment of 1876-1878. To escape Hamidian repression, cultural activism was transferred from within the empire into its émigré branches in Romania and Egypt and in doing so it passed on the torch of Albanian national activities from Muslim activists to Orthodox merchants, shopkeepers and property owners. The prosperity of these immigrants provided a financial muscle but also expanded these regional cultural activities to include the political emancipation of the Albanian Orthodox from the ecumenical bonds of the Patriarchate of Istanbul. Initially the focus of émigré associations lay on internal reform within the Church to accept the Albanian vernacular in the learning, interpretation and preaching of the Holy Scriptures. Yet, fearing that behind the Rum high culture lurked the danger of Hellenization into the modern Greek state, these social activists gradually opted for autocephaly. Until the

⁶⁰ "Society of Letters to *Drita* in Bucharest," 1882, Constantinople, AQSh, F. 101, D. 49, Fl. 1.

great uprising of 1910-12, the demand for the restoration of the constitution and constitutional rights served as a focal point that crystallized and unified Albanian émigré centers with Ottoman domestic processes into a liberal opposition against the Hamidian regime and the Patriarchate of Istanbul. We now turn to these foreign centers, whose range of locations, activities and ultimate importance, as we shall see below, deserve detailed attention.

Other Social Networks: From Romania to Egypt and the United States

The concentration of émigré activities on Bucharest made perfect sense for several reasons. First, Romania was near the Ottoman border and thus afforded to the activists a geographic proximity with Ottoman-Albanian lands while, at the same time, avoiding the legal repercussions that were sure to arise from engagement in illegal activities. Second, in liberal Romania, freedoms of press and assembly were constitutionally protected, thus permitting the development of Albanian letters to a degree unmatched within the Ottoman Empire. Third, Romania afforded important economic and financial incentives for Albanian activists. With the possible exception of the Italian peninsula and internal migration within the Ottoman Empire, Romanian lands had traditionally attracted Albanian immigration from the late sixteenth century onwards.⁶¹ By the mid-nineteenth century Albanian communities had successfully established themselves in and/or around urban areas such in Pitești, Bucharest, Ploiești, Constanța, Brăila and Brașov where they gradually grew prosperous. Lastly, in contrast to Serbia, Bulgaria and certainly Greece, many Albanians, as we shall see

⁶¹ “Charter by Simion Movilă,” 1 May 1602, Târgoviște, F. 99. D. 261, Fl. 2-3.

below, singled out Romania as the only foreign power positively interested in Albanian emancipation and thus amenable to collaboration.

According to Albanian perceptions of the time, Albanians and Vlach (Aromanian) in the vilayets of Monastir and Yanya were equally endangered by Greece's nationalist program, the *Megali Idea*. Historically, the Aromanian population here possessed some of the most commercially and intellectually active members of the Ottoman Rum millet as evidenced by the prosperity of the town of Voskopojë (Moscopolis) in the mid-eighteenth century.⁶² Following the Russo-Ottoman War of 1768-1774 and the ensuing rise of ayans and highway brigandage, the fortunes of the Aromanians declined and after 1770 that population was pushed back to subsistence levels, making a living mainly as shepherders. With the rise of independent Greece, the Aromanians became subjected to a long process of Hellenization, which was accepted by some and rejected by others.⁶³ Those who rejected it found a receptive ear in Bucharest. After its independence in 1878, the new Romanian state (the *Vechiul Regat*) intervened in local politics and began to actively oppose Hellenization policies by organizing societies, distributing funds for local schools in Monastir and Yanya.⁶⁴ Less known are the connections that Aromanians established with Albanian activists that facilitated the emergence of collaboration between separate Albanian and Aromanian cultural programs.⁶⁵

⁶² Traian Stoianovich, "The Conquering Balkan Orthodox Merchant" in *The Journal of Economic History* 20, 2 (1960), 252-253 and in passim.

⁶³ Giuseppe Motta, "The Fight for Balkan Latinity: The Aromanians until World War I," in *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 2, 3 (2011), 253.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ For more on this see Visar Dodani, *Memorjet e Mia: Kujtime Nga Shvillimet e Para e Rilindjes të Kombit Shqipëtar në Bukuresht* (Costanza: Albania, 1930), 10-14.

On 27 November 1884 at the Green Tree Salon in Bucharest, the Romanian branch of the now defunct Society of Letters of Istanbul held its second general meeting. This date marks the formation of the association *Drita*, named so after the briefly functional periodical in Istanbul. The association was founded as a “philanthropic organization” dedicated to the advancement of Albanian language based on the Istanbul alphabet, the studying of Albanian culture and history, and the funding of Albanian-language schools in Romania and the Ottoman Empire. *Drita* opposed Sultan Abdülhamit II’s new bans on cultural assembly in the Ottoman Empire and saw itself as a legal entity entirely in keeping with the Porte’s decision to permit the publication of works in Albanian letters in November 1879.⁶⁶

Within the association, members developed and adopted old goals into new ways of interaction and communication. *Drita*’s statute stated that membership was open to all who consented to the goals of the association. Article 9 of the statute divided membership into three classes. First, active members were those who paid monthly dues of 1, 2, 4 or more Romanian lei and those who contributed substantially more both financially and “morally.”⁶⁷ Second, honorable members were those who were specifically designated so by the board on the basis of exceptional service, past, present and future. They were exempt from paying membership dues. Last, supportive members were those who provided for the general funds of the association a minimum of 250 lei. Article 7, reserved membership for individuals born in “Albania,” regardless of differences in regional, religious, gender, occupational and

⁶⁶ “Statuti i Shoqërisë Shqiptare ‘*Drita*,’” 1884, Bucharest, AQSh, F. 99, D. 1, Fl. 2.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 6. It is not stated what “moral support” entailed. It is likely that provision was specifically designed for contributing writers and itinerant activists that travelled far and wide in distributing of printed materials or otherwise spread “the word” about the activities of the association.

social statuses or individuals of Albanian origin provided they spoke the Albanian language. Those who did not fulfill these criteria could be accepted into the association but they had only a “consultative” vote, meaning, that they could give their opinions in proposed legislation but did not have voting rights.⁶⁸ Since membership was voluntary, any member had the right to freely resign. The association could also summarily cancel membership if members failed to pay dues or appear in meetings for three consecutive months.

Drita also put in place a bureaucratic apparatus. Its leadership committee, or the board, included a chairman, a vice-chairman, eight members, two secretaries and one treasurer. It could not function unless at least seven of these thirteen members were present. The committee could call members in three types of different meetings. First, general meetings were intended for dues-paying members to choose associational leaders and officials who went on to serve for a period of no more than three years. Second, representative meetings were held strictly only for the purposes of approving the annual budget, approving unforeseen expenses, setting dates for successive meetings, concerts, and publications and to expel members. The committee held only administrative and arbitrage powers. Its authority was subject to and checked by majority rule. Members could effectively challenge the committee, and meetings served as forums for associational debate.

Associational funding received special attention in the statute. Initially *Drita* was formed on a considerable budget of 4,240 lei collected through voluntary

⁶⁸ See Article 13 of the statute in “Statuti i Shoqërisë Shqiptare ‘*Drita*,’” 1884, Bucharest, AQSh, F. 99. D. 1, Fl. 6.

contributions of its original fifty-one members.⁶⁹ Article nine specified that all funds were collected through first, monthly dues by the active members, second, voluntary donations and third, income secured by fundraisers and receipts from theater, musical shows and publication of printed materials. The treasury of the association consisted of deeds for immovable and movable properties deposited in a Romanian savings bank and insured by the government if invested in Romanian commercial and public activities. If and when the association was dissolved, all these funds were inherited by another sister association and were to be used exclusively for the advancement of Albanian language and Albanian-language schools, both in Romania and the Ottoman Empire.⁷⁰ To avoid financial abuse, a strict system of checks and balances was put in place. The ledger of incomes, contributions and assets was checked and double-checked by a series of associational leaders and appointees. After the treasurer accepted the sums, the ledger was then checked by three auditors and signed by the association's secretary and the chairman. Withdrawals necessitated a majority rule by committee members after the activity for which the sum was needed had been approved in the representatives meeting.

Finally, in contrast to the Muslim majority of members in the Istanbul Committee, Orthodox merchants from the vilayet of Monastir, mainly from the Korçë district and its environs, dominated the central committee. Most of these were related or had been childhood friends. Its first chairman and treasurer was the wealthy Anastas Avramidhi-Lakçe (1821-1890) who had immigrated to Bucharest at a very early age and who contributed nearly half (2,000 lei) of the funds that originally set

⁶⁹ Dodani, *Memorjet e Mia*, 20.

⁷⁰ "Statuti i Shoqërisë Shqiptare 'Drita,'" F. 99. D. 1, Fl. 10.

up the association. From Korçë were also brothers Jorgo and Vangjel Gjeço, and their cousins, the four Tërpo brothers, who had resided in Bucharest since 1863. From Drenovë (in the Korçë district) came Konstantin Eftimiu, the vice-chairman, and members Spiru Eftimiu, Irakli Duro and Z. Konstantin Naumesku. Vasil Kanas Frashëri, as his name suggests, came from the village of Frashër, in the Përmet district in the vilayet of Yanya. Andre Ioan, a member of the committee came from the village of Mborje, it too, in the Korçë district. Finally from Debre/Dibër, also in Monastir, came the only Muslim member, Vahit Abdullah Murat.⁷¹

The creation of *Drita* was an unprecedented step forward in Albanian cultural activities. For the first time a formally organized entity took over associational activities and transformed previous personal relationships into a depersonalized system of administrative functions supported by an incipient bureaucratic apparatus and promising growing logistics. Such a transformation was neither smooth nor immediate. *Drita's* stated aim to function as an association representing Albanian life and culture in Romania was not realized and by 1886 it split into two rival groups. Both factions claimed to be the worthy successors to the Society of Letters of Istanbul. In an effort to maintain precisely the legitimacy of that continuity, the first group, led by Nikolla Naço, retained the name *Drita* for their association whereas the second group, led by Kostaq Duro, adopted *Dituria*, the name of the second Albanian-language periodical published by the Society of Letters.

Nikolla Naço was born in Korçë in 1843, the son of a well-to-do Orthodox farmer and cattle trader. In 1860 he immigrated to Mansurah, Egypt where he entered the cotton trade, gradually accumulating enough wealth to open two cotton-

⁷¹ Ibid. 2.

processing factories. In the early 1880s he left Egypt and relocated to Bucharest. Under Naço, the new *Drita* association was an entirely different organization from its namesake. In contrast to *Ditura* whose membership was composed of wealthy merchants propped up by far-reaching family networks and business interests, *Drita* targeted the lower rungs of society, the petty merchants, the shopkeepers and the working class immigrants, thus expanding its membership but diluting the middle class values that had originally set up Albanian associational life in Romania. After his arrival Naço mounted serious fundraising and propaganda campaigns to broaden its support base outside Bucharest. In an appeal to the Albanians of Pitești (soon followed by similar appeals in Braşov, Ploieşti and Constanţa), Naço noted that the historical imperial symbiosis of the various Ottoman peoples had been irreparably eroded to the detriment of the Albanians. As he put it:

The Greeks call us *palo Arvanites*...the Turks [sic.] call us *pis Arnauts* (dirty Albanians)...[and here] in Wallachia (i.e., Romania) some call us Greeks, some Bulgarians, some Arnauts and others capricious, and treat us worse than gypsies. [What is worst] we don't understand this for we are surrounded by [ignorance] and we do not see that if we do not work speedily we will be extinguished from the face of the earth; for the nation which has its written language exterminates the one that does not...I remind you that already [the Albanians] in Janina (Yanya/Ioannina) have forgotten Albanian in favor of Greek and in the Geg lands, Serbian is taught in schools there.⁷²

In addition, Naço assiduously courted prominent members of the Romanian establishment. He held that the greatest threat to the Albanians came from the expansionist designs of Greece and Serbia. Naço singled out Greece in particular since Orthodox Albanians and Aromanians traditionally had formed part of the Ottoman Rum millet and thus could easily be swayed by Greek ecclesiastical influence. A firebrand, Naço and his group believed that cooperation of the Albanians

⁷² "Nikolla Naço to the Albanians of Pitești," Bucharest, 27 January 1888, AQSh, F. 99, D. 11, Fl. 1-2.

with the Aromanians in the Monastir vilayet and the Pindus region of the Yanya vilayet could potentially form a great unified Orthodox block to obstruct the Hellenization of nineteenth-century Rum peoples by the Greek political state. In the long term, Naço speculated that Albanian-Aromanian cultural cooperation could potentially ensure the political influence of the Romanian state, which through its wider resources and established institutions could provide substantial material and financial wealth while, at the same time, potentially lent valuable diplomatic representation to the Albanians in international forums.

The new *Drita* retained the original statute of its namesake largely unchanged. Article seven, on the other hand, underwent a complete and significant revision. Considering *Albanianness* to be a very narrow and simultaneously legally ambiguous descriptive category, which limited instead of encouraging participation in associational activities, the revised article opened up membership “to Albanians, Romanians and Ottomans,” without distinction, regardless of their regional, religious, occupational and social statuses. Consistent with Naço’s vision of Albanian-Romanian cooperation, the new leadership reflected these changes immediately. Vasile Alexandrescu Urechia, a noted Moldavian-born Romanian academic and former Minister of Education in the cabinets of National Liberal Party Prime Ministers Dimitrie and Ioan Brătianu, was appointed the new president of *Drita*. His second in command was the eminent Romanian archeologist Dimitrie C. Butculescu. Most of the Committee membership was likewise Romanian with only a handful of Albanians, suggesting that the wealthier Albanian interests in Romania remained represented by *Ditura*. Indeed, associational minutes in 1887-88 show that purely

Romanian names, for which there is no Albanian equivalent (such as Tatile, Drasch, Leonte etc.), predominate over Albanian ones.⁷³ In due course, these Romanian affiliations provided *Drita* with invaluable public exposure, which were reflected in links with wider European scholarly circles.⁷⁴ In February 1887, *Drita* member Jovan Risto was able to organize fifty Albanians in Brăila and open a branch of *Drita* there. He estimated that if carefully attended to, in time the branch could soon rise to about three hundred members.⁷⁵ In January 1888 another branch was established in Pitești with working class immigrants.⁷⁶

Following its reorganization after 1887, *Drita* published more material based on the Istanbul alphabet. In December 1887 a new primer tried to simplify certain letters of the Istanbul alphabet by replacing them with fully Latin-based equivalents.⁷⁷ In May 1887, the Brăila branch began the publications of a literary-scientific periodical “*Drita*” and in August 1888 the bilingual newspaper “*Sqipetari/Albanezul*” appeared in print as the weekly official organ of *Drita*.⁷⁸ Initially, Naço found it difficult to ensure publication contracts from the wider world of Albanian activists. As the most “Albanian” of the two organizations, *Dituria* retained the original membership cadre of its parent organization, its network of activists and publishing contracts from the Ottoman-Albanian intellectuals. Yet, when Naço’s energy and

⁷³ “Procesverbal,” Bucharest, 4 January 1887, AQSh. F. 99. D. 1, Fl., 5-6; 14-16. For linguistic affinities of Albanian with Romanian see Noel Malcolm, *A Short History of Kosovo* (New York: New York University Press, 1999)

⁷⁴ “Procesverbal,” Bucharest, 26 May 1887, AQSh. F. 99. D. 1, Fl. 17.

⁷⁵ “Jovan Risto to V.A. Urechia,” Brăila, 3 February 1887, AQSh, F. 99, D. 1.

⁷⁶ “Nikolla Naço to the Albanians of Pitești,” Bucharest, 27 January 1888, AQSh, F. 99, D. 11. Fl. 1-2.

⁷⁷ “Frontispiece of an Albanian Primer by Jani Kristo and Lazi Terova in Bucharest,” Bucharest, 4 December 1887, AQSh, F. 99, D. 10, Fl. 1. Nathalie Clayer argues that this was an Aromanian primer closer to the Romanian alphabet. Clayer, *Ne Fillimet e Nacionalizmit Shqiptar*, 273.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* Clayer argues that the central committee saw the publication of “*Drita*” as potentially divisive and harmful to Albanian interests but provides no explanation as to why that may be so.

single-minded determination proved an obvious asset, former members of the now defunct Society of Letters, such as Şemseddin Sami Frashëri, Naim Frashëri, Jani Vreto and others published through *Drita*'s resources collections of poems, primers and grammatical works, historical and geography books, translations of European scientific and literary works, textbooks in mathematics, civics and the like.

By 1889 these activities had publicized *Drita* to a wider audience and the association began to receive ever-increasing requests for more subscriptions into its mailing list.⁷⁹ In what was arguably its greatest achievement to date the association received permission in May 1892 from the Romanian Ministry of Education to open a bilingual Albanian-Romanian pedagogical school (Rom: *şcoală normală*) in Bucharest. It functioned for seven years before closing down for lack of funds in 1899. The president of this school, “funded, organized and administered primarily by the Albanian-Romanian community,” was Nikolla Naço, who in that year also replaced V. A. Urechia as the new chairman of the association. The goal of the school was to provide secular professional teacher’s training for young Albanians from the vilayet of Monastir (expressed in the text as *Albanomacedonia*). Its curriculum included the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Islamic theology; Albanian, Romanian and Ottoman-Turkish languages; pedagogic theory and practice, European history and geography, Ottoman history and law, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Visual Arts and Calligraphy, Music, Gymnastics and Physical Fitness, Foreign Languages, and Civics. The administration of the school provided salaries for teachers, required to be Albanians, and also set up strict codes of moral and professional behavior. Upon graduation, the graduates were then sponsored by *Drita*

⁷⁹ “Letters to *Drita*,” AQSh, F. 99, D. 13, Fl. 1-2; “Letters to *Drita*,” AQSh, F. 99, D. 16, Fl. 1-3.

to open schools and teach the same subjects to Albanians in “Albania,” and Albanian communities in Bulgaria, Italy, Montenegro, Russia, Serbia and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.⁸⁰

It is unlikely, however, that within the short seven years of its existence the pedagogical school achieved all the goals set by its founders. *Drita* itself had underestimated the costs and the logistics involved in mounting such a school. Only a year later, Naço appealed to the Romanian government, Bucharest’s learned circles and the general public at large arguing that without their support the noble goal of enlightenment would remain unfulfilled. The people in *Albanomacedonia* – a veiled reference that included Albanians as well as Albanian-speaking Aromanians in the vilayet of Monastir – risked “denationalization” in their own lands.⁸¹

In contrast, *Dituria* remained consistently wedded to its founding principles of being primarily an Albanian organization serving Albanian educational needs.⁸² It retained the original cadre of its parent organization, its network of activists and publishing contracts from the Ottoman-Albanian intellectuals such as the Frashëri brothers and others. Yet after Naço changed the rules of the game, *Dituria* found its fortunes eclipsed by *Drita* for much of the 1880s and early 1890s. Its original chairman Kostaq Duro does not appear to have been a particularly efficient manager. Nonetheless, *Dituria* was the first association that secured through its own funds a printing press.⁸³ This press allowed the printing of textbooks on geography and social

⁸⁰ “Statute of the First Albanian School in Bucharest and its Canon,” Bucharest, 10 May 1892, AQSh, F. 99, D. 22, Fl. 1-6.

⁸¹ “Call of the President of the Albanian School in Romania asking for Joint Help by Romanians and Albanians,” Bucharest, 1893, AQSh, F. 99, D. 26, Fl. 1.

⁸² “Statute of the Cultural Society *Dituria*,” Bucharest, 14 January 1896, AQSh, F. 99, D. 71, Fl.1-6.

⁸³ Dodani,

sciences, written by Şemseddin Sami and Naim Frashëri followed by a primer in the traditional Latin Gheg alphabet, a primer in the Istanbul alphabet by Jani Vreto, collections of poems by Naim Frashëri and a pocket book edition of the Old Testament's *Book of Genesis* in a roughly-hewn Tosk dialect.⁸⁴

A change in the fortunes of *Dituria* came only after 1896 with the appointment of Pandeli Evangjeli as its chairman. Also an Eastern Orthodox from Korçë, Evangjeli (born in 1859) immigrated to Romania in the early 1880s and settled in Bucharest where he was apprenticed to an Albanian merchant and shopkeeper. Possessing administrative and political acumen, in January 1896 he was chosen to lead *Dituria*. Borrowing from Naço, Evangjeli appreciated the need to broaden its social support base beyond the Albanians. He swiftly turned *Dituria* into a coherent organization, consolidated its finances and began to expand the association's network of activists in Romania and abroad. Individuals who had contributed to various Albanian causes in the past and continued to contribute were rewarded with honorary memberships or placed into the association's board, thus excluded from having to pay membership dues.⁸⁵

Drita's and *Dituria's* rivalry did not, however, mean that their activities necessarily developed in opposition to one another's as may be implied by their initially acrimonious relationship. There were considerable meeting points and both remained dedicated to the advancement of Albanian literary culture and emancipation. Consequently, by the turn of the twentieth century associational

⁸⁴ Akademia e Shkencave të Shqiperisë, *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar* vol. II (Tirane: Botimet Toena, 2002), 245; "Të Bërë të," Bucharest, 1889, AQSh, F. 99, D. 67.

⁸⁵ "Jeronim de Rada to *Dituria*," *Machia Albanese*, 1897, AQSh, F. 99, D. 74, Fl., 1-2. See also Minutes of the General Meeting of the Leadership Committee," Bucharest, 2 March 1897, AQSh, D. 73, Fl. 3.

activities expanded by leaps and bounds. By 1906 other societies were created.

Albanian students established in Bucharest *Shpresa* (Hope) in 1903. It was followed by *Drenova* in 1894; a branch of *Dija* (also Knowledge, originally founded in Vienna on 27 December 1904 by Catholic activists under Habsburg patronage) in 1906 and *Djalëria Shqiptare* (Albanian Youth) founded in Brăila in 1905.

Social activists, however, were conscious that the existence of many societies did not satisfy their ultimate goal of consolidating associational activities under a single organizational roof. Though a stated goal ever since the creation of the original *Drita*, early centralization was briefly interrupted by Naço's arrival in Bucharest and other internal dissention, ideological differences and general lack of public trust stemming from the novelty of associational activity. By 1906, however, the situation had improved markedly. On 9 April, in the Bucharest salon *Amiciția* (Friendship), the leadership committees of *Drita*, *Dituria* and *Shpresa*, and (later) *Drenova* entered negotiations for a merger of their associations. The meeting tentatively decided to merge these associations into a single organization, which for the time being adopted the name *Drita* and retained the 1892 statute of this organization. When by November associational leaders managed to secure majority consent within their respective organizations, the final form and context of the merger were finally decided upon. On 28 November the leadership committees met again and formally declared the creation of the cultural association *Tomorri*, which on 7 December 1906, was renamed *Bashkimi/Unirea* (Union).⁸⁶

⁸⁶ "Minutes of the General Meeting and the Leadership Committee of the Association *Bashkimi*," Bucharest, 28 November 1906, AQSh, F. 99, D. 116, Fl. 1, 3, 5-6; For more context see also "Minutes of the Meeting for the Creation of the Cultural Society *Drita*," Bucharest, 9 April 1906, AQSh, F. 99,

The formation of *Bashkimi* was a signal event in associational life. It consolidated all other fissiparous memberships, resources, assets and all activities for the first time under a single roof. Its first statute was signed by 199 founding members, not counting the other membership categories: active, honorific and donors.⁸⁷ *Bashkimi* inherited the printing presses, memberships, administrative branches, libraries, financial wealth and assets of three formerly independent voluntary associations *Drita*, *Dituria* and *Shpresa*. This wealth was considerable. For instance, when *Dituria* affected the legal transfer of its assets into *Bashkimi*, part of its inventory included a library with a staggering number of 18,163 volumes printed primarily in Latin script based on the Istanbul alphabet.⁸⁸ *Bashkimi* also took great care to avoid unnecessary schisms within its ranks. Thoma Çami, an Orthodox Çam Albanian, who until 1906 was a little known activist and thus, most likely a compromise choice, was chosen to lead the association. Kristo Meksi and Pandeli Evangjeli, respectively of *Drita* and *Dituria*, were both allotted a vice-chairman seat. Even *Dija*, the Bucharest branch of its Viennese parent organization received a nomination in the appointment of Rafail Anastasiu as First Secretary.⁸⁹

Although an association staffed almost exclusively by Orthodox Albanians, *Bashkimi* never claimed to represent only Orthodox Albanians. Associational experiences had shown clearly the value of appealing to a broader social support base. In 1906, it had become demonstrably the largest single Albanian association with

D. 49, Fl. 1. See also Edwin E. Jacques, *The Albanians: An Ethnic History from Prehistoric Times to the Present* (Jefferson NC; McFarland & Company, 1995), 294-95.

⁸⁷ See "Statute of the Albanian Cultural Society *Bashkimi* in Bucharest," Bucharest, 7 December 1906, AQSh, F. 99, D. 118, Fl. 11-14.

⁸⁸ "Inventory of *Dituria*'s books," Bucharest, [December] 1906, AQSh, F. 99, D. 120, Fl. 1.

⁸⁹ See list of members in "Statute of the Albanian Cultural Society *Bashkimi* in Bucharest," Bucharest, 7 December 1906, AQSh, F. 99, D. 118, Fl. 14-15.

mass mobilization ambitions and had successfully intervened and challenged the predominance of Greek lay and ecclesiastical high culture in those areas within the vilayets of Monastir and Yanya, which the modern Greek state claimed as its own.⁹⁰ Its reach and influence were equally broad. In 1886, for instance, Dhimitër Mole, a member of the original *Drita* in Bucharest was sent to Sofia, Bulgaria, to organize an association from Albanian artisans, petty merchants, seasonal workers and free labor hands recently arrived there from the vilayet of Monastir. By 1889, Mole managed to unify a nucleus of activists into the Society for Education in Albania (*Shoqëria per Arsim ne Shqipëri*).⁹¹ In January 1893 this evolved into the association *Dëshira* (Aspiration). *Dëshira* borrowed heavily from its Romania parentage. It appears that its original statute was a carbon copy of the statutes of the associations in Bucharest. Within a decade, *Dëshira* managed to establish embryonic branches in Varna, Plevna, Rila and Plovdiv. Yet, as Nathalie Clayer has recently shown, Albanians in Bulgaria were simply too few, not as well integrated and, within the context of a low income Bulgaria insufficiently prosperous to make a significant impact comparable to the associations in Romania.⁹² Although the Albanians in Bulgaria could not match the cultural output of their kin in Romania, *Dëshira* was instrumental in organizing Albanian social life by spreading Albanian-language texts either produced locally or generously sent from Bucharest, protecting the destitute and aiding newly arrived immigrants to settle and find jobs. It became particularly notable for producing *Kalendari Kombiar* (The National Calendar), one of the more voluminous and better-

⁹⁰ Letter of Protest to the Patriarchate of Istanbul,” Bucharest, [undated], AQSh, F. 99, D. 115, Fl. 1-2.

⁹¹ See Skëndi, *Albanian National Awakening*, 154.

⁹² Clayer, *Ne Fillimet e Nacionalizmit*, 125-26.

preserved émigré print collections for the period between 1894 and 1913.⁹³ *Dëshira* was also instrumental in launching the careers of many Albanian activists such as Mithat bey Frashëri, Kristo Luarasi and more.

Following *Bashkimi*'s establishment in 1906 congratulatory letters arrived from Albanian activists in Europe, North Africa, Russia and North and South America who saw in it an example to emulate.⁹⁴ From Boston, Fan Noli, about whom more below, sought *Bashkimi*'s help to find a sympathetic Romanian Orthodox prelate willing to ordain him as the head of an autocephalous Albanian Orthodox church.⁹⁵ From 1907 onward, *Bashkimi* was inundated with letters sent from unorganized Albanian immigrant communities and individuals from the United States, Egypt, Bulgaria, the Ottoman Empire, Greece, Russia, Habsburg Croatia and even Argentina asking *Bashkimi* to provide organizational assistance and textbooks in Albanian.⁹⁶ In one curious case, such a letter was sent even from Irkutsk, a city in Siberia where there were about one hundred resident Albanians.⁹⁷ It appears that these immigrants were a community of Orthodox master builders, masons and artisans from Kolonjë in the Korçë district who had migrated to Siberia, more precisely to Irkutsk and Vladivostok, during the construction boom of the 1880s and 1890s, when the Trans-Siberian railway reached these remote parts of Russia. These immigrants first heard about Albanian associations from Father Naum Cere (born 1866), an itinerant Orthodox priest who travelling through Imperial Russia distributed

⁹³ Preserved in "Kalendari Kombiar," Sofia, 1894-1904, AQSh, F. 96, D. 27 – 33, for a total of 1083 pages.

⁹⁴ "Thanas Fllloqi to *Bashkimi*," Jamestown N.Y., 19 March 1907, AQSh, F. 99, D. 128, Fl. 2.

⁹⁵ "Fan Noli to *Bashkimi*," Boston Mass, 20 February 1907, AQSh, F. 99, D. 129, Fl. 1.

⁹⁶ There are multiple files in the Albanian archives where this correspondence is stored. For an example see a collection in "Letters sent to *Bashkimi* from Various Countries," 13 March – 9 September 1907, AQSh, F. 99, D. 131, Fl. 1-19.

⁹⁷ "Letters from Irkutsk to *Bashkimi*," Irkutsk, 12 March 1907, AQSh, F. 99, D. 130, Fl. 1-4.

Orthodox missals and primers in Latin-based Istanbul alphabet to older Albanian-Russian communities in Odessa, Kharkov, Vladikavkaz, Kiev, the Donets and Crimea. The crumb trail led Father Cere to these far-away communities.⁹⁸

What made the Romanian connection so crucial to Albanians' early social activism was the relative large size of the immigrant communities there and the growing presence of not only a large core of merchants, artisans and property owners but also professional salaried individuals consisting primarily of lawyers, clerks, journalists and skilled workers. The Albanians remained a statistically insignificant minority in Romania, less than one-percent if the approximate number of 40,000 suggested recently by Nathalie Clayer is correct.⁹⁹ Yet, the bulk of these Albanians, about three-fourths, lived and worked in Bucharest, where at the turn of the twentieth century they constituted a significant percentage of Bucharest's 300,000 citizens. In addition to Albanians, the associations attracted ordinary Romanians who in the process became also employers for members of the free professions and college graduates. Other sympathetic professionals like historians, geographers, ethnographers and linguists shared a common scholarly interest in investigating Albanian language and culture and thus became involved as donors in Albanian activism to varying degrees.¹⁰⁰ By catering to this base *Bashkimi* and its parent associations expanded their networks and links with professional organizations significantly and in the process it achieved a high degree of public visibility and even

⁹⁸ Ibid. See also Llazar Llazari, *Naum Cere: Shqiptar i Kthjellët, Kombëtar i Palodhur* (Tiranë: Junvil, 2013)

⁹⁹ Clayer, *Në Fillimet e Nacionalizmit*, 124.

¹⁰⁰ Speech of B.P. Hasdeu 'What are the Albanians,' Bucharest, 25 May 1905, AQSh, F. 99, D. 47, Fl. 1-2; "Emile Legrand to *Dituria*," Paris, 6 October 1898, AQSh, F. 99, D. 77, Fl. 1-2.

middle class respectability within Romanian high circles.¹⁰¹ These connections fueled the engine of associational life through voluntary contributions and active participation. Associational life was unrestricted, well-ordered and possessed a remarkable capacity for compromise and collaboration, so much so that associational life in Romania became the yardstick by which to measure associational life elsewhere.

In contrast to Romania, Albanian immigration to Egypt was of recent origins. It started during the Napoleonic wars, which brought Mehmed Ali and his contingent of Albanian soldiers to power in 1805. Following this initial wave, new immigrants arrived after the British occupation in 1882, partly attracted by the economic incentives provided by the penetration of European capital and partly because Egypt, though nominally under the Ottoman Empire, lay outside its jurisdiction. This consideration allowed many Albanian social activists to operate just as freely as their kin in Romania and Bulgaria. The Albanians settled mainly in urban areas in the Nile Delta, such as Cairo, Alexandria and Shibin al-Kum, but also further south into Lower Egypt, spread along the Nile basin in Faiyum, al-Fashn, Maghagha, Heliopolis, el-Mansurah, and Madinet al-Ayyat. By all accounts there were no more than 3,000 Albanians in Egypt and immigration slowed to a trickle in early 1900s when Albanians began to favor the United States above the more traditional locales in Romania, Bulgaria, Italy.¹⁰² Most of the immigrants to Egypt came from the vilayets

¹⁰¹ For certain examples see “Royal Palace to *Drita*,” Bucharest, 25 June 1892, AQSh, F. 99, D. 19, Fl. 1; “Royal House to *Drita*,” Bucharest, 28 August 1902, AQSh, F. 99, D. 40, Fl. 1 and also “Royal House to Nikolla Naço,” Bucharest, Bucharest, 2 January – 25 November 1906, AQSh, F. 99, D. 48, Fl. 1-3; “Joseph, First Metropolitan of Bucharest to *Drita*,” Bucharest, 6 January 1905, AQSh, F. 99, D. 44, Fl. 1-2

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 127

of Monastir and Yanya predominantly from the regions of Korçë, Skrapar, Përmet and Ergiri (Gjirokastrë) but the vilayets of Kosovo and İşkodra were also represented.¹⁰³ The first Albanian association, *Vëllazëria Shqiptare* (Albanian Brotherhood), was formed in 1894. It was followed sometime before 1908 by the association *Mirëbërëse* (an adjective loosely translated as Beneficence) first established in al-Ayat but then spread to al-Fashn as well.¹⁰⁴ In 1910, clearly emulating *Bashkimi* of Bucharest, social activists consolidated most minor associations in the Albanian Brotherhood *Bashkimi*.

The Albanian immigrant community in Egypt was as homogeneous as in Romania or Bulgaria. As in these two locations, the overwhelming majority of associational members were also Orthodox Christians who traditionally enjoyed more opportunities for upward mobility as either salaried professionals or within the Egyptian Greek Orthodox merchant class. More prosperous Albanians emerged from within the Balkan and later Egyptian *Rum* millet, having gotten their start within the Greek merchant and banking elite in Cairo and Alexandria. Especially important were the locations in today's Minya, Beni Suef, Faiyum and Giza governorates where Orthodox Albanians could hire themselves out as apprentices or middlemen in the local tobacco and cotton industries. As shown earlier, it was here that Nikolla Naço, *Drita*'s chairman, made his fortune in the cotton trade before immigrating to Bucharest.

An instructive case about the upward mobility of Albanian immigrants in Egypt is Athanas Tashko's rise to prominence, as a leader and one of the main

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ "Mirëbërëse of al-Ayat to Headquarters in al-Fashn," *Madinet al- Ayyat*, 16 March 1908, AQSh, F. 96, D. 1, Fl. 1.

financiers of associational life in Egypt. Tashko was born and Eastern Orthodox in 1863 in the village of Frashër in the Përmet district, which, at the time, was part of the sancak of Ergiri (Gjirokastër) in the Yanya vilayet.¹⁰⁵ At an early age Tashko immigrated to North Africa in search of better fortunes. Settling in Egypt he apprenticed as a restaurant server, peddler, and other menial odd jobs until he managed to open his own coffee shop. A hard worker, he managed to scrape together considerable savings, which allowed him to open a hotel on the shores of Lake Moeris (Qaroun) next to the ancient site of Crocodilopolis. The hotel quickly became a favorite tourist and resort spot for colonial and military administrators, Egyptologists, diplomatic consuls and aristocratic and independently wealthy safari enthusiasts from virtually every European country, Russia, the United States and the Ottoman Empire. Possessing strong business acumen, Tashko subsequently built on site the Grand Hotel Qaroun, which became even more successful.¹⁰⁶

Tashko's wealth allowed him to be a patron to many Albanian social activists in Egypt. His hotel in Faiyum became a regular meeting point for many activists such as Fan Noli, Jani Vreto (recently arrived from Bucharest), Sotir Kolea and many others. This material help was crucial in the establishment of *Bashkimi* of Alexandria, which, according to Tashko's records was fraught with controversy. In a letter to Sotir Kolea, Tashko revealed that *Bashkimi* was an initiative of the *Grekomans* – a loose pejorative term denoting Rum Orthodox, and sometime even Muslim, Albanian and Greek alike – who, for historical and economic reasons, favored politically the modern Greek state. Historically, Albanians and Greeks did not face the sort of sharp

¹⁰⁵ Robert Elsie, *A Biographical Dictionary of Albanian History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 433.

¹⁰⁶ See "Hotel 'Moeris' [Guest] Book of Impressions," Faiyum, 23 January 1902 – 25 October 1914, AQSh, F. 9, D. 38, Fl. 1-78.

cultural and linguistic divide between Albanians and the South Slavs. Ever since the Byzantine Empire, Greeks and Albanians shared symbiotic cultural experiences and formed part in equal measure of the Byzantine aristocracy and institutions. Furthermore, the Albanians shared with the Greeks important confessional ties in contrast to the Serbs and Bulgarians who possessed their own separate churches and religious rites. More recently, the political perception of the Albanians at the turn of the twentieth century was that Greece was just as “friendless” and equally as endangered by pan-Slavic agendas as the Albanians.¹⁰⁷ Albanians frequently attended Greek schools and often intermarried with Greeks regardless of religious and national differences. Examples for the latter include Ismail Kemal Bey Vlora, Pandeli Sotiri and many more.

These commonalities had made it possible for Abdyl Frashëri to approach Stephanos Skouloudis, a member of the Greek parliament and future Minister of Foreign Affairs, during the height of the Eastern Crisis in 1877 with plans for union and collaboration between Greece and the Albanians in case of the threatened demise of the Ottoman Empire. Thimi Mitko and Spiro Dine in Egypt and even Ismail Kemal bey also held similar views as late as 1907.¹⁰⁸ Yet the basis for such initiatives had always been one-sided. Whereas the Albanians simply sought their official recognition as a distinct national group, the more politically advanced Greeks sought

¹⁰⁷ For the Greek view on this see Basil Kondis, *Greece and Albania: 1908-1914* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1976), 33; For the Albanian approach, Ismail Kemal bey, *The Memoirs of Ismail Kemal bey*, ed. Somerville Story (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1920), 5-10.

¹⁰⁸ For some examples see, Kristo Frashëri, *Lidhja Shqiptare e Prizrenit: 1878-1881* Vol. I (Tirane: Shtypshkronja “8 Nëntori,” 1989), 123-30; Skëndi, *Albanian National Awakening*, 55; Kaliopi Naska, *Ismail Qemali ne Lëvizjen Kombëtare* (Tirane: Kombinati Poligrafik “Shtypshkronja e Re,” 1987), 13; Timo Dilo, “Mbi të ashtuqajturën marrëveshje Shqiptaro-Greke midis I. Qemalit dhe J. Theotoqis,” *Studime Historike* 1 (1967), 107-126; Lejnar Mitrojorgji, “Borders of Identity: the Greek-Albanian Union of 1907 and the Epirote Question in the Late Ottoman Empire” in *Balkanistica*, 24 (2011); 129-74.

tangible political gains in expanding their own territory into the Ottoman Empire. As a result, these meetings failed to turn into meaningful collaborations.

A similar dynamic evolved in Alexandria as well. According to Tashko, this would have taken place in three stages. In the first stage, the political aim of the Greek party was to form an association of true Christians (i.e. those who considered themselves Greek) and led by trustworthy elements such as the medical doctors Turtulli and Adhamidhi could labor for the unification of the Albanian Orthodox Christians. In the second stage, this association was then to link up and receive aid from the Greek association *Hellinismos*, led at the time by Neocles Kazazis a professor at the University of Athens. Jointly and under the auspices of the Greek government and with the blessing of the Patriarch in Istanbul, both associations were expected to foment an insurrectionary movement at the Greek-Ottoman border among the southern Tosks so as to gain wide national, political and diplomatic leverage for the downtrodden Christians suffering under the Albanian and “Turkish’ [sic] yoke. In the third stage, Albanian schools, where possible, were to be closed, whereas in Korçë, where the Albanian literary movement was the strongest, lessons in Albanian were to be incorporated for a time into Greek schools and then, under the right circumstances, removed from the curriculum. In addition, Muslim Albanians were to be considered collectively as “Turks” and be allowed neither participation nor representation in any form of associational agency.¹⁰⁹

Tashko found others’ view of the Albanians to be of resignation, compliance and shortsightedness. Lacking political representation, they accepted the formation of an Albanian association even under those circumstances. Obviously distraught at this

¹⁰⁹ “Athanas Tashko to Sotir Kolea,” Faiyum, 21 February 1911, AQSh, F. 97, D. 5, Fl. 3-5.

reputation, Tashko made his views public and this brought him under considerable pressure from the other members of the association. Yet the size of his wealth and patronage meant that Tashko could not be easily alienated and *Bashkimi* of Alexandria eventually relented. At any rate, Tashko's fears did not materialize since the statute of *Bashkimi* adopted a broader participatory basis thanks to the efforts of two Orthodox Albanians, Sotir Kolea and Loni Naçi. The statute, probably reflecting Tashko's fears, took the name The Albanian Brotherhood *Bashkimi* and specifically forbade any form of dissent or disputes among its members on national and religious bases. Membership was open to all without regard to birthplace, sex, and religion, provided they considered themselves Albanians and over twenty years old. Leadership was invested in a *Pleqësi* (Senate) wherein decisions were reached by a majority vote.¹¹⁰

Reflecting the low demographic weight of Albanians in Egypt, the social composition of *Bashkimi* of Alexandria was as occupationally diverse and largely composed of Orthodox Christians as in Romania. Thus, the Senate meetings that took place between 1911 and 1912 show only two Muslims in attendance, Fejzi bey Dishnica and Qamil Tahiri. The other forty-two members were Orthodox. Since associational activity did not provide members with regular paychecks, most of these individuals engaged in some form of commercial activity, tailors, entrepreneurs, salaried professionals, lawyers and merchants. Whatever professional differences these members possessed, most of them doubled as journalists, publicists, poets and translators of European pamphlets and texts into Albanian. Egypt, however, simply

¹¹⁰ See "Statute of Albanian Brotherhood in Egypt 'Bashkimi,'" [Alexandria], [12 December 1910], AQSh, F. 9, D. 6. Fl. 1-9; "Minutes of the Albanian Brotherhood in Egypt," Alexandria, 28 January 1911 – 20 September 1912, AQSh, F. 9 D. 7, Fl. 1-12.

lacked the sufficient emigrant numbers that fueled the financial success of associational life in Romania and later in the United States of America.

Albanian associational life in the United States cannot be properly understood without the singular figure of Theofan (Fan) Stilian Noli. He was born on 6 January 1882 in İbriktepe (Alb: *Qytezë*) in the vilayet of Edirne, presently situated at the Greek-Turkish border. According to Noli's most comprehensive biography, İbriktepe was at the time a small town of about 400 households, whose primary source of income came as hired hands, particularly in construction work, agriculture and animal husbandry.¹¹¹ Born a frail child requiring a great deal of attention and care, Noli was placed in the care of his grandmother. A strong-willed matriarch, she exercised a great influence in his early years and educated Noli in religious tracts and legends and stories about his ancestors.

In 1890, an elementary Greek school operating with a curriculum set in independent Greece, the first school of any kind in the village, opened in İbriktepe. Enrolled as Theofan "Mavromatis," – a name by which he would be known until his immigration to the United States in 1906 – Noli soon became a model student throughout the six years that he attended the school.¹¹² Afterwards, in 1896, he enrolled in the Greek gymnasium in Edirne. Though largely a lay institution, it was also known as a preparatory school for the clergy. There he received a thorough classical and religious education. His interest at the time lay primarily with issues of Christian social justice, first introduced to him by his grandmother's stories about the crucifixion of Christ. Above all, Noli demonstrated a great aptitude in classical

¹¹¹ Nasho Jorgaqi, *Jeta e Fan S. Nolit: 1882-1924* vol. I (Tiranë: OMBRA GVG, 2005), 40-45.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 57-58

rhetoric, languages, music and literature, reading whatever books were included in the formal curriculum but also heavily borrowing from the personal libraries of his teachers. In time, he learned ancient Greek, Latin, French, Arabic and Ottoman Turkish. Eventually, and not without considerable impediments, in the summer of 1891 Noli moved to Athens where he managed to enroll part-time at the University of Athens while at the same time working as an editor with several theater repertory companies.

It was in Greece where Noli's political career first started but not as a champion of Albanian rights. From the moment he started work in theater, he found himself involved in the language controversy that had run rampant since the founding of the Greek state in 1830. At the heart of the dispute was the question as to whether the official language of the state would be Katharevousa or Demotic Greek. Katharevousa was a new, artificial language first conceived and proposed by Adamantios Korais, a Greek eighteenth-century émigré revolutionary thinker who aimed to purify Demotic Greek by all loanwords acquired throughout the centuries by any and all non-Greek imperial masters of the peninsula. In nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Greece, *Katharevousa* became a potent indicator of the nationalizing sensibilities pervading the modern Greek national state.¹¹³ Within the fifty years since Greek independence, it had become the dominant language of administration, newspapers and education but in doing so it created a veritable linguistic anarchy by producing a wide range of language varieties that virtually

¹¹³ Katerina Zacharia, "Introduction" in *Hellenisms: Culture, Identity and Ethnicity from Antiquity to Modernity*, ed. Katerina Zacharia (Burlington VT: Ashgate Publishing House, 2008), 11.

excluded the Demotic-speaking masses.¹¹⁴ Aligning himself with the Demotic faction, Noli began a close collaboration with Dimitrios Tangopoulos (1867-1926), a Greek-Albanian (*Arvanites*) from the island of Hydra and founding editor of *O Noumas*, a periodical (1903-1931), which played a leading role in the campaign for the demotic language.¹¹⁵ In *O Noumas* he found receptive collaborators even for the Albanian language. It was at this time that he wrote and staged several plays such as *το ξύπνημα* (*To Ksipnima/The Awakening*) and *Israelites and Philistines*, which dealt with issues of social justice and where the author explores the struggle between reason and passion, the dichotomy of good v. evil and, more abstractly, the love for one's birthplace.

Noli's career in the Greek theater came to an end in 1903 in Alexandria, Egypt. Jobless, he responded to a newspaper advertisement and was able to find employment as a *psaltis* (cantor of psalms) at an Orthodox Church in Shibin al-Kum headed by Nilo Petridis an amiable Aegean Greek prelate. It was during this time that Noli became active on the Albanian question. His encounters with literary Albanian started in the mid-1890s during one of his summer breaks from high school when a family member handed to him Konstantin Kristoforidhi's Albanian translation of the Orthodox New Testament. In contrast to İbriktepe and Athens where there were no libraries or cultural centers to pursue reading in the Albanian language, Shibin al-Kum offered plenty of opportunities. Initially, Noli had avoided Albanian émigré circles in Egypt even though he knew personally many Albanians there. In his biography, Jorgaqi suggests that the taciturn Noli did not participate in nationalist

¹¹⁴ Antonis Liakos, "Hellenism and the Making of Modern Greece: Time, Language, Space" in *Ibid.*, 224.

¹¹⁵ Jorgaqi, *Fan Noli*, 108.

debates and was able to navigate his identity across Albanian and Greek national lines, without antagonizing either one.¹¹⁶ Still known mostly as a Greek from Thrace, a personal friend of Father Petridis and an inspirational psalter, he endeavored to remain immune from the dominant Pan-Hellenic rhetoric in Shibin al-Kum. Yet when pressured, he openly declared an Albanian identity after which his Greek circle shunned him.¹¹⁷ Noli, however, soon became acquainted with Spiro Dine and Thimi Mitko, two veteran activists, who, recognizing his great potential, took the twenty-two year old under their wing.¹¹⁸ Dine and Mitko opened up their homes and the private libraries to Noli who, proceeded to read virtually everything that had been published in Albanian since 1878.

Influenced by Dine and Mitko, Noli attacked the Greek nationalists and wrote scathing articles criticizing the hypocrisy and emptiness of Pan-Hellenism. On one occasion, he noted how “Greece could not protect its own kind during the war [of 1897], and yet it pretends to liberate the Albanians from the ‘Turkish’ yoke!”¹¹⁹ Such pronouncements by a “Greek” priest caused such public outcry that Noli was forced to quit Shibin al-Kum and travel to Faiyum where he linked up with Athanas Tashko and Jani Vruho, arguably the two most active members of Albanian associational life in Egypt.

As Dine and Mitko before, Tashko and Vruho quickly recognized in Noli an original and aggressive intellectual thinker who could bridge the gap between the often-illiterate Orthodox immigrants that still thought in parochial terms and

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 110-120.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 120.

¹¹⁸ Jorgaqi, *Fan Noli*, 118. See also Skëndi, *National Awakening*, 175.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

twentieth-century cultural and political activism. Accordingly, they immediately made available to him their resources, printing presses, libraries and social networks. Through Vruho, Noli became acquainted with Shahin bey Kolonja, the Muslim-born editor-in-chief of the periodical *Drita* in Sofia, Bulgaria who encouraged the young man to become the new voice of the Albanian Orthodox activism opposing the culturally dominant Greek press. Within a year, Noli had become an indispensable contributor of the Albanian publications in Egypt, Bulgaria and in Greece – where he continued his contacts and collaboration with *O Noumas*. He published widely and in a variety of topics contradicting Greek perceptions of Rum Orthodox Albanians as ethnic Greeks, opposing on theological grounds the anathemizing of Albanian letters, the excommunication of Albanian activist Orthodox priests by the Patriarchate, and exposing the extrajudicial raids and gratuitous killings of Greek nationalist bands in the vilayets of Yanya and Monastir.¹²⁰

By 1906, following new immigration patterns, Albanian networks had expanded across the Atlantic into the United States. The first informal organization was the short-lived *Pellazg*, an association organized in 1904 by Petro Nini Luarasi (1864-1911), a former editor of “*Drita*” in Sofia, Bulgaria. Following the demise of *Pellazg*, Luarasi organized in Jamestown, New York, in early 1906 Albanian immigrants into the association *Malli i Mëmëdheut* (The Longing of the Motherland). *Malli* too, suffered from lack of coordination and organizational talents and thus could not bring its influence to bear on Albanian immigrants. When two Orthodox associational members Vani Vangjeli and Vani Karameto, respectively the vice-

¹²⁰ Ibid., 129.

chairman and secretary of the association, asked Tashko and Vruho in Egypt for help, their answer was to send Noli to the United States.¹²¹

Shortly before his departure for the United States, Noli became acquainted with Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, a text that defined his revolutionary character as it unfolded in his subsequent associational and political activities until 1930. Enthralled by Zarathustra's speeches, Noli held Nietzsche's *Übermensch* to be the ultimate affirmation of human naked free will and potential in its natural state unfettered by any and all institutional shackles imposed historically on human beings. For Noli, the *Übermensch* had at the same time ontological, functional and ethical values, which underpinned by the universal humanity of all human beings alike, provided a blueprint for what they could and should aspire to achieve within a lifetime. Noli accepted that naked human ambition had its limitations but rejecting at the very least their private nihilism, underpinned by inherited parochialisms and narrow understanding of life's goals, human beings accepted *a priori* that any established social values were learned constructs, which, once challenged and then accepted as such, opened the door for a new reality, first privately constructed and then publicly accepted by all. In doing so, all human beings became masters of their own fate and creators of a new existence; in other words each man became a living God. In accepting the *Übermensch* as the foundation of future existence, Noli was moving dangerously close to a blasphemous conception of life, a curious choice for the future Orthodox bishop and someone who, hitherto, had placed great value on Christian humility and moral justice. Yet, as we shall see below, Albanian immigrant experiences in the United States and his political role in interwar

¹²¹ Ibid., 130.

Albania until 1930 reinforced in practice what he had taken from Nietzsche in theory. In time, Noli's Nietzschean *Weltanschauung* led to the adoption of a pantheon of personal heroes, among whom the most influential included, Jesus Christ, Napoleon Bonaparte, Ludwig van Beethoven and the fifteenth-century Albanian nobleman Gjergj Kastrioti-Skanderbeg, whom Noli helped elevate to the status of a modern national hero.¹²²

Noli landed on Ellis Island, New York, on 31 May 1906.¹²³ On 3 June he traveled to Buffalo, New York where he estimated that of 200-300 Albanians, only fifty were engaged, at varying degrees, in associational life. *Malli* did not have an associational treasury and could not afford to pay Noli a retainer and keep him on its payroll. In addition, Noli appears to have undergone a significant cultural shock. If in the Balkans and in Egypt he was an intellectual of note, his general and unspecialized education in the United States was virtually irrelevant. Since he could not rely on wealthy patrons or associational funds for his upkeep, as he had done in Egypt, he was forced to find work with a logging factory in Buffalo.¹²⁴ Soon, as we shall see, he would do much more.

Albanian associational life in the United States received another lifeline at the time with the arrival of Sotir Peçi (1873-1932) the son of a wealthy merchant from Korçë and Noli's fellow alumnus of the National University in Athens, where he had

¹²² If Noli embodied his Christianity by wearing the cloth of a Bishop he went on to author significant theological treaties and laic works of the men who he held to have embody the Nietzschean ideal. See for an example his *Beethoven and the French Revolution* (New York: International Universities Press, 1947); *George Castrioti Skanderbeg, 1405-1468* (New York: International Universities Press, 1947). He also went on to translate into Albanian an impressively large compendium of classic and contemporary European and American works by Cervantes, Shakespeare, Ibsen, Baudelaire, William Knox, Longfellow, E.A. Poe, Blasco Ibáñez and more.

¹²³ "Noli to Tashko," New York, 1 June 1906, AQSh, F. 9, D. 20, Fl. 5.

¹²⁴ "Noli to Tashko," Jamestown, 9 July 1906, AQSh, F. 9, D. 20 Fl. 9.

majored in chemistry. Having gotten his start in Bucharest, Romania, in 1905 Peçi settled in Boston, Massachusetts. There he formed an association, *Shoqëria Patriotike e Dardhës* (The Patriotic Society of Dardha) with Albanian and Aromanian immigrants. In June 1906 he began the publication of an Albanian-English newspaper, *Kombi* (The Nation) and in late July he hired Noli to serve as a second editor. On the way to Boston, Noli managed to raise about \$700 from the Albanians and Aromanians of Buffalo, Jamestown and New York City, but by and large he found the immigrants divided by “petty egoisms,” deeply religious and worn-down by their daily troubles.¹²⁵ When he met with a local Albanian “who spoke Greek better than Albanian and was a bit of an atheist,” Noli produced from his luggage Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* and exclaimed “Aren’t you ashamed of collecting money for the church? ... Why not buy bombs and dynamite so that we can blow up those who until now have kept us blind and in ignorance? Courage now, Long Live Nietzsche!”¹²⁶

By Noli’s estimation there were 280 Orthodox Albanians/Aromanians in Southbridge, 250 in Worcester, 30 in Webster, 50 in New Grosvenor Dale and 35 in New Boston, Connecticut, and a Muslim community in Biddeford, Maine, from whom he managed to enroll only five subscribers for the new *Kombi* newspaper.¹²⁷ In a moment of honesty, which he usually shared only with Tashko, he vented his frustration about the “indifference” of the Albanians whose only virtue was the pursuit of money and whose “historical bravery” and “chivalry” was bought and sold for the right price. “We are a nation of mercenaries,” he wrote to Tashko, pointing out

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ “Noli to Tashko,” 23 July 1906,” Boston, AQSh, F. 9, D. 20, Fl. 11.

¹²⁷ “Noli to Tashko,” 14 August 1906, Boston, AQSh, F. 9, D. 20, Fl. 17

that the task assigned to him was pointless, thankless and futile.¹²⁸ In assuming that all Albanians would share his zeal and purpose to the degree that he did, Noli had courted failure. He had far more success in pursuing the small proprietors, especially the coffee shop owners in whose places of business in and around Boston's Park Square, Albanian immigrants congregated and participated in discussions of news about their homeland.

The turning point came in late November 1906 when a Greek nationalist band in Salonica assassinated Spiro Kosturi, a young Albanian trader from Korçë and local activist. The murder was in retaliation for the slaying of Bishop Photios, the Greek prelate of Korçë (22 September 1906) by an Albanian band led by Bajo Topulli, a former Ottoman-Albanian schoolteacher. Topulli had in turn assassinated Photios in response to the murder of Papa Kristo Negovani (1875-1905), a thirty-year-old Albanian Orthodox priest who had defied the Patriarchate of Istanbul by teaching the Divine Liturgy in Albanian and by publishing religious texts in the Istanbul alphabet. Kosturi's death caused an enormous uproar that reverberated across the Atlantic. In Boston, Noli, Petro Nini Luarasi and Sotir Peçi organized in December a mock funeral to honor the deceased, which was attended, according to Jorgaqi, by over 500 Albanians of all faiths. The funeral oratory was led by the Bishop of the Orthodox Syrian church in Worcester and attended by Noli as a cantor psaltis. Noli seized the opportunity to speak to the attendees about the need for Albanian-language print materials, schools and the like.¹²⁹ So impressed were the Albanians by Noli's oratory

¹²⁸ "Noli to Tashko," 26 September 1906, Boston, AQSh, F. 9, D. 20, Fl. 18-20.

¹²⁹ Jorgaqi, *Fan Noli*, 167.

that subsequently subscriptions to *Kombi* skyrocketed.¹³⁰ After finally securing sufficient support from the immigrants, the society *Besa-Besë* of New England [henceforth *Besa*] was formed in Boston in January 1907 and led by the twenty-five year old Noli. *Besa* conformed in essence to the principles set before by other Albanian associations elsewhere in Romania and Egypt. In its statute, it shunned involvement in politics and affirmed its purpose to be solely a cultural and emancipatory one.¹³¹ Provided that members abided by its regulations and supported Albanian educational program, *Besa* opened up its ranks to Albanians and non-Albanians alike without differences of nationality, regional particularisms, gender or faith. Membership constituted of two classes, active voting members who paid \$1.00 every three months (\$25 in 2013) and honorary non-voting members chosen amongst those individuals who helped the society morally or materially, but who otherwise did not wish to join formally. Honorary members however did have the choice to become active members if they so wished. The society paid no salaries and its treasury was reserved only for associational expenses.

Besa's success is rightly attributed to Noli's oratory, his restless and often-hyperactive energy, his capacity for travel and organizational abilities, skills that he had learned from Athanas Tashko but also derived in equal measure from his own

¹³⁰ Jorgaqi mentions 3,000 subscribers but this number appears to be exceedingly high considering the reportedly lax attitudes of the Albanians and, their relative low numbers at the time. Noli, himself, had a penchant for panegyrics and inflating the importance of real-time events, especially his own. Thus, among other such statements, when he first landed in Boston, he writes to Tashko that he was received as a *Messiah*, an unlikely expectation considering his initial fundraising failures and the fact that he was, at least up until he became the editor of *Kombi* relatively unknown in Albanian-American immigrant circles. On the other hand, if the low numbers of Albanians mentioned by Noli are accurate than the \$700 he collected on the way to Boston constitute a sizeable sum for the time, about \$17,800 in 2013.

¹³¹ "Constitution and Bylaws of the Albanian Society 'Besa-Besë'" [January] 1907, Boston, AQSh, F. 100, D. 1, Fl. 3-4.

itinerant experiences with the theater companies in Greece. Within five months he conducted a door-to-door fundraising campaign, gathering voluntary contributions throughout the Northeastern United States and later as far west as Cleveland, Ohio.¹³² The message remained broadly the same. Albanians needed to become cultured and emancipated just like any other modern nation, but how could this be achieved if the Albanians continued to recognize the preeminence of the Patriarchate's high culture and deny the obvious fact that the Albanian vernacular, too, can be written in its own script? By extension, even the Holy Scriptures could be written, preached and interpreted in Albanian just as the sacraments could also be passed in the same language. Extolling the highest virtues of the Albanians, hospitality, bravery, uprightness etc., struck a cord with its audience, but Noli himself remained highly critical of the Albanians' capacity for social organization. To Tashko, he continued to call them "a herd" of "indigent," "good-for-nothing country bumpkins" and despaired of the marginal monetary returns that he managed to secure.¹³³ Even Luarasi and Peçi did not escape Noli's criticism and were accused of being lazy and failing to fulfill Nietzsche's ideal of true human potential.¹³⁴ Indeed, at this time, prompted partly by the obvious apathy of the Albanian-Americans and partly because of his self-ascribed Nietzschean vision, Noli had an ironic, if not megalomaniac, sense of self. "I am God's chosen son," he blasphemed tongue-in-cheek in a lengthy letter to Tashko on 6 June 1908:

... Because my mother told me [so] that the night before she gave birth to My Holiness, the Honor of Albanianism, she had a terrible birth that she gave birth to five children at the same time. Then I told her that she had better

¹³² "Noli to Tashko," Boston, 9 January 1907/14 March AQSh, F. 9, D. 20, Fl. 22, 25.

¹³³ "Noli to Tashko," Boston, 2 March 1907, AQSh, F. 9, D. 20, Fl. 23-24.

¹³⁴ "Noli to Tashko," Natick, 20 May 1907, AQSh, F. 9, D. 20, Fl. 27.

given birth to an entire army. Here [in Boston] stands the commander of that army, ready to order His soldiers to saddle their horses and take on to the battlefield.¹³⁵

Noli's invective against his countrymen gradually grew more acerbic and, as he arrogantly admitted to Tashko, "only I understand these matters... I am Albania... [Only] I believe in an Albanian God, but [He] is mine alone [for] I am He."¹³⁶ In a bid to expand the visibility of *Besa* into the larger world of Albanian associations, Noli continued to publish in the associational printing presses of Greece, Egypt and Bulgaria and appeal to the better-established Albanian associations for funds and material help.

A further turning point came on 25 August 1907 when an Albanian Orthodox youth, Kristaq Dëshnica died in Worcester. Because Dëshnica had refused membership in the Greek-speaking flock during his short life, the Greek Orthodox clergy refused to bury him. The clergy's refusal to administer the last rites of the deceased according to custom incensed the Albanian Orthodox community of the Middlesex and Suffolk counties in Massachusetts, and crowds of believers from Hudson, Natick, Boston and Marlborough protested energetically. The Antiochian St. George Cathedral, too, refused to bury Dëshnica. *Besa* and Noli then approached Platon Rozhdestvensky, the primate of the Russian Metropolia in the United States who had recently arrived (5 September 1907) to occupy his position in the American diocese in New York. Throughout December, Platon and his envoy, Father Grigoriev, conducted multiple talks with *Besa* and launched a fact-finding mission purporting to honor the wishes of the Albanian community. Finding near unanimous consensus, on

¹³⁵ "Noli to Tashko," Boston, 6 June 1908, AQSh, F. 9, D. 20, Fl. 41.

¹³⁶ Quoted in Jorgaqi, *Noli*, 152.

3 January 1908, a decision was reached to establish Albanian parallel ecclesiastical structures, under the auspices of the Russian Metropolia.¹³⁷ On 9 February 1908, the 26-year-old Noli became a deacon and on 8 March he was ordained as a priest by the Russian Primate. *Kombi* hailed the decision as God-sent and Noli was praised in the associational presses in the United States, North Africa and Europe as “a great apostle sent meteor-like to the Albanians by Christ,” “a spring nightingale singing mass in Albanian,” and as “as the first Albanian priest since the fall of man.”¹³⁸

Noli himself took a more functional view. For him, the cassock of the priest was the first step toward the achievement of his private struggle to fulfill the Nietzschean vision of the *Übermensch*, one that would eventually lead the masses into enlightenment. Unlike the Christian martyrs of old who went gladly and selflessly to the cross, or to the stake, for the sake of bringing “civilization” to pagans, Noli regarded the cloth as a means to emancipate and educate “the grocers, the butchers, and gasbags” of the nation – men who knew nothing and understood nothing. For him, this chattering, barking mob, which was just as likely to “bite” his reverend hand as to kiss it, was now his flock, a flock that needed to be “tethered” behind the church. Noli asked Tashko to conduct a fundraising campaign in Egypt and use his connections to mobilize the diaspora so as to secure the means to translate, publish and disseminate the canons of the Church in Albanian. Nonetheless, Noli was satisfied to see that his flock grew with each sermon and like “Noah’s Arc,”

¹³⁷ Jorgaqi, *Fan Noli*, 192-193.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 193, 197.

it contained Orthodox Albanians, “Grecomans,” Aromanians and even curious Albanian Muslims.¹³⁹

The death of Dëshnica and the subsequent investiture of Noli radically transformed Albanian associational life in the United States. At the turn of 1912, as we shall see below, no less than ten other societies were formed and in April four of these consolidated and formed the Pan-Albanian Association “*Vatra*” (Hearth). In time, *Vatra* became the most important Albanian émigré association, rivaling and even surpassing *Bashkimi* of Bucharest.¹⁴⁰

Informal Associations in the Four Ottoman Vilayets

If the growth and expansion of voluntary associations met with considerable success in émigré centers, this process was considerably more difficult in the Albanian-inhabited Ottoman provinces. Following the demise of the League of Prizren as a parallel institution representing Albanians within the vilayets of Kosova, İşkodra, Monastir and Yanya, the Hamidian regime state reneged on the Tanzimat principles of popular assembly and forbade all manifestations of political and legal representation. Under these circumstances it was impossible for the Albanians to organize associations within the empire. This, in turn, had caused the focus for such activities to shift outside Ottoman borders. For their part, émigré associations never lost sight of their primary goals, which were printing Albanian-language books and textbooks, financing the opening of schools and lastly preparing responsible teachers

¹³⁹ “Noli to Tashko,” Boston, 6 June 1908, AQSh, F. 9, D. 20, Fl. 42.

¹⁴⁰ “Memoirs of Kristo Flloqi on the Foundation of the Pan-Albanian Society ‘*Vatra*,’” 1928, AQSh, F. 100, D. 40, Fl. 1-9.

for public service in these schools. Until the eve of the Young Turk revolution in 1908, to be discussed in Chapter 2, the associations in Egypt were weak, numerically insignificant and prone to factionalism, and those in the United States exceedingly lethargic and too far away; it fell to the associations in Romania and Bulgaria as the oldest and most prestigious organizations to carry the torch of cultural activities. From the late-1880s onward *Dituria*, *Drita* and after 1906, *Bashkimi* of Bucharest began to send books to “Albania” and fund local efforts for the erection of schools or informal holding of instruction in Albanian in private homes. The greatest impact was felt primarily in the vilayet of Monastir, somewhat less in the vilayet of Yanya but it was negligible, if indeed it existed at all, in Kosova and İşkodra.

In the early twentieth century, Albanian demands fell into three categories: first, responsible administration in the provinces, second, border security and protection of local communities from Greek, Bulgarian and Serbian nationalist bands and third, reform of the millet system along national rather than religious lines. The need was greater in the vilayets of Monastir and Yanya rather than in İşkodra and Kosovo. In particular, the vilayet of Monastir became the focal point for much of the social activism. At the turn of the twentieth century this vilayet had become a hotbed of insurrectionary activities fueling the competition of Bulgaria, Greece and to a lesser extent Serbia over the province’s diverse ethnic and religious composition. The Macedonian question, as it came to be known, was largely fought over the national identity of the Macedonian Slav population, but this competition left no space for Albanian representation. There was, in addition, a concern with continuous official maladministration that gradually exacerbated the relationship between local

authorities and the society. According to Avlonyalı Süreyya bey (Syrja bey Vlora), brother of Grand Vizier Avlonyalı Ferid Pasha (served 1903-1908), who went on to serve as the Ottoman General Director of Customs, municipal income from taxes in the vilayets of Monastir and Yanya was minimal. After covering the expenses, salaries of travelling tax collectors and lining the pockets of influential officials, little was left to spend on investments and social projects in these areas. For Albanian-born, well-connected civil administrators like Avlonyalı Süreyya bey, lack of substantive investments in the Albanian provinces and the absence of general progress directly contributed to the erosion of society's trust in the government.¹⁴¹ Perennially out of pocket, the Ottoman inability to remain financially solvent meant that it was unable to project its authority effectively. Similarly, the absence of a wider tax base on an already overly taxed population meant that disaffection and popular unrest were sure to follow.

From the Albanian perspective, a particularly neuralgic point was the inability of the state to fund educational programs, find suitable buildings for schools, supply school materials and train and pay teachers. *Bashkimi* of Bucharest was quick to exploit the opportunity and doubled its efforts to send books printed in the Istanbul alphabet, money and also teachers who had received training in associational schools, such as for example the short-lived Pedagogical School in Bucharest. Printed texts sent from Romania and Bulgaria consisted mostly of mathematics, physics, geography, cosmography, Albanian, Ottoman and European history, social sciences and civics, collections of Bektashi, Sunni and Christian literature by Albanian,

¹⁴¹ Syrja Vlora, *Kujtime: Nga Fundi i Sundimit Osman në Luftën e Vlorës*, Marenglen Verli and Ledia Dushku eds. (Tiranë: "ICEBERG" Publishing House, 2013), 29-31.

Ottoman and European writers and the like.¹⁴² These efforts apparently met with considerable success since, at the turn of the twentieth century, Faik Konica – on whom more later – estimated that the Albanians in Monastir possessed the highest literacy rates across the occupational, social and religious spectrums, the largest number of schools and the highest public interest in Albanian education of all the other three vilayets where Albanians lived.¹⁴³ These relatively high levels of public awareness made it possible for the Orthodox Albanians to form groups on the basis of already existing networks of family and like-minded individuals, which in turn facilitated the emergence of informal cultural clubs and associations as well as Albanian-Aromanian commercial companies.¹⁴⁴

Yet, as important as the émigré connection was to the growth of the Albanian national rhetoric, the empire’s Albanian territories were also developing a separate dynamic of their own. First, taking advantage of the organization of Roman Catholics into a separate millet in 1830, two Catholic associations were formed in İşkodra, far west of the vilayet of Monastir, at the turn of the twentieth century. Under Austrian and Italian patronage, in 1899 the Franciscan abbot of Mirditë, Father Preng Doçi (1846-1917), formed with fellow clerics the *Bashkimi* association, which then took up the publication of Albanian literature in the traditional Latin alphabet that had been used by the local Roman Catholic clergy and missionaries since the sixteenth century.

This *Bashkimi* alphabet made extensive use of diagraphs by adding “h” to form new

¹⁴² “Requests from USA, Russia, Albania etc. to *Bashkimi* in Romania,” AQSh, F. 99, D. 170, Fl. 1-27.

¹⁴³ Faik Konica quoted in Skëndi, *Albanian National Awakening*, 144. See also, Bejtullah Destani ed. *Faik Konica: Selected Correspondence, 1896-1942* (London: The Centre for Albanian Studies, 2000), 144-173

¹⁴⁴ See for an example “Statute of the Beneficent Association Drenova,” Bucharest, March 1894, AQSh, F. 99, D. 277, Fl., 1-9; “Statute of the Association of the Boboshtica Brothers of Macedonia,” Bucharest, AQSh, F. 99, D. 280, Fl. 1-19; “Income and Expenses of the Association of the Boboshtica Brothers’ of Macedonia,” Bucharest, AQSh, F. 99, D. 281, Fl., 1-6.

compound letters such as “th,” “dh,” “sh.” In 1901, another clerical society, *Agimi* (Dawn) was formed by the Jesuits of İşkodra. Under the leadership of Dom (i.e. *Domine*) Ndre Mjeda (1866-1937), the *Agimi* alphabet utilized diacritics instead of *Bashkimi*'s diagraphs or the original Greek and Cyrillic concoctions present in the Istanbul alphabet.¹⁴⁵ Culturally significant, these organizations, discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, did not develop the kind of sprawling networks that characterized the émigré Orthodox associations and, as we shall see below, the Muslim informal associations within the larger Young Turk activism.

Second, in the vilayet of Monastir, *Bashkimi* of Bucharest found out quickly that it could expand its reach beyond family ties by tapping into existing informal operational networks of the Ottoman Hamidian opposition, which consisted of Muslim Albanians. For a start, *Bashkimi* forged a working relationship with the Balkan network of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), a Young Turk organization originally founded in 1889 as a student organization at the Royal Medical Academy. It espoused western notions of anti-clericalism, positivism, scientism and materialism, becoming the main source of opposition to the Hamidian regime. Initially, Albanian émigré associations did not actively seek out such collaboration. Yet, by the mid 1890s, Albanian members of the CUP, seeking to avoid arrest by the Hamidian police, established important links with émigré organizations. It was precisely to escape arrest that the Albanian Ibrahim Temo, one of the co-founders of the CUP and a staunch positivist, fled to Bucharest on 1

¹⁴⁵ For Doçi's political career see Skëndi, *Albanian National Awakening*, 170-173, 275-276; Frances Trix argues that the *Agimi* alphabet was influenced by the Croatian language reform. See Trix, *Stamboul Alphabet*, 265.

November 1895.¹⁴⁶ Often described as the driving force behind the creation of the CUP, once in Romania, Temo established a close collaboration with the Albanian networks, which from a logistical standpoint made perfect sense. On the one hand, the influence and the geographic spread of Albanian networks greatly aided Temo in setting up various CUP branches in Romania and Bulgaria. For their part, the associations utilized Temo's CUP networks in the Balkans, to distribute books and other printed materials.¹⁴⁷ This collaboration increased with the passage of time and after the establishment of *Bashkimi* in 1906, Temo regularly appears listed in the leadership committee of the association's branch in Constanța.¹⁴⁸

On the other hand, and perhaps more importantly, the CUP's ideological worldview of building a new and rational future society on secular and scientific grounds necessarily implied safeguarding the natural rights of Ottoman citizens. Yet, as many Albanian Young Turks observed, the reforms had stalled and the current Ottoman legal system reflected neither popular aspirations nor the reality of the time. The state, the Albanians charged, freely extended civil rights and privileges to its citizens, but, inexplicably, it also routinely withheld recognition of natural rights to its constituent peoples. Citing the case of the Bulgarians, Greeks, Serbs etc., who, on this basis enjoyed the right of political representation as national groups, the Albanians complained that their natural rights continued to be recognized on the basis of *millet* tradition, which at the turn of the twentieth century had clearly become an archaic and even counterproductive institution. By awarding such rights to those who sought to

¹⁴⁶ M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) 89.

¹⁴⁷ For Temo's activities see, *Ibid.* 122-24, 165.

¹⁴⁸ "Bashkimi of Constanța to Headquarters in Bucharest," Constanța, 30 January 1907, AQSh, F. 99, D. 124, Fl. 1.

undermine the empire and denying them to their loyal subjects the government was subverting the authority of the law and undermining public confidence in the state itself.

In 1899, a group of Albanian Young Turks in Bucharest, amongst them noted CUP personalities, Ibrahim Temo, Dervish Hima and Jashar Erebara, articulated jointly with *Dituria*'s leadership a four-point program. It called for the formation of a single vilayet for all Albanians, the reintroduction of the Tanzimat reforms, the introduction of the Albanian language in state schools as per the 1879 firman and the repatriation of Albanian activists exiled by the government because of their cultural activities.¹⁴⁹ Since there was little chance that the government would consider these demands, by the late 1890s, CUP branches in Albanian-inhabited territories promptly sprang up in Durrës (Dıraç), Tiranë, Monastir, Salonica, Skopje, Ohrid, Resen, Grevena, Margariti, Paramithia, and Filiates and beyond.¹⁵⁰ The geographical distribution of these CUP branches closely resembled the Albanian associations' own logistical base. Except for Durrës and Tiranë in the vilayet of İşkodra, the rest were located in the vilayets of Monastir and Yanya, areas most threatened by Bulgarian, Macedonian and Greek nationalist bands.

A second link was provided by employees of the Ottoman administration in these localities, particularly by schoolteachers and administrative clerks. One particularly illuminating case was that of Bajram (Bajo) Topulli whose actions would reverberate across the Atlantic in the formation of the *Besa* association by Noli in Boston. Born in 1869 in Gjirokastër (Ergiri), Topulli was by profession a

¹⁴⁹ "The Legal Right of the Albanians," Bucharest, 22 July 1899, AQSh, F. 99, D. 35, Fl. 2-4.

¹⁵⁰ Clayer, *Nacionalizmi Shqiptar*, 343-346.

schoolteacher of chemistry and cosmography in the government gymnasiums of Trabzon and Salonica. In the early 1900s he was appointed to serve as the Acting Director of the gymnasium in Monastir. As many other Albanians, he had early on propagated the inclusion of the Albanian language in government schools but until 1905 had taken no active measures that might necessarily point toward nationalist radicalization. Yet following the death of the Orthodox cleric Kristo Negovani in February 1905, he promptly resigned his post and with two of his students formed an armed band, which retaliated against Greek activities by killing the Greek Metropolitan of Korçë, Photios. Even before Negovani's assassination, Photios's Pan-Hellenic proclivities and his insistence that all in the Ottoman *Rum Millet* possessed an essentially Greek nationality had made him a hated figure among the Albanian-, Vlach-, and Slav-Orthodox.¹⁵¹

During the months that followed, Topulli appealed to other like-minded individuals in Monastir. With Halit Bërzhita, a colonel in charge of the pharmaceutical department with the Ottoman Third Army; Fehim Zavalani, a landowner; Sejfi Vllamasi, a veterinarian, Gjergj Qiriazi, a Protestant and interpreter of the local Habsburg consulate, and Jashar Bitincka, a fellow teacher, they formed in November 1905 the so-called Committee for the Liberation of Albania (henceforth CLA).¹⁵² The program of the CLA expanded the list of demands above to include in addition the recognition of Albanian as an official language alongside Ottoman Turkish in provincial administration, the appointment of Albanian-born civil servants

¹⁵¹ "Call of the National Defense Committee on the Occasion of the Assassination of Metropolitan Photios," Undated, AQSh, F. 102, D. 21, Fl. 1-4. See also Somel, *Modernization of the Public Education*, 73, 116.

¹⁵² Prifti et al., *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, 317; Clayer, *Nacionalizmi Shqiptar*, 511.

in official posts and the stationing of Albanian army recruits exclusively in the European provinces of the empire, rather than seeing them deployed to the Asian provinces.

The formation of the CLA's, CUP branches and their alliance with émigré associations coincided with a wave of popular discontent stretching from the Albanian highlands of Kurbin below İşkodra into the plains of Kosovo. Although the majority were Muslims, Catholic highlanders featured equally prominently. The insurrectionists protested against tax increases on cattle and livestock, the right to bear arms, the tithe, on the maintenance of government schools with locally raised funds, compulsory military service and the like. Initially peaceful, the discontent soon gained momentum and was further radicalized by the intransigence of local authorities. The dispatch of military units to force the populace's compliance with the new taxes spilled over into a massive, though local and disjointed series of uprisings. At the same time, the highhandedness of the public officials encouraged cooperation between Christian and Muslim peasants, who, at any rate, were similarly affected by the new taxes. Albanian historians have been too quick to see an interconnected chain of events and have reached the "logical" conclusion that, in tandem, these represented an ideological and armed struggle against their "Turkish" [sic] overlords.¹⁵³ In reality, as Shahin Kolonja, the leader of the *Drita* association in Sofia, revealed to a Habsburg consul in 1906, the CLA was a local reaction by social activists seeking to affirm an Albanian national consciousness specifically in those contested locales where Greek activities, by both the Patriarchate and the Greek state-sponsored

¹⁵³ Prifti et al., *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, 317-327.

nationalist bands, were nearing “epidemic” proportions.¹⁵⁴ By the start of 1906 CLA branches were formed throughout the vilayet of Monastir but also in Kosova and Yanya. As with the League of Prizren, the CLA was not a vertically structured organization, rather, loose proto-revolutionary political alignments of aggrieved local interests reinforced by units of territorial defense opposing Greek and Slavic band incursions into Monastir and Yanya.

It was at this time that the associations, which were initially slow to realize the magnitude or even the potential value of the uprisings, first made contact with the CLAs. In April 1906, Bajo Topulli approached Shahin Kolonja and received printed materials, which were then distributed across the length and breadth of the territory in the Yanya and Monastir vilayets. In the first half of 1907, Topulli struck a similar relationship and signed a formal collaboration agreement with *Bashkimi* of Bucharest.¹⁵⁵ It was also at this time, that a founding member of *Bashkimi* of Bucharest, Mihal Grameno, was attached to the band of Topulli’s brother and former student at the Salonica state gymnasium, Çerçiz Topulli, leader of the Ergiri branch and arguably one of the most active CLA branches. Grameno’s task was not strictly that of a fighter though he did actively participate in virtually all armed encounters of the band. Similar to the role of Second World War political commissars, Grameno acted as a cultural agent in charge of ideological preparation of band members but also explaining to illiterate peasants the value of education in the Albanian vernacular as sponsored by the associations. Yet, as far as it can be determined, this was an isolated example when intellectuals became attached to what became known as

¹⁵⁴ See Clayer, *Nacionalizmi Shqiptar*, 511.

¹⁵⁵ “Declaration of the Committee for the Liberation of Albania,” Bucharest, 5 May 1907, AQSh, F. 99, D. 135, Fl. 1.

kaçak, or fighting units. Most *kaçak* leaders were local notables operating small bands of up to twenty men each. Most bands had fewer. Sometimes the *kaçak* leader, if he had a formal schooling background, served himself as a political leader as in the case of Fehim Zavalani, the veterinary doctor co-founder of the CLA and leader of a band operating in Kolonjë.¹⁵⁶ Sometime before 1908 Zavalani was, however, caught by the authorities and briefly exiled to Anatolia.

Alliances were soon struck between the associations, the CLA and CUP Balkan branches. Yet these alliances were at best informal since no one could ever be sure as to where local loyalties really lay. Recent work by Isa Blumi and Nathalie Clayer has called into question the existence of exclusivist political programs and emphasized instead the fluidity of identities in the late Ottoman Empire. The complexities of the Ottoman anti-Hamidian movement required the collaboration of all interest groups that opposed the personal rule of Abdülhamit II and social networks expanded to the degree that included various ethnic and religious groups as diverse as the empire itself.¹⁵⁷ Yet some ethnic groups were more “important” than others. In contrast to the generally weaker Greek, Macedonian-Slav, Serbian and Bulgarian organizations, which were often plagued by internecine competition were, and at any rate susceptible to outside influences by Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria, the social and political influence of the Albanians in the existing Ottoman framework was considerable. As Hanioglu has shown, the Albanians were well connected in the imperial bureaucracy. They also made up a considerable proportion of the empire’s Muslim population in the European provinces and they were the only ethnolinguistic

¹⁵⁶ Akademia e Shkencave, *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, 321; Clayer, *Nacionalizmi Shqiptar*, 509-510.

¹⁵⁷ Isa Blumi, *Reinstating the Ottomans*, Introduction. See also, Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902-1908* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) 229.

block within the empire that had neither what Rogers Brubaker has called an “external homeland” nor an international patron that might exercise influence on their behalf.¹⁵⁸ So important were the Albanian networks to its revolutionary agenda that the CUP leadership was unwilling to contemplate collaboration with other bands, such as for instance, the Serbian *četniks*, lest it “offended” and thus alienated the Albanians.¹⁵⁹ Consequently, the CPU and the Albanian émigré associations, especially those in Romania, Bulgaria and, within the empire, the CLA, entered into frequent collaboration. Since the Albanians had also their own specific agenda, this was an uneasy alliance since the CUP did not accept *a priori* Albanian cultural programs, which it considered tantamount to separatism.¹⁶⁰ As we shall see in Chapter 3, in rejecting Albanian demands for constitutional rights and more that followed the revolution, the CPU sowed the seeds for future conflict.

Conclusion

Albanian associational life that developed after 1879 was a made possible by three factors: first, the Tanzimat promise for equality and justice, second, the threatened demise of the Ottoman Empire and third, the confinement of the political process to the patrimonial dynastic framework by Sultan Abdülhamit II. The political opposition that grew in emigration was almost exclusively a manifestation of Albanian Orthodox Christian energies and their financial muscle. These Orthodox social activists shed the high culture of the Greek-speaking *Rum Millet* and

¹⁵⁸ Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 229. Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 5, 111-112.

¹⁵⁹ Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 254.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 258.

consciously adopted a vernacular Albanian identity. This cultural homogeneity did not lend itself to a centralized associational life. What ensued was as hybrid and as decentralized as Albanian society itself. Centralization remained elusive and, despite growing contacts, no efforts were launched to consolidate them. In part this can be explained by the huge geographical and cultural space that divided these émigré centers but also by the fact that, though operating on behalf of an Albanian “electorate,” they were nonetheless physically separated from it. In addition, although associational activism was initially conceived in the 1880s as a patriotic duty, by 1908 it had also become a mechanism exploited for the advancement of personal ambitions and prestige.

As a result, these new émigré centers developed independently and shared more contacts with local politics rather than with one another or with the Albanians in the Ottoman Empire. Influenced by already existing Central European patterns, in Romania, the associations were formal, wealthier, more structured and less decentralized. The creation of *Bashkimi*, an umbrella association encompassing several other smaller societies and clubs, created a model which all other associations elsewhere aspired to emulate. Indeed, as described above, Bucharest gradually became a sort of Mecca for all Albanian social activists elsewhere who constantly lobbied *Bashkimi* for financial and organizational assistance, books and other publications. In Egypt, as in Romania, the associations were a manifestation of middle-class values and aspirations but unlike Romania, the absence of sufficient emigrant numbers and the presence of a larger Greek-speaking population there prevented the manifestation of a professionalized bureaucratic apparatus. As a result,

these societies and clubs remained highly informal, decentralized and dependent on private funding from generous patrons rather than public finance. Consequently they were politically weaker. In the United States, as in Egypt and Romania, the associations were almost exclusively Orthodox Christian in character but in contrast to the other two the middle class was proportionally significantly less of a factor. Initially this working class character proved to be a handicap simply because there were fewer educated members. However, with growing emigrant numbers, the presence of an inspirational and dedicated leader (i.e. Fan Noli), and the great potential for public finance, soon, as we shall see in the two following chapters, associational life in the United States was able to offset all the disadvantages of not having erected a professionalized bureaucratic apparatus as in Romania. Indeed after 1915, *Vatra* rivaled and even surpassed *Bashkimi* as the political and financial center of the Albanian diaspora.

In the Ottoman Empire, associational activities continued to be as informal and as decentralized as they once were during the brief episode of the League of Prizren and loosely connected within the larger Young Turk Hamidian opposition. This was hardly surprising considering that Albanians in the Ottoman Empire were denied legal opportunities for assembly for creating national associations as elsewhere in Europe, North Africa and the United States. Yet, this group strengthened the earlier contacts established with the émigré associations, and Albanian Young Turks acted as a loose associational agency in distributing printed materials in their homeland.

Both these segments brought into Albanian national politics two different kinds of political and social experience. On the one hand, the émigré associations were liberal civic organizations, consciously modeling their operations, statutes and cultural/political objectives following the example of their liberal Central European equivalents. In their organization and internal administration the associations spearheaded the extensive use of representative democratic tools such as elections, balloting, checks and balances and in the process obtained important constitutional experience. Since their appearance in the early 1880s the associations, both formal and informal, espoused two main objectives: provide the Albanians with a written language and culture of their own and, at the same time, help through their extensive professional, kinship and family networks, introduce formal learning of Albanian as a language of instruction in the Ottoman public education system. More broadly, the associations also sought to establish a system of Western, European and American, values and cultural practices in the Albanian society both in immigration and in the Ottoman Empire by instilling uniform codes of modern values, civic duties and public morality. This was a daunting task, but one which social activists were confident to achieve in due time.

On the other hand, associational activities in the Albanian provinces assumed early on a conspiratorial and revolutionary impetus that developed within the Young Turk opposition to the Hamidian regime. Abdülhamit's efforts to reassert patrimonial control over the empire through authoritarian measures, his inability to provide security against Macedonian and Greek bands' intrusions in the Albanian provinces and the absence of social, economic and political improvements there, contributed to

the gradual emergence of more radical organizations in the form of the CLA. At no point, however, did any of these Albanian organizations advocate war and revolution to overthrow the state which they sought to reform. Instead, their aim was to obtain representation in a constitutional state by transforming the relationship of the administrative state with the provincial society, a process started by the Ottoman state itself when it made possible the growth of political space and institutional venues during the Tanzimat period. Virtually every segment of social activism introduced an element peculiar to it alone in the Albanian demands to the Ottoman state. Thus, the émigré associations sought language rights, schools and emancipation from the Patriarchate; Albanian-born Young Turks sought administrative decentralization and political pluralism; the CLAs sought protection of border communities from Greek and Bulgarian incursions and appointment of Albanian-born civil servants into provincial administration, and so on. Against the backdrop of ongoing peasant uprisings these demands produced the appearance of an Albanian ethnic nationalism. As we shall see in the next chapter, these initial stirrings represented the germination of a civil society that exploded after the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. With this we turn to the Young Turks' constitutional revolution and the brief but significant experiment with informal home rule.

Chapter 2: The Struggle for the State: From the Young Turk Revolution through the First World War, 1908 – 1918

This chapter turns to significant shifts in Albanian associational activities following the Young Turk Revolution in August 1908. It assesses the relationship between the Ottoman imperial state and society in the Albanian provinces during the second constitutional era. Conducted in the name of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity and Justice, the revolution that promised to replace the Hamidian regime with a constitutional monarchy founded upon the rule of law. The reinstatement of the constitution of 1876 gave rise to freedoms of press, religion, assembly, petitions and the formation of new cultural interest groups hitherto unprecedented in Ottoman history. As a result of these political changes the Albanian associational center of gravity shifted back home. It was no longer in Romania, Bulgaria, Egypt, or the United States but rather in the Ottoman Albanian provinces, where the city of Monastir (now Bitola, Macedonia) held an honored status of *primus inter pares*. In the immediate aftermath of the revolution, it appeared as though the Tanzimat promise of civic freedoms supported by political decentralization was finally fulfilled. The new associations sponsored language congresses, cultural activities and vigorously intervened in political life by seeking to elect representatives to legislative bodies to win concrete reforms for the Albanian national group. What began as a Muslim project with the Istanbul alphabet in 1879 and was then realized through the finances and logistics of a dominantly Orthodox diaspora coalesced in subsequent years as a non-sectarian civic movement demanding national representation in the new constitutional regime.

Yet, once the Hamidian regime was removed, the cooperation between the associations and the former Ottoman opposition also split along political and social lines. The subsequent competition with the CUP's policy of centralization sharpened this divide. A growing number of Albanians turned against the Committee of Union and Progress, which they had helped cofound and even led. The subsequently authoritarian rule of the CUP gradually became synonymous with "Turkish" autocracy, leading to tensions and eventually estrangement. Disenchantment also led to numerous popular rebellions that ultimately forced the Ottoman government to grant the Albanians in August 1912 home rule within the vilayets they inhabited provided that the vilayets did not unify into a single one. The eruption of the Balkan Wars two months later, however, demonstrated the fragility of the principle of collective defense that the empire afforded and the process of imperial transformations was abandoned in favor of full independence, lest the Albanians become subjects of the Greek, Montenegrin and Serbian states. With the Balkans ablaze, virtually all traces of formal and informal associational activity in the Albanian-inhabited vilayets was removed and the center of associational gravity shifted yet again, first to the émigré associations in Europe and later to Fan Noli and the associations in the United States

Association in the Second Constitutional Era: Continuity and Change

In early June 1908, thousands of Albanians from the Kosovo and Monastir vilayets began to pour into Firzovik (Ferizaj/Uroševac), protesting what they thought to be news of an impending Austrian invasion of Kosovo. Within days, the crowds

grew to 20,000-strong and, after occupying Firzovik's post office, issued invitations to Albanians in other provinces to join them. This outburst was a neglected triggering that helped start the rise of the CUP to power. CUP branches in Monastir and Kosova, religious leaders and associational leaders soon filled the ensuing power vacuum and persuaded the crowds to demand the reinstatement of the Tanzimat reforms and the restoration of the 1876 constitution.¹⁶¹ From all circles, telegrams inundated the Porte and the Sultan in Istanbul warning them of dire consequences if the crowd's demands were not met. In the field, especially in the vilayets of Monastir and Salonica – where the Third Army was stationed – the CUP branches were hard at work sending telegrams, ultimatums and threats, inciting the populace and handing out weapons from the garrison barracks. Impressed by the magnitude of the uprising, the Sultan relented and two days later, on 24 July 1908, issued an imperial decree that restored the constitution. Following this, CUP declared *hürriyet*, liberty, a term meant primarily to convey the restoration of the 1876 constitution but, as a recent dissertation has shown, also understood liberally to reflect specific political aspirations of various communities.¹⁶²

The events in Kosovo were a spontaneous outburst that caught the Ottoman authorities, all major organizations, and even contemporary witnesses by surprise. Initially portrayed as a liberal revolution of western-oriented secularists against the reactionary and despotic rule of Abdülhamit II, the remaining months of 1908 did much to give legitimacy to these views. Following the restoration of the constitution, Albanians celebrated the restoration of the constitution as euphorically as did the

¹⁶¹ For more detail on these events see Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 271-278.

¹⁶² Stefan Sotiris Papaioannou, "Balkan Wars between the Lines: Violence and Civilians in Macedonia, 1912-1918," (PhD Diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 2012), 86-92.

other peoples of the empire but from a very different viewpoint. The fact that the demonstration started in Kosovo and that many of the rank-and-file soldiers that constituted the so-called CUP national battalions embedded within the Ottoman 3rd Field Army were Albanian-born, gave legitimacy to the perception that this was a revolution orchestrated and carried out by Albanians.¹⁶³ Songs were written and bards and poets showered praise for the CUP and their own leaders. Parents named their sons after the leaders of revolution and even after the names of the émigré associations. In Ergiri, for instance, on 16 October, a Bektashi cloth merchant, Halil Hoxha, named his newborn son Enver – the future communist leader of Albania – after Ismail Enver bey (later Pasha), one of the heroes of the revolution. Congratulatory letters came from the émigré associations praising local leaders and activists for their courage. From Boston, Fan Noli wrote of plans to go to Elbasan and launch what he called “the first crusade of Albanian history,” against the Orthodox clergy loyal to the Patriarchate.¹⁶⁴ In İşkodra, Edith Durham witnessed emotional and curious scenes where Muslims and Catholics “shed tears together and swore brotherhood on the Koran and a revolver...”¹⁶⁵ There was also widespread apprehension and confusion as to what a constitution really meant. Those old enough to remember such a moment in 1876 only to be disappointed in 1878, were skeptical. For the peasant majority and the clansmen of the highlands, “constitution” meant no more government intrusions on their traditional liberties and no more taxes.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Ibid., 258.

¹⁶⁴ “Noli to Tashko,” Boston, 14 August 1908, AQSh, F. 9, D. 20, Fl. 42.

¹⁶⁵ Edith Durham, *High Albania* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), 223-225.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

The general excitement gave rise to a more politically assertive Ottoman public. Thanks to the CUP influence over the government, the restrictions of the Hamidian regime were lifted, political prisoners freed, the constitutional prerogatives of the sultan curbed and elections announced. By 1909, 353 newspapers and periodicals were published in Istanbul alone, of which 200 had received their permits in the first month of the revolution.¹⁶⁷ The CUP tried to promote its political goals to become a mass organization by consolidating its branches in the provinces, sponsoring cultural activities, organizing night classes, opening new private schools funded by both its own membership dues and community resources, and organizing community work.¹⁶⁸ In those areas where the CUP was comparatively weak, as in the Arab provinces, various social and professional groups quickly formed associations, committees and clubs espousing the liberal spirit inherent in the CUP message of equality, liberty and justice. In Damascus for instance, physicians, merchants and shoemakers formed their own associations, whereas other disenfranchised groups found that they could successfully appeal to CUP committees against the predations of local rapacious notables.¹⁶⁹

Membership in the CUP, however, was not a precondition for the growth of a pan-Ottoman public sphere. The Albanian émigré associations were as surprised as the CUP about the sudden explosion of the revolution but once the initial confusion passed, they tried to assume a leadership role in those areas in the vilayets of Monastir and Yanya where their presence was the strongest. Directives came down

¹⁶⁷ Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1997) 55.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 62.

from Bucharest and Sofia to local affiliates and other independent social activists to immediately establish formal associations and educate the people about constitutional rights, open schools in the Albanian language and prepare for the electoral campaign that was to take place that fall. Following early CUP expansion patterns, but also reflecting organizational trends established by previous associational émigré experience, new voluntary associations proliferated throughout the Ottoman Balkans. The first association that was formed was *Bashkimi* of Monastir on 24 July 1908.¹⁷⁰ Its first chairman was a certain Riza bey, the chair of Monastir's Health Inspectorate. Following his recall to Istanbul, the association unanimously chose as chairman Fehim bey Zavalani, the former CLA leader who had just returned from exile in Anatolia. In early 1909, *Bashkimi* clubs and associations were founded in at least twenty other urban centers: Filiates (now in Greece), Korçë, Elbasan, Berat, Yanya, Avlonya, Durrës (Dıraç), Gramsh, Vardar, Karaferya (now Veria in Greece), Leskovik, Ohrid, Peqin, Përmet, Starovë, Strugë, Üsküp, Tiranë, Prishtinë, Salonica and Istanbul. Following closely on *Bashkimi*'s heels were *Vllazënia* (Brotherhood) clubs, formed at least in Elbasan, Koçan (probably Kozani, Greece) and Filiates; *Afërdita* (Aphrodite) in Elbasan; *Drita*, in Korçë, Ergiri and Elbasan; *Përparimi* (Progress), *Banda e Lirisë* (Ensemble of Liberty) and *Dituria* in Korçë, and *Gegënia e Gjuhës Shqipe* (the Geg of the Albanian Language) in İşkodra.¹⁷¹ These organizations sent subsequently petitions to the Porte in Istanbul, requesting the

¹⁷⁰ "Minutes of the first meeting of Bashkimi of Monastir" Monastir, 24 July – 11 August 1908, AQSh, F. 102, D. 97. Fl., 1-4. See also Abdyli, *Lëvizja Kombëtare*, 61.

¹⁷¹ For an example see, "Notifications for the establishment of Albanian Clubs and Associations," 31 August – 19 December 1908, AQSh, F. 102, D. 100, Fl., 1-13. For a recent partial tally by an Albanian scholar see also Xhevat Lloshi, *Rreth Alfabetit të Shqipërisë: Me Rastin e 100 Vjetorit të Kongresit të Manastirit* (Skopje: Logos-A, 2008), 64-66.

legalization of education in the Albanian language in accordance with the decree of November 1879.¹⁷²

The creation of so many *Bashkimi* clubs and the reappearance of older émigré associational names may suggest a considerable degree of vertical control by separate nationalist organizations seeking to influence political affairs in Ottoman-Albanian territories. The overall tone of the available archival documents, however, confirms informal collaborations between the newly established and older émigré associations. In the first place, as seen in Chapter 1, although the émigré associations had dominated the financial flow of publications in Albanian and related aspects of intellectual life in the Albanian provinces, they had never succeeded in dominating local political activism against the Hamidian regime. Similarly, although *hürriyet* made possible the voluntary formation of clubs, societies, the associations had never developed a central mechanism to consolidate control which, in turn, meant that such activities were and remained informal, highly unstructured and, for the main part, dependent on the energies of individual members such as Naço in Bucharest or Noli in the United States. Unsurprisingly, disagreements, competition over members (and thus funding), and mutual jealousies between various associations were frequent.¹⁷³ Second, after the declaration of *hürriyet*, associational names suddenly became fashionable and assumed, not without a considerable degree of confusion, a life of their own. For instance, when social activists in Bucharest had chosen the name *Bashkimi* in 1906 they were simply reacting to the unification of several associations into a larger one, arguably unconcerned that a Franciscan Catholic association also

¹⁷² “*Bashkimi* of Bucharest to the Grand Vizier,” Bucharest, Undated, AQSh, F. 99, D. 205, Fl. 1-4.

¹⁷³ “*Vllazënia* to *Bashkimi*,” Elbasan, 11-12 April 1909, AQSh, F. 102, D. 47, Fl. 1-2.

called *Bashkimi* had existed in İşkodra since 1899. The fact that “*Bashkim*” also signified a symbolic unification of Albanians above all other religious, class, and regional distinctions did not go unnoticed. After 1908, associational names, past and present, outdated or current, became household franchise names, which were routinely recycled and effectively exploited for purposes of symbolic power and prestige. More realistically, however, terms such as *Bashkimi* or *Përparimi* (i.e., Union and Progress) were simply separate derivatives of the compound *Union and Progress*, positivist notions that the CUP had championed in the Ottoman Empire since 1889. Indeed, it is at this time that *Bashkim*, *Gëzim* (Joy/Happiness), *Liri* (liberty i.e., *hürriyet*), *Përparim* (Progress), *Besnik* (Loyal/Loyalty) and more – political principles of the second constitutional era – became fashionable and enduring first names for newborn boys and girls alike and are still frequently encountered today as personal names for many Albanians in the Balkans.

Following *hürriyet*, the political pluralism implied by the new constitutional regime and the growth of a politically assertive public made possible the non-sectarian inclusion of Albanians, Muslims and Christians alike, in associational activities. As seen in Chapter 1, the émigré associations had never imposed membership quotas on the basis of religion and if one or another association included more members of one religion more than another, this was largely a function of prevailing immigration patterns and personal status or wealth, rather than the affirmation of cultural and religious hegemony. Also, in the Albanian provinces confessional differences had never featured prominently in the CUP’s own Ottomanist agenda, the cornerstone of which relied on integrationalist and secular

policies.¹⁷⁴ Religious differences and contradictions certainly existed and often the perception that this or that association was more “Christian” than “Muslim” and vice-versa could limit membership growth. In İşkodra, for instance, where the Muslim-Christian (Catholic) divide was sharply defined, Muslims did not want to hear of either an Albanian Latin language script or Albanian schools.¹⁷⁵ The bias, however, seems to have been more prevalent in rural areas and to a lesser degree among the urban poor and it varied from one town, region and vilayet to the other.¹⁷⁶

In keeping with the earlier goals to create diverse civic national organizations, the associations rejected no one and were eager to include everyone, provided, of course, they were men of means and/or educated. In Egypt, *Bashkimi* of Alexandria grew from a handful of Orthodox activists at the turn of the twentieth century to about sixty-four activists in 1908, of which fifty-one were Orthodox and thirteen were Muslim.¹⁷⁷ *Bashkimi* of Istanbul, which was instrumental in establishing *Bashkimi* of Yanya, explained in the second article of its statute that it would include only members “twenty years old and above who are occupationally active, merchants or learned ones.”¹⁷⁸ Previous experience had shown that the associations made secular education a crucial requirement for membership yet the associations expanded this category to include Muslim clerics of the *ilmiye* institution. The latter were entitled to hold their own meetings, separate from lay intellectuals and the free professions.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁴ Hasan Kayali, “Elections and the Electoral Process in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1919,” in *IJMES* 27, 3 (1995), 268.

¹⁷⁵ Skëndi, *Albanian Awakening*, 368.

¹⁷⁶ “Associational Reports and Correspondence,” Elbasan, 4 October – 9 December 1909, AQSh, F. 102, D. 45, Fl. 1-2.

¹⁷⁷ “Call of the Brotherhood *Bashkimi* of Alexandria to all Albanians,” February 1912, AQSh, F. 97, D. 40, Fl. 2.

¹⁷⁸ “Statute of *Bashkimi* of Istanbul,” Istanbul, 1908, AQSh, F. 101, D. 50, Fl. 1.

¹⁷⁹ See *Ibid*, fl. 5.

Similarly, *Bashkimi* of Elbasan was initially formed largely on the initiative of Bektashi Muslims in contrast to *Bashkimi* of Monastir or *Drita* of Korçë, which were mostly Orthodox. Occasionally, the associations made conscious efforts to include other ethnic groups. *Bashkimi* of Yanya for example started out with a surprisingly large number of some 350 members, which included Albanians (both Muslim and Orthodox) but also Aromanians and at least one Jew.¹⁸⁰ Only women were conspicuously absent on associational rolls, although not entirely absent as social activists in their own right. Women like the Qiriazis sisters created their own societies and frequently collaborated with the more established associations dominated by men. Though presumably equal, associational life was, however, a segregated phenomenon.

Reflecting empire-wide trends, the proliferation of associations and clubs after the declaration of *hürriyet* was followed with an explosion in print of publication materials throughout the Albanian lands. Reflecting wider trends in the Ottoman world, it is estimated that during the second constitutional era more than forty associations supported by about thirty-five Albanian-language periodicals were in operation.¹⁸¹ Because of difficulties in obtaining the necessary funds and complications in ensuring adequate replacement parts for worn-out printing presses, these publications continued with interruptions. Nonetheless, the emergence of legal printing in the Albanian language, following the Young Turk revolution, was a considerable achievement.

¹⁸⁰ Abdyli, *Lëvizja Shqiptare*, 77.

¹⁸¹ Demiraj and Prifti, *Kongresi i Manastirit*, 57, 67.

Schools experienced a similar proliferation, though because these were still a novelty their quality was usually low. The first new Albanian school after 1908 was opened in Elbasan on 2 August 1908, followed by others in Tiranë, Avlonya, Kaninë and Monastir. Between September and December, the girls' school in Korçë (closed in 1898) reopened and other schools became operational in Filiates and Loros now in Thesprotia, Greece; Prizren, Üsküp, Skrapar, Nistrovo, Debre (Dibër) and several villages in the Myqeze plain. In already existing state schools, Albanian became a secondary language of instruction alongside Ottoman Turkish and Greek in Monastir, Ergiri, Tiranë, Yanya and Berat.¹⁸² In rural areas and more generally wherever schools did not exist before, Albanian was the sole language of instruction and teaching was informally held in private homes generously provided and/or rented out for that purpose by their owners. Teachers were readily found among the members of the Muslim clergy, both Bektashi and Sunni, and Albanian-born CUP members, but most were volunteers from émigré associations and their local affiliates.¹⁸³ These activities increased the demand for textbooks, which not unexpectedly placed considerable strain on the limited finances available to local state administrators. The émigré associations stepped in to cover the financial shortfall and began providing funds and distributing textbooks and other printed materials free of charge directly on location. In August 1908 the first Albanian printing press in the Ottoman Empire began to publish textbooks in the Istanbul alphabet in Salonica, followed shortly by

¹⁸² "Bashkimi to the Education Board of Monastir," Monastir, 13 November 1908, AQSh, F. 102, D. 116, Fl. 1.

¹⁸³ "Letters from Associations and Various Individuals to *Bashkimi* of Bucharest," Various Locations, 6 January – 22 December 1909, AQSh, F. 99. D. 151, Fl. 1-7.

two more, respectively in Monastir and in Korçë.¹⁸⁴ It is estimated that in the few months following the formation of *Bashkimi* of Monastir, this association became the exclusive distributing agency for more than 20,000 primers freshly arrived from Bucharest, of which nearly 15,000 were sold in the Korçë district alone. The associations in Bulgaria also promised to send “1,000 Geg primers and 800 other books,” which were already available in Sofia for distribution in Tiranë.¹⁸⁵ It was a surprising offer considering that Albanian printing houses in Bulgaria utilized the Istanbul alphabet. Many émigré activists interpreted the expansion of Albanian cultural activities as a deathblow to the pervading influence of the Patriarchate and of the Greek state in Monastir and Yanya.¹⁸⁶

The educational activities and the explosion of print materials had two sources. First, the transfer of authority from the Hamidian regime to the liberal constitutional order in the aftermath of the revolution was still uncertain. Until elections were held, real power lay in the hands of CUP committees, the associations, community leaders and local councils that had, as Edith Durham and various European consuls observed in İşkodra, monopolized virtually all the power structure of the previous regime.¹⁸⁷ In other words, it appeared that the Albanians had achieved their goal of home rule, though it is unclear what they intended to do with it in the long term. Second, the Habsburg authorities pressured the Ottoman government through their ambassador in Istanbul, Marquis Johann von Pallavicini, to legalize instruction in the Albanian language in state schools. Accordingly, the Ministry of

¹⁸⁴ Zenelaj, *Çështja Shqiptare*, 305.

¹⁸⁵ Akademia e Shkencave, *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, 390

¹⁸⁶ “Loni Logori to *Bashkimi* of Monastir,” Maghagha, 30 August 1908, AQSh, F. 102, D. 139, Fl. 1.

¹⁸⁷ Durham, *High Albania*, 227-231.

Education issued in October an edict that enabled Albanian to become an official language of instruction at the primary and secondary levels.¹⁸⁸ These events necessitated further consolidation with the associations looking to form an intra-associational managing body and a bureaucratic system of mutual accountability for their respective activities. First on the agenda was the replacement the various scripts in circulation – Istanbul, *Agimi* and *Bashkimi* alphabets – with a single standardized alphabet. This was to reduce significantly printing costs and increase the productivity of presses in producing identical textbooks, hopefully indefinitely into the long-term future. In November 1908 social activists succeeded in sponsoring a language congress to address precisely this problem.

The First Monastir Congress of 1908

Like all other multiethnic states, the Ottoman Empire was a multilingual state. Its official language of state was an elaborate amalgamation, which, though based on Turkish syntax, was heavily influenced by Persian and Arabic grammar and vocabulary. As the Ottoman Empire expanded, linguistic elements and vocabularies of other ethnic groups were subsequently incorporated in the Ottoman language.¹⁸⁹ This wide variety, however, presented huge standardization problems that alienated the masses by limiting their accessibility to both local and central government.¹⁹⁰ At the turn of the nineteenth century, admiration for European modernity led to other

¹⁸⁸ Akademia e Shkencave, *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, 387.

¹⁸⁹ Hanioglu, *Brief History*, 33-34.

¹⁹⁰ Kemal Karpat, *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History: Selected Articles and Essays* (Brill: Leiden, Boston, Köln, 2002), 265-266.

waves of borrowing from European languages, especially from French, frequently with confusing results since often the borrowed word would usually have a perfectly acceptable alternative already present in Ottoman usage.¹⁹¹

Processes of standardization began in earnest during and following the Tanzimat reforms and intensified with the establishment of a public education system. In the vilayet of Yanya, for instance, the number of state *Iptidai* and *Rüştiye* schools grew to 135 in 1909.¹⁹² Nonetheless, the state never succeeded in making the language of government accessible to all those below the upper middle class. At lower social levels the Ottoman state encountered the competition of European, Bulgarian and Greek schools. In the vilayet of Yanya, for instance, the state's 135 schools had to contend with a staggering number of 663 Greek-language schools.¹⁹³ The shortcomings of the state coupled with the demand for positive action, encouraged Albanian national activists to launch their own parallel efforts, who did so by exploiting provisions in Ottoman law that stipulated that local schools should to be kept with community resources.¹⁹⁴ The Istanbul alphabet had sought to address precisely these issues. Yet in 1908 it was one of the three available alphabets in circulation, competing informally with the *Bashkimi* and *Agimi* alphabets. All these three Latin-based alphabets were equal in strength. The only substantive difference was the unique representation of only eleven sounds peculiar to the Albanian language and which were pronounced differently from one region to the next. These

¹⁹¹ Hanioglu, *Brief History*, 34.

¹⁹² Isa Blumi, "The Role of Education in the Albanian Identity and Myths," in *Albanian Identities: Myth and History*, eds. Stephanie Schwander-Sievers and Bernd J. Fischer (University of Indiana Press: Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2002), 50.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ For Ottoman efforts see Evered, *Empire and Education under the Ottomans*, 55-62.

are the modern *Ç, Dh, Ë, Gj, Ll, Nj, Rr, Sh, Th, Xh* and *Zh* letters, which in the Istanbul alphabet were represented by original concoctions based on either Greek or Cyrillic letters, in *Bashkimi* by diagraphs, and in *Agimi* by diacritical marks.¹⁹⁵ Now, in the new constitutional regime when the aspiration of a single standardized Albanian script appeared possible, social activists were determined to solve these few and unique differences.

Toward the end of August 1908 *Bashkimi* of Monastir published a resolution calling for a language congress to select a single script from the available *Bashkimi*, *Agimi* and Istanbul alphabets. All other newly established associations in the Albanian provinces as well as the émigré associations in Romania, Egypt and the United States enthusiastically received *Bashkimi's* resolution. The congress convened on 14 November at the house of Fehim bey Zavalani, the chairman of *Bashkimi* of Monastir.¹⁹⁶ Virtually all major associations, clubs, committees and even CUP branches were invited to attend, though for various reasons, not all did. The congress convened on such a broad participatory and representative basis that the role of religion or regional preferences, such as Tosk v. Geg, in the congress is difficult to gauge. Apparently the main criteria to be a delegate lay first, in the distinction, strength and influence of the association that was represented, second, in the distinction and prestige of unaffiliated activists who did not necessarily represent a particular association, and third, in the overall contribution of the association or of the individual to Albanian letters and/or politics. The voting members included a body of thirty-two delegates representing twenty-two associations spread in twenty-six

¹⁹⁵ See Appendix B for the alphabets discussed in Monastir

¹⁹⁶ "Diturija" 1908, No. 2, F. 41 cf. Demiraj and Prifti, *Kongresi i Manastirit*, 184.

Ottoman cities that were informally linked to émigré associations in Bulgaria, Romania, Egypt, the United States and southern Italy. An additional eighteen delegates were also invited to attend and participate in the plenary meeting albeit without the right to vote. Among those represented, İşkodra (Geg) and Korçë (Tosk) – the two main hubs of Albanian urban and cultural life in the Ottoman Empire – led with six and five representatives each.¹⁹⁷ The remainder of the delegates came from Monastir (3), Elbasan (2), Ergiri (2), Üsküp (2), Leskovik (1), Berat (1), Durrës (1) and so on. Some delegates represented two cities. Mithat Frashëri, the son of Abdyl bey Frashëri and future leader of *Balli Kombëtar* during the Second World War, represented Salonika and Yanya, and Rrok Berisha who represented both Yakova (Gjakovë in Kosovo) and Üsküp. Many delegates possessed two votes, a mechanism arguably instituted to reflect the distinction of certain delegates as social activists and/or the number of constituencies they represented in the congress. Overall, thirty-two delegates possessed a total of fifty-two votes.¹⁹⁸ Last, the religious composition of the delegates was as diverse as the Albanian social spectrum itself. In attendance were fourteen Muslims, seven Roman Catholics, ten Orthodox and one Protestant. The delegates selected Mithat Frashëri (Muslim, Salonika and Yanya) as chairman of the Congress and Gjergj Qiriazi (Protestant, Monastir), Luigj Gurakuqi (Catholic, İşkodra and Southern Italy), Hilë Mosi (Catholic, İşkodra), Nyzhet bey Vrioni (Muslim, Berat) and Thoma Avrami (Orthodox, Korçë) as vice-chairmen of the Congress.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Quoted in Zenelaj, *Çështja Shqiptare*, 308.

¹⁹⁸ Demiraj and Prifti, *Kongresi i Manastirit*, 83.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

The plenary sessions that took place in the first two days were the best expression of an open civil society and, indeed, were attended by nearly 400 individuals. They included not only Albanians but also Bulgarians, Greeks, some Serbs, representatives of the CUP local branch and even the Vali of Monastir, Hifzi pasha, to whom the leadership of the congress bestowed the title of honorary chairman. All three alphabets had their own supporters, who, surprisingly, were almost equal in number. Those who supported the Istanbul alphabet stressed its value as a collective work of “notable patriots” representing all Albanian lands across regional and religious divide. They pointed out that since its inception nearly three decades before, this alphabet had become virtually the *lingua franca* for most Albanian publications and, therefore, it would have been costly and confusing to arbitrarily affect a sudden change.²⁰⁰ *Bashkimi*'s supporters, on the other hand, stressed the simplicity of their alphabet which, if adopted, would have simplified considerably not only learning but also the printing costs since it eliminated typesets for letters that did not exist in any other language but Albanian, Greek and Cyrillic. *Agimi* also had its own supporters, but the inclusion of diacritical marks made it as troublesome for printing as the Istanbul alphabet.

Given these difficulties, the leadership of the congress selected a working group, which would, behind closed doors, evaluate all options and arbitrate a single alphabet. The result was the Commission of the Eleven, which, too, was established on a broad participatory basis with three Catholics, three Orthodox, four Muslims and one Protestant members. The Commission of the Eleven was faced with three choices: 1) adopt either one of the three available alphabets, 2) merge all three or at

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 90.

least two in a single alphabet, or 3) eliminate the existing alphabets and concoct an entirely new one.²⁰¹ Since the last two points posed more problems than they solved, they were quickly rejected, at which point the discussions centered on selecting the best fit among the available choices. Eventually, on the seventh day of the congress and three days after the Commission of the Eleven was established, a Solomonic decision was reached “to split the baby in half” and select the *Bashkimi* and Istanbul alphabets. *Agimi* was rejected on the basis that its contributing strengths were represented in both *Bashkimi* and Istanbul alphabets.²⁰²

The curious choice to adopt two alphabets instead of one has puzzled historians ever since. Western scholarship has conventionally depicted this choice as an expression of pervasive, and ultimately insurmountable, regionally based loyalties endeavoring to select a dialect – either Tosk or Geg –to serve as a basis for the literary language.²⁰³ Since each of the two dialect groups subscribed to a separate alphabet, then the failure to reach an agreement only served to sharpen the presumptive Tosk and Geg divide. Albanian scholars on the other hand do not draw a distinction between the literary language and a standard alphabet. For them, the question of Albanian unification behind a single literary print culture was the very expression of an indigenous self-engendered modernity.²⁰⁴

The territorial diffusions and respective strengths of the alphabet appear to provide some legitimacy to proponents of the Tosk-Geg divide. On the eve of the

²⁰¹ Ibid., 95.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ For a recent work see Alexander Vezenkov, “The Albanian Language Question: Contexts and Priorities,” in *Entangled Histories of the Balkans*, eds. Roumen Daskalov and Tchavdar Marinov (Brill: Leiden and Boston, 2013), 490.

²⁰⁴ Demiraj and Prifti, *Kongresi i Manastirit*, 70

Young Turk revolution the Istanbul alphabet enjoyed the widest territorial diffusion. It formed the basis for most private, intellectual and commercial communications spanning what is today central and southern Albania, eastern Macedonia and northern Greece as well as most periodicals and other printed materials, including most of the translations of scientific and literary works printed through émigré resources in Bulgaria, Romania and the Ottoman Empire. *Bashkimi* and *Agimi* alphabets, on the other hand, were the manifestation of a personalized Catholic intellectual heritage, conceived primarily within the rubric of serving the needs of the Catholic community. As such, they experienced a limited diffusion, primarily in the *İşkodra* and Kosovo vilayets. Under Habsburg and Italian patronage thirty-six clerical preparatory schools for boys and girls, parish elementary schools and orphanages opened in the Albanian Catholic dioceses in *İşkodra* and Kosovo. Although Muslims were known to frequent them, these schools catered specifically to the Catholics and thus to only a tiny minority of the Albanians. Most of these schools, about nineteen, were located in the main Catholic triangle between *İşkodra*, *Lezhë* and *Mirditë* highlands. The rest were too thinly spread out from *İşkodra*, across the highlands and into the *Prizren* diocese.²⁰⁵

Still, such readings embody some longstanding misunderstandings and contradictions fundamentally distorting the nature of how popular and national politics developed in the context of the second constitutional era. For a start, the Congress of Monastir was not a meeting of regional activists but rather an assembly of the educated and propertied members of Albanian society who, calling themselves “patriots,” had developed a paternalistic attitude toward all things Albanian. In the

²⁰⁵ See Zenelaj, *Lëvizja Kombëtare*, 544-568.

process, they eschewed all other regionally and religiously based loyalties as private notions, which had nothing to do with the establishment of a public national Albanian identity.²⁰⁶ The Istanbul alphabet itself symbolized precisely that public unity and did so by removing educational activities from the realm of personalized cultural activities that dominated since the 1830s and depersonalizing them to reflect the needs of a culturally diverse but symbiotic society. In other words, the Istanbul alphabet was the earliest manifestation of an attempt to institute a rational system of linguistic standardization, or what Ernest Gellner has called a *high culture* replacing all previous separate and self-contained low provincial cultures.²⁰⁷

Yet in the early 1900s, the Istanbul alphabet itself was clearly in desperate need of reform. Three factors convinced national activists to further “Latinize” the Istanbul alphabet, a process, which, as it will be remembered, started with the Society of Letters in 1879. First, the recent introduction of the *Bashkimi* and *Agimi* alphabets at the turn of the twentieth century had to be taken into consideration. Second, there was a concern with growing printing costs. Those who had not yet chosen to adopt this easier access to printing presses struggled to find financial support. As a result, editors of periodicals and newspapers made conscious choices to replace complex letters with purely Latin letters or invariably utilizing diacritical marks and diagraphs instead of the Greek letters present in the Istanbul alphabet. As seen in Chapter 1, as early as 1887, two *Drita* activists in Bucharest had already attempted to simplify the Istanbul alphabet. Another example was Faik Konica’s highly influential *Albania*. It appeared first in Brussels (1897-1902) and then in London (1902-1910) in Albanian

²⁰⁶ “Open Letter of the Literary Association *Bashkimi*,” Skkoder, [İşkodra], 20 August 1908, AQSh, F. 102, D. 183, Fl. 1-2.

²⁰⁷ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 33, 57.

and French. Konica was born in Konitsa (today in Greece) in the vilayet of Yanya and thus, as a Tosk, one would expect his loyalties to lie with the Istanbul alphabet. Konica's insufficient income, however, could not support the purchase of special typesets in this alphabet for which reason his periodical appeared exclusively in a Latin alphabet published in the Tosk dialect. Ironically, *Albania* routinely utilized *Bashkimi's* diagraphs, thus becoming one of the earliest manifestations of a publication outside İşkodra in that alphabet. Associational presses, on the other hand, such as *Shqiptari/Albanezul* in Bucharest, *Diturija* in Salonica, or the printing house *Mbrothësia* (Prosperity) in Sofia were wealthier and thus could afford financing in both local languages, Romanian, Bulgarian or Greek, and Albanian in the Istanbul alphabet. Nonetheless, such operations were expensive and could not be maintained with the meager paychecks and emigrant workers. Also sometime before 1908, in Sofia, *Mbrothësia's* editor Kristo Luarasi appealed to all "honest patriots" to contribute financially to the maintenance of that printing house which was in dire need of replacing worn-out parts. He pointed out that *Mbrothësia's* role in publishing "several thousand books on seventeen different subjects," made this publishing house an integral cog of the "Albanian Awakening," and thus its continuing operation was a national duty for all Albanian patriots.²⁰⁸ To all this, one must also add that keeping two separate types of printing typesets, one in the Istanbul alphabet and another in other European languages made no practical sense.

Third, gradually, and as if by a process of social osmosis, a fully Latin alphabet percolated into the personal correspondence of the social activists usually written in their own specific dialects. Even before 1908, Fan Noli, for instance, wrote

²⁰⁸ "Call of Kristo Luarasi," Sofia, Undated, AQSh, F. 97, D. 26, Fl. 1.

to Athanas Tashko in the Tosk dialect mainly utilizing a simple Latin alphabet.²⁰⁹

Tashko's replies were usually in the Istanbul alphabet. But while this interchangeability was acceptable for everyday communication, the rich diversity of these personalized expressions of three different, but still Latin-based, scripts would simply not do for expressed goal of Albanian mass education.

The issue debated in the Congress of Monastir therefore had nothing to do with regionalist attitudes or the standardization of the literary language but rather with the institution of a depersonalized and standardized script intended to serve as a medium for mass education. Given the high illiteracy rates among Ottoman Albanians, standardization of the spoken language was not an issue and it did not manifest as such until well after the Second World War when the communist regime sponsored the Congress of Orthography in November 1972. This congress adopted the orthographic standards in place today.²¹⁰

This interpretation supports only one conclusion. First, in 1879 the Istanbul alphabet was intended to be only a temporary solution that would facilitate the printing of materials in the Albanian language in those particular locales where associational life was already possible during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The growth of associational life since the 1880s shows that it admirably served that purpose. Yet, after 1908, it became obvious that the alphabet needed to

²⁰⁹ See Athanas Tashko with various individuals in AQSh, F. 9, D. 16, D. 20, D. 22, D. 23

²¹⁰ Androkli Kostallari et al. *Kongresi i Drejtshkrimit të Gjuhës Shqipe: 20-25 Nëntor 1972* (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave të RP të Shqipërisë, Instituti i Gjuhësisë dhe i Letërsisë, 1973). These sounds are not uniformly pronounced by all Albanians. Thus, for instance the sound *Gj* is for the Tosks a voiced palatal stop /j/ whereas for the Gegs is a stronger /dʒ/ which sounds like the voiced postalveolar affricate *Xh*, also represented in the alphabet.

conform to new realities.²¹¹ To quote Ernest Gellner, the Congress in Monastir sought to further reduce “local dialectical idiosyncrasies” in an attempt to further standardize “a school-mediated, academy-supervised idiom, codified for the requirements of a reasonably precise bureaucratic and technological communication,” that the revolution of 1908 promised.²¹² *Bashkimi’s* alphabet, while it developed independently from these efforts, represented a readily available option that saved these activists time and effort while, at the same time, holding fast to original principles of a Latin-based script that were first articulated by the Society of Letters in 1879. The majority of printing presses were already set up for the Istanbul alphabet and suddenly switching to *Bashkimi* would have been cost prohibitive. This would have paralyzed the fragile state of Albanian publications and by diminishing the output in school texts and other printed materials would have had a detrimental effect on Albanian national education. The Congress in Monastir therefore did not “select” two alphabets. Instead, it opted to retain the Istanbul alphabet until fully transitioning into the *Bashkimi* alphabet. The fact that this formula encountered no resistance during and after the Congress provides persuasive evidence that the preservation of regional hegemonies was neither a political nor a cultural aim for these social activists.

The Congress in Monastir has been examined so far only with respect to the language question that has attracted scholarly attention. It also produced a resolution of eighteen points addressing important social and economic grievances that also developed within the context of the promise of the revolution. These reversed the

²¹¹ “Call to Establish a Single Alphabet,” Skoder [İşkodra], 3 August 1907, AQSh, F. 102, D. 182, Fl. 1-2.

²¹² Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 57.

relationship between Ottoman- Turkish and Albanian in the public education system by calling for the Albanian language as *the* primary medium of education with Turkish being taught from the fourth year of elementary school forward and petitioned the imperial authorities to end Greek subsidies in elementary schools in the Albanian provinces. The resolution also called for part of the income from religious orders, the *waqf* endowments, and taxes levied at the sancak level to be used for secular educational purposes in the Albanian language; it appealed to collect archeological antiquities in the Albanian provinces and store them in a museum acting as a branch of the imperial museum in Istanbul, preferably in Elbasan, and petitioned for the establishment of a preferential system for Albanian public officials and army officers to serve in Albanian provinces. In addition the resolution also called for the state to undertake the draining of swamps and marshes, the irrigation of rivers, and assistance regarding land reclamation work so as to increase the amount of agricultural land especially in the Myzeqe plain. The resolution also sought to limit concessionary rights of foreign companies in mining and railroad building in the Albanian provinces. Otherwise, the Ottoman criminal and civil codes as well as all other legal obligations remained in place supported by a large commitment to Ottomanist principles and the constitutional order.²¹³ Subsequent events show that hopes for the decentralization of authority away from the capital to allow for broader representative politics in the provinces were misplaced.

²¹³ See “Appendix of the Resolutions of 30 November 1908, No. 75” cf. Demiraj and Prifti, *Kongresi i Manastirit*, 152-154.

CUP's Crisis of Legitimacy in the Albanian Provinces

In the fall of 1908, as the elections loomed close, ideological disagreements within the CUP and between it and its electorate mounted. Hasan Kayali has identified two main issues that gradually led to a CUP crisis of authority in the immediate post-revolutionary period. First, the CUP's lack of administrative experience and social standing meant that its influence on the government had to rely on top government position being occupied by statesmen affiliated with the Hamidian regime and not connected to the committee. Coupled with the hesitation in dealing with Abdülhamit II, who still enjoyed moral supremacy with the Muslim masses as both Caliph and Sultan, this climate allowed the emergence of three separate centers of power: the Palace, the Porte and the Parliament. As a result, the empire experienced five changes of government within less than a year, a counterrevolutionary coup and the beginning of organized opposition in the provinces. Second, tensions between the civilian component and the military, which was seen to have carried out the revolution, were exacerbated and the latter began to exert an ever more assertive role in domestic politics.²¹⁴ To these, one must also add the continuous reshuffling of the public administration both in the capital and the provinces as the CUP scrambled to dismantle the patronage system established by Abdülhamit II and replace these outgoing officials with CUP reliable men. Politically reliable and administratively competent new officials, however, were in scarce supply, which led to political accommodation with officials of the older regime, which, in turn, fueled social discontent.²¹⁵ In addition, the proliferation of committees

²¹⁴ Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks*, 56-57

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 57-58, See also, *Memoirs of Ismail Kemal bey*, 328-329

and associations portended strong ideological challenges to the CUP's own goals of becoming a mass organization able both to control public opinion and implement its policy of centralization.

In the Albanian provinces, there is persuasive, though limited evidence that as early as fall 1908, CUP branches were failing to meet its dues-paying and membership quotas. For instance, the CUP's regional headquarters in Elbasan complained on 11 November to its Peqin branch that no contributions or enrollments had been made since early October²¹⁶ and that many of the committee's branches were increasingly assuming a preponderantly Albanian national character especially in Monastir and Yanya.²¹⁷ Despite this evidence there is nothing in the associational correspondence of fall 1908 to suggest that the associations were prepared to challenge the CUP as political rivals in their own right. They were young, politically immature, insecure of their own strength and lacked sufficient social status to contest the CUP's moral authority as the hero organization of the revolution. The associations clung to their identification of "clubs," "committees" and "associations" and made no effort to organize as political parties or even interfere with the electoral processes. Albanian deputies appeared to be content to be elected on the CUP's ticket especially since the political issue of decentralization versus centralization had not been yet fully politicized. Nonetheless, some farsighted leaders, fearing the incipient authoritarianism of the CUP, organized the *Ahrar* (Liberal) Party, a loose political association of Albanian, Arab and Armenian deputies proponents of decentralization led by Ismail Kemal bey, the Albanian deputy for Avlonya. *Ahrar* came into

²¹⁶ "CUP Headquarters Elbasan to Peqin," Elbasan, 11 November 1908, AQSh, F. 102, D. 39, Fl. 1.

²¹⁷ "Letter to *Bashkimi* of Monastir," 1908, AQSh, F. 102, D. 155, Fl. 1

existence only in early November, a few weeks before the elections and thus too late to mount an effective challenge to the CUP. As Kayali has shown, “balloting took place in a festive atmosphere and became the occasion for celebrating the principles that the elections symbolized: liberty, equality and justice.”²¹⁸

The new parliament opened on 17 December 1908. Its ethnic composition consisted of 147 Turks, 60 Arabs, 27 Albanians, 26 Greeks, 14 Armenians, 10 Slavs and 4 Jews for a total of 288 deputies.²¹⁹ From the beginning, formal sessions were dominated by security concerns that came from the annexation of Bosnia by Austria-Hungary, the Bulgarian declaration of sovereignty, the nationalist bands in Macedonia, and the resettlement of displaced people from these lost territories.²²⁰ In addition, the parliamentary sessions saw the CUP’s aggressive measures to assert its preponderance of deputies in the chamber by challenging on various technicalities the eligibility of those deputies who favored decentralization.

According to Ismail Kemal bey, the CUP showed its true intentions when it enacted a series of new laws intended to enhance its already dominant preponderance in parliament. First, new measures were passed intending to combat the spread of rural insurgency in the Balkan provinces. According to Ismail Kemal Bey, these provisions sought to criminalize individual behavior at the community level, providing that “in case any one member of a family joined [the] bands, the whole family should be exiled and their goods confiscated so that a whole village might be

²¹⁸ Kayali, “Elections,” 272.

²¹⁹ Ergun Özbudun, “Turkey” in Myron Weiner and Ergun Özbudun eds. *Competitive Election in Developing Countries* (Duke University Press, 1987), 334.

²²⁰ Ismail Kemal, *Memoires of Ismail Kemal bey*, 324-326.

penalized for the act of one member of the community.”²²¹ Then, in contravention to promises made before the revolution that it would ease the fiscal burden on the peasantry, CUP passed new laws seeking to collect taxes for 1909 and in addition all back taxes owed since 1907. Albanian communities, however, were traditionally subject to minimal or no taxation and, furthermore, owing to bad harvests since 1906, the Hamidian regime had cautiously avoided collection in order to not to stir up troubles with the Albanians subjects. The CUP now sought to collect them in total. Reaction against these measures mounted and a fresh round of uprisings erupted in the first half of 1909 in Kosova and Debre, later expanding in a less intense form into the Albanian highlands, İşkodra, Elbasan and even Yanya.²²²

The breaking point came in the aftermath of the Hamidian countercoup of 1909. Culminating in the so-called 31 March Incident, the countercoup was an attempt by pro-Abdülhamit conservative forces – religious student and officials, officers with traditional education and loyalists of the old regime – to reinstate Abdülhamit’s executive power, abolish the constitution and secular policies and restore a religiously based legal system.²²³ Albanian responses to the countercoup were as diverse as those in Istanbul. Traditionalists, loyal to the Sultan, supported the insurrectionists and encouraged their success.²²⁴ Progressive intellectuals and the parliament deputies did not agree with the political goals of the insurrectionists but may have lent their support only to weaken the CUP’s efforts at centralization.²²⁵ The

²²¹ Ibid., 329.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ For more detail see Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks*, 71.

²²⁴ “Telegrams sent to Bashkimi and Vllazënia in Elbasan,” 17 February – 11 May 1909, Elbasan, AQSh, F. 102, D. 30, Fl. 1-10.

²²⁵ Ismail Kemal, *Memoirs of Ismail Kemal bey*, 331-338; Prifti et al, *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar, Vol. II*, 399; Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks*, 71 and his *Arabs and Young Turks*, 71.

associations, on the other hand, remained neutral, true to their statutory bylaws which consistently shunned political activities.²²⁶ The CUP's reaction was quick. An *ad-hoc* "Action Army" of regular troops and volunteers under Mahmud Şevket Pasha quickly put down the insurrection.

The countercoup brought into the open not only political and social divisions within the empire but also underscored the way in which an unfettered public sphere permitted the conservative uprising. Immediately after quelling the countercoup, the CUP moved decisively to centralize its grip on power. First, it replaced a visibly despondent Abdülhamit with his brother Mehmed V Reşad, thereby removing the most powerful symbol of the countercoup.²²⁷ Second, a series of laws intended to discipline the activities of associations, clubs and committees were quickly enacted. On 29 July the CUP-dominated parliament passed the Press Law and on 16 August a Law of Associations, both of which significantly curtailed liberties of press and assembly. In addition, it amended articles of the Constitution of 1876 and enhanced the parliament's legislative powers, which made cabinet ministers and deputies responsible to the legislature both individually and collectively.

In the Albanian provinces, as indeed elsewhere as well, the CUP used both the stick and the carrot. The new legal measures were used with apparently greater efficiency against the smaller clubs and the less well-integrated associations. In May 1909, for instance, the club *Labëria* in Avlonya was closed down and its members jailed while in Ohrid, the local Albanian Club was similarly closed down and its

²²⁶ "Correspondence of *Bashkimi* and *Vllazënia* with Prefect of Elbasan," Elbasan, 17 February – 11 May 1909, AQSh, F. 102, D. 30, Fl. 1-10.

²²⁷ Ismail Kemal, *Memoirs of Ismail Kemal bey*, 341.

members reportedly “bound hand and foot” and sent to Istanbul via Monastir.²²⁸ The larger associations, however, escaped relatively unscathed. To them the CUP offered the carrot. On the occasion of the anniversary of the revolution, the CUP sponsored a congress, held between 23 and 29 July 1909 in Debre seeking to ensure Albanian support urging them to 1) accept a principled *Ottomanism*, 2) loyalty to the constitution 3) readiness to protect the Ottoman Empire against foreign threats, and 4) opposition to domestic uprisings.²²⁹ The composition of the more than 320 attending delegates in the congress was heterogeneous, including landowners, religious leaders, civil employees, teachers and army officers on both active and reserve duty. They came from five vilayets, İşkodra, Kosova, Monastir, Yanya and Salonica. The overwhelming majority of the attendees were Albanians but some Balkan Turks, sixteen Slav Macedonians, fifteen Greeks and some Vlach and Serbs were also in attendance.²³⁰ The congress’s four-point program, in its CUP version, encountered widespread opposition by the Albanian members especially from a disproportionately vocal active minority composed of members of various *Bashkimi* associations for whom Ottomanism and defense of the constitution on the one hand and unquestioned loyalty to the CUP on the other were not synonymous. Eventually, the congress concluded with a compromise. In its Articles of the Union, the Albanians accepted the CUP demands in their entirety provided that the CUP acquiesced to Albanian demands. They were largely the same as those agreed upon by the meeting of

²²⁸ “Government Measures against the Albanians,” May 1909, AQSh, F. 102, D. 32, Fl. 1.

²²⁹ “Invitation to Celebrate the Constitution,” 9 July 1909, Elbasan, AQSh, F. 102, D. 55, Fl. 1.

²³⁰ Prifti et al, *Historia e Popullit, Vol. II*, 412; Abdyli, *Lëvizja Kombëtare*, 217-229.

associations in Monastir a year prior. These were called the Supplementary Articles.²³¹

Associational correspondence suggests two possible reasons for the growing tensions between the Albanians and the CUP. First, while on paper the CUP had become a truly mass organization, in practice the extent to which it exercised centralized authority within its ranks is doubtful. Very early on it became clear that the inability, or the unwillingness as the case may be, of the CUP branches to cater to Albanian demands, directly affected their growth and funding. Thus, for instance, on 10 April 1909, the CUP branch in Elbasan sought information from *Vllazënia* of Elbasan about a number of army active officer members who had failed to pay their dues and were suspected of having “defected” and joined Albanian associations. Nearly a month later, on 20 May 1909, *Vllazënia* confirmed these suspicions.²³² Second, the novelty of belonging to a national association was still attractive for many Albanians and the agreements reached earlier in Monastir had fueled further ambitions and hopes. Instead of being driven away as the CUP hoped, repression radicalized attitudes as a result of which the associations continued to experience growth and consolidation as new members, often from the closed associations and clubs, joined in.²³³ On 14 March 1910, for instance, the two largest associations in Elbasan, *Vllazënia* and *Bashkimi*, merged loosely into *Bashkimi i Ri* (The New Bashkimi), in what may well have been a concerted effort to resist CUP

²³¹ Prifti et al, *Historia e Popullit, Vol. II*, 413-414.

²³² “CUP Correspondence with *Vllazënia*,” Elbasan, 10 April – 20 May 1909, AQSh, F. 102, D. 48, Fl. 102.

²³³ See “Associational Reports and Correspondence,” Elbasan, 4 October – 9 December 1909, AQSh, F. 102, D. 45, Fl. 1-22; “Letters from Elbasan and Ergiri to *Bashkimi* of Bucharest,” Elbasan, Ergiri, 26 February – 25 April 1909, AQSh, F. 99, D. 155, Fl. 1-2.

suppression.²³⁴ In this manner the associations gradually became a new and powerful tool that continued to redefine local notions of popular assembly in a climate of transition and reform.²³⁵

The new dynamic became apparent when the associations sponsored two subsequent congresses held at the behest of various *Bashkimi* and *Vllazënia* clubs. The second pan-Albanian congress since the Congress Monastir in 1908, was held in Elbasan between 2 and 10 September 1909. The Elbasan congress upheld the cultural platform reached in Monastir in November 1908 but went further in calling for the establishment of a teacher training institution, the selection of a bureaucratic apparatus that would oversee budgeting and other organizational matters for Albanian schools, and the coordination of the activities of all associations and clubs toward the single goal of Albanian education. The congress produced tangible results in the establishment of the Normal School of Elbasan, which, as in Bucharest in 1892, was a six-grade teachers' training college. Initially staffed by seven instructors, it taught a curriculum of thirty mandatory courses concerning various aspects of the Albanian language (syntax, grammar, rhetoric, poetry and literature), mathematical sciences (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, mechanics, etc.), natural sciences, humanities, and foreign languages (Ottoman Turkish and French).²³⁶ English and Greek were also to be taught but as electives. The need for the establishment of similar schools in other locales was also anticipated. The congress entrusted the association *Përparimi*

²³⁴ "Notification on the Merger between *Bashkimi* and *Vllazënia*," Elbasan, 14 March 1910, AQSh, F. 102, D. 79, Fl. 1.

²³⁵ See for an example "Correspondence of *Bashkimi* and *Vllazënia*," Elbasan, 18 August 1909, AQSh, F. 102, D. 61, Fl. 1-2; "*Përparimi* Correspondence with *Bashkimi* and *Vllazënia*," Korçë, 1 October 1909, AQSh, F. 102, D. 67, Fl. 1.

²³⁶ "Decisions of the Congress of Elbasan," Elbasan, 1909, AQSh, F. 102, D. 235, F. 1-4; See also Abdyli, *Lëvizja Kombëtare*, 249-250.

(Progress) of Korçë to be the main regulatory body in charge of raising the necessary operational funds for the upkeep of the facilities and financing the Normal School in Elbasan.²³⁷

The rivalry with the CUP deepened when a new law, passed on August 1909, expanded military recruitment to include the independent clans of the highlands. Hitherto, the highlanders had traditionally served the Ottoman military as a stipendiary force of their own free will rather than regular conscripts. Between August and October 1909 several uprisings exploded in Kosova, İşkodra, and the northern parts of the vilayet of Monastir following after the previous insurrections in May. In response, a series of punitive expeditions were mounted against the insurrectionists that included many gratuitous acts of violence. These expeditions never achieved their intended goals. No sooner was an area “pacified” and the army departed, the population reneged on its promises to surrender their weapons, pay back taxes and submit to a census.²³⁸

From all quarters, the associations reacted energetically and telegrams were sent to the parliament’s leadership protesting closures, arrests, the re-imposition of censorship and the army’s violence. The CUP was particularly vulnerable to charges of “Turkification.” In a manner similar to the Arabs, the Albanians also claimed that the majority of Turkish-speakers within the CUP, the dominance of the Turkish-speaking majority in parliament, the CUP’s unrelenting opposition to instruction in the Albanian language and schools and resistance to legally recognize the Albanians as a nationality at a time when they were routinely addressed as such in common

²³⁷ Arben Puto, *Shqipëria Politike, 1912-1939* (Tiranë, Botimet Toena, 2009), 13.

²³⁸ Akademia e Shkencave, *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, 398, 404-411.

parlance, subordinated CUP promises to the pursuit of a policy of centralization through willful “denationalization.”²³⁹ “When they need us,” complained the students’ branch of the Society for True Liberty (*Shoqëria e Lirisë së Vërtetë*), “they call us *kardeş* (brothers), *aslan* (lions, i.e., brave) and *kahraman* (heroes)... but when we do for ourselves we are *gjaur* (i.e. *kâfir*, infidel) and Latinized Muslims [sic].”²⁴⁰

Turkification under the CUP tapped into a deep vein in Albanian social activism that had began to throb since the heydays of the Hamidian regime.²⁴¹ At stake was not the issue of demographic discrimination and statistical underrepresentation in parliament that, for instance, galled the Arab deputies.²⁴² The Albanians’ invective was primarily directed against the legislation enacted by the CUP-dominated parliament. The CUP was charged with fanning the flames of sectarian, political and cultural differences within Ottoman society, thus undermining, on the one hand, the unity and equality implied by the constitutional regime and on the other, the trust of the people in Ottomanist principles and the legality of the state.

Such tensions received wide coverage when a third pan-Albanian congress was held again in Monastir on 2 April 1910 ostensibly to debate issues left in abeyance since the first congress in 1908. In attendance were twenty delegates representing thirty-four associations. The sessions of the congress were dominated by two salient questions: securing funds for printing presses (which the congress entrusted to the care of all participant associations) and assessing the unstable political situation resulting from the bloody suppression of the rebellions in the

²³⁹ For the Arab perceptions see Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks*, 82-95.

²⁴⁰ “Call of the Association for True Liberty,” Undated, AQSh, F. 102, D. 18, Fl. 1-2

²⁴¹ “The Legal Right of the Albanians,” Bucharest, 22 July 1899, AQSh, F. 99, D. 35, Fl. 2-4.

²⁴² Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks*, 83-85.

vilayet of Kosovo. The congress produced a ten-point program that upheld all previous resolutions concerning the development of Albanian letters, schools, the publication of textbooks and Albanian-Turkish dictionaries. It also anticipated the establishment of a Normal School in Üsküp after the example of the same school in Elbasan.²⁴³ In addition, the congress published a Memorandum, which reminded the CUP-led government that while the Albanians were holding fast to the pledges made in the Congress of Debre, the CUP had yet to hold to its promises. Thus, the congress petitioned the government to do its utmost to stop the ongoing suppression of Albanian educational activities, protect their free progress, stop Greek subsidies in lay and religious schools and instead subsidize Albanian teachers. This would counter Greek influence in Yanya and Monastir, whose Greek schoolteachers were held to be enemies to the empire. It also called on the government to take active steps to enforce border security in these vilayets and deny entry to Greek paramilitary bands, which were accused of having killed at least forty-five Albanian activists since Negovani's death in 1905.

Faced with the CUP's intransigence, a more radical strain of social activism emerged after 1910, one that drew on the past experiences of the CLAs and the CUP's own revolutionary past. Established sometime by the end of 1910 or early 1911 probably in Sofia, Bulgaria, an organization called the Central Albanian Committee (CAC) published in May 1911 a three-point program calling for an armed struggle to achieve and defend Albanian rights and demands.²⁴⁴ The CAC claimed to trace its lineage to an obscure *Black Society* allegedly established in 1878. In its

²⁴³ Prifti et al., *Historia e Popullit*, Vol. II, 424.

²⁴⁴ "Call of the Leadership Group of the Central Albanian Committee," Sofia, 1 September 1911, AQSh, F. 102, D. 3, Fl. 1.

statute, the CAC sought to organize and finance itself along the same patterns established earlier by other associations. It also aspired to establish itself as an umbrella organization for all other associations in the Ottoman Empire, Egypt and in the United States. In June 1911, another organization *Ana Kombëtare Shqiptare* (roughly, the Albanian National League) was established along the same principles but it did not share CAC's lofty ambitions for a mass organization. Its membership structure was subjected to a strict, almost militarized discipline. In its statute of 23 June 1911, the ANL was at a loss to define the political borders of a putative Albanian nation but later settled the issue by simply lumping the vilayets of Kosova, İşkodra, Yanya and Monastir into one single Albanian territorial mass. The ANL said nothing about Ottoman suzerainty and departed from all previous programs of other associations by requesting that "Albania," follow the Greek and Bulgarian example and be made a "self-governed kingdom with a European prince" as its ruler.²⁴⁵

Other such organizations soon followed. All claimed that the CUP had betrayed the revolution and by alienating its own peoples it was giving the empire away to its enemies, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia. Although these grievances were seen exclusively through the prism of Albanian-Balkan experiences, efforts were made to cast the CUP as the source of evil for all Ottoman constituent peoples. True Freedom, for instance, sought to portray the CUP as the "enemy of the people" noting, in addition to the massacres in Kosovo, the role of Ottoman regular troops in the Armenian pogroms in Adana in April 1909 and the violent suppression of the Druze

²⁴⁵ "Statute and Demands of Dega e Anës Kombëtare Shqiptare," 23 June 1911, AQSh, F. 102, D. 13, Fl. 1-8; "Political and Organizational Program of Ana Kombëtare e Shqipërisë," Undated [1912], AQSh, F. 102, D. 14, 1-4.

rebellions in Hawran and East Jordan in May 1909-August 1910.²⁴⁶ Opposition to the CUP made it possible that from 1911 onward there was increasing talk about the “mountains,” “*çetas*,” “armed struggle,” “legal assassinations” and the like.²⁴⁷ Even the symbols in these new organizations changed. They did not now display peaceful seals that in the past included the quill and the inkpot, the open book, shaking-hands, or turtledoves over laurel wreaths. More militant emblems appeared, such as, crossed rifles, sabres and grenades superimposed on an open book or over the inkpot and the like.²⁴⁸ Mottoes also changed, from civic notions like Justice, Brotherhood, Equality, Service, etc., to more eschatological and messianic concepts like Freedom, Honor, Death, Nation and the like.

In theory these organizations offered a considerably more active and potentially more centralized form of Albanian social activism. Their efforts, however, do not seem to have been very successful since their memberships (never listed in the documents) likely remained limited and, in the documents consulted, there is virtually no record of collaboration with the older civic associations. For their part, these main groups remained committed to the Ottoman legal processes and sought to rally public opinion through constitutional processes. Their chance came in January 1912, when the elections for the new parliament were declared.

²⁴⁶ “Call of Association *True Freedom* for action against the CUP,” Undated [1912], AQSh, F. 102, D. 17, Fl. 3-4.

²⁴⁷ “Program of Albanian *çetas* organized by CAC” [1912?], AQSh, F. 102, D. 10, Fl. 1.

²⁴⁸ “The Statute of the Black Society for Salvation,” [1912?], AQSh, F. 102, D. 11, Fl. 3.

From Imperial Divorce to Initial Independence

By 1912 it became clear that integrationalist Ottomanism had failed to produce tangible results for the centralist platform. The growth of political pluralism and an abundance of associations and interest groups supported by an ever-assertive press demanding changes in the social and political fabric of the empire had become a reality, one which the CUP-dominated government could neither successfully ignore nor effectively suppress. An early example that suggested challenges to come for the CUP itself, was when the recently reorganized liberal opposition, the new *Hürriyet ve İtilâf Fırkası* (Freedom and Accord Party), more commonly known as the Liberal Entente or the Entente, won a contested seat in Istanbul in the by-elections of November 1911 shortly after its formation. This victory in the heart of the empire was an important indicator of the CUP's dissipating authority as the main political force in the empire.²⁴⁹ Thenceforth, the main political divide centered on the competition between the centralist CUP on the one hand and decentralist Entente on the other.

As Hasan Kayali has shown, there were, however, few differences between the CUP and the Entente, both being in agreement over basic political objectives but divided over leadership and by social background.²⁵⁰ Nonetheless, from the perspective of the electorate, the CUP represented the centralized administrative apparatus whereas the Entente catered to wider social interests advocating education in local languages, encouraging the separation of local and central governments, and supporting economic and intellectual institutions specific to ethnic and religious groups.

²⁴⁹ Kayalı, "Elections," 273 -274.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

It is difficult to gauge the political sentiments of the Albanian public across the occupational and educational spectrum. Archival evidence suggests that while the Muslim public placed great value on the notions of imperial unity and strength championed by the CUP, administrative centralization ran contrary to the desires of even Muslim traditionalists, who regarded it as threatening to their traditional liberties. Furthermore, the rhetoric on Muslim imperial unity and strength could cut both ways. Many remembered only too well the role that CUP played in dethroning and then replacing Abdülhamit II, a still venerated public figure in his former dual role as both Sultan and Caliph.

The associations, on the other hand, rallied behind the Entente and campaigned vigorously to influence public perceptions about which candidates they thought were better suited as MPs. Curiously, these groups still made no conscious effort to transform into fully-fledged political parties even though, by 1912, they clearly possessed sufficient logistical support, organizational experience, moral legitimacy and even authority to do so. Despite their unceasing appeals to the public not to shun the elections, the associations have left almost no lists of their own candidates. Only one such list is known to exist. In February 1912, *Bashkimi* of Alexandria made the selection of deputies on the ticket of the Entente and opposition to the CUP a patriotic duty for all Albanians.²⁵¹ This list is a valuable document for two reasons. First, it reveals that in the Albanian provinces, which were divided into fourteen electoral districts, a demographic majority supported the liberal opposition, either the Entente or Ismail Kemal's *Ahrar* Party. Second, it shows the unreserved

²⁵¹ "Call of the Brotherhood *Bashkimi* of Alexandria to all Albanians," February 1912, AQSh, F. 97, D. 40, Fl. 1-4

support that a primarily Orthodox organization gave to Muslim deputies, suggesting that a depersonalized political process was considered far more important than political nationalism. Indeed, the associations appeared only too happy to elect their preferred candidates on the ticket of already existing parties and perfectly willing to obtain their goals through constitutionally legal means.²⁵²

The elections, however, were marred by widespread fraud. Desperately seeking to maintain their majority in parliament, the CUP resorted to intimidation, coercion and ballot stuffing, which prompted Sultan Mehmed V to cancel the elections on 5 August 1912 and order new ones. But the new elections ran into problems of communications between party headquarters and their provincial branches as well as the usual machinations concerning new instructions to avoid a repeat of improprieties. On 8 October the Balkan Wars intervened and the elections were cancelled by imperial decree on 25 October.²⁵³

As these events unfolded, another drama played out in Istanbul. On 11 January 1912, Hasan bey Prishtina, the MP for Prištine (Prishtinë) in the vilayet of Kosovo, was asked to explain in parliament the political situation in Kosovo following the rebellion of 1911. Prishtina concluded his report by warning that if “the [CUP] government does not change its policies and administration [and] if the Albanians do not receive the political rights that are due them, it is inevitable that there will be an explosion, and grave and bloody incidents [i.e., general uprising] will

²⁵² “Invitation of the Senate of the [Regional] Election Committee,” 1 November 1912, AQSh, F. 102, D. 6, Fl. 1.

²⁵³ For more on the elections of 1912 and the aborted elections of the same year see Kayali, “Elections,” 273-274, 276-278.

be the consequence.”²⁵⁴ In his memoirs, Prishtina admitted that Albanian grievances were many and varied but he listed as most pressing 1) the “chauvinism” of the CUP, 2) its highhanded centralization tendencies, 3) pan-Islamic intrigues, 4) the constant interference of the military in domestic politics, 5) the atrocities in Kosovo and Albanian highlands since 1910 and 6) the “illegal” interferences of the CUP with electoral law for the elections of 1912. The speech received positive reactions from all Albanian deputies in the chamber and the Arab members of the Entente’s opposition. The CUP deputies on the other hand accused Prishtina of being a firebrand who sought to set the empire ablaze. In response, Albanian deputies Ismail Kemal Bey, Avlonyalı Süreyya bey, Mufit Bey Libohova, Esat Pasha Toptani (on whom more later in Chapter 3), and Aziz Bey Vrioni, left the chamber and met subsequently at Süreyya bey’s house in Taksim Square near the artillery barracks. There they agreed that in order “to put an end to the Turkish policies affecting our national culture and to ensure some political gains for the Albanians, there was no other way out than a general uprising.” The plotters selected Kosovo as the place for this insurrection since that vilayet had been on a warpath intermittently since 1906 and more recently since 1910. Toptani pledged to effect the mobilization of what is today central Albania, in Durrës, Tiranë, and the clansmen of Mirditë. Aziz, Mufid and Süreyya Beys pledged to mobilize the peasants of Berat, Avlonya, Ergiri and Tepedelen, whereas Ismail Kemal was tasked with touring Europe in order to raise

²⁵⁴ Hasan bey Prishtina, *Nji Shkurtim Kujtimesh mbi Kryengritjen Shqiptare të Vjetit 1912*, quoted in Robert Elsie “Texts and Documents of Albanian History” Retrieved from http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts20_2/AH1921_3.html.

awareness but also to procure weapons and financial support for the would-be insurrectionaries.²⁵⁵

Following the dissolution of the parliament by the Sultan, Ismail Kemal left for his European tour whereas Hasan Prishtina went to Kosovo.²⁵⁶ Before his departure, however, Prishtina met one last time with the Arab and Kurdish *Ahrar* deputies and endeavored to recruit their aid into a general anti-CUP general uprising. Nothing came of this and the projected Albanian-inspired pan-Ottoman uprising became, like the League of Prizren in the not-too-distant past, simply an Albanian affair. The insurrection began gradually in April 1912 right after the ballots suggested yet another CUP electoral victory, in the highlands of Yakova in Kosovo. By May it had spread throughout the vilayet of İşkodra. By the end of July, as a group of officers, the *Halaskân* (Saviors), sympathetic to the Entente launched a coup against the CUP government, Kosovo and İşkodra vilayets fell to the insurrectionists. By mid-August, Fier and Përmet in Yanya and Üsküp in Monastir also fell to the insurrection. According to Hasan Prishtina, the Albanian revolt did more damage to Ottoman prestige than the recent Italian-Ottoman war over Libya (1911-1912) and was directly responsible for facilitating the coup of officers that toppled Mehmed Said Pasha's government on 22 July 1912. Be that as it may, Mukhtar Pasha the new Grand Vizier of the so-called Grand Cabinet, abandoned the previous government's rejection of any deal with the insurrectionists and entered negotiations. The Albanian demands can be summarized as follows:

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ For Prishtina's role see "Telegram of the Revolutionary Committee of Southern Albania," Fier, 2 July 1912, AQSh, F. 102, D. 96, Fl. 2.

1. The establishment of an autonomous single vilayet.
2. Performance of military service by Albanian recruits in said vilayet, except during wartime.
3. Appointment of public officials with knowledge of the country, customs and language in the Albanian vilayet (not necessarily of Albanian birth or origin).
4. Recognition of the Albanian language as an official language and the establishment of primary schools in all towns and villages, with vocational and agricultural schools in the more populous districts.
5. Freedom to establish private schools and societies.
6. Theological schools to be opened as needed and [only] where requested.
7. Development of agriculture, trade, and road infrastructure including railways
8. Amnesty for all those Ottoman peoples and individuals involved in the insurrection.
9. Compensation for damaged properties during the insurrection.
10. Court Martial for all members of the cabinet of Haki and Mehmed Said Pasha that attempted to quell the insurrection.
11. Official recognition of the *laws of the mountains* (i.e., customary legal codes, the *Kanuns*) for those regions where already in application.
12. Modern weaponry to be distributed at the discretion of the government but stored in sensitive regions that are under foreign threat.²⁵⁷

After some procrastination, on 18 August Mukhtar pasha acquiesced to the Albanian demands. The content of the concessions, however, was diluted considerably and applied by the Porte as personal agreements promising reforms with each specific vilayet individually, lest it appear that Istanbul succumbed to Albanian collective national pressure. There was a precedent for this. The insurrections of 1911 in İşkodra had produced a separate similar agreement, which the Porte recognized at the time as a personal covenant with its subjects solving that particular crisis. The current agreements, therefore, applied only to Yanya, Monastir and Kosovo and excluded İşkodra. Still, by the Porte's keeping with the spirit, if not the letter, of the Albanian demands, the insurrectionists had achieved an important victory for the cause of decentralization since now local governance and self-administration were legally

²⁵⁷ Ibid. See also Prifti et al, *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar, Vol. II*, 495.

recognized. The deal persuaded the Albanians to hold back. The process of further self-governance was, however, interrupted, just like the election of 1912, by the onset of the Balkan Wars.

The Wartime Role of the Associations, 1912-1918

The Balkan Wars destroyed the fragile civic balance between the Albanians and their Ottoman government and reframed the context of Albanian politics. For the next eight years the Albanians underwent a considerable social trauma, the likes of which Europe as a whole would not experience until well into the First World War but which, for Albanians, began earlier and lasted longer. The failed promise of the Young Turk revolution had done much to dissipate the initial national optimism. But it was the failure of the principle of imperial collective defense and the Great Power treaties in London and Bucharest 1913, which removed even the slightest hope for self-government. The civic experience that the Albanians had acquired through endless negotiations with their imperial government now seemed useless and their political fate rested in the hands of rapacious neighbors and the Great Powers.

On 28 November 1912 a pan-Albanian congress convened in Vlorë composed of eighty-three delegates consisting of former Ottoman civil servants and associational and community leaders and chaired by Ismail Kemal Bey. Ismail Kemal had recently arrived from his European tour where the only achievement of note had been to secure the support of the Albanian associations in Romania.²⁵⁸ The congress

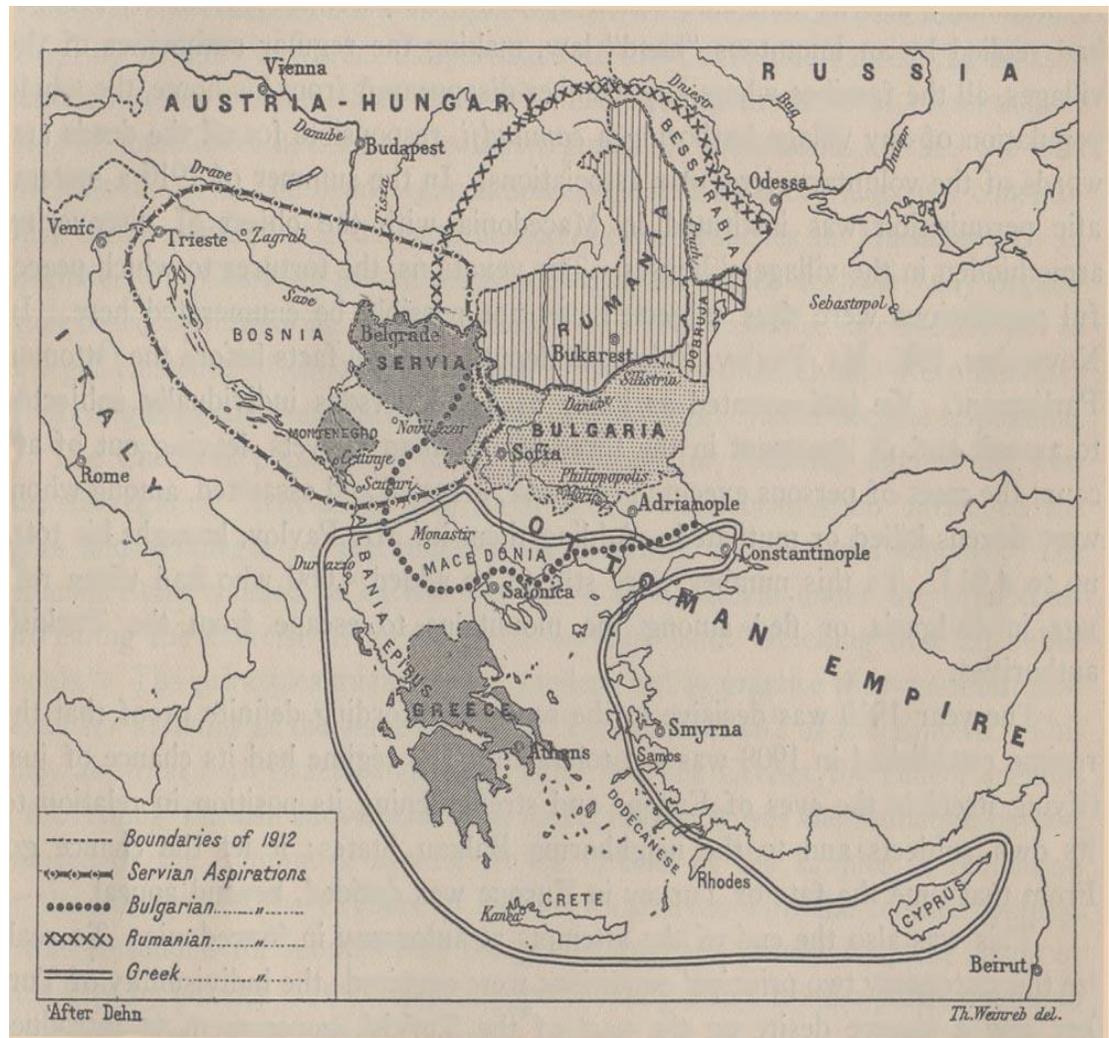
²⁵⁸ “Ismail Kemal bey and Luigj Gurakuqi to *Bashkimi* of Bucharest,” [Vlorë], 1912, AQSh, F. 99, D. 198, Fl. 1-2.

declared Albania an independent country, and it elected a Senate composed of eighteen members and a Provisional Government of twelve members consisting of six Muslims, three Orthodox and three Catholics led by Ismail Kemal bey as President.²⁵⁹ The most pressing problem faced by the Vlorë assembly was to reach beyond Vlorë to the wider world and communicate Albanian desires. The declaration of independence signified that intent and telegrams were sent to the authorities in Istanbul and the European governments requesting international recognition. Ismail Kemal appealed to the European powers to recognize Albanian independence and forestall the plans of the Balkan states for territorial dismemberment.²⁶⁰ For their part, the émigré associations made similar appeals in the name of the Albanian majority within the four Ottoman vilayets.²⁶¹ In the early stages of the war such expectations were not necessarily misplaced since none of the Great Powers desired a fundamental departure from the *status quo* established by the Berlin Treaty in 1878. Indeed, on 8 October 1912, a joint Russian-Habsburg declaration called on the League to respect the Berlin Treaty and cautioned that the war must not result in any territorial changes. Eventually, the powers anticipated further reforms *a' la* the Mürzsteg Agreement of 1903 for Macedonia but otherwise remained committed, on paper, to the preservation of Ottoman territorial integrity. For the Albanians it became therefore a matter of national urgency to lay claim to the territories they inhabited, representing themselves not as split between four Ottoman provinces but rather as a national ethnolinguistic population deserving a separate state.

²⁵⁹ Ismail Kemal, *Memoirs of Ismail Kemal bey*, 370-372.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 373.

²⁶¹ "Motion of the Albanians of Bucharest to the Great Powers," 2 December 1912, Bucharest, AQSh, F. 99, D. 197, Fl. 1-2.



Map 2.1 Aspirations of the Balkan States fueling the Balkan Wars

There was, however, a fundamental difference for Albania with similar processes in the Balkans. In contrast to the complicated historical experiences of the Greeks, Serbs and Bulgarians and their claims to geographically grounded historical rights supported by substantial proto-national links with the pre-Ottoman past, the Albanian declaration of independence was not an act of secession born out of romantic notions of the nation and representations of “Turkish” alien rule. Such notions had proven politically useful in the rise of patron/client relationships and had

aided the Greeks, Serbs and Bulgarians in establishing embryonic states, but were useless in the Albanian case which had never articulated such ambitions. When the Ottoman order was dismantled such efforts were redirected toward Europe, which by virtue of representing “the civilized world,” was held morally responsible for extending political protection to newly independent peoples.²⁶² In other words, Albanian efforts to establish a relationship with Europe sought to ensure new collective rights guaranteed in the name of social justice by the Europe powers. As Ismail Kemal bey put it in a telegram intended for the British government:

The Albanians, who have entered into the family of the peoples of Eastern Europe, of whom they flatter themselves that they are the eldest, are pursuing one only aim, to live in peace with all the Balkans States and become an element of equilibrium. They are convinced that the government of His Majesty, as well as the whole civilized world will accord them a benevolent welcome by protecting them against all attacks on their national existence and against dismemberment of their territory.²⁶³

Albanian moral assertions did not so much reflect what Paskal Milo and, more recently, Nikola Guy have called the weakness of the local political class as they revealed the limited range of options available.²⁶⁴ The Albanian experience was that of public pressure and interest groups that first grew within the context of the émigré cultural associations seeking political representation within the existing Ottoman state. As such were acutely aware that they lacked strong representation and support in Europe. With the armies of the Balkan League bearing down upon them, there was consequently little opportunity for political maneuverings.²⁶⁵

²⁶² “Protest of the Albanian Colony in Romania” Bucharest, 2 December 1912, AQSh, F. 99, D. 216, Fl. 1; See also Larry Wolff, “Western Representation of Eastern Europe on the Eve of World War I: Mediated Encounters and Intellectual Expertise in Dalmatia, Albania and Macedonia,” *Journal of Modern History*, 86, 2 (2014), 383.

²⁶³ Ismail Kemal, *Memoirs of Ismail Kemal bey*, 373.

²⁶⁴ Vlora, *Kujtime*, 56-60.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 62-63.



Map 2.2 The Occupation of Albanian-Ottoman lands from Serbia and Greece. Triangle around Valona/Vlorë refers to the maximum extend of authority enjoyed by Ismail Kemal bey's provisional government.

Within a month following the declaration of hostilities, the armies of the Balkan League had swept away Ottoman defenses, which henceforth concentrated the bulk of

the resistance defending Istanbul from the advancing Bulgarians in Eastern Thrace.²⁶⁶ Elsewhere, Serbian and Greek military advances were followed by gratuitous acts of violence and wanton destruction of property wherever their armies and paramilitaries went. Ethnic cleansing emptied entire Albanian areas in the former Kosovo, Monastir and Yanya vilayets.²⁶⁷ By early November, Bulgarian armies had overrun the vilayet of Edirne and eastern half of the Salonica vilayet in the Aegean coast. By the end of November, Serbian forces had conquered the vilayets of Kosovo and İşkodra, stopping only when they reached Durrës in the coast of the Adriatic Sea. At the same time, other Serbian forces under Marshal Radomir Putnik conquered Üsküp on 26 October and continued their advance in the Monastir vilayet, reaching into the Vardar valley and annexing Monastir on 19 November.²⁶⁸ In the south, Greece accepted the surrender of Salonica on 8 November from the Albanian-born Ottoman general Hasan Tahsin Pasha and invaded the vilayet of Yanya, laying siege to Yanya on 26 November. The Greek forces did not advance in earnest until after the fall of Yanya in February 1913. The Greek navy, on the other hand, moved north where the Ionian Sea meets the Adriatic and, imposing a naval blockade over much of the Albanian southern coast, launched a small amphibious force in Himarë consisting of Cretan volunteers, army regulars and local auxiliaries led by Spyros Spyromilios a

²⁶⁶ Edward J. Erickson, *Defeat in Detail: The Ottoman Army in the Balkans, 1912-1913* (London: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 334.

²⁶⁷ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: Division of Intercourse and Education No. 4, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment, 1914); Malcolm, *Kosovo* 246-257; F.W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*, Vol. I, ed. Margaret M. Hasluck (Mansfield Center, CT: Martino Publishing, 2005), 539-540.

²⁶⁸ See Richard C. Hall, *The Balkan Wars, 1912-1913; Prelude to the First World War* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 11-12; 45-69.

Gendarmerie Major with a long record of insurrectionary activities in the Macedonian struggle.²⁶⁹

Under these circumstances, the associations found it difficult to exist let alone operate as freely as in the recent past. Nearly half the number of pre-war associations and their members suddenly became illegal entities and unwanted citizens of Serbia and Greece. They ceased their operations altogether and the activists left Albania bound for more secure locations in Romania, Italy, Spain, Austria, Great Britain, the Ottoman Empire and the United States. Consequently, the torch of social activism passed once again to the émigré associations, which, for their part, found themselves just as powerless to influence the political course of events. Inevitably, they became increasingly reliant on Habsburg and Italian patronage to champion a diplomatic solution favorable to them. The associations scored a negligible success when, supported by the Austrian authorities and the Viennese official press, they managed to win over Hungarian public opinion as well.²⁷⁰ With little European backing, the associational center of gravity quickly shifted to the United States, where, on 28 April 1912, the pan-Albanian Federation of America *Vatra* (Hearth) had been established in Boston through a merger of *Besa*, the Flag of Krujë of New England, the National Association of Worcester and the Swallow of New York. For the next three years, until 1915, a triumvirate consisting by Fan Noli, Kristo Dako and Faik Konica, three

²⁶⁹ Ledia Dushku, *Kur Historia Ndau Dy Popuj Fqinj: Shqipëria dhe Greqia, 1912-1914* (Tiranë: QSA, 2012), 132-136; For the Macedonian Struggle see Douglas Dakin, *The Greek Struggle in Macedonia 1897-1913* 2nd Ed. (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1993).

²⁷⁰ Vlora, *Kujtime*, 63.

of the most illustrious members of the Albanian American community, assumed the chairmanship of *Vatra*.²⁷¹

Much like *Bashkimi* of Bucharest in 1906, *Vatra* in 1912 represented the culmination of Albanian associational activities in the United States but also reflected the ambitions of its leaders to become the premier organization acting for Albanian interests in the wider world. Associational correspondence shows that *Vatra* neither anticipated Albanian independence nor was it fully in touch with the prevailing currents of Ottoman politics.²⁷² Following the declaration of independence, Fan Noli's perception that Ismail Kemal had "sold out" Albanian national territories to Greece by failing to speak out for the presumptive demographic unity of the vilayet of Yanya led him to regard Ismail Kemal a traitor. Although in future years Noli's hostility to him would grow more intense, political necessities suddenly forced him to lend his support to Ismail Kemal's government, to the Austrian position on Albania, and even to Ottoman military efforts against the Balkan states. In late November, Noli (followed shortly thereafter by Dako, Konica and the itinerant monk Naum Cere of earlier Russian fame) embarked on a European-wide tour seeking, according to Jorgaqi, to publicize *Vatra* in the larger world of Albanian émigré circles, influence Great Power policy and European public opinion in favor of Albania, galvanize Albanian public opinion and secure its support for a foreign Christian prince. Supported by a *Vatra* stipend of \$80 a month (approximately \$1,900 in 2015) and other generous contributions from Egypt he traveled first to England and then to Romania, Austria, Italy and Albania. The onset of the First World War found him in

²⁷¹ For the establishment of *Vatra* see "The History of *Vatra*'s Establishment" [Boston?] Undated 1912, AQSh, F. 100, D. 9, Fl. 1-2.

²⁷² Jorgaqi, *Fan Noli*, vol. I, 268

Trieste from where he went to Vienna, where he linked up with a wider circle of Albanian activist immigrants. There he declared *Vatra*'s moral support for the Central Powers, given the role that Austria-Hungary played in securing the existence of an Albanian state in 1913-14. It was not until May 1915 that Noli was able to return to Boston via Denmark.²⁷³

In the absence of its most charismatic leaders, back in Boston *Vatra* had grown divided and had fallen prey to unimaginative individuals competing for the leadership of the association. After his return, Noli was unanimously elected as the new sole chairman. A month later in August, the former co-chairman Kristo Dako also arrived from Sofia, Bulgaria, to suddenly find himself no longer a member of the leadership triumvirate. At the time, Dako swallowed his pride but his ousting damaged his subsequent relationship with Noli. In the event, he brought back from Bulgaria a proposal, originally flaunted by Themistokli Gërmenji, to consolidate and coordinate all Albanian activities in Europe, northern Africa and the United States under a single roof so as best to portray united Albanian interests to the European powers. Gërmenji, a veteran activist originally a member of *Bashkimi* of Bucharest, had established in July 1914 an informal association, *Lidhja Kombëtare*, the National League. According to its statute, the National League envisioned itself as a *de jure* Albanian representative government and provided for the creation of committees and councils that would act as embryonic state institutions defending and representing Albanian interests in the wider world.²⁷⁴ Like Gërmenji, but unlike Noli, both Dako

²⁷³ Ibid., 274-302.

²⁷⁴ "Statute of the National Albanian League," [Korçë] July 1914, AQSh, F. 447, D. 19, Fl. 1-12.

and Konica advised the importance of maintaining strict political neutrality between the Central Powers and the Entente.²⁷⁵



Map 2.3 Territorial Modifications in the Balkans, 1912 – 1913

²⁷⁵ “Faik Konica to Kristo Dako,” Vienna, 6 February 2015, AQSh, F. 447, D. 8, Fl. 1-2.

Briefly giving his support to Gërmenji's proposals, Noli mounted fresh efforts to expand *Vatra's* support base among the Albanian-Americans. He started an energetic campaign, traveling the length and breadth of New England and preaching the merits of and the dangers to the "motherland" from the pulpit.²⁷⁶ He published prolifically, branching out also in the Massachusetts' press. In addition, Konica at the time located in Lausanne, Switzerland, was tasked to publish a periodical, which, according to Noli's vision, "should become an apology (defense) of Albania... leaning neither on Austria nor Italy."²⁷⁷ Similarly, Dako, his wife Sevasti Qiriazhi and his sister-in-law Parashqevi had established since the late 1890s important links with Protestant missionaries in the vilayet of Monastir and now, from Southbridge Massachusetts, set to expand their network with bible societies, missionary institutions that were often supported with generous donations by wealthy Americans.²⁷⁸ By late 1915, *Vatra* had absorbed various other smaller organizations representing, according to Paskal Milo, a few thousands of more than 40,000 Albanian immigrants in the United States.²⁷⁹ At this time *Vatra* also began to appeal directly to members of the Wilson administration at the Department of State protesting vigorously the Treaty of London and urging that "the United States in the name of justice and international morality use [its] moral influence to prevent partition of Albania as proposed by the Balkan states to Entente powers."²⁸⁰ At this

²⁷⁶ Jorgaqi, *Fan Noli*, vol. I, 311.

²⁷⁷ Paskal Milo, *Politika e Jashtme e Shqiperisë, 1912-1939* Vol. I. (Tiranë: Toena, 2013), 346.

²⁷⁸ Jorgaqi, *Fan Noli*, vol. I, 307

²⁷⁹ Milo, *Politika*, 345.

²⁸⁰ Telegram from Fan Noli, President of Pan Albanian Federation *Vatra*, to Secretary of State Robert Lansing, State Department, Boston, 21 August 1915, in Records Group 59, Political Affairs: Albania, 1910-1939, M1211, Roll 1, National Archives and Records Administration II College Park, Maryland (hereafter abbreviated as RG. 59, Political Affairs: Albania, 1910-1939, M1211, Roll 1, NARA II, College Park, MD.)

stage of American neutrality, there was no reason why the State Department would pay attention to Albanian demands. The United States was not a signatory to the Treaty of London and, perhaps more importantly, little was known of Albania in the United States.²⁸¹ Nonetheless, *Vatra* kept up the pressure and continued to inform the State Department about Albania as well as provide coverage of the ambitions of the Balkan states, their wartime conduct and the absent desire of the European powers to consider Albania an independent and neutral country.²⁸²

Vatra fully appreciated the predicament of the Albanian national question as well as the need for wider coordination. There was, however, a huge psychological gap between it and the social activists based in Europe and Albania. In contrast to the safety of the United States, the range of social activists in Europe appeared to suffer from an impending sense of doom and saw no relief from supporting either the Entente or the Central Allies. In 1915, from Lausanne, Jovan Gode cautioned Dako against believing the propaganda of both belligerent camps claiming that if the Entente won the war there would be no Albania, whereas if the Central Powers won than Greece would obtain the Albanian south from Korçë to Gjirokastër.²⁸³ Instead, he advocated that *Vatra* lend its support to the International Socialist Committee in Berne, Switzerland, and participate in the Zimmerwald Conference that was to be

²⁸¹ Alvey A. Adee, Second Assistant Secretary of State to Fan Noli, President of Pan Albanian Federation *Vatra*, Washington D.C., 26 August 1915, RG. 59, Political Affairs: Albania, 1910-1939, M1211, Roll 1, NARA II.

²⁸² "Mihal Tourtoulis [Turtulli] to Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States," Lausanne, Switzerland, 27 February 1916, RG. 59, Political Affairs: Albania, 1910-1939, M1211, Roll 1, NARA II.

²⁸³ "Jovan Gode to Kristo Dako," Lausanne, 8 June 2015, AQSh, F. 447, D. 8, Fl. 3. In identifying the loss of southern Albania with the possible victory of the Central Powers, Gode apparently labored under the assumption that Greece would rally on the side of the central powers given the well-known pro-German sympathies of King Constantine, whose wife Sofia was the sister of Kaiser Wilhelm III.

held that September. For Gode, the socialist aim to ensure a “*paix durable*” was the only chance to save Albania for the Albanians.²⁸⁴

The traumatic events of the First World War proved the presumption of national solidarity false even in the United States. Throughout the war, *Vatra*'s leadership was in agreement on basic political objectives but divided over leadership disputes and social background. Associational leaders in the United States, Noli, Dako, Konica, Konstantin Çekrezi and Mihal Grameno were energetic and dedicated leaders, but they rarely saw eye to eye. Dako, Grameno, Çekrezi, Gërmenji were all from Korçë in the vilayet of Yanya and gotten their political start in Bucharest. In contrast, Noli shared no such loyalties to any network. Eclectic and independent, Noli's individualism and firebrand leadership was resented on grounds that he failed to conform to the standards or background of his collaborators, especially since he had neither visited Albania prior to 1913 nor had he gotten his start in any of the Albanian associations in Europe. Noli came under considerable pressure by Dako and Grameno who resented what they saw as increasingly authoritarian brand of leadership, radical populist rhetoric and intellectual snobbery. For his part, Noli spurned Dako's and Grameno's sense of self-worth and rejected their unquestionable support for the National League in Albania. Noli vehemently opposed the notion of putting *Vatra*, and himself, under Gërmenji's leadership, at a time when the latter was supported in part through financial contribution from the United States.²⁸⁵ Toward the end of 1915, Noli appeared to have established his unquestioned rule over *Vatra* and turned its newspaper *Dielli* into a vehicle for his own brand of social activism. When

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ “*Vatra* to Themistokli Gërmenji and the National League,” Boston, 10 February – 29 April 1915, AQSh, F. 447, D. 11, Fl. 1-3

Dielli's editor Konstantin Çekrezi objected, Noli promptly sacked him. Çekrezi subsequently enrolled at Harvard University, Noli's Alma Mater, and went on to establish his own periodical *Illyria*.²⁸⁶

Çekrezi's dismissal deepened Noli's rivalry with Dako and Grameno and two opposing camps openly vied for political control of *Vatra*. On the one hand, by 1916 Noli had become an accomplished professional politician, unceasingly publishing articles and critiques of Great Power policies, assailing the apathy of the Albanians, urging revolutionary action and exhorting the Albanian community to provide more money and support. It is difficult to ascertain Noli's ideological position. It is safe to say that his primary concern was to turn *Vatra* into a workers' organization of mass movement dependent on him alone. Loath to share leadership with anyone else, he viewed others as lacking both the necessary energy and vision commensurate with the challenges at hand. Eventually, Noli's growing authoritarianism broke every convention of Albanian social activism. Hitherto, these had been instrumental in establishing democratic and decentralized representative bodies where a growing Albanian middle class increasingly articulated various social, cultural and political demands. In contrast, in the United States, Noli was well on the way to centralize planning and decision-making of *Vatra* into his own hands. By mid-1917, he had become *Vatra's* factotum as chief organizer and campaigner, editor in chief of *Dielli* as well as its chief contributor. In addition, he had also become also the "nation's" chief historian, chief polemicist, chief poet and chief politician and the most publicly visible Albanian in the United States, all by the age of 34. He even found the time to translate Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Othello*, which *Dielli* announced ready for

²⁸⁶ Jorgaqi, *Fan Noli*, vol. I, 305-342; Milo, *Politika*, vol. I, 345-47.

publication on 25 May 1916, as well as praising the bravery of both attacking German and defending French forces at the battle of Verdun.²⁸⁷

On the other hand, Noli's opposition consisted of virtually every other top Albanian leader in the United States, including Dako and the Qiriazi sisters, or the so-called Protestant Trinity, Mihal Grameno, editor in chief of two Albanian dailies, *Koha* (The Times) and The Albanian Era, Çekrezi and many others. This confrontation soon rallied for the Dako camp his American protestant network, which included noted missionaries, industrialists and philanthropists like Charles Richard Crane.²⁸⁸ British sympathizers for Albanian independence like Edith Durham and Aubrey Herbert remained largely neutral but they appear to have preferred Dako's camp to Noli's.²⁸⁹ Yet despite the impressive array of forces rallied against him, none could match Noli's mastery of the spoken and written language. The main differences therefore were neither over ideology nor over basic political objectives but rather over prestige and leadership.

Meanwhile in Albania, the National League and the wider range of social activists found it increasingly difficult to maintain wartime neutrality.²⁹⁰ After the stabilization of the Macedonian front in 1916, a system of protectorates was established with Italy occupying much of what is today southern Albania, the French settling in Korçë, and the rest of the country north of the Vjosë river going under Austria-Hungary. Constant reshuffling, however, from military to civilian

²⁸⁷ Jorgaqi, *Fan Noli*, vol. I, 317-318, 327.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 323.

²⁸⁹ M.E. Durham to Sevasti Qiriazi, London, 22 August 1918, RG. 59, Political Affairs: Albania, 1910-1939, M1211, Roll 1, NARA II

²⁹⁰ For an example see "Themistokli Gërmenji to Pandeli Cale," Various Locations, 30 May – 7 October 1915, AQSh, F. 447, D. 6, Fl. 1-22; "Themistokli Gërmenji to Vatra," Korçë, 12 October 1917, Ash, F. 447, D. 13, Fl. 1-2. For a more detail see Muin Çami *Shqipëria në Rrjedhat e Historisë, 1912-1924* (Tiranë; Onufri, 2007), 127-150.

administrations produced much confusion. For instance, between December 1912 and June 1920, only Korçë experienced ten separate regimes that included various Greek military and civilian administrations, Albanian national management and French military protectorates.²⁹¹ Thus, in order to ensure that their voice was heard and that they were not passive political onlookers, Albanian activists were forced to collaborate with occupational authorities in each zone while at the same time professing neutrality. In Vlorë, Turhan Përmeti took advantage of the Italian support for Albanian independence as a foreign policy tool to discredit Austrian rule and to establish an informal short-lived Albanian administration.²⁹²

Links with occupational armies were stronger in the Autonomous Albanian Republic of Korçë, where the French authorities established an Albanian administration in December 1916 composed of National League social activists, led by Themistokli Gërmenji as president of the republic.²⁹³ This French decision reverberated widely and appalled the governments of Greece and Italy as well as the Serb- and French- backed pretender for Albanian presidency Esat Toptani, on whom more will be said later. Nonetheless, Gërmenji proved an asset and an energetic collaborator for the French governor Colonel Henri Descoins, who apparently, and uncharacteristically for a French officer of the time, nurtured considerable sympathy for the Albanians.²⁹⁴ In 1917 Gërmenji led an Albanian detachment in the French

²⁹¹ Çami, *Rrjedhat e Historisë*, 141

²⁹² “Proclamation du General Ferrero,” Gjirokastër, 3 June 1917, AQSh, F. 209, Fl. 17-20. See also Milo, *Politika*, 289-300 and Vlora, *Kujtime*, 432, 434, 437.

²⁹³ “Protocole du Koritza,” Korçë, 10 December 1916, AQSh, F. 14, D. 209, Fl. 15-16. See also, Milo, *Politika*, 272.

²⁹⁴ Henri Descoins, *Six Mois de ‘Histoire de l’Albanie, Novembre 1916 – Mai 1917* (Paris: Alfred Costes Editeur, 1930), 29, 52-53; Stefan Popescu, “L’Albanie dans la Politique Étrangère de la France, 1919-1940” in *Valahian Journal of Historical Studies*, 1, (2004), 38-40) and his “Les Français et la

drive to capture Pogradec from the Austrians, an action for which he was decorated with the *Croix de Guerre*. Yet, a native Albanian administration in Korçë ran counter Greek designs for the region as a result of which Gërmenji was accused in early November of collaborating with the Austrians. Arrested by the French on trumped up Greek charges he was sent in Salonica (now as Thessaloniki) where he was quickly tried and summarily executed a week later on 9 November 1917.²⁹⁵

Back in the United States, Gërmenji's death may well have removed a significant, though largely symbolic, threat to Noli's dominance of *Vatra*. Yet Korçë was too far away to influence events in Boston. Noli's decision to support Mehmet Konica, Faik Konica's brother, as *Vatra* envoy in Europe, irreparably ruptured relations with his on and off again opposition. In retaliation, Dako and his group nominated Ismail Kemal bey (which rekindled Noli's earlier opposition with Ismail Kemal) but also went further when it established in late 1917 the National Political Party (ANP) in America. It was a shrewd maneuver, since officially *Vatra* was an organization devoted solely to educational purposes yet, as we shall see, to little avail.²⁹⁶

In 1917, two major political changes had a profound impact on Albanian social activism. First, following the Bolshevik revolution, Russia withdrew from the war in early November 1917. On 22 November the new Bolshevik government denounced the Pact of London of 1915, a series of secret diplomatic discussions that

République de Kortcha (1916-1920)" in *Guerres Mondiales et Conflicts Contemporains* 213 (2004), 77-87.

²⁹⁵ Owen Pearson, *Albania in the Twentieth Century, A History: Volume I, Albania and King Zog: Independence, Republic and Monarchy, 1908-1939* (London: Center for Albanian Studies in association with I.B. Tauris, 2004), 109.

²⁹⁶ Jorgaqi, *Fan Noli*, vol. I, 339, 350.

had negotiated, in part, Albania's complete dismemberment.²⁹⁷ According to the secret treaties, Italy was awarded the port of Vlorë and a mandate over the rest of Albania; the Kingdom of Montenegro was awarded the port of Shëngjin below the river Buna next to Lezhë. Italy similarly undertook to not oppose the division of northern and southern Albania between Montenegro, Serbia and Greece should France, Britain and Russia so wish. With other concessions to Balkan states left unspecified, the "Albanian" state was presumed to be a largely Muslim state in central Albania under the protectorate of Italy.²⁹⁸ The subsequent publication of the secret treaties by the Bolshevik government caused a massive uproar and served to enhance the prestige of Russian communism among many Albanian social activists as a new alternative egalitarian and progressive social system.²⁹⁹ This first perception would further grow in the coming years. Second, the United States entry into the war necessitated a shift in wartime allegiances. Noli and the Albanian-American community quickly disavowed previous support for Austria and declared for the Entente. As Nicola Guy has recently argued, the United States' moral support for self-determination as envisioned in President Woodrow Wilson's famous 14 Points promised at the very least newfound confidence in the U.S. support for Albanian sovereignty.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁷ George Frost Kennan, *Russia Leaves the War: Vol. 1 of Soviet-American Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), 92-94.

²⁹⁸ Guy, *Birth of Albania*, 99-118.

²⁹⁹ Kristo Frashëri, *Historia e Lëvizjes së Majtë në Shqipëri dhe e Themelimit të PKSh-së, 1878-1941* (Tiranë: ILAR, 2006), 19.

³⁰⁰ Guy, *Birth of Albania*, 143-145.



Map 2.4 The Albanian rump state according to the Secret Treaties of 1915.

Vatra's chance came when President Wilson decided to establish "The Inquiry" in September 1917, a secret study group composed of historians, geographers and political scientists preparing for the United States' postwar moral interventionism in European affairs. *Vatra*, which had hitherto assiduously expanded its range of contacts within the American political establishment and wholeheartedly supported American political ideals and institutions, received an invitation to submit its contribution. Subsequently, Noli met with Wilson in the spring of 1918 aboard the presidential yacht USS *Mayflower*, "having been invited as a Representative of the Albanians of America to accompany the President to the tomb of George Washington in Mount Vernon." Following a lengthy interview with Noli, Wilson reportedly promised him that he would "have [only] one voice in the next Peace Congress and use that voice on behalf of Albania."³⁰¹

It is unclear the degree to which Noli's presentation influenced Wilson and American policy circles. Noli met with Wilson on two other occasions including a visit for the Fourth of July celebration at the White House in 1918.³⁰² What is certain is that several factors played to Albanian advantage. First, Wilson's crusade to make the world "safe for democracy" and usher in a new moral world order based on collective security, rather than the system of alliances which had caused the eruption of the First World War, was in line with Albanian thinking. Although not listed in the 14 Points, this was a global vision assumed to include self-determination for Albanians as well as all other peoples. Second, the energetic Noli also made significant inroads even with the Republican Party probably in the expectation that

³⁰¹ "Kol Tromara to Faik Konica," Boston, 30 July 1918, AQSh, F. 100, D. 14, Fl.2.

³⁰² Jorgaqi, *Fan Noli*, vol. I, 351-353.

the popular Theodore Roosevelt might seriously challenge and replace Wilson in the presidential elections of 1920.³⁰³ Although he exaggerated Roosevelt's reception of Albanian claims, Noli's aim may have been to make Albania part of the foreign policy discussion in the upcoming elections.³⁰⁴

Now that the United States had committed to the war effort on the side of the Entente, Noli's earlier sympathies for the Central Powers came under the official scrutiny of the Bureau of Investigation, (BOI), the predecessor of Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Reports by special agent Feri F. Weiss of the Boston office confirmed the disunity of the Albanian social activists in the United States. Interviews with Dako and the Qiriazi sisters, the so-called Protestant Trinity whom Weiss called the Trinity of Jamaica Plain, revealed that Dako's group employed every chance to discredit Noli as a shady character and a man of obscure origins. For Dako, the fact that Noli had never been to Albania prior to 1913 and that he had entered the United States under the name "Stefano Mavromatis" – the name by which he was known prior to declaring for an Albanian identity in Egypt – constituted sufficient proof to conclude that he was not even Albanian.³⁰⁵ Furthermore, Dako's wife Sevasti Qiriazi sought to portray Noli as an embezzler of charitable donations generously given by patriotic Albanians. Weiss also quoted an anonymous source that claimed that Noli was on the payroll of the Austrian government. Since Noli's earlier trip to Vienna was a well-known fact, Weiss considered his source credible.³⁰⁶ The BOI

³⁰³ "Kol Tromara to Faik Konica," Boston, 30 July 1918, AQSh, F. 100, D. 14, Fl.2

³⁰⁴ "President Wilson and Ex-President Roosevelt for Albania," *Adriatic Review* 1, 1 (1918), 5-6; H.W. Brands, *T.R.: The Last Romantic* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 795, 806-810.

³⁰⁵ Pan-Albanian Activities, Fan Noli, Austrian Spy Matter, Boston, 16 June 1918, RG. 59, Political Affairs: Albania, 1910-1939, M1211, Roll 1, NARA II.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

investigation further encouraged Dako to appeal to the authorities to put *Vatra* under surveillance and even restrict Noli's whereabouts on the grounds that the association was essentially just an educational organization and should leave political work to his organization, the ANP, that was formed precisely for such activities.³⁰⁷ Although the investigation continued well after the end of the war, Weiss concluded that the case against Noli rested on petty jealousies and competition to dominate Albanian community affairs and to control the finances in the United States. As he put it, "these Albanians leaders are so cunning that the whole question may be nothing but a scheme to get more money out of Albanians in America... The raising of [a] regiment of Albanians in America may just be this financial proposition; if they can send 5,000 Albanians across [the Atlantic], they could probably raise \$100,000 and somebody would get a large share of that."³⁰⁸

Dako's appeals, however, were all for naught. Noli ploughed ahead winning hearts and minds by conducting meetings and sponsoring conferences, raising funds, composing stirring patriotic poems, making speeches to Albanian-American soldiers in training camps and even joining the League for Small and Subject Nationalities which convened at the McAlpin Hotel on 29 October 1917 and chaired by the U.S. Commissioner for Immigration Frederick C. Howe.³⁰⁹ Ironically, the convention coincided with the German peace offensive in 1918, which led to accusations that the League was pro-German. In particular, the recently formed pro-Greek Pan Epirotic Union in America, the Serbian legation in Washington D.C. and the Serbian Prime

³⁰⁷ Pan Albanian Activities, Fan S. Noli, Austrian Spy Matter, Boston, 3 July 1918, RG. 59, Political Affairs: Albania, 1910-1939, M1211, Roll 1, NARA II.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Jorgaqi, *Fan Noli*, vol. I, 343; Rev. Fan Noli, "Debt Albania owes to America: Rev. Noli's Address at Camp Devens," *The Adriatic Review* 1, no. 2, (1918), 58-61.

Minister Nikola Pašić sought to discredit Noli and *Vatra*'s envoy in London Mehmet Konica, whom they regarded as the greater threat to their territorial interests in Albania.³¹⁰ Greek and Serbian arguments relied on the sound legal interpretation that Greek and Serbian territorial interests were never part of an Albanian state rather “Turkish” [sic] and thus *Vatra* had no territorial claim to either southern or northern Albania. Similarly, but less convincingly it also argued that Noli and Konica, who secretly were Germano- and Austro-philic, could not represent Albanian interests since that position was already assigned to the landed magnate of central Albania Esat Toptani.³¹¹ Nonetheless, such exchanges served only to highlight the fact that at the conclusion of the First World War, *Vatra* under Noli had grown exponentially from a few hundred members in 1914 to more than 8,000 members spread in approximately 65 branches by July 1918. In addition, a yearlong fundraising campaign had filled the association's coffers to more than \$40,000, which was essential for the later upkeep of the Albanian envoys in Paris. Noli was no longer quoting Nietzsche. But it may be said that in the 1920s he displayed a supreme confidence in himself alone. As we shall see, this overconfidence may have contributed to his rapid ascent and then descent from political power in 1924.

³¹⁰ L.G. Probert to Philip H. Patchin, Department of State, Pittsburgh, 15 September 1918, RG. 59, Political Affairs: Albania, 1910-1939, M1211, Roll 1, NARA II; For more context see Pan Epirotic Union of America to U.S. Secretary of State Robert Lansing, Boston, 8 July, 1918, RG. 59, Political Affairs: Albania, 1910-1939, M1211, Roll 1, NARA II; H. Percival Dodge, Chargé d'Affaires in Serbia to Secretary of State Lansing, Corfu, 26 July 1918, RG. 59, Political Affairs: Albania, 1910-1939, M1211, Roll 1, NARA II.

³¹¹ Ibid.

Conclusion

Following the Young Turk revolution it seemed that the traditionally wide gap between state and society had finally narrowed. Albanian associational activity expanded exponentially and thenceforward the new domestic associations created an open and socially inclusive egalitarian associational life. Within the first months of 1908 the associations became important mechanisms for organizing and coordinating Albanian participation in imperial politics. In doing so, the associations and their Albanian-born Young Turk partners, established an informal authority over public life in the Albanian Ottoman provinces in expectation of the presumptive overhaul of the Ottoman legal and institutional framework promised by the revolution.

This associational life was remarkably well ordered and pluralistic. The initial optimism for constitutional reform was such that regional and religious loyalties did not influence the national program for language reform, social emancipation and economic progress as envisioned in the various congresses that took place between 1908 and 1912. Similarly, even personal ambitions, more common than either regional or religious loyalties, were tempered and self-contained within each association, which in turn enjoyed some potential to transform into future political parties. The geographic size of the Ottoman Empire, its multicultural diversity and the existence of a large bureaucratic apparatus afforded political and economic opportunities that were ultimately able to either absorb or curb personal ambitions.

Freedoms of assembly and free speech – necessary preconditions for the evolution of a public sphere – were not long upheld and the CUP became increasingly intolerant of associational activities. Although it ultimately considered such activities

subversive the CUP was nonetheless unable to outlaw the associations. There are two reasons for this. First, unlike the Hamidian regime, the CUP's authority was subject to parliamentary oversight even as it became the dominant political party after 1908. Second, the CUP's pre-1908 reliance on Albanian cooperation and the promises it made to the Albanian organizations in return for their aid against the Hamidian regime was itself responsible for aiding in their formation and abetting the subsequent growth of rival national programs with which it had to contend. They were thus difficult to suppress after 1908.

The CUP's failure to honor pre-1908 promises strengthened the associations' resolve, internal cohesion and their informal cooperation as they pursued a decentralized imperial political regime. Despite this, no association sought to monopolize the political process in exclusionary nationalist terms. Albanian social activism after 1908, while it appeared to fulfill cultural demands for political representation, remained, intentionally so, a structurally decentralized movement. Here was a Balkan indigenous ethnic group whose civic identity was loyal to the imperial state, contrary to the nationalist ambitions of its neighbors sought to achieve national representation within the existing state through legal means rather than by overthrowing it.

The Balkan Wars were shattering events that reframed the context and the character of Albanian social activism. The initial political optimism with the Tanzimat reforms led to the disappointment with constitutional rule under the CUP government and was replaced after the imperial divorce in 1912 with fear, uncertainty and insecurity about the future. Within now independent Albania the destruction of

formal associations and their informal rule over social life was so complete that no organization that was formed after 1912 succeeded in mustering the prestige enjoyed by their predecessors during the late Ottoman period. As a result, following the powers' decision to award the Albanians a theoretically independent state, the temptation was to form a national government rather than formal associations. The previous émigré and Young Turk experiences provided an organizational blueprint for political organization and state building. Yet because there were too many experiences from which to choose, clear tensions between associational and governmental frameworks emerged that would last well into the 1920s. Coupled with traditional decentralization, this maximized the crisis of confidence that was initially born during the Balkan Wars but then was further compounded by the onset of the First World War and a series of foreign occupations that followed through 1918. Indeed, wartime experiences did demonstrate the inadequacies of decentralization as a political regime. While it held indisputable benefits within an imperial framework, it was unsuitable in the context of a small and resourceless national state like Albania. Those activists who, like Ahmet Zogu, had witnessed wartime abuses by Serbian and then Austrian, Greek, French or Italian occupation firsthand stressed national stability of the state as more important than the political form of the government. For those who did not, like Fan Noli, the political form of the government was the essence of national stability of the state. In the more radical environment of the interwar period, the divisions among the new forms of Albanian political associations that emerged were far more profound and polarizing.

Chapter 3: National Governments, Old and New Associations and the Challenge of Independence, 1918 – 1925

From 1919 onward, the informal associations that grew up before and during the First World War faced the challenge of forging stable institutions of government in a supposedly independent Albania. After the state that came into existence in 1912-1914 was abolished during the wartime occupations, the Albanians had to assert their independence anew. Under the threat of national dissolution, the divided social activists seemed relatively unified in their efforts to preserve the unity of Albanian territories to the greatest extent possible. Yet, a new source of division developed. On the one hand, within Albania the experiences of Ismail Kemal bey and Prince Wied led to the activists' growing temptation to suspend efforts to band into informal associations and instead strive to form a national government. On the eve of independence it appeared that the collective experience of voluntary associations had sufficiently stimulated an active citizenry well enough versed in constitutional processes and ready to take up the reigns of the nascent Albanian state. Yet, when Albanians gave up informal associations in favor of creating a national government, ideological differences, local traditions, special interests and personal rivalries and ambitions came to dominate national politics to a hitherto unprecedented degree since 1878. National stability required uniformity, which, coupled with the previous decentralization, made creating centralized administrative institutions problematic.

On the other hand, émigré societies had not undergone such transformations and kept their associations intact. Their experience differed substantially since few of the émigré activists were touched personally by the ravages of the war or suffered it

as most Albanians in Albania did. They continued their former work but also sought representation in the Albanian national government. The émigré activists considered themselves better positioned to lead the national state, because their knowledge and involvement in stable and prosperous states (i.e., Romania, the United States) could provide the necessary stimulus that Albania needed to build its institutions. Somewhat patronizingly, many émigré activists came to Albania with lofty intentions to transform state and society wholesale in line with the modern states whence they came. In doing so, however, they neglected to take into account that within Albania the need to establish political stability took precedence over democratic reform. Nor did they take into account the variety of special interests, local traditions and personal rivalries that had emerged during the war years, assuming that a collective sense of patriotic duty was sufficient incentive to overcome divisions.

Internal and Domestic Challenges, 1918 – 1920

The challenges the Albanians faced in the Paris Peace Conference between 1918-1920 were more daunting than those faced during the London Conference in 1913. The defeat of Austria-Hungary in the war deprived the Albanian of their staunchest supporter, leaving Italy the only remaining Great Power with vested interests in Albania. Without Austrian influence in Albania, Italian policy geared up to counter the rising influence of the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Yugoslavia from 1929) in disputes that stemmed from concessions made to Italy at the secret London Pact in 1915. These included territories along the eastern seaboard of the Adriatic Sea, on the Austrian littoral in Istria, Fiume, Trieste and Gorizia and

Gradisca; northern Dalmatia and most of the coastal islands and lastly parts of the former Austrian Duchy of Carniola. Jointly with control over the port of Vlorë and the question of the Italian protectorate over Albania these disputes became known at the Peace Conference in Paris as the Adriatic Question. In addition, the loss of Austrian support meant that the pre-1914 commitment for an independent Albania state was artificially downgraded to the status of a previously non-existent state.³¹² The Albanian question was therefore effectively considered as the equivalent of “a colonial problem in areas not yet ready for independence.”³¹³ This did not bode well for Albanian activists who not only feared Serbian/Yugoslav and Greek aspirations but also had to contend with the colonial ambitions of Italy.

At the Peace Conference in Paris Albanian interests were at any given time represented by at least three different centers of advocacy. First, there was the Durrës Government, an informal governing body created by former Ottoman civil servants. Attempts to form a national government had begun since the departure of Prince Wied in August 1914 only to be thwarted by the occupying armies. Toward the end of the war chances improved, as Italy, the Great Power most interested in the Albanian question, abandoned its former opposition and became more amenable to the idea of a native local authority. Italian policymakers judged that support for Albanian national objectives would foster the Albanians goodwill for an Italian mandate. In addition, it would also stem Yugoslav influence in areas of Italian national interest and provide a stepping-stone for promoting wider Italian influence in the Balkans.³¹⁴ Yet at the

³¹² For Great Power guarantees of Albanian sovereignty prior to WWI see, “Extrait du Statut Organique de L’Albanie,” [1914] AQSh, F. 14, D. 209, Fl. 14.

³¹³ Guy, *Birth of Albania*, 162, 193.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 155-156.

same time, Italy sought to limit to the greatest extent possible the Albanians' freedom of action and agreed only to the formation of a National Council or Committee staffed by individuals deemed loyal to Italy. In November 1918 several Albanian activists with noted Italian sympathies – amongst whom future Axis collaborators during the Second World War Mehdi Frashëri and Mustafa Merlika-Kruja – were called for consultations in Rome and entrusted to form such a Committee in Albania centered in Shkodër.³¹⁵ Meetings were held in Durrës during the first week of December.

The timing of the congress, however, was inauspicious for the Italian sponsors because it coincided with the anniversary of the 1912 declaration of independence. In Vlorë mass celebrations were held in defiance of the Italian mandate where a young student by the name of Avni Rustemi – about whom more later – threw down the gauntlet proclaiming, “the blessed soil of Vlorë is our land; we intend to live in freedom and no power shall prevent us to abandon our cause.”³¹⁶ Under intense public pressure, the meetings of Durrës produced instead a national Provisional Government, which went beyond what Italy was prepared to accept. The congress called for the defense of Albanian national rights in Albania and elsewhere, petitioned for the return of natural ethnic borders in accordance with the principle of self-determination, full independence for this Albanian state and equal membership in the international state system.³¹⁷ Nonetheless, the Congress of Durrës was not prepared to alienate Italy. On the contrary, it worked diligently to ingratiate itself as much as it

³¹⁵ Milo, *Politika*, vol. I, 367; Kristaq Prifti et al, *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar, Volume III: Periudha e Pavarësisë, 28 Nëntor 1912 – 7 Prill 1939* (Tiranë: Toena, 2002), 127; Puto, *Shqipëria Politike*, 221-227.

³¹⁶ Prifti et al, *Historia e Popullit, Vol. III*, 127-128; See also Jan Myrdal and Gun Kessle, *Albania Defiant* trans. Paul Britten Austin (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1976), 105.

³¹⁷ Milo, *Politika*, vol. 1., 370.

could with Italian policy-making circles. In a letter to the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Baron Sidney C. Sonnino, it argued that the formation of a truly representative government was not only in keeping with the sovereign wishes of the Albanian people but was also to Italy's benefit since it bolstered Italy's image within the country and strengthened Italy's case vis-à-vis the other Great Powers for a protectorate over Albania in the Peace Conference. Also it undermined the domestic political competition from Esat Pasha Toptani and his Serb and French sponsors.³¹⁸ Under a final compromise, Sonnino recognized the authority of the congress to voice Albanian demands and obtained in return the concession that the final political status of Albania would be decided by the powers at the Peace Conference.³¹⁹

Second, there were the older societies in Europe, North Africa and the United States. In Paris, most of the émigré Albanian associations sought to send their own delegates to Paris but with the exception of *Vatra* and to a lesser extent the Albanian colonies of Bucharest and Istanbul few had the financial means to do so. As a result, most societies came to accept the moral, if not the political, leadership of *Vatra* as the only organization, which, thanks to Noli's energy, possessed a war chest of more than \$40,000.³²⁰ Ironically, Noli lacked a passport and could not secure a French visa because he was still subject to the ongoing BOI investigation. In his absence, Mehmet Konica, Mihal Turtulli and Charles Telford Erickson, a director of American Board of Foreign Missions, represented *Vatra* in Paris.³²¹

³¹⁸ Ibid., 371.

³¹⁹ Milo, *Politika*, vol. I, 372.

³²⁰ "Vatra to the Albanian Colony of Bucharest," Boston, 7 May 1920, AQSh, F. 99, D. 239, Fl. 2.

³²¹ Jorgaqi, *Fan Noli*, vol. I, 365.

Noli himself would never make it to Paris but he found other ways to keep Albanian attention focused on *Vatra* through yet another round of intense fundraising, publications, and, more significantly bringing up the question of the Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. Again he recruited the aid of the Russian diocese of America, which was now led by Archbishop Alexander Nemolovsky, presented no resistance to his ecclesiastical elevation. Yet the Bolshevik revolution had thrown the Russian church into disarray, and his confirmation was delayed indefinitely. As in the past, Noli again encountered the opposition of the Greek Church that still retained canonical authority over Albanian ecclesiastical life. This opposition angered the Albanian believers much as it had in 1908 during the Dëshnica affair and incited by Noli's own theatrics, they proceeded to proclaim Archimandrite Noli, Bishop by the will of the people. The unauthorized proclamation of Albanian Orthodox autocephaly came to cost Noli the support of the entire Orthodox hierarchy in America. His disregard of canon law was condemned also by Dako's Albanian National Party (ANP) and even by *Vatra's* cleric members, who failed to appreciate Noli's symbolic act in political terms.³²² Because of this opposition, it was not until 1923 that he was consecrated as a Bishop.³²³ Noli, however, felt secure enough in his public image and from support by the Albanian-American community that he could allow himself in late 1919 to suggest that Faik Konica should replace him as chairman of *Vatra*, an "honor" that Konica rejected. Similarly, helped by Konstantin Tashko, Athanas Tashko's twenty-year old son and future Comintern emissary in Albania, he tried to patch up *Vatra's* relationship with the ANP and eventually procured a tenuous

³²² Jorgaqi, *Fan Noli*, Vol. I, 370-377.

³²³ *Ibid.*

agreement for mutual cooperation of their two delegations in Paris. Temporarily appeased and thus united only in appearance, the wider spectrum of Albanian societies in Paris came loosely to rely on *Vatra's* leadership.

The large landed magnate of central Albania, Esat Toptani, represented the third center of advocacy and the sole individual contender for the position of either the Albanian presidency or principedom, something to still be decided by the powers in Paris. Arguably, the most controversial political figure of war-torn Albania of the war years, Toptani's political record elicited hatred and support in equal measure. In April 1913, as *İşkodra* lay besieged by the Montenegrin and Serbian armies, Toptani, who was cunning though not particularly bright or imaginative, made the gross political error of surrendering the city to Montenegro in return for a hefty monetary reward and promise of political support. Then, as the European powers debated the political future of Albania in London and Bucharest, Toptani took advantage of the power vacuum to establish the Republic of Central Albania (October 1913 – March 1914) centered in his own lands between the rivers Mat and Shkumbin. His political opportunism quickly squandered all domestic good will and after 1914 he was vilified from the other social activists and their international support groups.³²⁴ Expelled from Albania by Prince Wied, Toptani signed the Treaty of Niš with Serbian Prime Minister Nikola Pašić in September 1914. The treaty envisioned a railroad to Durrës, a joint customs union, common defense and other concessions in northern Albania in return for Serbian financial and military support against Prince Wied and recognition of his preeminence in Albanian political affairs. In a similar subsequent agreement

³²⁴ M.E. Durham to Sevasti Qiriazzi, London, 22 August 1918, RG. 59, Political Affairs: Albania, 1910-1939, M1211, Roll 1, NARA II.

with Greece, Toptani recognized Greece's right to annex southern Albania.³²⁵ Then, he moved to Thessaloniki where he established under Serbian and French protection a provisional Albanian Government.³²⁶

Toptani represented an atypical case in Albanian politics of the time. In contrast to even the most ambitious and individualistic Albanian activists, men like Nikolla Naço in Romania or Fan Noli and Faik Konica in the United States, who put their personal ambition at the service of a higher cause, Toptani had no other loyalties except to himself. Indeed, virtually every Albanian social activist rose in prominence, prestige and status by exploiting well-defined social networks and establishing new venues of collaboration between like-minded individuals and groups. Gradually, this group dynamic increased the reception of their ideas within the larger Albanian communities as a result of which these individuals and their societies represented considerable, though mixed, popular support and legitimacy. In 1914 for instance a secret organization called *Krahu Kombëtar* (National Wing), composed by a heterogeneous mixture of young professionals, students, Ottoman civil servants, progressive landowners, Kosovar refugees and the like was formed intent on establishing an ethnic, independent and democratic Albania.³²⁷ According to one of its most prominent members, Sejfi Vllamasi, a veterinarian and former member of Bajo Topulli's Committee for the Liberation of Albania (CLA), the National Wing

³²⁵ Milo, *Politika*, Vol. I, 319-332. See also his *Shqipëria dhe Jugosllavia, 1918-1927* (Tiranë: "Enciklopedike," 1991), 51-54.

³²⁶ H. Percival Dodge, Chargé d'Affaires in Serbia to Secretary of State Lansing, Corfu, 26 July 1918, RG. 59, Political Affairs: Albania, 1910-1939, M1211, Roll 1, NARA II.

³²⁷ Sejfi Vllamasi, *Ballafaqime Politike në Shqipëri, 1897-1942: Kujtime dhe Vlerësime Historike*, ed. Marenglen Verli, (Tiranë: NERAIDA, 2000), 419.

was the product of intense opposition to the “Italophiles” of the Congress of Durrës.³²⁸

In contrast, Toptani, a member of the Ottoman provincial aristocracy, had to rely on vertical patron-client relationships with lesser landowners, his own peasant serfs and tenant farmers who, living at subsistence levels, were bound to him by tradition and economic necessity. It was from these that Toptani drew his insufficient economic and military muscle. What he lacked in domestic resources he more than made up for with a Serbian stipend of 50,000 dinars per annum.³²⁹ For instance, under Serbian auspices, an “Office of Esat Pasha’s Government” was created in Debar as a branch of the provisional government in Thessaloniki. Its Albanian officials and gendarmes served as auxiliary troops for the Serbian military in Albania.³³⁰ After the war, however, his power base within Albania grew smaller and the advent of the Congress of Durrës rendered him a stateless person. When Frank Lyon Polk at the State Department sought to ascertain the French official opinion of Toptani, he learned that the “French government now regards Essad Pacha [sic] as unimportant and has withdrawn its representative who had been attached to him.”³³¹ Yet, thanks to Serbian and some residual French support, Toptani remained a threatening political presence for the other Albanian activists. This threat was ended only on 13 June 1920 when the aforementioned Avni Rustemi assassinated him as he left the Hotel Continental in Paris. Rustemi, a graduate of La Sapienza University in Rome, Italy,

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Milo, *Politika*, Vol. I, 321.

³³⁰ Milo, *Shqipëria dhe Jugosllavia*, 51-54.

³³¹ Bliss to Secretary of State in Washington D.C., Paris, 28 January 1919, RG. 59, Political Affairs: Albania, 1910-1939, M1211, Roll 1, NARA II.

would go on to play a brief but immensely important role in galvanizing left-wing Albanian students in the mid-1920s.

At the Peace Conference, therefore, the Albanians lacked the unity to formulate a single platform to achieve a common political objective for two reasons: first, because they were denied full representation and second, because policy was made by individual political and economic interests rather than institutions. This produced a confusing myriad of competing viewpoints and perspectives that eventually undermined the trust of the Great Powers in the ability of the Albanians to administer the country. As a result, overall Albanian influence in Paris was minimal. Wilson's initial commitment to self-determination had raised expectations for the rectification of past injustices inflicted by the Treaty of London in 1913. Yet, Wilson's decision of 14 April 1919 to include Vlorë within the larger Adriatic Question and his willingness to relinquish the city to Italy appeared to virtually all Albanians as an American intention to allow the future colonization of Albania by Italy.³³² In response, the Albanian position quickly reverted to the more limited hope of preserving at the very least the 1913 borders.

In principle, most Albanians were not opposed to an international mandate. On the contrary, Albania's weak position in the international state system made an international mandate a necessity. The problem was not *if* but *who* was to be the mandatory power. Previous experience under the Ottoman Empire suggested that as long as requirements for self-rule were satisfied, membership into a multinational political order was preferable. In 1918, Albanians set out to adjust those past realities

³³² Fan Noli, "The Question of Valona: Albania is not Terra Nullius," *The Adriatic Review* 1, no. 9, (1919): 337-339

to the new international conditions. There were two options available. *Vatra* and the other émigré societies preferred an American mandate because, as a distant power, the United States harbored no territorial demands on Albania, and at any rate, American federalism struck a responsive cord for those who believed in the strength of regional loyalties. Albanians and their American support groups expected the United States to mount its own civilizing mission by aiding the state-building processes and strengthening the civil society that had emerged during the late Ottoman Empire by financing Albanian educational institutions and safeguarding the country's borders until such time that the Albanians became qualified to manage their own affairs. W. W. Howard, a director of the Armenian Relief Fund and subsequently Secretary of the Balkan Relief Fund, defended an American mandate on the basis of the United States experience in Cuba and the Philippines:

The officials of the new government of Albania should be chosen from the young men ... now living in the United States because...they have caught the inspiration of American civilization, they have learned our language, they have attended our schools, they have developed habits of thrift and industry, they have become skilled in various lines of manufacture, they have fitted themselves to become valuable assets of the citizenship of the United States ... which in due season shall ... give to Albania that upward impetus that shall place her upon an equality with the nations of Western Europe, where she belongs.³³³

The second option was an Italian mandate, which was supported by the Congress of Durrës, already noted for its pro-Italian sentiments. During the war, Italy had successfully courted Albanian good will by improving roads, opening schools,

³³³ William Willard Howard, "An American Republic in Europe," in *The Christian Work*, 518-520, Frederick Lynch to President Woodrow Wilson, New York, 17 November 1918, RG. 59, Political Affairs: Albania, 1910-1939, M1211, Roll 1, NARA II.

creating new jobs and supporting local administration by Albanians.³³⁴ The wartime Italian-Albanian relations had grown so close that pro-Greek centers alleged to the U.S. State Department that Albanians, assisted by Italians, were effectively changing the demographic map of southern Albania.³³⁵ Yet while the desire for an American mandate was for the most part a product of true belief and a sincere affinity with American political and humanistic principles, the Italian mandate attracted mixed feelings of hope and trepidation, since many remembered it as a signatory power to the Secret Treaties of 1915. Some members of the Congress of Durrës, such as Mustafa Kruja, the future Italian Senator and Prime Minister of Albania during the Italian occupation in Second World War, were genuinely convinced that the Italian connection was to Albania's benefit. They admired Italian culture, which in their view represented a gateway toward the achievement of European western modernity even if came under the imposition of colonial influence. The Italian option also drew the support of the Kosovar immigrant circles and the patriotic youth and Geg notables who viewed Italy as the only rational hope to win back Kosovo from Serbia.³³⁶ For others, the Italian mandate was simply a matter of choosing the lesser of two evils. Ever since 1915, many perceptive Albanians doubted Italian sincerity, arguing that for Italy, the so-called "hinterland" of Vlorë puzzlingly included Skrapar some 80 kilometers away.³³⁷ After the end of the war, however, the continuation of Italian military administration of local life and the presence of occupational forces in

³³⁴ Brigadier General George P. Scriven to the Secretary of War, "A Report on the Country and People of Albania," 5 August 1918, RG. 59, Political Affairs: Albania, 1910-1939, M1211, Roll 1, NARA II.

³³⁵ Pan Epirotic Union of America to Robert Lansing, U.S. Secretary of State, Boston, 1 July 1918, RG. 59, Political Affairs: Albania, 1910-1939, M1211, Roll 1, NARA II.

³³⁶ Villamasi, *Ballafaqime Politike*, 197.

³³⁷ "Jovan Gode to Kristo Dako," Lausanne, 15 June 1915, AQSh, F. 447, D. 8, Fl. 4.

peacetime was quickly becoming more than just a nuisance to Albanian sensibilities. Even in Rome, the authorities came to appreciate the necessity to draw down their military presence and so, in August, a plan recommended by Foreign Minister Tommaso Tittoni and endorsed by the Prime Minister Francesco Nitti, proposed to relinquish domestic administrative matters to the Congress of Durrës.

According to the plan, teams of Italian experts would provide assistance to Albanians in developing and managing state institutions. Albanian courts would be in charge of administering local justice except for crimes committed against the security of Italian forces and their bases in Albania. Similarly while the local gendarmerie would be Italian-led but under Albanian administrative command, the Albanian military would be formed, financed and controlled wholly by Italy. According to Paskal Milo, the Congress of Durrës accepted the Italian proposal only because it promised a theoretical guarantee of the territorial integrity of the 1913 borders.³³⁸ Fears that the powers in Paris might yet endorse the Treaty of London of 1915 or versions thereof that would leave Albanians with even less territory prompted them to make significant concessions.

But if the Albanians remained disunited, the major powers in Paris also lacked clear objectives and, to some degree, even the political will on what to do with Albania. Ideally, the European powers would have preferred the implementation of the Pact of London to reward Serbian and Greek wartime alliance. However, contradictory information from fact-finding missions, pressure from Albanian initiatives and, more importantly, disagreements between the powers themselves and the tendency to view the Albanian question as part of the larger Adriatic question

³³⁸ Milo, *Politika*, Vol., I 422-424; See also Guy, *Birth of Albania*, 177.

prolonged the process of giving Albania a definite political status.³³⁹ Unsurprisingly, rational political calculation by the powers in Paris was inherently difficult because whatever was conceded in Albania became a roadblock to the northern Adriatic settlement.

On 14 September 1919 Wilson finally accepted the Italian mandate over Albania. This signaled an end to Albanian hopes for an American mandate and heightened the apprehension over an Italian mandate. Under popular pressure, on 25 September, the Congress of Durrës submitted an analogous but substantially revised plan to the one originally flaunted earlier by Tittoni. It proposed to place Albania under an Italian administration, which would act as a mandatory power on behalf of the Great Powers. The proposal further called for giving the crown of Albania to a prince of the Italian royal house of Savoy and having Italian military and civil experts assist with the organization of the national military, the gendarmerie and state institutions until such time that Albanians developed the capacity to govern their own affairs.³⁴⁰ Predictably, the proposal was rejected, but new proposals by the powers appeared to come closer to Albanian aspirations. On 9 December 1919 a joint French-American-British plan resolved to keep northern and eastern borders as established in 1913, grant Vlorë to Italy and the overall mandate but also postponed any decision about the southern frontier pending resolution of Italian-Greek negotiations.³⁴¹ In the

³³⁹ Guy, *Birth of Albania*, 152-200.

³⁴⁰ "Proposal of Albanian Delegation at the Peace Conference," Paris, 25 September 1919, AMPJ, 1919, D. 8, Fl. 58-60.

³⁴¹ Milo, *Politika*, 436-438; Guy, *Birth of Albania*, 185.

coming weeks further modifications were proposed by the Italians in an attempt to force Yugoslavia compromise elsewhere in the Adriatic question.³⁴²

As 1919 came to a close, the principled defense of Kosovo and Çamëria as unredeemed national lands all but disappeared from the Albanian political program. Gone was also the rejection of the Italian mandate on moral grounds. The societies and the Congress of Durrës understood only too well that they possessed very little, if any, bargaining power in the international state system and consequently distrusted every proposal by the powers that appeared to be interested only in obtaining more land and more concessions without giving anything back. The social trauma of wartime was followed by postwar pessimism with many viewing the Peace Conference as a market where Albania and its inhabitants were “traded like cattle” to Italy, Serbia and Greece.³⁴³

The political tactics employed by the Albanians were based on the pre-1914 assumption that the Great Powers, individually or collectively, were still arbiters of Balkan political disorders. This proved unrealistic after 1918 because the previous balance of power no longer applied. After the collapse of the Central Powers it was to be expected that the Entente’s victory in the war should have increased the victors’ political cohesion, which, in turn, should have made the role of political calculation inherently easier and, with the demise of Austria-Hungary, have eliminated, or at the very least minimized, the role of bluff and deterrence in international diplomacy. In reality, the opposite took place. The emergence of a new political vocabulary in Paris, i.e., self-determination, racial equality, minority rights and more, accompanied by the

³⁴² Guy, *Birth of Albania*, 186.

³⁴³ “Protest of the Lushnjë Congress to the Peace Conference in Paris,” 2 February 1920, cf. Milo, *Politika*, Vol. I., 478.

entry of new powers into the diplomatic scene and, perhaps more importantly, the sheer amount of competing claims and counterclaims, presented the powers with a large number of new political issues for which there was no precedent.³⁴⁴ In the short term, the absence of political cohesion in Paris bought for the Albanians the necessary time to come together and even defeat Italian plans for a mandate.

The occasion presented itself in October 1919 when the Albanians received leaked news of the TITTONI-VENIZELOS agreement. Originally signed in July 1919, the agreement was an effort to settle conflicting territorial claims between Greece and Italy. In return, for Italian recognition of Greek claims over southern Albania, Greece undertook to recognize Italian sovereignty over Vlorë and Italy's overall mandate over Albania, and promised to lease to Italy the city-port of Sarandë for a period of fifty years should that city become part of Greece in the future. In addition, Greece promised to reimburse Italy for all public works constructed in southern Albania during the war and pledged to provide competitive contracts to Italian railway societies for the building of railroads linking Sarandë with the internal part of the country should Greece find it prohibitive to do so itself. Both countries also established new lines of demarcation between their respective areas of interest in Asia Minor.³⁴⁵ When news of the agreement leaked out, the Albanians reacted furiously, only to be "advised" by American and British negotiators to accept the Italian mandate scheme.³⁴⁶ By November, however, anti-Italian hostilities were mounting, as did public sentiment against the Congress of Durrës, which was accused of serving

³⁴⁴ Carole Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others: The Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection, 1878-1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 133-160 and in passim.

³⁴⁵ Milo, *Politika*, Vol. I., 415-417.

³⁴⁶ Guy, *Birth of Albania*, 197.

Italian interests. As Faik Konica quipped to a young Ahmet Zogu, “the world shall not work for us, if we fail to work for ourselves.”³⁴⁷ Attempts by the Congress of Durrës to reach a compromise failed and in January 1920 an assembly gathered in Lushnjë elected to form a new government.

The Congress of Lushnjë and the Reaffirmation of Independence in 1920

The new national congress was held in Lushnjë between 28 and 31 January 1920. In attendance were fifty-six delegates representing virtually every corner of the country including some areas that now lay in Greece and Yugoslavia. Almost immediately, the Congress of Lushnjë went on the offensive, displaying in contrast to all preceding Albanian governments, surprisingly high levels of political courage. Vllamasi stated this was the initiative of “true nationalists,” (i.e., National Wing) who ‘revolted’ against the Congress of Durrës by holding the Lushnjë meeting.³⁴⁸

The original meeting in Lushnjë reached three important decisions that would lay the foundations of the interwar Albanian state. First, it toppled the provisional government of the Congress of Durrës. It selected a new government under Sulejman Delvina, a former graduate of the Ottoman *Mekteb i-Mülkiye* and since 1918 the representative of the Albanian colony in the Ottoman Empire in Peace Conference. Among others, Delvina’s cabinet included *Vatra*’s original envoy Mehmet Konica as Minister of Foreign Affairs, a young clan leader Ahmet Zogu as Minister of the Interior, and the veteran activist, founder of *Kombi* in Boston and Noli’s former employer, Sotir Peçi as Minister of Education. Second, the Congress of Lushnjë

³⁴⁷ “Faik Konica to Ahmet Zogu,” 14 February 1920, AQSh, F. 416, D. 10, Fl. 24.

³⁴⁸ Vllamasi, *Ballafaqime Politike*, 420.

categorically denounced all plans to partition Albania at the Peace Conference and mandates to put Albania under a foreign power, and it pledged to fight to the last to defend sovereignty of the borders established in 1913. In the absence of national defense and police institutions, the Congress borrowed from previous associational experience, more specifically the CLAs and pre-1908 CUP provincial branches, when it sanctioned National Defense committees (NDC) throughout Albania to act as informal local bodies entrusted with military functions. This measure set an important precedent that would be repeated again during the Second World War with the erection of regional anti-Fascist councils for logistical support. Third, the congress set the foundations of state institutions. For the first time in the short history of independent Albania, the Congress established the National Council, a legislative body composed of thirty-seven members. In addition, it established the Regency, or High Council, which embodied the function of the executive. Since Prince Wied had never formally abdicated the Albanian throne, the Congress attributed only limited executive powers to the Regency, whose membership and functions were subject to the scrutiny of the National Assembly, or the Parliament.³⁴⁹

The Congress' choice for a capital naturally fell upon Durrës since that city had already functioned in that capacity since the Wied's administration in 1914. However, it encountered Italian opposition as well as that of the pro-Italian lobby, which refused to recognize the new government as a legitimate one. The choice thenceforth fell upon nearby Tiranë, which at that time was a small city of fewer than 15,000 inhabitants. The first acts of the new Tiranë government were to dismiss Italian civil and military advisers, which was accomplished by 7 February. On 22-23

³⁴⁹ Akademia e Shkencave, *Historia e Shqipërisë*, vol. III, 146.

February the last members of the former Congress of Durrës, now bereft of Italian assistance, “resigned” and official activity passed to Tiranë. That success was repeated when the government extended its jurisdiction into other parts of the country entering first Shkodër on 11 March. A day later French troops relinquished the administration of the city to a hastily convened municipal council and left Shkodër. Only the Italian contingent remained, which refused to evacuate without a clear mandate from the Peace Conference.

Worried, Italy endeavored to stem the tide of events. On 10 May the Italian garrison in Durrës mounted a local *coup* by ousting the Albanian-staffed city council and appointed an army captain as prefect. Similarly, with Italian aid Esatist bands approached Tiranë in March.³⁵⁰ Forces loyal to the new government under Ahmet Zogu, however, managed to check the attack by mid-April. The neutralization of the threat allowed Tiranë to take a number of other contested settlements like Gjirokastrë in late April. In late May 1920 the government signed the Protocol of Kapshticë with Greece, whereby it confirmed Korçë for Albania pending the expected French withdrawal and promised to respect ethnic, religious and civic rights of the Greek minority. The Tiranë government, however, allowed Greek troops to keep troops in twenty-six villages until the Peace Conference permanently decided on the issue of the border.³⁵¹

By the end of May 1920 the most pressing problem for the Tiranë government was its absent sovereignty over Vlorë. Although determined not to relinquish its influence, Italy had by now had lost control of Albania and agreed to evacuate the

³⁵⁰ Milo, *Politika*, vol. I, 479

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 498-503; See also Guy, *Birth of Albania*, 213.

country and withdrew its forces along the coast. In Vlorë, the Italian forces took a number of security measures. In early May they tried to restrain movements there by erecting checkpoints on roads and highways and halting barge traffic across the Vjosë River. On 17 May Vlorë was placed under martial law, a measure that noticeably reduced the number of anti-Italian protests in the city but failed to stamp out local resentment. Furthermore, the Italians placed minor garrisons in neighboring towns such as in Tepelenë in an effort to prevent the Albanians from assuming a strategic posture that would threaten Vlorë.

Bolstered by its recent successes and faced with the overall Italian intransigence, the Tiranë government broke off diplomatic negotiations and entrusted the NDC of Vlorë, led by Qazim Koculi, a former Ottoman Navy lieutenant and a member of the National Wing, to take over military affairs. Tiranë took care to avoid open official complicity and sought to portray the upcoming hostilities as a popular national uprising and not a war between state actors. By 2 June nearly 4,000 volunteers from southern and central Albania organized in village *çetas* led by local strongmen and notables responded to the call of the NDC. A day later, the NDC presented to the Italian commander in Albania General Piacentini, an ultimatum requesting the evacuation of Italian troops and the placement of Vlorë under Albanian authority. Predictably, the ultimatum was ignored whereupon the hostilities commenced.³⁵²

In the battle for Vlorë, the Albanian volunteers faced some 20,000 regular infantry and artillery, elite *Alpini* and *Arditi* battalions and Carabinieri troops. For the

³⁵² “Ultimatum of the National Defense Committee of Vlorë to Gen. Piacentini,” Vlorë, 3 June 1920, cf. *Lufta e Popullit Shqiptar për Çlirimin Kombëtar, 1918-1920: Përmbledhje Dokumentesh*, ed. Muin Çami (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave e RPSH, Instituti i Historisë, 1976), 324-325.

defense of the city, the Italians had invested nearly 10,000 soldiers under the command of General Emanuele Pugliese. The rest of the troops were thinly spread to cover an approximate area of 1,500 square km that extended south to Himarë, to the east to Tepelenë and to the northeast to Selenicë. On 4 June the Albanian volunteers attacked isolated checkpoints and the smaller garrisons in Kotë, Drashovicë, Gjorm, Matohasanaj and Llogara, which were overrun by 7 June. The fiercest fighting took place in Kotë, which housed a mixed artillery battalion, an *Alpini* battalion, a regular infantry battalion and a Carabinieri detachment. Brigadier General Enrico Gotti, the third highest-ranking Italian officer in Albania was killed there.³⁵³

Emboldened by these successes, Tiranë opened negotiations with Italy, promising its help to intercede with the NDC and halt hostilities provided that Italy agreed to the Albanian demands. The appeal went unheeded and on 11 June the Albanian forces, reinforced by new volunteers began their assault on the outskirts of Vlorë. Within the city, citizens joined in the fight by attacking Italian columns and disrupting communication and supply lines. Elsewhere, on 4 June, Bajram Curri and Ahmet Zogu put down a brief resurgence of Italian-sponsored pro-Esat activities in central and northern Albania and remained in northern Albania to guard against Yugoslavia. The subsequent assassination of Esat Toptani on 13 June in Paris by Avni Rustemi eliminated the Esatist threat once and for all. Meanwhile in Vlorë, although the Albanians were successfully pushed back to their original positions outside the city, an outbreak of malaria and low morale worsened the Italian situation. An attempt to break the encirclement east toward Drashovicë on 19 June failed with heavy casualties. Similarly, two days later, on 21 June, the beleaguered Italian

³⁵³ Prifti et al., *Historia e Popullit*, Vol. III, 158-161.

garrison of Tepelenë surrendered. After this, large-scale operations ceased except for skirmishes in the outskirts of Vlorë.

The surprisingly effective Albanian struggle now intervened in Italian domestic politics, where since 1919 an intense social conflict, the *Biennio Rosso*, marked by high unemployment and political instability took place within the context of the post-war economic crisis. In the midst of the Vlorë crisis, labor strikes forced Francesco Nitti's government out of office. Giovanni Giolitti, now in his fifth tour as Italian Prime Minister, continued Italian policy of considering Vlorë's hinterland essential to Italy's strategic position in the Adriatic. He ordered reinforcements to the beleaguered Albanian port. In the Villarey barracks in Ancona, however, soldiers from the 11th Bersaglieri Regiment revolted. Soon, anarchist, socialist and republican organizations joined in the Bersaglieri revolt, which spread into neighboring municipalities and cities of central Italy. In Milan, Rome and Naples, the General Confederation of Labor (*Confederazione Generale del Lavoro*) and the Socialist Party, took advantage of the Bersaglieri's rebellion and intensified their own earlier labor strikes. The subsequent decision of the government to send military troops to quell the strikes, led to a general strike of railway employees attempting to hinder the advance of government troops to Ancona. The government was able to quell the rebellion only on 28 June.³⁵⁴ Against this backdrop, Italian attempts to force a diplomatic solution in Vlorë emboldened the Albanian government to reject any deal that would leave them without the sovereignty of Vlorë. After several failed attempts,

³⁵⁴ Pietro Pastorelli, *L'Albania nella Politica Estera Italiana* (Napoli: Editore Jovene, 1970), 370-371. For more detail see Ruggero Giacomini, *La Rivolta dei Bersaglieri e le Giornate Rosse: I Moti di Ancona dell'estate del 1920 e l'Indipendenza dell'Albania*, (Ancona: Assemblea Legislativa delle Marche, 2010).

the Italian envoy Gaetano Manzoni signed with the Albanian Premier Sulejman Delvina on 2 August 1920 a secret preliminary protocol, according to which Italy agreed to transfer sovereignty of Vlorë to Albania, minus the small island of Sazan (Saseno). On 2/3 September the last of the Italian troops left for Italy and Albanian civil administrators entered the city.³⁵⁵

Albanian reaffirmation of independence in 1920 was thus a result of the confluence of several domestic and international factors. The Great Powers' failure to translate military victory in the First World War and subsequent occupation of Albania into a clear political victory undermined the legitimacy for a new and equitable social order that the Albanians expected from them. This led the Albanians to reestablish after 1920 the same kind of unity that had served them well against their former imperial government in the 1908-1912 period. By successfully exploiting these factors, the Albanians were able to reestablish their elusive independence of 1912. In addition, as the Albanian scholar Kristo Frashëri has recently suggested, the Italian social unrest of 1920 served in the long run to kindle the perception among Albanian youth and students of an ideological alliance between European left-wing movements and Albanian nation-building programs. Many, such as Stavro Vinjau and Halim Xhelo, disciples of the Italian socialist Filippo Turati and Llazar Fundo, influenced by the French Socialist Party and an early supporter of Lenin's idea for a Balkan Communist Federation, subsequently brought radical and revolutionary ideas to Albania.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁵ Milo, *Politika*, vol. I, 487-488; Guy, *Birth of Albania*, 217-218

³⁵⁶ Frashëri, *Historia e Lëvizjes së Majtë*, 22-24.

Patterns of National Government and Political Associations after 1920

On 17 December 1920 Albania was accepted unanimously as a member of the League of Nations.³⁵⁷ Yet although the country eventually established normal diplomatic relations with its neighbors and the powers, pressing problems still remained. The borders remained undefined and the national government was still not recognized by the powers. A secessionist movement in the Mirditë highlands backed by Yugoslav support between July and November 1921 threatened to undermine Tiranë's diplomatic attempts to convince the Great Powers of the Albanians' capacity for self-government.³⁵⁸ Oddly, the financial sector in Albania was judged to be "healthy" owing to the fact that Albanian currency did not rely on paper money but rather on gold and silver coins stockpiled during the war. The reliance on metallic circulation meant that the country had virtually no public debt and more manageable trade imbalances accrued during the war. Yet the underdeveloped state of economic, institutional and communication infrastructures, the massive illiteracy, and corruption and the reluctance of European states to provide loans to fund state building initiatives offset any positive indicators.³⁵⁹ Furthermore, while Albania's meager resources were justifiably allocated for military purposes, this nonetheless worsened an already severe domestic crisis burdened as it was by lack of food supplies and refugees from Kosovo and northern Greece since 1912. Albania teetered on the brink of famine.

³⁵⁷ Austin, *Founding a Balkan State*, 18-20; Guy, *Birth of Albania*, 224-227.

³⁵⁸ Milo, *Politika*, vol. I, 525.

³⁵⁹ Alessandro Roselli, *Italy and Albania: Financial Relations in the Fascist Period* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 15-20.

In domestic politics, parliamentary elections were called in the spring of 1921 to replace the unelected officials that emerged from the Congress of Lushnjë. The Albanian public had acquired a significant degree of experience in political representation from previous participations in provincial administrations in the Ottoman Empire since the 1860s, associational experiences, and more recently from the two elections held in 1908 and 1912. Unsurprisingly, the electoral system put in place was a close adaptation of the Ottoman electoral law of 1908. Participation was restricted to tax-paying males 20 years old and above who had resided in their districts for no less than six months. It was a two-tiered electoral system with indirect voting. In the first round, every 500 males selected an elector who then proceeded to select 75 or 78 deputies, each representing 12,000 voters in Parliament. The electoral law stipulated that only males who spoke and wrote Albanian but “were servants to no one” could stand for election. The voter had to put down in writing the name of his preferred candidate or, in case he was illiterate, a second individual could do so in his stead. Since most Albanians were illiterate peasants who did not own sufficient property to pay taxes, this stipulation was largely prohibitive and effectively barred the peasant masses from participation. Moreover most peasants were tied to land still owned by the great Ottoman-Albanian families and thus were in fact servants of someone. Whenever peasants participated, the ordinary illiterate voter tended to defer to community leaders who would presumably better judge his and the district’s interests. More often, empowering someone who could read and write with additional votes resulted in voting abuses since the peasant could never be sure for whom he had cast his vote. In this manner, this system provided ample opportunities for corruption

and in doing so, reinforced existing links of Ottoman-inherited patronage and clientage.³⁶⁰

The two political parties that came into existence in the second half of 1920 were not representatives of wider social interests, but rather alliances of disparate social groups and individual interests with even less coherence than the previous associations. The National Popular (or People's) Party formed on 10 October was the most reform-minded political organization. Led by the returned Fan Noli, the Populars – as they became known – included a curious collection of Albanian personalities across the political spectrum: socialists such as Stavro Vinjau, former liberal Ottoman deputies such as Luigj Gurakuqi, progressive Tosk landowners such as Ali bey Këlcyra and Geg chieftains such as Ahmet Zogu, all Muslim and Christian alike. They promised to the electorate protection of basic civil rights of speech, faith, expression and press. In addition, the Populars advocated strong state interference in managing the national economy, social affairs and education. These issues for the Populars were not separate but interlinked. The party's near socialist program emphasized the development of agriculture by promising to institute far-reaching agrarian reform, emancipating peasants from their landowners, opening agricultural schools and educational institutions, establishing agricultural banks, granting subsidies from tax proceeds and protecting local produce from international competition through tariff programs. Other issues emphasized gender equality,

³⁶⁰ Prifti et al, *Historia e Popullit, Vol. III*, 178; Vllamasi, *Ballafaqime Politike*, 246-250; Austin, *Founding a Balkan State*, 9; Kayali, "Elections," 268-271.

support for a bureaucratic apparatus based on a truly meritocratic system and friendly relations with Albania's neighbors.³⁶¹

In response to the Populists, the National Progressive Party was formed a month later on 21 November. Although they promised similar reforms, the Progressives represented the interests of the great landowners primarily Tosk but also Geg who bitterly opposed any changes that would encroach upon their economic interests. For a brief time the émigré Kosovo Committee also allied itself with the Progressives mainly because Ahmet Zogu, widely considered to be Belgrade's man in Albania, stood for the opposing Populists. For the Progressives any talk of agrarian reform was an anathema that was quickly labeled "Bolshevism." Several former members of the now defunct Congress of Durrës also aligned themselves with the Progressives.

To a large degree, the new political realignments in Albania were a product of economic disparities, different forms of social mobilization and the variety of foreign threat to Albania. In the absence of strong national institutions, the Albanian fledgling state had farmed out national defense to local communities to the detriment of any single national military or police force. In the south and the western lowlands (including Shkodër), where the notion of state authority had always been prevalent, mobilization took place under National Defense committees (NDC), which afforded broader forms for social inclusion and participation. In contrast, in the north, except for the adjacent parts of the western lowlands, it was the insular clans that remained the main vehicle for social mobilization. The pervasive Greek/Italian and

³⁶¹ "For an example see Program of National Popular Party," 10 October 1920, AQSh, F. 447, D. 24, Fl. 1.

Serbian/Montenegrin threats respectively in the south and north meant that during the war years the attention of these communities was outwardly directed first, toward the protection of their border communities and only after, and through it, the security of the state as a political entity. In the long run, the state stood a far better chance of coopting the more open and socially inclusive south through the state-sponsored NDC's than the highly insular and individualistic north, which continued to preserve the historical autonomies of the pastoral-highland communities. Indeed, in the south no secessionist movement emerged as it did in Mirditë in 1921. As Besnik Pula has recently argued, only peasants who had accepted the state as part of their moral universe could form an active political interest in the state and the structure of its institutions.³⁶²

The binary north-south division of social and political affairs nonetheless proved less relevant in the 1920s. The challenges faced by the new Albanian state, though motivated by personal ambitions, were national in character and not regional. First, in the fall of 1921, both the Progressive and Popular parties briefly joined forces in order to resist recurring Yugoslav raids across the border and suppress the Mirditë rebellion. What was called as the Sacred Union (*Bashkimi i Shenjtë*) formed a government under Pandeli Evangjeli, the former chairman of *Dituria* and then *Bashkimi* of Bucharest. Evangjeli's government, however, encountered the opposition of the landowner of central Albania who received no cabinet appointments. On 9 November 1921 the powers finally confirmed the borders of Albania to be those originally established in 1913-14. This decision obliged Yugoslavia and Greece to

³⁶² Besnik Pula, *State, Law and Revolution: Agrarian Power and the National State in Albania, 1850-1945* (University of Michigan: PhD Dissertation, 2011), 3, 14.

evacuate Albania as a result of which government forces under Zogu finally suppressed the Mirditë rebellion on 20 November.

Following the relaxation of international tensions, Evangjeli's government was unable to obtain a motion of confidence in parliament and it was replaced on 7 December by Hasan Prishtina, the leader of the Kosovo Defense Committee. Prishtina's cabinet too suffered from lack of wider recognition, mainly from the Popular Party and fell only four days later. Prishtina's decision to appoint Bajram Curri as commander in chief of the Albanian military and volunteer forces, prompted Ahmet Zogu to rush to the capital where he put the national gendarmerie under his command. Thereupon a mock investigation prompted by Zogu dissolved the Regency. In addition, the Populars, taking advantage of the absence elections in formerly Yugoslav-held areas in northeastern Albania, eliminated the mandates of deputies from these areas. This measure affected primarily the Kosovar members of parliament.³⁶³ These events brought about the dissolution of the Progressives as a political organization after which its members retreated into their own areas of influence from where they opposed the new government. A new cabinet under Xhafer Ypi, a future Axis collaborator, was formed striving to portray itself as a coalition of the Populars, liberals, independents and the intelligentsia.

Second, when the threat of imminent military foreign military occupation ended, political attention was directed back to domestic issues. The previous reliance on popular movements for national security – sanctioned by the state but outside its control – empowered the peasantry in both north and south to articulate their own

³⁶³ Vllamasi, *Ballafaqime Politike*, 274-276.

economic and social demands.³⁶⁴ A series of disconnected peasant rebellions erupted in fall 1920 first in Llakatund, Vlorë, where peasants refused to pay their dues to their landlords and declared themselves owners of the lands on which they worked. Soon similar rebellions erupted in Durrës, Lushnjë, Gjirokastrë and Përmet. In the north, in Milot, Pukë and elsewhere, the parliament's decision to increase custom duties on agricultural goods and collect taxes left in arrears provoked, not unlike the anti-CUP 1909 insurrection, a fresh round of uprisings. In 1923 a widespread famine and the absence of imported foodstuff caused peasants to rail against food speculators and attack stores and warehouses where grain was stored.³⁶⁵ Political instability worsened when a series of labor strikes erupted in 1921, first with typograph workers in Gjirokastrë, tobacco workers in the *Tarabosh* factory in Shkodër, construction workers in central Albania, dockworkers in Vlorë and later with the bitumen, chromium and zinc miners in Selenicë, Mirditë and Dibër.³⁶⁶

The expansion of representative institutions was a third component through which the Albanian government sought to replace the Ottoman administrative legacy, weaken the personalized and highly formalized historically-inherited social mechanisms of the past, and extend centralized national rule throughout the country. In December 1920 the Statute of the Congress of Lushnjë was expanded. While the framework remained fundamentally the same, the government set down new regulation governing the independence of the branches of government, the growth of

³⁶⁴ "Proclamation of 'Neither of the Pasha nor of the Bey' Group," Elbasan, 31 December 1923, AQSh, F. 447, D. 103, Fl. 1-2.

³⁶⁵ Prifti et al, *Historia e Popullit, Vol. III*, 195-196. For more detail see, Burhan Çiraku, "Çështja Agrare ne Parlament në Vitet 1921-1923," in *Studime Historike*, 3 (1974).

³⁶⁶ Hysen Kordha and Tefta Gjoleka, *Shoqëria Bashkimi, 1922-1925* (Tiranë: Shtëpia Botuese "8 Nëntori," 1987), 22-26

state institutions, separation of state and religion and the like.³⁶⁷ In addition, a new prefecture system was established countrywide. On the eve of the First World War, under Wied's administration, Albania had seven prefectures. In 1922 two more were added. Each prefecture was subdivided into sub-prefectures and then further into *krahina* (or districts) and communes as the lowest administrative level.³⁶⁸ Sizeable problems remained. The statute of Congress of Lushnjë, which hitherto functioned as the legal constitution, had granted sweeping powers only to the parliament so as to prevent the creation of a tyrannical executive. In doing so, however, it deprived the executive of the possibility to take timely decisive action. These three factors nationalized Albanian politics outside the strict confines of regional loyalties but, in turn, fueled the competition between the Progressives and Populars in their struggle for executive authority.

Nonetheless, the nationalization of politics and diminishing external threats encouraged the growth of a politically and socially active citizenry, which supported by an active press, was intent on social reform. With the national question solved, however imperfectly, by 1921 the former informal associations of the Ottoman period were largely replaced by professional and labor-oriented associations such as the Society of Workers for [Mutual] Assistance, established in Shkodër; the League of Educators that promoted teachers' interests in Gjirokastrë, Durrës, Tirane, Korçë, and Shkodër; the Society for Mariners' [Mutual] Assistance in Albania's main port cities. By early 1922 more than thirty labor-oriented associations and organizations were formed throughout Albania, supported by a growing number of print publications,

³⁶⁷ Gramoz Hysi, "Zgjerimi i Statutit të Lushnjës," in *Studime Historike*, 4 (1982), 69-88.

³⁶⁸ *Shqypnija: Njoftime Geografike, Shtetistike – Administratore* (Shkodër: Shtypshkroja e së Paperlyemes, 1923), 24.

which, by 1924, had increased to ninety-four newspapers and periodicals.³⁶⁹ In addition, the number of sport clubs, fitness organizations and extracurricular cultural societies also increased. For instance, on 11 August 1935, twenty-one such societies joined to establish the Sports and Arts Federation, “Albanian Brotherhood” (*Vllazënia Shqiptare*).³⁷⁰

A new dynamic developed in which activists now increasingly thought more in terms domestic social reform within the context of the whole state and less in terms of national representation as in the Ottoman period. In part, this was the progressive legacy of that drew on the late nineteenth-century Young Turk intellectual trends as well as the liberal tradition of European middle-class émigré associations. It also reflected the social and economic challenges that the nascent Albanian state faced. This can be seen first in the social diversity of interwar associations in whose ranks previously marginal social groups became increasingly more vocal and second in the changing intellectual and associational patterns. First, in the recent Ottoman past, voluntary associations had silently accepted that women could in principle play an individual role in Albanian national life. As a result, many women, such as the Qiriazis sisters, had served as teachers, editors and the like. Another, Marigo Pozio (Poçi) – Albania’s Betsy Ross – assumed a semi-legendary status for embroidering the flag that Ismail Kemal bey used when declaring Albania an independent country. Yet women had remained an underrepresented and segregated constituency in associational rolls of the late Ottoman period. After the second attainment of

³⁶⁹ Kordha and Gjoleka, *Shoqëria Bashkimi*, 37-39; Prifti et al., *Historia e Popullit, Vol. III*, 198;

³⁷⁰ “General Meeting of the Representatives of Sports and Arts Societies,” Tiranë, 11-13 August 1935, AQSh, F. 447, D. 61, Fl. 1-9.

independence in 1920 associational activity, though still heavily dominated by men, ceased to be solely male.

The Albanian scholar Fatmira Musaj recognizes three factors that contributed to the social emancipation of women in the interwar period. After the 1890s a greater number of men opted to emigrate in search of better economic opportunities. It is estimated that within 1919, 30,000 men emigrated mainly from southern Albania to the United States alone, not counting both long-term and seasonal emigration to various European countries and the Ottoman Empire/Turkey.³⁷¹ Faced with an absent male at home, many women dissolved marriage bonds and assumed a greater role in family, local and national economic life. This presented considerable new challenges for a patriarchal society like Albania. The customary legal codes of southern Albania adjusted to the new demographic realities while those in northern Albania did not.

National independence also stimulated women's emancipation. The government of Ismail Qemali accepted initially the utility of customary codes but, at the same time, undertook a series of progressive laws that saw the erection of many primary schools for girls and attempted to enhance gender equality between spouses, formalize unions between couples of different religions, and end the practices of infant betrothal and veiling. By the 1920s, gender equality was regularly asserted in the Albanian press and drew support by a younger generation of progressive and liberal activists.³⁷² In addition, wartime experiences served to push women's rights onto the national stage. Many women had contributed by forming committees to assist men at the front. In 1920 Marie Çoba in Shkodër organized the Committee of

³⁷¹ Fatmira Musaj, *Gruaja në Shqipëri, 1912-1939* (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave, Instituti i Historisë, 2002), 17-30, 67.

³⁷² Musaj, *Gruaja*, 61-64, 71.

the Albanian Woman to provide assistance to the voluntary units fighting a Yugoslav incursion in Koplik. In Vlorë, Sado Koshena and Zekie Krasta participated in the battle for Vlorë against Italy and in Kosovo, Shote Galica's actions against the Yugoslav army and newly arrived Serb settlers, became legendary.³⁷³ Starting in the early 1920s women's associations sprang up in many Albanian cities, primarily in those areas known as hubs of national culture such as Shkodër, Korçë, Vlorë, Gjirokastër, Elbasan and now in the new capital Tiranë.³⁷⁴

Second, the national advocacy asserted in the Ottoman Empire, although still present, became a distant preoccupation for activists who now focused on establishing a coherent political structure for the Albanian state. Even Luigj Gurakuqi, arguably one of the principal advocates in Albania for the Albanian identity of Kosovo, rejected what he called "revindication" of "lost" territories.³⁷⁵ Gurakuqi's main contribution was not in the service of subjective irredentism but rather in advocating economic progress as a rational panacea for the ills afflicting Albania. Influenced by Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, Pierre Paul Leroy-Beaulieu but in particular by Augusto Graziani, a noted economist and Gurakuqi's mentor at the University of Naples, he held that if Albania was to become prosperous and, by extension, enjoy a deserved place in the international state system, domestic reform had to address the salient issue of bringing the interests of state and society closer together. Like Graziani, Gurakuqi defined society and state as economic aggregates. To him society

³⁷³ Prifti et al. *Historia e Popullit, Vol. III*, 199.

³⁷⁴ See for instance, "Statute of Girls' Society 'Development,'" Korçë, 1921, AQSh, F. 447, D. 125, Fl. 1-6; "Correspondence of Women's Society 'Albanian Rebirth,'" Korçë, 12 January 1924 – 1 April 1925, AQSh, F. 447, D. 127, Fl. 1-12.

³⁷⁵ "Fjalë e Luigj Gurakuqit ne 'Kuvendin Kombëtar' lidhë me Çështjen e Kosovës," in *Bisedimet e Këshillit Kombëtar*, 1921, cf. Ndriçim Kulla ed. *Antologji e Mendimit Shqiptar* (Tiranë: Plejad, 2003), 88.

meant a community of people sharing complex interdependent relations and outcomes that arose from such encounters. The state, on the other hand, was the political organization of the society, organized by a self-conscious people of a determined territory that, unified in common aspirations, recognized the authority of single governing body.³⁷⁶ The problem in Albania, for Gurakuqi, was that neither state nor society recognized such convergence either as an economic expediency or as a political necessity, as a result of which the gap between the two entities continued to be unbridgeable.³⁷⁷ The state for Gurakuqi had a moral obligation to enlighten the people through far-reaching educational programs. He identified the state of ignorance and naked political ambition as chief causes and faulted both state and society for not choosing the path “of least effort” in endowing the political process and economic progress with the essence of popular representation. Borrowing heavily from Graziani he held that “the majority of moral values are also economic values; the process of labor, [economic] self-sustainability, intelligence, patience, spirit of justice, love of family are part of [a person’s] morality as well as political economy.”³⁷⁸

Gurakuqi was not the only activist to focus on the rational and enterprising spirit of economic progress. Mithat Frashëri, the veteran editor of “Dituria” stressed constant activity, motion and work as the essence of national progress. Frashëri sought to instill into public consciousness a collective and unifying subjective force or what he termed an *ideal*. According to him, “a people cannot live without an *ideal*,

³⁷⁶ Luigj Gurakuqi, “Mbi Kuptimin e Karakteret e Ekonomis Politike,” in *Hylli i Dritës* 4, 9 (November 1923), 510. See also, Augusto Graziani, *Istituzioni di Economia Politica* (Torino: Fratelli Bocca Editori, 1904), 6.

³⁷⁷ Luigj Gurakuqi, “Qeverija e Opozita,” cf. Ndriçim Kulla ed. *Antologji*, 98.

³⁷⁸ Gurakuqi, “Mbi Kuptimin,” 512.

without stimulus, without that purpose that propels one forward in constant movement to strive and to excel.”³⁷⁹ For Frashëri, this *ideal* was an deontological force, the same that propelled the enterprising expansion of the Roman, Arab, Ottoman and British empires, the conviction that made the early Christian fathers willingly accept martyrdom and the stimulus that saw the eventual independence of Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria from the Ottoman Empire.

Frashëri argued that Albanians did not have an *ideal*. He listed five contributing factors: 1) a flawed character which made Albanians always blame others for their troubles, 2) the upland geography which kept its people divided in perpetual animosities and strife, 3) economic poverty which made Albanians covet and steal, 4) laziness, for Albanians always disdained hard work as shameful, and lastly 5) five centuries of foreign Ottoman occupation which enhanced these flaws by employing Albanians as mercenaries “warring, thieving and stealing from Hungary to Baghdad and Yemen.”³⁸⁰ Patriotism without hard work was arrogant and empty. For Frashëri, an *ideal* based on honesty, dedication, self-sacrifice, education, pride and work was the only “cure” to overcome apathy, ignorance and “mental anemia.”³⁸¹ Like Gurakuqi, Frashëri too advocated closing the gap between state and society or as he put it, “the greatest service to a nation is to ask the government to respect the laws, free the people and [stimulate] their initiative to work, speak and act freely [for themselves].” But in contrast to Gurakuqi, Frashëri’s prescription was too abstract and, contrary to his own pronouncement, ultimately moralistic. He wrote that the

³⁷⁹ Mithat Frashëri, “Plagët Tona: Ç’na Mungon? Ç’duhet të Kemi?” cf. Ndriçim Kulla ed. *Antologji*, 109

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 111-112.

³⁸¹ Mithat Frashëri, “Do Mejtuar dhe do Gjetur Shërimi i Sëmundjvet,” cf. Ndriçim Kulla ed. *Antologji*, 136-141.

ideal of the Albanian should have been the belief in “the greatness and the honor of the Albanian, the unit and the unity of the nation and general progress.”³⁸² These vague precepts would later feature in the political manifesto of *Balli Kombëtar*, led by Frashëri himself during the Second World War, and be partly responsible for its downfall. Ironically, the same deontological principles that fueled Frashëri’s thinking would also feature heavily during the Second World War in the communist-led insurgency albeit in the context of a Marxist *ideal* rather than a nationalist one.

In Frashëri and Gurakuqi we find the continuation of late Ottoman beliefs that science and positivistic progress were at the root of the construction of a rational modern society, albeit mixed with the morality of nineteenth-century national romanticism. These principles fueled Albanian efforts for Ottoman administrative decentralization but which now were recast as the very essence of Albanian national centralization. These notions were alien to ordinary Albanians. Even most politicians admitted that, however lofty and desirable, what the country needed most was political stability not abstract ambitions.

Thus, immediately after coming to power, Xhafer Ypi’s government took decisive steps to tackle political instability. By the end of March 1922, it fought and eliminated several insurrections that emerged in various parts of the country by former members of the Progressive Party and Kosovar leaders. In addition, it instituted policies to disarm the population and remove the foci of regional and personal independence. On 2 December a new government under Ahmet Zogu was formed which continued Ypi’s policies. Zogu, however, took care not to extend disarmament into his own base of support among the Mat clansmen and moved

³⁸² Ibid., 138.

instead against his political opposition and the Kosovo Committee.³⁸³ Similarly, in the fashion of the CUP after 1909, Ypi and Zogu sought to stamp out dissension by suppressing freedoms of assembly and press. Citing Zogu's increasing dictatorial tendencies, progressive and liberal members of the Popular Party tendered their resignation and removed themselves from politics. It was at this time that Noli rededicated himself to the question of Orthodox Albanian Autocephaly. His efforts culminated in the convocation of a congress in Berat held between 10 and 19 September 1922. On 12 September, the congress decided to break administrative ties with the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul and, reaffirming only spiritual and apostolic ties, proclaimed the Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church.³⁸⁴ This enabled Noli to fulfill his earlier goal of becoming the Bishop of the Orthodox Church, thus completing the process that started in 1908.

Zogu's elevation to power when he was only twenty-six years old shattered the fragile political system hitherto in existence. By the summer of 1923, the previous Popular and Progressive Parties ceased to exist and new forms of political association emerged. Zogu's camp was simply known as the "government," whereas his opposition was "the opposition." The latter included the Korçë-based branch of *Vatra*, which, led by Noli, brought to Albania an American experience that advocated the transformation of Albanian government into a democratic republic without landowners.³⁸⁵ In addition, Noli, Gurakuqi and his circle of liberal opposition drew support from the Catholic community and societies of Shkodër and the labor and

³⁸³ Austin, *Founding a Balkan State*, 30.

³⁸⁴ Prifti et al., *Historia e Popullit*, Vol. III, 191.

³⁸⁵ In 1920 *Vatra* established a branch in Korçë as an independent organization seeking to emulate the success it had in the United States See "Statute of the Society *Vatra* of Albania," Korçë, 1920, AQSh, F. 447, D. 122, Fl. 1-15.

student associations that had emerged since 1920. Chief amongst them was the *Bashkimi* Society created and briefly led by Esat Toptani's assassin Avni Rustemi. Rustemi's *Bashkimi* survived only for three years but it was the only Albanian society in the interwar period with ambitions to establish an organization for mass mobilization. Many of its members went on either to flirt with or adopt a communist viewpoint in later years.

Bashkimi traced its roots to its predecessor, the association *Atdheu* (Fatherland), an umbrella federative organization formed at a congress held in Vlorë between 25 April and 3 May 1921. Called the Congress of the Unification of Albanian Societies, *Atdheu* loosely integrated over thirty nationalist, labor and cultural-educational societies representing the main urban centers of Albania but also organizations of Kosovar and Çam refugees expelled from Kosovo and northern Greece respectively.³⁸⁶ In its program, it called for agrarian, educational and monetary reforms, end of social privilege, full gender equality, distribution of wealth and the stimulation and protection of national economy through local investments and protectionist tariffs. However, given the political instability of Albania in the early 1920s, the government distrusted any social movement it could not control. As a result, not unlike the CUP in 1909, Ypi's and then Zogu's governments passed a series of measures in June 1922 that aimed to disband all political clubs and societies. *Atdheu* dispersed and its constituent members scattered. Undeterred, Rustemi and a small group of left-wing radicals, Halim Xhelo, Stavro Vinjau, Selim Shpuza and others, established *Bashkimi* in Tiranë on 13 October 1922, as the programmatic descendant of *Atdheu*, albeit without *Atdheu's* heterogeneous grouping of informal

³⁸⁶ Kordha and Gjoka, *Bashkimi*, 40-42

societies. The name itself, *Bashkimi*, suggests at the very least the same intent to unify the disparate progressive forces that had preoccupied Albanian immigrant activists in Bucharest and beyond since the onset of associational life in the 1880s.

Bashkimi sought to expand its support base mainly among in the lower middle class, students, teachers, workers, artisans and civil servants but it also drew significant support by allying itself with Zogu's opposition. This included the émigré Kosovar Committee, the Catholics of Shkodër and local branches of émigré societies in Albania like *Vatra*.³⁸⁷ The social and political program of the society closely adhered to *Atdheu's* progressive basis. The internal administration of the society was, in contrast to *Atdheu's*, far more structured and promised further future centralization. The higher public forum of the society was its congress, a legislative body where delegates from across the country debated the society's political strategy, tactics, statutory changes, and general logistics. The executive office was the General Commission, a five-member body elected for one year responsible for implementing decisions reached by the Congress. Below the General Commission branches were planned at the Prefecture and Subprefecture levels provided that they reached a targeted minimum of five members. In villages and smaller localities an office led by a single secretary sufficed to establish the society's footprint there until such time that it permitted further growth.³⁸⁸ The branches' main objective was to conduct active propagandistic work to sensitize the population through meetings, speeches,

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

³⁸⁸ *Statute of the Society Bashkimi*, (Tirane, Shtypshkronja Nikaj, 1924) in AQSh, F. 442, D. 11, Fl. 85.

conferences and the press about the need to radically transform the country's political process, economy and social structure.³⁸⁹

Although *Bashkimi* valued the freedom of individual thought and behavior, it nonetheless prohibited any activities that did not conform to the founding principles and objectives of the society. To reinforce group cohesion – a perennial problem for all Albanian societies – *Bashkimi* introduced for the first time members' public self-criticism for actions that did not fall into line with the society's ideological program. Members were obliged to keep all time a hart-shaped lapel pin where the society's motto, "Criticize yourself" was printed in black over a burgundy field.³⁹⁰ According to an early draft the statute, *Bashkimi's* members were required to submit to "military discipline" in their respective branches and accept without question the directives of the General Commission.³⁹¹ The enforcement of internal discipline would make *Bashkimi* an important source of political pressure for Fan Noli's regime to push ahead with revolutionary changes a year later in 1924 as well as an obvious, albeit informal, precedent for a Soviet-style Communist Party.

Electoral Crisis, Revolution and the Exile of the Liberals, 1923 – 1925

The elections of 1923 were the major political test for Albania. In contrast to the elections of 1921, in 1923 there were no political parties but rather candidates drawn from state officials and politicians sustained by their own support groups. The first hurdle came from proposed revisions to the electoral law under opposition's

³⁸⁹ Kordha and Gjoka, *Bashkimi*, 50

³⁹⁰ See Statute in AQSh, F. 442, D. 11, Fl. 89.

³⁹¹ Statute of 1922 quoted in Kordha and Gjoka, *Bashkimi*, 50.

efforts to eliminate indirect voting as undemocratic. Ironically, since educated professionals were few in Albania, the parliamentary commission entrusted with changing the electoral law was drawn primarily from the opposition. It took several months to submit recommendations, which for the most part focused on increasing voter participation. The voting age was lowered from 20 to 18. Similarly, it was recommended that a deputy would need 8,000 votes to ensure eligibility instead of 10,000 and one elector would be selected for every 100 voters instead of every 500 voters. In addition, it was also proposed to expand the franchise to include women who could read and write while the illiterate men and women could cast their open vote by marbles (blackballing) so as to eliminate reliance on someone else. Few if any of these recommendations were accepted. Zogu's government rejected blackballing on grounds that the sanctity of a secret ballot had to be preserved even if this meant excluding virtually most Albanians. Women similarly were not included in elections, presumably because recent laws had somewhat ameliorated somewhat their social conditions and this was considered sufficient. Since late 1922 women had obtained the right to sue for divorce or to break an existing union. In addition, polygamy was outlawed, as was the practice of giving money or putting a down payment for future unions.³⁹² On 29 September 1923 the opposition walked out of the chamber and accused the government of having established an oligarchy which identified state and party interests as one and the same, contravening popular sovereignty.³⁹³ Left without an opposition, the Parliament dominated by Zogu's camp

³⁹² Musaj, Gruaja, 74-76.

³⁹³ Prifti et al., *Historia e Popullit*, Vol. III, 215.

approved a largely unchanged electoral law and, the next day, on the 30th, it dissolved itself.

With Parliament not in session, the campaign now took place. Broadly speaking, the government party was represented by the incumbent Ahmet Zogu who, after coming to power, had moved to the conservative right and forged strong links with the landowning class, the running engine of the erstwhile Progressive Party. Symbolizing this relationship was Zogu's promised engagement to the daughter of Shefqet Vërlaci, the greatest Albanian landowner and former leader of the Progressives. The opposition party with Noli and his liberals at the helm included principally *Bashkimi*, *Vatra* and the Kosovar opposition but also smaller progressive societies such as the Xhoka Society in Tiranë, the National Democratic group in Berat, Liberal Party in Korçë and Përmet, the Democrat club in Gjirokastrë, the National group in Vlorë, the "Neither of the Pasha nor of the Bey" group in Elbasan and the Catholic Ora e Maleve (Spirit/Muse of the Mountains) in Shkodër.³⁹⁴ The only common goal that kept the opposition united was their antagonism toward Zogu. Each espoused a variety of social programs. For instance, in addition to Noli and his closest supporters in *Bashkimi* and *Vatra*, no other group except for "Neither of the Pasha nor of the Bey" and the Gjirokastrë-based Democrat club included agrarian reform in their programs.³⁹⁵ This absence of internal cohesion within the opposition would come to haunt Noli in the coming year.

Elections for 102 seat Parliament, took place in an atmosphere of confusion, gross irregularities, inflammatory accusations and personal attacks by both sides. The

³⁹⁴ Ibid. 216; Austin, *Founding a Balkan State*, 32-33

³⁹⁵ Proclamation of 'Neither of the Pasha nor of the Bey' Group," Elbasan, 31 December 1923, AQSh, F. 447, D. 103, Fl. 1-2.

absence of unified political programs for either caused so much confusion that one leading newspaper commented that the ordinary voter did not know who was running and for whom he was supposed to vote.³⁹⁶ Past party lines now blurred and it was not unusual to find progressive liberals on the government ticket and vice versa. In Korçë, for instance, Pandeli Evangjeli formerly of *Bashkimi* of Bucharest allied himself with Zogu whereas Aqif Pasha Biçakçiu, an influential landowner from Elbasan adhered to Noli's camp. Similarly, in Gjirokastrë and Berat the heterogeneous but Orthodox-led opposition secured victories thanks to the support of the local Muslims whereas the Muslim beys on the government ticket obtained considerable support from the Greek Orthodox minority. In the Shkodër district the opposition party won by a landslide. In Vlorë, the results were mixed, whereas in central Albania, in the Tiranë and Durrës districts, the government won thanks to the dominating influence of the landowners and rampant intimidation tactics. According to Sejfi Vllamasi, mercenaries paid by Shefqet Vërlaci murdered Adem Gjinishi a senator for Peqin.³⁹⁷ On 25 December Haxhi Isuf Kazazi a popular Muslim religious leader, elector for Kavajë and member the National Wing was also assassinated along with his wife on his doorstep. Both, Kazazi and Gjinishi, were known vocal opponents of Zogu, which led the liberal press to proclaim, "Their blood will bring about the 1789 of France."³⁹⁸ Zogu's manipulations also shattered the relative unity of the National Wing, which, in the decade since it came into existence, had had relatively little dissensions. According to Vllamasi, the all-too-common human

³⁹⁶ Prifti et al., *Historia e Popullit*, Vol. III, 216.

³⁹⁷ Vllamasi, *Ballafaqime Politike*, 351-352.

³⁹⁸ "National Democratic Party Condolences to the family of Isuf Kazazi," 26 December 1923, AQSh, F. 447, D. 28, Fl.1; Kordha and Gjoka, *Bashkimi*, 62.

ambition for government posts, social prestige and political importance was at the root of these dissensions. In addition, the conservative press ostracized the National Wing as a masonic and atheistic clique bent on Bolshevik extremism.³⁹⁹ As we shall see, the opposite was true.

The elections ended on 27 December. The government side took 44 seats, the opposition 39 and independent candidates took 19 seats.⁴⁰⁰ With no clear majority, the crisis continued. It was further intensified when Beqir Valteri from Mat – Zogu’s birthplace – attempted to assassinate Zogu in Parliament on 23 February 1924. Although the would-be assassin failed in his attempt, it became clear to Zogu that under these circumstances it was nearly impossible for him to obtain a motion of confidence. In late March 1924 he resigned, but not before defeating opposition attempts to form a moderate government under Sami bey Vrioni. A new government was finally formed on 30 March 1924 under Zogu’s presumptive father-in-law, Shefqet Vërlaci. He took several measures to appease the flaring tempers. Negotiations began to finalize the fundamental law and decide once and for all the political structure of the state, whether a monarchy or a republic. Then the government postponed the collection of taxes in the mountain areas that had also been living under the threat of famine. Additionally, it offered some compensation to the peasants of Tiranë and Elbasan for the devastation wrought by the March 1922 insurrection and promised to find money to pay salaries in arrears to the army, the gendarmerie, teachers and governmental clerks. Few members of the opposition, however, regarded the change of the government’s leading political figure as a

³⁹⁹ Vllamasi, *Ballafaqime Politike*, 370.

⁴⁰⁰ Prifti et al., *Historia e Popullit*, Vol. III, 216.

positive development and many saw in it the continuation of Zog's regime led by his loyalists.⁴⁰¹

In this polarized atmosphere the only common ground that the government and opposition could reach was observing five minutes of silence in honor of Woodrow Wilson who died on 3 February 1924. *Bashkimi's* leader Avni Rustemi, MP for the Kosovo Prefecture, persuaded the assembly to include in the common observance V. I. Lenin, who had died twelve days earlier on 21 January.⁴⁰²

Vërlaci's government was rocked by two sets of unconnected murders that took place within three weeks in April 1924. The first was the murder of two American businessmen in Mamurras half way between Tiranë and Shkodër on 6 April. Amidst a critical reaction from the US press, the government scrambled to find the perpetrator, but to no avail. According to Vllamasi, although the government knew the identity of the assassin, the investigation charged and subsequently executed two brothers whom the public knew to be innocent. The public's anger brought grist to the opposition's mill, which argued that the government was incapable of providing security in the country.⁴⁰³ Faced with mounting domestic and international condemnation Vërlaci decided to expand the social base of his government by appointing Luigj Gurakuqi Minister of Finance, Mufit Libohova Minister of Justice and the Kosovar Fahri Rushiti, Minister of Education. These measures, too, failed to mollify the opposition.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰¹ Vllamasi, *Ballafaqime Politike*, 361; For more see also Austin, *Founding a Balkan State*, 41-42.

⁴⁰² Ibid.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 363; Austin, *Founding a Balkan State*, 43-44.

⁴⁰⁴ Akademia e Shkencave, *Historia e Shqipërisë*, vol. III, 220.

Yet, as damaging as the death of the Americans was to Albania's public image abroad, it was the assassination of *Bashkimi's* charismatic leader Avni Rustemi in Tiranë on 20 April, which prompted a serious political upheaval.⁴⁰⁵ Rustemi's death two days later was greeted with widespread condemnation throughout the country. The opposition, intellectuals, the free press, labor and professional societies, government officials and clerks, army officers and émigré societies, Tosk and Geg, Muslim and Christian alike, condemned the "traitorous and murderous" hand of the assassin, sought decisive effort to apprehend the perpetrator (Isuf Reçi), and placed blame on Zogu and the government side. In Vlorë, Tiranë, Berat, Shkodër and elsewhere citizens took to the streets, honoring Rustemi, who in their view had become a symbol of patriotism and democracy.⁴⁰⁶ Rewriting its statute, *Bashkimi* decreed that thenceforth the society's full name was to be *Society Bashkimi – Founded by the Immortal Leader Avni Rustemi*. In addition, the society abolished the role of the chairman and reserved that position thenceforth only to Rustemi's memory. *Bashkimi* also modified its oath, which from then on read, "I swear on my honor and on the memory of Avni Rustemi that, as a disciplined soldier, I will be loyal to the Statute of *Bashkimi*."⁴⁰⁷ Day to day administration of *Bashkimi* was given to the vice-chairman Llazar Fundo. Born in Korçë in 1899 he had studied at the French Lyceum in Thessaloniki and obtained a law degree from the Sorbonne in Paris where he had also become active in communist youth organizations.

⁴⁰⁵ "Telegrams to *Bashkimi*," 20 – 22 April 1924, AQSh, F, 442, D. 25, Fl. 1-46.

⁴⁰⁶ For more see "Telegrams on the loss of Avni Rustemi," 22 – 30 April, AQSh, F. 442, D. 26, Fl. 1-24

⁴⁰⁷ *Statute of the Society Bashkimi*, (Tirane, Shtypshkronja Nikaj, 1924) in AQSh, F. 442, D. 11, Fl. 85

Following Rustemi's death, *Bashkimi* experienced a considerable rise in membership. New branches opened up in cities and villages of northern Albania, well outside the society's usual stronghold in the southern and central parts of the country. Rustemi's body was subsequently embalmed and in a symbolic act of defiance transported to Vlorë, the city of the declaration of independence, where it was buried near the grave of Ismail Kemal bey. His funeral ceremony was allegedly attended by a massive crowd of 15,000 people, which also included 26 parliament deputies and 300 representatives from various districts and cities of Albania. Seventeen members of the opposition and anti-Zog personalities delivered eulogies, in effect transforming the funeral ceremony into a political rally. The now Vlorë-based opposition made fresh demands to the government demanding its resignation, the apprehension of the culprit, stimulating local economy and agriculture, and the dismissal of Albanian Yugoslav agents in Albania.⁴⁰⁸ Others resolved to take up arms and overthrow the government by force.

Because his short-lived regime now followed, Noli has been recognized as the main catalyst for the revolutionary upheaval that put him in power. Yet while Noli's oratory did much to inflame public anti-government perceptions, his presumptive leadership over the opposition is doubtful. This opposition represented various interests whose common link was their mutual antipathy, fear or jealousy of Zogu's growing monopolization of the political process. Outside those liberal and progressive activists who opposed Zogu on ideological grounds, most saw in him an obstacle to the achievement of their own ambitions. According first to Vllamasi and

⁴⁰⁸ Jorgaqi, *Fan Noli*, vol. I, 492. Austin provides much lower but still significant numbers between 5-10,000. Austin, *Founding a Balkan State*, 47.

more recently, Noli's biographer, Nasho Jorgaqi, Noli and Gurakuqi recognized the danger of such allies and were opposed to a violent overthrow of the government. Instead, they sought to obtain power through constitutional means by forcing yet another round of elections.⁴⁰⁹ It was instead the radical organizations within the opposition, the Kosovar Committee, *Bashkimi*, the Army and landowners snubbed by Zogu, who advocated his violent overthrow. Vllamasi singled out the influential landowner Ali Këlcyra and the former leader of NDC of Vlorë Qazim Koculi who did their utmost to incite the masses into action.⁴¹⁰ Similarly, *Bashkimi* launched a general call seeking to "keep the flame of Rustemi's ideal alive."⁴¹¹ Noli and Gurakuqi sought to calm tempers and proposed that the new Parliament be held in Lezhë, not in Vlorë, so as to avoid the appearance of regional factionalism and signal to the government their willingness to cooperate on national issues. They proposed Lezhë not because of its location in northern Albania but rather for the symbolic value that it held as an historical site of national reconciliation. In March 1444, Gjergj Kastrioti-Skanderbeg, Albania's modern national hero, had forged an historic alliance of all Albanian lords – Catholic and Orthodox alike – to resist the Ottoman advance. After his death in 1468 Skanderbeg was buried in St. Nicholas church in Lezhë, thereby investing that city with near mythic properties.⁴¹² Despite this, Noli and Gurakuqi found it impossible to contain public excitement and were eventually swept up into it.

⁴⁰⁹ Vllamasi, *Ballafaqime Politike*, 365; Jorgaqi, *Fan Noli*, vol. I, 494

⁴¹⁰ Ibid. 366

⁴¹¹ Kordha and Gjoka, *Bashkimi*,

⁴¹² Jorgaqi, *Fan Noli*, 494; H.T. Norris, *Popular Sufism in Eastern Europe: Sufi brotherhoods and the dialogue with Christianity and Heterodoxy*. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 54, 56, 63-64.

In the weeks that followed, Vërlaci's government, paralyzed by defections, resigned. A new government by the moderate Iliaz Vrioni, a signatory of the declaration of independence, was formed. Vrioni proved just as incapable of influencing the course of events. In Vlorë, on 16 May 1924, the gendarmerie disobeyed the prefect's orders to open fire on an anti-government demonstration and threw in their lot with the opposition. Similarly, *Bashkimi* organized a paramilitary battalion with young volunteers coming from Tiranë and Vlorë. By 26 May the army garrisons of Shkodër and Përmet rebelled. In Krumë, in the prefecture of Kosovo, Bajram Curri and the local military complement chased away a platoon of gendarmes reinforced by Zog's brother-in-law and Yugoslav agent Ceno bey Kryeziu's band of retainers. By 5 May, Shkodër fell to the opposition followed by Lezhë, Skrapar, Berat, Fier, Peshkopi and Lushnjë. On 10 June, the opposition entered Tiranë. Within a week, the revolution was a success. Albanian estimates place the number of casualties on both sides at 200 whereas US reports estimated only seventy-six dead and wounded.⁴¹³

Did the events of May-June 1924 amount to a revolution or just a coup d'état? Citing the ease with which the government was defeated, the low number of casualties on both sides, the absence of ideological coherence within the opposition and Luigj Gurakuqi's pronouncements to that effect in the Italian newspaper *Popolo d'Italia*, Robert Austin has recently called the insurrection more a coup d'état, thus no revolution. Indeed, except for the district of Vlorë, by far the most radicalized part of Albania, general attitudes remained muted by fear and insecurity. A peasant leader in Devoll, district of Korçë, admitted to Vllamasi that,

⁴¹³ Prifti et al., *Historia e Popullit*, Vol. III, 223-226; Austin, *Founding a Balkan State*, 54.

The government of the beys will make us suffer as we always have. There will be a time when we will settle accounts with them but today an insurrection is a frightful thing, because Greeks and Serbs will use it to their advantage. We are still suffering from the wounds of the rebellion of Epirus in 1914 and we fear that the Greeks will take Korçë if we rise up.⁴¹⁴

Virtually all peasants and rural communities in Albania shared similar attitudes. But, how then can the success of the insurrection be explained? First, while it true that the opposition lacked popular support, the same holds equally true, if not more so for a government that most Albanians regarded as corrupt and inefficient. In turn, this provided the opposition with at least the moral support that it needed, while, at the same time, hoping that successful action would eventually bring the masses into their movement. Second, the opposition's military offensive shows that its initially small bands did not attack government forces piecemeal but rather proceeded from one installation to the next, gaining momentum as they went along. In this manner they eliminated the government's ability to regroup. Although, the government's defeat was humiliating, it was far from total. On the day when the government evacuated Tiranë, heading for the border with Yugoslavia, it still possessed a formidable, though wholly disheartened, force consisting of an army battalion and 600 paramilitary clansmen from Mat.⁴¹⁵

On the other hand, for Albanian scholars these events are still enshrined as the June Revolution. In their thinking, the "revolution" need not be a military affair but rather a manifestation of an inescapable evolutionary process – political, moral and economic – demanded by historical necessity, while Noli and his band of liberals merely the agents of a rational modernity. In this sense, it mattered little what one

⁴¹⁴ Vllamasi, *Ballafaqime Politike*, 368.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 378.

thought of the actions that brought Noli to power – be that a Revolution or a coup – or how strong initial public support was for him and his liberal agenda. For this long established view, the real revolution started when Noli formed his government on 16 June, or more appropriately, when Noli unveiled his 20-point social program on 19 June.⁴¹⁶ Within the context of contemporary Albania the program of the government was indeed revolutionary:

1. The overall disarmament of the population
2. Denunciation of the inciters of fratricide and their agents with expulsion and confiscation of their wealth
3. Reestablishment of tranquility, order and sovereignty of law
4. Authority of the State supreme over any personal or extralegal power
5. Elimination of feudalism, freedom of the people and establishment of a democratic order
6. Radical reforms in all departments, civil and military
7. Simplification of the bureaucracy and the cleansing of the ranks who, however, enjoy redress provided they show ability, good moral standing and patriotism.
8. Establishment of a law for civil servants, equal for all.
9. Erection of special plenipotentiary commissions to investigate and improve the condition of the peasantry.
10. Balancing the budget by introducing radical savings programs
11. Change the taxation system in a manner favorable to the people
12. Improve the condition of the farmers and aid in their economic emancipation
13. Easing conditions to favor foreign capital while organizing and defending local assets against predations.
14. Raise the prestige and standing of the state in the international community
15. True independence of the judiciary
16. Radical reform of the archaic courts and tribunals (i.e., customary legal codes)
17. Improvement of the communications infrastructure throughout the country
18. Organization of the Department of Health to combat diseases that are ravaging the people
19. Organization of the education system on modern and practical basis so as to produce valuable, patriotic and a productive work force
20. Friendly normal relations with all foreign states especially neighboring countries.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁶ Prifti et al., *Historia e Popullit*, Vol. III, 228

⁴¹⁷ Reproduced with minor changes from Austin, *Founding a Balkan State*, 60

From these sweeping proposals it becomes apparent that the new government's ambitious program amounted to nothing less than engineering a new state and society in Albania. It is, however, a mistake to call this solely Noli's program for it reflected the aspirations of many individual groups within the opposition: students, peasants, workers, women, etc. *Bashkimi's* statute, for instance, already mentioned peasant and gender emancipation, education and agrarian reforms, eradication of feudalism and agricultural banks in the society's program. Noli's government simply solidified associational goals into a single political agenda, and in doing so it set an important ideological precedent for the future.

Yet the opposition was unprepared to assume political control of the country. It was and remained a decentralized and informal association of too many interest groups and organizations sharing little ideological consistency beyond their common hostility to Zogu and to a lesser degree of the landowning class. The first sign of dissension appeared in the contention over Shkodër or Vlorë serving as the capital of Albania. This was an odd dispute considering that Tiranë (and before it Durrës) had served in that function, albeit in an interim capacity, since February 1920. The partisans of Shkodër stressed the cultural capital of the city and the relatively sophisticated urban development as advantages. These reasons were well merited but Vlorë had developed since 1912 a political capital that rivaled the historical and cultural value of Shkodër and even of Korçë, the two most prominent Albanian cities where associational life had first flourished. Vlorë was the city of the declaration of independence, the city of the first Albanian national government and a city that had never been invaded during the Balkan Wars. In addition, it was also the city that had

expelled the Italians in 1920, thus, symbolically defeating the projected plans for an Italian mandate over Albania. It appears, however, that the matter was not pressed and after a brief dispute, as Vllamasi later stated, “reason prevailed and both sides started negotiations for the formation of government.”⁴¹⁸

In reality, individual political ambitions trumped regional loyalties. The leadership of the revolutionary cabinet was hotly debated. The candidates were Fan Noli, the moderate Sami Vrioni and the former Prime Minister Sulejman Delvina. Delvina was considered ineffective, so the choice was between Noli and Vrioni. Open discussions produced no result, and it was only by secret ballot that Noli received the absolute majority, whereupon he became the new Prime Minister. His contemporary Mustafa Kruja, on whom more later, admitted that, “Noli stood far above all other Albanians... a great and powerful orator in Parliament able to demolish his opponents with fine satire.”⁴¹⁹ Yet, the decision was not unanimous. Kruja himself was forced to admit that Noli’s experience was academic, that he did not understand Albanian mentality and that “righteous and naïve, [Noli] was unable to manage political intrigues or understand them.”⁴²⁰ In a similar vein, after learning about the elevation of Noli, Sotir Peçi the former editor of *Kombi* and rival in Boston alarmingly proclaimed, “the gypsy of Edirne will inflict misfortune upon us all.”⁴²¹ Later and with the benefit of hindsight, Vllamasi, considered Noli a political neophyte who listened too much to Luigj Gurakuqi, himself an indecisive, second-rate politician

⁴¹⁸ Vllamasi, *Ballafaqime Politike*, 379.

⁴¹⁹ Jorgaqi, *Fan Noli*, vol. I. 502

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ Jorgaqi, *Fan Noli*, vol. I. 510.

suitied at best for academic work.⁴²² Noli's elevation nonetheless, appeared to have satisfied two main goals. On the one hand, he was a compromise choice that elevated a personality with well-known liberal credentials to lead a government that nurtured revolutionary changes. On the other hand, he was judged to be the only political figure that stood above factionalism and therefore stood a better chance than most to bring together the various interests.

Yet within weeks it became apparent that Noli was incapable of forging the much-needed political coalition. One Franciscan priest, Father Ambroz Marleskaj, summarized the reasons why Shkodër participated in the revolution as relying first, on transferring the capital to that city and second, achieving the common aspiration to overthrow Zogu. Absent satisfaction, he stressed, Shkodër saw no reason why lending further support.⁴²³ In addition, Noli's agrarian program attracted opposition even within his cabinet, leaving Noli to rely only on the socialist Stavro Vinjau, *Vatra* and the radical youth of *Bashkimi*. The latter had expanded into forty branches and also made inroads among Albanian student circles abroad, mainly in Bari, Naples, and Rome, Italy, but also in Paris, France.⁴²⁴ Despite continuing to support the government, this association grew increasingly radical and impatient with Noli, proclaiming uncompromising war against "feudalism, sentimentalism and leniency."⁴²⁵

Within weeks the uneasy alliance within the former opposition paralyzed the work of the government. More factions emerged accusing one another of corruption,

⁴²² Vllamasi, *Ballafaqime Politike*, 381, 409, 415-416.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, 386.

⁴²⁴ Kordha and Gjoka, *Bashkimi*, 94.

⁴²⁵ Jorgaqi, *Fan Noli*, Vol. I. 512.

nepotism, and of abandoning the revolution and its reforms. Even Noli's camp did not escape these divisions. On 3 October 1924 the new National Democratic Party (NDP) was formed in Tiranë under Bahri Omari – brother-in-law of the future communist leader Enver Hoxha – who got his start in Boston in 1914 as the editor of Vatra's *Dielli*. The NDP claimed to stand above factionalism and promised to end political opportunism, careerism, and corruption and uphold the *ideal* of true patriotism.⁴²⁶ At about the same time, another new party, the Radical Democratic Party, was formed promising similar reforms.⁴²⁷

Yet no political organization, old or new, could contain the downward spiral. The political environment approached chaos. The country was virtually partitioned into zones of ministerial influences: Noli in Korçë, Koço Tasi and Stavro Vinjau in Gjirokastrë, Qazim Koculi in Berat and Vlorë, Mustafa Kruja in central Albania, Bajram Curri in the Prefecture of Kosovo and Luigj Gurakuqi in Shkodër.⁴²⁸

According to Vllamasi, disenchantment with Noli was so severe that many Albanians began to view Zogu's period with a certain nostalgic yearning, for his government, at the very least, was not mired in political anarchy.⁴²⁹ By November, taking advantage of Noli's absence at the League of Nations, factions within the army, the government and the new political organizations were plotting Noli's removal from power. From Belgrade, Zogu exploited the situation by sending his own followers to foment insurrection. Shortly thereafter he rallied behind him a medley force of Albanian and Kosovar clansmen, disaffected Italophiles in Greece, Yugoslav soldiers and white

⁴²⁶ "Declaration of the National Democratic Party," Tiranë, 3 October 1924, AQSh, F. 447, D. 29, Fl. 1.

⁴²⁷ "Invitation to appear in Party Meeting," Durrës, 23 October 1924, AQSh, F. 447, D. 33, Fl. 1.

⁴²⁸ Vllamasi, *Ballafaqime Politike*, 388.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, 429-432 and in passim.

Russian mercenaries led by General Pyotr N. Wrangel. In addition, Zogu also enjoyed the financial support of the Yugoslav government and the Anglo-Persian Oil Company who provided substantial sums to see him back in power.⁴³⁰ The latter considered Zogu essential to its plans to obtain exclusive drilling rights in the oil fields of southern Albania.

By December Noli's credibility within the country and abroad was gone. He later took full responsibility when he remarked to Joseph Swire:

By insisting on the agrarian reforms I aroused the wrath of the landed aristocracy; by failing to carry them out I lost the support of the peasant masses. My government colleagues and the majority of the army officers were either hostile or at best indifferent to these reforms, although they had declared themselves in favor previously. Mr. Sotir Peçi, the Regent, opposed them violently and openly. Mr. Eyres (Great Britain's representative in Albania) succeeded in persuading everybody around me that agrarian reforms were a dangerous Bolshevik innovation.⁴³¹

In mid-December 1924 Zogu and his forces, allegedly numbering 8,000 men including two Yugoslav regular battalions and several hundred White Russians, entered Albania from Prizren toward Shkodër and toward Tiranë. From the Greek border the "Italophiles" under Mufit Libohova and Koço Kota crossed the border as well. On the evening of 23 December trucks were seen transporting government officials from Tiranë to Durrës and from Elbasan via Lushnjë to Vlorë. From these locations, Italian ships transported them to Brindisi where they relocated for a time before dispersing elsewhere in Italy, Austria, France, Switzerland and Yugoslavia. For his part, Noli eventually settled in Vienna.

⁴³⁰ Prifti et al., *Historia e Popullit*, Vol. III, 240; See also Vllamasi, *Ballafaqime Politike*, 399, 400-406; Austin, *Founding a Balkan State*, 106-108.

⁴³¹ Quoted in Austin *Founding a Balkan State*, 63.

The National Democrats and the Democrat Radicals had resolved to fight and joined forces with *Bashkimi*. Together they launched a general call to the population and especially to the youth to rise up and defend the country against Zogu (whom they called Zogollović because of his reliance on Yugoslav military support). For these political organizations Zogu's assault was yet a new chapter in the historical struggle to dismember Albania between Serbia and Greece.⁴³² Their efforts, however, came to naught and on Christmas Eve 1924 Zogu and his forces entered Tiranë.

Once there, Zogu proclaimed the "Triumph of Legality" under a government led by Iliaz Vrioni. Vrioni's government launched a series of measures intent on cleansing the state apparatus of Noli's supporters. Political societies, organizations and clubs were likewise disbanded, individual and civil rights abolished and censorship imposed. Declared illegal, *Bashkimi* continued to operate in Bari, Italy until 11 March 1927 under the leadership of Haki Stërmilli, one of the original founders of the society.⁴³³ Lllazar Fundo who had led *Bashkimi* after Rustemi's death migrated first to Vienna where he linked up with the Balkan Communist Federation and then subsequently went to the Soviet Union where he became a member of the Comintern. Many former government officials, opposition and associational leaders received lengthy prison sentences, some in absentia. Others were simply murdered. In late December, the Kosovar leader Zija Dibra, who thought that he had reached a gentleman's agreement with Zogu, was murdered in Kavajë. On 2 March 1925 Luigj Gurakuqi was likewise assassinated in Bari and on 29 March Bajram Curri fell in Tropojë fighting against a punitive expedition. Families of leaders who had left

⁴³² "General Calls to the Population," 15-22 December 1924, AQSh, F. 442, D. 39, Fl. 1-19.

⁴³³ Kordha and Gjoka, *Bashkimi*, 166.

Albania were exiled. Properties of landed magnates confiscated during Noli's administration as part of his agrarian reform project, were returned to their owners. Institutions deemed hotbeds of insurrection were abolished, such as the Ministry of War, replaced by a General Command of Armed Forces. The Ministry of Education was slated for a similar fate on the basis that intellectuals were naturally inclined toward liberalism.⁴³⁴ Once political repression ended twelve days later, Zogu replaced Vrioni's government with a new one led by him on 5 January 1925.

Zogu initially filled his cabinet with members of the Italophile faction. He retained for himself the office of the Prime Minister and that of the Minister of the Interior. Catholic Bishop Gjergj Koleci became the nominal Minister of Foreign Affairs but power lay on Eqrem Libohova. Mufit Libohova became the Minister of Finance and received also the Ministry of Justice. Koço Kota became simultaneously the Minister of Public Works and Communications, Justice (under Mufit Libohova) and Education. Left without an organized opposition, Zogu felt secure to recall the parliament, which now, a pale shadow of its former self, included only sixty-four members. On 21 January the Parliament abolished the Regency and declared Albania a presidential republic with Zogu as President. At the same time, Zogu reversed the political process that had emerged from the Congress of Lushnjë by limiting the powers of the parliament while expanding those of the executive. On 14 March a new election law was approved which prohibited participation in elections for the gendarmerie, the army, women, prisoners, the poor and individuals who had gone bankrupt on private enterprise. The new elections, held on 12 April, saw the electorate cut to twenty percent of the previously eligible voters and a parliament

⁴³⁴ Prifti et al., *Historia e Popullit*, Vol. III, 248.

filled with only fifty-seven members. By exiling his opposition, within four months after he assumed power, Zogu achieved the political stability that the entire Albanian political class had sought but was incapable of accomplishing democratically in the last three years. In addition, by securing such broad powers, Zogu found little difficulty in proclaiming himself King in 1928.

Conclusion

In the early interwar period Albanian politics were pushed outside the strict confines of parochial and sectarian loyalties. The problems facing Albania were too great and could not be solved locally as in the past. Indeed except for Haxhi Qamili's rebellion in 1914, which sought a return to imperial Ottoman rule, and the brief episode of the Yugoslav-sponsored Mirditë Republic in 1921, these divisions were secondary to national economy, social emancipation, and the political form of the government. Even irredentism, despite the imposed borders that left as many Albanians outside the state as inside it, did not rank as high in the interwar period as these other issues.

As seen in Chapter 2, the imperial divorce in 1912 produced a significant crisis of confidence, which was then exacerbated by the violent atomization of kinship, family, professional and associational ties that followed the initial territorial dismemberment of the Ottoman and Albanian territories in 1912 and then the occupations of First World War until 1918. Following the reassertion of independence in 1920 informal associations began anew, but did not enjoy their former authority. After 1920 they had become alienated from the public and save for the brief unified resistance that averted the Italian mandate 1920, this adversely

affected the degree to which the new political associations, later parties, interacted with the common people. In addition, they possessed specific constituencies peculiar to the émigré associations in particular, different traditions, different values and different strengths that reflected the absorption of social and political values in their countries or regions of operations. In the early 1920s there were many political legacies that operated freely and openly in competition with one another, Ottoman, American, Romanian, central European, North African etc. Furthermore, from political actors able to negotiate their identities and interests at a global stage – imperial and transnational – these Albanian activists were suddenly recast as national actors confined to a resourceless, tiny state that many believed had little chance of survival. The ensuing shift from advocates of political decentralization to champions of state centralization and the introduction of their individual experiences in Albania were too abrupt to resonate with the public at large or be politically effective. But if these trends did place national politics above regional loyalties, they did, however, irreparably divide national politics itself.

Unsurprisingly therefore Albanian political behavior in the national state closely resembled their previous political experience during the late Ottoman Empire. On the one hand, as Robert Austin has recently shown, Zogu and the great landlords followed the Ottoman example of divide and rule.⁴³⁵ Not unlike Abdülhamit II, Ahmet Zogu's decision to institute an authoritarian monarchy was an attempt that simultaneously served his own ambitions while at the same time providing Albania a patrimonial figurehead symbolizing national unity and state continuity. Yet in contrast to the Ottoman Empire, the "patrimony" of the House of Zogu did not extend

⁴³⁵ Austin, *Founding a Balkan State*, 8.

beyond his birthplace of Mat and any attempt at symbolic royal continuity fell short. This, however, did not stop Zogu from adopting Hamidian tactics of an enlightened monarch, fostering religious toleration, some education reform, providing peasants with some land and granting pardons. At the same time he was actively suppressing dissent, free speech and press, retreating from agrarian reforms, subordinating ministers as personal secretaries and refusing to open the political process beyond his inner circle. Like Abdülhamit II, Zogu lacked the imagination and the political will to effect a wholesale transformation of the social and political fabric of the state.

On the other hand, the progressives under Noli sought to dismantle the previous Ottoman rule and engineer the emergence of Albania as a new modern and reformed European country. It was a lofty goal, which, even under optimal conditions, would have required a long time to undo five centuries of imperial rule. Noli's regime did not fail because he was a political outsider and not "a truly national figure" as Austin has recently argued, though these vulnerabilities made him easier to be ignored by others. Heirs to émigré experiences in orderly and industrialized countries, virtually all émigré returnees to Albania, like Noli, were to one degree or another outsiders, ill fitting to the mentality of an agrarian and illiterate Albania. Noli was an atypical representative of this experience. What set him apart from other returnees like Pandeli Evangjeli, Sotir Peçi, Mithat Frashëri and others was his own brand of political authoritarianism, the same that had made him so many enemies in the United States. Indeed, for someone who set foot in Albania only in 1921, Noli towered above all in prestige and renown even above Mithat Frashëri, the former chairman of the Congress of Monastir in 1908. What eventually brought Noli down

was the general apathy of the public, cowered, fearful and estranged from the political process by more than a decade of war, despoliation, foreign occupations, economic abuses and political chaos. In other words there was no social backing for Noli and, in more general terms, for the entire progressive camp. In contrast, Zogu could at least rely on his own Geg Mati clan for military support, the finances of the large Tosk landowners, and support from Yugoslavia and then Italy.

At the same time, as Noli came to understand, other collective interests were demanding accommodation within the state. A growing segment, still in infancy before 1924 but promising strong tendencies toward future political centralization, was the radical youth: young men born at the turn of the twentieth century and raised amidst the ravages of Balkan Wars and the First World War. These young men turned away from a purely nationalist advocacy that marked their parents' activism and began looking towards an internationalist ideal that represented the wishes and aspirations of the common people. As we shall see in the next chapter, inspired and led briefly by Noli, their model became the Soviet Union, a country which in the early-mid 1920s, appeared of have had already achieved a truly modern, egalitarian and classless society free of nationalist excesses and feudal and capitalist oppression. Ironically, it was Zogu and his "Triumph of Legality" which provided much of the ideological legitimacy for the left when it collectively branded liberals, socialists, nationalists, and progressives alike as "Bolshevik." Much like Abdülhamit and the CUP government after 1908, Zogu, however, could neither ignore nor suppress the left wing activism that, as we shall see in Chapter 4, grew again in emigration, independently from Albanian domestic politics.

Chapter 4: Associational Divisions: From New Emigration to the Soviet Role and Beyond, 1925 – 1939

The effort to establish political parties in the immediate postwar to 1924 had proved premature. The subsequent decline of the political process into unstructured personal rule and rivalries combined with the domestic failure of informal associations seeking to reverse that decline showed how tenuous their hold was over the wider public. But from the end of domestic opposition to Zogu by 1925, informal associations became relevant again as mechanisms of political mobilization. By choosing exile, Zogu's opposition unwittingly recreated the older patterns in Albanian associational life before 1900 we saw in Chapter 1. Now, however, the main antagonist was not Abdülhamit II but Albania's own Ahmet Zogu, who proclaimed himself King in 1928. In immigration the exiles came into renewed contact with interwar ideas and ideologies that they adopted and helped bring back to Albania. Among the new intellectual stimuli they encountered, communism gradually became the most powerful ideology. It promised political centralization as a solution to the social and economic ills afflicting the Albanian society and state as well as the latter's increasing subordination to Fascist Italy. But central control or coordination would prove elusive to the émigré associations as it always had.

KONARE and the Radicalization of Émigré Associations, 1925 – 1930

The exiles did not give up hope of returning to Albania to overthrow Zogu. Led by Fan Noli they formed the National Revolutionary Committee, or KONARE

(*Komiteti Nacional Revolucionar*) in Vienna on 25 March 1925. This was an umbrella association intended to function as a broad coalition that included former ministers and government officials, parliament deputies, military officers and associational and political leaders. More specifically, it included exiled liberal and progressive democrats, Noli's *Vatra*, Avni Rustemi's *Bashkimi*, members of the Kosovo Defense Committee and staunch anti-Zogu right-wing landowners and those Italophiles who opposed Zogu. Although not a member of KONARE or affiliated with it, even the veteran *Bashkimi* of Bucharest soon found itself in opposition to Zogu's regime.⁴³⁶ As in the past, the only common ground holding these disparate centers of advocacy together was their shared opposition to Ahmet Zogu. KONARE never finalized a statute of its own, arguably to forestall internal dissent among its highly diverse composition. It did, however, remain broadly faithful to the twenty-point program adopted earlier by Noli:

1. Saving Albania from the tyranny of Ahmet Zogu, its feudal clique and foreign interests.
2. Establishing a true republican government.
3. Launching agrarian reform in the interest of those who work the land.
4. Reasserting Albania's full ethnic borders.⁴³⁷

KONARE was painfully aware that it lacked both support within Albania and diplomatic access to an international community that had sanctioned Zogu's return to power. Politically isolated from the West, KONARE sought to reestablish links with the Soviet Union, a process that had begun when Noli appealed to the Soviet regime for diplomatic recognition, a dead letter following Zogu's return to power. In a note to the Soviet diplomat in Vienna, Adolph Joffe, KONARE portrayed itself as the

⁴³⁶ "Zogu's National Betrayal," Bucharest, 1 November 1925, AQSh, F. 99, D. 249, Fl. 1.

⁴³⁷ "Declaration." Geneva, 5 May 1925, F. 1/APL, D. 1, Fl. 1.

natural successor of Noli's government, overthrown illegally and against the wishes of the Albanian people. According to the note, that government's revolutionary determination in carrying out the much-needed program of "socialist" reforms in Albania was discontinued when Western imperialism and Serbian militarism installed their agent Ahmet Zogu in power. In addition, the reactionary regime interrupted a promising Soviet-Albanian rapprochement.⁴³⁸ To assure the Soviet government of its sincerity and socialist commitment, KONARE included two more points to its program:

5. Support for the Communist Balkan Federation
6. Friendly relations with the Soviet Union

Thenceforth contacts with Soviet Union increased. On 16 April KONARE appealed to the Soviet Union for moral, financial and political support, thus formally introducing into Albanian politics a new source of international patronage.⁴³⁹

The timing of the KONARE's initiative was very propitious for on 16 June 1925 the Profintern – Comintern's international body established in July 1921 to spread Communist influence among workers' organizations in Europe – created a Balkan Bureau in Vienna whose aim was to "be in touch with the Presidium of the Balkan Communist Federation."⁴⁴⁰ Attempts to bring KONARE in line with the socialist revolution resulted in the alteration of the association's initial structure. In April, radical progressives and left wing activists adopting a wide array of Social-

⁴³⁸ "Petition of Albanian Political Emigrants to Soviet Plenipotentiary Representative Adolph A. Joffe," Vienna, March 1925, AQSh, F. 15/APL, D. 20, Fl. 7-8. The document is unnumbered but the sequence of pages included in this file suggests pagination.

⁴³⁹ "To the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics," Vienna, 16 April 1925, AQSh, F. 15/APL, D. 20, Fl. 5-6. The document is unnumbered but the sequence of pages included in this file suggests pagination.

⁴⁴⁰ Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe, *International Communism and the Communist International, 1919-43*, 1, 194

Democratic, Socialist, Democratic and Communist principles formed the Committee of National Liberation, CNL (*Komiteti i Çlirimit Kombëtar*), which included Noli, *Vatra* and the radical youth of Avni Rustemi's *Bashkimi*, including figures of later significance, Llazar Fundo, Halim Xhelo, Sejfulla Malëshova, Omer Nishani, Riza Cerova, Selim Shpuza and others. In late 1925 the CNL sent about a dozen of its younger members to pursue higher education in Soviet universities.⁴⁴¹ In response, shortly thereafter center- and right-wing nationalists, landowners and clerics including Sejfi Vllamasi, the former regent Sotir Peçi, Ali Këlcyra, Xhemal Bushati and others formed the National Union, NU (*Bashkimi Kombëtar*). Objecting to growing links between KONARE and the Soviet Union, these activists argued that the association had lost sight of the common objective, which was to overthrow Zogu.

Fears about the growing alignment of KONARE with the Soviet Union grew when two years later in 1927 Noli participated in the International Association of Friends of the Soviet Union Congress held in Moscow on the tenth anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution. Amazed by the “accomplishments achieved by the first state of workers and peasants,” Noli proclaimed that Albanian aspirations of liberation from Zogu, Yugoslav militarism and Western “financial imperialism” would be possible only through the common struggle of a “single republican Balkan federation of workers and peasants as in the USSR.”⁴⁴² Following Noli's return to Geneva, KONARE began to rapidly reorganize its structures so as to fall in line with the proposed Soviet platform for a national revolutionary organization. This, however,

⁴⁴¹ For an example see, “Letter to Malëshova and Shpuza,” Paris, November 1927, AQSh, F. 15/APL, D. 5, Fl. 1.

⁴⁴² Noli's interview to *Pravda*, Moscow, 4 November 1927, cf. Frashëri, *Historia e Lëvizjes së Majtë*, 294.

fueled incipient anti-communist sentiments of the more conservative members of KONARE.

Early 1928 saw even more defections from KONARE to the National Union. Gradually, the NU grew to include the older and better-known personalities of Albanian associational life during and after the Ottoman period: conservative members of *Vatra*, former National Wing activists, members of the now-defunct National Defense committees from 1920, progressive landowners and former officials of Albanian governments since 1912. It formed branches in Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia and France.⁴⁴³ Others who exhibited far-right political tendencies or those who had openly sided with Italian fascism, such as future Second World War collaborators Mustafa Kruja, Xhevat Korça and Konstantin Kote, created the Zara Group, named so after the small Italian enclave of Zara (Zadar) on the Dalmatian coast, where their leader Mustafa Kruja settled for eight years after leaving Albania in 1924.⁴⁴⁴ In light of such splits, even émigré Kosovar leaders also grew weary about KONARE's ability to remain cohesive and doubted that the association could ever become a positive mechanism for the presumptive liberation of Kosovo from Yugoslavia. Subsequently they created their own faction, the Committee for the Liberation of Kosovo (*Komiteti i Çlirimit të Kosovës*), CLK, but unlike the NU and the Zara Group they elected to remain loosely affiliated with KONARE.

Thus further diluted, KONARE became an essentially left wing association whose political spectrum oscillated somewhere between social democracy and Soviet Bolshevism. Within it, there were three largely separate but closely associated

⁴⁴³ Vllamasi, *Ballafaqime Politike*, 303-306.

⁴⁴⁴ "Biographical Material of Mustafa Kruja," 25 October 1940, AQSh, F. 37, D. 11, Fl. 13.

factions, most of whose members traced their origins to the radical youth of Rustemi's *Bashkimi*. Those who did not, were young professionals or students associated with émigré associations in the United States, Romania and Italy. First was the CNL, led by Halim Xhelo a former member of *Atdheu* and *Bashkimi*.⁴⁴⁵ CNL also included within its ranks future communist leaders, such as for instance, Omer Nishani, a trained non-practicing physician who after the Second World War became the first Chairman of the Presidium of the People's Republic of Albania. Second, was the Albanian Communist Group (ACG), an CNL offshoot of radical communist activists led by Konstantin Boshnjaku, a trained economist at the University of Athens and future governor of the Albanian National Bank after the Second World War; Konstantin (Koço) Tashko, the Harvard-trained son of Athanas Tashko, Noli's original benefactor in Faiyum, Egypt, and Llazar Fundo, the Sorbonne-trained lawyer and vice-chairman of *Bashkimi* following Avni Rustemi's assassination. Established in Vienna in the first half of 1927, the ACG served for a time as the main Albanian link to the Comintern's Balkan Bureau. The third group was the Kosovar CLK, which, too, had managed to obtain Comintern's recognition as a communist group separate from the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY).⁴⁴⁶

Meanwhile, on 28 August 1927, the original group of Albanian students sent by CNL to the Soviet Union formed the Albanian Communist Organization (ACO) organized into three miniscule cells in Moscow, Leningrad, and Odessa. The ACO included originally only ten members including Tajar Zavalani, the son of Fehim Zavalani, the Ottoman-Albanian leader with the Committee for the Liberation of

⁴⁴⁵ Kordha and Gjoleka, *Bashkimi*, 40-44 and in passim.

⁴⁴⁶ Frashëri, *Historia e Lëvizjes së Majtë*, 36.

Albania in 1905 and in whose house the first Congress of Monastir was held in November 1908.⁴⁴⁷ Others included Ali Kelmendi and Sejfulla Malëshova a trained physician in Rome, Italy and briefly Noli's secretary during the latter's tenure as Prime Minister. The formation of ACO was a watershed. On the one hand it obtained Comintern support for the Albanian left and on the other it received the former's authorization to proceed ahead with plans to merge and consolidate these apparently fissiparous memberships into a single communist party. Indeed, following the advice of Georgi Dimitrov in mid-1928 Malëshova proposed the merger of the ACO in USSR, ACG in Vienna, and CNL in Geneva under a General Commission as a necessary first step toward the creation of the Communist Party of Albania (CPA). It selected the aforementioned Malëshova, Zavalani, Shpuza and (later) Demir Godelli from ACO and Halim Xhelo from CNL.⁴⁴⁸

From the start, the ACO assumed a central role in the effort to create an Albanian communist party, arguably because its location in the communist heartland in Moscow obviated the need for mediating agencies such as the role that the Balkan Bureau fulfilled in keeping ACG in Vienna in contact with the Comintern in Moscow. It thus sought to expand within and eventually absorb its sister organizations in Geneva and Vienna into a single mass organization of communist movement within KONARE. Already in Leningrad and Moscow ACO members were busy translating Marxist and Leninist literature for future Albanian readers as well as preparing

⁴⁴⁷ "Report of G. Dimitrov to the Balkan Secretariat of the Comintern," 12 November 1928, AQSh, F. 16/APL, D. 1, Fl. 1.

⁴⁴⁸ "Protocols of ACO," Leningrad, 13 October 1928, F. 16/APL, D. 38, Fl. 9; "Llazar Fundo to Tajar Zavalani," [Moscow], 10 May 1928, AQSh, F. 16/APL, D. 12, Fl. 2-3

reports for the Comintern on Albanian economic, social and political conditions.⁴⁴⁹ At the same time Fundo and Boshnjaku, ACO's representatives in Vienna, were instructed to do their utmost to become members of the CNL as a first step toward the merger. Yet, despite its growing affiliation with the Comintern, the CNL, for reasons that are explored below, rejected such an overt association with the Soviet Union. In addition it also rejected ACO overtures for membership as an organization but was open to accept membership of ACO members on individual basis. Faced with CNL's refusals, ACO eventually relented and on 17 December 1928 four ACO members, Fundo, Malëshova, Zavalani and Këlliçi, were accepted as CNL members.⁴⁵⁰

Meanwhile ideological differences between the CNL and the communists of the ACO and ACG mounted. Both the CNL and the Communists were in agreement with Comintern's initial line of the revolutionary offensive. This soon posed a problem. Earlier, following the disaster of the German Revolution (November 1918 – August 1919) and the failure of other European parties to launch similar communist revolutions, it became apparent that the revolutionary offensive was running out of steam. In the Twenty-one Conditions of Admission to the Communist International adopted by the Third World Congress in the summer of 1921, Lenin modified his political stand and urged greater flexibility by advising communists to take part in national elections with the purpose of using the bourgeois' own political tools to overthrow their regimes. Lenin also included a proviso which instructed communists in colonial and backward countries to enter into temporary alliance, while remaining independent, with national liberation movements. Under the leadership of the

⁴⁴⁹ "Marko Sulioti's report for the Comintern," 1926, AQSh, F. 15/APL, D. 30, Fl. 1-25.

⁴⁵⁰ "Protocols of ACO," Leningrad, 13 October 1928, F. 16/APL, D. 38, Fl. 11.

communists, these alliances were expected to establish a Soviet state without having to go through a capitalist stage.⁴⁵¹ Such considerations had never entered the purview of the Albanian left prior to 1924. After Noli's downfall in December of that year these instructions sowed confusion among the Albanian organizations of the left, who now could not agree about whether Albania was a sovereign capitalist country ready for a Bolshevik-type revolution or a backward country, suffering under imperialist oppression that first needed to develop a political working class consciousness. At the heart of the problem, therefore, were differing views on the existence or absence of a working class and Albania's sovereignty.

The ACO and the ACG adopted the argument that Albania was a sovereign state, albeit an undeveloped capitalist country. In accordance to Marxist logic, it followed that the country must have a revolutionary working class that was ripe for a revolution.⁴⁵² It thus held that the national question for liberation against Zogu's regime would be best served with a Bolshevik revolution since it simultaneously solved both the political and social problem left unaccomplished by Noli's failed June revolution of 1924. Its program sought the Comintern's help to create the CPA, which would lead workers, intellectuals and students into a national revolution. At the same time, the CPA would also work to raise workers' consciousness about their political condition. The ACO, however, was cognizant of its own weakness particularly with respect to the absence of a communist movement within Albania and reluctantly recognized that the CNL was the largest and strongest of the Albanian left-wing émigré organizations that simultaneously enjoyed significant support and influence

⁴⁵¹ Leszek Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: The Founders, the Golden Age, the Breakdown*, trans. P.S. Falla (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 872-873.

⁴⁵² "Theses on the Albanian Condition," 17 October 1928, AQSh, f. 16/APL, D. 15, Fl. 10-12.

within Albania. Yet, in the ACO's view, the CNL was not a communist organization but rather a national socialist association of the petit bourgeoisie that stood only for "mass enfranchisement" of the Albanian people, supporting: 1) the nationalization of agricultural property, 2) the liquidation of feudal vestiges, 3) the struggle against foreign imperialism and 4) the struggle for the establishment for a pan-Balkan federation under the aegis of the Comintern.⁴⁵³ It was thus unequipped to lead a true workers' revolution.

For its part the CNL also supported the idea of the revolution but insisted that Albania was not yet a sovereign capitalist country. On the contrary, under Zogu it had passed from Yugoslav military domination to Italian financial and institutional control. Rejecting a principled proletarian revolution, the CNL's basic argument in its program of 25 April 1927 relied on a number of economic and military agreements that Zogu had signed with Mussolini in an effort to diminish the apparent dominance of erstwhile Yugoslav sponsorship that allowed him to overthrow Noli's government. The CNL argued that the proliferation of Italian specialists throughout key Albanian state institutions, especially in defense and economic sectors and the Italian search for new territories to offset high Italian unemployment, mostly from agrarian Apulia, undermined Albanian sovereignty and thus subordinated it wholly to Italian imperial control.⁴⁵⁴ This convinced Xhelo that Albania had become a *de facto* Italian province under Zogu acting as Mussolini's prefect. These conditions, the CNL argued, necessitated a struggle of National Liberation first against Zogu, its Western

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁵⁴ Prifti et al., *Historia e Popullit, Vol. III*, 256-266, 302-305, 308-315; Roselli, *Italy and Albania*, 33-44, 71-90 and in passim; Giulio Esposito, Vito Antonio Leuzzi and Nevila Nika eds. *Puglia e Albania nel Novecento* (IPSAIC – Fondazione Antonio Gramsci di Puglia: Salento Books, 2008).

imperialist and Yugoslav militarist supporters along the lines of the revolution of 1924 and then the launch of reforms.

CNL's line saw considerable connection with Marxist thought, especially on the issues of peasant emancipation, nationalization of land and anti-imperialism. But it found the working class wanting. Citing its intellectual poverty and the dearth of socialist and Marxist literature, it rejected ACO's conclusion that a working class existed, let alone one sufficiently conscious of its own potential as a political force.⁴⁵⁵ Rejecting the communist plan of a proletarian-led revolution, CNL proposed that the progressive lesser middle class of small land and property owners, shopkeepers, artisans and small-scale traders and merchants, should lead the revolution for only they possessed the prerequisite political consciousness and means of social mobilization. Xhelo argued that the CNL program was neither entirely communist nor exclusively bourgeois, rather "it [was] 50 percent communist so that when that 50 percent is applied then, without delay, the other 50 percent would follow."⁴⁵⁶ While not opposed in principle to the creation of a CPA, the CNL claimed that Albania remained a predominantly agricultural country, industrially backward and without a developed educational and institutional infrastructure that was needed to raise class-consciousness.

Xhelo, therefore, thought of the revolution as an immediate necessity but unlike the ACO assigned the middle class its temporary leadership. This was anathema to the ACO, which in accordance to its Leninist principles, sought to retain for itself the role of the revolutionary vanguard. What was even more galling to the

⁴⁵⁵ For an example see Xhelo's thinking see "Xhelo to Malëshova, Godelli and Shpuza," Geneva 28 November 1928, AQSh, F. 16/APL, D. 14, Fl. 27-28.

⁴⁵⁶ "Halim Xhelo to L Lazar Fundo," Geneva, 17 December 1928, AQSh, F. 16/APL, D. 14, Fl. 47.

ACO, Xhelo had the “effrontery” to suggest that the communists should unite with CNL (rather than the other way around) in a common patriotic democratic front as in 1924.⁴⁵⁷ Because of these differences, two main ideological camps emerged within KONARE, the Liberationists (*Çlirimtarët*), mainly the CNL and those who sided with Xhelo’s views and the Bolsheviks, the ACO, ACG and those who supported immediate revolution. Ironically, Xhelo’s arguments persuaded several Bolshevik members who had recently begun to have serious reservations about Soviet tactics after 1928. Chief amongst them was L Lazar Fundo who, in mid-1929, made his peace with Xhelo. Kristo Frashëri has recently alleged that the severity of Soviet collectivization of agriculture and the fall from power of Nikolai Bukharin, whom Fundo admired and on whose staff he had briefly served when Bukharin led the Comintern, had a profound effect on Fundo and marked for him the beginning of a long and steady process of disillusionment with Soviet practices.⁴⁵⁸

Faced with unremitting opposition from the CNL, the ACO – whom Frashëri has portrayed as a General Staff without an army – was forced to revise its original theses of 17 December 1928 and bring its policies in line with the CNL. The revised theses of 18 October 1929 held that Albania after 1925 had indeed become “a semi colony” of Italy, but did not relent on the issue for the need of a unified CPA to act as the proletarian vanguard. The ACO recognized three dialectical phases. In the first phase, Zogu’s Triumph of Legality consolidated its power in collaboration with the great landowners without whose financial support it stood no chance for victory. In the second phase that began with the signing of the first Treaty of Tiranë in 1926,

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 39-57

⁴⁵⁸ Frashëri, *Historia e Lëvizjes se Majtë*, 51.

Albania gradually became a semi-colony of Italy. In the third phase, Zogu self-anointment as King of the Albanians (1928) was followed with radical new legislative changes which, coupled with more Italian concessions in Albania, facilitated the penetration of Italian capital into the country, the “fascistization” of the state apparatus, and the strengthening of bourgeois interests, foreign and domestic – all at the expense of Zogu’s traditional support base, the landowning class, which, in turn, now became the new opposition.⁴⁵⁹

As a result, a working class now developed in those economic sectors where Italian investments dominated; the mineral and light industries and the agricultural sector. This working class “naturally” possessed a proletariat conscious of its own conditions and inner strength, which already “began to strongly assert itself in the social arena [as demonstrated by] the strikes of the dockworkers in Durrës and Sarandë.”⁴⁶⁰ ACO strengthened its argument by citing the massive increase of the state budget for military purposes (over 46 percent) as a certainty that the regime felt threatened by the new changes in the domestic social structure.⁴⁶¹ The theses proposed the following course of action:

1. Establish a syndicalist movement and communist cells by sending capable militants to accomplish this goal in the country and among emigrant workers
2. Establish a printing press in Albania dedicated to publishing and disseminating revolutionary literature
3. Prepare workers in the “school” of the revolutionary class struggle. Our experience shows that we cannot rely on students to fill this role.⁴⁶²

⁴⁵⁹ “Theses of the ACO,” 18 October 1929, AQSh, F. 16/APL, D. 30, Fl. 1-2

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, 7.

The CNL, however, continued to remain highly skeptical of ACO arguments. While accepting the premise that new developments had improved conditions, it remained adamant that the Bolsheviks should defer leadership of the “bourgeois-democratic” revolution to the Liberationists. In doing so the CNL justified its own policies within Comintern instructions reached in the Third Congress but tailored to local conditions.

From 1930 onwards, events outside Albanian control sowed further confusion among these associational networks. First, subsidies from the Soviet Union to KONARE slowed to a trickle. Noli, who unaligned had assumed the role of a *paterfamilias* mediating disputes among the various KONARE splinter groups, judged Stalin’s recent focus on Soviet industrialization as an abandonment of the permanent revolution. This was Noli’s second and last major disenchantment with a major power following Woodrow Wilson’s earlier abandonment of Vlorë to Italy in 1919. Second, contrary to widely held assumptions by the Albanian émigré networks Zogu’s regime did not show the expected signs of decay, thus reducing common hopes for exporting a revolutionary momentum in Albania. Third, it became apparent that KONARE and Noli were incapable of forging the necessary unity within the association between the Bolsheviks and the Liberationists camps. This was the last straw for Noli, the so-called Red Bishop. Disappointed by the Albanians’ inability to come together and, simultaneously, convinced of a Soviet “Thermidorian Reaction” he resigned from KONARE’s leadership and announced his decision to return to the United States.⁴⁶³ His departure was followed by major shifts in personnel and resources across the associational spectrum and as a result KONARE – maintained

⁴⁶³ “Tajar Zvalani’s Report Explaining Noli’s Position,” [Vienna], 4 March, 1931, AQSh, F. 15/APL, D. 7, Fl. 79-83; Also, “Noli’s Position in the KONARE’s Leadership Committee Meeting,” Vienna, February 1931, cf. Frashëri, *Historia e Lëvizjes se Majtë*, 332-336.

thus far only by Noli's own moral prestige – ceased to exist as an umbrella organization. Still, as we shall see, virtually all of the splinter groups kept the title *Konarist* for many years hence as a badge of honor. Thus ended Noli's involvement with politics followed by a career as an historian, poet, translator, cleric and public figure in the United States.

Fourth, following Zogu's decision in 1927 to offer a general amnesty for political offenders, Georgi Dimitrov had urged ACO members to return in Albania and disseminate Bolshevik principles. The ACO had not followed up Dimitrov's advice at the time. But in 1930, when conditions were judged sufficiently auspicious and following declining Soviet subsidies, Bolshevik members of the ACO and ACG declared their intent to go to Albania and fulfill their key objective of raising political awareness of the working class. The dissolution of these external associations now left the CNL as the strongest Albanian émigré informal network of the left.

Before going to Albania, however, the Bolsheviks and Liberationists were embroiled in an intense competition in France. An increasing number of Albanian émigré workers and students had settled there in the second half of the 1920s, primarily in Paris, Lyon, Saint-Étienne and Grenoble. In 1928, Halim Xhelo had found it difficult to support his upkeep in Geneva and in order to minimize living costs and, at the same time, continue to fund the operations of CNL's publication *Liria Kombëtare* (National Freedom), opted to settle in Brussels, Belgium where the living costs were lower than in Switzerland and France.⁴⁶⁴ In collaboration with Llazar Fundo, Xhelo labored to either organize workers into their own societies or to recruit them for the CNL. After the dissolution of the ACO, many of its members

⁴⁶⁴ "Letter by Halim Xhelo," Geneva, 21 May 1929, AQSh, F. 16/APL, D. 14, Fl. 76-78.

such as Sejfulla Malëshova, Tajar Zavalani, Ali Kelmendi and Demir Godelli also went to France for the same purpose. These attempts were successful insofar as raising awareness and expanding existing associational networks, but in France, no Albanian organizations comparable to the ones in the Soviet Union, Vienna and Geneva ever emerged. Social activists in France complained about the competition between the CNL and the *Bolsheviks*' and the latter's failure to send materials and organizational help. In addition, it appears that they themselves were not clear about their purpose because many continued to understand communism as an umbrella movement of all émigré organizations from the left as well as the right into a united front against Zogu. This meant that for the most part, the Albanian émigrés in France leaned toward the CNL though the NU was active there as well.

It was in this context that a young Enver Hoxha made an appearance in France in 1930 as a student pursuing a degree in natural sciences at the University of Montpellier on a scholarship from the Albanian state. Hoxha displayed little interest in the natural science and would have preferred pursuing instead a degree in political science, sociology or related subjects.⁴⁶⁵ Lacking strong motivation in sciences, he was an average student and devoted his time to reading widely about his own specific interests, auditing classes in these subjects and spending time socializing with Albanian, French and international students in the city's cafés. Sometime toward the fall of 1934 his scholarship was cut off and Hoxha left Montpellier without having completed his formal education. For this, Hoxha himself stated that the Albanians authorities routinely failed to distribute scholarships in time, leaving the students to either fend off for themselves for months at times and forcing them to rely on the

⁴⁶⁵ Enver Hoxha, *Vitet e Rinisë: Kujtime* (Tiranë: Shtëpia Botuese "8 Nëntori," 1988), 111.

charity of their landlords or borrowed money from friends within the local Albanian community. Eventually these debts were repaid but their burden fueled students' discontent. In the fall of 1933 a group of them complained to an inspector of the Ministry of Education that had arrived in Montpellier to assess their conditions only to be rebuffed. Subsequently the ministry took notice of the students' displeasure and denied disbursing several scholarships, Hoxha's among them.⁴⁶⁶ But another version supported by some historians and journalists after 1990 cite Hoxha's poor academic performance as the reason why the Minister of Education, Mirash Ivanaj withdrew financial support, whereupon Hoxha settled briefly in Paris.⁴⁶⁷

His brief sojourn in the French capital is relevant for his reputed collaboration with Paul Vaillant-Couturier the editor in chief of the French Communist publication *l'Humanite*. This meeting was another of his many attempts to find a job in a capacity suited to his intellectual skills rather than menial work, but at the same time increase contacts with the French left.⁴⁶⁸ Contrary to the later pre-1989 accounts, Hoxha did not pursue collaboration with Vaillant-Couturier further than the initial application. According to a recent account by Blendi Fevziu, an Albanian journalist, the Central Committee of the PLA launched an investigation in 1987, two years after Hoxha's death, to find the three articles that Hoxha reputedly wrote for *l'Humanite*. It found that no such articles existed under Hoxha's name or any of his known pseudonyms.⁴⁶⁹ Interestingly, however, not even Hoxha indicated in his memoirs that he had written

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., 178-180.

⁴⁶⁷ For an example see Blendi Fevziu, *Enver Hoxha: E Para Biografi Bazuar në Dokumente të Arkivit Personal dhe në Rrëfimet e Atyre që e Njohën*, (Tiranë: UET Press, 2011), 35-37; Schreiber, *Enver Hodja*, 35-60.

⁴⁶⁸ Hoxha, *Vitet e Rinisë*, 173-176, 191, 200.

⁴⁶⁹ Fevziu, *Enver Hoxha*, 38.

any articles. He simply stated that he asked Vaillant-Couturier whether *l'Humanite* would accept any articles that criticized Zogu's regime. A few days later he moved to Brussels where he started work for a certain Count Georges Marothy who had been appointed Honorary Consul of Albania in Belgium and contacts with *l'Humanite* ceased.⁴⁷⁰ He would remain under Marothy's employ until 1936 when he returned to Albania.

In the early 1930s the future communist leader of Albania, therefore, was not integrated in any of the Albanian political émigré associations although he may have been engaged to some degree with the French Popular Front. According to a detailed study of the Communist Party in France, it appears that in 1938 such efforts included a plan to found a Communist Party in Albania under the direction of Enver Hoxha, "a student at the Sorbonne and future dictator of communist Albania."⁴⁷¹ Most historians challenge his status as a student at the Sorbonne. In his memoir, Hoxha does mention that after leaving Montpellier he intended to pursue law at the Sorbonne but claimed that financial difficulties prevented him from formally enrolling at the university. Instead, he asserts that he audited classes informally, which may explain the absence of his name in the official rolls of the university.⁴⁷² This, however, did not prevent him from introducing himself as a "student" whenever meeting members of the Albanian community in France or applying for jobs with potential employers. In light

⁴⁷⁰ Hoxha, *Vitet e Rinisë*, 200. First written between 1971 and 1975 *Vitet e Rinisë* (Years of my Youth) were published only in 1988. It is possible that in the absence of confirming Hoxha's collaboration with Vaillant-Couturier, the choice was made to redact that passage from the presumed original. The archives of *l'Humanite* now available online in Gallica, the digital library of the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* (BnF) do not show entries under any of Hoxha's name or known aliases for the period 1933-1936, thus confirming both Hoxha's version and his biographers' claims.

⁴⁷¹ Stéphane Courtois and Marc Lazar, *Histoire du Parti communiste français* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995), 151-152.

⁴⁷² Hoxha, *Vitet e Rinisë*, 181, 186, 189.

of his considerable, though unspecialized erudition, as well as the subsequent fond memories of his formative years in France it is fair to say that on these point alone, Hoxha's own account may not necessarily be incorrect.

What is important is that at this time, Hoxha did not engage with the Albanian émigré associations though he knew many people within both the CNL and NU. These contacts however were not political but rather cultural. Hoxha himself does not confirm any political affiliations. What is more, although clearly situating himself within the political left, his most significant patrons, men who helped him with funds and provided him with shelter were members of the nationalist NU, as for instance Bahri Omari a former *Vatra* member, leader of the National Democratic Party during Noli's premiership in 1924 and husband to his sister Fahrije.⁴⁷³ During his emigrant years therefore, Hoxha eschewed Albanian political participation. Although clearly known for his communist sympathies he would remain unaffiliated until the late 1930s.⁴⁷⁴

It should be noted that other émigré organizations of the political right and center were also active at the time in France and Italy. Chief among them were the aforementioned Zara Group and the NU. Their presence further fractioned an already decentralized opposition, thus undermining any future hopes of mounting a unified front to Zogu's regime. In order to remain relevant and functional all émigré associations soon gravitated towards greater dependency on those powers that were willing bankroll their activities. Herein lay the difference. For the organizations of the left, KONARE and its CNL, ACO and ACG offshoots, association with Comintern

⁴⁷³ Ibid., 119-129; 195-199.

⁴⁷⁴ Blendi Fevziu interview with Abaz Ermenji in Blendi Fevziu, *Jeta Ime... Intervistë me Blendi Fevziu* (Tiranë: UET Press, 2014), 247.

and the Soviet Union was the product of important pragmatic as well as ideological congruities. Following the end of Soviet subsidies, the left went through many iterations and, as we shall see below, these would continue to go on throughout the 1930s continuously reframing their organizational framework, their political message and gradually picking up momentum painstakingly through trial and error; without ever compromising their final goals.

In contrast, the intellectual outlook of the Zara Group and the NU, whose only *raison d'être* was their opposition to Zogu, ossified and stagnated. To make up for its financial shortfalls, the Zara Group began to rely heavily on subsidies by Mussolini's fascist government that, for its part, saw in Zara a political alternative to Zogu's regime. Following the Italian invasion in 1939 the members of the Zara Group formed the nucleus of Albanian Fascist Party, an associate branch of the Italian Fascist Party and the leadership of the collaborationist government. Similarly, according to Bedri Pejani, a member of the Kosovar CLK, the NU sought and obtained Yugoslav financial support, an odd choice for an organization that claimed to represent the traditional values of Albanian nationalism. The Yugoslav government however did not directly distribute organizational funds to the NU. Instead, it subsidized its individual members by putting them on retainers commensurate to their social status and position they once held respectively in Albanian society and state employment prior to their emigration. Their logistical center for those residing outside the Balkans became the Yugoslav legation in Vienna and their activities funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For those in Kosovo and Albania the funds

came mainly from the Ministry of Finance.⁴⁷⁵ As Pejani wrote, “when speaking about the National Union, we should not think that we are dealing with a bourgeois revolutionary organization, but with several leaders of traditional Albanian nationalism or the older forms of Albanian movements who still enjoy some credibility or some influence because of past services.”⁴⁷⁶ Pejani also noted that individual members retained some influence in the regions from whence they came but discounted any practical value of the NU as an organization that enjoyed no national appeal. The manner in which the NU construed its member relationships and raised revenues further undermined the internal cohesion of the organization keeping it informal and highly decentralized.

As the decade of the 1920s came to a close, the former Zog opposition had dispersed and consolidated into three main well-defined major, though ideologically ambiguous camps – the left, politically centered somewhere between the European left and Soviet communism, the nationalist center paradoxically funded by Belgrade and the right increasingly dependent upon Italian subsidies. By the 1930s, however, associational activism was also reviving in Albania.

Expansion of Social Networks in Albania, 1930 – 1935

Zogu’s ascension to power was not well received by the external centers of Albanian associations. These became especially critical after Zogu ceded to Yugoslavia Vermosh and Shën (Sveti) Naum, which Paris Peace Conference had

⁴⁷⁵ “Report of Bedri Pejani to the Comintern,” Paris, 17 January 1938, AQSh, F. 15/APL, D. 23, Fl. 1-3.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

originally assigned to Albania.⁴⁷⁷ *Bashkimi* in Bucharest was particularly critical of Albanian politics, mocking political opportunism and the survival of Ottoman system of patronage and clientelism in the Albanian national state.⁴⁷⁸ Yet following the announcement of the 1927 amnesty, political repression eased and associations began gradually to reemerge. These multiplied after Zogu's proclamation of the Kingdom of Albania. For the most part, these groups were apolitical in nature, such as sports and gymnastic associations, women societies, high school sororities and fraternities, charity organizations, theatrical groups, reading clubs and the like. After the proclamation of the monarchy in 1928, the royal family assumed a leading role in patronizing newly recreated societies. The Queen Mother Sadie Zogu, née Toptani, for instance was the patron of the society The Albanian Woman, which was allowed to reopen in 12 November 1929 and was led by her daughter Princess Sanie.⁴⁷⁹ Another one of Zogu's sisters, Princess Ruhije, promoted traditional artistic handiwork, participating actively in national exhibits featuring embroidery collections from different regions of country.⁴⁸⁰

Behind this veneer of normalcy, a struggle took place in the press, arts and other forms of media, which revealed the Albanian disjuncture between traditional values and a modernizing role of the state in society. A network of loosely associated publicists, jurists, editors, landowners and civil servants called the Elders emerged. Their conservative views became early defenders of Zogu's monarchy, the

⁴⁷⁷ "Proclamation of the Albanian Colony in Bucharest against Ahmet Zogu's National Betrayal," 1 November 1925, AQSh, F. 99, D. 249, Fl. 3; "Protest of the Albanian Federation *Dëshira* in Bulgaria against King Zog," Sofia, 29 September 1935, F. 96, D. 34, Fl. 1.

⁴⁷⁸ See "Dënimi i Politikanëve" *Zëri Shqipëtar*, June 6, 1926, 2 in AQSh, F. 99, D. 250, Fl. 1.

⁴⁷⁹ "Statute of the Society The Albanian Woman," Tiranë, 12 November 1929, AQSh, F. 447, D. 389, Fl. 1.

⁴⁸⁰ "Telegram Thanking Princess Ruhije," Tiranë, 16 May 1931, AQSh, F. 447, D. 120, Fl. 1.

landowning elite and Italian interests in Albania. They opposed any reform – progressive, liberal or democratic – that would undermine the *status quo* established since 1925. Led by Terenc Toçi (Terenzio Tocci), an Italian-born *Arbëresh* from San Cosmo Albanese in Calabria and the future Chairman of the Supreme Corporative Fascist Council during the Second World War, the Elders invested Zogu with quasi-divine legitimacy and promoted his personality cult. They portrayed him as the Savior of the Nation from the social and political anarchy of the early 1920s. To legitimize the monarchy further they produced a historically unproven genealogical line, which linked Zogu to the Albanian fifteenth-century nobleman Gjergj Kastrioti Scanderbeg through his sister Mamica Kastrioti.⁴⁸¹ Even more doubtfully, the Elders glorified Zogu as a modern incarnation of Alexander the Great and Pyrrhus of Epirus. In addition, the Elders extended the same legitimacy to the landowning elite. Seeing the evil and conspiratorial hand of Bolshevism behind agrarian reform, they maintained that the Albanian economy had to remain agrarian and forego modern industrialization. For the Elders, the beys were not just a social elite but, rather, Fathers of the Nation and their actions, just like those of a family patriarch, were unassailable and unimpeachable. The Elders' illiberal *Weltanschauung* extended the same recognition to the national merchant elite, the moneylenders and the Italian financial interests in Albania whom they saw through the rose-colored glasses of a charitable modernity imported from Western Europe. Staunch supporters of Italian Fascism, the Elders argued that Albanians were incapable of modern development and saw Mussolini as the one leader to bring Albania into the “family of civilized

⁴⁸¹ Prifti et al, *Historia e Popullit, Vol. III*, 378.

peoples.”⁴⁸² Even Faik Konica supported this intellectual line, albeit reluctantly and with reservations. The venerable activist and former chairman of *Vatra*, now serving as the Royal Ambassador in the United States, was critical of Zogu but because he valued institutional and political stability in Albania, gave the King his support.⁴⁸³

The Elders denied that Albania was undergoing an economic crisis and argued that the Great Depression of the early 1930s was the product of pessimistic alarms bent on undermining the legitimacy of the King and transferring sovereignty to the people. On the face of it, their argument was appealing since a number of generous Italian loans enabled Albania to withstand the burdens of the Great Depression better than most countries. Most of these loans were never repaid and interest reductions were routinely granted on capital and interest payments.⁴⁸⁴ Zogu’s inability to repay loans did not dry up Italian subsidies; on the contrary, Italian generous and generally interest-free assistance with no fixed terms for repayment continued to subsidize Albania’s small economy and even finance balance of payment deficits.⁴⁸⁵

Opposing the Elders were the Young, an informal network of similar social background, who traced their intellectual stimuli to Branko Merxhani, an Albanian sociologist born in Anatolia and educated at the British College in Smyrna (Izmir). He had constructed an esoteric doctrine that focused on the primacy of culture over politics as a solution to the ills afflicting Albanian state and society. Called neo-Albanianism, Merxhani argued that the only way how Albanian could to shed their primitive Oriental past and adopt Western modernity was to develop national

⁴⁸² Ibid.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁴ Roselli, *Italy and Albania*, 148-150.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid. 57.

idealism, for “nations exist only when they form a social consciousness. Outside this idealism, “man is only a creature and Nations are only mobs.”⁴⁸⁶ Merxhani held up Mustafa Kemal’s Turkey in particular but also Mussolini’s Italy as the highest expression of national unity and modernization, accomplished simultaneously by genius of the modern “serious idealist man” and the “national ideal” as the ultimate expression of collective life.⁴⁸⁷

The Young adopted many of Merxhani’s precepts seeking the establishment of an atheist Enlightened Dictatorship of intellectual based on the Fascist and Nazi model, with elements of Kemalism. For the Young, fascist modernity had proven itself successful in creating a harmonious balance between family and community, the individual and the collective (as an organic body), the traditional and the modern, in both Germany and Italy. Although they found the Elders rival vision an aberration, they, too, were in basic agreement that Albania was not ready for democracy. In particular they found the mobilizational tactics in Germany appealing and sought to replicate the Nazi mass rallies with “youth battalions,” unfurled flags, and media pressure. Such techniques, however, were entirely foreign to Albanian experience and found support only among the few likeminded German-educated intellectuals. Like the Elders, the Young too pledged support for Zogu but argued that the Elders’ influence on the King was too great. This caused a split within neo-Albanianism for while Merxhani rejected politics in theory, the Young saw that without politics they could not detach Zogu from the grasp of the Elders. The Young enjoyed their moment in the sun when a liberal cabinet led by Mehdi Frashëri came to power in October

⁴⁸⁶ Branko Merxhani, *Formula të Neo-Shqiptarizmit*, ed. Aurel Plasari (Tiranë: Apollonia, 1996), 18, 20, 22.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 228-231; 245-249

1935. Yet the dissolution of that cabinet a year later saw the Elders back in power. The Young movement, if indeed it can be called a movement, disappeared following the abortive Delvinë uprising in 1937 by its leaders to “wrest out” the King from the control of the Elders.⁴⁸⁸

The existence of these networks represented no ideological threat to Zogu’s regime, since central to their thinking was the hallowed figure of the King as the living State itself. Indeed, even for Merxhani, a self-proclaimed democrat, a Mussolini in Italy, a Mustafa Kemal in Turkey, a Hitler in Germany or a Zogu in Albania represented Nietzschean archetypes, prophets of deterministic forces in history sallied forth by the trials and tribulations of the epoch.⁴⁸⁹ Furthermore, their staunch anti-communism served practical ends for Zogu’s regime that at the very least distracted public attention from left wing ideologies.

Indeed, it was the émigré circles and the left in particular which bore the brunt of Zogu’s repressive measures. The regime’s definition of what constituted a political crime was broad, encompassing anything from mere possession of prohibited literature, to speaking critically about nepotism in employment practices and the lack of economic progress, acts of vandalism, heinous crimes, property theft, criticism of the government and anti-Italian agitation. Such interpretation allowed Zogu’s police state to keep under surveillance all known left activists within Albania and even in immigration.⁴⁹⁰ A partial list of judicial verdicts for those suspected of political crimes between 1929 and 1932 shows that thirty-two individuals received sentences

⁴⁸⁸ Prifti et al, *Historia e Popullit*, Vol. III, 376-77.

⁴⁸⁹ Merxhani, *Formula të Neo-Shqiptarizmit*, 25, 232, 245.

⁴⁹⁰ See “Acts of the Special Political Court,” Tiranë, 12 January – 20 May 1931, AQSh, F. 157, D. 8, Fl. 1-21 and AQSh, F. 157, D. 9, Fl. 1-2.

ranging from six years to life imprisonment. Only nine of these were connected to communist activities, all belonging to the “Organization of Vlorë.”⁴⁹¹ To these one must also add other sentences often rendered in absentia of known émigré activists. For instance, the authorities investigated Koço Tashko, Tefik Mborja and Kristo Kirka for insurrectionary activities, endorsing death sentences for all. Of them, only Tashko was a communist, whereas Mborja and Kirka became during the Second World War, respectively the General Secretary of the Albanian Fascist Party and the chairman of the nationalist *Balli Kombëtar* district committee in Korçë. What they all had in common was their involvement with *Vatra* and common opposition of Zogu, albeit from different vantage points and different ideological bases.⁴⁹²

Despite this, several cells composed of few individuals had sprung up in Korçë, Vlorë, and Tiranë by 1928, initiated for the most part by former members of Rustemi’s *Bashkimi* such as Dhimitër Fallo (Tiranë), Hysni Lepenica (Vlorë) and Hasan Reçi (Tiranë).⁴⁹³ Yet, the members of these typically had an extremely low ideological consciousness and appeared to be largely ignorant of communist praxis. Much to the chagrin of the more developed émigré organizations, these cells lacked a revolutionary organization and were more akin to reading clubs, exploiting every opportunity to obtain and read Marxist literature. It was not easy to smuggle illegal literature in Albania as one student with left sympathies, Masar Sopoti, found out.

⁴⁹¹ “List of Inmates Sentenced by the Political Court,” Tiranë, 11 December 1935, AQSh, F. 157, D. 5(35), Fl. 1-5; For one of the most detailed court cases involving the presentation of the indictment by the prosecutor, statements by the defense and witnesses testimonies see “Indictment Against Myslym Myrteza Tugu,” Tiranë, 13 August – 26 October 1938, AQSh, F. 157, D. 6(38), Fl. 1-38. A first time offender, the crime of the 17 years old Tugu was that, while inebriated, after a successful game of billiards he celebrated his victory by tongue-in-cheek calling out loud “Long Live Bolshevism and his Dictator.” This was one of the more common types of political crimes for which many stood trial.

⁴⁹² “Special Political Court on Communist Activities,” Tiranë, 4 July 1926 – 3 June 1927, AQSh, F. 157, D. 4(27), Fl. 1-15;

⁴⁹³ Frashëri, *Historia e Lëvizjes së Majtë*, 66-67.

When disembarking in Durrës from France sometime in 1927, the port authorities briefly detained him. Among his possessions, the police found a newspaper article on Luigj Gurakuqi, Zogu's erstwhile opponent, a publication by *Ora e Maleve*, the Catholic newspaper in opposition to Zogu and a photograph of Beqir Valteri, Zogu's would-be assassin. Sopotu was charged with intent to overthrow the regime and was sentenced to three months imprisonment.⁴⁹⁴ In the following years cells experienced a modest growth and by 1932 in Albania there were a grand total of thirty-two individuals openly calling themselves communists, while sympathizers included a larger number, as we shall see.

From 1930 the Albanian left in Europe was able to reestablish itself in Albania. The first major figure to arrive was Ali Kelmendi, a Kosovar-born activist, formerly a member of *Bashkimi*, and since 1928 a member of the Albanian Communist Organization (ACO) in Moscow. In the Soviet Union, Kelmendi had attended the Felix Dzerzhinsky Federal Security Service Academy and become an ardent revolutionary.⁴⁹⁵ Often portrayed in historiography as the main representative of Albanian interwar communist, Kelmendi was in fact before 1930 a minor activist certainly lacking the public renown that Xhelo, Malëshova, Fundo and Zavalani enjoyed. In 1930, Kelmendi entered Albania as a member of the Kosovar CLK rather than a Comintern envoy. After his return to Albania in 1924, Zogu's relationship with Yugoslavia soured while those with Italy soared. Yugoslav attempts to minimize Italian influence in Albania, however, came to naught and by 1927 Belgrade began to explore the option of having Zogu removed from power by giving aid to his political

⁴⁹⁴ "Masar Sopotu to Reshat Këlliçi," Paris, 27 December 1927, AQSh, F. 15/APL, D. 6, Fl. 1-2.

⁴⁹⁵ "List of Pseudonyms of Those who Have Studied in the USSR," AQSh, F. 16/APL, D. 43, Fl. 1.

opposition. Such attempts were particularly popular among Yugoslavia's military circles. Yet Belgrade was wary of the possible international repercussion fearing in particular Mussolini's reaction. For his part, Zogu sought to adjust his foreign policy carefully between Albania's more powerful neighbors but his room for maneuver was limited.⁴⁹⁶ One of the most significant decisions he took was in 1927 to extend to his former opposition, now in emigration, an amnesty for all political offenses committed since 1924, provided that the beneficiaries did not engage in political activities. Following this reprieve, the first to return were members of the CLK. In order to draw Kosovar support and thus undermine Yugoslav plots against him, Zogu allowed the CLK to agitate and move freely throughout the country. At the same time, however, he also restricted the extent of their activities by providing many of them with land, jobs and financial incentives. As expected, these measures did much to undermine the cohesion of the CLK and animosity against Zogu decreased.⁴⁹⁷

It is within this context that Kelmendi obtained a passport from the Albanian embassy in Vienna and disembarked in Durrës on 29 July 1930 along with several other Kosovar leaders.⁴⁹⁸ When he saw that the Kosovo issue gained no traction among the Kosovar community because of Zogu's concessions, he immediately focused on Dimitrov's earlier (1927) instructions of stirring up communist activities with the goal of forming a CPA. The situation as he encountered it in 1930 was highly disappointing. Except for a few key economic sectors in mining and oil

⁴⁹⁶ It will take us too far afield to explore the complexities of Albania's relationship with Italy and Yugoslavia in the period between 1925 and 1930. The interested reader may consult Paskal Milo's *Shqipëria dhe Jugosllavia*, 424-452, and his more recent work *Politika*, 675-743, 779-857.

⁴⁹⁷ Frashëri, *Historia e Lëvizjes së Majtë*, 73.

⁴⁹⁸ "Prefecture of Durrës to the Secret Office, Ministry of Internal Affairs," Durrës, 29 July 1930, AQSh, F. 659, D. 3, Fl. 1.

production that were linked Italian interests (such as the oil production in Kuçovë and the bitumen mines in Selenica) the ramshackle Albanian economy did not live up to the communists' expectations:

... It appears that our groups are made [with individuals] outside the industrial enterprises existing in Albania. The reason for this is that there are very few industrial companies and the number of workers is very limited. We have, for example, believed that in the Tarabosh tobacco factory in Shkodër there were one thousand workers but in reality there are hardly twenty, most of them children. In the textile factory in Korçë we thought there were fifty workers when in reality there are only less than fifteen children. The same can be said about the other companies. The construction workers are seasonal peasants. These [facts greatly] complicate our work in the long run. In addition the ideological level of the Albanian workers is very low. There are some companies with more workers but 75% [of the workers] are well-paid and privileged Italians.⁴⁹⁹

Despite these small numbers and difficulties the communist movement in Albania was not absent. On the contrary, it was grudgingly gaining ground. The Italian Legation for instance noticed that a communist group was active in Elbasan but dismissed it as an initiative of the Turkish Legation among Muslim Albanians who, for historical reasons, were still loyal to Turkey and thus susceptible to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's populist rhetoric.⁵⁰⁰ The reality was of course much different. Kelmendi listed seven cells in the city of Korçë, four of which were composed by artisans and factory workers and one by students of the Lyceum. These united in a single group (*gemeinsamen Zentrum*) and enjoyed the support of a moderately significant number of sympathizers (non-members). In Tiranë, he listed two groups composed by clerks, students and teachers. They did not possess a single center but were nonetheless loosely associated under the charismatic leadership of Hasan Reçi, a

⁴⁹⁹ "Ali Kelmendi Report to the Comintern: 'Meine Arbeit auf Parteilinie,'" March 1932, AQSh, F. 15/APL, D. 19, Fl. 18-21.

⁵⁰⁰ "Information of the Legation," Tiranë, 27 March 1935, AQSh, F. 163, D. 257, Fl. 1.

former member of Rustemi's *Bashkimi*. There were also other cells as well as unaffiliated individuals in Fier, Krujë, Elbasan and Gjirokastrë.⁵⁰¹ Kelmendi also asserted that communist sympathies had begun to spread even amongst the army's junior officers and cadets in military schools. Among others, sympathizers included Asim Vokshi, Bedri Spahiu, Tuk Jakova, Hulusi Spahiu, Tahir Kadare, Dali Ndreu and others. The significance of this network composed by army officers and students was not well understood at the time but during the Second World War, except for the Kosovar-born Vokshi who died in Spain at the Battle of Ebro in 1938, these men constituted the top military leadership of the CPA-led National Liberation Front (see Chapter 5).

All this, however, lay in the future. In the early 1930s, Kelmendi observed that communist movement in Albania was undergoing labor pains. For a start, domestic developments appeared to closely resemble the émigré pattern. The Albanian masses and even most members of the communist groups were far more acquainted with Noli and the KONARE rather than its splinter communist groups. Since the CNL was perceived at the time to be the natural successor of KONARE, in its early stages, most of these early cells and networks within Albania professed closer links to the CNL network rather than Bolshevik faction formed in the Soviet Union. Indeed, Reçi the charismatic leader of the Tiranë network fully supported the Liberationists' program of national revolution, rather than the immediate proletarian uprising. In contrast, Kelmendi's tone suggests that the Korçë network was closer to the Bolshevik program.

⁵⁰¹ "Bericht über meine Arbeit in der Zeit von 1932-1936," 14 December 1936, AQSh, F. 15/APL, D. 25, Fl. 18.

In an effort to bring CNL supporters closer to the Bolshevik line, the Communist Center in Vienna, itself an association of the now dissolved ACO and ACG, sent a further group of activists in 1932. Moscow returnees, Demir Godelli, Reshat Këlliçi and Tajar Zavalani, like Kelmendi, were supplied with passports from the royal embassy in Vienna and entered the country legally. Three others, Xhelo (from the CNL), Selim Shpuza and Rexhep Çami crossed the border illegally from Greece. The authorities quickly learned about the crossing and started a pursuit, especially of Xhelo whom they knew to possess an extensive network of sympathizers and followers in Vlorë. Xhelo's past as one of the leading members of *Bashkimi* caught up with him. Forced to retreat back into Greece, Xhelo would never make another attempt to return. Of his fellow travelers, Çami, too, left but returned shortly after obtaining a legal passport in Vienna. Shpuza was caught but thanks to the intervention of well-connected friends was able to benefit from the amnesty, provided that he did no longer engage in political activities. He settled in his native Shkodër and was forced to abandon communist activities for the simple fact that in Shkodër there were none at the time. Despite this, the existing Bolshevik- and Liberationist- aligned networks decided to meet and resolve their differences and found a Communist Party. On 14 August 1934, activists representing the prefectures of Shkodër, Tiranë, Elbasan and Korçë gathered in the small village of Dishnicë in Korçë.⁵⁰² The Dishnicë meeting produced two resolutions; first, it formed an organizational center led by Ali Kelmendi, Hasan Reçi and Selim Shpuza and second, decided to hold a new meeting, a year hence in November 1935, to form the CPA.

⁵⁰² "Ali Kelmendi to the Comintern," 14 December 1936, AQSh, F. 15/APL, D, 25. Fl. 19.

The Dishnicë meeting proved premature, for the Bolsheviks and the Liberationists could not reach an agreement either on their ideological differences or on the issue of leadership.⁵⁰³ It was, however, a significant meeting for three reasons. First, although both resolutions remained a dead letter, it marks the first time that a concerted domestic effort was made to form a single communist party.⁵⁰⁴ Second, it also served as focal point for the Liberationists to finally crystalize, for the first time since their inception nearly a decade ago, a political program:

1. Overthrow of the monarchy and establishment of a peoples' republic
2. Establishment of basic human and civil rights of speech, religion, press, etc.
3. Dissolution of the feudal system and expropriation of great landowners without compensation and distribution of land to peasants and highlanders.
4. Eradication of onerous taxes on cattle, the corvee, and the obligation to pay with physical labor the absence of monetary-based taxes.
5. End monopolies and foreign concessions that have starved the people.
6. Forgive all debts, abolish usury and extend free credit to whomsoever needs it.
7. Ensure political and professional rights of assembly, strikes, labor unions, etc. to defend the workers from employer abuses. Limit working hours to 8 per day and establish worker compensation in case of layoffs or work injury
8. Focus expenditures of state taxes on public works improving road infrastructure, drying swamps, building hospitals and laic schools.
9. Abolish all Albanian-Italian treaties which have made [the] country a colony of Italy and ensure Albania's full economic and political sovereignty
10. Reclaim from the grasp of imperialism Kosovo, Dibra and Çamëria and fulfill the national unification of the Albanian people.⁵⁰⁵

Lastly, the Tiranë, Liberationist-aligned, network considered its timing and the joint resolutions propitious for an uprising against Zogu's regime despite strenuous objections by Kelmendi, who argued that a *coup d'état* would find no social backing

⁵⁰³ "Ymer Dishnica Report to the Comintern," Lyon, 9 April 1936, AQSh. F. 15/APL, D. 16, Fl. 1-8.

⁵⁰⁴ Frashëri, *Historia e Lëvizjes së Majtë*, 85-88.

⁵⁰⁵ "Broshura e Komitetit të Çl. Nacional, No. 2: Shpëtimi i Fshatarëve," Geneva, 1935, AQSh, F. 1/APL, D. 1, Fl. 4-29.

and bring no political value to the cause. The Tiranë network, however, went ahead with its plans. To expand their social base, they established links in late 1934 with an organization called the Secret Organization, composed by disaffected anti-Zogu merchants, clerks, retired and laid off military officers, republicans, nationalists and the like. Their concerted efforts culminated into the ill-fated Fier Uprising on 14 August 1935, led by Riza Cerova, a leading KONARE and CNL member. The authorities suppressed the uprising the same day with relatively little bloodshed. Cerova was killed and mass arrests followed rounding up more than a thousand people. In Fier, the political court passed sentences on 533 individuals, a tenth of whom received death sentences, most of which were however later commuted into lengthy prison terms.⁵⁰⁶ The Tiranë network was the hardest hit. The next day after the suppression of the uprising, the authorities arrested 92 members, and in doing so crippled communist operations in central Albania.⁵⁰⁷

With Cerova dead, the Tiranë network was dismembered and the communist movement paralyzed. The differences between the Liberationists and the Bolsheviks mounted fast. Trying to find an excuse to justify their defeat, the Liberationist camp accused the Bolsheviks of cowardice and disloyalty, in particular the Korçë network for failing to support the uprising. In contrast, the Bolsheviks saluted the bravery of the Liberationists but tried to exploit their failure as yet another example why the establishment of a CPA was an historical necessity. Without a strong mass base and support by the workers and the peasants, “the feudal clique and the fascists will reign

⁵⁰⁶ Prifti et al., *Historia e Popullit*, Vol. III, 325.

⁵⁰⁷ Frashëri, *Historia e Lëvizjes*, 86, 96.

supreme” wrote Ymer Dishnica to the Comintern.⁵⁰⁸ With little else to do, those who escaped arrest left Albania bound yet again for their European strongholds.

From the Moscow Compromise to Black Friday, 1936 – 1939

Following the abortive Fier uprising the Albanian left was in shambles and the communists, Bolsheviks and Liberationists alike, disunited and in disarray.

Embittered by the Albanian experience and the failure to form a party in Dishnicë, the émigré activists left and congregated yet again in their European bases in Austria, Switzerland and France to lick their wounds and try and expand their social base among the more militant emigrants. It is unclear how strong or even frequent links with the Comintern were. Since there was no Albanian communist central organization, the Comintern was understandably wary of squandering any political and financial capital in supporting networks that might turn out to be ineffectual. Then in 1934 Stalin put forward the “popular front,” a policy that reflected Stalin’s growing fear of fascism. This entailed the rallying of all anti-fascist political movements, democratic, liberal, progressive, socialist and even conservative forces under communist leadership against the fascist threat.⁵⁰⁹ Albanian activists, be they Bolshevik or Liberationists, welcomed the new line for they had long held that since 1926 Albania was the European country most overtly threatened by fascism.⁵¹⁰ Then in 1936 a series of Italian-Albanian agreements increased Italian economic, military, political and cultural penetration to the point that even the foreign press struck an

⁵⁰⁸ “Ymer Dishnica to the Comintern,” Lyon, 9 April 1936, AQSh, F. 15/APL, D. 16, Fl. 2.

⁵⁰⁹ Leszek Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: The Founders, The Golden Age, The Breakdown*, trans by P.S. Falla (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 876.

⁵¹⁰ “Ali Kelmendi to the Comintern,” 14 December 1936, AQSh, F. 15/APL, D, 25, Fl. 23.

alarmist tone. In its edition of 5 May 1936, the Swiss socialist newspaper *Le Droit du Peuple* commented, “The national wealth of an entire people is now in the hands of fascist Italy. For a low price [Mussolini] has bought the sovereignty of Albania... [and is now] the overlord of Tiranë.”⁵¹¹

Yet the Albanian left had nothing with which to confront Zogu. After the Fier debacle, the movement itself had stalled and the communist networks were isolated, with no representation in the Comintern, no funding, and few followers. As a result, the older disagreements grew even deeper. Thus, while the Bolshevik faction held fast to the new Comintern line, the Liberationists took a much liberal interpretation. They accepted the popular front line but only if the communists rallied to it only as an equal political group and as long as they were not committed to the immediate establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat following Zogu’s downfall. They agreed to establish a social democratic regime, not a Soviet-style state.⁵¹² Influenced by the National Union they rejected the term Popular Front, instead preferring the less sanguine National Liberal League.⁵¹³

These events suggest that CNL had begun a slight shift toward the right and away from the presumed internationalism of the left. Probably in an effort to increase their support base, they responded positively to an appeal by NU, much to the chagrin of the liberationists.⁵¹⁴ The result was the convocation of a National Liberal Congress held in Paris between 10 and 16 March 1936. The congress was held on a broad participatory basis: the National Union, the CNL, the Albanian League of St. Louis

⁵¹¹ Prifti et al., *Historia e Popullit*, Vol. III, 335.

⁵¹² Frashëri, *Historia e Lëvizjes*, 104.

⁵¹³ “Koço Tashko to the Comintern,” Paris, 20 April 1936, AQSh, F. 15/APL, D. 17, Fl. 11.

⁵¹⁴ “Koço Tashko to the Comintern,” Paris, 4 March 1936, AQSh, F. 15/APL, D. 17, Fl. 8

(USA), the Boston Group, the Revolutionary Group of Boston, the Zara Group, the Fieri Group and several other associations and emigrant organizations in Bulgaria, Greece, France, the United States, Italy and even Cuba.⁵¹⁵ All these groups espoused a mixture of ideological convictions ranging from fascism (Zara Group) to the socialism of the CNL. The Congress adopted three “lines;” the CNL line, which rallied the American networks and the workers, their organizations and networks in France and Greece; the NU line represented by the associations and networks in Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and the Fieri group (consisting of only two exiles) and the Italian line, representing Mustafa Kruja’s peculiar brand of Albanian fascist sympathizers. According to Koço Tashko, Mussolini sent the Zara Group to the Congress with the expressed purpose of sowing dissent and undermining attempts to form a popular front.⁵¹⁶ Despite this, the Congress was successful in avoiding broader schisms, especially from those NU and Italophile members who feared that a move too much to the left would spell the end of their Italian and Yugoslav subsidies. The congress adopted a set of resolutions that generally upheld the spirit of the CNL program.⁵¹⁷

As dispiriting as these developments may have appeared at the time to the communist networks, they were equally aware that these rearrangements did not necessarily translate into a centralized mass movement. Yet the communists too suffered from the same ills that afflicted all other émigré associations and networks. First, they had neither a single center nor formal channels linking them directly to the Comintern. The ACO had disbanded and the Communist Center formerly in Vienna

⁵¹⁵ “Koço Tashko to the Comintern,” Paris, 20 April 1936, AQSh, F. 15/APL, D. 17, Fl. 14

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 14-16.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.

had transferred to France thus weakening its connections with the Balkan Bureau. Second, virtually every communist activist kept its own council and venue of communication as reports by Kelmendi, Tashko, Fundo and Malëshova indicate. Gradually, many activists developed for themselves a cult-like status as each assumed a self-ascribed title of the Comintern leading personality for the Albanian movement. The only outside links to the Comintern were for a time Ali Kelmendi and Llazar Fundo, but these itinerant activists could simply not be in all places at all times and at any rate they belonged to two different organization. As a result, each one regarded the others as deviating from the party line (though there was yet no party) and accused each other of being traitors, Trotskyite, micro-bourgeois etc. In what foreshadowed his execution in late 1944, Llazar Fundo in particular bore the brunt of many such criticisms. In one report, Tashko regarded Fundo as “filthy scum, no longer a traitor, for he has already become a provocateur.”⁵¹⁸

At this point, the Comintern intervened, seeking to mediate disputes among the disputative Albanian left and shape an ideologically consistent popular front. In the fall of 1936 leading Liberationist and Bolshevik members – Halim Xhelo and Llazar Fundo for the former and Sejfulla Malëshova, Koço Tashko and Ali Kelmendi for the latter – were summoned to Moscow for consultations. The meeting was presided over by Wilhelm Pieck, one of the secretaries of the Comintern. It soon became clear that in light of the apparent, irreconcilable ideological differences and the small size of the working class in Albania as encountered by Kelmendi and the others, even the Bolsheviks had their own doubts about the value of the popular front.

⁵¹⁸ Koço Tashko to the Comintern,” Tiranë, 8 June 1938, AQSh, F. 15/APL, D. 17, Fl. 21. For Llazar Fundo’s judgment by a partisan court on 23 September 1944 see “Minutes of Zai Fundo’s Trial,” 23 September 1944, AQSh, F. 14/APL, D. 102, Fl. 1-2

Instead, Kelmendi and the others proposed a different route. First, he stated that Zogu's dictatorship had squandered any popular good will and was able to stay afloat only through Italian financial support, the strength of the army and the gendarmerie, the state apparatus dependent on him alone for patronage, mercenary highland gangs attracted by lucrative contracts, and the support of the Muslim and Orthodox clergy.⁵¹⁹ As a result, public opposition to the regime within Albania was growing fast, virtually throughout the country except for some areas in central Albania, in Krujë, Mat and Elbasan where Zogu's monarchy was popular. Second, Kelmendi also held that the focus of activities should shift from émigré centers to domestic activism. The NU and the CNL the two strongest associations were products of life in emigration and thus enjoyed no support among the masses. For Kelmendi, therefore, the chessboard was still uncluttered and the pieces had yet to move. In order to "find concrete methods how to expand our message to the people and raise consciousness about the struggle," Kelmendi proposed to shift focus from seizing power to building a logistical base, which would have at its core the Korçë Group, the only group to have survived intact the Fieri debacle a year prior, and double efforts of publishing Marxist, Leninist and Stalinist literature of Soviet origin.

Kelmendi was particularly optimistic about penetrating Albanian domestic associations – the cultural, sports, gymnastic, high school, women societies – which, according to him, already possessed sufficient organizational experience. In addition, expansion should focus on creating syndicalist movements the likes of which had yielded positive results in France. Kelmendi also recommended the establishment of philanthropic societies and schools in the provinces so as to "instruct the peasant to

⁵¹⁹ "Ali Kelmendi to the Comintern," 14 December 1936, AQSh, F. 15/APL, D, 25. Fl. 23-24.

take active part in the social and economic life of the country.”⁵²⁰ But Kelmendi’s suggestions encountered opposition from both Xhelo and Fundo since ultimately they included the deal-breaking phrase “proletarian revolution” and appeared irrevocably committed to the communist leadership.⁵²¹ After two months of haggling, Pieck managed to secure a tenuous compromise whereby all parties agreed in principle on the necessity to form an anti-fascist democratic organization with a central committee composed with members from all communist, liberal, progressive and nationalist networks.⁵²² In addition, for the first time, the Comintern appointed its first official representative in Albania. This was Koço Tashko and not Ali Kelmendi. Kelmendi was unable to obtain an entry visa.

The Moscow compromise did not produce a binding resolution. Kelmendi’s assessments, however, were vindicated. It soon became apparent that the CNL’s activism was on the decline, mainly because an Albanian struggle maintained solely with Albanian talents and resources and without the patronage and influx of foreign cash and organizational aid was simply unsustainable. In this context, the National Liberal Congress of March 1936 was a desperate and ultimately futile attempt to expand the CNL’s support base. By late 1936 – early 1937 the communists still within CNL shifted their allegiance and with former ACO and ACG members established an informal Communist Representational Agency (CRA) in France as a conduit for formal links with the Comintern. In addition, the unexpected death of their experienced social democrat leader Halim Xhelo in February 1937 in Paris further weakened the CNL. Following Xhelo’s death, the CNL simply ceased to

⁵²⁰ “Ali Kelmendi to Wilhelm Pieck,” AQSh, F. 15/APL, D. 19, Fl. 12.

⁵²¹ Frashëri, *Historia e Lëvizjes*, 107-110.

⁵²² *Ibid.*, 110

function. The torch of continued activism passed on the communist opposition in the CRA.

The now official, Comintern agent in Albania, Koço Tashko was the scion of family with a long track record in Albanian associational activities. He was born in Faiyum, Egypt on 14 July 1899, the son of Athanas Tashko, Fan Noli's original benefactor and main patriotic influence. Like Noli, Koço Tashko's Albanian experiences were limited. He had spent only two years in Albania, 1907-1909, being sent there by his father in order to be, as he puts it, "Albanianized."⁵²³ Initially educated at the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut he was forced to interrupt his studies because his father's hotel business went bankrupt shortly after the First World War erupted. In 1915 he emigrated to the United States settling for a while in Akron and then Tiffin, Ohio, where he did odd jobs as a messenger boy, a waiter and then as an electrician's aid. After the conclusion of the First World War, he moved to Boston where he became heavily engaged in Fan Noli's fundraising activities for *Vatra* while at the same time attending Harvard University. Thanks to the support of *Vatra* and in particular Noli's patronage, Tashko did not have to pay tuition. His intelligence and perspicacity earned him a position as Noli's private secretary while the latter negotiated Albania's fate at the League of Nations in 1921. During Noli's tenure as Prime Minister in 1924 Tashko briefly served as the Albanian Consul in New York but was forced to resign that position after Zogu came to power in December of the same year. He was replaced by Faik Konica, the former editor of *Albania* in Brussels and another one of Noli's erstwhile collaborators. Konica's appointment, however,

⁵²³ During my research at the AQSh in Tiranë in the summer of 2013 I met and interviewed Koço Tashko's son, Frederick Tashko, who generously provided me a few biographical pages handwritten by his father. The Tashko family holds this document in its private archive.

ran afoul of the majority of *Vatra*'s members that were still loyal to Noli. His attempts to isolate *Vatra* from defections were not successful and under Tashko, and with Noli's blessing, a new [unnamed] association was created opposing both Zogu and Konica. This association briefly published a journal called "The Idealist" under Tashko's editorship.⁵²⁴ On 2 June 1927, Zogu condemned Tashko to death in absentia for communist conspiracy against the Triumph of the Legality movement but threats against the families of this association members proved more effective tools.⁵²⁵ Under such threats, the association dissolved after less than a year. Tashko was forced to live again day-to-day by selling Noli's books and his translations of literary classics. By his own admission, work at "The Idealist" acquainted the 28-year-old Tashko with the Soviet Union and communism. With Noli's blessing and CNL financial backing, in October 1930 Tashko travelled to Soviet Union where he enrolled and spent two years at the International Lenin School [ISL] run by the Comintern in Moscow. In 1933-34 he worked as the secretary of the American section of the ISL. After 1934 he completed a course by the International Red Aid [MOPR] – the Soviet equivalent of the Red Cross – in an unspecified capacity. In 1935 he immigrated to France where he became an active member of the CNL and aided Xhelo at the Liberal Congress of 1936. At the same time he applied to the Albanian authorities to retract the death sentence issued in 1927. It appears that by late 1936 or early 1937 the death sentence was commuted, for he entered legally Albania on 4 July 1937.⁵²⁶

Tashko faced a daunting task mainly because there was no coordination between émigré activities and developments within Albania. Prior to his arrival in

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

⁵²⁵ "Notice on Koco Tashko's Death Sentence," Tiranë, 12 December 1935, AQSh, F. 157, D. 4, Fl. 1.

⁵²⁶ "Koço Tashko's Report to the Comintern," 23 May 1938, AQSh, F. 15/APL, D. 29, Fl. 1.

1937 communist activities in Albania were organized into eight separate groups, cells or networks of varied size and influence mainly in Korçë, Berat, Tiranë, Shkodër, Kuçovë including other, mainly self-ascribed communist cells or just individuals in other towns of lesser importance, often remnants of broken-up organizations like those of Vlorë, Fier and Tiranë. First, there was the Korce Group, the oldest and continuously functioning communist group. This group traced its origins to the mid-1920s period to an informal association of apprentices of the city's shoemaker and tailor guilds (esnaf) seeking to reform the master-apprentice relationships; joined later by construction and textile workers and tin making artisans. Early attempts to expand recruitment within the ranks of the public administration were unsuccessful. From this *mélange*, the Korçë Group emerged in 1928, initially as small cell composed by four shoemakers, two pharmacist technicians joined a year later by two students newly graduated from Greek universities and another one from France. This initial eclectic membership brought different influences to the group, ranging from the democratic principles found in the Noli's 1924 program, to French syndicalism and a peculiar Greek brand of original Marxism, called Archeio-Marxism.⁵²⁷

It was only after the arrival of Ali Kelmendi in 1930 that the Korçë Group took active steps to consolidate its divergent influences and memberships, publish Comintern and Soviet sanctioned literature and start to expand beyond the city borders into the other districts of Korçë. In addition, under Kelmendi's supervision the Korçë Group consolidated the artisan guilds and construction workers into the

⁵²⁷ Koço Tashko, "Report on the Formation of Communist Groups in Albania," in AQSh. F. 14/APL, Unclassified Document, 5.

society *Puna* (Labor).⁵²⁸ Kelmendi's efforts were also successful in expunging the proponents of Archeio-Marxism. Led by Dhimitër Fallo and Niko Xoxi, they split from the Korçë Group and briefly formed another group in 1934 in direct opposition to the Comintern/Soviet line. A member of this faction, Aristidh Qëndro, a mechanic who had served in the French Foreign Legion and claimed to have been a member of the Romanian and later Greek communist parties, openly expressed "Trotskyite sympathies and declared himself anti-Comintern, anti-Soviet, anti-Popular Front, anti-Republican Spain and anti-national-revolutionary movement."⁵²⁹ But eliminating such mavericks from the group also excluded most of its freethinking independents, leaving mostly illiterate and semi-educated workers. Following Fallo's and Xoxi's "purge", Miha Lako a shoemaker became the new leader.

The second major organization was the Tiranë Group. Its initial network had been a virtual extension of the CNL, which was, however, dismembered after the Fier uprising. The death of Xhelo and decline of CNL had dealt yet another blow, but individual members had somehow successfully maintained a network of few cadres in existence. When Zogu's repression eased and after the start of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, the Tiranë network obtained a new lease on life. In addition to the network of military officers mentioned above, the Spanish Civil War had attracted even high school students in Tiranë. Ramiz Alia (1925-2011), the future last leader of communist Albania, was at the time a student at the Lyceum of Tirana, the only state high school. In his memoirs, he recalled how older students spoke in glowing terms of the international solidarity for republican Spain, of the international brigades fighting

⁵²⁸ Ibid., 9, 12.

⁵²⁹ "Koço Tashko's Report to the Comintern," 23 May 1938, AQSh, F. 15/APL, D. 29, Fl. 6.

there, of the freedom-loving civilians suffering under the fascist yoke of Francisco Franco and of the Soviet Union, a country “where the common people lived happy” and free. Through press, radio and word of mouth, 14-18 years old students like Alia adopted idealized images of leading communist figures such as Stalin, Lenin, Palmiro Togliatti and Dolores Ibárruri.⁵³⁰ By 1937-1938 there were two student cells, the first in the American Vocational School and the second at the Lyceum, which would later become the Qemal Stafa Gymnasium. By 1939 these cells had joined and formed the Youth Group, the third major communist group in interwar Albania. Several of these teen activists however also joined other groups in Shkodër and Tiranë.

The fourth group was the Athens Group, formed in 1935 in the Greek capital by Albanian students and immigrant workers as a reaction against Greek nationalist (pan-Epirotic) activities in Albania and Greek “imperialism and fascism.”⁵³¹ Influenced by Greek Archeio-Marxism, the Athens Group also established links with the CRA in France through Llazar Fundo and was encouraged by Ali Kelmendi to expand its membership and activities. Its charismatic leader was Andrea Zisi who, after returning to Albania, espoused a particular brand of communism. According to him, it observed the original thinking of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and eschewed the subsequent adulterations by Lenin and Stalin. Settling first in his native Korçë, Zisi sought to impose this version to the Korçë Group by establishing contacts with the recently purged Fallo and Xoxi. Unsuccessful, he then travelled throughout Albania claiming that his group was the true Communist Party of Albania. According to Tashko, Zisi distributed blank membership rolls in Korçë, proclaiming that “the

⁵³⁰ Ramiz Alia, *Jeta Ime: Kujtime* (Tiranë: Botimet Toena, 2010), 29-30.

⁵³¹ Koço Tashko, “Report on the Formation of Communist Groups in Albania,” in AQSh. F. 14/APL, Unclassified Document, 33

chairman of the Communist Party must have the bravery of Skanderbeg, the wisdom of Naim Frashëri, and the courage of Avni Rustemi,” a clear indication of his own future ambitions.⁵³² Snubbed again he went back to Greece and did not return until a year after the Italian occupation, in 1940, at which time he reestablished his previous Athens Group in Tiranë as the *Zjarri* (Fire) Group. *Zjarri* was surprisingly successful in its recruitment efforts and enlisted many members, among others well known activists such Moscow-trained Selim Shpuza, the former ACO activist; Hysni Lepenica, one of the original members of the Tiranë Group who later abandoned communism and became the most active guerilla fighters of *Balli Kombëtar* during the Second World War; Spiro Koleka, a future CPA Politbureau member and Andrea Varfi a leading voice in the post-war socialist realism literature.⁵³³

The fifth group was the Shkodër Group. Earlier efforts by former ACO members Selim Shpuza, Reshat Këllici and others had been unsuccessful but progressive ideas were not alien there especially among the students and the artisans of the city’s guilds. In 1935 an association called the Albanian *Besa* was formed claiming to be the main form of opposition to the monarchy. Yet, this appears to have been little more than a book club where members read and discussed Soviet literature and world events especially those surrounding the civil war in Spain.⁵³⁴ The initial cell of what would later become the Shkodër Group was formed in 1936 by four high school students studying at the Lyceum in Tiranë, two workers and one newspaper editor, all born between 1913 and 1920 in Shkodër. Their leader was Zef Mala, a

⁵³² Koço Tashko, “Report on the Formation of Communist Groups in Albania,” in AQSh. F. 14/APL, Unclassified Document, 15

⁵³³ Ibid., 34.

⁵³⁴ Tashko, 50.

former student of the historic Jesuit Xaverian College in Shkodër who also briefly attended the University of Vienna before his scholarship was interrupted on charges of subversive activities. Members of this cell also included future founders of the CPA, Qemal Stafa (1920-1942), and Vasil Shanto (1913-1944), who, at 26 years old (in 1938), was the eldest member of the group. The Fallo-Xoxi fraction, formerly of the Korçë group, also adhered briefly in the Shkodër Group.

Another group soon materialized in Berat but their operations focused primarily in Kuçovë, the center of Albania's oil industry. By 1932 the Albanian state had granted several Italian conglomerates about fifteen concessions in mineral and oil exploration, in a large swath of land that extended from Devoll near Korçë to Vlorë in Adriatic coast. Italian investments in this area were extensive and constituted an important part of the Italian economic project in Albania.⁵³⁵ Although specialized labor were Italians, Albanian workers constituted a majority of the employees.⁵³⁶ Since labor was far more concentrated in these areas, the Berat network was arguably better positioned than the other communist groups to recruit within the growing working class. On 18 October 1935, the group experienced its first success when it helped organize 500-600 oil workers into the labor society *Puna* (Labor) not to be confused with the similarly named society in Korçë.

Puna of Kuçovë was the only sufficiently large society in Albania at this time organized as a trade union and intended by the Berat Group to function on the French syndicalist model.⁵³⁷ In November 1935, following the dismissal of some workers by

⁵³⁵ For more detail see Roselli, *Italy and Albania*, 127.

⁵³⁶ Ibid. Roselli estimates that from a total of 70,000 employees engaged in public works in Albania 20,000 were Italian and 50,000 Albanians.

⁵³⁷ "Statute of the Society Puna (Work) in Kuçovë," Kuçovë, 18 October 1935, AQSh, F. 6, D. 1, Fl. 2.

AIPA – *Azienda Italiana Petroli Albania* – *Puna* organized a series of labor strikes that quickly spread in the oil producing fields of Patos and Kuçovë but also among the dockworkers and bitumen workers in Vlorë. The workers complained about unequal treatment and wages they received, substandard living conditions within the company property, dangerous working conditions, long working hours, and the absence of representation to address grievances with the company. In addition, workers railed against national bias in the favorable treatment of Italian over Albanian workers manifested through obscene language, beatings and summary layoffs at the slightest demonstration of objection or vocal protest.⁵³⁸ The Albanian Ministry of Economy launched its own separate investigation and found out that the workers' complains were not without some justification, especially with respect to repeated discrimination and ethnic slurs.⁵³⁹ Nonetheless, the Albanian and Italian authorities maintained that while working hours may have appeared long, these were not consecutive and included long breaks. Similarly, compensation, when adjusted for inflation and national wage standards, was competitive in the labor markets of foreign countries. Also, the dismissal of the employees that sparked the strike was, according the authorities, a response to the theft of a meter of tubing.⁵⁴⁰

Albanian communism, therefore, while on the rise before Tashko's arrival was a confusing movement lacking coordination, ideological coherence, and stable group membership. In addition, these groups kept their own council and links with the Comintern. *Zjarri's* preference for Greek communism has already been noted. Similarly, prior to 1937, the links of the Korçë Group with the Comintern went

⁵³⁸ Ibid., 8-9.

⁵³⁹ "Eng. Vangjel Goxhamani to Minister of Economy," Berat, 19 November 1935, Ibid., 9.

⁵⁴⁰ "Note to the Prefect of Vlorë," 30 March 1936, Ibid., 20.

through the CRA in Paris. In contrast, the Shkodër Group occasionally linked up with the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, (CPY) through two Kosovar intermediaries, Emin Duraku (1918-1942) and Fadil Hoxha (1916-2001 and no relation to Enver) both early members of the CPY. Yet there were signs that work inched forward. In late 1936, as Tashko was appealing to the authorities to rescind his 1928 death sentence, a travelling Croatian communist Milorad Nikolić, (nom de guerre *Mastoras*) arrived in Albania. Finding the other communist groups in Albania wanting, he urged the Korçë Group to uproot the existing informal structure and instead bureaucratize the expansion process by:

1. Establishing a Central Committee (CC) with branches composed by members of the existing regional groups. Each branch would be responsible for building popular support in their areas acting autonomously but in concert with other branches and under instructions of the CC
2. Breaking up the cell-based networks and create troikas in their stead
3. Establishing a troika in each prefecture and following their expected growth, divide the area into “party-zones,” whereupon each area boss and prefecture boss would establish district and regional committees.
4. Maximizing contact with the masses.⁵⁴¹

Impressed, the Korçë Group followed Nikolić’s advice and created the New Committee, a mechanism responsible for carrying out Nikolić’s instructions. The result was the expansion of the Korçë support base in Berat and Kuçovë and the merging of these cells into a larger group.⁵⁴² Judging this expansion successful, the Korçë Group tasked Koçi Xoxe – a tinsmith and the future Minister of Defense and

⁵⁴¹ Koço Tashko, “Report on the Formation of Communist Groups in Albania,” in AQSh. F. 14/APL, Unclassified Document, 13.

⁵⁴² I have been unable to corroborate with other sources Nikolić’s episode in Albania and the impact he had on Albanian communism in this period. On the issue of the merger, Kristo Frashëri takes the opposite view and argues that it was the Kuçovë group that first approached the Korçë network in an effort to lend to the strikes of the oil workers a more “national” legitimacy, rather than the other way around. See, Frashëri, *Lëvizja e Majtë*, 125.

Interior before his eventual purge as a Yugoslav collaborator in 1949 – to go to Istanbul in early 1937 and appeal to the Soviet embassy there to send an official Comintern envoy. Xoxe returned empty handed but several months later the group made a similar appeal to the Soviet embassy in Paris. This time, the Comintern accepted the request and on 4 July 1937, Tashko made his appearance in Korçë as the first official Comintern envoy in Albania.

Tashko faced an unenviable task. He found that in the aftermath of the Fieri debacle the communist movement was in disarray.⁵⁴³ Contrary to what the group claimed in its Comintern appeals, links between various prefectures were nonexistent or tenuous at best. Police surveillance was so intense that it made “it impossible for a comrade to go from Korçë to Vlorë or a comrade from Vlorë to go to Korçë.”⁵⁴⁴ In addition, Tashko also observed that leaders were intensely territorial and paranoid about outside influences. They treated their organizations as their own personal feuds, which caused members to often switch allegiances and join other groups. Tashko argued that many of the problems afflicting Albanian communism resulted from the absence of social integration. More than a decade after Zogu came to power, economic, political, and more importantly, social integration in Albania remained elusive. Workers’ unions while allowed and somewhat successful in Korçë, were forbidden elsewhere and private societies and mass organizations were either government-sponsored or protected entities or existed only on paper. Libraries, coffee shops, societies and any form of social organization were closely watched upon or

⁵⁴³ “Koço Tashko’s Report to the Comintern,” 23 May 1938, AQSh, F. 15/APL, D. 29, Fl. 1.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

forcibly disbanded when deemed subversive.⁵⁴⁵ Disaffection with the regime, while widespread in the country, was nonexistent in the capital because it was the only city in Albania where unemployment was largely checked. Tiranë, the fastest growing city of the interwar period, had more than tripled in size, from slightly more than 10,000 in 1920 to approximately 35-40,000 on the eve of the Italian occupation.

All the rich come to Tiranë. The [foreign] Concessions have their headquarters in Tiranë. The State is building new edifices, the concessionaries are building, the rich settlers are building, and the Italians and other foreigners are building. The whole country pays taxes to be spent in Tiranë. Then there are the great festivities, which are celebrated with the pomp of the great kings. During these festivities there is an influx of labor power from the provinces and even with this influx it becomes impossible for private persons to hire labor-power during the festivities, [... which] are frequent. In short, there is little unemployment and wages and profits are higher here than elsewhere. The inhabitants of the provinces dream to go to Tiranë in search of work.⁵⁴⁶

Despite this, the capital remained a city consisting of what Tashko termed *zemlatchestvo*, or settlements, where the provincial *zemlaks*, or settlers, kept to themselves, avoided interactions with outsiders and relied on aid from a government minister, deputy or official that hailed from their own province or town. Singling out the absence of social integration as the main “handicap to our movement,” Tashko concluded that, “There is no national public opinion but islands of opinions. Even in schools, the pupils and students of the same province stick together.”⁵⁴⁷ Still, Tashko identified two potential sources from where to build something resembling public opinion. First, work had to start from scratch within the *zemlatchestvos* and then expand outwardly to unify these disparate social groups. Second, the communists had to infiltrate the four chief groups of intellectuals who, although reluctant to participate

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid. 12.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid. 10

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., 11.

in the communist movement, were nonetheless far more opposed to the regime itself. These groups included women, teachers and students, intellectuals who had studied in France and Italy and “always stick together,” intellectuals who have studied in Austria and Germany and “kept to themselves” and professionals educated in Albanian schools who also kept to themselves.⁵⁴⁸

By 1938, there was considerable indication that the center of activities had begun to shift from the émigré organizations to Albania itself but hardly producing unity. In 1937, as mentioned above, Halim Xhelo died in a Paris hospital after a long illness. Exactly two years later, in February 1939 Ali Kelmendi, now largely shunned, also succumbed to tuberculosis in a Paris hospital. In addition, Stalinist purges of 1936-1938 were strongly condemned by several leading Albanian communists and many, such as Tajar Zavalani, abandoned the struggle altogether.⁵⁴⁹ These events brought further friction among the various groups. There was still the problem with working definitions that had plagued the CNL’s early relationship with the ACO and the ACG. Was Albania colonial or semi-colonial country or a sovereign one, and if so, what was to be done? According to Tashko, the Tiranë and Shkodër groups fell “victim” to the Archeio-Marxist interpretation originally espoused by the Korçë splinter groups that considered their brand of communism to be closer to the original Marxist thought unadulterated by Leninist vanguardism. The Shkodër Group held that although the foreign capital, jointly with the national bourgeois, had shifted its focus from the exploitation of natural resources to the exploitation of the labor force, the working class had not yet matured and since any revolution “is the product of

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁵⁴⁹ For more see Frashëri, *Historia e Lëvizjes*, 112-117.

economic, social and political conditions, we can not [violate such iron laws]... and take up the banner of the revolution.”⁵⁵⁰ For this reason, the group advised caution and held that the communists should instead focus on preparing cadres, agitating among the masses and be ready to eventually lead them once the development of industry accelerated the simultaneous development of proletarian consciousness.⁵⁵¹ According to Tashko, for both Tiranë and Shkodër groups, Italian capital represented a necessary step in the evolution of class relations and thus, a necessary evil that must be suffered if the communist movement were to gain momentum, even if it manifested under “threat of the Italian” occupation.⁵⁵²

The Korçë Group was in basic agreement that Albania was an Italian semi-colony in the European periphery but rejected any form of passivity and argued that the struggle necessitated decisive revolutionary action by the communists even within these unfavorable conditions. It argued that Albania was created and maintained by the mutual antagonisms of its imperialist neighbors:

[Great Britain] does not want Italy to possess the entire Adriatic and Albanian coast and so have its hands free in the entire Mediterranean. Italy does not want the Albanian coast to fall in the hands of Yugoslavia and Greece and so threaten the safety of the Italian cities in the Adriatic coast. Yugoslavia does not want that Albania to fall in the hands of Italy and so open the door for the Italian [supremacy] among the dissatisfied minorities of Macedonia. Greece too does not want Italy established in Northern Epirus and so squeeze Greece in a pincer in the north from Albania and in the south from the Dodecanese islands...Albania is [thus] not a sovereign country for it dares do nothing on its own and without the approval of the imperialist states interested in its domestic affairs...Albania is neither free nor a colony in the literal sense ...It belongs to all and no one at the same time...We have in Albania therefore a national and a social problem...Our duty is to free Albanians from the

⁵⁵⁰ “Për Një Parti Komuniste,” *Buletin i Organizatës Komuniste të Shqipërisë*, 1, 1 (1938), AQSh, F. 11/APL, D. 7, Fl. 3-4.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵² Koço Tashko, “Report on the Formation of Communist Groups in Albania,” in AQSh. F. 14/APL, Unclassified Document, 20

ideological and political influence of the imperialists, to quickly eradicate the agreements between Albania and the imperialists..., and form a general front of all Albanians against the foreigners that seek to make it a battlefield to settle their own affairs with the blood of Albanians.⁵⁵³

The Korçë Group was therefore not averse to collaborating with nationalist and “honest” bourgeois organizations. Such measures had begun in earnest under Kelmendi’s earlier guidance, thus preceding by several years Stalin’s popular front line of 1935 and would continue until the communist victory in the Second World War. After 1935, however, Stalin’s new line provided a powerful source of legitimacy that could potentially persuade new members to shed their inactivity and join the struggle. After all, had not KONARE been formed on similar terms, as a broad popular front uniting Zogu’s opposition in emigration under the banner of democracy, social progress and political liberalization? Were not the communists themselves products of KONARE and had they not all been, at one time or another, members of the now defunct CNL? Tashko sought to also expand the number of free thinking intellectuals within the group who, as seen above, had been largely purged from the group since 1934-1935 as part of Kelmendi’s anti-Archeio-Marxist “reforms.” His efforts were notable in the recruitment of Enver Hoxha who at the time was working as a lecturer of French at the Lyceum of Korçë.

After Tashko’s arrival, the Korçë Group had managed to penetrate the city’s neighborhood councils, the county’s council and the Chamber of Commerce. At the same time had made significant inroads into the city’s and county’s educational institutions and labor societies and guilds. According to Tashko, its greatest success to date came during the elections for the city’s mayoral council on 26 June 1938

⁵⁵³ “Foreign Imperialists must not Interfere in Albanian Domestic Affairs,” *Përpara*, 1, 1 (1938), AQSh, F. 9/APL, D. 1. Fl. 5-6.

when the group's candidates won approximately 1,500 out of 1,698 votes.⁵⁵⁴ Efforts of other groups to replicate Korçë successes elsewhere in Berat, Tiranë, Gjirokastrë, Peqin, Vlorë and Shkodër failed.⁵⁵⁵ The reason for these failures had to do for the most part with the communists' own lack of coordination and lack of ideological coherence but also because Zogu's government was more entrenched in those areas, than it was in Korçë.⁵⁵⁶

Following this surprisingly vigorous upsurge of communist activities, the authorities launched a massive crackdown in late 1938 – early 1939, arresting in the process seventy-three communist activists on charges of illegal assembly and association, of plotting to overthrow the monarchy and establish the dictatorship of a single social class, of discussing privately and in public through print and other mediums illegal communist theories, and of purchasing printing machinery with intent to publish and distribute illegal literature.⁵⁵⁷ Particularly hard hit were the Shkodër and Tiranë groups but Korçë, *Zjarri*, and Youth groups were similarly affected. The majority of the accused were high school students followed by workers employed as carpenters, shoemakers, tailors, mechanics, truck drivers and construction. A few high school teachers, clerks, newspaper editors and tradesmen were represented as well. The majority of the defendants were under 23-year-old (18 – 23-year-old) with only a handful above 30 and only one defendant, a laid off “professor,” was 47 years old. The average age for all the accused was 24 years old. The government's decision to hold on 4 February 1939 a joint trial for all the accused

⁵⁵⁴ Koço Tashko, “Report on the Formation of Communist Groups in Albania,” in AQSh. F. 14/APL, Unclassified Document, 24.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁷ Frashëri, *Historia e Lëvizjes*, 153.

instead of bringing them up in separate charges backfired with many defendants proudly accepting all charges and using the courtroom as venue for agitation. One defendant in particular, Qemal Stafa, of the Shkodër Group at the time an 18-year-old student in Tiranë's Lyceum, won public renown for himself when he used the podium to accuse the government of servility to Italian interests and of its failure to reform the social, economic and political fabric of the country. It is noteworthy that Enver Hoxha was not among the arrested communists. While this does not constitute sufficient proof of non-involvement, it does, however, strongly suggest that at this time Hoxha was at best only a minor activist. In the event, the jury acquitted 22 defendants and delivered guilty verdicts on the other 51. The latter received prison sentences ranging from a few months to ten years, with the majority receiving one year or less. Yet only those defendants who received less than two months completed their full length of their sentence for on 9 April 1939, Italy invaded Albania adding it to its "fifth shore" and ushering in the Second World War for the Albanians.

Conclusion

Albanian associational activism of the interwar period remained in a constant state of flux regardless of the political stability and some institutional centralization provided by Zogu since his "Triumph of Legality" in 1925. Important questions concerning the country's modern political structure, economic welfare and social integration and position in the international state system remained unsolved. The most politically active members of society remained silent or were forced into exile. Their departure enabled Zogu to continue the time-honored Ottoman system of patronage

and clientelism, thus inhibiting any political process premised on open and broad participation as hoped for after the Congress of Lushnjë in 1920.

On the one hand, the struggle between Zogu and the émigré associations was a continuation of the political ambitions and personal rivalries of the early 1920s. Indeed, for the associations on the political right, supported by their Italian and Yugoslav connections, opposition to Zogu was their *raison d'être*. On the other hand, those who called themselves communists, in line with their Soviet sympathies, pressed far more aggressively for radical modernization. The apparent success of the USSR in bringing about a new political and social order served as an inspiration and Soviet tactics of mass mobilization, industrialization, social integration and, above all, its anti-imperialist stance provided an example for the creation a future society beyond what the former Ottoman regime and now Zogu's regime attempted but never achieved. The Communists situated the Albanian problem within a broader global political and social context, where becoming modern meant the establishment of a sovereign, economically and political independent state that enjoyed full legal membership in the international state system.⁵⁵⁸ It was the old aspiration repackaged in a new ideology. This new pattern of social activism was marked by a gradual transition, wherein the left thought less and less in terms of the ethnic nation and increasingly in terms of adopting the idealized state system of the Soviet Union. Even within the CNL, nationalism became almost an afterthought at the end of a program that first listed social and economic demands.

⁵⁵⁸ Stephen Kotkin, "Modern Times: The Soviet Union and the Interwar Conjuncture," in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2, 1 (2001), 111-164; Samuel J. Hirst, "Eurasia's Discontent: Soviet and Turkish Anti-Westernism in the Interwar Period" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2012). M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Atatürk: An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

The new emphasis marked a generational change from associational politics of the past. The activists of the Ottoman and early independence period, now in their 50's, had been landowners, clerks, merchants that brought into their politics nationalist notions belonging to a time when the Albanians were thought to live as one under the House of Osman. In contrast, those who identified with the political left and communism in the interwar period were a new generation born at the turn of the twentieth century. But again, most were émigrés, this time in exile after 1925. They had grown up witnessing the massive disruptions wrought by the excessive nationalism of the Balkan Wars and the First World War. For some, like Noli, the former members of Rustemi's *Bashkimi* and other younger progressives it represented a natural evolution from their previous activism in order to provide new answers to older persisting and unsolved social issues. For a few others it was also a right of passage to a new sort of activism transmitted from father to son. The examples of Koço Tashko and Tajar Zavalani, scions of families with a long record of social activism, represent only two of the better-documented cases among many others. Supported by growing contacts with Soviet and European radical ideologies, these two transitions kept momentum going forward.

But to speak of Albanian communism as a coherent ideological movement is misleading. For the most part, communism was understood, accepted and adopted as an umbrella for expressing frustration with international events, rebellion against old norms, and rejection of the status quo in favor of meaningful social change and an opening of the political process to new alternatives. Given continuing divisions in applying these vague formulations, it was not surprising therefore that Albanian

communism moved forward only slowly and incoherently. Yet, whether it was sincere or self-serving, conceived within a regionalist, nationalist, or internationalist framework, viewed through a “pure” Marxist or “adulterated” Stalinist, Trotskyite or a Western European lens, envisioned as either a class or a syndicalist movement or as a unified struggle for “national-liberation” from Zogu and his international sponsors, Albanian communists grew from a few individuals in 1924 to about two hundred members split into six major groups in 1939, not counting their informal support base within the country or the émigré communists in Western Europe. The problem was that these groups could not agree on a single doctrine, center or leader. Only after the Italian occupation were Albanian communists able to move past these divisions.

By the late 1930s, after the deaths of Kelmendi and Xhelo, the dissolution of the CNL, the failure of Communist Representational Agency in France to transform into a CPA, and Tashko’s arrival in Albania, it became apparent to some that a new generation untainted by such divisions would be needed. The great trial of the communists in 1939 suggests that yet another generation composed of workers in their twenties, young, sometimes unemployed professionals, and high school students barely out of their teens, now emerged. For these activists, communism represented a struggle to secure for themselves a place and a role in the political space of the country. It was in other words a youth movement emerging from local high school students and workers that were influenced by exiled activists but who developed their own momentum. In this sense, it was a parallel evolution with the ideological trends already established in emigration. As future events during the Second World War

would show, it was from this class of activists that the subsequent cadres of the CPA would emerge with only few of the exiled activists in positions of leadership.

Chapter 5: The Second World War and the Communist Victory, 1939 – 1945

The Italian occupation of Albania on 7 April 1939 disrupted and reframed Albanian associational life. In contrast to the First World War, Italy, after 1939, combined military strength with an elaborate three-fold strategy. It sought first, the ideological cooptation of the hitherto largely independent émigré associational elites into political fascism, second, the integration of the Albanian bureaucratic apparatus into the larger framework of Italian state institutions, and third, the support of the Albanian public by providing economic advantages. Having achieved their prewar aim of removing Zogu from power, albeit by an Italian proxy, many of the interwar émigré associations ceased to exist. Some even professed fascist allegiance. The founding of the Fascist Party of Albania and other ideological forms of social organizations further threatened to dismantle the tradition of independent voluntary associations that had emerged in the late Ottoman Empire.

Among those who resisted the new fascist social order were the communists, who finally succeeded in founding a party in November 1941. Taking advantage of popular front initiatives that had emerged after 1934, the new Communist Party of Albania (CPA) sought to band together with the more traditional nationalists to form a united front of national resistance. These efforts culminated in the National Liberation Front (NLF) in September 1942, but divisions over ideology and political leadership made this an uneasy alliance. As a result, some leading nationalists opted out of the NLF and formed *Balli Kombëtar* in November 1942; an eclectic organization intended to function as a parallel alternative to NLF. Although *Balli*

enjoyed some initial success, the departure of these nationalists from the NLF threatened to weaken the NLF's resistance against the Axis. To the CPA's advantage, however, *Balli* failed to build the requisite administrative structure necessary to enforce internal military cohesion for a resistance organization suited to modern forms of warfare. It remained to the end of the war a loose association of personal relationships. In contrast, with Yugoslav and belated British help, the NLF, now under CPA management, was able to build up a centrally organized wartime bureaucratic apparatus that after March 1943 proved able to take power as the German troops retreated in 1944.

Personal Union and Fascist-sponsored Associations, 1939 – 1941

On 25 March 1939, spurred on by German success in Austria and Czechoslovakia and the absence of effective international opposition, the Italian fascist government delivered an ultimatum to King Zog of Albania. It demanded complete control of all Albanian ports, airfields, roads, lines of communication and international borders. It also asked for the right of Italian farmer colonists to cultivate Albanian land and full citizenship for Italians with all civil and political rights envisioned by it, the appointment of Italian officials in strategic positions in Albanian ministries, and the abolition of customs barriers between Italy and Albania. It also demanded the reorganization of Zogu's gendarmerie – the only relatively cohesive fighting force in Albania – under the control of Italian army officers and the raising of the Italian legation to the rank of embassy.⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵⁹ Pearson, *Albania and King Zog*, 428.

Zogu received the Italian ultimatum with great apprehension and it appears to have suffered a near total nervous breakdown. The wellbeing of his Hungarian-born wife, Queen Géraldine, née Apponyi, heavy with child in a difficult pregnancy, was uppermost in his mind.⁵⁶⁰ Seeking to gain time, he resorted to his useless procrastination tactics. Italian influence in Albania had been so thorough in the 1930s that he too was well aware that most members of his inner circle were already on the Italian payroll. Then his confidant and chief adjutant General Zef Serreqi, dispatched to Rome on 31 March to negotiate a diplomatic solution to the crisis, tendered his resignation on 6 April and declared for Italy. Serreqi was promised the post of the prime minister under an Italian administration. On the same day, the Mayor of Durrës, Mark Kodheli, flew to Bari and began broadcasting pro-Italian and anti-Zog statements.⁵⁶¹

Exhausting all diplomatic measures available to him, Zogu finally emerged from isolation and appeared to have rediscovered the political courage that had served him so well during his youth. On 6 April he declared martial law, ordered full mobilization and gave instructions for the evacuation of the civilian population from Durrës. It was too late. In the early afternoon of 7 April, following the Italian disembarkation of troops in Durrës, Zogu made a final appeal to all Albanians urging them to fight on. Soon thereafter, a motorcade carrying the royal family, government ministers, parliament deputies and high-ranking military officers was seen rushing

⁵⁶⁰ Bernd J. Fischer, *Albania at War*, 17-19; Paskal Milo, *Shqiptarët*, Vol. I., 22-26.

⁵⁶¹ Fischer, *Albania at War*, 27; Milo, *Shqiptarët*, Vol. I, 24-26.

through the capital making its way southeast toward Elbasan. After briefly pausing in Zemblak, in the Korçë district, Zogu's motorcade crossed the border into Greece.⁵⁶²

Zogu's departure facilitated the Italian takeover as well as the subsequent construction of Italian Albania.⁵⁶³ Military operations lasted only five days after which Italian administrators proceeded to consolidate political power. The Italian Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano, Mussolini's son-in-law and chief architect of the invasion, found willing collaborators in the existing ruling elites who opportunistically abandoned all ties to the previous monarchy and readily declared for a personal union with Italy. Ciano, however, regarded the personal union only as a transitional phase before total annexation and would soon disabuse the Albanians of such expectations.⁵⁶⁴

First on Ciano's agenda was the assimilation of Albanian state institutions within the larger ambit of the Italian fascist establishment. On 8 April, one day after the invasion, Ciano and Francesco Jacomoni, the former Italian minister in Albania, constructed a Provisional Government composed by former officials of the monarchy headed by Xhafer bey Ypi, a former Prime Minister (1922). In his first act of office, Ypi proclaimed the Albanians' loyalty to Mussolini, openly and warmly "receiving the glorious Italian army with the same love that *il Duce* nurtures for the

⁵⁶² Mirash Ivanaj, *24 Orët e Fundit të Mbretërisë së Zogut*, quoted in Arben Puto, *Shqipëria Politike: 1912-1939* (Tiranë: Botimet Toena, 2009), 642-643.

⁵⁶³ Bernd J. Fischer, *Mbreti Zog dhe Përpyqja për Stabilitet në Shqipëri* (Tiranë: Çabej, 1996), 295-297; Abaz Ermenji, *Vëndi që zë Skënderbeu në Historinë e Shqipërisë*, (Tiranë: Çabej, 1996), 472-473; Frashëri, *Historia e Lëvizjes*, 158-159; Milo, *Shqiptarët*, 38; Francesco Jacomoni, *Gjysma Ime Shqiptare*, trans, Arian Vasiari (Tiranë: Ora, 2005), 110-120; Puto, *Shqipëria Politike*, 640-643.

⁵⁶⁴ Galeazzo Ciano, *Diario, 1937-1943*. Ebook. Ed. Renzo De Felice (Milano: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 2015), 459 Retrieved from http://www.liberliber.it/mediateca/libri/c/ciano/diario_1937_1943/pdf/ciano_diario_1937_1943.pdf

Albanians.”⁵⁶⁵ On 12 April, under Jacomoni’s guidance and with Ciano setting down the design of the future government, Ypi called for the reconstruction of the National Assembly. Many of the deputies however had left with Zogu and had to be brought back aboard Italian planes to Tiranë. When first convened, the National Assembly gathered 159 deputies consisting of virtually the entire Albanian elite: 68 large landowners, 25 tribal and community leaders, 46 merchants and businessmen, representatives of all religious denominations of the country and a few intellectuals.⁵⁶⁶ On 14 April, a body of 50 men consisting mainly of regional clan leaders but also including landowners, clergymen and merchants dressed in national costumes representing virtually all regions of Albania arrived in Rome. Led by Shefqet bey Vërlaci – Albania’s largest landowner and Zogu’s scorned presumptive father-in-law – this colorful assembly offered Zogu’s royal crown to the Italian King Vittorio Emanuele III. The symbolic act was enough for Ciano to write in his diary “independent Albania is no more,” using the exact same phrase he employed on 11 March 1938 when observing the elevation of Arthur Seyss-Inquart as Austrian Chancellor in Hitler’s Reich.⁵⁶⁷

At the same time the Italian authorities proceeded to formalize the final shape of Albania’s new government. The Albanians initially hoped that the Viceroyalty would become a representative institution for the Kingdom of Albania within the joint union. Adalberto di Savoia-Genova, duke of Bergamo, was briefly considered for that position, but Mussolini and Ciano intervened and on 22 April appointed Francesco Jacomoni, thus keeping Albanian affairs subordinate to the Ministry of the Foreign

⁵⁶⁵ Frashëri, *Historia e Lëvizjes së Majtë*, 159.

⁵⁶⁶ Fischer, *Albania at War*, 36

⁵⁶⁷ Ciano, *Diario*, 155, 451.

Affairs.⁵⁶⁸ On 20 April the new Albanian government and the Italian authorities signed into law those demands pertaining to the full equality of Italians as Albanian citizens as initially on the 25 March ultimatum. Special attention was also devoted to the integration of the small Albanian security apparatus into the Italian armed forces. On 10 May the Albanian gendarmerie and the border guards were absorbed respectively into the Royal Carabinieri and *Guardia di Finanza*.⁵⁶⁹ In addition, an Albanian Fascist Militia was created and staffed with local personnel including Italian settlers that had trickled into Albania intermittently since 1925. This was a satellite wing of the Italian MVSN – *Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale*, the infamous Blackshirts – that included *Milizia Fascista Forestale*, a paramilitary agency responsible for law enforcement in forested and rural areas and *Milizia della Strada*, the Highway Patrol service.⁵⁷⁰ Similarly, the army, which the Italians had taken care to make ineffective in the 1930s, underwent considerable reorganization. On 13 July 1939, it was reconstituted into six infantry battalions and four artillery batteries totaling 6,500 men, each of which was attached to six Italian divisions stationed in Albania of some 60,000 – 70,000 troops.⁵⁷¹

The new security forces in Italian Albania, however, were subordinated to an unwieldy and overlapping structure that would undergo considerable changes in the future. For instance, after the merger of the Albanian forces within the larger Italian military, the Superior Command of the Armed Forces in Albania was established on 22 July in expectation of better-defined relationships and tasks pending further

⁵⁶⁸ Milo, *Shqiptarët*, Vol. I, 57. For Jacomoni's own views see his *Gjysma Ime*, 124-126; 146-155.

⁵⁶⁹ Milo, *Shqiptarët*, Vol. I, 61; Fischer, *Albania at War*, 43-44; Silvia Trani, *L'Unione fra l'Albania e l'Italia* (Roma: Edimond s.r.l., 2007), 52-60.

⁵⁷⁰ Trani, *L'Unione*, 62..

⁵⁷¹ Fischer, *Albania at War*, 44

mergers with other units either freshly arrived from Italy, including those raised within Albania, or expected to arrive shortly thereafter. As a result, two different command centers came into existence: the Command of the Army Corps in Albania and the Superior Command of Armed Forces in Albania. To make matters worse none of these commands were folded directly under Jacomoni's Viceroyalty, who, for his part, found himself serving in an ambiguous dual role, as the King's Viceroy in Albania on the one hand and as a diplomat of the Foreign Ministry subordinate to Ciano and the Fascist Party on the other.⁵⁷² In addition, the existence of a separate Albanian government led Premier Vërlaci – autonomous in name only – led to a divided political structure with multiple centers of civil and military authority. These divisions improved somewhat when on 1 December the Superior Command of Armed Forces was abolished and its command structures were absorbed within the Command of Army Corps in Albania, the newly rechristened Command of the XXVI Army Corps in Albania.

Second, Ciano also paid close attention to the Albanian émigré associations, legations, embassies and the around the world, attempting to either enroll their services or neutralize potential political opponents. On 25 April, the Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as indeed all other previous institutions, was abolished and the embassies and consulates either merged within the Italian ministry or were closed. Left without gainful employment, Zogu's former ministers for Foreign Affairs threw their support behind Italy, as did nearly half of Zogu's erstwhile diplomatic

⁵⁷² Trani, *L'Unione*, 53; Fischer, *Albania at War*, 44

corps.⁵⁷³ The majority of the Albanian émigré communities in Europe and the United States did not. Still, at this stage, Ciano was still able to exploit the still widespread resentment against Zogu and made considerable headway in coopting many leading figures of the nationalist center and the radical right. The Zara Group and a majority of the members of the National Union, who had long been on his payroll, now openly professed fascist loyalties. Mustafa Kruja, the leader of the Zara Group, went as far as declaring himself a true fascist proclaiming Mussolini, “the true prophet of our political faith.”⁵⁷⁴ In what was arguably the greatest Italian success, Ciano also managed to sway Faik Konica one of the most illustrious names among the Albanian social activists.⁵⁷⁵ He died soon thereafter, in 1942, but his “betrayal” cast a long shadow in the institutional memory of the subsequent communist regime. To further cement these and other relationships, Ciano distributed substantial gifts to the old Albanian associational leaders. Many were made Italian senators, members of the Italian Academy of Sciences, professors in Italian universities and so on. Reflecting on these appointments, Ciano remarked: “Few offices sufficed to perform the operation to castrate Albania without making the patient scream. The annexation is realized. And...the Albanians ... are not grumbling... All in all, a perfect solution”⁵⁷⁶

As the older Albanian associations were dismantled, the Italian authorities replaced them with new fascist forms of social organizations. On 2 June 1939 the Albanian puppet government and the Viceroyalty decreed the creation of the Fascist

⁵⁷³ Fatmira Rama, “Reagimi i Diasporës Shqiptare ndaj Pushtimit Fashist të Shqipërisë” (paper presented at the International Conference: “The Role of the Diaspora in State-Building” Prizren, Kosovo, June 10-13, 2012).

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 59-60

⁵⁷⁵ Zenone Benini to Francesco Jacomoni, Rome, 6 June 1940, AQSh, F. 161, D 74, Fl. 1-12; Jacomoni to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tiranë, AQSh, F. 161, D. 75, Fl. 1-2, 16, 22, 27.

⁵⁷⁶ Ciano, *Diario*, 502.

Party of Albania (FPA). At the head of the FPA was Ciano's personal friend Terenc Toçi, previously the leading voice of the Elders that praised Zogu in 1930s, now serving as Chairman of the Albanian Superior Fascist Corporative Council. Tefik Mborja, who Zogu had sentenced to death for insurrectionary activities in 1927, became the Secretary General of the FPA. All those who accepted the new regime change were required to register with the FPA and use the Roman salute.⁵⁷⁷ This rule was shortly thereafter expanded to include the entire state apparatus and even the spouses of all state officials. FPA created a satellite youth wing, the Albanian Youth of the Lictor, modeled on its Italian equivalent. It was organized into four age groups for boys and girls alike: the *Eaglets*, 6-8 years old; the *Balilla*, 8-13 years old; the *Vanguardists*, 13-17 years old; and lastly, the *Young Fascists*, 17-21 years old.⁵⁷⁸ A strict regimen was imposed which assigned activities on the basis of gender. Whereas boys performed gymnastic and paramilitary activities, central to the fascist vision concerning girls and women were household notions of procreation, economy, hygiene, participation in cultural fascist centers, libraries, charities and programs of public assistance.⁵⁷⁹

Third, as the construction of an Italian-dependent administration proceeded apace, the new Italian regime sought to lessen the trauma of annexation by fostering economic growth. Initial studies about Albanian economic potential conducted in the two months following the invasion were, as Bernd Fischer and Paskal Milo have argued, overly optimistic.⁵⁸⁰ Nonetheless, Italian economic expansion changed the

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid. For more information see the detailed coverage in Fischer, *Albania at War*, 44-47,

⁵⁷⁸ Milo, *Shqiptarët*, Vol. I, 70,

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid. Fischer, *Albania at War*, 51.

⁵⁸⁰ Fischer, *Albania at War*, 66.

face of the public infrastructure of Albania and had a considerable success in raising living standards. Work was plentiful, salaries doubled, taxes lowered, and pensions, benefits, workers' compensation and insurance became available for civil servants as well as the unemployed.⁵⁸¹ In addition, the Italian regime undertook other projects dealing with the draining of marshes and swamps, making electricity available to others below the upper classes, building aqueducts to ensure a steady supply of water and etc.⁵⁸² As shown in Chapter 2, Albanian associations had actively and consistently lobbied the CUP-led government to undertake such projects only to be consistently rebuffed. Now they promised to become a reality under the Italian fascist leadership.

The promotion of irredentism for Kosovo and Çamëria was an additional avenue through which the Italian regime hoped to win Albanian support. This issue, however, could not be addressed until the German occupation of Yugoslavia in 1941.⁵⁸³ Certainly resonating with Kosovar Albanians and some nationalist-minded Albanian associations and intellectuals, those claims were of lesser importance to most Albanians within Albania.⁵⁸⁴

Despite these efforts, the Italians failed to win the Albanians over to their side. The leading Western account by Bernd Fischer sees several factors militating against a full Albanian-Italian rapprochement: the Albanians' overly negative attitude and absent respect for Italy and the Italians, distrust of broader Italian motives, and maladministration, corruption and the obvious Italianization of the Albanian public

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., 67; Milo, *Shqiptarët*, Vol. I, 62-84; Roberto Morozzo della Rocca, *Kombi dhe Feja në Shqipëri*, trans, Luan Omari, (Tiranë: Elena Gjika, 199?), 185-189.

⁵⁸² Trani, *L'Unione*, 64-72.

⁵⁸³ Fischer, *Albania at War*, 70-88.

⁵⁸⁴ Milo, *Shqiptarët*, 38-49. For more detail see his *Politika e Jashtme*, 901-920.

sphere and institutions.⁵⁸⁵ These, however, were symptoms of a much larger problem. First, Italy was an invading country and there was no reason why Albanians would be content under foreign rule. Second, Italy never developed a coherent program with respect to Albania. It intended to incorporate the country as an Italian province (akin to French Algeria) but presented it to the Albanians as a joint personal union, which it then administered as a formal colony. They continued to treat the Albanians as a people without history – passive Ottoman/Oriental subjects – believing fascism to be a noble and indispensable enterprise that brought a modern cultural and moral development to a backward people. As Jacomoni reported:

[Fascism was] called to work on the psychological background of a people who, after just 28 years since the termination of Turkish [sic] feudal rule, has not experienced the excesses that took place in other [European] countries as a result of the principles of corporate governance of 1789. The Party tends now to carry its work in accordance with the principles of [spiritual and material] elevation of the people and of the justice expressed by *Duce* that [caused] this people to spontaneously and enthusiastically salute [him] in 1939 as Liberator of Albania.⁵⁸⁶

Thus for Jacomoni:

The local element which has always lived within the ambit of an empire, except for the last 25 years is ready to lend itself to our imperial [vision]... [But] until the Albanian is convinced that he is treated in Italy as an inferior being, that he is despised and distrusted only because he is an Albanian; until he hears of Albania being spoken as colony intended for exploitation, there will be a tendency, especially in the smaller industrial and commercial interests, that will question the sincerity of our work of Italianization. Thus, the work of the Party intended to take root even in the best of the Albanian souls is destined to fail.⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸⁵ Fischer, *Albania at War*, 89-93.

⁵⁸⁶ "Jacomoni to Ciano," 31 August 1942, ASMAE, Gabinetto Albania, 1938-1945, Scaffale 13, Busta 107.

⁵⁸⁷ "Jacomoni to Ciano," 27 May 1941, ASMAE, Gabinetto Albania, 1938-1945, Scaffale 13, Busta 107.

Third, the Italians placed individual Albanians in power who enjoyed at best only limited prestige in their localities of birth but lacked national stature, popular backing and legitimacy. The lackluster Shefqet Vërlaci, for instance, was a poor choice for Prime Minister given his past as a member of the Popular Party in the early 1920s and his opposition to agrarian reform. He was replaced in December 1941 with Mustafa Kruja, who was an even more controversial choice given his reputation as an Italophile and physical absence from Albania for the past fifteen years. Even Kruja's dismissal in January 1943 did not constitute a revision of Italian policies in Albania. He was merely replaced with Eqrem Libohova, Zogu's former minister of court on Italian payroll.

By the second half of 1939, the Italian-Albanian honeymoon was coming to an end. Growing popular resentment and concerns with Italian maladministration and corruption, gradually contributed to a gradual recognition of Italian exploitative intentions. Initially, resistance was limited to spontaneous and non-violent outbursts of patriotic defiance to follow Italian orders, refusals to sing fascist song or render the fascist salute and the like. By June 1939 such spontaneous acts spilled over into larger demonstrations and strikes where students, teachers and workers took to the streets complaining about Italianization, rising number of Italian migrant workers and settlers, strict discipline in the work place, austere punitive laws for failure to comply with fascist norms, the extension of military jurisdiction in areas of social life, economy and etc.⁵⁸⁸ The disconnected nature of these protests led Jacomoni to

⁵⁸⁸ Instituti i Studimeve Marksiste-Leniniste. *Historia e Luftës Antifashiste Nacionalclirimtare e Popullit Shqiptar ne Katër Vëllime (April 1939-November 1944): Volume I: April 1939-December 1942* (Tiranë: 8 Nëntori, 1984), 162.

dismiss general resentment as a “murmur.” His response was to throw more cash into the Albanian economy.⁵⁸⁹

The demonstrations, however, continued. Particularly concerning for the Italians was the behavior of students and teachers, the one demographic group that could not be relied upon to be either as opportunistic or as indifferent as the majority of the population.⁵⁹⁰ On 28 November 1939, on the occasion of the 27th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, the communist groups of Korçë, Shkodër and Tiranë in collaboration with nationalists and Zogu supporters orchestrated a series of concurrent demonstrations in several major Albanian cities. The authorities reacted harshly and cracked down hard on the students and teachers. In Korçë, Tiranë and Shkodër local high schools and lyceums were closed, teachers and students were arrested, and personal files were opened on the detained individuals.⁵⁹¹ Among those arrested were Abaz Ermenji and Stavro Skëndi (the noted Albanian-American scholar) future leaders in the nationalist *Balli Kombëtar* organization, and several communists among whom was Enver Hoxha.⁵⁹² A number of these such as Ermenji and the vacillating émigré communist Lllazar Fundo were incarcerated at the internment camp in the island of Ventotene off the Lazian coast in the Tyrrhenian Sea.⁵⁹³ Enver Hoxha, on the other hand, was only fired from his teaching position at the Lyceum of Korçë. Thereafter, he rented a shop from the great landowner Ibrahim Biçakçiu in Tiranë selling tobacco products. This tobacco shop, “Flora,” subsequently

⁵⁸⁹ “Jacomoni to Ciano,” 26 February 1940, ASMAE, Gabinetto Albania: 1938-1945, Scaffale 13, Busta 107.

⁵⁹⁰ “Jacomoni to Ciano,” 26 February 1940, ASMAE, Gabinetto Albania: 1938-1945, Scaffale 13, Busta 107; Ciano, 12 April 1939; Alia, *Jeta Ime*, 32.

⁵⁹¹ AQSh, 1939, F. 160, D. 30, Fl. 2-7; AQSh, 1941, F. 158; D. 143, Fl. 1.

⁵⁹² AQSh, 1940, F. 161 D. 223, Fl. 41; AQSh, F. 161, D. 477, Fl. 1-20.

⁵⁹³ AQSh, 1940, F. 153, D. 31, Fl. 12-13; D. 31/9, Fl. 1-3.

became an important base for the communist underground, a node for the coordination of activities between the Korçë and Tiranë groups that ultimately culminated in the founding of the CPA in November 1941.⁵⁹⁴

Starting from January 1941 there were reports of increasing infiltration of armed bands across the border from Yugoslavia, composed of expatriate supporters of Zogu, clansmen on the British payroll, bands of armed deserters from Albanian units at the Greek front and returnees from internment camps.⁵⁹⁵ In addition, in March 1941 conflicting rumors reported also a surge of left wing émigré activists seeking to enter Albania via Italy or Yugoslavia.⁵⁹⁶ Initially, the authorities did not appear to be overly concerned but noted that lack of progress in the war against Greece had made the Albanians question not only the strength of the joint military but also the very notion of the joint union. Even the most ardent supporters of Italy opined that a political arrangement analogous to the British Dominions would have appeased the Albanian sentiments more realistically than the full-fledged annexation supported by Mussolini and Ciano. Yet now, when, a loss in the war against Greece appeared to be a foregone conclusion, Albanians feared that their territory would become a “theater of war” as it had been during the First World War.⁵⁹⁷ In central Albania, at the village of Pezë near Tiranë, a local strongman, Myslym Peza (1897-1984), formed a *çeta* and, after linking up with communist cells in Tiranë, declared war on Italy. Between March and June 1941 his seventy-men attacked Italian military outposts and small

⁵⁹⁴ Fevziu, *Enver Hoxha*, 57-58.

⁵⁹⁵ ASMAE, Gabinetto Albania, Scaffale 13, Busta 107, 24 January 1941; Fischer, *Albania at War*, 101-114; Milo, *Shqiptarët*, Vol. I., 181-209; Haxhi Lleshi, *Vite, Njerëz, Ngjarje: Kujtime* (Tiranë: Dituria, 1996), 27-63.

⁵⁹⁶ Jacomoni to Ciano, ASMAE, Gabinetto Albania, 1938-1945, Scaffale 13, Busta 107, 12 March 1941.

⁵⁹⁷ Jacomoni to Ciano, ASMAE, Gabinetto Albania, 1938-1945, Scaffale 13, Busta 107, 29 January 1941

convoys' disrupting communications by cutting telephone wires or destroying roads built at great cost.⁵⁹⁸ Also in central Albania, in the highlands of Elbasan and Martanesh, a prominent Bektashi Sufi leader, Mustafa Xhani, known also as Baba Faja of Martanesh, was able to rally members of his faith by emphasizing the anti-Islamic nature of Italian fascism and the dangers of Italian imperialism.⁵⁹⁹ Like Peza, he linked up with the communists rather than the more traditional nationalists. Up in north and northeastern Albania on the border with Yugoslavia other mixed left wing, monarchist and nationalist *çetas* became equally active. Yet these separate attempts, although operating in largely contiguous areas, also failed to become a cohesive movement. The only promising initiative saw communist representatives joining up with supporters of Zogu's monarchy and Gheg Muslim clansmen united in the British-sponsored United Front of Albanian Resistance in April 1941. The so-called UFAR crossed into Albania from Gjakovë, Kosovo, and found some initial support among Muslim clansmen. It failed however to attract wider popular backing among fellow Geg Catholic clans and the urban population of the western lowlands. Having achieved none of its aims, UFAR members dispersed.⁶⁰⁰

Until late 1941 these sporadic acts of organized violence failed to win broader support and developed only in those locales where resistance was aided by geography. Yet this too was to change with the founding of the CPA in November 1941 and *Balli Kombëtar* in November 1942.

⁵⁹⁸ Instituti i Studimeve Marksiste-Leniniste, *Historia e Luftës Antifashiste*, Vol. I., 195-201.

⁵⁹⁹ Fischer, *Albania at War*, 112.

⁶⁰⁰ Milo, *Shqiptarët*, Vol., I, 193; Owen Pearson, *Albania in the Twentieth Century: Albania in Occupation and War, From Fascism to Communism, 1940-1945* (London: Centre for Albanian Studies and I.B. Tauris, 2004), 138-139.

Founding the CPA, the Yugoslav Role and Wartime Rivals

Albanian associations had never coalesced into a unified body but collaboration in loose coalitions, as seen in Chapter 4, was often possible. The 1936 congress of the liberal opposition in Paris, the Moscow meeting and other individual initiatives, including initiatives under Comintern's Popular Front line, were the most visible attempts to manufacture a unity that ultimately remained elusive. The convocation in Paris of sixteen left wing societies and groups did agree on an umbrella Federation of Albanian Emigrants (*Federata e Shqiptarëve të Jashtëm*). FAE too proved a short-lived agreement. Following Germany's conquest of France in 1940, Albanian left wing activists in France were rounded up and extradited to Albania where Italy could keep an eye on their activities. Thus ended the émigré connection of the Albanian left-wing activists. In Albania, the quarrelsome divisions among the communist groups in Albania would continue until November 1941.⁶⁰¹

Already confronted with the new Italian-sponsored associational alignments and the founding of the Fascist Party of Albania, this direct threat to communist aspirations, had prompted the Korçë group to launch a fresh effort in the summer of 1939 to overcome ideological differences and unite all communist groups into a single party. One of its most distinguished members Miha Lako linked up in Paris with Sejfulla Malëshova, who, after the death of Ali Kelmendi in February 1939, had assumed the leadership of the Communist Representational Agency [CRA] there. The discussions reinstated the cell-base organizations originally abolished in 1937 but

⁶⁰¹ Koço Tashko, "Report on the Formation of Communist Groups in Albania," in AQSh. F. 14/APL, Unclassified File, Fl. 26-28; Alia, *Jeta Ime*, 32.

went no further.⁶⁰² Nonetheless, in spring of 1940, in Tiranë, the Korçë and Shkodër groups launched a second serious attempt since the ill-fated Dëshnica meeting of 1934. The new proposals, however, did not envision a merger but, as often in the past, put forward a loose association wherein each individual communist group preserved intact their political autonomy. The only joint administrative body agreed upon was the creation a Central Committee composed by an equal number of members from each group. Everything else, internal organization, recruitment, press and political line were to remain within the purview of each group. Predictably, this initiative also failed. According to Tashko, both Shkodër and the Youth groups regarded this as a hostile takeover by the more senior and better-organized Korçë group and thus a direct threat to their own political independence.⁶⁰³

Gradually, it became apparent to all that only an external communist party that enjoyed membership in the Comintern could break the deadlock. Considering wartime challenges and the general call for an antifascist resistance, Albanian communists considered the Comintern to be far more likely to pay attention to the Albanian question than it had in the past. In 1940, two of the most distinguished members of Shkodër group, Vasil Shanto and Qemal Stafa, sought to establish links with the clandestine Italian Communist Party, a prospect also favored by the Youth group. But they were unsuccessful. Similarly, following the German invasion of France, opportunities to link up with the Communist Representational Agency (CRA), and, through it, the French Communist Party, also ceased. A project to contact the Greek Communist Party did not gain sufficient backing especially since it

⁶⁰² Koço Tashko, "Report on the Formation of Communist Groups in Albania," in AQSh. F. 14/APL, Unclassified File, Fl. 30

⁶⁰³ Ibid.

was held to be insufficiently revolutionary, anti-Soviet and, at any rate, “tainted” by *Zjarri’s* Archeio-Marxist leanings.⁶⁰⁴ Failing in these initial attempts, Stafa and Shanto linked up with the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) with which they had had some limited connections since the mid-1930s. In the spring of 1940, they held several meetings in Ulcinj, Montenegro, with a CPY member Boško Strugar, which, although promising, did not amount to anything concrete. In Albania, the Yugoslav option encountered opposition from the Youth group, which still preferred the Italian option.⁶⁰⁵ Nonetheless, informal contacts with the CPY increased and by 1941 the Shkodër group along with Albanian-Kosovar communists, established links with the CPY’s Kosovo branch. An early plan to send Dušan Mugoša, a member of the district committee of the CPY for Kosovo, was a logical choice given Mugoša’s familiarity with local Albanians communists in Kosovo. It too came to naught because of strong objections raised by the Korçë group on grounds that they had no information on Mugoša.⁶⁰⁶

To allay the reservations displayed by the Korçë group both sides agreed to another meeting, which took place on 11 October in Vitomirica, a locality in the municipality of Pejë (Peć), Kosovo. The Albanian delegation consisted of Koço Tashko, Xhevdet Doda, both of the Korçë group and two CPY Albanian-Kosovar communists Fadil Hoxha and Elhami Nimani who had gotten their start in Albania but were not formally affiliated with any specific communist group there. Boro Vukmirović, Pavle Jovićević, Dušan Mugoša and the Kosovar-Albanian Ali Shukriu,

⁶⁰⁴ Frashëri, *Historia e Lëvizjes*, 209; Milo, *Shqiptarët*, Vol. I., 231.

⁶⁰⁵ Koço Tashko, “Report on the Formation of Communist Groups in Albania,” in AQSh. F. 14/APL, Unclassified Document, Fl. 57.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

all members of the CPY District Committee for Kosovo, stood for the Yugoslav side. Although this was only an informal exploratory meeting, the discussions were surprisingly positive. By all accounts the Yugoslavs were impressed with the Albanian delegates, in particular with Koço Tashko whom they considered an activist “tired of [the] cabal-like mentality” of the Albanian groups.⁶⁰⁷ In the meeting, Tashko admitted to the Yugoslavs that the Albanian failures in founding the CPA could be overcome only if the current leaders of each individual group were prohibited from contesting the leadership position of the CPA. For him, these leaders had become irreparably tainted by their ambitions for power and enjoyed no cross-group respect. Instead, Tashko proposed to identify and elevate new, younger and more promising members focusing the talent search especially on those who possessed sufficient intellectual background and a strong commitment for the struggle ahead. Tashko’s plan relied heavily on presenting this strategy as a Yugoslav proposal, lest the Albanian left suffered yet another failed effort to founding a party. The fact that the CPY would stand and speak in this planned meeting for the Comintern would most certainly prohibit the manifestation of personal ambitions that had proven detrimental in the past. Taking himself out of the race for the leadership caused Tashko little discomfort since the main objective was to found a party. The only position that he coveted was to remain the Comintern’s official envoy in Albania, a role in which he had served since 1937. As he would come to find out, it was, however, a title that held no political significance.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰⁷ Milo, *Shqiptarët*, Vol. I., 232.

⁶⁰⁸ “Koço Tashko Report to the Comintern,” 1942, AQSh, F. 14/APL, D. 5, Fl. 1-2.

Encouraged, the Albanian delegation welcomed CPY representatives in Albania, one of whom was Mugoša. The second representative, expected to be Shukriu, would have had to be vetted first by the CC of CPY. Soon thereafter random chance intervened. In May 1941 the German military authorities in Serbia had arrested in Raška Miladin Popović, the political commissar of the CPY for Kosovo, and sent him to the Peqin internment camp near Elbasan, Albania. The CPY appealed to the Albanian communists to free Popović, in what was probably a test for the Albanians' commitment. In turn, the Albanian communists entrusted the task to Mustafa Gjinishi, a native of Peqin and the son of Adem Gjinishi, the senator in Fan Noli's Opposition Party assassinated on the night of the 1923 elections.⁶⁰⁹ Gjinishi freed Popović on 11 October 1941 and hid him at a safe house in Tiranë. After the CPY learned of the successful rescue it was decided that Popović, and not Shukriu, be the second CPY representative in Albania.

With the apparent support of a senior communist party that simultaneously enjoyed membership in the Comintern, the Albanian communist groups launched a new attempt in early November 1941 to reconcile individual groups differences and form the CPA. The meeting was held between 8 and 14 November in Tiranë. In attendance were five members of the Korçë group, among who Koço Tashko who, in accordance to his plan, had brought along his protégé Enver Hoxha, five members of the Shkodër group, among whom Shanto and Stafa and four members of the Youth

⁶⁰⁹ See Chapter 3. Gjinishi (1910-1944) was a graduate of the American vocational high school in Tiranë and active in the student left, the Fier abortive uprising of 1935 and briefly in in the British-sponsored UFAR episode mentioned above. Considered to be “witty, highly intelligent and incorruptibly honest ... commanding the affection and respect of all his countrymen of whatever political complexion,” politically, Gjinishi tended more toward social democracy rather than communism. See Milo, *Shqiptarët*, Vol. I., 234; Elsie, *Biographical Dictionary*, 173.

group. Present also were Mugoša and Popović. The reconstruction of what exactly took place is difficult because no written record survived the war. The minutes of the meeting were apparently kept by Qemal Stafa but he was killed on 5 May 1942 and his papers were seized. Three weeks later, on 25 May, the Italian military police, Carabinieri, raided the house where the November 1941 meeting was held and the owner of the house under torture revealed two more communist safe houses where the Carabinieri found a treasure trove of illegal materials, an underground printing press and the complete minutes of the founding meeting, hand-written in three notebooks. None however survive in either the Albanian or Italian archives.⁶¹⁰ Only a brief four-page summary of these proceedings survives to help us reconstruct what went on during the meeting.⁶¹¹

Miladin Popović, who spoke Albanian fluently, made the opening statement. After giving a lengthy presentation about the international situation, Popović, clearly influenced by Tashko's earlier revelations, attributed the failure to form a "united and monolithic Party" to "well-meaning activists" who nonetheless "suffered from the disease of ambition, opportunism and factionalism." He urged the "elimination" of such vices and the expulsion of all vacillating or unproductive "comrades."⁶¹² The Party, he explained, must systematically organize and prepare for the "bolshhevization" of its internal structures, members and the masses.⁶¹³ As a guest, however, Popović did not have any real power to lead the discussions. As a result, to avoid expected dissensions especially by those who still considered allying with the

⁶¹⁰ For more detail Milo, *Shqiptarët*, 242-243

⁶¹¹ "Pro-Memoria," Tiranë, 15 June 1942, AQSh, F. 153, Unclassified Document, Fl. 1- 4.

⁶¹² "Proclamation of Miladin Popović to the Albanian Communists," Tiranë, 8 November 1941, AQSh, F. 14/APL, D. 2, Fl. 1-3.

⁶¹³ Ibid.

CPY as unwise he simply went on to describe the central tenets of democratic centralism. He urged the Albanians to uphold majority rule when a common decision was reached. He also urged the formation of a Central Committee staffed with members of each group and warned that dissent over leadership positions would simply hinder progress without helping individual ambitions.

The debates that followed were heated. For the most part the discussion focused on establishing a blueprint for future activities, either by the legal measures favored by the Korçë group since 1937 while preparing for insurrectionary activities or by going immediately on the offensive as the Yugoslavs suggested. But while Popović's opening speech and definitions of revolutionary activities clearly set the tone for the debates, the Yugoslavs were unable manufacture unity among the delegates of each group present in the meeting. One particularly vexing issue was how to ensure a normative agreement on what did constitute an appropriate level of ideological and revolutionary commitment. This meant that the delegates would have to engage in self-criticism of past activities so as to atone for the failure of founding a party in the past. Since personal reputations were at stake, this was bitter pill for many to swallow. To break the deadlock, Enver Hoxha, who had no past sins to expiate, proposed to defer to Popović the honor of arbitrating working definitions that would have been legally binding and enforceable by all Albanian communist groups.⁶¹⁴ Yet because the CPY represented the Comintern in the meeting, neither Popović nor Mugoša enjoyed a mandate to lead the proceedings. Hoxha's proposal was vehemently rejected by a majority of the participants.

⁶¹⁴ "Pro-Memoria," Tiranë, 15 June 1942, AQSh, F. 153, Unclassified Document, Fl. 1 – 4. Frashëri argues that Hoxha gave unreserved support to the Yugoslavs backing their every suggestion or proposed theses. See, Frashëri, *Historia e Lëvizjes*, 231.

In the event, the meeting concluded successfully on 14 November, and the CPA was at long last established. The meeting produced two documents, a Resolution and a Proclamation. The Resolution was an address to all communist cells in Albania. It gave a brief description of the history of the Albanian left since KONARE and then focused on the role of the CPA within the context of the Second World War. It denounced “deviationism,” “factionalism,” opportunism, apathy, personal ambitions, absence of discipline and total commitment. In addition, the CPA unilaterally “aligned” Albania with the “antifascist” coalition of Allied forces, expressed the desire to join the Comintern and declared uncompromising war to Italy and its domestic collaborators.⁶¹⁵ The proclamation, on the other hand, was a somewhat amended carbon copy of the Resolution announcing to the Albanian people the formation of the CPA as the leading resistance movement in Albania.

Another important outcome was the establishment of a Provisional Central Committee (PCC). Since past experiences had demonstrated the Albanian inability to overcome individual ambitions for the sake of a common goal, the task of writing up instructions was entrusted to Popović, who did so in collaboration with Stafa and Shanto for the Shkodër group and Hoxha for the Korçë group. Popović was clearly not an appropriate choice since he had been among the Albanians only for less than two months and did not know any of the Albanians. Yet, this ignorance made him an ideal choice for as a member of the CPY he could never covet for himself an official position within the CPA. Sadik Premte and Anastas Lula, leaders in the Youth group, were disliked and immediately rejected. Popović’s savior, Mustafa Gjinishi, was too

⁶¹⁵ “Resolution of the Communist Party of Albania,” November 1941, AQSh, F. 14/APL, D. 1, Fl. 1-10.

junior and distrusted for his liberal convictions. At 21 years old, Qemal Stafa was even younger and regarded as a starry-eyed idealist. Koçi Xoxe, the future Defense Minister and CPY's strong man in the CPA, was considered open and approachable but with severely limited intellectual capacities insufficient for a leadership position. Tashko, despite the good impression that he made earlier on the Yugoslavs was considered so knowledgeable of Marxism-Leninism that it was feared that he would incur the envy of his colleagues who possessed none of his sophistication. At any rate, by his own plan, Tashko had eliminated himself from the competition. Enver Hoxha, too, was regarded as "a man of unstable character, apathetic, lazy, indecisive, and insecure."⁶¹⁶ Yet, Popović's options were limited for in Albania, these men were the most identifiable individuals incorporating in varying degrees seniority, intellectual abilities, working class credentials and ideological commitment. The rest of the members were of worker and peasant stock. Although committed, they possessed little formal training or ideological discipline to lead an underground insurrection with mass mobilizing ambitions. Among the former leaders of the communist movements in emigration and the original groups in Albania, most were either dead or had abandoned the movement altogether. The remaining older members of the political left were quickly labeled as Trotskyists or sidelined into secondary functions.⁶¹⁷ In the absence of clear choices, the PCC consisted exclusively of members of Shkodër and Korçë groups, much to the chagrin of the Youth group, which received no nominations. No permanent positions were assigned but three individuals were given some necessary administrative functions: Gjin Marku,

⁶¹⁶ Milo, *Shqiptarët*, Vol. I., 236.

⁶¹⁷ "Resolution of the Communist Party of Albania," November 1941, AQSh, F. 14/APL, D. 1, Fl. 9.

(Shkodër) became responsible for the organization of combat units, Enver Hoxha (Korçë) for finance and Qemal Stafa (Shkodër) for the youth branch of the CPA. Other functions distributed to other activists that included the Kosovar-Albanian Ramadan Çitaku for the political press, Tuk Jakova and Koçi Xoxe as political secretaries and Kristo Themelko for military affairs.⁶¹⁸ Of these, Hoxha was the eldest.

From all this it is apparent that Tashko's strategy of September 1941 in employing the Yugoslavs was only partly successful. It succeeded in founding a party but could not guarantee its internal cohesion. For a start, the absence of past connections with the CPY discouraged respect for the Yugoslav emissaries. The implementation of their proposals depended on whether the Albanians considered them worthy in the first place and, if agreed upon, how far-reaching they wanted the proposed changes to be. Second, the CPA was not a formal adherence of three individual groups, Korçë, Shkodër and Youth groups as held commonly in the existing Western and even the pre-1989 Albanian historiography, but rather of an organization formed by willing individual members within these groups who, frustrated by the failures of the past, decided that the matter could be no longer postponed. Indeed, CPA's own pronouncements from April 1942 appeared to confirm the founding of the party by individuals "least affected by the virus of factionalism."⁶¹⁹ Concomitant to the new line, the CPA set to work to establish "a united and monolithic" party by demolishing the original groups and folding their support networks into its own incipient structures. The purges that ensued were

⁶¹⁸ Milo, *Shqiptarët*, Vol. I., 250.

⁶¹⁹ "Konsulta e Parë e Partisë," April 1942, AQSh, 14/APL, D. 4/1, Fl. 1.

thorough and uncompromising. All who did not agree with the new line were purged whereas those who had reservations against it, but nonetheless supported it, were sidelined. Particularly vicious were the struggles with the Youth and *Zjarri* groups. Among those expelled was also a young Kristo Frashëri (born 1920) member of the Youth group who went on, however, to have a distinguished career as one of Albania's preeminent historians. In this contentious atmosphere Enver Hoxha distinguished himself for the energy and decisiveness that the Yugoslavs had seriously underestimated. According to Mugoša:

In the settling of scores with the factionalists, especially with Lulo and Premte in Tiranë where they enjoyed much backing, Hoxha indefatigably travelled from one organization to the next, working on strengthening party structures against the absurdities of factionalisms. A great orator ... who wrote fast and nimbly... giving his outmost and lending his personal example [to others].⁶²⁰

Hoxha's steady rise within the Party's bureaucracy followed. In February 1941 he was entrusted with the post of the political secretary of the district committee of the CPA for Tiranë. Following Stafa's death on 5 May and with all other PCC members fanned out in other districts of the country, the leadership of the CPA was temporarily left in the hands of Hoxha, Popović and Mugoša. The trio continued to undermine the social cohesion of the prewar Youth and *Zjarri* groups by chipping away at their memberships' logistical and network support.

So intense was the reorganization drive into the new CPA that the PCC became inundated with self-criticisms coming in either on individual or collective basis.⁶²¹ For Tashko, the Yugoslav influence had suddenly moved the CPA too far to

⁶²⁰ Mugoša quoted in Milo, *Shqiptarët*, Vol. I., 256.

⁶²¹ See for an example, "Report of the District Party Committee of Gjirokastër to the Central Committee," Gjirokastër, 14 November 1942, AQSh, F. 14/APL, D. 6, Fl. 1-5.

the left and its newfound energy was threatening to alienate broader support base. He wrote:

The country's economic problems are not studied and remain unknown. Our revolutionary and anti-imperialist struggle, which is in essence agrarian, receives no attention. Not a single word ...[about]... the struggle against landlordism, feudalism, and foreign interventions in Albania. We do not mentioned anything about the Durrës Government [1919-20] of which Mustafa Kruja was a member and which was the precursor of the current government led by him; not a word about his struggle against the Congress of Lushnjë [1920] or about the battle for Vlorë as the precursor of the national struggle we are preparing today. We have said nothing about [Avni Rustemi's] *Bashkimi*, its ties with the peasant masses, its sympathy for the Soviet Union; the [social] origins of the party, its membership or struggle, the demonstrations of 7 April 1939 or the Italian preparations to invade the country through its Albanian agents. As a result of all this, our party comrades have become "specialists" of the international situation and neophytes of our own revolutionary history! Not surprisingly, propaganda [of the collaborationist puppet government] that we are agents of foreign powers [i.e. Serbia and Soviet Bolshevism] is gaining in credibility!⁶²²

Indeed, the initial proclamations of the CPA and surviving tracts issued by the district committee of Korçë in early 1942 show that Tashko's early assessment was correct.

These tracts consist of lengthy praise of Soviet Union, Stalin and efforts of "the freedom-loving peoples of Europe" but contained imprecise generalizations about Albania and random threats against wood-be "traitors."⁶²³ In his reports to the Comintern, Tashko denounced the Yugoslav emissaries, in particular Miladin Popović, and their superior attitude toward the Albanians. For him, Popović lacked skill in conspiratorial work and was nervous, careless and indifferent to the point that he needlessly endangered the wellbeing of the Albanian comrades and safe houses that had offered him shelter. What was more, Popović was a tiresome hypochondriac. He was also unapproachable while refusing to revisit policies that did not work and

⁶²² "Koço Tashko Report to the Comintern," 1942, AQSh, F. 14/APL, D. 5, Fl. 4.

⁶²³ "Tracts of the District Committee of Korçë," Korçë, July-August 1942, AQSh, F. 20/APL, D 27, Fl. 1-12.

engage in self-criticism because this, he claimed, “caused a decline in prestige.”⁶²⁴ “Without this,” Tashko exasperated, “how are we to divine what lies in Miladin’s mind!”⁶²⁵ More importantly, Tashko charged that Popović’s influence was alienating the leadership from its cadres and the masses thus, limiting recruitment options. An early example of his influence on Hoxha were the latter’s assertions that:

We shall hit hard even the Albanian soldiers [and] every collaborator who seeks to crush our struggle. This does not mean that we should do so tomorrow because it is easier to do so. After the formation of our *çetas* we shall attack and the enemy will respond. From one punitive measure to the next, naturally our work will suffer and [a new] situation will develop. There will come the day when the enemy will use [Albanian] soldiers and police against us and we will answer. Events will bring this about and we will declare “with us or against us.”⁶²⁶

This Yugoslav-inspired preview of Red Terror was, at this juncture, clearly a step too far for the more moderate and inexperienced CPA members who argued that a *modus vivendi* with the nationalists and all other embryonic proto-resistance groups had to be found. For this reason a conference was held in Pezë in the fall of 1942.

This meeting presented considerable problems because, in contrast to the communists, neither did the nationalists constitute a compact ideological block nor was “nationalism” readily identifiable as a political ideology. Historian Paskal Milo has identified four separate nationalist strands 1) the ideological radical right that constituted Albanian fascism, 2) the former Zogu émigré opposition; that is, former members of informal associations of the Ottoman and immediate post-Ottoman period whose political outlook, as described in the previous chapter, included a wide spectrum of conservative, progressive, monarchist and social-democrat views, 3)

⁶²⁴ “Koço Tashko Report to the Comintern,” 1942, AQSh, F. 14/APL, D. 5, Fl. 8 and in passim.

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

⁶²⁶ Ibid., 3

traditional rural strongmen such as clan and tribal leaders, village elders and the like and 4) an eclectic mix of the last two categories.⁶²⁷ Any attempt to link up with the nationalists was therefore sure to raise problems for which there was no ready solution. One problem was the Kosovo issue, which the nationalists were sure to bring up and which the communists, for ideological and tactical reasons, sought to avoid. From an ideological perspective, the communist struggle was internationalist in nature and thus, in principle, incompatible with nationalism. In contrast to their nationalist opposition, the CPA conceived the war in class terms waged simultaneously against international imperialism (i.e. the Axis) and the national bourgeoisie and landowners. In this sense, nationalist alignments of Kosovars with or versus Albanian communists were nonsensical since the struggle was conceived as a joint effort under a global communist international movement. From a tactical perspective, Kosovo already possessed its own party structures represented within the CPY and thus there was no practical reason why it would ally with the CPA especially since the latter was too weak, too young and too inexperienced. Furthermore, the CPA could not realistically hope to have a significant influence in Kosovo without securing a support base within Albania proper and was, at any rate, itself reliant of Yugoslav organizational experience. Challenging the CPY on the national issue made therefore no practical or ideological sense. In addition, as we shall see below, there is nothing to suggest that the communists were less patriotic than those who called themselves nationalists.

Yet, avoiding this issue paved the way for the penetration of Axis collaborationist propaganda in Kosovo. Particularly active was Mustafa Kruja, who

⁶²⁷ Milo, *Shqiptarët*, 280

after being installed as Prime Minister in December 1941 saw Kosovo as a valuable pool of available recruits for the Albanian militia. The initial collaboration of četnik leaders in Yugoslavia like Kosta Pećanac and Draža Mihailović with the CPY gave Kruja wide berth to taint the CPA by association, not only as a Serbian creation, but also as the servant of Great Serbian foreign policy in Albania. Given the Kosovar Albanians' struggle with the četnik bands in the first Yugoslavia and the fact that most of Kosovo was now joined with Albania under Axis auspices, Kruja's propaganda was successful.⁶²⁸

For his part, Miladin Popović strongly objected to a conference with the nationalists, arguing; first, that Pezë was an unsecure location given its close proximity to the capital; second, that the CPA should instead focus its efforts in consolidating its internal structures, forming a General Staff for its own combat units, providing these units with uniforms and insignia, a new flag and political commissars; and third, that it was difficult for underground movements and illegal parties to hold conferences.⁶²⁹ The CPA, still influenced by the popular front policies, rejected these formulations since the main issue was to ensure the widest participation possible. It is, however, important to note that Popović's recommendations were not rejected as unwise but rather as premature. At this time the CPA had neither sufficient numbers to form regular combat units nor ideologically prepared cadres to exert political control over these units.⁶³⁰ In the event, the CPA compromised and it was

⁶²⁸ Ivo Banac. *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1984) 291-306; Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945: Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); 150-156; Muhamet Shartri, *Kosova ne Luftën e Dytë Botërore, 1941-1845* (Tiranë: Toena, 1997); Milo, *Shqiptarët*, Vol. I., 411-422.

⁶²⁹ "Popović to Tashko," September 1942, AQSh, F. 14/APL, D. 5, Fl. 9-20.

⁶³⁰ "Koço Tashko Report to the Comintern," 1942, AQSh, F. 14/APL, D. 5, Fl. 5.

agreed that consolidation of resistance structures would be presented as part of the conference's agenda. Many communist leaders, in particular Koço Tashko, were very concerned about Popović's presence at the conference lest it substantiate rival propaganda claims that the CPA was a Yugoslav creation.⁶³¹ A solution was found when the CPA "barred" Popović from participating as a delegate but invited him to attend as an observer.

The conference began its sessions on 16 September 1942 on a broad participatory basis, although turnout was not very high. Only about 17-18 delegates convened at Peza's house though a few others also came and went, sitting in only for part of the meetings. Of these delegates only the CPA represented a structured organization attending as a formal delegation with seven members.⁶³² The rest of the delegates represented a variety of different nationalist outlooks at odds with one another.⁶³³ It is unclear how hotly debated the sessions of the conference really were, but the agenda focused on four main points, the domestic and international political situation, the formation of national-liberation councils, the mobilization of youth and lastly forming a representative body in charge of writing the resolution of the conference. Other problems discussed also included the sensitive issue of Albanian-inhabited territories in Yugoslavia and Greece, the formation of resistance units and symbols, and the idea of a General Staff.⁶³⁴

The proceedings of the conference, as recalled by Nexhmije Xhuglini, Enver Hoxha's future spouse, show the nationalists' anxieties not only with communism but

⁶³¹ Ibid.

⁶³² See Nexhmije Hoxha, *Jeta Ime me Enverin: Kujtime* (Tiranë: Lira, 1998), 75-85.

⁶³³ Ibid., 70-75 and in passim.

⁶³⁴ Ibid.

also with the CPA's more structured organization. The nationalists refused in principle to adopt the communist symbol of the five-pointed star for their headgear and for the national flag, the designation of combat units as "partisan," and the formation of a General Staff as tantamount to accepting the CPA's leadership. The refusal on the last point would later condemn the nationalists to retain unchanged the nationalist tradition of informal band (or *çeta*) structure that first emerged during the late Ottoman period, thus severely hampering the consolidation of their resistance. Except for these points, all in attendance were in basic agreement about the necessity for a joint struggle in keeping with all earlier efforts to establish a popular front. Eventually all parties reached an agreement to enter into a loose association for a common resistance, which was formally named the National Liberation Front (NLF). The resolution of the conference shows that the CPA made significant compromises and tactically scaled back on Marxist rhetoric. It selected a Provisional General Council to lead the NLF headed by Kamber Qafmolla, a former military officer during Zogu's regime. Lesser ranks of two vice-chairmen, members and secretaries were filled by an equal number of nationalists and communists. Furthermore, the CPA dropped the term "antifascist" as identification for the regional councils and conceded on the issue of the symbols. Whereas CPA-led units kept the star all other voluntary territorial units adopted a badge representing the national flag.⁶³⁵

Particularly important for the growth and organization of a successful resistance movement was the institution of regional councils for the occupied and "liberated" territories; the latter category referring to rural areas outside direct Italian control. Although patterned after previous forms of social organization that first

⁶³⁵ "Resolution of the Conference of Pezë," Pezë, September 1942, AQSh, F. 40/APL, D. 2, Fl. 11.

emerged with CUP branches and committees and with the NDCs (1918-1920), these councils promised to become far more elaborate and structured agencies of mass mobilization. Under prevailing wartime conditions, the functions of these two seemingly separate categories were blurred and often intersected. The regional councils in the occupied territories, were considered military institutions in charge of popular mobilization and recruitment, organizing logistics and securing foodstuffs for the fighting units, storing weapons and munitions, sabotaging the enemy's rear, logistics lines of communication and "weeding out" fifth columnists. The councils in the liberated areas continued to fulfill all functions mentioned above but expanded their scope to serve also as informal institutions of an embryonic national government. They set about erecting informal schools to combat illiteracy, easing the economic burden of the peasantry by abolishing moneylending, protecting agrarian land, produce and peasants from rapacious landlords, moneylenders, speculators and summary Italian requisitions; fostering rudimentary finance and trade, abolishing or limiting to largest extent possible blood feuds and keeping law and order.⁶³⁶

The Conference of Pezë had significant effects, both practical and moral. On the one hand, it was a reiteration of Albanian unity, which throughout recent history had been possible only as a result of external pressures from the Hamidian period, through the CUP regime and on to the Congress of Lushnjë and battle for Vlorë in 1920. On the other hand, it served as a blueprint with which to replace the haphazard, sporadic and disorganized resistance that had hitherto taken place. But the long-term legacy of conference portended also divisions. By Hoxha's own admission, for the CPA, "it was an improvised affair" of political neophytes who, while conscious of

⁶³⁶ Ibid., 11-12

political objectives, did not know how to generate and organize public support.⁶³⁷ It failed to attract the support of leading nationalist figures, many of whom, like Mithat Frashëri (honorary chairman of the conference) or Ali Këlcyra, still commanded widespread national prestige and respect. The apparent, but at this stage, still unachieved consolidation of the CPA as a political organization, disputes over ideology and concerns over the leadership of the NLF prompted these nationalists to reject association with the CPA. Yet whatever its failings, the CPA clearly enjoyed some momentum and succeeded in rallying a large number of lesser nationalists to its cause, such as Myslym Peza, Haxhi Lleshi and the Bektashi cleric Mustafa Xhani. The CPA possessed better resources and had the support of active guerilla cells dispersed into areas that reflected the pre-CPA geographic distribution of individual communist groups and their urban networks, the youth, students, teachers, workers, artisans, apprentices and serving staff in hotels and restaurants.⁶³⁸ Pre-1989 communist historiography provides some figures. For instance, in the first half of 1942 communist networks included seven cells totaling 40 individuals in Tiranë, six cells in Korçë, four cells in Shkodër, two cells in Vlorë and Elbasan respectively and one cell in Durrës. By the second half on 1942, these cadre cells had expanded their support networks in rural areas as well, which, in turn, later became the nuclei for the future councils that were established after the conference of Pezë. By early fall 1942 the county of Korçë alone counted twenty-one cells in both urban and rural areas.⁶³⁹

⁶³⁷ See Enver Hoxha's opening speech in the Second Plenum of the CPA in Ndreçi Plasari and Luan Malltezi eds., *Politikë Antikombëtare e Enver Hoxhës: Plenumi i 2të i KQ të PKSh, Berat, 23-27 Nëntor 1944: Dokumente* (Tiranë: Eurorilindja, 1996), 16-17.

⁶³⁸ "Koço Tashko Report to the Comintern," 1942, AQSh, F. 14/APL, D. 5, Fl. 5.

⁶³⁹ Instituti i Studimeve Marksiste-Leniniste. *Historia e Luftës Antifashiste Nacionalclirimtare e Popullit Shqiptar ne Katër Vëllime (April 1939-November 1944): Volume II: January 1942-December 1942* (Tiranë: 8 Nëntori), 283.

According to the same sources, by the turn of 1943, the safe houses available to the communists in the counties of Korçë and Vlorë, increased to approximately 150 and 300 respectively.⁶⁴⁰ Although popular loyalties cannot be easily construed and these figures should be treated with careful reservations, CPA-led partisan units experienced a steady rise after the Conference of Pezë. No less than sixteen new fighting units were created in its wake operating in the southern, central and eastern parts of the country. By the end of 1942, communist-led units alone counted approximately 2,000 partisans.

The CPA was also successful on the international stage. On 16 December of 1942 it scored an important political victory when it finally obtained official recognition and membership in the Comintern. The decision to notify the Comintern had been reached since the early days following the party's founding but since the Albanians had no formal links it fell to the CPY to act as an intermediary agency. In April 1942 Dušan Mugoša, accompanied briefly by CPA founding member Vasil Shanto, had set out for Glamoč in Bosnia-Herzegovina where the CPY General Staff was located at the time.⁶⁴¹ In September, Tito obtained the Comintern's positive reply and in December Mugoša returned to Albania accompanied by two other CPY envoys, Blažo Jovanović and Vojo Todorović, bringing along news of the recognition and Comintern directives, authored however by Tito. The implementation of these directives would have to wait until March 1943 when the CPA convened its first national congress in Labinot.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid., 285.

⁶⁴¹ Enver Hoxha, *Titistët* (Tiranë: Shtëpia Botuese "8 Nëntori," 1982), 23; Milo, *Shqiptarët*, Vol. I., 308-309.

In contrast, the disaffected nationalists had little to show for themselves. Halim Begeja, the representative of the Nationalist Youth, admitted the failure of leading nationalists to initiate to organized forms of action.⁶⁴² Their departure from the NLF enabled the CPA to shape the NLF into what Kristo Frashëri has recently described “a nationalist body with a communist spine.”⁶⁴³ In November 1942 these disaffected nationalists formed *Balli Kombëtar*, an organization intended to function as an alternative to the CPA’s NLF.

Balli Kombëtar and the Failure of Unified Resistance

Balli Kombëtar has been routinely described in Western historiography as a front, in part because of a mistranslation of the term *Balli* itself, which can alternatively mean front, forehead, façade, avant-garde etc. This has led to the assumption that, as a front, *Balli* was a political organization with sufficiently advanced command and control central structures that could provide a political alternative to the NLF.⁶⁴⁴ Yet the framers used the term *Balli* loosely to mean as “forehead” or “avant-garde,” a neologism coined to signify the elevated status of a broad national elite that enjoyed, by virtue of its collective age and long political experience since the late Ottoman period, a moral primacy and should, on those grounds, be afforded a dominant position in the affairs of state and community:

Nationalism raises its voice and this voice must echo deeply in the heart of every Albanian. We say “every Albanian” because our Nationalism is not a party. It is not an organization. It is the gathering of all our Albanian Nation; it is the [unspoken] connection of our Albanian Race, of all the people that

⁶⁴² Hoxha, *Jeta Ime*, 80.

⁶⁴³ Frashëri, *Balli Kombëtar*, 53.

⁶⁴⁴ Fischer, *Albania at War*, 132-135.

speak the Albanian language. This race, this nation, this people is bound together in brotherly ties, everyone tethered to one another.⁶⁴⁵

Balli's assumption that nationalism was a sufficiently potent ideology for mass mobilization proved detrimental to its political program. From the start, *Balli* diluted its ranks by imposing no ideological or political filter for its recruits. Its membership consisted of the nationalist elite of past associations, members of Kruja's collaborationist government, large landowners, businessmen and even a large number of disenchanted communists that either did not accept the authority of the CPA or were purged from it in early-mid 1942.

Similarly, *Balli's* program was politically ambivalent and even contradictory given its social composition. For a start, even former members have admitted that confrontation with the Italians was not a primary objective and indeed its leadership did not make any official commitments to attack the Axis.⁶⁴⁶ In addition, *Balli's* recruitment methods made its political commitments impractical. Articles 4, 7, and 8 of its official program, the Decalogue (or the Ten Commandments) stressed an uncompromising struggle against “feudalism” and “tainted anti-patriots, traitors, spies, turncoats, speculators, moneylenders”⁶⁴⁷ and the like, while at the same time its leadership consisted, in part, by the same landowners that had opposed agrarian reforms in the past and officials of collaborationist Kruja government who had endorsed requisition warrants, authorized punitive expeditions and signed internment orders.⁶⁴⁸ Similarly, *Balli's* expressed goal of redrawing Albania's borders to include Kosovo and the other territories in Yugoslavia and Greece was already an Italian-

⁶⁴⁵ “Albanian Nationalism: Balli Kombëtar,” 1943, AQSh, F. 270/APL, D. 11, Fl. 3.

⁶⁴⁶ Frashëri, *Balli Kombëtar*, 68. See also below.

⁶⁴⁷ “The Decalogue of Balli Kombëtar,” March 1943, AQSh, F. 270/APL, D. 11, Fl. 4.

⁶⁴⁸ Frashëri, *Balli Kombëtar*, 70.

donated political reality; a fact which threatened to put that association on the side of the Axis rather than the “antifascist” Allies. After the Second World War, exiled former *Balli* members distanced themselves from the Decalogue stating that the influence of that program had been “disconcerting, defeatist, divisive and a punch-like shock to [the organization’s] prestige.”⁶⁴⁹ One such leader, Isuf Luzaj, went further when stating that *Balli*’s policies had always been “false and indecisive. In the two years and three months of war against Italy, the Central Committee never issued any orders or directives [to fight].”⁶⁵⁰

Luzaj’s indictment suggests an examination of *Balli*’s internal social and political composition. Recently, Kristo Frashëri has written that *Balli*’s core consisted of two entirely different factions in terms of their social and political experience.⁶⁵¹ The first group was the older generation of social activists mentioned above. Steeped in the experience of civic national associations that first emerged during the late Ottoman period, these men first created and were heirs to a political legacy that originally contended for greater national empowerment within a reformed multinational state. As members of a liberal intelligentsia and middle-upper class landowning and merchant elite, their strength lay in the manipulation of politics through legal processes not through radical demands for war and revolution. Now in their fifties and sixties, they were unlikely to take up arms and live a guerilla life of

⁶⁴⁹ Faik Quku, *Qëndresa Shqiptare Gjatë Luftës së Dytë Botërore: 1941-1944*, vol. 2 (Tiranë: Ilar, 2006), 137.

⁶⁵⁰ Isuf Luzaj, *Filozofia e Bukurisë: Pjesë Ditaresh, Ese dhe Rrëfime për Vetveten* (Tiranë: OMBRA GVG, 2009), 92.

⁶⁵¹ Frashëri, *Balli Kombëtar*, 70. Frashëri distinguishes these groups only in terms of a generational gap and commitment to active combat without exploring their respective social composition and political legacies. Typical representatives of this group included Mithat Frashëri, Thoma Orollogaj, Hasan Dosti and Ali Këlcyra.

constant privations in the mountains, especially since most had much prestige, properties and assets to lose. This had not been their experience anyway.

The second group represented a much more militant class of younger activists who had more in common with the equally militant CPA than with the older generation that led *Balli*. Many of these men, born in the early 1900s, were anti-monarchist republicans, progressive and democrat young intellectuals, civil servants, former officers and former members of the now defunct interwar émigré associations; the KONARE and its offshoots, the CNL and the NU. In contrast to *Balli's* ageing leadership, they argued that the CPA's growing momentum could be countered only through decisive action against the common enemy and not through empty rhetoric, negotiations or backroom deals. In addition, the deterioration of relations between the communist groups after November 1941 because of Yugoslav interference and Enver Hoxha's increasingly radical "with us or against us" formula led many members of the *Zjarri* and Youth groups to abandon communism and join *Balli* instead. This younger faction brought into *Balli* a radical attitude that characterized their former communist activism. Considering nationalism incompatible with fascism, rejected the fulfillment of Albanian national ambitions by Italian proxy. Consequently they formed their own units, Hysni Lepenica and Skënder Muço (both former communist members of the *Zjarri* group) in Vlorë, Luzaj in Dukat, Abaz Ermenji in Skrapar and Safet Butka in Kolonjë.⁶⁵²

The working relationship between these two factions was rarely constructive. While the older generation dictated policy in *Balli's* Central Committee, the younger

⁶⁵² Frashëri, *Historia e Lëvizjes*, 65-67.

faction dominated the association's military arm.⁶⁵³ The latter acted independently and often contravened their political leadership, but it was thanks to the actions of these energetic young leaders that *Balli* briefly enjoyed a reputation as a resistance group prior to its collaboration with the Germans after October 1943. The death of Lepenica and Butka in September 1943 and Muço in the summer of 1944, weakened the political leverage of *Balli's* younger militant faction, as a result of which, the older generation monopolized now the political process. By then it was too late.

Indeed, *Balli's* indecisive senior leadership invited early on needless criticism from within testifying to the absence of organizational discipline and hierarchy. On 15 March 1943, two landowning members of *Balli's* Central Committee, Ali Këlcyra and Nuredin Vlora, signed an agreement with General Renzo Dalmazzo, the Commander in Chief of the Italian 9th Army. Brokered by Maliq Bushati, Prime Minister of the puppet government, this agreement provided for a unilateral secession of hostilities between *Balli* and Italy, or an armistice.⁶⁵⁴ *Balli's* representatives pledged to halt insurrectionary and sabotage activities in the problematic south and to aid in efforts to raise recruits for newly reorganized Albanian military and gendarmerie. This presented the younger faction of *Balli* with a moral dilemma since it obliged them to commit to an agreement with which they did not agree. Called a gentlemen's agreement (Albanian: *Protokoll Nderi*), this was the infamous

⁶⁵³ Ibid., 106-112.

⁶⁵⁴ Ali Këlcyra, *Shkrime për Historinë e Shqipërisë: Kujtime Politike si dhe Shkrime të Tjera e Letërkeëmbimi, të Huluntuara ndër Arkiva prej Tanush Frashërit*, ed. Tanush Frashëri (Tiranë: Onufri, 2012) 208.

Dalmazzo-Këlcyra Agreement, which, for Paskal Milo, heavily mortgaged *Balli's* moral and political authority in the eyes of many ordinary Albanians.⁶⁵⁵

Thus, it is clear that *Balli's* internal cohesion suffered from a reiteration of the old centralization-decentralization dilemma that had pervaded Albanian politics since the onset of associational life in the late Ottoman Empire. Both *Balli* and the NLF were in agreement on the basic political objective of seeing Albania free of foreign rule but remained divided from leadership disputes, ideology and social background. First, *Balli's* leadership resented the CPA's and later the NLF's apparent ascendancy as an organization staffed by young upstarts who appeared on the verge of monopolizing the entire political process of a unified resistance without regard for their past contributions or due reverence to their seniority. This was a bitter pill to swallow for *Balli's* ageing leadership which was unwilling, perhaps even unable, to reject a collective legacy of more than forty years of political involvement in Albanian social life. Second, the stress on nationalism – conceived as an all-inclusive moral national public sphere – precluded other less inclusive but more practical forms of mass mobilization. In contrast, communism gave the NLF an ideological binding agent that enabled the CPA to forge superior cohesion, unite against the intractable old guard and provide more promising answers to popular expectations concerning wartime resistance and a consistent vision about the post-war political and social order. Third, the social context was also different. Politically astute Albanians had already observed that the Italian occupation in 1939 had caused a major demographic

⁶⁵⁵ Milo, *Shqiptarët*, 300; Abaz Ermenji later denounced the agreement as a “farce” claiming that Këlcyra did not have the authority to deal separately with Dalmazzo with whom he apparently shared “friendly” relations. See Blendi Fevziu, *Jeta Ime...Intervistë me Blendi Fevziun* (Tiranë: UET Press, 2010), 250-251.

shift in associational politics. Tajar Zavalani, the former leading émigré communist of the ACO in Moscow, who emigrated to Great Britain after the Italian invasion where he worked in BBC's Albanian language program, was among the first few to recognize the new trend. In May 1943 he wrote to Fan Noli in Boston that "a new and more serious generation inspired by fiery patriotism" fueled the communist-led insurgency.⁶⁵⁶ Set in their ways, *Balli's* shortsighted elders failed to understand and acted as if the 1940s were the early 1920s. But the NLF's communist victory in the Second World War still lay ahead.

Building a National Liberation Movement: Ascendancy of the NLF, 1943 – 1945

The CPA did not publicly react to *Balli's* gentlemen's agreement with the Italian occupational authorities. It was busy organizing its first national conference, which was held in Labinot, Elbasan, on 17 March 1943 two days after the signing of the Dalmazzo-Këlcyra Agreement. The importance of this conference cannot be understated. It was the moment when the CPA shed its political inheritance of informal associations and became a fully-fledged political organization with a bureaucratic apparatus able to withstand political challenges within the NLF and from rival organizations.

The Labinot Conference has been portrayed in the Western historiography as Hoxha's attempt to "strengthen his own internal position" within the party.⁶⁵⁷ While Hoxha's own ambitions cannot be discounted, the argument is nonetheless open to question. In the seventeen months since the founding of the party, its ranks had

⁶⁵⁶ "Tajar Zavalani to Fan Noli," London, 24 May 1943, AQSh, F. 14, D. 123, Fl. 5 and in passim.

⁶⁵⁷ Fischer, *Albania at War*, 246-248.

swelled to about 700 members, a near four-fold increase since November 1941.⁶⁵⁸ These cadres were thinly spread throughout the country and thus not always able to be in constant contact with the PCC. As a result, neither Hoxha nor the Yugoslavs were ever able to impose an unquestionable authority over so many individuals.⁶⁵⁹ In the CPA's Second Plenum, held in Berat on the eve of liberation in November 1944, Hoxha revealed that he was acutely aware of his own vulnerability within the party, limitations which rendered him unable to foment or take advantage from internal crises.

In reality, the conference served to strengthen the party's bureaucratic apparatus by streamlining its membership, increasing ideological cohesion and centralizing its institutions. On the eve of the conference, the interwar *Zjarri* group, by now rife with internal dissention, was simply disowned and dissolved. Several of its members, like Skënder Muço and Hysni Lepenica (mentioned above), had already declared their preference for *Balli*. Other members abandoned their opportunistic stand and joined the CPA. For its own part, the CPA could afford to be magnanimous and accept its wayward sons with open arms. Having grown more disciplined, it no longer feared dissensions or political challenges.⁶⁶⁰ In Labinot, the former PCC became a formal Central Committee, consisting of fifteen members plus five candidates/alternates. In addition, a Politburo and the Secretariat, largely consisting of the same members, were also created.⁶⁶¹ The conference elevated Enver Hoxha to the

⁶⁵⁸ Milo, *Shqiptarët*, Vol. I., 313; Plasari and Maltezi eds., *Politikë Antikombëtare*, 20-22.

⁶⁵⁹ Plasari and Maltezi eds., *Politikë Antikombëtare*, 84.

⁶⁶⁰ "Resolution of the First National Conference of CPA," Labinot, 17-21 March, AQSh, F. 14/APL, D. 9, Fl. 1-110; "Minutes of the First National Conference of CPA," Labinot, 17-21 March, AQSh, F. 14/APL, D. 10, Fl. 1-126.

⁶⁶¹ AQSh, F. 14/APL, D. 9, Fl. 20.

post of General Secretary. In keeping with the practice of identifying the party and the struggle with a specific leader, much like what Lenin and Stalin were to the CPSU, Tito to the CPY and other leaders to countless other communist parties across the world, the CPA also undertook to “popularize” the figure of Enver Hoxha as the human face of the party and of the overall NLF resistance. It is here where the institutional origins of Hoxha’s personality cult can be found.

In contrast to the Conference of Pezë, the Yugoslav emissaries assumed a prominent, if not a determinant, role in Labinot. This was to be expected since the CPY was an intermediary agency tasked to bring the young CPA up to Comintern membership standards considering the inexperience of the Albanians.⁶⁶² As Enver Hoxha later put it:

In [Popović and Mugoša] we saw the great [CPY] aiding us to go forward and organize our struggle against the occupier. Virtually all of us in the Provisional Central Committee were without party experience, without organizational experience and without broad intellectual knowledge ... [therefore] we had to continually rely on [Popović and Mugoša]. Our work was like that of a schoolboy who relies on his teacher for instructions and guidance ... [thus], we naturally adopted not only their work ethic but also their manner of thinking.⁶⁶³

Yet the CPY emissaries did not constitute a single block and rarely spoke with the same voice. Popović and Mugoša resented Jovanović and Tempo and sought to limit their access and influence in the Albanian leadership. Conversely, Tempo and Jovanović disliked Popović and Mugoša and because Tempo outranked all he sought to dominate them. Tempo and his supporters, however, could not hope to match Popović’s influence within the CPA given the latter’s almost uninterrupted stay in

⁶⁶² The average age of the members of CC of CPA in 1943 was only 28 years old, with nearly half of the members younger than 25. For new up and coming leaders see AQSh, F. 14/APL, D. 112, Fl. 1-6.

⁶⁶³ Plasari and Malltezi eds., *Politikë Antikombëtare*, 27.

Albania since November 1941. Since then, Popović and Mugoša had carved out a niche within the former PCC inevitably complicating their own relationship with the Albanians, hindering party unity rather than promote it.⁶⁶⁴ Still, in the seventeen months since the party's founding, wartime had led the CPA to experience considerable political centralization, which had succeeded in increasing the number of its partisan units. In addition, with the creation of *Balli*, the earlier popular front efforts had failed.⁶⁶⁵ This effectively disentangled the CPA from unwanted associations and allowed it to develop and consolidate its political authority over the NLF bureaucratic apparatus. Yugoslav directives that had been previously either ignored or postponed could now be safely implemented.⁶⁶⁶

On 5-10 July 1943, in Labinot, the General Antifascist Council (GAC), the ruling body of the NLF founded the regular National Liberation Army (NLA) and established a General Staff; precisely nine months after Popović had suggested the idea on the eve of the Conference of Pezë. Its membership consisted of six communists, three nationalists, one monarchist and major Spiro Moisiu, a hitherto politically unaffiliated but experienced career officer that had faithfully served both Zogu's royal army and puppet government under Italy at the Greek front.⁶⁶⁷ The GAC elected Moisiu as the commanding officer in charge of military operations and placed

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid., 32-33; 70-71.

⁶⁶⁵ The breaking point with *Balli* would not come until the failed Mukje Agreement on 2 August 1943. See Fischer, *Albania at War*, 149-142. For a new and improved treatment see Milo, *Shqiptarët*, Vol. I., 385-398.

⁶⁶⁶ Some organizational blueprints that the Yugoslavs transmitted to the Albanians for the latter's use include: "Formations of Volunteer Partisan Groups," AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 3, Fl. 2-14; "Manual on the Organization of Partisan Units," AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 6, Fl. 1-34; "Establishment of Military Courts," AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 56/1, Fl. 1-15; "The Work of the Party in the Army," AQSh, F. 14/APL, D. 42/1, Fl. 1-10.

⁶⁶⁷ "First Meeting of the General Staff," Labinot, 5 July 1943, AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 1, Fl. 1-2; "NLF Establishes the NLA," 10 July, AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 166, Fl. 1-10.

Enver Hoxha in charge of the political commissariat. The founding of the General Staff represented a further step in the development of bureaucratic structures of the NLF since the establishment of the CPA's permanent institutions earlier in March of that year. The functions of the General Staff consisted of a headquarters in charge of military planning and operations, a political commissariat and lastly support services such as medical and administrative systems, discipline, the commissary, courts, intelligence, engineering and communications.⁶⁶⁸

Crucial to the CPA's control of the NLF was the expansion of duties of the political commissariat. Each NLF unit headquarter down to the company level was assigned a commissar and a vice-commissar responsible for the political education of the members of the unit, reinforcement of combat morale through ideological lessons, teachings and entertainment and public relations. They also could influence military policy but only when a commander's decisions ran counter to party instructions. In this, they often acted as second in command higher than the vice-commander. When ranks were finally established in May 1944 (see below) political officers assumed equal rank to the unit commanders.⁶⁶⁹ The commissars established within the military the cell system so as to increase the number of the party ranks in each unit.⁶⁷⁰ They kept detailed lists about each partisan and recommended promotions or punishments as each case required. But because the majority of the Albanians were illiterate and those who could read and write generally possessed very little formal education and/or training, commissars were in short supply. As a result, the CPA was forced to seek political cadres from among its support organizations who possessed some

⁶⁶⁸ "First Meeting of the General Staff," Labinot, 5 July 1943, AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 1, Fl. 2.

⁶⁶⁹ "Proposals for Elevations in Rank," 27 May 1944, AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 123, Fl. 1-36.

⁶⁷⁰ "Manual on the Organization of Partisan Units," AQSh, F. 41/APL, D, 6, Fl. 2-3.

formal educational experience. These were the Union of the Antifascist Youth (UAY) and the Union of the Antifascist Woman (UAW), two segments of the CPA's support base that were as idealistic as they were steadfast in their loyalty. Political classes were organized for these youth that consisted of nothing more than crash courses on Marxism and history of revolutionary struggles after which they were quickly dispatched into the fighting units. Predictably the quality of these cadres was low since not too long ago they had been merely high school students. For instance, one 20 year-old battalion vice-commissar (born 1924) and a representative of the Union of the Antifascist Youth with the 19th Brigade, after the end of the war, was still said to be spirited, smart and intelligent but "prone to loosing his head if left without constant supervision and guidance."⁶⁷¹

Women proved to be more reliable cadres. Averaging 17-23 years old, they represented about nine percent of the entire NLF. They were unwavering in their belief that the post war social order would bring irreversible change in gender relations. Challenging such norms was not easy especially for those women who came from rural areas. This gave ammunition to the more conservative *Balli* to claim that women took up with the NLF only so as to live a life of licentiousness in the mountains. Patriarchal norms could be encountered even within the NLF but these were not sanctioned and indeed harshly condemned by the CPA.⁶⁷² Improper behavior was deemed detrimental to unit cohesion, morale and discipline and thus the General Staff and the CC of CPA strictly regulated gender relations within the NLF.

⁶⁷¹ "Personal File of P.M.," in AQSh. Unnumbered personal files in the archive of the Party of Labor, (AP). For a more comprehensive list about the leadership cadres of all subordinate units within the 5th Shock Division see AQSh, 1945, F. 206, D. 22.

⁶⁷² "Enver Hoxha to the Union of Antifascist Woman Council of No.5 Quarter in Korçë," 1944, AQSh, F. 14/APL, D. 109, Fl. 4.

For instance, a controversial affair in early 1944 resulted in the execution of Ramize Gjebrea, a charismatic partisan woman condemned for having engaged in improper sexual relations. Thereafter, changing course, the General Staff loosened its policy on partisan romantic associations and permitted such activities provided that they were conducted in private and outside the public eye.⁶⁷³ Generally, the war empowered women by giving them unprecedented access to political processes. Although they were excluded from military command positions, they served as district and town council leaders, nurses, teachers, clerks, accountants and political leaders in the Central Committee and its district branches and even commissars in frontline companies, battalions and brigades.⁶⁷⁴

Increasing centralization allowed the CPA to minimize dissensions, reduce resentments and increase efficiency. In turn, the General Staff launched an ambitious program of administrative and military reforms. First, the country was divided into territorial commands, which were then grouped into five main operational groups or zones, each of which had its own staff. Thus, for instance, the Staff of the Pezë Group funneled the human and material resources of the commands of Kavajë, Pezë, Peqin, Berat, Tiranë and Durrës.⁶⁷⁵ The Central Committee of the CPA took care to ensure the military dependency of these staffs to the political chain of command by

⁶⁷³ Gjebrea was born in Gjirokastër on 20 April 1923. She was a former high school student at the Queen Mother Pedagogical Institute for Women where she, Hoxha's future spouse Nexhmije Xhuglini and future CC member Liri Belishova formed the nucleus of the Institute's party cell. In 1943 she was appointed as Political Secretary of the UAY in Berat. Later she joined the NLF's 5th Brigade where she was part of the brigade's command staff. She was also the fiancé of Nako Spiru, a member of the Central Committee, on whom she cheated with Zaho Koka, the vice commissar of the 3rd Battalion. "Deposition of Ramize Gjebrea and Zaho Koka," 1944, AQSh, F. 14/APL, D. 72, Fl. 1-28.

⁶⁷⁴ "Circular of the Union of Antifascist Woman," 25 October 1943, AQSh, F. 14/APL, D. 12, Fl. 1-3.

⁶⁷⁵ "First Meeting of the General Staff," Labinot, 5 July 1943, AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 1, Fl. 4. For a schema, see David Smiley, *Albanian Assignment* (London: Chatto & Windus, The Hogarth Press, 1984), 58.

appointing their own permanent representatives and linking headquarters to its district committees. Despite this, these staffs enjoyed wide autonomy in managing local logistics, recruitment, finances, agitprop, military courts, intelligence and communications in addition to retaining primary control over basic military units up to a battalion including the voluntary territorial units and urban guerilla units.⁶⁷⁶ The only exceptions were the prefectures of Vlorë and Gjirokastër, where all local commands fell under the direct authority of the General Staff, grouped into the First Operational Zone.⁶⁷⁷

In their work these staffs acted jointly with the regional councils, which officially remained institutions of the GAC. Ever since their creation in the conference of Pezë, the councils had expanded the scope of their work. They provided the populace with food or seed for crops, requisitioned state and Italian private property in the territories of the group commands, collected taxes either in coin, promissory notes or in kind, helped the populace rebuild burned houses or replant damaged soil, opened schools to combat illiteracy, mediated reconciliation of blood feuds, reopened basic municipal functions such as hospitals, first aid treatment, water management and newspaper circulation, kept census records and guarded against sabotage from rival organizations. On the eve of the liberation, some areas such as Gjirokastër, Pogradec and Berat, appear to have established even basic telephone networks.⁶⁷⁸ Admittedly, much of this was done to serve NLA purposes

⁶⁷⁶ “Order of the Headquarters of the General Staff,” 17 August 1943, AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 5, F. 1.

⁶⁷⁷ “Order of the Headquarters of the General Staff,” 8 September 1943, AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 3, Fl. 36.

⁶⁷⁸ Instituti i Studimeve Marksiste-Leniniste. *Historia e Luftës Antifashiste Nacionalclirimtare e Popullit Shqiptar ne Katër Vëllime (April 1939-November 1944): Volume III: September 1943-May 1944* (Tiranë: 8 Nëntori, 308. For more specific cases see “Invoices and Correspondence of the General Staff,” 1944, AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 133, Fl. 1-93.

and the NLF took from the peasants as much as it gave. There can be, however, little doubt that the NLF paid considerable attention to its own logistical base in the territories of the group commands, far more than its rivals did.

An unintended but arguably welcomed consequence of further centralization was the defection of the monarchist faction of the NLF, its last splinter group. Rallying behind Abaz Kupi, a senior member of the GAC and the General Staff, this faction split on 21 November 1943 and formed the Legality Movement. A former gendarmerie major, who had heroically resisted in the Italian invasion in Durrës, Kupi was one of the most experienced career officers in the NLF. The General Staff had placed Kupi in charge of the Krujë group command (Krujë and Mat), obviously with the expectation of bringing these royalist regions into the NLF.⁶⁷⁹ But Kupi's unwavering loyalty to Zogu may well have been the main reason why he was passed over for the post of overall commander that in July 1943 went to Spiro Moisiu. Moisiu's appointment, however, was fully in keeping with the earlier policy of placing into leadership positions individuals untainted by previous associations. Kupi also had other reasons for leaving. Since March, he had uneasily observed the proliferation of communists into senior positions and fearing the growing unchecked power of the CPA within the NLF, opted for creating a separate political camp much like some nationalist leaders sought to create with *Balli* in December 1942. His defection did not lead to a redrawing of the borders of the Krujë group command but the General Staff apparently did take measures to protect its own support and logistical base there.⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁷⁹ "First Meeting of the General Staff," Labinot, 5 July 1943, AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 1, Fl. 1, 3.

⁶⁸⁰ "SITREP of the Krujë Group Command," 30 April 1944, AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 72, Fl. 1-4.

Second, along with the administrative reform, the General Staff called for military restructuring and expansion of the NLA. Before July 1943 partisan units consisted of fifteen battalions of about 2,100 regulars supported by twenty-four *çetas* of about 2,175 territorials and 4,680 urban guerillas and rural bands for a total of approximately 9,000 regulars and volunteers.⁶⁸¹ These figures were considerably less than those reported by the official communist historiography and cited ever since by a number of historians.⁶⁸² The size, composition and number of battalions and *çetas* were a function of local geography and greatly varied from one command or operational zone to the next. For instance, prior to the founding of the General Staff, the Korçë group had six cadre battalions of about 100 regulars each, ten *çetas* for a total 250 territorials and 100 rural guerilla units numbering 1,000 volunteers. In contrast, the Pezë group had one battalion consisting of 220 regulars, two *çetas* for a total of fifty territorials and a unit of guerillas numbering fifty volunteers.⁶⁸³ These numbers were obviously too disparate and low, yet so determined was the General Staff to bring about the uniform growth of the NLF, that it planned the eventual armed mobilization of an astonishing five-percent of the population. Here the General Staff required the assistance of the British, rather than of the Yugoslavs who were in no position to either intervene militarily in Albania or provide weapons.

⁶⁸¹ "First Meeting of the General Staff," Labinot, 5 July 1943, AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 1, Fl. 9-10. These numbers were jotted down by General Staff member Sejfulla Malëshova. Although more realistic, it is however likely that Malëshova's figures represent an estimate of those units deemed fit for immediate inclusion into the regular units of the NLA.

⁶⁸² For an example Instituti i Studimeve Marksiste-Leniniste, *Historia e Luftës Antifashiste, Vol. III*, 308; Fischer, *Albania at War*, 137.

⁶⁸³ "First Meeting of the General Staff," Labinot, 5 July 1943, AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 1, Fl. 4. These numbers may well be approximates

British involvement in Albania made no real effort to open contact with the native resistance until April 1943.⁶⁸⁴ Then the first British missions came to Albania intent on supporting this fledgling resistance but they lacked even basic knowledge of Albania and its people.⁶⁸⁵ The relationship between the Albanian communist leadership and these British missions was fraught with suspicion from the start. The British officers apparently preferred *Balli* and later Legality units who better catered to their orientalist notions of the apolitical but fierce and gallant savage.⁶⁸⁶ Nonetheless, the British could not ignore the fact that the NLF had become by far the most active resistance in Albania. Consequently, the bulk of their aid was delivered to the NLF.⁶⁸⁷ Following its founding, the NLF's General Staff requested weapons for at least 10,000 partisans. These involved the personal equipment for the individual partisan but also included heavy weapons necessary to increase the unit's firepower, such as anti-aircraft and anti-tank rifles and guns, land mines, mortars, flamethrowers, mountain artillery and light and heavy machine guns. To help with transportation and communications, horses, mules, motorcycles, trucks, bicycles and radio sets were also requested.⁶⁸⁸

Such an ambitious program also reflected the expansion of military control over the civilian population, in order to establish of bigger tactical formations: the brigades. In contrast to the battalions and the territorial *çetas*, which remained subordinated to the staffs of the group commands, these brigades were fully under direct military authority of the General Staff. In mid-1943, the existing NLF regular

⁶⁸⁴ See Fischer, *Albania at War*, 102-111. Milo, *Shqiptarët*, 181-194; 360-375.

⁶⁸⁵ Smiley, *Albanian Assignment*, x.

⁶⁸⁶ See Smiley's descriptions of Kupa in *Ibid.*, 109-110 and in *passim*.

⁶⁸⁷ Some figures mentioned in Milo, *Shqiptarët*, Vol. I., 370-371.

⁶⁸⁸ "First Meeting of the General Staff," Labinot, 5 July 1943, AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 1, Fl. 2.

units were not large enough and thus merging them *ad hoc* into frontline brigades would have severely depleted the ability of each group command to defend its territory. Consequently, the General Staff expanded the scope of recruitment for the brigades into the available manpower from the rural territorial çetas and urban guerilla units.⁶⁸⁹ All these units were instructed to send only brave, experienced, “morally upright,” and disciplined cadres proven in actual combat (or subversive activities in the urban areas) who already possessed a personal firearm and sufficient clothing. Jointly, the territorial battalions, çetas and urban guerillas, fulfilled the important role of transforming low skilled recruits into trained conscripts for the frontline brigades, ultimately leading to the establishment of a regular and disciplined military. Thus, on 15 August 1943 in the Korçë Group, two battalions, several territorial çetas and volunteers from other group commands merged to form the 1st Shock Brigade under Mehmet Shehu. Shehu was an aggressive commander who had led a battalion of the 12th International Garibaldi Brigade in the Spanish Civil War. The 1st Brigade’s structure consisted of a staff headquarters, four rifle battalions with three companies each and two heavy weapons companies, each equipped with mortars and .20 mm antitank, rifles for a total of 556 partisans.⁶⁹⁰ Formed largely with British assistance, the brigade’s inventory included a variety of armament of Italian and British origin but also Greek and Serbian weapons dating from the First World War.

⁶⁸⁹ “Order for the Formation of the 2nd Brigade,” 8 September 1943, AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 3, Fl. 37. At this stage the NLF lacked the ability to provide uniforms or standard clothing and armament for all of its partisans. These were later secured by adopting and converting into personal use mainly Axis and British uniforms.

⁶⁹⁰ “Cadres of the First Shock Brigade,” 14 August 1943, AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 11, Fl. 1-9.

The low numbers in the brigade were not necessarily a drawback since emphasis was placed on establishing a cadre unit of experienced and disciplined regulars able to transmit that experience to future low skilled recruits without endangering unit cohesion. In time, battalions were expanded and other units were attached, which, just prior to authorizing the creation of divisions in May 1944, reached a complement of 800-1,300 partisans. Furthermore, Albania's predominantly mountainous terrain is not conducive to large regular formations and keeping battalions and brigades small made them nimbler and faster moving units. The new nomenclature also served an important ideological function. A novelty in Albanian military history, the new terminology was a powerful indicator of the continuing professionalization and unit standardization of the NLF, in the long term threatening to pull resources away from rival groups who kept instead to the traditional çeta formations. The NLF had a long way to go to become a modern army but, in the context of contemporary Albanian resistance and politics, it gradually became a more ordered and disciplined force.

The transition from the Italian to the German occupation in September 1943 found the NLF in the midst of a major reorganization. In September, the Second Conference of Labinot transformed the councils into proto-government administrative bodies that included all functions mentioned above plus new institutions as electoral colleges.⁶⁹¹ From a military perspective, the primary focus of the General Staff of the NLF was the creation of the brigades and providing for their equipment. Its regular and territorial units received orders to establish the NLF's administrative authority in

⁶⁹¹ "Resolution and Statute of the Second National Liberation Conference," Labinot, 4-9 September 1943, AQSh, F. 40/APL, D. 5/1, Fl. 1-53.

as many areas of the country as they could, do their outmost to take over Italian armament before *Balli*'s çetas got their hands on it.⁶⁹² As a result, the conference abolished all administrative institutions of the puppet state in the "liberated areas" and replaced them with NLF institutions.⁶⁹³ Since its bureaucratic apparatus was far more elaborate and broadly established, the NLF was more successful than *Balli* and consequently was able to receive the bulk of Italian weapons. By October, the NLF formed cadre units for what eventually became 2nd, 3rd and 5th Shock Brigades.⁶⁹⁴ In addition, about 2,200 Italians joined the NLF, although only half were ever engaged in front and rear line duties. The rest were folded into the support structures of the various group commands. These Italians filled important functions that Albanians could not for lack of technical training, such as truck drivers, medics, gunners etc. Many of these Italians were entrusted with positions of great responsibility equal to Albanians, albeit only up to the battalion level.

Yet these new brigades were embryonic and thus were not ready to engage the Germans in frontal combat. The NLF, therefore, wisely avoided direct confrontation and spent much of the rest of 1943 and early 1944 organizing their ranks, expanding its civilian authority and supplying their stores with weapons, clothing and victuals. Allied equipment featured heavily on these stores but never constituted more than a third of the NLF's overall supplies.⁶⁹⁵ Only the 1st Shock Brigade, the NLF's senior and best-equipped brigade, was at this time at what may be considered full strength.

⁶⁹² "General Staff to Haxhi Lleshi," 18 September 1943, AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 9, Fl. 14; "Staff of Peze Group Command to 3rd Battalion," 18 September 1943, AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 29, Fl. 1.

⁶⁹³ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶⁹⁴ For a description of the transition between the Italian and German occupation see Fischer, *Albania at War*, 157-165. Fischer does not fully recognize the importance of NLF's reorganization drive and subsequent strength.

⁶⁹⁵ For an example of such stores see "Supplies of Pezë Command Group," Fall 1943, AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 29, Fl. 2-3.

In early 1944, in the midst of the German's Winter Offensive, it contained 1,118 partisans divided into five battalions averaging 200 men each. This represented a doubling of its strength since its formation in August 1943. Its Italian complement consisted of 222 partisans (20% of the total number) organized primarily in the Antonio Gramsci battalion (172 partisans), the artillery company (73 out of 79 partisans) and the medical section (one doctor, three orderlies and three muleteers).⁶⁹⁶ In time, when other brigades reached their full strength, similar battalions of former Italian soldiers were attached to them as well.⁶⁹⁷ Despite best efforts, however, the NLF never managed to secure adequate supplies of weapons and ammunition or feed or clothe its partisans as planned.⁶⁹⁸ Standardization, shortage of ammunition, and insufficient foodstuffs and clothing remained a constant problem throughout the war. These deficiencies severely incapacitated the NLF's ability to engage the Germans for prolonged amounts of time as a result of which most engagements developed as brief skirmishes, raids and ambushes, though lengthy encounters are also well documented. Unless engaged first, the NLF strategy until spring-summer 1944 was to protect the territories of the group commands and use the brigades to project its own strength as far away from these territories as possible. Except for the 1st and 2nd Shock Brigades no other brigade appears to have left the immediate vicinities of their or other group commands.

As the NLF was undergoing its reorganization in November 1943 the Germans launched their Winter Offensive, a series of concurrent operations designed

⁶⁹⁶ "List of Partisans of the 1st Shock Brigade," AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 82, Fl. 7-21.

⁶⁹⁷ See for an example, "Italian Complement of the 5th Shock Brigade," 1944-1945, AQSh, F. 181/APL, L.2 D. 26, Fl. 1-15.

⁶⁹⁸ "1st Shock Brigade SITREP," AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 32, Fl. 1-12.

to keep partisan operations away from major highways and remove the threat to lines of communications. In an effort to avoid reprisals, which would have eliminated its already depleted units, *Balli Kombëtar* had avoided open confrontation with the Germans. Now, during the Winter Offensive, that organization openly sided with the Axis and aided the Germans in joint efforts against the NLF.

Although both the Germans and *Balli* dealt heavy blows to the NLF, the Winter Offensive failed to arrest its continuing reorganization and growth.⁶⁹⁹ On the contrary, *Balli*-assisted German punitive expeditions only served to increase the numbers of the NLF with displaced peoples, who abandoned their burned out villages and joined partisan ranks. By March 1944, the NLF had consolidated its 2nd, 3rd and 5th Shock Brigades and formed cadre units for the 4th, 6th, 7th brigades with the 8th also underway.⁷⁰⁰ So confident was the NLF in its own strength that the process of transforming into a fully-fledged government could now begin. At the Congress of Përmet held on 27 May 1944 the NLF established the National Liberation Council (NLC), a 121-member “legislative and executive body representing popular sovereignty.”⁷⁰¹ Consciously modeled after the Antifascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ) and “the original soviet councils that sprang after the Russian Revolution in 1917,” the new NLC established the Legislative Council, a deliberative assembly in charge of legislation, and the Executive Committee consisting of a president, two vice-presidents and officers in charge with overseeing

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid., 195-198.

⁷⁰⁰ “General Staff of NLA to Vukmanović-Tempo,” 28 March 1944, AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 134, Fl. 1

⁷⁰¹ “Decisions of the First National Liberation Council.” Përmet, 27 May 1944, AQSh, F. 40/APL, D. 18, Fl. 1-3.

eleven separate departments.⁷⁰² With the creation of the NLC the structure of the resistance became even more complex since, in theory, the NLC was the NLF's offspring. Yet the relationship was mutual and reciprocal in nature. The NLC assumed political functions of governance that after the Congress of Berat in November 1944 created a provisional national government. In contrast, the NLF, now dominated exclusively by the CPA, remained an administrative body in charge of overseeing mass social mobilization. Through the various group commands, it continued to influence aspects of military mobilization and through the CPA and its organs political mobilization. In theory, membership in the NLC and NLF was not limited to the communists alone and other organizations or individuals with other political convictions could participate. In practice, however, the conscious choices made by leading nationalists in December 1942 and the monarchists after August 1943 to defect from the NLF, left the CPA the only structured political organization within both the NLC and the NLF. By the end of the war, the CPA's membership had grown to about 2,500 leading a mass resistance movement of 35 – 50,000.⁷⁰³ All other politically motivated activists were nationalists who had sided with the CPA rather than *Balli*. Indeed, reflecting this heterogeneous composition, all NLF policies bore the stamp of the "Front" and one rarely heard the phrase *party directives* or indeed the word *party*.⁷⁰⁴ Nonetheless, there was no doubt that, after the defections of the past, "Front" and "Party" had by now become synonymous political notions.

⁷⁰² Ibid.

⁷⁰³ A view about the gradual sifting of resistance foci can be obtained in "A Who's Who of Albanian Guerillas" in Records Group 84, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Tirana, U.S. Mission Miscellaneous Reports, 1943-44, Box 1, NARA II.

⁷⁰⁴ As a result of these fast-paced structural changes it is incorrect to refer to the communist-led resistance by any of its constituent acronyms; NLF, NLC or CPA. After the Conference of Përmet in May 1944 but especially following the Congress of Berat in November where the Provisional

Although the new NLC concluded that Albania was to have a democratic and popular government in accordance to the will of its people, it also restricted choices for the future electorate when it forbade King Zog's return to Albania. The fact that Zogu had come to power in 1924 through a counter-coup that toppled Fan Noli's government, and then placed Albania "under Italian economic and financial vassalage," all counted against him. So did the charges that he "stole" the state's treasury and abandoned Albania instead of resisting the Italian invasion in April 1939 and that his former bureaucratic apparatus supported the Axis during the war. As far as the NLC was concerned, the former king had spent all his moral and political capital. Furthermore, to underscore its credentials as primarily an anti-imperialist social movement, the NLC rendered null and void all previous economic, political and financial agreements made during the monarchy as well as any agreements that political groups in exile may have signed.⁷⁰⁵

In May 1944, the NLC established its own ranking system for General Staff personnel, frontline units, and the political ranks while the NLF continued to assemble forces for the brigades. In the first batch of newly minted officers, Enver Hoxha was elevated to Colonel General and confirmed overall commander of the NLA, above Spiro Moisiu who, appointed Major General, remained as chief of staff. In addition, the NLC created 4 Colonels, 7 Lieutenant Colonels, 11 Majors, 18 Senior Captains, 52 Junior Captains, 42 Lieutenants, 106 Junior Lieutenants and 92 Aspirant

Government was formed, the Albanian communist-led resistance had eliminated the political power vacuum and formed, for all purposes and intents, an as of yet unrecognized but definite government reinforced by its own institutions.

⁷⁰⁵ "Decisions of the First National Liberation Council." Përmet, 27 May 1944, AQSh, F. 40/APL, D. 18, Fl. 2.

Officers.⁷⁰⁶ Gradually, the ranking system was expanded steadily to include support, paramilitary units and the civilian leadership of the group commands.⁷⁰⁷ At the start of summer 1944, the NLF can be said to have largely accomplished its restructuring. It had successfully penetrated most, if not all, levels of Albanian society and built a bureaucratic apparatus that both governed as a free state in the territories of the group commands and administered a large army.

In March 1944 the NLC began to transform its most senior brigades into divisions. Thus, the 1st, 4th and 5th Shock Brigades merged on 25 May to form the 1st Division under Colonel Dali Ndreu and with Lt. Colonel Mehmet Shehu, the former commander of the 1st Brigade, as his second in command. By the end of summer and beginning of fall 1944, two more divisions, the 2nd and 4th were formed. Initially averaging between 2,000 – 2,500 partisans (but later growing in size to about 3,500) – just like the brigades in their embryonic phase – the nomenclature of these units did not reflect modern military expectations, but they did, however, satisfy Albanian standards, local geography and the NLF’s expectations. The Albanians had never had permanently standing units of this size, at least none built from scratch in such a short time. While military encounters of the past, such as the battle for Vlorë in 1920, had indeed featured thousands of men, command and control had neither assumed a mono-directional exercise of military authority nor ever developed sophisticated structures for the coordination of the activities of large formations. In the battle for Vlorë, for instance, the Albanian forces relied on a loose cooperation of units belonging to the individual chieftain or village councils absent a single centralized

⁷⁰⁶ “Ordinances about Elevation in Ranks,” May – December 1944, AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 123, Fl. 1-14.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid 14/2-16, 17, 21, 31.

command structure. Thus, by the end of summer 1944 the 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th, 14th, 16th, 19th and 20th brigades were formed. As a result of these transformations, on 18 August, the NLF ordered the 1st and 2nd divisions into northern Albania where communist power base was patchy at best or nonexistent at worst. To facilitate independent command and control structures north of the Shkumbin River, these two divisions merged to form the 1st Corps, absorbing also all the individual çetas and battalions of the group commands of Elbasan, Krujë, Dibër and Shkodër. Led by General Dali Ndreu, the 1st Corps, according to the official communist historiography, consisted of 40 battalions for a total of 9,500 partisans equipped with 110 mountain guns and mortars and “hundreds of antitank rifles and light and heavy machine guns.”⁷⁰⁸ By the end of the war, in November, the NLF had created thirty brigades grouped into eight divisions and three corps supported by an administrative division of the country where 59 regional councils and no less than 72 territorial commands were active. Keeping in mind an average of 200 partisans per battalion, this would yield an approximate total 35,000 partisans, a figure much lower than the 70,000 partisans claimed routinely by the official communist historiography.⁷⁰⁹

In late August-early September 1944, the NLF began probing German defenses in Tiranë but the final assault on the capital did not occur until early

⁷⁰⁸ Instituti i Studimeve Marksiste-Leniniste. *Historia e Luftës Antifashiste Nacionalclirimtare e Popullit Shqiptar ne Katër Vëllime (April 1939-November 1944): Volume IV: May 1944-November 1944* (Tiranë: 8 Nëntori, 1989), 246. Assuming the usual average of 200-250 partisans per battalion, the size of the 1st Corps yields a number between 8000-10,000 partisans. The armament of these brigades was a mix of Italian, German and British weapons.

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 276, 803, 825, 856. The Corps were disbanded after 1945 as were a number of divisions. This number, however, may be higher since in the summer-fall 1944 the NLF and the party organs became inundated with petitions for memberships or supplicants applying for aid or seeking re-evaluation of their political past. Put together, after the war, the NLA, the NLF, the CPA bureaucracy, the civilian administration and other support groups and organizations may have numbered well above 50,000 men and women, thus closer to the 70,000 cited by the official historiography of the party. For an example see, “Petitions and Supplicants,” 19 May – 29 October 1944, AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 121, Fl. 1-12.

November. Although the capital was a target of great political significance, Tiranë was by now tactically insignificant. On 8 September 1944, the Red Army entered Bulgaria and on 14 October the British liberated Athens, forcing the Germans to evacuate northwards toward Albania. The NCL focused on expanding its area of influence throughout the country, especially in northern Albania in the territories of the mountain clans where its influence had been tenuous. In early September the 2nd Division penetrated into Mirditë, the heartland of Albanian clan territory and established local councils. In late October – early November the NLA had taken over the entire southern, central and northeastern Albania and units of the 5th Division crossed over into Yugoslavia followed briefly thereafter by the 6th Division (consisting of the 3rd, 6th, 7th 8th and 22nd brigades), led by the 26-year-old General Gjin Marku. Having established its authority over much of the country, the 1st Corps took Tiranë from the retreating Germans on 17 November at the same that 3rd Brigade in collaboration with the 1st Kosovar brigade liberated Pejë (Peć) in Kosovo. The next day, on 18 November, the General Staff sanctioned the formation of the 2nd and 3rd Corps and on 29 November liberated Shkodër, at the same time that the NLA's 3rd and 5th Brigades entered the Drenica valley in central Kosovo. In mid-December, the 7th, 8th and 22nd brigades of the 6th Division penetrated into Montenegro and, with Albania now free from German control, units of the 5th and 6th Divisions continued to pursue the retreating Germans into Bosnia-Herzegovina. Following the capture of Višegrad on 14 February by the 6th Division, the NLA forces in Yugoslavia got orders to fall back to their original positions in Kosovo mainly because of the impossibility of bringing supplies so far north. The Yugoslavs were able to fulfill some of the

Albanians' needs, but with the front moving fast northwards there was also no reason for the Albanians to continue their pursuit.⁷¹⁰ When they reached Kosovo, local Albanians spoke to NLA commanders about atrocities committed by the Yugoslav partisans in their absence. According to the communist historiography complaints were lodged with Tito's Headquarters, which, however, provided no explanation. Later, following the Tito-Stalin split in 1948, which allowed Hoxha to break free from Yugoslav political control, these atrocities provided ammunition for Hoxha's anti-Yugoslav rhetoric.⁷¹¹ In early December 1945, the 5th and 6th Divisions returned to Albania.

In Albania, despite the identification of the NLF with communism, the CPA found itself after the war to be still an underground and thus an illegal political organization. The legal history of the CPA, in one recent account, began only on 6 December 1945. The National Assembly, a parliamentary body representing the former councils, approved Law No. 370, concerning the founding of political parties, associations and organizations. This law allowed the CPA was able to become a legal organization. The founding of the party was now officially backdated to 8 November 1941 even though at the time it never obtained recognition on any legal basis. In doing so, the CPA remained faithful to its own underground legacy but also set itself above all other parties as the oldest political organization in Albania. After the transformation of the National Liberation Front into the National Democratic Front in

⁷¹⁰ For NLA operations in October – December 1944 and its expedition in Yugoslavia see, "Radiograms and SITREPs" July-November 1944, AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 158; "Radiograms and Phonograms," May-December 1944, AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 159; "Phonograms and SITREPs," August-November 1944, AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 160, Fl. 1 – 69. "Radiograms and Telegrams for the General Staff," December 1944, AQSh, F. 41/APL, D. 161, Fl. 1-77.

⁷¹¹ Instituti i Studimeve Marksiste-Leniniste, *Historia e Luftës Antifashiste, Vol. IV*, 912-914.

August 1945, the legalization of the CPA and its subsequent renaming as the Party of Labor of Albania in 1948, the communist state began the construction of socialism in Albania.

Conclusion

Bernd Fischer has argued that while politically successful, the NLF's "military strategy of resistance can hardly be called successful."⁷¹² The sporadic hit and run tactics of the partisan units and the failure of the NLF to engage in frontal battles are seen as a sign of inherent weakness for a resistance movement that had yet to capture wider support. In reality, the military effort within the NLF reflected a longer-term political objective. The NLF's strategy was one of pure defense, designed to maximize strength while promoting a gradual maximization of violence, but not so much to bring about defeat. On the one hand, this strategy called for a limited war. Its objective was not the total destruction of the enemy, a futile and self-destructive strategy considering the military superiority of the Nazi German forces in particular who also enjoyed some domestic support. On the other hand, the NLF's war was uncompromising, and thus absolute, in its ultimate aim of national sovereignty. In this the NLF quickly recognized that a defensive war could grow to engender domestic support, centralize its previously informal associational ties into a coherent and commanding organization and lastly, spread its political ideology by presenting Marxism in a more national context. As time passed, the NLF was able to establish its own limited sovereignty over portions of national territory, which, organized in the

⁷¹² Fischer, *Albania at War*, 189.

various group commands, gave the NLF the ability to withstand the enemy's attacks, preserve its own strength, and bide its time for domestic and international support.

From all this it becomes apparent that the previous historical consensus of the existence of three politically equal but separate resistance movements into communist, nationalist and monarchist is incorrect. It is more accurate to say that in wartime Albania there were three main separate political movements, each of which enjoyed some potential to become a resistance movement. Wartime resistance was possible only in context of a unified opposition to the Axis, a principle agreed upon by every political camp when they formed the NLF at the Conference of Pezë in September 1942. Had *Balli* and the Legality Movement opted to remain in the NLF and striven for more political representation *within* the NLF's growing numbers – like the CPA did – than the postwar political map of Albania would have developed differently and probably even threaten to pull the NLF apart into true civil war, the sort of which ravaged postwar Greece.

The evolution of the NLF can be divided into three phases. In the first phase, November 1941 – March 1943, the founding of the CPA broke with the traditional patterns of informal associations. Here the Albanians did have the aid of the CPY. But the first Yugoslav emissaries came to Albania under the instigation of Koço Tashko, the leader of the Korçë communist group rather than from the Yugoslav leadership. It was an informal liaison that later grew and consolidated into a formal alliance. In the documents consulted there is no evidence to suggest that prior to Yugoslavia's invasion in April 1941, the CPY was interested in helping the Albanians set up their party. For their part, the Albanian émigré associations of the left in the

interwar period had not shown any interest in the CPY holding Yugoslavia as no less a threat to Albania than Italy. As seen in Chapter 4, Albanian preferences rested with the communist parties in France and Italy where an emerging infrastructure supported by growing numbers of migrant workers was already established. Had it not been for wartime necessities neither the CPY nor the Albanians would have entertained formal collaboration. Regardless of their political or ideological differences, the Yugoslav connection aided also the new CPA by providing support for their official acceptance into the Comintern in December 1942.

While the CPA was growing more centralized internally, the inclusion of nationalist organizations or politically active non-communist individuals into the NLF gave a new if brief lease on life to informal associations. This posed a challenge to Yugoslav directives but it was in keeping with Comintern's approval of a popular front line. In the second phase, May 1943 – May 1944, the CPA and the NLF increased internal centralization by painstakingly building a common set of institutions. The CPA was able to finalize that process at the first Labinot Conference in March 1943; the NLF took longer into the spring of 1944. A steadily growing hierarchical apparatus grew up to coordinate an expanding network of locally based resistance which still thought of the struggle in national rather than communist terms. The NLF's increasing strength enabled it to shoulder an ever more ponderous burden of its military commitments. With the departure of the monarchist faction in August 1943, the NLF lost its last link to an informal association allowing further centralization under the CPA. In practice the CPY had to contend with the Albanians' own differences, which the Yugoslav emissaries could not address. Despite inherent

limitations of the past, the previous associational experience had also established the precedent of appealing to all Albanians regardless of religious or regional differences, which, in turn, had led to developing at least the potential for mass mobilization. Nonetheless, within the NLF, communists counted for only five-percent of the presumed 50,000 enrolled men and women. This suggests that individual motivations for participation in resistance varied. The early defections of leading nationalists that formed *Balli* in December 1942 and of the Legality in November 1943 simplified matters for the CPA, but the CPA had to work hard to ensure the political reliability of the NLF's rank and file.

In the third and last phase, May 1944 – November 1944, the resistance movement itself, became a mass mobilized social movement. Politically led exclusively by the CPA, its administrative hierarchy and staff also grew rapidly. Personal files in the Albanian archives confirm that as long as one served faithfully, political credentials were not a precondition for acceptance within the ranks of this administrative apparatus. Just like the Chief of Staff, Spiro Moisiu, other military officers, clerks, doctors, accountants, virtually anyone who could contribute to the war effort were accepted and even promoted accordingly, despite previous records of serving both Zogu's and the Italian puppet state. Many subsequently became card-carrying party members but others did not.⁷¹³ The swift rise of a bureaucratic

⁷¹³ Personal files in AQSh are difficult to access and often require permission by family members. Having gained very limited access in a number of these, the case of S.I., a medical doctor by profession is instructive for what may well illustrate communist "hiring" practices. S.I. was born in 1905 in Përmet and after having attended the lyceum of Korçë graduated in France with a degree in medicine, later followed up by a specialization course in Florence, Italy. Between 1936 and 1939 he served as a doctor in the Royal Albanian Army and then in the Albanian puppet state during the occupation. The Italians promoted him to the rank of Major and made him Officer of the Order of Skanderbeg. After the Italian capitulation, he served for three months with a *Balli çeta* under the charismatic former communist Hysni Lepenica. On 2 November 1944, two weeks prior to the

apparatus drew on the previous advocacy for state reform. Then the exigencies of war and the Communist model for central control provided the national unity that the associations had sought but not found. Within the short space of just two years, under CPA management, the NLF grew from a few loosely associated çeta units to a disciplined mass organization of approximately 50,000 members enjoying mass domestic support and international recognition. For the first time in Albanian modern history a single association had mobilized a mass national membership under its central control while at the same time taking control of the state.

liberation of Tiranë from the Germans he joined the NLA as a medic. In July 1945 he was promoted and appointed Director of the General Military Hospital in Tiranë. It is not clear what happened afterward since the file in my possession is incomplete. "Personal File of S.I." in AQSh, Unnumbered personal files in the archive of the Party of Labor, (AP). See also AQSh, F. 14, D. 16, Fl. 1-7.

Conclusion

Albanian associational life traces its origins to nineteenth century structural transformations of Ottoman state institutions, which, on the one hand, facilitated the assertion of Albanian national identity and, on the other, succeeded in coopting elite Albanians as state employees, rather than as state contractors as they had been in the past. But while the Tanzimat reforms offered a blueprint for a new social order premised upon equality and justice, it was the threatened demise of the Ottoman Empire during the Eastern Crisis and the subsequent confinement of the political process away from the implied Tanzimat constitutionalism to the patrimonial dynastic framework of Sultan Abdülhamit II which provided the impetus for the organization of the Albanian voluntary associations. Starting from the early 1880s, Albanian men and women forged cultural and then political movements that challenged the Hamidian bureaucratic absolutism, the ecumenical hold of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Istanbul over confessional life, and the existing Ottoman *millet* system as inadequate markers of modern identity. Initially articulated by Muslim Albanians, this Albanian approach to modernity was then carried ahead with the resources of prosperous Orthodox émigrés.

Their associations enjoyed some success. From the late 1880s onward an explosion in print culture appeared to have reversed the earlier denials about the existence of a separate Albanian ethno-linguistic identity. A system of informal and at times rudimentary schooling was also successful in checking (though not halting) the influence of the Orthodox Greek clergy among Orthodox Albanians. More

importantly, the associations, formal and informal, and their networks succeeded by 1912 in constructing an Albanian secular identity above religious divisions. Politically, the associations spearheaded the extensive use of representative practices from elections to checks and balances. In the process, they obtained important constitutional experience that became useful when, after July 1908, the associations became important mechanisms for organizing and coordinating Albanian involvement in imperial politics consistent with a constitutional order. But if the associations and their networks succeeded in nationalizing perceptions they failed to mobilize the masses. As evidenced by Haxhi Qamili's and the Mirditë rebellions of 1914 and 1921 respectively, the largely illiterate lowland peasants and the highland clans remained largely immune to the associations' nationalist message. Nonetheless, the associations succeeded in winning over those segments of the Albanian society that now mattered the most politically, the middle class, the intelligentsia, the free professions and, increasingly after 1918, the youth.

The political message of the associations was civic in character. In contrast to the surrounding Balkan states, whose national programs emphasized geographically grounded territorial acquisitions, these Albanian organizations acted as pressure and special interest groups seeking only to influence public opinion and state policy. As a result historical (states') rights and religious allegiances never entered into political confrontations and identity discourse with a force equal to, say, the territorial competitions of the Balkan states on the one hand and the sectarian upheavals that have occurred in Lebanon since the 1840s on the other.⁷¹⁴ This was so for two

⁷¹⁴ Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History and Violence in Nineteenth Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2000).

reasons. First, unlike the other Balkan countries, the Albanians did not possess medieval states, which in turn precluded the construction of exclusionary and mythic properties for the ethnic group. Second, in the Ottoman Empire, the Albanians were already whole and thus had no reason to construct similar irredentist notions for territorial expansion. To speak of an Albanian ethnic nationalism is misleading. Associational activists routinely called themselves “nationalists” but they understood and applied the term broadly to mean defense of natural and later civil and political rights from infringement by the Ottoman government and predatory foreign powers. For them, nationalism meant the social and political emancipation, primarily from the millet system, but also freedom from repression that came from identifying the Albanians on religious rather than national grounds. It was on this basis that the associations sought language rights and fought for the political representation of Albanians first in the Ottoman Empire and later in the European state system.

Despite their achievements and their ideological unity, the associations were politically divided. On the one hand, these divisions were tactical reflecting the multiple identities percolating under “Albanianism,” itself an umbrella identity uniting all émigré voluntary associations but dividing the social activists among themselves. As seen above, the associations possessed specific constituencies peculiar to each one, different traditions, different values and different strengths that reflected the absorption of social and political values in their adopted countries or regions of operations. These divisions eventually led to disputes as seen between Nikolla Naço’s *Drita* and *Ditura* in Bucharest in Chapter 1, between Noli and Dako’s camp in the United States in Chapter 2, between Noli and Zogu in Albania in Chapter 3, between

the various émigré associations in Chapter 4, and ultimately between the CPA and its rivals in Chapter 5. In doing so, such disputes created tensions between the nation as a concept and the form that the state should take as a political unit. Because of these multiple identities, the associations did not successfully make the transition from cultural-political associations to stable political parties when the opportunity presented itself, first in 1908-1912 and then again in the early 1920s. Thus, whereas the Serbian *prečani*, the Greek *Phanariotes* and Romanian and Bulgarian returnees from France, Russia, Germany and beyond were soon either absorbed in the domestic mix or pushed aside not long after independence, the Albanians associations gained access to state authority only in 1908-1912 and 1921-1924 and then only too briefly.⁷¹⁵ This in turn gave a longer lease on life to the émigré experience that far exceeded other Balkan examples. It was from here that a new class of younger social activists adopted communism after 1924 in the same way that their parents had adopted a liberal conception of a constitutional state after 1880. This younger segment, shaped by unfulfilled aspirations for the domestic sovereignty of the state, national security, social reform, were galvanized by the nationalist excesses of the Balkans Wars and the First World War. Dissatisfied by the absence of equal Albanian representation in the international state system, they turned away from the moderation and optimism of the early 1900s. They sought more radical remedies.

In emigration, the interwar communists, like their predecessor associations in Romania, Egypt and the United States, used freedoms of press and assembly to

⁷¹⁵ For an example of similar Balkan patterns see Petar V. Krestić, “Political and Social Rivalries in Nineteenth Century Serbia, *Švabe* or *Nemačkari*” in *Balkanica* 41, (2010), 73-92; John Anthony Petropulos, *Politics and Statecraft in the Kingdom of Greece, 1833-1943* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 153-212, 235-265 and in *passim*.

operate legally and expand their informal and formal networks. Although they did not create a movement of the left within Albania, like the émigré associations of the late Ottoman period, they were nonetheless instrumental in ensuring its continuity. The eruption of the Second World War then provided them the impetus to transcend informal associations that had kept Albanians perpetually divided from an organizational viewpoint and centralize as a single coherent political party. Indeed it was the wartime conditions rather than the arrival of the Yugoslav emissaries that facilitated the founding of the CPA. At the meeting of the communist groups in November 1941, the Yugoslavs assumed only the symbolic role of honest brokers standing in for the Comintern, at the request of the Albanians. It was this internationalist connection that allowed the Albanian communists to transcend the old nationalist animosity toward their northern neighbor and collaborate with the Yugoslavs under the transnational umbrella of the Comintern.

What the Yugoslav emissaries could neither dictate nor manufacture was the Albanians' own capacity for national mobilization. Its potential was already present. Mobilization through the regional antifascist councils followed the footsteps of the informal associations of the past: the National Defense Committees during the battle for Vlorë (1920), the associations that sprang up during the second Constitutional era (1908-1912), the Committee(s) for the Liberation of Albania (CLAs) during the late Hamidian period (1905-1908) and before that the CUP branches during the Young Turk opposition heydays (1890s onward), not to mention the experience of the émigré independent voluntary associations. And, true to their young age, these communists were eager students, learning and adapting knowledge from whichever source it

came. Military talents, for instance, were readily found in the young graduates from military schools and academies both in Albania and Italy. For instance, in the view of the Western historiography, Mehmet Shehu appears to be the only commander of note that the NLF possessed. Although certainly the most aggressive commander and part of the senior military leadership, Shehu was not a member of the General Staff. Until late in the war (August-September 1944) he was politically junior to most officers such as Dali Ndreu, Tuk Jakova, Hulusi Spahiu, Gjin Marku and others, members of the original communist groups in interwar Albania. The gradual purging of these wartime generals in the 1950s and 1960s left Shehu the longest living wartime senior officer until he, himself, was purged in 1981.

Even the roots of the postwar single-party Stalinist state can similarly be traced in the Albanian past rather than in the experience that the Yugoslavs brought to Albania. Except for the brief 1920 to 1924 period, all other political regimes since Abdülhamit II had been authoritarian in nature. Similarly, military regimes of the Balkan Wars and First World War had not allowed the manifestation of political pluralism. Thus, the political legacy inherited by the communists was one of two royal dictatorships, a single-party regime (CUP 1908-12) and war. It was in the reorganization of Ottoman state institutions and the new European intellectual trends percolating among the Young Turks that first taught educated Albanians to think in terms of a rational modern civilization based on scientific progress, rejection of religion, positivism and a materialistic concept of history. Such initial influences would then turn toward the Soviet model by the mid-1920s. Then the wartime Italian and German occupation turned the communist associations into a single Communist

Party able to build a mass resistance movement and take power in 1944, finally combining nation and state.

Appendices

Appendix A: Documents of the League of Prizren

1. Kararname

Kararname (Resolution), signed by 47 Muslim deputies from the districts of Prizren, Gjakova, Ipek [Pejë], Gucia, Yeni Pazar [Novi Pazar], Sjenica, Tachlidja [Pljevlja], Mitrovica, Vuçitern [Vushtri], Prishtina, Gjilan, Skopje, Kalkandelen [Tetovo], Kirchovo [Kërçovë / Kičevo], Gostivar, and Lower and Upper Dibra.

Article 1

Our league has come together to oppose any government other than that of the Sublime Porte and to defend our territorial integrity by all possible means.

Article 2

It is our most earnest intention to preserve the imperial rights of our Lord, the irresponsible person of His Highness the Sultan. We will therefore regard as foes of our nation and fatherland all those who counteract this intention and cause a disturbance, as well as all those who endeavor to weaken the authority of the Government and those who assist in such endeavors, until they mend their ways, and we will eject from our territories those who make trouble for the loyal inhabitants of the country.

Article 3

We will willingly accept delegates from other districts who wish to join our League and will register them in the national list as friends of the Government and the country.

Article 4

In accordance with our noble religious law (*sharia*), we will protect the lives, property and honor of our loyal non-Muslim compatriots as our own, but yet we will act against rebels and punished them according to circumstance and venue.

Article 5

All expenditures for the troops to be mustered by the districts will be covered under directives to be issued. Auxiliary troops from abroad will be gratefully welcomed into our ranks.

Article 6

In view of the situation in the Balkans, we will not allow any foreign troops to enter our territory. We will not recognize Bulgaria and do not even wish to hear its name mentioned. If Serbia does not agree to give up the regions it has occupied illegally,

we will deploy volunteer corps against it and do our utmost to bring about the return of these regions. We will do the same with Montenegro.

Article 7

We will support our fellow countrymen and those faithful to the Government in the Balkans who have shown that they support our League. We will assist one another in times of need. There will be no lack of mutual support and understanding.

Article 8

Should one district encounter opposition in carrying out the objectives of the League, the neighboring districts will come to its aid and will provide requisite support to achieve the desired objectives.

Article 9

Anyone who leaves our League, anyone who – God forbid – commits the crime of espionage against it, and anyone who does not obey the orders of his superiors, will be given the punishment he deserves.

Article 10

Should the inhabitants of the districts that joined the League, whoever they be and whatever religion they follow, choose to leave our League, they may not go over to Serbia or Montenegro. Should anyone do so nonetheless, he will be declared a spy and will be punished according to the laws in force.

Article 11

Anyone of us who has been entrusted with competencies from our League and does not carry out his duties properly, neglects them or absents himself from them, or who misuses his office or official power in any manner, or who behaves brutally or causes dishonor, will be publicly exposed and punished accordingly, and his property will be confiscated.

Article 12

Marching orders for the troops, conscription, use of the forces and other such matters will be specified in special regulations to be set forth.

Article 13

Great attention is to be paid to documents and written correspondence to ensure that these orders and directives are clearly followed.

Article 14

It is understood that the Government may not interfere in the affairs of the League. Accordingly, the League will not interfere in the administrative affairs of the Government, unless the latter can be shown to have issued orders involving the use of force.

Article 15

A copy of these resolutions will be presented wherever necessary.

Article 16

In accordance with the covenant of the League that we deputies of the undaunted men of northern Albania, Epirus and Bosnia have contracted – men who have known nothing but arms since their birth and who are willing to shed their blood for the Empire, their nation and their fatherland - we have selected Prizren as the capital of the League. As soon as the League is functioning successfully, we will nevermore allow a tyrant to oppress us and the inhabitants of our districts. After us, this League will be taken over by our children and grandchildren. Whoever abandons it, will be treated as if he had abandoned our Islamic faith and will be the object of our curses and scorn. We pledge that we will carry out the provisions of our Resolutions faithfully and give witness thereto with our signatures.

2. Talimat (Instructions) on the organization of the administration and the creation of its military arm.

Article 1

In implementation of the Resolutions of the League, a central administration will be set up in the town of Prizren, consisting of persons elected as the best representatives of each sancak governing the administration of all the *kazâs*. In turn, local branches of the central administration will be set up in each *kazâ*, using the most capable figures of the towns and municipalities thereof. In their written correspondence with one another, the members of this administration will use their personal seals.

Article 2

Apart from the deputies sworn in by the central administration, all the other functionaries will return to their homes and set up local branches of administration for the *kazâs* as soon as possible, and, within a period of 10-15 days, will make ready the armed forces mustered there. To this end, they are to inform the central administration of the sancaks of their activities, and act according to the responses they receive from it.

Article 3

Each *kazâ* is to [recruit] the requisite number of soldiers in two phases and ensure that they be made ready for duty.

Article 4

In addition, should any of the local branches of the administration require armed forces, each *kaza* will second regular troops to the place in question, corresponding to the number of soldiers they have registered and who are able to bear arms.

Article 5

Should our enemies attack before the Congress [of Berlin], currently underway, takes its decisions, the nearest *kazâs* are to second a sufficient number of troops, recruiting

them in a mass call-up. The *kazâs* not situated in the immediate vicinity of the fighting are to second their regular troops to the regions in question without delay, as soon as they are so informed hereof by the central administration,

Article 6

The head of command, major and other officers of the army, that is to be set up in an orderly fashion in line with the registry carried out in each region, will be appointed with the approval of the local population.

Article 7

The local branches of administration in the sancaks and *kazâs* must carry out a detailed check of the number of soldiers at their disposal, and none of the officers is to offer any opposition to this.

Article 8

As soon as the deputies return to their homes, they are to carry out a detailed inventory of the amounts and kinds of weapons available to the population of each *kazâ*, and are to inform the central administration thereof.

Article 9

All men of the *kazâ* deemed fit for military service shall be sent into battle immediately. Should any of these men refuse to go to battle, or should they set off and harm the local population on their way, or flee from the battlefield, their houses will be burnt down or, according to the gravity of the offense, they will be sentenced to death or deported to some distant region where they will do their military service in the ranks of the regular army. Should there be men among them who have no houses and who go into hiding at the homes of their relatives or in houses of other people, the owners to these homes giving shelter to them will be severely punished in line with the gravity of the offense.

Article 10

Should a soldier from a *kazâ* flee the battlefield, or while on marching orders, take refuge in another *kazâ*, the local population of that *kazâ* must arrest him immediately and hand him over to the local authorities. If the people of that *kazâ* hide him, they will be severely punished.

Article 11

The members of the councils of elders, together with the imams and muftis of each town, village and hamlets in the *kazâ*, are to provide detailed information, without any exception, on the number of men capable of bearing arms in their villages and hamlets. Anyone not obeying this regulation or abusing his authority will be severely punished.

Article 12

Each officer, irrespective of rank, is to provide his commanding officer with the exact number of registered and trained soldiers under his orders. Should he not inform his

superior or exaggerate the number of men under his command, he will be punished for abuse of power.

Article 13

Committees for the distribution of booty are to be set up in the military camps that are to conduct an inventory of the booty and distribute animals captured from the enemy as booty during the fighting.

Article 14

Should at any given time one or more units sent from camp into battle capture animals as booty, this booty must be divided up in front of a special committee and shared with the other units that did not capture any booty, the distribution being made on the basis on the number of rifle-bearing men. The aforementioned committees must hand over the respective portion of the animals to the officers to be distributed to the surviving soldiers or to the families of those who fell in battle that day. Soldiers who remained at the camp and did not take part in the fighting will not receive any animals captured from the enemy. Should the soldiers who originally seized the booty be put to flight and other soldiers come to their rescue, defending them and saving the seized animals, they will have a right to be counted in the distribution of the booty like the original soldiers. All other objects taken from the enemy as booty, aside from the animals, will belong to the person who captured them.

Article 15

Should an officer or a soldier send home any animals that were seized from the enemy as booty, instead of handing them over to the booty committee, the local branch of the *kazâ* administration will seize the animals and send them back to the camp. In such a case, the soldier having committed this offense forfeits his right to any of the booty.

Article 16

For the period during which the League is active, the local branches of the administration for each *kazâ* may recruit and employ as many people as they need.

Article 17

Beasts of burden, ammunition and other military equipment needed by the army that are to be provided by each *kazâ* will be made available with the approval and by decision of the local branches of the *kazâ* administration.

Article 18

Should any officer, irrespective of rank, be relieved of his duties because of an offense he has committed, another capable officer will be chosen and appointed to replace him, with the approval of all the members of the committee set up to this end, made up of other officers of the division in question.

Article 19

With regard to military organization, each company must be composed of one

hundred men, and have a captain, a lieutenant, five sergeants, ten corporals and one *emin* [keeper of accounts]. Four companies of infantry and one company of cavalry, a total of five hundred men, will make up a battalion that will have one commander, one deputy commander, one imam, one battalion secretary and a sufficient number of flag-bearers. The beasts of burden of the battalion are to be incorporated into the cavalry units. For every four battalions there will be a colonel, a regiment secretary and a lieutenant-colonel, and the forces of two colonels will be commanded by a general. Wages and other requisites for these officers will be regulated by State instructions for the regular army. It was noted above that a commander and the officers under his orders will have at their disposal five hundred men, but if needs be, this number may be reduced to three hundred. A person commanding over 2,500 men will have the rank of a general.

Decree on the organization of the army and the deployment of its units where they are needed.

Article 1

To defend the regions of Gucia [Gusinje] and Rugova, 2,000 soldiers from Gjakova are to be seconded to Gucia and 1,000 from Pejë are to be seconded to Rugova. All these soldiers belong to the Kosovo division.

Article 2

Since Gjakova has enough forces to defend itself, 1,000 men are to be recruited in Novi Pazar and seconded to defend Kolashin [Kolašin].

Article 3

Since the local population is not in a position to defend Čajniče [Čajniče], Tachlidja [Pljevlja] and Foča [Foča], 2,000 men from the Novi Pazar army are to be sent those regions.

Article 4

An army is also to be formed in Herzegovina. The troops of this army will consist of 30,000 men recruited from the population of the Sancak of Herzegovina and troops mustered in Sarajevo. This army will defend the region from Gacko to Trebinje.

Article 5

The region from Banja to Priboj will be defend by the army of Novi Pazar which, if needs be, will do battle with the enemy in this area. It will merge in Priboj with the army of Sarajevo.

Article 6

Another army is to be formed in Novi Pazar. This army will consist of Albanians, excluding the inhabitants of the Sancak itself, and will reach a level of 20,000 men, not counting the inhabitants of the region, who will supplement this army.

Article 7

An army, made up of Albanians, is to be formed in Kosova. This army will defend the region from Mitrovica to the *kazâ* of Gjilan and will join forces with the army of Skopje in that area. It will consist of 70,000 men.

Article 8

An army is also to be formed in Skopje that will march on Palanka with a view to joining forces with the army of Kosova. It will consist of 40,000 men. The Shkodra Corps will consist of 30,000 men. Thus, the total number of troops in the national army (not including the Sarajevo Corps) will reach 190,000, divided into 380 battalions (150,200 infantrymen and 39,800 cavalrymen).

We hereby sign and place our seals to these Instructions consisting of nineteen articles and to this Decree consisting of eight articles, passed with our approval, so that the institutions concerned act in full accord with the contents thereof and that the provisions thereof be kept in force in wartime and in peacetime.

Reproduced with minor changes from Robert Elsie, "Texts and Documents of Albanian History" in http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts19_2/AH1878_2.html

Appendix B: Alphabets discussed in Monastir compared to the modern day standard.

No.	Modern Alphabet in Use Today	Istanbul Alphabet (1879)	<i>Bashkimi</i> Alphabet (1899)	<i>Agimi</i> alphabet (1904)
1	A, a	A, a	A, a	A, a
2	B, b	B, b	B, b	B, b
3	C, c	C, c	Ts, ts	C, c
4	Ç, ç	Ç, ç	Ch, ch	Č, č
5	D, d	D, d	D, d	D, d
6	Dh, dh	Δ, δ	Dh, dh	D, d
7	E, e	E, ε	É, é	E, e
8	Ë, ë	?, e	E, e	Ě ě
9	F, f	F, f	F, f	F, f
10	G, g	G, g	G, g	G, g
11	Gj, gj	Γ, γ	Gh, gh	Ĝ, ĝ
12	H, h	H, h	H, h	H, h
13	I, i	I, i	I, i	I, i
14	J, j	J, j	J, j	J, j
15	K, k	K, k	K, k	K, k
16	L, l	L, l	L, l	L, l
17	Ll, ll	Λ, λ	Ll, ll	Ł, ł
18	M, m	M, m	M, m	M, m
18	N, n	N, n	N, n	N, n
20	Nj, nj	И, η	Gn, gn	Ń, ń
21	O, o	O, o	O, o	O, o
22	P, p	Π, π	P, p	P, p
23	Q, q	Q, q	C, c	K, k
24	R, r	R, r	R, r	R, r
25	Rr, rr	P, ρ	R, rr	R, r
26	S, s	S, s	S, s	S, s
27	Sh, sh	Σ (C), σ	Sh, sh	Š, š
28	T, t	T, t	T, t	T, t
29	Th, th	Θ, θ	Th, th	T,
30	U, u	U, u	U, u	U, u
31	V, v	V, v	V, v	V, v
32	X, x	X, x	Z, z	Dz, dz
33	Xh, xh	Ẋ, ẋ	Zh, zh	Dž, dž
34	Y, y	Y, y	Y, y	Y, y
35	Z	Z, z	X, x	Z, z
36	Zh	Z, z	Xh, xh	Ž, ž

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Fondi 37: Mustafa Kruja, 1900 – 1944
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Fondi 161: General Viceroyalty, 1939-1943
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abbreviated as APL

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