

ALBANIA AND GREECE – POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN 1920-1930

Bledar Komina

Universiteti Vitrina, Albania

Abstract

When we talk about political and diplomatic relations between Albania and Greece in the period 1920-1930, always we try to refer to state relations and political actors of both countries. For this period we can explain that the relations between the two countries have not been good, but are often characterized by tension, almost by the Greek state interference in the internal affairs of Albania. At the same time this troubled situation is characterized by tense political and diplomatic relations, further from the repressive policies pursued by Athens over Albanian Cham population, living in Northern Greece, otherwise called Northern Epirus.

These relationships will draw the tense and characterizes politics and diplomacy of the two countries for almost two decades. Albania and Greece politicians and political leaders time after time tried to stabilize the situation. But Greece, which felt superior because of alliances that she had with the Great Powers, put conditions in order to stabilize the relations between two countries. While the Albanian state without any help from the Great Powers, try to protect his rights in relation to Greece, and in relation to the Greek minority living in Albania, providing them all possible rights stemming from the agreement that Albanian state had signed in 1921.

Keywords: Protocol of Kapshtica; Northern Epirus; Albanian minority; Paris peace conference

Albania and Greece in the early '20s

The first agreement between the two countries is signed in Kapshtica on May 15, 1920. In the Albanian historiography is known as Protocol of Kapestica. It was signed between the Albanian and Greek state in a general climate of tension. During this period Greece was concentrated in consecutive losses in the Turkish front, as well as Albania which has the seethed desire to unite the territories held under Italian occupation with the rest part of the country. The basic point of this Protocol was it to maintain the status quo between the two countries, especially in Southern Albania, until a final determination will be given to the issue by the Great Powers attending the Paris Peace Conference.⁵⁵ In protocol was stated that Greek churches and schools will not be affected or prejudiced and would operate freely in the Albanian territory. This agreement marks the first Greek recognition de facto of the Albanian government. Before the Protocol of Kapestica the Greek state refused to recognize any of the governments that emerged from the Albanian National Congress.⁵⁶

The fact that the Athens government owes to sign a status quo agreement, however partial, with the government's exit from Lushnja Congress, means that Athens indirectly acknowledged and recognized this Albanian national authority, but legally and publicly she

⁵⁵ Çami, Muin. Albania in the course of history 1912-1924, Tirana: Onufri, 2007, pp. 210-211.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 211.

would never engage openly to define its position in favor of recognition of the Albanian state.

The signing of this agreement is more concerned with the fear that the Greek army was located between two fronts, one in Asia Minor and one in Albania, rather than the desire to sit face to face with the Albanian government.⁵⁷ Greek thesis always remains the annexation of Northern Epirus. But, on the other hand the Tirana government was not interested, that while she was engaged in battle with Italian troops in Vlora, to open herself a second conflict with Greek troops in the south.⁵⁸ The strategy set out by the government of Suleyman Delvina, in cooperation with the National Defense Committee, aimed for a short period, as long as the official Tirana was engaged against Italian troops, to reduce the tension with Greece and Yugoslavia and to be focused by all his power in Vlora. The victory in Vlora would serve later as strategic support to show Athens and Belgrade that the Albanian state would do everything he could to preserve the territorial integrity set in the London Conference of Ambassadors in 1913.

Several months later on August 10, 1920 was signed between the Allied Powers and Turkey the Treaty of Sevres. Greek state was represented in these talks by E. Venizelos. Under this Treaty Greece pledged to ensure full protection of life and freedoms for all citizens, without distinction of origin, nationality, language, race or religion.⁵⁹ All citizens who lived in Greece will be allowed to exercise freely, publicly and privately religion and faith.⁶⁰ This treaty has a great importance, because the Greek state during 1920-1928, not only mistreated and displace the Albanian population living in Greece, but assumed that none of these rights that were assigned and accepted by the treaty of Sevres, couldn't perform by Albanian minority.⁶¹

With the acceptance of the Albanian state in December 17, 1920 in the League of Nations, the tension between the two countries will grow even more. Albanian adherence to this international organization was a step toward for Greek diplomacy in its demands for annexation of Southern Albania. The character of the commitments undertaken by the Albanian state in connection with the issue of minorities in the country, was completely abrogated by the signing the declaration for recognition of minority status.

The defeat of Greece in Asia Minor created a more complicated situation. A group of generals, as N. Pllastrias, S. Gonata, A. Haxhiqirjakos, rebelled and forced King Constantine of Greece leaving on September 22, 1922. Greece was characterized by chaos and a difficult economic situation, thousands of Greek refugees wandered the streets without any means of living. In these circumstances coup d'état leaders signed in January 1923 in Lausanne the convention for the exchange of Greek and Turkish populations. Albanian governments felt anxious about signing of this treaty, as the Greek government in exchange may include the Albanian Muslim population who lived in Greece.⁶²

During the years 1919-1924 the relations between the two countries had always been tense, because the Greek government claims frequently to annex the southern Albania and in the other hand Tirana government protested against the Greek violence over Albanian population. This situation doesn't help Greece to take advantage of Albanian economic

⁵⁷ Albanian Academy of Sciences, Albanian History, Vol. II, Tirana: 1965, p. 486.

⁵⁸ Italian troops in Albania (Years 1914-20 e 1939), Roma: Stato Maggiore Esercito (SME) – Ufficio Storico, 1978, p. 365.

⁵⁹ Meta, Beqir. Cham tragedy, Tirana: Klean, 2010, p. 32.

⁶⁰ AMPJSH. F. 151, V. 1920, D. 73, p. 2-3. (AMPJSH – Albanian Archive of Ministry of Foreign Relations; Fund, Year, Folder, Page).

⁶¹ Meta, Beqir. Cham tragedy, Tirana: Klean, 2010, p. 32.

⁶² Isufi, Hajredin. "Greek state policy for the expulsion of the Cham population in the years 1914-1928 and the Albanian resistance", Historical studies, No. 1-4, XLVIII, Tirana 1997, p. 62.

concessions that remained open for any investment. The impact of the Greek economy was very negligible in comparison with Italian influence in Albania.⁶³

Unlike Italy who tried to take advantage of economic concessions in Albania, to use them later as leverage against the Albanian government, Greece did not intervene in this area, but created a vast vacuum which will be filled by Italy and Yugoslavia.⁶⁴

The following table presents imports and exports of Albanian state with other countries during 1920-1921.⁶⁵

	Imports		Exports		Balance	
	1920	1921	1920	1921	1920	1921
Italy	11,086	12,731	1,426	1,614	9,660	11,117
Greece	3,978	2,124	43	488	3,935	1,637
Turkey	782	665			782	665
United Kingdom	734	1,135			733	1,135
Austria	724	669			724	669
United States	123				123	
Yugoslavia	106	335	53	88	54	246
	<u>17,533</u>	<u>17,659</u>	<u>1,522</u>	<u>2,190</u>	<u>16,011</u>	<u>15,469</u>

The tense political and diplomatic situation between the two countries would continue to remain such until the end of the '20s.⁶⁶

Relations between the two countries in the 1930-1939

Albanian state in the early 30s faced numerous challenges in its foreign policy. The Tirana government having no diplomatic alternatives to help the Albanian population that remained abroad, started to think about systemizing them in Albanian territory, initially guaranteeing them the costs of food until they reach the destination where they will be settled, and the payment of travel expenses. The decree of 2 September 1931 "On establishment of Migrants" was the most important issue for the time (on the matter) approved by King Zog I.⁶⁷

Through this Decree the Albanian state strategically aimed to approach these emigrants to resist and not to suffer violence and persecution in neighboring countries, especially in Greece. Settling them in these territories was a strategy made available by the Albanian government to increase the number of inhabitants in some villages and to benefit them as a cheap labor force.⁶⁸ Mostly this population was settled in those areas where the land was left fallow and where the population can be achieved through the revitalization of the economy and agriculture. In addition to offering assistance to those who immigrate to Albania, the Albanian monarchy also focused on the extension and expansion of concrete cooperation and assistance to the Albanian population that had decided to stay and

⁶³ Toçi, Veniamin. *Interference of foreign capital in Albania and democratic attitude groups 1921-1925*, Tirana: "Mihal Duri", 1973, p. 151.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.151.

⁶⁵ Rosseli, Alessandro. *Italy and Albania, Financial Relations in the Fascist Period*, London: I.B. Tauris, UK, 2006, p. 17.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 17.

⁶⁷ AQSH, F. 251, V. 1931, D. 232, p. 16. (AQSH - Albanian Central State Archive; Fund, Year, Folder, Page)

⁶⁸ Ibid.

not to depart from Greece. Preservation of identity, language, culture and academic education of this population will return to one of the strategic priorities of the foreign policy of the Albanian state during the early 30s.⁶⁹

The Balkan Treaty assigned in February 9, 1934 represents a point with great importance in interstate relations and diplomatic history of Albania and Greece as two Balkan countries. Negotiations for the implementation of this pact were made in terms of aggravation of the Albanian-Italian relations. Ahmet Zogu government was trying to break the tutelage of Italy to pursue an independent policy in foreign relations. This situation began when A. Zogu refused to extend the First Pact of Tirana. The only alternative for Albanian foreign policy remains adherence in Balkan Treaty.⁷⁰

Athens in early 1934 showed a particular interest for the position of Albania, because at that time Greece political relations with Italy were not in the top levels and not so cordial.⁷¹ For this reason, in late 1933 the Greece Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Maksimos, assumed the task to reach between the Balkan states a natural agreement without disturbing the Great Powers.

Albanian government and diplomacy, tried at any condition to be part of the Balkan Treaty. Albanian governments concerned to demonstrate that Albanian state was part of Balkan Peninsula not only geographically but also politically. Through rapprochement with Greece, Turkey and Yugoslavia, King Zog aimed to show that Albania did not belong to Italy but she has an independent foreign policy.⁷²

Despite these efforts, Albania still remained outside the Balkan Treaty, helpless she lost a strategic opportunity to escape the Italian influence, which would result fatal in the following years. At the same time the failure of this goal, wasn't a failure of Albanian state, but it was a failure of policies of neighboring countries, such as Greece and Yugoslavia, which saw Albania not part of the Balkan Peninsula, but as part of the Italian political influence in the peninsula.⁷³

During the years 1936-1937 the Albanian state continued to maintain in its foreign policy a clear and constant line focused on the status of the Albanian population (minority) in Greece. This interest came increasingly, especially when in August of 1936 in Greece embraced fascism and John Metaxas became prime minister, ruling a fascist dictatorship. Over Albanian population immediately began a systematic persecution and collision. The Greek government Greek pursued various strategies to separate Albanian Muslim population from the Christian population.

With the dictatorship of J. Metaxas the few achievements that were realized between the two countries in the field of minority rights, especially that of education in the mother tongue, will turn back to ground zero. Albanian relations with Greece during the second half of '30s, besides political interests will be developed in another aspect that includes the field of economic interest.⁷⁴

The table below shows the level of interest rate of the Albanian National Bank compared with other countries. As we can see in the table the high level of interest rate indicates that the Bank of Albania has applied higher interest level than other countries in the region. The same policy has been followed by Greece for almost a decade.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ AQSH, F. 252, V. 1934, D. 55, p. 145.

⁷¹ Shpuza, Gazmend. "Albania and the Balkan Pact of 1934", *Historical Studies*, Tirana: No. (1-4), (XXXIII), 1997, pp. 37-38, 40.

⁷² Ibid, p. 41, 48.

⁷³ AQSH, F. 252, V. 1934, D. 54, p. 78.

⁷⁴ AQSH, F. 251, V. 1936, D. 164, pp. 309-312.

⁷⁵ Fishta, Ilias Monetary and credit system in Albania 1925-1944, Tirana, Tirana University, Faculty of Economy, 1971, pp. 170-171.

Countries	Interest rate expressed in %		
	1929	1932	1938
Albania	9	8	6
Italy	7	5	4 1/2
France	3 1/2	2 1/2	2 1/2
Britan	5	2	2
Austria	7 1/2	6	4
Greece	9	9	6

Referring to import-exports dates between Albania and Greece during 1938-1939, we can note that the rapport between the two countries is clearly in favor of Greece. In 1938 the value of Greek exports to Albania amount to 1,434 gold fr., or 14.7%, while imports amounted to 737 gold fr., or 3.2% of the total value.⁷⁶ One year later in 1939 this relations change completely, this explained by the fact that Albania was occupied by Italy, which influenced in economy and trade relations with other regional countries.⁷⁷

Conclusions

Political and diplomatic relations between Albania and Greece during the years 1920-1930 are characterized by tension and discussions on the issue of minorities.

The decline of Greek influence in south Albania during these years came as a result of the increasing of Italian influence in the Balkan, especially in Albania.

Albanian rejection from the Balkan Treaty, led to the isolation of the Albanian kingdom in the region and its capitulation to Italian foreign policy.

The question of the Albanian minority in Greece remained an unsolved problem during this period.

On the other hand the Greek minority in Albania benefited all the rights included and derived from the agreement signed with the Albanian state in the early '20s.

Influenced by a tense political situation, economic relations remain at a low level of development.

References:

- Albanian Academy of Sciences, Albanian History, Vol. II, Tirana: 1965.
- Çami, Muin. Albania in the course of history 1912-1924, Tirana: Onufri, 2007.
- Fishta, Ilias Monetary and credit system in Albania 1925-1944, Tirana, Tirana University, Faculty of Economy, 1971.
- Isufi, Hajredin. Greek state policy for the expulsion of the Cham population in the years 1914-1928 and the Albanian resistance, Historical studies, No. 1-4, XLVIII, Tirana, 1997.
- Meta, Beqir. Cham tragedy, Tirana: Klean, 2010.
- Italian troops in Albania (Years 1914-20 e 1939), Roma: Stato Maggiore Esercito (SME) – Ufficio Storico, 1978.
- Rosseli, Alessandro, Italy and Albania, Financial Relations in the Fascist Period, London: I.B. Tauris, UK, 2006.
- Shpuza, Gazmend. Albania and the Balkan Pact of 1934, Historical Studies, Tirana: No. (1-4), (XXXIII), 1997.
- Toçi, Veniamin. Interference of foreign capital in Albania and democratic attitude groups 1921-1925, Tirana: “Mihal Duri”, 1973.
- * (AMPJSH – Albanian Archive of Ministry of Foreign Relations; Fund, Year, Folder, Page).
- * (AQSH – Albanian Central State Archive; Fund, Year, Folder, Page).

⁷⁶ Ibid, 194.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 194.