

## Austro-Hungarian Foreign Policy and the Independence of Albania

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This paper aims to analyze the role and impact of the Austro-Hungarian policy on maintaining the territorial status quo in the Balkans at the time when the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire was becoming inevitable. The independence of Albania was because of three main factors: the Albanian revolt in 1912, First Balkan War in 1912/13 and the diplomacy of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The Albanian revolt in 1912 gave the decisive blow against the Ottoman administration in Kosovo, which even resulted with the occupation of Skopje, but, due to internal differences Albanians did not declare independence from the Ottoman Empire. The First Balkan War hastened the decision of the Albanian leaders to declare independence, which can also be seen as a reaction of a threat of occupation to the Albanian territories by the Balkan Alliance (Serbia, Greece, Montenegro, and Bulgaria). However, Serbia and Montenegro managed to occupy Northern Macedonia (part of the Vilayet of Manastir). In this context, the role of the Austro-Hungarian diplomacy during the London Conference (1912–1913), was crucial for the recognition of the independence of Albania and the determination of the borders of the Albanian state. Since the occupation in 1878 and the later annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was strongly interested and involved in the Balkans, both economically and politically. The rivalry between Austria-Hungary and Russia over the dominance in the Balkans intensified since the beginning of the twentieth century and led to a deterioration of their relations. In this context, Austria-Hungary was interested in creating the Albanian state as a counterbalance to Serbian and Russian influence in Southeast Europe, as a barrier to prevent the territorial extension and to block the road of Serbia, which had already occupied Kosovo, toward the Adriatic.

[Albania; Kosovo; Austro-Hungarian Monarchy; Balkan Wars; Balkan League; Ottoman Empire]

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## Introduction

Not only in specifically Albanian literature, but on the international scale – that which pertains to the developments related to the declaration of Albanian independence there are in many cases unclear or incorrect data. However, we must say that during the last years, there have been many papers, even Ph.D. thesis, that either did not bring anything new, or were kept “closed” and unpublicized, since the authors were aware of their scientific limits. So, the situation of historiographic studies has remained in a kind of a *status quo*. In some cases, the level of scientific feed has been lower than during the period of the socialist and monist systems. Although the science of the last two decades has formally managed to be free of control over the way the history is written in Prishtina, Tirana, and Tetovo, it did not manage to break old clichés. Written history has not been able to surpass the traditional ideological course of the theory of social sciences.

Therefore, a detailed analysis, absent of any selection and factual instrumentalisation, has been missing of all the factors that brought about the moment of independence of the Albanian state. It has happened that three merits were given either to one internal factor, or a national hero. But due to this absence, we have not been rightfully, deservedly, acknowledged by Austria-Hungary, which played the most important role of all the actors in the foundation of the Albanian state.

As a result, there are few scientific works or commentaries that go beyond the old clichés and challenge the traditional interpretation – many events or historical figures still remain taboo. Data taken from Western archives provide us with answers to various issues and present opportunities to reconstruct the local and international events that led to the proclamation of Albanian independence. This writing is mainly based on the data taken from the Austro-Hungarian archives at the Austrian State Archive in Vienna and Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Berlin. The aim is to provide a paper that goes beyond the “stereotypes” of the Albanian historiography and pushes a different interpretation of the historical events during the period leading up to the independence of Albania. The goal is to stimulate scientific debates of a quality that will revise the usual interpretations and at the same time will offer orientation for the readers and studies of this historical period. I am not pretending to give a sole answer, let alone the final one. Therefore, I will try to unveil the significance of Austro-Hungarian diplomacy in the proclamation of Albanian independence. I will also highlight the key role of the anti-

Ottoman uprising in Kosovo. I would even consider this paper an attempt to deepen my knowledge within the broader theme of heroism.

### **Albania, the farewell Symphony of the European Concert**

The essential idea of this writing is to analyze the internal and external legitimacies which brought about the independence of Albania, more than one hundred years ago. It is a well-known fact that the Balkan states – among them Albania – were created as a consequence of the dynamic between the demands of the people for political independence, and the engagement of European powers. Since the establishment of the European Concert during the 1815 Vienna Congress, the main focus of the European states had been to maintain the status quo and avoid a continental war.<sup>1</sup> The State foundation was a product determined by the intersection of internal ethnic and political factors coupled the external factor of the European powers. The first foundations encompassed the idea of freedom, while the following focused on ensuring security and maintaining the regional and European balances.

Seeing the insufficiency of the Albanian factor to independently resolve their national dilemma, the Albanian elite of European orientation gave the right to be closer to Austria-Hungary. This positioned Albania as the only European state that would benefit from a protector's role in the formation of their state.<sup>2</sup> In this framework, Vienna officially supported

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<sup>1</sup> J. DÜLFER, Die Kreta-Krise und der griechisch-türkische Krieg 1890–1898, in: H.-O. MÜHLEISEN V. TORUMSKY (eds.), *Inseln als Brennpunkte der internationalen Politik. Konfliktbewältigung im Wandel des internationalen System 1890–1984*, Köln 1986, p. 13; H. Ch. LÖHR, *Die Gründung Albaniens. Wilhelm Wied und die Balkan-Diplomatie der Grossmächte 1912–1914*, Frankfurt am Main 2010, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> When Austria was excluded from Germany in 1866, its interests returned very quickly towards the Balkans, as the only region that bore expansion possibilities. While the Russian-Ottoman (1877) war was happening, Austro-Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs engaged to compile a memorandum for Albania. Considering the possibility to create, new Slavic states, at the eastern borders shared by Austria-Hungary. In the Ballhausplatz, they thought that the Albanians and their land would serve as strongholds to prevent the expansion of the Slavs. If the Albanians were to be left alone, they would be too weak to face the impending Slavism, as stated by F. Lippich, an Austro-Hungarian Consul in Shkodra. As part of a larger Austro-Hungarian force, they had the potential to be valuable allies, “since they are not only a strong nation, with totally anti-Slavic thoughts, but also because they owned a land territory which went up the border with Serbia, on one side, and up to Bulgarian Morava on the other”. The Albanians would clearly prevent the expansion desires of Serbia and Bulgaria. Supported by the Danubian Monarchy, they would gain a post that would make it impossible for the

the notion of the Albanian National Movements, which would establish an Albanian autonomous province within the Ottoman Empire. This was to act as an intermediary phase towards the implementation of external self-determination.<sup>3</sup> The political elite, although not integrated within the Ottoman system, formulated the idea for Albanian state development. As the Albanian national movement of 1912 reached its peak, Kosovo took center stage for the first time since the East Crisis. Due to the internal and external premises, Kosovo took the primary role of the state-created political nationalism movement.<sup>4</sup> Kosovo maintained this role until the other Albanian regions particularly the Southern regions became the bearers of cultural nationalism.

The formation of Albania seems today a coincidental chain of historical events. The First Balkan War forced the great European powers to face the demands of Albanians. The formation of Albania came also as the result of equilibrium of the great European powers. Albania was the farewell symphony of the European Concert.

### **Austro-Hungarian Foreign Policy and Albanians**

For Austria-Hungary, which had the status of a major European power in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Balkans were the last possible region in which it could apply an active foreign policy and played an important role in the alliances between the most powerful European states.<sup>5</sup> At that time Austria-Hungary became part of the European ensemble not only because of its merits, but also because of its alliance with Russia and its good relations with Eng-

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Russian-protected Slavs to fight in the Western Balkan, which was within the interest sphere of Austria-Hungary. Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv (HHStA), Politisches Archiv (PA) XII/256, Türkei 1–V, “Denkschrift über Albanien” von k. und k. Consul F. Lippich, Wien, Juni 20, 1877.

- <sup>3</sup> H. D. SCHMANDER, *Die Albanienpolitik Österreich-Ungarns und Italiens 1877–1908*, Wiesbaden 1971; S. SKENDI, *Albanian National Awakening*, Tiranë 2000; *Österreich-Ungarns Aussenpolitik von der Bosnischen Krise 1908 bis zum Kriegsausbruch 1914*, Wien 1930; R. SCHWANKE, *Das Pretokrat Österreich-Ungarns über die Katholiken Albanien*. Diss., Wien 1961; A. H. BENNA, Studien zum Kultuspretokrat Österreich-Ungarns in Albanien im Zeitalter des Imperialismus (1888–1918), in: *Mitteilung des Österreichischen Staatsarchivs*, VII, 1954, pp. 13–47.
- <sup>4</sup> K. SCHMITT – J. OLIVER, *Kosovo. Kurze Geschichte einer zentralbalkanischen Landschaft*, Wien 2008, pp. 166–168.
- <sup>5</sup> I. DIÓSZEGI, *Die Aussenpolitik der Österreichisch-Ungarischen Monarchie 1871–1877*, Wien 1985.

land.<sup>6</sup> In this context, the four Albanian vilayets in the Ottoman Empire<sup>7</sup> were of particular importance for the protection of the interests of the monarchy for the Austro-Hungarian Empire as well as for Russia, Italy and the countries of the region. In the last three decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Austria-Hungary played a prominent role through its cultural, political, and economic protectorate.<sup>8</sup> In this way, Vienna played a historic role in the national awakening of the Albanians and in expanding its “vital interests” in the Balkans.<sup>9</sup>

What were the motivations for the Austro-Hungarian involvement in the Balkans? The main reason for an active Balkan policy lay in the great efforts of the Habsburg monarchy to expand his military, religious and economic influence on the east.<sup>10</sup> Another incentive was the loss of the Austro-Hungarian leadership in the German states, but also in northern Italy. In 1859 Austria-Hungary lost the war against France. In the northeast was Russia, who was also aimed at penetrating the interior of the Balkans and saw itself as the protective power of the Orthodox Slavic population. In addition to that, their relationship has been turbulent since the Congress of Vienna and the Crimean War, and they have almost remained rivals. The price of the anti-Russian attitude in this war, which led to the reversal of Tsarist policies in the Balkans and the Aegean Sea, prolonged the Balkan rivalry between the dual monarchy and Russia until the outbreak of World War I.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> F. R. BRIDGE, *The Foreign Policy of the Monarchy 1908–1918*, in: M. CORNWALL (ed.), *The last Years of Austro-Hungary, Essays in Political and Military History 1908–1918*, Exeter 1990.

<sup>7</sup> The Albanian Vilayet (Ottoman Turkish: دوانراتي الو Vilâyet-i Arnavid) was a projected vilayet of the Ottoman Empire in the western Balkan Peninsula, which was to include the four Ottoman vilayets with substantial ethnic Albanian populations: Kosovo Vilayet, Scutari Vilayet, Manastir Vilayet, and Janina Vilayet. In some proposals, it included the Salonica Vilayet as well. N. CLAYER, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais: la naissance d'une nation majoritairement musulmane en Europe*, Karthala 2007, p. 463.

<sup>8</sup> BENNA, pp. 13–26.

<sup>9</sup> Z. PRELA, *Aspekte ekonomike të depërtimit paqësor të Austro-Hungarisë në Shqipëri (1900–1912)*, in: *Studime Historike*, 3, 2, 1966, pp. 77–104 (here p. 102).

<sup>10</sup> K. GOSTENTSCHNIGG, *Wissenschaft im Spannungsfeld von Politik und Militär: Die österreichisch-ungarische Albanologie 1867–1918*, Wiesbaden 2018, p. 263.

<sup>11</sup> I. MÜLLER, *Die Handelspolitik der österreichisch-ungarischen Monarchie am Balkan zwischen 1890 und 1914*, Diss., Wien 1979, p. 185.

Based on that, Austro-Hungarian politics initially focused on the Catholic Albanian population, whom they offered protection against the attacks of the Ottoman Empire. Given the growing opposition to Russia and Serbia, as well as the ongoing weakening of the Ottoman Empire, Austro-Hungary has committed himself since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to the national consciousness finding of the Albanians. The Albanian question was the main objective of Austro-Hungary and aimed at the founding of the Albanian state, which would make it for Serbia impossible for gain access to the Adriatic Sea.<sup>12</sup> In northern Albania, respectively in Kosovo, for example, it pushed the campaign to build a railway line that would connect Vienna through Sandzak with Thessaloniki, but unfortunately it was never realized.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to this with the Reichstadt Agreement of 1876 Austria-Hungary had made it clear that she would oppose the formation of a great Slavic state in the Balkans.<sup>14</sup> This was reaffirmed in the secret Austro-Russian Convention of January 15, 1877, where the creation of an independent Albanian state was mentioned as possible in the event of a territorial remaniement or a dissolution of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>15</sup> Austro-Hungarian policy at the Congress of Berlin consequently endeavored to keep to a minimum the annexation of Albanian territory by the South Slavs. The importance to Austria-Hungary of northern Albania as a counterpoise to Slavism is also shown in the memorandum of 1877 by F. Lippich.<sup>16</sup>

This interest was not only a result of the geographical proximity and its strategic position in this part of Eastern Europe, but especially due to a great interest of Austro-Hungarian government to ensure control on the eastern of the Albanian Adriatic Sea. On the other hand, slavic people of peninsula related to Russia, because of common origin and

<sup>12</sup> See the memoir written by Zwiedinek „Die albanesische Action des k. und k. Ministeriums des Aeussern im Jahre 1897“, Wien, Januar 11, 1898. HHStA, Botschaftsarchiv Konstantinopel, Kt. 422.

<sup>13</sup> I. F. PANTENBURG, *Im Schatten des Zweibundes. Probleme österreichisch-ungarischer Bündnispolitik 1897–1908*, Wien, Köln, Weimar 1996, pp. 411–413.

<sup>14</sup> A. NOVOTNY, Österreich-Ungarn auf dem Berliner Kongress, in: E. ZÖLLNER (Hg.), *Diplomatie und Außenpolitik Österreichs. Elf Beiträge zu ihrer Geschichte*, Wein 1977, pp. 113–123, (here pp. 114–115).

<sup>15</sup> Article 111 of the Additional Austro-Russian Convention of 15 January 1877, pp. 284 and 601.

<sup>16</sup> HHStA, PA XII/256, Türkei IV, „Denkschrift über Albanien“, Vienna, June 1877, pp. 15–18.

culture. Albanians were the only people in the Balkans, which could not count on Russian support. Since Austria-Hungary needed to go out to the Adriatic Sea to become part of trade in the Mediterranean, the existence of the new Albanian state would serve them well, primarily as an obstacle against the expansion of the Slavic states. For this reason, Vienna was gradually jeopardizing its relations with its ally Russia. Especially with the appointment of Gyula Andrassy<sup>17</sup> as Foreign Minister, anti-Russian orientation prevailed in foreign policy. At the Congress of Berlin in 1878 he was the principal Austrian plenipotentiary and directed his efforts to diminish the gains of Russia and aggrandize the Dual Monarchy. Before the Congress opened on 13 June, negotiations between Andrassy and the British Foreign Secretary Marquess of Salisbury had already “ended on 6 June by Britain agreeing to all the Austrian proposals relative to Bosnia-Herzegovina about to come before the congress while Austria would support British demands”.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, Andrassy wanted to block any attempt to create a large Slavic state to the south of Austria. In fact, Andrassy once said, “Austria’s mission remains [...] to be a bulwark against Russia, and only so long as she fulfils this mission is her existence a necessity for Europe”.<sup>19</sup>

Due to the above circumstances, Albania was the only area where the Austro-Hungarian Empire could extend its influence. Initially, this interest was limited to penning and funding some schools for the needs of preparing the Albanian Catholic clergy and to the financing of church and Catholic clergy, whereas later this activity kept increasing.<sup>20</sup> The Government of Vienna provided funds for the publication of textbooks in Albania, and helped with the publication of scientific works, which scope dealt with Albania and the Albanians. Although the Austro-Hungarian

<sup>17</sup> Count Gyula Andrassy de Csíkszentkirály et Krasznahorka (8 March 1823 – 18 February 1890) was a Hungarian statesman, who served as Prime Minister of Hungary (1867–1871) and subsequently as Foreign Minister of Austria-Hungary (1871–1879). Andrassy was a conservative; his foreign policies looked to expanding the Empire into Southeast Europe, preferably with British and German support, and without alienating Turkey. He saw Russia as the main adversary, because of its own expansionist policies toward Slavic and Orthodox areas. He distrusted Slavic nationalist movements as a threat to his multi-ethnic empire.

<sup>18</sup> F. R. BRIDGE, *From Sadowa to Sarajevo: the Foreign Policy of Austria-Hungary, 1866–1914*, London 1972, p. 49.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>20</sup> F. RAMADANI, Albania in the Austro-Hungarian Policy during 1912, in: *100 Years of Independence. Speeches of the International Scientific Conference*, Tirana, November 26–27, 2012, Vol. I, Tirane 2014, pp. 191–208 (here pp. 191–193).

Empire gave significant contribution to the development of the Albanian education and culture, it had a reserved attitude of Ottoman Empire *status quo*, therefore, it opposed any action that could undermine. According to Austro-Hungarian diplomats, cultural and economic development of Albania was a prerequisite for ensuring autonomy or independence of Albania. In this context the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy did not support the idea of the organization of an Albanian uprising, also because Serbia and Montenegro Russian-backed could exploit these uprisings for their own interests. Breaking the status quo was contrary to the policy pursued by the Austro-Hungarian Government in the Balkan Peninsula.

But Austria-Hungary wanted to include Albania had the most direct interest in the survival of Albania. Vienna wished to add the area to its own sphere of interest and to check the expansion of the neighboring Slavic.<sup>21</sup> For Foreign Minister Andrassy, partition of Turkey in Europe was almost as abhorrent to him as its domination by Russia.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, Serbian policy was more cautious at this stage the crisis in relations between Austro-Hungary and Serbia after the latter's annexation of Bosnia had made the Serbian government less hostile to the Ottoman state. Serbs thought that they would seize any opportunity to march in again and annex that territory, and perhaps even vilayets of Kosovo and Monastir (Macedonia) too.<sup>23</sup> The invasion of Kosovo and Macedonia was also aimed at Serbia, which at least since the Berlin Congress enjoyed the support of Russia, whose ultimate goal was to reach the shores of the eastern Adriatic.

The completion of the treaty reinforced Russia's suspicions that at the Congress of Berlin, Germany threw its complete support behind Austria-Hungary, and now with the 1879 treaty, Bismarck intended to continue that policy. Dual Alliance of October 1879 "*generated counter-alliances, which generated further mistrust and tensions, leading to an arms race, and the further polarization of the alliance structure*".<sup>24</sup> Eventually, the Tsar's regime felt compelled to look for another friend to protect against this threat on the crucial western border. Although many other things had to occur between 1879 and 1894 to prompt the Romanovs to turn to the French

<sup>21</sup> C. JELAVICH – B. JELAVICH, *The Establishment of the Balkan National States, 1804–1920*, Seattle, London 2000, p. 229.

<sup>22</sup> A. J. P. TAYLOR, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848–1918*, Oxford 1954, p. 248.

<sup>23</sup> N. MALCOLM, *Kosovo: A short History*, London 1998, p. 243.

<sup>24</sup> J. S. LEVY, Alliance Formation and War Behavior. An Analysis of the Great Powers, 1495–1975, in: *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 25, 4, 1981, p. 582.



Republic, Russia finally completed this step with their alliance with France in 1894.<sup>25</sup>

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the European part of the Ottoman Empire was made up of Macedonia, Thrace, and Albania. These regions, however, were the focus of permanent tensions in relation to the ethnic, denominational and national diversity of its citizens, and the inability of the central government to implement necessary reforms and achieve law and order.<sup>26</sup> During this time, when most of the nationalities in the Balkans had already managed to create their own nation states and were struggling to expand their territories, the Albanians were still part of the Ottoman Empire, where religious affiliation was more important than the ethnic (Millet System). This delay in Albanians was due to the lack of sufficient support of European powers as well as the even rudimentary national awareness of the Albanians. The Albanians, divided into four Ottoman vilayets, belonged to the most secluded and isolated nationalities. For example, the well-known Austro-Hungarian diplomat and Albanologist J. G. von Hahn stated during a trip to Albania that there was no organic compound and no communication between the provinces.<sup>27</sup> Isa Blumi emphasizes that there were only two schools in Albanian in 1900 and that around 1914 in Mirdita, a predominantly Catholic region in the northwest of Albania, could read only three people in Albanian.<sup>28</sup>

In this background, Albanian leaders were becoming more aware every day of the shaky structure of the Ottoman empire, supported only by interested powers for political motives. They feared, should the empire collapse, that a disunited Albania would be partitioned. On the other hand, they thought that union of the Albanian people could be achieved by remaining for some time within the framework of the Ottoman empire.<sup>29</sup> Their demand was, therefore, for administrative autonomy. Russia's increasing presence at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which

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<sup>25</sup> K. A. SHAFER, *The Congress of Berlin of 1878: its Origins and Consequences*, Portland State University, Diss. 1989, p. 87.

<sup>26</sup> M. URBAN, *The Balkans and Austria-Hungary 1908–1912*, in: *Prague Papers on the History of International Relations*, 2014, 2, pp. 112–127 (here p. 115).

<sup>27</sup> J. G. von HAHN, *Albanesische Studien*, Jena 1854, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> I. BLUMI, *The Role of Education in the Foration of Albanian Identity and Myths*, in: S. SCHWANDER-SIEVERS – B. J. FISCHER (eds.), *Albanian Identities: Myth and History*, Bloomington 2002, pp. 49–59 (here pp. 51–52).

<sup>29</sup> W. EFFENDI, *La verite sur L'Albanie et les Albanais*, Paris 1879, pp. 94–95; S. SKENDI, *Albanian National Awakening 1878–1912*, Princeton 1967, p. 88.

also resulted in the opening of a consulate in Mitrovica in 1903, made the Albanians in northern Kosovo to perceive Austro-Hungary more and more as a protective power, which opposed Serbian and Montenegrin ambitions.<sup>30</sup> This was why the Albanian majority population had warmly welcomed the arrival of the Austro-Hungarian consul in the newly established consulate in Mitrovica in 1904.<sup>31</sup> According to the Austro-Hungarian Consul Zambaur, the Austro-Hungarian consulate was seen both by Albanians and Muslims (Bosniaks) as a “counterweight” to the Russian consulate in Mitrovica, which was “[...] *completely openly hostile to the Turks* [...]”.<sup>32</sup>

In this situation the great powers could not remain disinterested, particularly Austria-Hungary and Russia. In September 1902, the reform project was elaborated by Calice and Zinoviev in Istanbul and was delivered to the Grand Vizier. One of the proposals recommended that the security forces, gendarmerie, and police, should also include Christians, their number to be proportionate to the Christian population of the region.<sup>33</sup> As there was fear of a clash between Bulgarian and Ottoman armies which could ignite Europe, the emperors of Russia and Austria-Hungary met, on October 2–3, 1903, at Mürzsteg, in Austria, and made a series of proposals for reform, embodied in the so-called “Mürzsteg program”.<sup>34</sup> On the basis of article 3 of this agreement, the powers would ask the Ottoman Government, following the appeasement of the country, to modify the territorial delimitation of the administrative units, with a view to a more regular grouping of the various nationalities.<sup>35</sup> This article also concerned the situation of the Albanians.

In the framework with the efforts of the European diplomacy to expand its influence in this part of the Balkans, Austro-Hungary represented the

<sup>30</sup> E. FRANTZ, *Gewalt und Koexistenz: Muslime und Christen im spätosmanischen Kosovo (1870–1913)*, München 2016, p. 139.

<sup>31</sup> HHStA, PA XXXVIII, Kt. 385, Zambaur an Gołuchowski, Mitrovica, Januar 22, 1904.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, Zambaur an Gołuchowski, Mitrovica, Februar 18, 1904, Nr. 11.

<sup>33</sup> T. von SOSNOSKY, *Die Balkanpolitik Österreich-Ungarns seit 1866*, 2 Bde, Berlin 1914, p. 131.

<sup>34</sup> In 1903, the Macedonian Question was at the roots of the first concerted European international intervention. The Mürzsteg Agreement, which was signed by the six great powers and the Ottoman Empire, was an attempt at common European diplomacy. See: N. AKHUND, *Stabilizing a Crisis and the Mürzsteg Agreement of 1903: International Efforts to Bring Peace to Macedonia*, in: *The Hungarian Historical Review*, 3, 3, 2014, pp. 587–608.

<sup>35</sup> See the articles of the “Mürzsteger Programm”, pp. 133–134; SKENDI, p. 204.

position that the interests of the monarchy were best protected, if the status quo would be maintained in the Ottoman Empire, with the help of the English and Russian Entente. The position of the Habsburg Monarchy was determined by the fact that this European power had to face two major political forces of the time; Pan-Slavism, supported by Russia and Italy, who had become since 1891 the third official Balkan power, along Austro-Hungary and Russia. In the fight against both currents, the Albanian area played an increasingly important role to preserve the vital interests of Vienna. For this reason, the politics prepared the secret plan "Albanien-Aktion",<sup>36</sup> which focused on the question about the future of the Albanian population. On the one hand, the Albanian territories formed the foundation of a bulwark against the Serbian penetration to the Adriatic and allowed a way to Thessaloniki at the same time, while on the other hand, as part of the Ottoman Empire, it guaranteed the free shipping of the monarchy of the street of Otranto.<sup>37</sup> In the case of the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, Vienna aimed to create an autonomous Albania and at the same time preventing the deployment of Italy on the Adriatic coast of Albania.<sup>38</sup> This autonomous Albania had to fulfill three functions for the Habsburg monarchy: guarantee the road to Thessaloniki, ensure free transportation on the Adriatic and the protection against the spread of Pan-Slavism.<sup>39</sup> For this reason, it was now time that Austro-Hungary to achieve an agreement with his new rival in the Balkans, Italy. An expansion of Serbia or Bulgaria to the Adria had to be prevented so that Russia's "iron ring" is not wrapped around the dualistic monarchy.

The acceptance by Austria-Hungary of the Monastir sector for the Italian gendarmerie prepared the way for the meeting of Abbazia (Opatija) (April 9, 1904) between Goluchowski and Tittoni, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs. Both parties reiterated declarations in favor of the status

<sup>36</sup> F. R. BRIDGE, Österreich(-Ungarn) unter den Großmächten, in: P. URBANITSCH – A. WANDRUSZKA (Hg.), *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918. Bd. VI/1: Die Habsburger Monarchie im System der internationalen Beziehungen*, Wien 1989, pp. 196–373 (here p. 290).

<sup>37</sup> GOSTENTSCHNIGG, pp. 273–274.

<sup>38</sup> *Österreich-Ungarns Aussenpolitik von der bosnischen Krise bis zum Kriegsausbruch 1914. Diplomatische Aktenstücke des österreichisch-ungarischen Ministeriums des Äusseren* (hereinafter ÖUA), ausgewählt von L. BITTNER – A. F. PRIBRAM – H. SRBIK – H. UEBERSBERGER, Bd. 1, Wien, Leipzig 1930, p. 31.

<sup>39</sup> GOSTENTSCHNIGG, p. 276.

quo in the Balkans and preservation of Albanian integrity.<sup>40</sup> They stood for the principle of autonomy based on nationality.<sup>41</sup> The two powers were suspicious of each other and relentlessly watched each other's activities, particularly in Albania, but their public statements were always in favor of the maintenance of the Triple Alliance.<sup>42</sup>

The appointment of Conrad von Hötzendorf as Chief<sup>43</sup> of Staff for the Austro-Hungarian military forces and Alois Lexa Freiherr von Aehrenthal as the new Foreign Minister in 1906 marked a turning point in the Austro-Hungarian foreign policy. Together with his successor Franz Ferdinand, they were representatives of the aggressive hegemonic policy towards the Balkans. They were supported by military and political circles in the German Empire, which regarded Austria-Hungary as a pioneer of economic and political penetration of Germany in the Balkans and the Middle East.<sup>44</sup> While the question of Macedonian reforms was encountering great difficulties, Aehrenthal announced (January 27, 1908) the plan for the construction of the railway line Sarajevo-Uvac-Mitrovice-Salonica. This would give a powerful impetus to Austria-Hungary's Orientpolitik.<sup>45</sup> Italy responded with a project to build a railway line from Vlore to Monastir, following for the most part the ancient Via Egnatia. This would

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<sup>40</sup> SKENDI, p. 253.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>42</sup> Since there was no denunciation of the treaty of the Triple Alliance by July 8, 1907, the treaty was tacitly prolonged for another period of six years, that is, until July 8, 1914. *ÖUA*, Bd. 8, Wien, Leipzig 1930, p. 132.

<sup>43</sup> Count Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf (1852–1925), as chief of the Austro-Hungarian general staff, was the foremost proponent of preventive war as the means of solving both the foreign and domestic problems of the multinational Habsburg Monarchy in one grand action. The combination of Conrad's insistence on war and Serbia's official, and frequently reckless unofficial, nationalist policies set the stage for the outbreak of a Balkan conflict that would shake Europe to its very foundations and change the world forever. In 1914 he was one of the main proponents of war on Serbia in response to the assassination in Sarajevo of Franz Ferdinand. After disastrous military campaigns, Field Marshal Conrad was sacked from the General Staff in March 1917. His voluminous German-language memoirs "Aus meiner Dienstzeit, 1906–1918" contain some clear insight into what motivated Austro-Hungarian policies towards Albania during the chaotic events that took place there in 1914, just before the fall of Prince Wied. See: J. G. BEAVER, *Collision Course Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf, Serbia, and the Politics of Preventive War*, Lulu.com 2009.

<sup>44</sup> PRELA, p. 79.

<sup>45</sup> T. von SOSNOSKY, *Die Balkanpolitik Österreich-Ungarns seit 1866*, Vol. 11, Stuttgart, Berlin 1914, pp. 141–142.

be dangerous for Austria-Hungary for it would establish for Italy a sphere of interest in southern Albania, which could be “perhaps the forerunner of an occupation”.<sup>46</sup> Neither plan materialized because of the Young Turk revolution of 1908.<sup>47</sup> Although the formula of the two powers, status quo and, in the event of the collapse of Ottoman Empire, the autonomy of an Albanian province or state, corresponded to their fundamental wish, there were differences in their particular interests. The size of Albania was not immaterial to her. Austria-Hungary wanted the northern part at least to be within the Albanian state, for in this way the exit of the Slavs to the Adriatic would be blocked.<sup>48</sup>

When in July 1908 the Young Turks staged a revolution in Constantinople, established a constitutional government, and inaugurated a reform program, the Austrian foreign minister Graf (Count) Lexa von Aehrenthal resolved to annex Bosnia and Herzegovina before the new Turkish regime could regain control over them. To that end Aehrenthal met the Russian foreign minister, Aleksandr P. Izvolsky, at Buchlau, in Moravia; and, on Sept. 16, 1908, Izvolsky agreed that Russia would not object to the annexation. Izvolsky felt Aehrenthal had deceived him. The Russian Foreign Minister’s defeat was further augmented by the fact that he did not have the consent of the government, nor of Emperor Nicholas II for his actions.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, Serbia, which was closely related to Bosnia and Herzegovina geographically and ethnically, was outraged by the annexation.

As the so-called Balkan League was forged, Austria-Hungary rode on the coattails of its prestige triumph in Bosnia in 1909. Vienna adopted a “sphinx”-like posture to frighten Serbia into inaction, refusing to confirm or deny rumors that it intended to march to Salonika if it perceived any threat to the status quo.<sup>50</sup>

Russia tried to unite the Balkan States and the Ottoman Empire in an alliance against the alleged expansionist goals of Austro-Hungary. Of course, the Ballhausplatz feared that a Russia-controlled Balkan league at the southern border of the dual monarchy would not only endanger its trading interests on the Balkan’s peninsula, but also mean a military

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<sup>46</sup> L. Freiherr von CHLUMECKY, *Österreich-Ungarn und Italien. Das westbalkanische Problem und Italiens Kampf um die Vorherrschaft in der Adria*, Leipzig, Wien 1907, p. 201.

<sup>47</sup> SKENDI, p. 255.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>49</sup> BRIDGE, *From Sadowa to Sarajevo*, p. 305.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 339.

siege by Russia and his loyal states. Under these circumstances, all the powers were interested in a status quo in the Balkans: United Kingdom, Italy, Russia, and Austria-Hungary. However, Alois Lexa von Aehrenthal, Foreign Minister of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy (1906–1912), made special efforts to get closer to Italy and Great Britain because of the Russian danger. In December 1909, the foreign ministers of Austria-Hungary and Italy signed an agreement, according to which any proposal of a third party, that intervenes and tries to change the status quo in the Balkans and other regions of the Ottoman Empire, should be discussed between them.<sup>51</sup> But the Ottoman Italian War of 1911–1912 in North Africa led to a new threat of the status quo in the Balkans. At the same time, between 1909 and 1911 in Kosovo and the other Albanian areas, there were successive uprisings against the Young Turks regime, which gave the political status quo in the Balkans the final blow and shook the relations between Austro-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire, as well as Austro-Hungary and the Albanians. Austro-Hungary's ambivalent policy, which is not interested in destroying the Ottoman Empire, but engaged in a decentralization of the Ottoman Empire. Vienna rightly feared that a Serbia-supported War in the Balkans endanger the Austro-Hungarian interests in the Balkans and would risk Albania's division through his neighbours. In the meantime, the military leadership circling stands chief Blasius Schemua<sup>52</sup> demanded a solution through war, while the circles and in particular the government of the Ballhausplatz continued to build on military pressure and threat. However, when the uprising broke out in March 1911 in Northern Albania, Austro-Hungary called High Port to treat the Albanians the most humane way, and thus risk a deterioration in bilateral relations. The Ballhausplatz signalled the Albanian leaders that Austro-Hungary was ready to support the creation of an autonomous

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<sup>51</sup> PRELA, p. 153.

<sup>52</sup> In 1910, Schemua was responsible for nationwide mobilization in the Ministry of War. From 1911 to 1912 he was Chief of the Austro-Hungarian General Staff, the highest position in the hierarchy of the Austro-Hungarian Army. At the beginning of the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 he was appointed commander of the 16<sup>th</sup> Corps in Dubrovnik and promoted to Feldmarschalleutnant (lieutenant field marshal). In 1913 he was promoted to general of the infantry. At the beginning of World War I in 1914, during the Battle of Galicia, he commanded the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps, but failed to distinguish himself at the Battle of Komarów. He was replaced by Johann von Kirchbach auf Lauterbach. He was then appointed commander of the defense of Danube from Krems to Pressburg. In 1915 he retired at his own request. See: P. BROUCEK, Schemua, Blasius, in: *Osterreichisches biographisches Lexikon 1815–1950*, Bd. 10, Wien 1994, p. 76.

Albania.<sup>53</sup> Of course, Austro-Hungary intended to take over a leading role in this Balkan policy. The change of their attitude towards the High Port and the Albanian national movement led to the outburst of a new uprising in Kosovo in May 1912 and then throughout Albania. As a result, the reputation of Austro-Hungary gradually increased both within the Catholic and the Muslim population of Albanians.<sup>54</sup>

### **Kosovo, the State Nationalism Epicentre**

As the center of the Ottoman state weakened, seemingly endless conflict commenced between the peoples of the geographical outskirts and the center itself. The crumbling centre acted as a decisive battlefield: this was the case on the anti-Ottoman uprising at Kosovo Vilayet, in the spring of 1912. Led by Hasan Prishtina, the uprising's agenda centered on utilizing the unity of the innermost four vilayets, which held most of the Albanian population. This was the most substantial limit to implement internal self-determination, which was influenced by the internal and external legitimacies. Although the Albanian uprising at Kosovo Vilayet reached large dimensions, it still lacked the unique leading centre that could coordinate, organize, and adequately express direction, in contrast to the circumstances at the time of and also have an adequate organizational centre, as it happened the Albanian League of Prizren.<sup>55</sup>

Fractioned, the Albanians became a playing ball for the Ottoman state and Balkan and European powers. At the same time internally, Albanian politicians – with old-fashioned ideas and lacking political direction – raced for the Albanian primate. This continued until the Balkan states secretly established an agenda to divide the European heritage from the Ottoman state.<sup>56</sup> The expansionist plans of the Balkan countries risked the idea of the Albanian autonomous principate foundation. At the same time, they countered the expansion of the political and economic influence of Austria-Hungary.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> GOSTENTSCHNIGG, pp. 288–289.

<sup>54</sup> HHStA, PA XXXVIII, Kt. 405, Adamkiewicz an Berchtold, Prizren, März 4, 1912, Nr. 22.

<sup>55</sup> HHStA, PA XIV/41, Albanien XXXIV, Heimroth an Berchtoldt, Üskup, August 21, 1912, vertraulich.

<sup>56</sup> S. UKSHINI, Role of Isa Boletini at the anti-Ottoman (National) Movement, in: *Albanology, II*, Prishtina 2011, pp. 229–260.

<sup>57</sup> In 1912, Albania penetrated to the centre of the Great European Powers' politics due to the First Balkan War. However, prior to the Balkan war there was the formation of

The subject of the Albanian uprising in Kosovo led by Hasan Prishtina, manifested into the political and national agenda of the Taksim Meeting. This gave strong incentive for the idea of a national congress to achieve the unity of the Albanian vilayets.<sup>58</sup>

These events, which had a strong Balkan and European resonance, were however followed very closely by the official Vienna. For the sake of maintaining the status quo at a time when the Balkan countries were preparing to implement attacks against the High Porte, the official Vienna was attempting to reach a political agreement between the Istanbul Government and the Albanian insurgents. The Istanbul Government had not clearly understood the situation in Albania and was unaware of the aggressive plans of the Balkan states. This was seen very clearly during a meeting in Istanbul with the great vizier and minister of war, Mahmut Shefqet Pasha, and the Ambassador of Austria-Hungary at Constantinople Markgraf von Pallavicini, who assured Pasha that the Albanian uprising would be crushed quickly. This stand of the Ottoman vizier gave the right to the Austro-Hungarian diplomat to write to Vienna regarding the attitude of the Istanbul government, which was to be taken as *cum grano salis*.<sup>59</sup>

Meanwhile, the High Porte was forced to negotiate with the Albanian delegation. During these negotiations, which were used moreso to waste time and fraction the national movement leaders than to give a stable solution – three groups were present within the Albanian leadership:

The autonomous wing, led by Hasan Prishtina and Nexhip Draga, which continued the efforts to come closer to the conservatives and Hamidists. The autonomous wing, although having the declarative support of Middle and Southern Albania, did not get the support promised by the Taksim Agreement.<sup>60</sup> Hasan Prishtina's power was greatly undermined, as Ismail

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a Balkan Alliance in the spring of 1912, which was comprised of the military alliance of Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, and Greece. The plan to create such an alliance came from the Russian delegate in Belgrade. Thus, Russia became the initiator and the protecting force behind this alliance, since at the beginning of its expansion projects focused at heart on the division of the Ottoman Empire and the Albanian territories. K. BOECKH, *Von den Balkankriegen zum Ersten Weltkrieg. Kleinstaatenpolitik und ethnische Selbstbestimmung auf dem Balkan*, München 1996, p. 34.

<sup>58</sup> See: H. B. PRISHTINA: Brief Memoir on the Albanian Uprising of 1912, [http://www.albanianhistory.net/1921\\_Prishtina/index.html](http://www.albanianhistory.net/1921_Prishtina/index.html) [2021–10–31].

<sup>59</sup> HHStA, PA XIV/39 Albanien XXXIV, Pallavicini addressed to Berchtoldt, Janiköi, Juni 25, 1912, No. 54.

<sup>60</sup> HHStA, PA XIV/41, Albanien XXXIV, Heimroth an Berchtoldt, Üskup, August 21, 1912, confidential.



Qemali did not come to him, arguing that he was abroad with intentions to meet directly with officials of Gazi Pasha's government in Istanbul. Ismail Qemali not coming to Prishtina and have in Trieste and that he had to go to Istanbul to discuss with the government of Gazi Pasha, weakened very much the position of Hasan Prishtina internally. As the minority actor, combined with materialization of the 14-point compilation, known in history as "14 Points of Hasan Prishtina", Prishtina was forced to make compromises with the *Hamidian* and *Turkoman* courses. On August 9, 1912, Hasan Prishtina, the ideologist and strategist of the uprising of Kosovo presented the 14 demands of the insurgents to Marshall Ibrahim Pasha in Prishtina, on behalf of all of the Albanian regions. Pasha in turn forwarded them to Istanbul. Later, the Albanian insurgents, at the beginning of August 1912, marched to Shkup/Üsküp with no resistance at all by the Ottoman army. Never before had unity of the four vilayets come so close to being a true and autonomous Albania.

Furthermore, a question is raised here: Why would the discussion in Istanbul between Ismail Qemali and the Istanbul government take place now when these events were occurring in Prishtina and Skup/Üsküp? Was this a diversion devised by the High Porte to divide the Albanians, or was the war for the political primate within the Albanian political scene in question? This is a topic to be studied thoroughly with a high level of scientific accuracy and no compromise to the historical truth. It is well-known that during the uprising of 1912 at Kosovo Vilayet – led by Hasan Prishtina as the ideologist of the Albanian modern nationalism and state – Ismail Qemali did not use any influence, and in fact abstained from it.<sup>61</sup> When the uprising of Kosovo Vilayet marked the first successes in July and August of that year, Ismail Qemali went to the northern part of Albaniathen passed through Cetinje to converse directly with the king of Montenegro. In September of 1912, again finding himself in Istanbul, the great vizier Qemal Pasha offered Qemali a position as minister post, an offer to which. Naturally at this moment, he understood that the Ottoman Empire was headed for the abyss. The Albanian politician, having enjoyed a long career of political experience, saw the solution to the Albanian problem: The recognition of the Albanian nation and its language, in the frame of an autonomy within the Empire.

Despite this recognition, we cannot suppose a correlation between the 14 demands of Hasan Prishtina and the viewpoints of Ismail Qemali.

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<sup>61</sup> Interview with Ismail Qemal bey: *Neue Freie Presse*, August 27, 1912.

He did not mention, in any declaration or even during the interview he gave in August 1912 for Vienna journal *Neue Freie Presse*, the uprising of Kosovo Vilayet. To distance this from the memorandum of Gërçe, this time his role on projecting the demands of the Albanian insurgents was invisible. The latest developments and his rivalry with Syrja and Eqrem bej Vlora for the primary position, in convening the National Convent, are evidence that Ismail Qemali was long preparing to emerge as the leader of Albania. This is also confirmed by the Balkans archive sources, which have made known the fact that, several months prior to the proclamation of Albanian independence, Ismail Qemali was preparing himself to be the prince.<sup>62</sup> He knew better than anyone else the internal and external legitimacies of that time in Albania, as well as the mechanisms to redirect politics and rise as the lead of these developments. This would lead later to the independence of Albania.

Apart from that, paralleling the uprising of Kosovo and the compilation of the “14 demands” of Hasan Prishtina,<sup>63</sup> Shkodra and South Albania presented demands and memorandums that differed from one another. It is important to note that the demands of the Albanian insurgents, although prepared on *behalf* of all Albanian regions, did not truly echo the other Albanian areas. This is explained by the fact that very few representatives of the regions outside Kosovo resided in Skup/Üsküp. Regarding the formative background of the Albanian elite, their differences and orientations made it impossible to create a unique political platform. Based on this fact, we can say that the Kosovo Vilayet uprising of the summer of 1912 did not have a general national character. Because of that, direct responsibility fell on the Albanian leaders who did not show the required level to implement the tasks formulated at the Taksim Meeting.

Following the intervention of the Balkan powers, the lack of the unity and a greater Albanian indecisiveness, as well as the prolongation of the Ottoman Empire to complete Albanian demands, even after the intervention of the Balkan powers, ensured that the epicentre of Kosovo Vilayet – Shkup/Üsküp – did not become the main center for the proclamation of Albanian independence.

Now when the organization level could have been revised, following the uprising of the summer of 1912, we observe a disorganization of the

<sup>62</sup> Z. CANA (ed.), *The Albanian Uprising of 1912 in the Serbian Documents*, Prishtina 2008.

<sup>63</sup> HHStA, PA/41, Albanien XXXIV, Tahy addressed to Berchtoldit, Mitrovica, Sugust 11, 1912, No. 48, confidential.

national movement in the second half of August. It is for this reason we lack a nationwide leading centre.

### **The Diplomatic Initiative of Berchtold**

Though failing to fulfill initial expectations, the Albanian uprising of Kosovo Vilayet and the entrance of the Albanian insurgents in Shkup/Üsküp in August 1912 shifted the frame of European diplomacy, starting with Austro-Hungarian ties. For a long time, Austria-Hungary had shown interest in the national movement, and had expressed sympathy towards its goal of unification of the four Albanian vilayets into a single autonomous entity. On August 13, 1912, the Foreign Minister of Austria-Hungary, Leopold von Berchtold, undertook the diplomatic initiative to safely maintain the political *status quo* in the Balkans and create circumstances for the achievement of an Albanian autonomy within the Ottoman Empire.<sup>64</sup> He followed closely the flow of developments in the Albanian space and monitored the preparations of the Balkans Alliance.

In this context, the synchrony is clearly seen between the 14 points of the Albanian insurgents and the diplomatic initiative of Foreign Minister Berchtold, who proposed to the great European power to undertake a collective step at the High Porte. This would be to force implementation of the gradual decentralization policy in accordance with the real ethnic relations within the empire. Observed independently of time and the other constraints of this Vienna diplomatic proposal, we can easily correlate the position of Austro-Hungarian politics with the Albanian issue and the demands of the Albanian insurgents compiled by Hasan Prishtina. At that time, sources revealed that Count Berchtold re-actualized the idea of his former, Aehrenthal, to take the necessary steps in a position closer to Istanbul to determine a general governor for the entirety of Albania.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> The Foreign Minister of Austria-Hungary, Berchtold, sent a proposal to representatives of its state at the residency of Great Powers in July 1912. It included this content: a proposal to the governments of the Great Powers of the mutual exchange of viewpoints, and encouragement of the Ottoman Empire to implement a principle of decentralization. At the same time, the Balkan states would be responsible for any action against the Empire. See: A. WERNER, *Vom Ende der Habsburgermonarchie bis zur Ersten Republik*, Diss., Wien 2009, pp. 60–61.

<sup>65</sup> At the speed of the Albanian uprising of 1911, Aehrenthal, proposed in front of the Great Powers a collective step to address the issue of the Porte, to implement the reforms and decentralization of the Ottoman Empire. The bloody crush of the uprising by Shefqet Turgut Pasha made the initiative of Vienna impossible. Z. CANA, *Serbia's Policy towards the Albanian Issue*, Prishtina 2006, p. 223.

The goal of Ballhausplatz was to secure support of the neighboring Great Powers for the Albanian demands. This was to ensure Istanbul's acceptance, and on the other hand, to avoid the intervention of the Balkan states, which would make it impossible to achieve the goal of the Danubian Monarchy.

By this initiative, Berchtold also aimed to create European diplomatic preconditions. These would prevent the expansion of Serbia towards Sanxhak and Novi Pazar, Kosovo Vilayet, the Albanian part of Adriatic or Manastir, to prevent the violation of vital economic and political interests of Austria-Hungary.

This initiative was the last chance to peacefully start the process of the separation of the Albanians and accept the transitory phase as the foundation of the autonomous Albania. This was the chance to consolidate its position in front of the Balkan states, or at least avoid the same fatal directions taken by the Ottoman state. It is not by accident that Russia spearheaded the failure of this Austro-Hungarian initiative.

If such a plan could have been brought to action, the Albanian state and its borders may have been very different in 1913. The High Porte did not realize the gravity of the Balkan situation, even as the initiative was presented by official Vienna. The High Porte refused, as the Balkan and European states – Russia in particular – opposed the diplomatic initiative of the foreign minister, of which the starting point was division of the Ottoman heritage. The High Porte's decision was highly motivated by the fear that Vienna's proposal would give way to the intervention of the European powers, as they did in the Mürzsteg Agreement (1903).<sup>66</sup> The Ottoman Empire, unaware of the aggressive plans of the Balkan states, refused the diplomatic initiative of official Vienna. In the end, this initiative would have maintained for a period the status quo of its territories from the foreign perspective, while internally would have avoided the pushing factors that would bring permanent conflicts and wars between Albanians and the Ottoman state. Moreover, Vienna's original initiative demonstrated that the Albanian uprisings were channelled on the institutional reforms floor, through which it would have opened a path for the foundation of an Albanian state with the widest ethnic borders.

To better understand the weight of the Austro-Hungarian commitments regarding the Albanian issue, we must firstly observe the position that

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<sup>66</sup> HHStA, Sonderbestände, N1. Berchtold 1, Typoskript d. Memoiren Berchtolds, Bd. I, pp. 61–62.

existed at that time within the European Concert, which is likewise the Contact Group of our days. On one side, we had Russia and France, and somehow even England backing the commitments. All three supported the Balkan states as a counterbalance towards the countries of the Triple Alliance and the Ottoman Empire. On the other side, Austria-Hungary was not consistently backed by Germany or Italy, the former, which was not ready to sacrifice for Vienna, the latter which detached itself from the Alliance whenever an interest was violated and was prepared to make compromises with Austro-Hungarian opponents. Alongside this, the powerful European states, all except Russia, protected the concept of maintaining the political *status quo*, until the end of the First Balkan War.<sup>67</sup>

Under these circumstances, Austria-Hungary was searching for an alliance to push forward Albanian state foundation, as the projection of the economic and political interests of Austria-Hungary was in concordance with the goals of the Albanian National Movement. Based on these premises, we can see also the discussion that took place done in September 1912 between Count Berchtold and German Chancellor, Theobald von Bethman Hollweg, regarding Austrian politics in Balkans.<sup>68</sup> The Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister declared the goals of his country: Vienna was first aiming to prevent Italian establishment on the Albanian coastline of Adriatic. Second, in case of the Ottoman loss, the independent Albania should be founded.<sup>69</sup> This was the first time that Vienna, only a few weeks after the Albanian uprising, presented the idea for the foundation of the Albanian state. At the same time, the disorganized Albanian elite simply for the completion of the promised 14 points. In the end, the policy of Austria-Hungary was motivated primarily by strategic aspect.<sup>70</sup> That is why the Austrian-Hungarian Council of Ministers decided on September 14, 1912 not to intervene in the event of a war in the Balkans.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>67</sup> G. D. SCHANDERL, *Die Albanienpolitik Österreich-Ungarns und Italien 1877–1908*, Wiesbaden 1971, p. 57.

<sup>68</sup> Der Botschafter in Konstantinopel Freiherr von Wangenheim an das Auswärtige Amt, Nr. 12158, *Therapia*, September 22, 1912, in: *Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette, 1871–1914. Sammlung der diplomatischen Akten des Auswärtigen Amtes* (hereinafter *GP*), J. LEPSIUS – A. MENDELSSOHN-BARTHOLDY – F. THIMME (Hrsg.), Bd. 33, Berlin 1926, pp. 113–114.

<sup>69</sup> H. CH. LÖHR, *Die Gründung Albanien: Wilhelm zu Wied und die Balkan-Diplomatie der Großmächte 1912–1914*, Frankfurt am Main 2010, p. 35.

<sup>70</sup> See: HHStA, Sonderbestände, N1. Berchtold 1, Typoskript d. Memoiren Berchtolds, Bd. III, p. 167.

<sup>71</sup> BRIDGE, *From Sadowa to Sarajevo*, p. 345.

The theoretical acceptance of the Albanian demands by the Istanbul Government<sup>72</sup> was only a ploy to gain time and to avoid the pressure of the Balkan states. Aiming to start a war against the Ottoman state, the Balkan states presented this pressure through an ultimatum that the same rights given to Albanians should be given also to Christian minorities. The purpose was to put Hight Porte in a precarious situation- to force, if not fulfill, the meeting of the Albanian demands, and to therefore make impossible the unity of the four vilayets. The Balkan Alliance was not interested in the demands of the Christian minorities, neither the reforms themselves, but were instead interested in the creation of preconditions in the decisive war against the Ottoman Empire.

### **The Eruption of the First Balkan War**

The preparations of Serbia for war were fastened up through many factors: after the occupation and the annexation of Bosnia-Hercegovina, the road to expansion of the Serbian state was free towards the south Balkans. This was a direction towards which Austria-Hungary was also interested in expanding its influence (*“Drang nach Thessaloniki”*). Austria-Hungary competed with Serbia for the plans on constructing a railway through Sanxhak of Novi Pazar, Kosovo Vilayet and Manastir. For the sake of the truth, whoever would have owned this railway would be in control of the entire Balkan. At the time when the Ottoman Empire was heading toward the dissolution, the Danubian Monarchy was undertaking all the diplomatic and military actions to prevent Serbia from having a direct line to the Albanian coastline in Adriatic Sea.

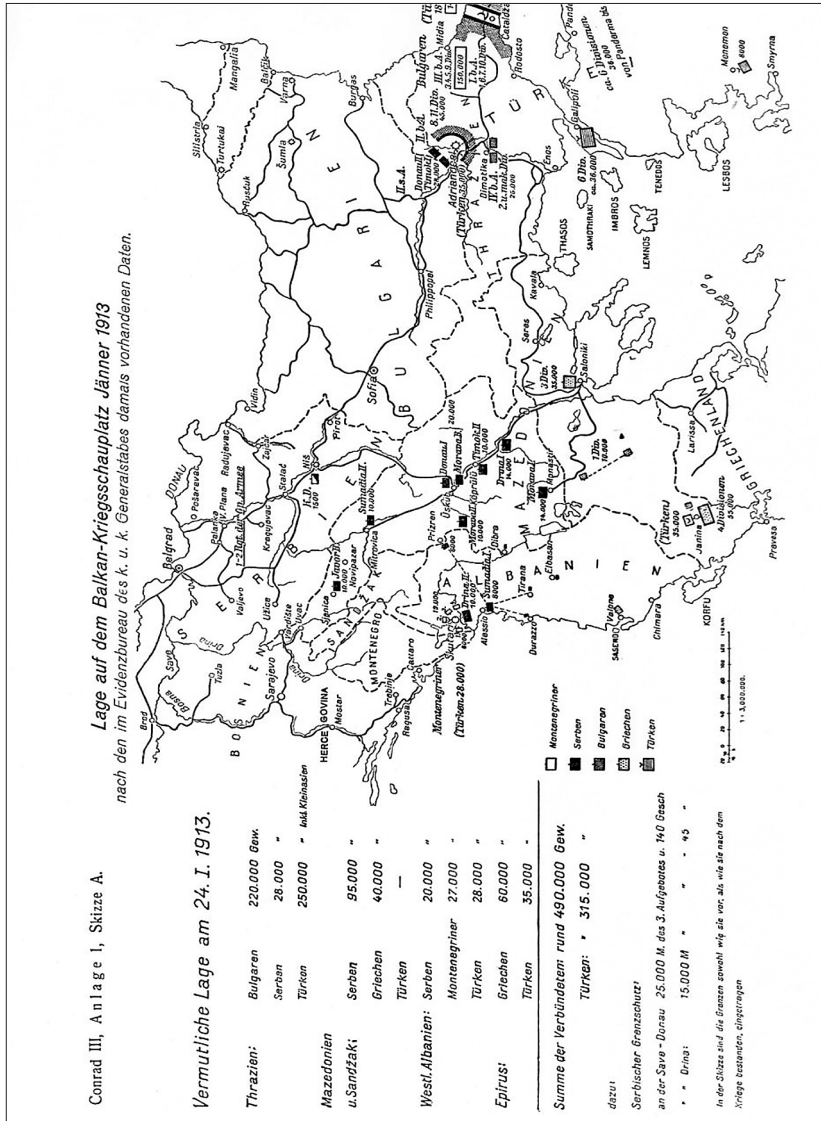
In August of 1912, when the negotiating Ottoman commission technically accepted the 14 points of Hasan Prishtina<sup>73</sup> later forwarded to the Istanbul Government – the potential of the rising Albanian autonomous state became visible, alarming the Belgrade and all the other Balkan centres.

According to the data given by the Office of the Royal and Empire General Headquarters of Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire Army was divided into three fractions, each of them having 315,000 soldiers. The countries of the Balkan Alliance had 490,000 soldiers (see below the map of the Empire General Headquarters of Austria-Hungary).<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> On 14 September 1914, Ottoman government officially notified that it accepted the Albanian conditions, except two points.

<sup>73</sup> HHStA, PA XIV/41, Albanien XXIV, Heimroth addressed to Berchtoldit, Üsküp, August 21, 1912.



74 CONRAD, III, Anlage 1, Skizze A: Situation in Balkan – the war theatre 1913, prepared at that time by the and Empire General Headquarters of Austria-Hungary. See: F. CONRAD von HÖTZENDORF, *Aus meiner Dienstzeit 1906–1918*, Bd 3, Wien, Leipzig, München 1922, p. 828.

In front of the great military force of the member countries of the Balkan Alliance, the army of the Ottoman empire was weaker, because it lacked sufficient qualified forces, and because it was unreformed with no military moral and nor internal cohesion. Two Ottoman armies were established in Europe: one that protected Trakia and its capital city, the second was retired in Macedonia. In parallel with these troops, under a common command were found also divisions of Shkodra and Ioannina.

Observing that the Balkan states were preparing for war, the Istanbul government reacted quickly. Under the layer of military exercises, the High Porte started the first regiments to Macedonia and Trakia in September 1912. The Balkan states mobilized their forces between September 13 and October 3, 1912.

In the end, on October 8, 1912, the Montenegrin troops passed the northern-west border of the Ottoman Empire, inciting the First Balkan War. Serbia and Greece joined on October 17 and later the same step was followed by Bulgaria.<sup>75</sup>

This was the beginning of the First Balkan War. This also presented the challenge of which position the Monarchy would take in this case: In favour or against the Balkan Alliance? What would it mean to be in favour or against Serbia? This presented two military policy possibilities for Austro-Hungarian intervention in the Balkan conflict: Unification with the Balkan Alliance, which vied for the permanent solution of the “Serbian issue” with the usage of the arms; or to fight Italy, which was weak against the forces of the Ottoman Empire, despite being very active on Balkan. To do this, Austria-Hungary tried to gain the support of Romania, since they had already a preexisting alliance from 1883. In contrast to the prior agreement, this alliance proved unstable, following discussion with General Conrad in December 1912 in Bucharest. This was due to Romanian foreign entanglement with Russia. In November 1912, military actions ceased, leaving only Greece to continue fighting on the sea until a cease-fire was reached on December 3, 1912, bringing peace on May 30, 1913. The Balkan Alliance, which was disintegrated on May 28 that same year, was found again at the center of another conflict between them: how best to determine the division of the Ottoman heritage. Meanwhile on June 26, Bulgaria started the operation against Serbia for Macedonia. Greece and Romania both attacked on July 5, 1913, while

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<sup>75</sup> Der Staatssekretär des Auswärtigen Amtes von Kinderlen an Kaiser Wilhelm II, *GP*, 33, Nr. 12244, October 9, 1912, pp. 178–179.



the Second Balkan War was at its peak. On July 21, Turkey entered war to try and capture Adrianopolis.

This war, to conclude, started because the Balkan states were trying to prevent the expansion of Austria-Hungary on the European part of the Ottoman Empire and to delay the direct penetration of Germany in the East. On the other side, Germany and Austria-Hungary wished to stop the path towards Balkan state victory as soon as possible, while, Russia, France, and Great Britain preferred to give them free space at this time.<sup>76</sup>

The First Balkan War ended successfully for the Balkan allies, marking the end of the Ottoman Empire in Europe and the beginning of decomposition of the Austro-Hungarian influence in the Balkans. This was fatal for the fate and the future of the Albanians. The strong Balkan states became the third factor for the international division of the influence in these regions of Europe. Serbia expanded its territory by 80% by occupying Sanxhak and replacing the territorial connection with Montenegro. In this way, Serbia began to present a risk for the Danubian Empire. Even Serbia, forced by Russia to withdraw from the goal to get access to the Albanian coastline, refused Vienna's demands to cease the military march headed to Kosovo Vilayet.<sup>77</sup> In its refusal, Belgrade had the political and military support of Russia. For this, Nikola Pašić emphasized that "*Albanians have a Serbian origin, but they have converted into another religion under the pressure and persecution of the Ottoman power*", as well as that he "*will not give up on the access to the sea, because it has a vital interest for Serbia, and without it, the country would boil and explode like as a closed pot*".<sup>78</sup>

In the general international overview, the Balkan wars present the most important development in Europe, as well as the most tragic for the many people of the Balkans, especially the Albanians. All the Balkan states were bordered by the Ottoman Empire, and all were aiming to invade the lands of this empire in the European part. Serbia and Montenegro wanted Sanxhak of Novi Pazar – the territorial nib between them – while

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<sup>76</sup> R. POINCARÉ, *First and Second Balkan Wars and the London Conference (1912–1913)*, Skup/Üsküp, Prishtina, Tirana 2005, p. 266.

<sup>77</sup> Serbia refused to accept the customs alliance – offered on November 6, 1912, by Austria-Hungary – that would have been very favourable to it, in exchange for withdrawal from north Albania. This brought about a new aggravation between the states, while the occupation of Lezha and Durres strengthened the decision of Austria-Hungary to enter war with Serbia. ÖUA, Wien 1930, Bd. IV, No. 4317.

<sup>78</sup> D. JANJIQ, *National Identities, Movements and Nationalism of Serbs and Albanians*, in: *Balkan Forum* (Skopje), 3, 1, 1995, 28, p. 125.

Serbia, Montenegro and Greece wanted Albania. All of them had their own projections for the regions of the Southern Balkans.

Although the Balkan wars of 1912/1913 comprised only one year from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they impacted the fate of Balkan people and developments during the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century. Since that time, these wars have remained as a point of interpretation for all the people of the region. Although they were first referred to as national liberation wars, they were wars fought for territories, wars for domination, wars to divide the European side of the Ottoman Empire and to keep away the Austrian-German influence. The rush of the Balkan states shows that they aimed to implement the plans as prepared by the Balkan Alliance, and to use the internal and external difficulties of the Ottoman Empire to eradicate it forever from the Balkans and divide between the Ottoman heritage.<sup>79</sup> Internal and external mobilization defined this war against the Ottoman Empire, which was also used as a religious mission against Islam. Thus, all the Muslim people of the Empire were, in the eyes of the Balkan powers, considered as an obstacle to the implementation of their expansion plans. For this reason, the Balkans remains an object of the contradictory interests, of the rivalries between the main worldwide powers.

When the Russian-backed Balkan Alliance started the war against the Ottoman Empire, Kosovo, North Albania (Kosovo) was still during war; the Serbian army was killing and destroying Albanian villages and cities and held presence in other Ottoman vilayets inhabited by Albanians. Tens of thousands were murdered and deported. From that moment on, Albania and Kosovo have taken separate roads: Albania as an independent state, while Kosovo as a region occupied by Serbia, namely Yugoslavia.<sup>80</sup>

As it is known, the battle that decided the fate of war happened in Kumanovo, North Macedonia, close to what today is known as the border triangle of Kosovo-Macedonia-Serbia. Exactly right there, on June 9, 1999, the Serbian commanders signed the Technical-Military Agreement with NATO. Thus, in a certain way, Kosovo was won and lost at the same ground by the Serbs.

Serbia was forced to withdraw from North Albania, but not Kosovo, under the pressure of Austria-Hungary, namely the member forces of the states belonging to the European Concert, much like the "Contact

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<sup>79</sup> Ch. HELMRICH, *Russland Einfluss auf den Balkan-Bund im Oktober 1912*, in: *Berliner Monatshefte*, 11, 1932, pp. 217–230, (p. 224).

<sup>80</sup> N. MALCOLM, *Kosovo. A Short History*, Prishtina, Tirana, 2001, pp. 262–274.

Group” of today. These included: Austria-Hungary, Germany, Italy, France, Great Britain, and Russia. However, following the Sanxhak occupation by Serbians and Montenegrins, Austria-Hungary was not able to intervene using military force, since after Sanxhak was occupied by Serbians and Montenegrins, being as it would disrupt the relations of the time between these two Slavic people, as well as the bridge between Bosnia and Kosovo. Even within the governmental circles in Vienna, there were differences between the political and military attitudes towards Serbian access. This was due to the fear of confrontation with the miserable Balkan state, which would drag Russia and France with it into war. Likewise, during the Balkan crisis, the official Germany was not decisive for the same war-related concern.

However, the formula for reforms and status quo in the lands, based on which the first agreements with the European diplomacy were reached, after the First Balkan War, seemed to come a moment too late. Nevertheless, at that time, this consisted of a common effort of the great powers to preserve the equilibrium and avoid confrontations on a continental scale.

Serbia itself, at the London Conference, resigned from the “ethnographic principle” and declared itself in favour of the “natural, geographic and strategic border.” According to Belgrade, “the ethnographic considerations” were unfavourable to define the borders in the Balkans.

Due to the acceptance of the war results and preservation of the equilibrium between the European powers, the London Conference sealed a fragile peace, although not one that could avoid the impending start of World War I.<sup>81</sup> This was an unjust peace, because it legalized the territorial changes in the Balkans, which became an altogether unstable factor of the region and Europe as a whole.

### **The Second Initiative of Berchtold**

The First Balkan War consisted of a military threat to Austria-Hungary: if the Serbians were to occupy the other part of Albania, then its Russian ally would gain access to the Adriatic Sea. And the sea would not be anymore, an inner Austrian-Italian sea, as it had been since the Congress of Berlin.<sup>82</sup> For this reason, Berchtold wanted to prevent a Serbian port in Adriatic using any means available.

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<sup>81</sup> See: R. KRITT, *Die Londoner Botschafter Konferenz 1912–1913*, Diss., Wien 1960.

<sup>82</sup> W. N. MEDLICOTT, *The Congress of Berlin and after. A Diplomatic History of the Near Eastern Settlement 1878–1880*, London 1963, p. 97.

With the fate of the First Balkan War defined, the fall of the Ottoman Empire inevitable, and the Serbian campaign to occupy Kosovo and proceed to the Adriatic's east coast already underway, and when it was clear that the existence of the Ottoman Empire could not be saved anymore, and when Serbia had occupied Kosovo, and was proceeding towards the east coast of the Adriatic, the Vienna diplomacy warned Belgrade not to proceed.

Berchtold made every diplomatic effort to prevent Serbia's access to the Albanian coast of Adriatic. He instructed the diplomatic delegates in Belgrade and Cetine to object to this military action within the Albanian territory. The Serbian prime minister was to respond to the Austro-Hungarian delegate, Ugron, upon the submission of his formal request that "*they could not withdraw whatsoever from a port into Adriatic Sea*", because this was "*a condition for existence*"<sup>83</sup> for Serbia.

There is no doubt that the way these two countries, Serbia and Montenegro, refused the requests of the Danubian Monarchy was not accidental. Tzarist Russia had demanded to support the actions of these Balkan states, and regarding this, more military measures were taken. Not only did these two states refuse the demands, but the Serbian troops undertook attacks even against the Austro-Hungarian forces.

In addition to that, the Serbian military forces also carried out arbitrary activities directed towards the consulate representatives of Austria-Hungary in Kosovo. It should be noted that the Danubian Monarchy could not change the situation on the southern border of the enemy neighbour, as military intervention was impossible following the creation of Balkan state factions in the terrains.<sup>84</sup> The occupation of Sanxhak was fatal for the position of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, since the wedge was taken off and the territorial continuity was destroyed from Bosnia-Sanxhak up to Kosovo.

The Austro-Hungarian diplomatic offensive continued also in the first part of November, when the idea for a European conference started to formulate.

After the results of the First Balkan War, with the Balkan states having emerged the winners Austria-Hungary clearly anticipated the improbability of unifying the four Albanian vilayets – Kosovo, Ioannina, Manastir

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<sup>83</sup> ÖUA, Bd. IV, No. 4351.

<sup>84</sup> E. Ritter von STEINITZ, Berchtolds Politik während des ersten Balkankrieges, in: *Berliner Monatshefte*, März 1931, p. 243.

and Shkodra – into a singular state. Given the circumstances, the official Vienna presented the foundation of an independent Albania.<sup>85</sup> This part of the program, resulting from proposals within the governmental circles of Austria-Hungary, was communicated to the other two members of the Three Parties Alliance, Germany on October 30, and Italy on November 3.<sup>86</sup> At the same time, through the 7-point program made public on November 3, 1912 by the ambassador to Germany, Berchtold requested assurance of a common attitude for the protection of the vital interests of Austria-Hungary, to be included in a free development of Albania.<sup>87</sup>

This program defined the future lines of the foreign policy of Danubian Monarchy, namely the frame of Vienna's actions after the First Balkan War. The first point emphasized that the Monarchy would agree to the territorial expansion of Serbia, on the condition that Serbia would not pursue aggressive policies towards it. But on the second point, Vienna was consistently opposed to the access of Serbia to the eastern Adriatic coastline, emphasizing that the expansion of Serbia harmed the interests of the Albanians. On the third point, it was stressed that a free development of Albania could benefit the interests of the Monarchy.<sup>88</sup>

Wanting to strengthen the position related to the foundation of an Albanian state, Berchtold proposed to Russia on November 17 a diplomatic exchange over the border definition and internal organization of Albania. In this phase, the main Austro-Hungarian objective was solely the foundation of an independent, secure Albanian territory.<sup>89</sup> As for the internal organization of Albania, it was suggested to select a prince who did not belong to any of the religions practiced in Albania.

### The Road to Independence

The fourteen points of the Albanian insurgents, formulated by Hasan Prishtina<sup>90</sup> in August of 1912, aimed to create the preconditions for the foundation of the Albanian independent state. The lack of a central nationwide organization ensured that the uprising stayed under the shadows

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<sup>85</sup> ÖUA, IV. Bd. No. 4170.

<sup>86</sup> SKENDI, p. 410.

<sup>87</sup> HHStA, PA XIV/42, Berchtold an Szögyeny, Wien, October 30, 1912.

<sup>88</sup> HHStA, Sonderbestände, No 1. Berchtold 1, Typoskript. Memoiren Berchtolds, Bd. III, pp. 291–292.

<sup>89</sup> H. HANTSCH, *Leopold Graf Berchtold, Grandseigneur und Staatsmann*, Graz 1963, p. 324.

<sup>90</sup> HHStA, PA XIV/41, Albanien XXXIV, Tahy an Berchtold, Mitrovitza, August 11, 1912, No. 48, confidential.

of the First Balkan War, which some Albanian leaders considered to be necessary to undertake radical steps. The goal of the Albanian elite was to combat the open intentions to divide the Albanian territories among the Balkan states. Ismail Qemali was a leading voice in discussing the future of Albania opening his path to serving as the head of the Albanian autonomous state. During a meeting in Bucharest, in November of 1912, the participants were not able to make a clear decision. They still faced the dilemma between autonomy and independence but were together on the points of not allowing any division of the Albanian territories and the convocation of a National Convent. On November 5, at the end of the meeting, a decision was taken in which the participants declared that the Albanians would form a Leading Committee for the administration of Albania, since the actual Ottoman government did not have the means to secure that for them at the time.<sup>91</sup> At the same time, Ismail Qemali expressed his desire to play a decisive role for the fate of Albania. He instructed his supporters from Bucharest to prevent the efforts of Syrja bej Vlora, who also sought to gain power in the newly forming Albania. In parallel, as Syrja bej Vlora did with his men, Ismail Qemali started his campaign to convene the National Convent, deepening the chaos in Albania.<sup>92</sup>

It was a well-known fact that Vienna preferred Syrja bej Vlora and his son, Eqrem bej Vlora, to raise the flag of independence of Albania, rather than Ismail Qemali. Vlora's son ventured to Vienna for this reason, and agreed with Austrians that together with his father, he would make every effort to convene a Convent in Vlora and proclaim Albanian Independence. In this ensuing Vloran convocation, not all representatives of the Albanian regions were present, and nothing came of the event. Syrja Vlora faced many difficulties: prejudice, heartbreak, and passivity characterized all the participants of the convocation. However, Syrja bej Vlora did not withdraw from his goal to proclaim independence and ensure the support of great powers namely the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

In fact, most Albanians did not believe that the Balkan states would win the war against the Ottoman Empire. Despite this, the First Balkan War erupted. When the first news arrived from the war front, Syrja bej Vlora

<sup>91</sup> *Qeveria e Përkohëshme e Vlorës dhe veprimtaria e saj – nëndor 1912 – janar 1914*. Edit. by D. KOTINI, Tiranë 1963, pp. 15–16.

<sup>92</sup> HHStA, PA XII/Türkei, Karton 417, 6a, Telegramm von Lejhanec aus Valona, November 6, 1912, No. 61.

decided to campaign from Vlora to the Middle and Northern Albania, attempting to convince regional leaders to help him devise a National Assembly in Middle Albania. Likewise, Eqrem bej Vlora went to Vienna to negotiate the eventual proclamation of independence and neutrality.<sup>93</sup> At this time, Ismail Qemali was in Vienna to discuss plans with the Austrian minister of foreign affairs. The arrival in Vienna of Eqrem bej Vlora, his cousin and adversary, forced Qemali to Budapest for the duration of Vlora's stay. When Ismail Qemali returned to Vienna, Berchtold no longer wished to enter detailed discussion on the topic of the future of Albania.<sup>94</sup> In his diary, Count Berchtold wrote that Ismail Qemali demanded diplomatic support for the Albanian national goals, as well as information regarding the position of Vienna on the future organization of Albania and the possible convention of a National Assembly. Although he pledged diplomatic support, Berchtold refrained from further detail until the end of the war.<sup>95</sup> Berchtold took a stand only to combat the goal of the Serbs to have access to the Albanian coastline of Adriatic: Austria-Hungary would prevent Serbia from having access to the east part of Adriatic Sea. The lack of interest to discuss with Ismail Qemali was characterized not only by insecurity following the end of the Balkan war, but by the interest of Ballhausplatz that the National Assembly should be convened by Syrja bej Vlora. Like the Italians, they considered Ismail Qemali an unsecure figure.<sup>96</sup>

The same viewpoints of the discussion that Ismail Qemali had with the foreign minister in Vienna were expressed in a cablegram sent on November 22 by Berchtold to the Austro-Hungarian ambassador in Rome, Merey, Berchtold confidentially conveyed to Marchese di San Giuliano, Antonino Paternò Castello, Marchese di San Giuliano, an Italian diplomat and Minister of Foreign Affairs, that the meeting with Ismail Qemali was "general" because he shared "*the same unfavourable opinion for this politician*". He did not plan to assign him any special role during the future development in Albania.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>93</sup> M. A. GODIN, *Aus dem neuen Albanien. Politische und kulturhistorische Skizzen*, Wien 1914, p. 12.

<sup>94</sup> HHStA, PA XII/Türkei, XXXXV/6, Daily Bulletin of Ballhausplatz, November 22, 1912.

<sup>95</sup> HHStA, Nachlass Berchtold, Kt. 1. Bd. IV, November 13, 1912, p. 366.

<sup>96</sup> HHStA, PA XII/Türkei, Karton 417, 6a, Tagesbericht, Wien, November 12, 1912; Telegramm von Berchtold aus Wien an Merey nach Rom, November 22, 1912, No. 196.

<sup>97</sup> HHStA, PA XII/Türkei, XXXXV/6, Karton 417, Telegramm von Berchtold an Merey, November 22, 1912.

On the other side, Eqrem bej Vlora was holding meetings with a myriad of Austrian state officials. He discussed with foreign minister Leopold Graf Berchtold, General Headquarter Chief Conrad von Hötzendorf, and experts on the service of the Foreign Ministry of Albania, among them Karl Macchio and Alfred Rapport. He was expecting answers from Berchtold on nine key issues, from which we can mention three: whether Vienna would take the assurance of the Albanian coastline until Preveza; whether the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Austria-Hungary would support the new territorial and organizational definition, and an Austro-Hungarian control “*of the territories inhabited mainly by Albanians under the Ottoman regime*”<sup>98</sup>; and whether the Monarchy was ready to diplomatically represent the Albanians and monetarily support the Albanian League, in case the integrity of the Albanians could not be protected by the international conference. In this issue posed the question of an eventual royal Austro-Hungarian occupation.<sup>99</sup>

Naturally, Berchtold gave rhetorical answers to maintain the *status-quo*, as was the collective duty of the European Concert. In the case of the continuance of the wars and the decomposition of the Ottoman Empire, the goals of the Austria-Hungary would be the foundation of an Albanian state up to the bounds of the Kalama River territorial mark. Berchtold rejected the possibility of an intervention, and of military control over the Albanian vilayets. Since Vienna considered that alone, it might not be able to prevent the division of the Albanian territories, the foreign minister was ready to support an Albanian eventual resistance in secret.<sup>100</sup>

It is necessary to emphasize that Vienna went further in instructing Eqrem bej Vlora: in the event of the fall of Ottoman Empire, he instructed Vlora to convene the National Assembly to proclaim the independence and the neutrality of Albania. Currently there was no unity among the Albanian leaders, even among the larger Vlora family, namely Syrja bej Vlora and Ismail Qemal Vlora. It was precisely these differences that prevented Syrja bej Vlora from holding an assembly mere weeks before. Therefore, Eqrem bej Vlora returned to the country with no results.

In the beginning of November, Syrja bej Vlora started his own cam-

<sup>98</sup> HHStA, PA XII/Türkei, Karton 417, 6a, letter written by Eqrem bej Vlora from hotel Sacher Wien (no date).

<sup>99</sup> K. CSAPLÁR-DEGOVICS, Der Erste Balkankrieg und die Albaner. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Unabhängigkeitsproklamation Albaniens (28. November 1912), in: *Südost-Forschungen*, 67, 2008, pp. 168–201 (here p. 181).

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.



paign through Albania. He met with individuals in Tirana and Durrës. His National Assembly had many objectives, including the formation of an Albanian delegation to protect Albanian interests on the international level. This would be a formal act in response to European evaluation of the emerging Albanian state circumstances for which Albanians themselves were not present.<sup>101</sup> In part due to Vlora's efforts, the principle of the proclamation of independence was supported Middle Albania, leaving the Toptani family and Northern Albanians to be convinced of it especially in Mirdita.<sup>102</sup> Likewise, the place where the independence would be declared was presented for discussion: should it be Elbasan, or Tirana, or Durrës? At that time, the population resistance was taken into consideration, as well as the conservative Muslim leadership, which had expressed through various public demonstrations loyalty to the Sultan.<sup>103</sup> This situation presented another challenge to the organization of a National Assembly. Despite this obstacle, as he wrote in his memoirs, Eqrem bej Vlora went to Shkodra to advocate for the organization of a national assembly. There, he met with the Ottoman military commanders, Hasan Riza Pasha and Esat Pashë Toptani. On this occasion, he proposed to them the notion that if the Ottoman Empire were to be dismantled, Albania would proclaim independence, raising their flag for the first time at that strategic point.<sup>104</sup> Esat Pasha maintained his reservations, while Riza Pasha was very enthusiastic. Following the news that the Serbian and Montenegrin troops were approaching Northern Albania, Toptani agreed to convene the National Assembly. This stand changed the situation among the Muslim population in Middle Albania, who at last supported the notion of Albanian independence.<sup>105</sup> With this change, hopes of organizing the National Assembly in Tirana were high. For this reason, Syrja bej Vlora instructed his son, Eqrem, who just returned from Vienna, to send to Tirana the last available representatives of Vlora.<sup>106</sup> But

<sup>101</sup> HHStA, PA XII, Türkei, Kt. 417, 6a, Telegramm von Lejhanec aus Valona, October 31, 1912, No. 1359.

<sup>102</sup> A.-G. KRAUSE, *Das Problem der albanischen Unabhängigkeit in den Jahren 1908–14*, Diss., Wien 1970, pp. 269–270.

<sup>103</sup> HHStA, PA XII, Türkei, Karton 411, 5a, Bericht von Lejhanec aus Valona, November 4, 1912, No. 59.

<sup>104</sup> E. bej VLORA, *Lebenserinnerungen, Vol. I (1885 bis 1912)*, München 1968, p. 258.

<sup>105</sup> HHStA, PA XII, Türkei, Karton 417, 6a, telegram von Rudnay aus Durazzo, November 15, 1912, No. 2846.

<sup>106</sup> HHStA, PA XII, Türkei, Karton 417, 6a, Brief von Lejhanec aus Valona, November 13, 1912, No. 64.

Eqrem bej Vlora failed in following his father's instructions.<sup>107</sup> Without the help of all the Albanian leaders, Syrja bej Vlora could make his goal a reality. The proclamation for independence failed again because he could not gather all the Albanian leaders. Syrja bej Vlora was attacked by his opponents and the mission of his son in Vienna ended in a fiasco. Syrja bej Vlora, disappointed by this failure, left for Istanbul, leaving his son to uphold his crumbling status.<sup>108</sup>

Meanwhile the predictions of Syrja bej Vlora were realized at the beginning of November the troops of the Balkan Alliance entered mercilessly and occupied nearly the entirety of the Albanian territories. Now the Albanian leaders understood that the critical moment had arrived, and they had to decide for the future of their country: seek their fate within the Ottoman state or declare the independence of Albania.

Threatened by the Greek armies in the south of Albania's Ioannina Vilayet, the Albanian leaders decided to fight to protect the country. Kosovo in the North was already occupied by the Serbian and Montenegrin troops. The Austro-Hungarian consul in Ioannina, Konstantin Bilinski, was informed by the Albanian leaders that the Tosks would demand protection from Austria-Hungary and, if necessary, would declare it through a National Assembly in the case of the fraction of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>109</sup> Meanwhile, Albanian Catholic intelligence called by Syrja bej Vlora, requested the possibility to negotiate a solution in Durrës. They held a meeting with the vice-consul to determine whether Austria-Hungary would, if necessary, take military measures to prevent the further penetration of the Serbian armies into the Albanian territories. The vice-consul, Lajos Rudnay, denied the possibility of an Austro-Hungarian intervention per the instruction of Vienna. Several days later, on November 12, several Albanian leaders in Durrës<sup>110</sup> sent a letter to the Emperor, Franz Joseph, and requested help, to organize an autonomous administrative unit of the four vilayets (Kosovo, Manastir, Ioannina, and Shkodra) within the Ottoman Empire. In case this would not be possible, they also requested the Emperor's help to bring together the four

<sup>107</sup> DEGOVICS, p. 182.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> HHStA, PA XII/Türkei, Karton 417, 6a, Brief von Bilinski aus Janina, November 7, 1912, No. 86 and No. 87.

<sup>110</sup> Nikollë Kaçori (Durrës), Mustafa Kruja, Fuad Toptani, Abdi Toptani, Murat Toptani (Middle Albania), Rexhep Mitrovica, Sali Gjeka and Bedri Pejani (North Albania-Kosovo).

vilayets to create an Albanian state according to the example of the other Balkan states.<sup>111</sup> That which could not be achieved in August of 1912 in Skup/Üsküp at the hands of Syrja bej Vlora was achieved by the Serbian, Montenegrin and Greek occupation, which influenced the unification of the different Albanian groups around the necessity to unify the vilayets and form a capable, autonomous state. This was previously only perceived possible in case the Ottoman Empire lost the war. We must admit that the Muslim population of Middle Albania and beyond did not sympathize with the faltering reach of the Ottoman Sultan's influence in Albania. On the other side, representatives of the North Albania population, who had escaped to Kotorr, were on the same page with the Albanian leaders gathered in Durrës. They addressed Count Berchtold for help, in making the four Albanian vilayets in one autonomous state. They even demanded that, in case of the decomposition of the Ottoman Empire, Albania be put under the control of Austria-Hungary.<sup>112</sup> Catholic clerics emphasized the necessity of having the Austro-Hungarian military intervene.<sup>113</sup>

Meanwhile, in the Himara region of South Albania, the Greek troops had landed. The Ioanninan commander, Esad Pashë Halasti, sent a group of 500 Kosovars under the command of an Ottoman officer, and requested Eqrem bej Vlora to organize further resistance against the Greek army. When Eqrem bej Vlora left Vlora to combat the Greeks, a once-in-a-lifetime possibility was created for Ismail Qemali, to at last declare independence. What could not be done in times of peace by Syrja bej Vlora, was realized by Ismail Qemali under the threat of total Balkan occupation. Ismail Qemali a clever and experienced politician, who in the years 1911–1912 was heavily involved in relations between Cetinje, Bucharest, Sofie, Istanbul and Vienna.<sup>114</sup>

Upon his return to Durrës on November 21,<sup>115</sup> Ismail Qemali had meetings with several Albanian leaders of different regions of Albania. At the same time, Vienna took action to meet and support the Albanian leaders starting with Syrja, Eqrem bej Vlora and Ismail Qemali. Count Berchtold,

<sup>111</sup> HHStA, PA XII/Türkei, Karton 417, 6a, Brief von Rudnay aus Durrazzo, November 13, 1912, No. 86 and No. 74.

<sup>112</sup> HHStA, PA XII/Türkei, Karton 417, 6a, Telegramm aus Cattaro, November 20, 1912.

<sup>113</sup> HHStA, PA XII/Türkei, Karton 417, 6a, Telegramm von Zambaur aus Skutina, November 16, 1912, No. 3862.

<sup>114</sup> DEGOVICS, pp. 184–185.

<sup>115</sup> HHStA, PA XII/Türkei, Karton 417, Liasse XLV/6a, 6b, 6c, Telegramm von Berchtold an Rudnay aus Durrazzo, November 21, 1912.

in an instruction given to the vice consul in Durrës, Ludwig von Rudnay, repeated the necessity to ensure unity between the Albanian leaders. He demanded him to meet with them to devise the future governmental structure of Albania.<sup>116</sup>

Overall, the call of Berchtold for unity between the Albanian leaders aimed to create a favourable situation within Albania, which would eventually premise an eventual Albanian independence after several previous unsuccessful efforts. Overcoming the internal differences would be the alleviating factor for official Vienna to diplomatically protect the Albanian issue. This was a critical moment for diplomatic support, as diplomatic European conferences were being organized to regulate the problems following the First Balkan War. After Syrja bej Vlora's departure to Istanbul, Ismail Qemali found himself at the cusp of achieving the Albanian's ideal of independence. He took the set out to Vlora, and while in Fier was joined by large families of Kosovo refugees Draga, Deralla and Begolli, who supported his idea to convene the national convent in Vlora. Interestingly, these families were considered as delegates of the regions they were coming from. Although a considerable part of the delegates was still on the way to Vlora for example Isa Boletini and his troops engaged in Serbian conflict a short meeting was held to decide that the next day, on November 28, 1912, the independence of Albania would be declared. After the Albanian politicians declared the independence of the Albanian state and the Serbian troops arrived at the Adriatic coastline, both Vienna and Rome instructed their diplomats to proclaim that Austria-Hungary and Italy were in favour of the independent Albania. The policy frame and the decisive stand of Austria-Hungary made the dream of the Albanian nationalism for the national state a reality. The proclamation of the Independence of Albania in 1912 in Vlora was not an ideal ending, as it was forced by the nature of internal and external historical events which brought about the foundation of a truncated Albanian state.

The proclamation of independence simultaneously closed an era and marked the beginning of another ridden with continuous instability for the next century. Although Albania was recognized as a neutral state in the London Conference, its stability and consolidation depended on the direct support of the great European powers. Even after the Balkan wars 1912/13 the situation in Europe was unstable and in case of a European

<sup>116</sup> ÖUA, No. 4498, Telegramm von Berchtold an Vizekonsull Rudnay aus Durrazzo, November 19, 1912.

war, in Vienna there is vital for Albania to acquire military forces the, otherwise it could be invaded by neighboring countries. In this regard, the Chief of Staff of the Austro-Hungarian Army, Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf, in a letter to Foreign Minister Count Berchtold proposed that: *“the military situation in Europe is such that we must reckon in the coming years with a new Balkan war or a major European conflagration. If this should come about, Albania would of course be involved, too. This country was, however, declared neutral at the London Conference, as guaranteed by the Great Powers. But only military might is of importance in times of war, and it is evident that, should the Triple Alliance be defeated in a European conflict, Albania would, as a natural result,<sup>117</sup> be divided up among its neighbours.”*<sup>118</sup> These intentions of neighbouring countries regarding Albania are clear even in the official communications between Russia and Serbia. How Russia thinks about Albania can be seen in the following passage in the often-quoted report of the Serbian Prime Minister Pašić of 2 February 1914 on his audience with the Tsar.

*“He (the Tsar) was surprised at how Prince Wied could have himself elected monarch of Albania because, in his view, Albania was not a viable state and ought to be divided up between Serbia and Greece. Albania would perhaps become an apple of discord between Austria and Italy. I (Pašić) expressed the view that Italy and Austria were already in competition for it and had only concluded an alliance out of fear of a military conflict, and that even today they had probably only decided on joint occupation of Vlora out of fear of war.”*<sup>119</sup>

In this context, the above-mentioned facts show that the creation of an army in Albania is one of the most urgent and important problems to be solved by the new monarch. The creation of such an army would be decisive for the foundation of an independent Albania because it would serve as an important factor for Austria-Hungary, enabling it to pin down Serbian and Montenegrin forces. Conrad thought this army would be severely handicapped by the lack of funds in the country. It would therefore seem essential to me that Albania be subsidized with copious funds for military purposes.

<sup>117</sup> *“Für die Gründung eines selbständigen Albanien war wesentlich die Schaffung einer solchen Wehrmacht maßgebend, weil dieselbe für die Monarchie einen wesentlichen Faktor im Kraftkalkül bilden wird, da sie befähigt wäre, serbisch-montenegrinische Streitkräfte zu binden. Mehrjährige intensive militärische Tätigkeit vorausgesetzt, wäre Albanien immerhin imstande, zirka 80.000 wehrfähige Männer ins Feld zu stellen.”* CONRAD von HÖTZENDORF, p. 587.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 586.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 591.

During a conversation between candidate for the Albanian throne, Prussian officer Wilhelm von Wied<sup>120</sup> and Count Berchtold, held in Vienna in February 1914 after meeting with Count Berchtold, the necessity of raising a military force to the level of that of the front countries was again discussed. In this meeting Conrad explained to Wied that no one had as great and altruistic an interest in Albania as Austria-Hungary did and told him he could always address the government of Vienna for support. I stressed the necessity of armed forces, saying: “*Take Austro-Hungarian instructors with you.*” With regard to possible jealousy that might arise among the other Great Powers, in particular Italy, I added: “*Spread your instructors among the various branches of service, but give us the infantry and the cavalry.*” I also noted that, of the Dutch officers designated for the gendarmerie, Thomson was not particularly supportive of Austro-Hungarian interests,<sup>121</sup> underlined General Conrad.

The Austro-Hungarians had their doubts, however, as to whether Wied was indeed the rigorous “man of action” we needed in the Balkans, because he did not know the Balkans, and specifically Albania. For this reason, it would seem expedient to instruct our official representative of Austria-Hungary in Albania to exert continuing influence upon the prince in all his endeavours.

It is evident from the above remarks just how useful Albania could have been to Austria-Hungary. This would have been in the form of an independent country with close economic, cultural, and political ties to the Dual Monarchy and allied to it, against Serbia and Montenegro. Instead of this, Albania was the theatre of conflict between various powers and parties. Rivalry with Italy was the most pronounced. The seeds of conflict derived from the agreements Austria-Hungary had made years earlier with Italy over Albania.

As Austria-Hungary considered its options in Albanian affairs, event was taking place in the country itself that had no important link to the First World War but were of significance for the consolidation of that country and provided insight into the continuing chaos there. Austria-Hungary was doing its utmost to create a sovereign Albania upon which it would be able to rely as an ally. But even European and Balkan opponents

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<sup>120</sup> Prince Wilehm von Wied and his wife (née Princess Schönberg) left for Albania and landed in Durrës on 5 March 1914. He was welcomed on the country’s behalf by Essad. The atmosphere in the country was, however, not universally in the prince’s favour. Many of the Muslims were against him, and this soon led to an uprising.

<sup>121</sup> CONRAD von HÖTZENDORF, p. 688.

of Austria-Hungary endeavoured to torpedo this goal, and they reached their objective.

### **Conclusion**

One can say that the Albanian uprising against the Ottoman regime of 1912, twenty-four years after the League of Prizren (Kosova), was local in its character. It took place in Northern Albania, namely in the Kosovo Vilayet. The uprising of 1912, although it had passed the rudimental phase, lacked centralized leadership, and did not achieve nation wide recognition. There was no unity at that moment in time. Three fractions comprised Albanian leadership, and with or without their knowledge the fate of the Albanian regions was placed under the neighbours' or the Ottoman state's agenda. Only the autonomous wing, the most progressive of the time, was fractured under Turkish and Hamisit influence. In fact, this division came because of the High Port play, in which one side invested to deepen the differences within the Albanian National Movement, and the other side made vain promises in response to the demands of the Albanians. Another handicap to Albanian unity was a large portion of the Albanian elite rendered unable to communicate with the European governments, to bring messages across and clearly declare the national goal. The uprising of 1912 in Kosovo did not manage to spread to greater Albania, although it did not consider local interests, focusing instead on national demands. The uprising of Kosovo in 1912 was not followed by the other regions of Albania. Therefore, the event of 1912 did not correspond to the Albanian national political thought, and the national projections of Taksim Meeting. In addition, during the liberation movements of the Balkans, there was never a common front against the Ottoman suppression, as the Albanians were always excluded. They differed from the other populations due to religion and language. For this reason, its initial objective was the foundation of an autonomous Albania, but in the end included achieving a compromise between the conservatives/Hamidists, and the autonomous wing, led by known intellectuals Hasan Prishtina and Nexhip Draga. Another important obstacle to achieving the intended goals of the 1912 uprising in Kosova came from the neighbouring Balkan countries, aggressively projected the denial of the existence and interests of the Albanian nation. Religion also served as a prohibitive force in the national consciousness. In the Ottoman Empire, the church devised the criteria for Albanian treatment, rather than the state. Since most Albanians were Muslim, they had a privileged

post within the empire, at the expense of their Orthodox and Catholic brothers. This circumstance was not only an obstacle to national unity, but also to finding support among the European countries. The liberation of the Albanian nation, as the other Balkan nations, could not be made possible without the help of any Great European Power. However, these European states helped mainly the Christian nations of Balkans ignoring the fate of the Albanians, since most of them were Muslim and identified either as Ottoman or Turks. They had no common connection with any of the European powers in the manner of their connections to the nations existing between the Balkans and Russia, which were based on common Slavic heritage and orthodox religion.

Austria-Hungary paid attention to Albania, but did so in favor of its own foreign influence, particularly to gain an upper standing in its rivalry with Serbia. The European Concert's policy of maintaining the *status quo* protected Albania from the invasion of its neighbouring countries, but it was not enough for the national independent consciousness of the Albanians and the foundation of an autonomous state. Nevertheless, the most important role during this period was played by Kosovars. In a twist of fate, the Kosovo people, who had helped the young Turks to come to power, now were contributing more than anyone else to the dismantling of their empire. The best solution in these circumstances was an autonomous Albania, one step closer to independence. We must also consider Austro-Hungarian diplomatic initiatives for the decentralization of the Ottoman Empire.

Just as the Balkan states created their Alliance under the protection of Russia, Austria-Hungary undertook the diplomatic initiative to convince the High Porte and the other European powers of the necessity of the decentralization of the Ottoman Empire, as well as the unity of the four Albanian vilayets into an autonomous Albanian principate.

Encouraged by the strong international efforts of Austria-Hungary – and in turn the support of Germany and Italy the Albanian National Movement leaders were able to achieve independence for Albania. The 1912 uprising in Kosovo Vilayet also played a substantial role in this victory, from which Kosovo and other Albanian regions were left out. The London Conference for the most part recognized the results of the war, leading to the formation of a truncated Albanian state. This was just a partial completion of the idea of the National Albanian Renaissance. But we must acknowledge that, during the process of the border determination and state formation, the official Vienna's role remained



decisive. It was the decisive attitude of Austria-Hungary against the claims of Serbia and Italy to the Greeks that further ensured Albanian survival. Although unconsolidated, the foundation of Albania marked a decisive turn on the development of political consciousness and national identity among Albanian people within the borders, and in Kosovo, Macedonia, and other Albanian-inhabited regions for the ensuing decades. As for modern Albanian nationalism, the George Kastriot-Skanderbeg period solidified the base of Albanian state foundations, and for the Albanians of Kosovo, Macedonia, and other Albanian ethnic regions. Although Tirana never managed to claim any kind of irredentism, it has been the base for Albanian independence and political movements in Kosovo, Macedonia, and the Presheva Valley. With the independence of Kosovo, the original ideal of Albanian independence has been realized, bringing true closure and significance the 109-year anniversary of the declaration of independence of the Albanian state.

