
The attitude of the Albanian State towards the albanians of Kosovo in 1918-1941

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Abstract

In this paper, it is presented what was the attitude of the Albanian State towards the dispossessed and how much it managed to sistemated them in Albania. After all the research and findings about the way Albanians displacement, a treatment has been made of the attitude that the Albanian state had followed and its role towards the displaced and also the way they are organized in Albania, in which areas, in which regions, and also the way of treatment that was given to the Albanians who moved from their countries to the mother country Albania. The State of Albanians to come to the aid of these immigrants, managed to design the legal infrastructure by approving several laws in the 20s, especially the Decree Law on the Settlement of Immigrants of 1931. Likewise, during these years, the Albanian State was also interested in the condition of those who were outside its borders and engaged in various ways to help them.

Key words: Albanian State, ethnic cleansing, immigration, resettlement.

Introduction

Albania in these years was still in economic relations of the medieval type. Five centuries of Ottoman rule had not only not created the base foundations of a modern economic development, but had only hindered and delayed development. In 1922, over 90% of the country's population was engaged in agriculture or livestock and that Albanians lived in a state of extreme poverty.¹

An aspect of the issues raised in the Albanian parliament are those related to the Albanians of Kosovo and other countries in Yugoslavia, as well as the immigrants who came from these countries to Albania.² On March 3, 1921, the President of the Kosovo Committee in Shkodra sends a telegram to Aqif Pasha Elbasani, the President of the Supreme Council of Albania, where he says that the Serbs are exterminating the Albanian race in Kosovo. It also asks this Council to make the Albanian government take care of this issue and also to protest to the League of Nations and the United States of America.³

The persecution of Kosovo Albanians, whom the Serbian government intended to exterminate and expel from their lands where they showed inhumane treatment to the Albanian population. The news about the exterminating policy of the Serbian rulers in Kosovo deeply touched the feelings of the Albanian people and caused a powerful explosion of anger. In support of their brothers, the deputies of the Albanian parliament, which at that time was called the National Council, stood up and protested unanimously.⁴

¹ Bernd Fisher. *Mbreti Zog dhe përpjekja për stabilitet në Shqipëri*, (Tiranë, Çabej, 2004), 55.

² Emine. Arifi – Bakalli. “Çështja e Kosovës apo çështje lidhur me shqiptarët e Kosovës në parlamentin e Shqipërisë në vitet 1925-1939”, 100 vjet Paralementarizëm, (Tiranë: Republika e Shqipërisë Kuvendi, 2020), 79.

³ *AQSH*, F. 147 Këshilli i Lartë i Shtetit, V. 1921, D. I - 16, f. 1. Telegram i kryetarit të Komitetit të Kosovës në Shkodër ku thotë se serbët po shfatosin racën shqiptare në Kosovë.

⁴ Kaliopi Naska. “Çështja e Kosovës në parlamentin shqiptar të vitit 1921”, në *Çështja e Kosovës – Një problem historik dhe aktual (simpozium i mbajtur në Tiranë më 15-16 prill 1993)*, (Tiranë: Instituti i Historisë Prishtinë – Tiranë, 1996), 155.

In the discussions in May 1921, they discussed the treatment of Albanians outside Albania. Deputy Ali Këlcyra put forward the interest that the Albanian state should have, Leonidha Koja was behind him in this opinion, while deputy Kristo Dako asked the government to try to open Albanian schools. Likewise, in the discussions that continued in June, the deputy Jusuf Barka, drawing attention to the Serbian atrocities against our brothers in Kosovo and asking for petitions to be made in the League of Nations for the rights of Albanians outside the borders.⁵

The National Council of Albania in June 1921 sent a telegram to the Yugoslav parliament, asking it to intercede with its government to stop the atrocities in Kosovo. But the answer of the president of the Yugoslav parliament Dr. Ivan Ribar was that the Albanian parliament had no right to interfere in matters that, according to him, were the internal affairs of the Yugoslav state. But then the deputies of the Albanian parliament, indignant with the answer of the Yugoslav parliament, they pointed out that our telegram was not intended to interfere in the internal affairs of Yugoslavia, but to protect human rights.⁶

After that, various Albanian MPs publicly expressed their revolt. One of them, Luigj Gurakuqi, declared: *"How can they telling, a government that has sown our lives with the graves of our brothers that we are interfering in its internal affairs?" How can a government tell me that we interfere in internal affairs when we see that, because of it, my children and women behave naked and barefoot here in Tirana?"*⁷

As well, also Hasan Prishtina declared, expressing himself about the massacres and barbarisms that were being done to the Albanian people. Where in the city of Peja, a Committee named "Crna Ruka" was formed, created by the Serbian government under the chairmanship of Milo Dimitrovic, which only aims to commit murders against the Albanian population and rob their properties and assets. He gives a proposal to the Albanian government: *"For the government to take strict and urgent measures, since we cannot get enough benefit with written complaints, I propose to appoint a parliamentary commission to go to Rome, Paris, London and if necessary also in Washington, to complain verbally"*.⁸

After the discussions in the Albanian Parliament, on June 20, 1921, was approved the following telegram: *"The National Council has full hope in the human feelings of the various representatives of the people, take your permission to remove the remark on the cruel massacres and violence that have been going on for eight years now. continue with an ever-increasing harshness against the Albanians of Kosovo and we pray for the necessary steps to be taken by the Government of Belgrade for the cessation of these atrocities that are destroying the civilization of the 20th century"*.⁹

It is important that in the years 1920-1924, the main institution for determining contemporary politics became the Albanian Parliament, in which the issue of Kosovo was inevitable. Even the Albanian Government of Ilaz Vrioni during the months of July-August 1921 protested in the League of Nations against a new wave of persecutions that had erupted in

⁵ Marenglen Verli. "Çështja e Kosovës në Parlamentin shqiptar 1920-1924", në Studime Historike, nr. 1-2, (Tiranë: Instituti i Historisë, 2020), 250-251.

⁶ Ana Lalaj. "Problemi i Kosovës në parlamentin shqiptar (1920-1924)", në Studime historike, Nr. 1-2, (Tiranë: Instituti i Historisë, 2000), 127; Naska. "Çështja e Kosovës...", 156.

⁷ Beqir Meta. et al., *Historia e shqiptarëve gjatë shekullit XX (1920-1924)*, Vëllimi II, (Tiranë: Akademia e Studimeve Albanologjike – Instituti i Historisë, 2019). 588-589.

⁸ Kujtim Nuro. Nezir Bato. *Hasan Prishtina (Përmbledhje dokumentesh) 1908-1934*, (Tiranë: Drejtorja e përgjithshme e arkivave të shtetit, 1982), 112-113; Marenglen Verli. "Parlamenti shqiptar në vitet 1920-1924 për çështjen e Kosovës", Buletini, (Prishtinë: Fakulteti Filozofik, 2021), 26.

⁹ Lush Culaj. *Shqiptarët në gjysmën e parë të shekullit XX*, (Prishtinë: Instituti Albanologjik, 2005), 192.

Kosovo by the Serbian authorities, where through Mit'hat Frashër he informed them about the situation of the Albanians in Yugoslavia.¹⁰ Even in the seance of the parliament on July 16, 1921, in addition to the evidence of the Serbian massacres, a part of the deputies came up with the proposal to send a parliamentary commission to protect the Albanians of Kosovo. According to the balance made by the "MKK" Committee in 1921 for the genocide carried out by the Yugoslav authorities in the summer in Kosovo, it resulted that 12,371 people were killed and another 10,526 were looted.¹¹

Meanwhile, the Albanian parliament continued its work to inform the international opinion about what was happening in Kosovo, sending telegrams to the governments and parliaments of the Great Powers, as well as the League of Nations. However, the Albanian MPs called insufficient either the discussions in the parliament or the telegrams and calls on the Kosovo issue . They stated the need to provide documents and arguments that had to be prepared based on a complete and accurate knowledge of the situation in Kosovo.¹²

The protest was repeated by the government of Noli in July-August, when the terror of the Serbian government extended to Drenica. In all cases when the Albanian side made denunciations in the National League, Yugoslavia countered in various ways, up to fabricated accusations, to undermine the effect of these denunciations made by Albania.¹³

The government of Noli, not directly, but through the United Committees of irredentist Albanians, on September 26, 1924, with the signatures of Hasan Pristina, Bedri Pejani and Bajram Curri, sent a memorandum to the President of the Council of the League of Nations from Geneva in the name of " United Committees of Unliberated Albanians", where they protested with facts about the continuous violence and persecutions that the Serbian government did against the Albanians and demanded that the Albanian people be treated like any other people.¹⁴ But Mehmet Konica, in a telegram sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, announced that the British delegate is not willing to intervene with the Council of the League to look at the petition of the Kosovo delegates.¹⁵

The "MKK" committee take care of the housing and the food of the displaced people, who had left their homes in Kosovo due to Serbian violence. The territory of political Albania was always a refuge for those expelled from Kosovo and other Albanian countries in Yugoslavia. The Albanian government was against the discrimination against the Albanians outside its borders and judged the attempts to suppress through the violence of the Albanian uprisings as well as the expulsion of the Albanians. Zog's government demanded the cessation of these violent behaviors.¹⁶

¹⁰ Lalaj. "Problemi i Kosovës...", 127; Marenglen Verli. "Përpyjekjet për prezantimin e çështjes së Kosovës në Lidhjen e Kombeve në vitet '20", në Kosova, Nr. 27, (Prishtinë: Instituti i Historisë, 2005), 9; Paskal Milo. "Parlamentarizmi shqiptar dhe Lidhja e Kombeve 1929-1939", Buletini, (Prishtinë: Fakulteti Filozofik, 2021), 91.

¹¹ Naska. "Çështja e Kosovës...", 158; Milo. *Shqipëria dhe Jugosllavia...*, 132.

¹² Lalaj. "Problemi i Kosovës...", 128-129.

¹³ Verli. "Përpyekje për prezantimin..." 94.

¹⁴ *ASDN*. V. 25 shtator 1925, D. R1657/41/40731/11379, fl. 1-8, Letra e Bedri Pejanit drejtuar Sekretarit të Përgjithshëm të Lidhjes së Kombeve; Meta. et al., *Historia e shqiptarëve gjatë shekullit XX*, V. II, 230.

¹⁵ *AMPJ*, V. 1924, D. 523, fl. 14. Korrespondencë e Legatës Shqiptare në Londër me Ministrisë së Punëve të Jashtme të Shqipërisë, Londër, 03.12.1924.

¹⁶ Liman Rushiti. "Lëvizja Kaçake dhe Komiteti "Mbrotja Kombëtare e Kosovës", në Komiteti "Mbrotja Kombëtare e Kosovës" (Përmbledhje kumtesash), (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, Instituti i Historisë Tiranë, Instituti i Historisë Prishtinë, 2004), 100; Marenglen Verli, "Çështja e Kosovës dhe stabiliteti i shtetit 1912-1999", në Kosova – Rruga drejtë lirisë, (Prishtinë: Instituti i historisë, 2020), 20; Lush Culaj. *Sfida historike*, (Prishtinë: Instituti Albanologjik, 2020), 103.

The Albanian government was not in favor of immigrants from Kosovo due to the lack of funds. However, in the years 1925 - 1927, about 6000 Albanians emigrated from Kosovo and settled in Kavajë, Fier, etc. In order to settle the Albanians who emigrated, the Agrarian Reform Directorate was created, which gave them land from the state lands.¹⁷

In the discussions in the Albanian parliament in the session of April 25, 1928, the deputy B. Begolli gave a proposal to react to the expropriation and taking of Albanian land by the Yugoslav government, and asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs to react at the League of Nations. As well, Deputy J. Erebera said that it is our obligation to take care of the Albanians who happened to be in Yugoslavia, and he also added that it is a shame and a sin not to take care of them. The other MP F. Rusi also stated that the land is being taken from the Albanians and are being expelled from their homes and it is an unfair thing that is being done to them and asked the foreign minister for an explanation as to whether it is true that there has been no reaction. Meanwhile, Deputy F. Alizoti stated that we cannot interfere in the affairs of another country, but he wanted to know about the fate of the Albanians and asked the foreign minister whether the treaties with neighboring countries regarding the issue of minorities are being respected.¹⁸

On August 14, 1928, the person in charge of the Albanian Legation in Belgrade, Tahir Shtylla, informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the dire situation of the Albanians in Yugoslav captivity, where at this time the Yugoslav government had started an action using the most barbaric means to forced the Kosovar Albanians to leave their countries, especially those who live along the Albanian-Yugoslav border. And as a result of these severe measures against the Albanians, the goal was achieved that a large number of them were forced under pressure to sell their property for a little money and thus take the path of leaving their properties.¹⁹

Also, the Albanian consul stated that the Albanian consul in Ankara had been informed about this matter, and according to the instructions from the MFA, they had started a counter-propaganda in the Albanian districts of Kosovo, advising them not to leave their countries, as previously it was against interests of the Albanians and that in Turkey they would not find the welcome they were hoping. Likewise, in the response of the Minister of the Interior, Kostaq Kota, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Iljaz Vrioni, appealed to the bodies that advocate in every way the ban on the emigration of Albanians to foreign countries, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has to develop through the press national, a broad campaign related to the sufferings of all Albanians who had the misfortune to emigrate.²⁰

The Albanian state knew and this was understood that the Yugoslav government is not respecting human rights nor those rights that the League of Nations has announced to minorities. And he asks the MFA to commit to intervening with the Yugoslav authorities since the arrival of

¹⁷ AMPJ, V. 1960, D. 530, fl. 4. Relacion, Gjendja e shqiptarëve të Kosovës në periudhën e Luftës së Parë Botërore gjerë në vitin 1941, cituar sipas S. Syla. *Shteti shqiptar dhe çështja e Kosovës 1939 – 1981*, (Prishtinë: Instituti i Historisë, 2017), 25;

¹⁸ AQSH, F. 146 Parlamenti, V. 1928, D. 88, f. 388-390. Procesverbale të mbledhjeve parlamentare 16 - 25 në Sesionin e Dytë të Legjislaturës së Parë.

¹⁹ AQSH, F. 152 MPB, V. 1928, D. 66, f. 10. Korrespondencës e Ministrisë së Punëve të Jashtme etj, mbi disa familje kosovare që dëshirojnë të shpërngulen nga Jugosllavia për në Shqipëri e Turqi dhe qëndrimi i Qeverisë Shqiptare mbi këtë çështje.

²⁰ AMPJ, V. 1928, D. 155, fl. 9-14. Korrespondencë e Ministrisë së Punëve të Jashtme me Legatën Shqiptare në Jugosllavi dhe Ministrinë e Punëve të Brendshme mbi emigrimin e disa familjeve kosovare në Turqi si dhe masat e marra për ndalimin e tyre.

immigrants in the Albanian state they will neither have a place to settle nor money to meet their daily needs.²¹

Albania's interest in Albanians abroad country did not stop. In March 1929, the Albanian government submitted a complaint to the League of Nations against the atrocities and mistreatment of Albanians by the counties and the Yugoslav regime. The murder of Shtjefën Gjeçov on October 14, 1929 and the escape from Yugoslavia of three Albanian Catholic priests, due to persecution by the Yugoslav authorities, caused a deep irritation in Albania. That is why Albanian diplomacy had reacted strongly to these criminal acts of the Serbian government.²²

The diplomatic activity of the Albanian leaders in the territory of Kosovo marks a new stage without a doubt with the petition of the Catholic priests, where the condition of the Albanians under the Yugoslav occupation is best described by these three parishioners of the Albanian Catholic Church in Kosovo, the fugitives after the murder of Shtjefën Gjeçov in Zym the Has, Don Gjon Bisaku, Don Stefan Kurti and Don Luigj Gashi, missionaries of "Propaganda Fides" who, on May 5, 1930, sent a petition that was designed by Hasan Prishtina. Through this written protest, addressed the Secretary General of the Council of Nations in Geneva, His Excellency Mr. Erik Dramodi, where they provide facts about the Serbian genocide on the unprotected Albanian population in Yugoslavia, where they emphasize "the deplorable situation that Serbian domination has caused to Albanians ; we will certainly not be the last to advertise before this high instance of international justice if the policy of the Belgrade government towards Albanian subjects does not fundamentally change".²³

The attitude of the Albanian state, in particular of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to support Kosovo's immigrants, until Zogu's own meetings in the years 1930, 1933, etc., with leaders from Kosovo, namely immigrants, such as with Bedri Pejani, etc., or the reception of a delegation of the movement from Kosovo in 1933 and the offer for cooperation "for the sake of the homeland", etc., testify to the increased efforts of the Albanian governments of that period in favor of the Kosovo issue. Zog's government tried to keep alive the national spirit there and to prevent, as much as possible, the policy of violence, expropriation, migration and Slavic colonization of Albanian villages.²⁴

The interest of the Albanian state continued in the 1930s. At this stage the Albanian state tried to prevent the migration of the Albanian population of Kosovo to Turkey, but if they were forced to move by the Yugoslav government, they should move to toward Albania. Therefore, King A. Zogu also built the legal infrastructure through the approval of the decree-law for the settlement of Kosovar immigrants.²⁵ The interest of the Albanian state was a proof of the intention and efforts that was concretized with the system, mainly in the land-properties of the

²¹ AMPJ, V. 1929, D. 413, fl. 39-42. Ministria e Punëve të Brendshme në korrespondencë me Ministrinë e Punëve të Jashtme, njoftonte se në Pogradec kishin ardhur disa familje kosovare nga Jugosllavia.

²² Armend Mehmeti. *Diplomacia e Britanisë së Madhe në marrëdhëniet shqiptaro-jugosllave 1919-1939*, (Tiranë: Instituti i Historisë, 2020), 378; Marenglen Verli. *Kosova në fokusin e historisë (studime, analiza, dokumente dhe 231 ilustrime)*, Vëllimi i dytë, (Tiranë: Botimpex, 2003), 157; Skender Lutfiu. *Çështja e shqiptarëve në Jugosllavi në sfondin e marrëdhënieve ndërmjet Shqipërisë dhe Jugosllavisë 1918-1939*, (Prishtinë, Instituti i Historisë "Ali Hadri", 2021), 385.

²³ Hakfi Bajrami. *Naçertania program politik serb që shpie në shfarosjen e shqiptarëve 1844-1999*, (Prishtinë: 2004), 80; Marenglen Verli. "Veprimtaria diplomatike e Hasan Prishtinës për çështjene Kosovës", *Studime historike*, Nr. 3-4, (Tiranë: Instituti i Historisë, 2009), 179; Verli. "Përpyqje për prezantimin..." 9; Lulzim Mjeku. *Neoshqiptarizma për shekullin e ri*, (Prishtinë: Iliri, 2001), 40; Hivzi Islami. *Spastrimet etnike, Politika gjenocidale serbe ndaj shqiptarëve, (Shqyrtime, komente, elaborate, dokumente)*, (Pejë: Dukagjini, 2003), 28.

²⁴ Culaj, *Sfida historike*, 110 dhe 114.

²⁵ Mehmeti. *Diplomacia e Britanisë së Madhe...*, 378.

Albanian state, in the prefectures of Fier and Durrës, of thousands of families from Kosovo and beyond of the migrants from the Albanian countries in Yugoslavia.²⁶

The British representative in Durrës, A. Rajan, reflected King Zog's concerns about the Kosovo Albanians during a conversation between them in November 1937. Zogu did not see the problem in settling the Kosovo Albanians, even though there were financial difficulties and there would be a cost high to sheltered them, but he thought that the grievances of the Albanian population in Kosovo should be resolved.²⁷

Likewise, regarding a Yugoslav-Turkish agreement, there were several exchanges of letters from the British Kingdom, where the Foreign Ministry requested information and observations from its embassies in Belgrade and Ankara, following the concerns raised by Albania. The information about this agreement come from Ankara, which according to it was aimed at the relocation of only the Turkish element living in Yugoslavia, but that the ambassador declared that it will be difficult to verify whether they are only Turks or Albanians, and that this matter is enough suspicious.²⁸ Also, the British Ambassador had talked with the Albanian Representative in Belgrade, where the latter had complained about the mistreatment of 800,000 Albanians, and also stated that most of the Turkish residents from Kosovo had gone to Turkey, and the target of this agreement is therefore the Albanian element to be displacement.²⁹

Likewise, the Albanian pariah in Kosovo and beyond undertook a political action in 1938 to prevent the migration of the Albanian population. The Albanian irredentists led by Ferat Draga advised by Tirana, organized actions and especially propaganda to make the Albanian masses aware of the goals of the Yugoslav policy, to avoid the traps of Belgrade that tried to expel the Albanians.³⁰

The Albanian institutions were also informed about the Yugoslav-Turkish agreement through its Embassy in Istanbul, where it acknowledged that the agreement had been reached and also showed the details of this agreement.³¹ Likewise, the newspaper "Son Telegraf" in Istanbul on July 13, 1938 wrote about the manner and quantity of Albanian immigrants who will come to Turkey.³²

Regarding the diplomatic activity according to British sources, the Albanian government was extremely worried about this agreement, due to the fact that if this agreement could be realized, it was understood that an extremely large number of Albanians from Kosovo would move. In order to prevent the process of moving the Albanian population from Kosovo, the Albanian government started diplomatic activities. The Foreign Minister, Ekrem Libohava, proteste in Belgrade and Ankara against the implementation of the Convention. Even during 1938

²⁶ Marenglen Verli. "Interesimi i shtetit shqiptar për shqiptarët në Jugosllavi në vitet 20-30 të shek. XX", në *Monarkia shqiptare (1928-1939)*, (Përmbledhje studimesh), (Tiranë: Qendra për studime albanologjike - Instituti i Historisë, Botimet Toena, 2011), 223.

²⁷ Mehmeti. *Diplomacia e Britanisë së Madhe...*, 386.

²⁸ *AQSH*, F. 1510/1 Ministria e Punëve të Jashtme Britanike, V. 1937, D. 131, Fl. 1-7. Letërkëmbim ndërmjet Ministrisë së Jashtme Britanike, Amasadës Britanike në Ankara dhe Beograd, mbi problemin e dëbimit të shqiptarëve të Kosoës në Turqi, sipas një marrëveshje turko-jugosllave.

²⁹ *AQSH*, F. 1510/1 Ministria e Punëve të Jashtme Britanike, V. 1937, D. 131, Fl. 1-7. Letërkëmbim ndërmjet Amasadës Britanike në Beograd me Ministrinë së Jashtme Britanike mbi një takim me Përfaqësuesin shqiptar në Beograd, Beograd, 12 Prill 1937.

³⁰ Meta. et al., *Historia e shqiptarëve gjatë shekullit XX*, V. III, 613-614.

³¹ *AMPJ*, V. 1938, D. 107/2, Fl. 732-733. Korrespondencë e Ambasadës shqiptare në Stamboll me Ministrinë e Jashtme, rreth arritjes së marrëveshjes jugosllavo-turke.

³² *AMPJ*, V. 1938, D. 107/1, Fl. 244. Njoftim për Ministrinë e Jashtme Tiranë, Legaten në Beograd dhe Kryekonsullatën në Shkup, nga Konsullata shqiptare në Manastir, Manastir, 17 korrik 1938.

and the beginning of 1939, the Foreign Ministry of Albania did not stop its diplomatic efforts, once sending Ferat Draga and then Mehmet Konica with the same mission to influence the Turkish government to stop the migration of Albanians.³³

Conclusion

As a conclusion, in this paper we have dealt with the actions taken by the Albanian state towards immigrants displaced within Albania. Therefore, relying mainly on the archival sources in the various archives of the Albanian state and incorporating a part of the literature, we can conclude that the Albanian state welcomed the Kosovar immigrants to their lands. The Albanian state considered that the removal of Albanians from their lands should not be done as it had two main goals, where firstly the removal met the Serbian goals for ethnic cleansing of these lands and secondly it burdened the financial burden of Albania since the Albanian state itself was in a state difficult to face all the expenses that had to come to the aid of immigrants. But still, seeing the difficult situation that the Albanians were in Yugoslavia, without a doubt she tried to give various help to those immigrants who came to Albania, while for the rest remaining in their lands, she developed dense diplomatic activity in The Great Powers to put pressure on the Serbian state to stop the actions and the dire situation of the Albanian population there.

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