

THE ACCEPTANCE OF ALBANIA INTO THE NATIONS LEAGUE IN DECEMBER 17th, 1920

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Abstract

The League of Nations came into existence after the end of the First World War. The task of the League of Nations was simply to ensure that war never arose again. However, after the turmoil which was caused by the Versailles Treaty, many have considered the League to bring stability to the world.

America as a country embarked on the First World War in 1917, and the country as a whole and the president (Woodrow Wilson in particular) was horrified by the slaughter that had taken place in civilized part of the world. Thus, the only way to avoid the repetition of such disaster was to create an international body whose sole responsibility was to maintain world peace and resolve international disputes as and when they occurred. This is the task of the League of Nations of which Albania became a member. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to present the help and the policy followed by the members of this League for the acceptance of Albania.

Keywords: Nations, league, plan, circumstance

Introduction:

Though discussions in Paris had shown the dangers that could happen to Albania because of the stance of different states which had not reached final conclusions yet, the situation not only enabled the opportunity to defend the solution of the Albanian cause, but has also kept it at different levels of discussion in the international plan.

In these circumstances, the Government of Lushnja evaluated it as its policy and priority on the international level. It focuses its attention on the reaffirmation of the decisions of 1913 which had to do with the recognition of Albania. Thus, it became possible to shift the problem from the Peace Conference in Paris to the League of Nations. From a political point of view, it seemed as if "The League of Nations was the appropriate resolution of the case "(Puto, 2003)

However, this would bring a new element in the sphere of international relations in particular for Albania, especially by judging the problems based on the publicity of the favour of the Albanian questions. In November 15th 1920, the First Assembly of the League of Nations was held in Geneva in Switzerland. One month before that on 12th October, the Albanian delegation of the Peace Conference officially presented the request for the acceptance of the Tirana Government into the League of Nations to the general secretary. Thus in the letter sent to Drumond from Paris, it was said that the Albanian Government by faithfully presenting the feelings of all the Albanian people and wholeheartedly wanting to consolidate peace in Balkan, asked for an admission into the League of Nations. In addition, the Albanian government also stated its willingness to take part in the Great Assembly that will be held on November 15th in Geneva.

The stages of this Historic Process

Drumond replied by sending a telegram as follows: "Considering the request of Albania to be admitted into the United Nations Society, the Permanent Consultative Committee on Military Matters, sea and air in their latest collection of San Sebastian, has been involved in discussions regarding this issue to act in conformity with Article 9 of the Covenant of the League Council. Thus, the League rules and armament regulation are the criteria for their acceptance. As a result, I am happy to receive information on the following:

1. - Current composition of the military and naval air forces, as well as that of commercial marine and aviation of Albania.
2. - Military forces that the Government of Albania wants to have: For this, specific observations clarify that the Government wants to present this subject to the Plenary Committee or Air, Naval and Military Subcommittee.
3. - Albania's current boundaries.

Furthermore, the telegram added that the acceptance of Albania would be discussed at the first meeting of the Assembly on the 15th of November 1920. On the other hand, the Standing Consultative Commission had to submit a report on this."(NL, 1936)

The presentation of the Albanian candidature immediately raised the question of Albania's international status, and such thing was demanded by the article 1 of the Statute of the League which states that: "every state...that governs independently... could become a member of the League ... "(Statute of the League). However, here the attention was focused on the General Secretary letter of response on October 20th. He once took the initiative to make the Albanian request known and present it to all the members of the

Assembly. Thus at the same time, he asked for two kinds of documents at his disposal:

1. - Authentic copy of the documents by which Albania had declared its independence, or through which it was given full self-government together with any other document that reproduced subsequent ones;
2. - Authentic copies of statements through which other governments had recognized the Government of Albania as a de facto or de jure government.

Drumondit responses were helping them to pass the situation of the Albanian question, and they made it possible to find the way out of the current situation. In these conditions, the Albanian government decided to send a special delegation headed by Fan in Genoa. This delegation comprises of Pandeli Cale, Ademid Frashëri, and Mosi Hill who arrived in Geneva on the 12th of November 1920. Since that moment, the international status of Albanian problem passed from the Albanian delegation at the Peace Conference in Paris under the jurisdiction of a special delegation of the League of Nations. The Commission of the Nations League of 22nd November 1920 under the chairmanship of Lord Robert Cecil, had consulted the Albanian envoy for about half an hour " on the conditions of Albania and was interested in many of the news that he had received "(Selmani, 2008).

The first thing the delegation did when they arrived at Geneva was the presentation of the documents required by the Secretariat of the League. International acts of the period from 1913-1914 were presented and a lot of other documents were also presented. Such documents include the Treaty of London of May 30th 1913, which put an end to conflicts among the Balkan countries; Ambassadors Conference decision of 29 July 1913; the Organic Status of Albania of April 1914 accompanied by the relevant Articles which had to do with the organization of the Albanian state at different time periods expressing the relationship between Albania and other countries as well as its agreement with Italy.

Basically, the process passed into two main stages: the first stage of debates was that of Commission V, while the second stage was that of the plenary meeting of the Assembly. In Commission V, two opposing views which were located opposite each other in the Bay of commission were presented. Thus, the main objections presented were:

1. - Albania was not a Christian nation;
2. – Its admission would be premature till the moment its borders was set and stable.
3. - The government in power was not officially recognized by any force yet. France supporting Greece and Yugoslavia proposed that the Committee after examining the report of the sub-committees, should postpone the admission into the Nations League until the Albanian national

status was determined by an agreement which would replace the 1913-1914 agreement which has been considered obsolete. According to France, the acceptance of Albania into the League would be a challenge to the powers which have not been concluded about the Albanian problem" (Swire, 1920)

But Lord Robert Cecil, the chairman of the Foreign Affairs in the British Parliament through his speech clearly pointed out that religion was completely out of this issue, and there would be no peace in Europe until Albania was safe in front of her neighbour claims. However, the French point of view was supported by the representatives of Yugoslavia, England and Italy. So, everything was delayed for the plenary session of the Assembly which would have more participants, and the discussions would be more complete.

Few days later, precisely on 22nd November 1920, the delegation presented a memorandum which used to give arguments for the entrance of Albania into the Nations League. The aim of this memorandum was to explain the known fact that the Albanian state was not a state created after the First World War, but has existed as an independent state since 1913. They tried to argue that the main acts imposed by the Great Powers had entered into force beginning from 1913-1914, as none of the international powers had denounced them. Consequently, they have been valid from the point of view of the international law.

In this memorandum, the period of the World War was explained as a violation, and not as the cancellation of international acts which had the signature of the European great powers. According to the memorandum, war does not signify that Albania is an incapable country for its existence, but it was argued that Albania had suffered the same fate as many other countries which were involved in the Great War. It was a fact that "Albania recovered, reorganized and created a national government; and it was the owner of its territory as was allocated in 1913." (Puto, 2003). Thus our delegation in Geneva tried with all possible arguments to convince the Nations League that the Albanian state had been known before the war, and that the state status has not been altered since the development of the history of war. A very important issue had to do with the position of the Albanian Government. Through the memorandum, the thesis which shows that the Albanian government had all the opportunities to be treated as a government *de jure* and *de facto* of the state of Albania was defended.

Therefore, this resulted in some conditions as described below:

First, considering the internal plan, the expression of the will of the people by the extended power throughout the assigned territory in 1913 had emerged from the national assembly. Second, it had managed to emerge as a party in the international plan according to the agreement of August 2nd, 1920. Thirdly, a protocol was reached on May 28, 1920 by engaging in a

discussion with the Yugoslav side, regarding the regulation of borders based on the acts of 1913. In conclusion, Italy, Greece and Yugoslavia recognized the Albanian Government de facto. Hence, the delegation carefully introduced a note of 15 points which were explained either juridically or historically to the Nations League, including the myths of the Albanian history. After the memorandum of 22nd of November 1920 in the framework of the League's Assembly, a commission was established and it formed a subcommittee to examine the request of Albania by asking the Albanian delegation to answer the question, whether the government was recognized as de jure or de facto and by whom?

The final version of Albania's acceptance in the Nations League was given in the report that was compiled after the discussions by the Commission on December 4th, 1920, where it was approved by majority of votes. The Albanian state of the year 1913 and the government of the year 1914 headed by Vidi which were de jure was recognized by Europe, through sending official representatives. However, difficult events came during the First World War because many plans were projected for the partition of Albania, especially due to the fact that they were associated with projects of the Peace Conference in Paris.

However, it must be admitted that the legal section of the Secretariat of the League and the lawyers who were advised for this case, expressed that the agreements of 1914 were out of force. Thus juridically speaking, the recognition of Albania by the powerful states cannot be considered anymore as effective. The statement made by the representatives of Italy was of great importance. He categorically expressed the idea that the Italian government has not recognised the Albanian government as neither de jure or de facto, but it gave no exact response in the report which is neither positive nor negative.

On December 17th, discussions at the Assembly took a dual nature; and within a period of two weeks, the Albanian candidacy recognized both the rejection and acceptance. Debate in the Assembly was opened with two consecutive discussions of Lord Cecil and the delegate of Canada, Rouell in favour of accepting Albania into the League. Fisher, the British representative highlighted the fact that his delegation "had made a serious study of Albania position and had decided to be in favour of its immediate acceptance" (Puto, 1970). After, his representatives i.e. French and Italian gave a positive expression. At the end of voting, the result was spectacular: 35 votes pro and 7 abstentions. Therefore, no votes were con.

In December 17, the Albanian delegation was invited to take its place in the Nations League Assembly; while in the next day session, on December 18th, Albanian people showed a high sensitivity to this political fact. The people of Shkodra asked the Council of Ministers "to pronounce Mr. Lord

Robert Cecil, honorary citizen of the town for his special care for the Albanian question shown in the Nations League" (the archive). Meanwhile on 18 December, "The Times" drew attention to an interesting phenomenon that the Assembly had modified the whole report of the fifth Commission for the admission of Albania into the Nations League. Therefore, during the two weeks of international policy developments, Albania had consolidated the situation within its territory. But the most interesting fact was that this fact was accepted by the neighbouring countries of Albania such as Yugoslavia and Greece, which considered the situation in Albania as a normal one in order to justify its admission into the Nations League.

The Acceptance of Albania into the Nations League based on its conditions in 1920 at the time when the sovereignty and the territorial integrity were not for sure were very important for two reasons: firstly, through its acceptance, the international recognition of the Albanian state was reassured; and secondly, it would be considered as a collective recognition for Albania from the other states. During the following days, it was revealed that Albania had a convenient government which had given all the evidence of political maturity because its status had already been admitted internationally since 1912. Hence, this was when independence had been recognized. Many personalities such as: Lord Robert Cecil from South Africa, Mr. Rouel of Canada, Mr. Fisher of Great Britain and finally Mr. Viviani on behalf of the French delegation had protected the case of Albania in the League.

Finally Mr. Schanzer, the Italian delegate, with a small interruption declared and concluded that, "with the wish that Albania is an element of peace and order in the Balkans, we are to give a positive vote for its acceptance. Leaving aside the difficulties encountered in the beginning, the acceptance of Albania into the Nations League will be an act of supreme justice and great wisdom. The recognition of Albanian state should be done on the basis of its independence proclaimed by the Conference of Ambassadors in London from 1912-1913. For a year, Albanians have manifested their intention to alter nothing in their international status and they have given a lot of evidence in respecting the independence and sovereignty of Albania according to the borders which was defined in 1913.

The active willingness was manifested with the creation of the national government with its national program on January 28th, 1920. After that, Albania was emancipated with the Italian political issue to achieve the unification of the country by taking control of its cities. For example, Shkodra was evacuated from Anglo-French troops in the month March 1920, Gjirokastra was evacuated from Italian troops in late April, Korca was evacuated from French troops in May 1920, and likewise Tepelena and Vlora

which were evacuated after a bloody war of two months from June to July 1920. Hence, our lectors recognized the history of Italian-Albanian war.

Whereas, Forin Ofisi declared that Aires which is the British diplomat would depart for Durres as the consular officer. Different authors expressed their different opinions for that matter. According to Sejfi Vllamasi, Albania was admitted into the League of Nations for the sake of kerosene. William Bland thought that the invasion of Albanian territory during the First World War had led to the discovery of oil in Albania by the Italian and Austrian geologists. In March 20th 1920, Aires arrived in Albania with a special mission from the British Ministry of Foreign Affairs Office, and declared in Tirana that Britain was prepared to secure the admission of Albania in the Nations League, but on the conditions that the Albanian government should accept an Anglo-Persian concession monopoly for oil, controlled by the British government since 1914.

Therefore, the Albanian government accepted the conditions given. This fact can also be seen in the History of Albania: The English imperialist used to play a very important role in the Nations League, and their interest for the Albanian oil was increasing. Taking the advantages of the difficult position of the Albanian state, the British government announced that it would support Albania and make its admission to the Nations League possible but on the condition of giving the exclusive right the Anglo-Persian Oil Company to search and exploit oil in Albania. However, the government managed by Iljaz Vrioni, which replaced the Government of Suleiman Delvina in November 192 accepted their request.

Prof. Paskal Milo, thinks that the admission of Albania into the Nations League was in conflict with the goals of Yugoslavia, because it would be more difficult for it to intervene in the domestic affairs of the Albanian state and to keep its territory occupied.

The work of Tirana's Government was estimated positively due to its efforts to restore the country back to its normal position.

It was also noted that Albanians were distinguished for their national sentiment, because although they belonged to different religions, they did not have any conflict. The newspaper "Dielli" wrote: "Our nation has awakened the thirst for national independence like as it was proved in the Congress of Lushnja. Our people feel thirsty for religious independence as it was proved in the Middle part of Albania where the Orthodox Church was declared to be independent". This fact showed that the Albanian society was prepared to accept religious tolerance.

The report left the impression that the issue was left for resolution by the League Assembly, and it was explainable due to the fact that a number of delegates expressed for their admission into the Nations League. Albania had passed the first stage of treatment which extended until December 17, 1920,

a date which created possibility for the second phase and which represented another opportunity for Albania to complete the process. It was quite clear that the main supporters of Albania in the Nations League were those that were linked to the Commission such as: South Africa and Canada. Thus, they became defence lawyers of the Albanian issue, considering the main points of the memorandum of November 12th, 1920.

The supporters of Albania in the Assembly judged that the status of Albania could not be changed by the occupation of its territory or by belligerents or the consideration of the treaties, even though they were conceived and designed by the major European powers. Judging on the basis of these arguments, it meant that even Belgium and Serbia, which were parts of the League, would not be in it anymore. But the treaties and projects had remained on paper and had not changed the state of Albania de facto government. According to the Canadian delegate, it could not be considered legitimate and fair that a group of states had to decide the allocation of another country even though it was powerless and unknown, especially when it was established on a neuter ground.

Referring to the discussion of delegates to various countries, the discussion of the British delegation was most impressive. They stated that they had made a serious study about the Albanian position, and had concluded that the Albanian request for acceptance into the Nations League had to be supported.

Then came the Italian delegation which with “liberalism” meant the issue of accepting new members into the League. Being inspired by these general principles, they gave their votes in the favour of Albania’s request to be accepted into the League.

During the debates developed in the Assembly of the League, the two representatives of Britain's dominions, South Africa and Canada were more prominent. They appreciated the development of the Albanian nationality, which according to them was not much more different from the other countries. In their discussions, they stressed that Albania was the only country in the world where there existed the unity between the Red Cross and Crescent, and so, there was no discussion to reject the Albania’s request. As a result, they called a meeting of the League on December 17, 1920, where Albania took its place.

But what were the factors that enabled this political achievement for Albania? We must not neglect the situation in Albania. The activity of the Government of Tirana and its work had attracted the attention of the European policy. Therefore, this resulted in the withdrawal of the Italian army in the Vlora struggle and in the agreement which was realised on August 2nd, 1920. This historical fact was clearly explained by Leonardo Viteti in his study, “The Albanian negotiations” (politics), stressing the fact

that the agreement of August, signed between the Italian and Albanian governments was realised according to formula expressed in the official communiqué: "On August the 2nd, an agreement between the Italian and Albanian governments which contained regulations of pending issues, was signed in Tirana. It determined the question of the home arrival of Italian military troops".

During this time, the Albanian delegation headed by Fan Noli conducted a series of meetings with representatives of the Member States of the League. But what drew the political attention were the positive votes by South Africa and Canada. India, the part of the British Empire, also joined them. It was quiet clear that the dominions could not act politically without the advice of Forin Ofisi; so basically, this was a positive option of English politics. This was considered of great interest to English policy because of Albania's geographical position and its real groundwater.

Referring to Haris Silajdzic for the period we are analysing, we can say that Albania had attracted the attention of British policy regarding the use of Albanian underground, especially kerosene. Of course, this moment was very important and specific, and it was reflected in many newspaper articles of that time.

The newspaper "Dielli" wrote: "Finally, a very important step was made to ensure peace in Albania, and that made the Nations League to vote a committee of three persons to go to Albania and make a full report on the implementation of the decision of the Allied Powers and make it known, and also report any problem at the Albanian borders".

This commission in Albania had to be as authoritative as the Nations League in order to ensure the implementation of its decisions in Albania. At the same time, the Commission had the right to appoint the group of persons who would preserve balance in the defence of the borders in case of any possible stroke. Also, the Commission had legal attributes to find out those who had all the burden of responsibility. On this matter, "Dielli" noted that in the moment when the conditions might create any nasty situation which may be accompanied by disturbance and disorder, "the commission had the power to hold responsible those that have been wrong and it would be the League's duty to prove it and give the appropriate punishment" All arguments showed that the recognition of Albanian independence was of great interest for Europe, especially for Italy. Therefore, any threat against Albania would be considered as a threat to Italy. The Nations League had realised all the internal and external factors of Albania.

This issue had to be considered in relation to the decisions of the London Conference of November 1921, which would highlight the Albanian issue in relations with neighbouring countries and those of West Europe, especially Italy. But anyway, the Albanians were skeptical regarding the

policy of great powers, thinking that they had not abandoned the old ideas. They had just come out of the war and they could not sit quiet wondering if the Nations League would solve the problems quietly as president Wilson used to believe.

The newspaper “Dielli” added that even though Wilson used to believe in the Nations League, "we have no reason to believe that it could be done panacea of all wounds". Klemansoi did not trust in the League, because it had begun to seek alliance with the U.S. and England, which meant that these movements contravened the ideals of Wilson. Hence as a result of this, Albanians asked the president of America not to give permission for specific connections which could be used to destroy the Nations League and the hopes of Albanians too.

However, Albanians believed that their admission into the Nations League would be a great achievement for them. Thus, referring to the letter that Pandeli Anastasi sent to Mehmet Konica, it was noticed that the recognition and acceptance of Albania as a member of the United League made a great impression, and encouraged us to face the pain and difficulty without shyness, giving us the possibility of self-ruling. However, we can say that our future from this moment and on depends on the Albanians.

This event made Albanians understood that the fate of their country is dependent on them and they had created a political class that was able to represent their interests in international institutions. This fact can be seen in a series of correspondences, which valued the contribution of Fan Noli. Hence, Mr. Powell Mountoux in accordance with the instructions of the President of the Assembly addressed Fan Noli, and asked him to take the place which was reserved for him as the representative of Albania in the Nations League. This happened on Saturday morning in December 18, 1920.

Conclusion

From this view point, the acceptance of Albania in the Nations League in December 1920, should not be considered as an event by itself, but is much more important for the position of Albania in the world as a final state.

This event has politically redefined the international recognition of the Albanian state, which was so much needed by the Albanian society.

The government of Tirana was admitted as the government de jure, and that has occupied the place of the government of Prince Vid which had been known by other states since 1913. Therefore, considering the formation of the Albanian state through the developments in history, we can make a scientific judgement through times.

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