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DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS OF ALBANIA WITH THE KINGDOM OF SERBS, CROATS, AND SLOVENES (1925-1928)

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the research paper is to characterize the diplomatic relations between Albania and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes from 1925 to 1928 and to determine the influence of Rome on Albania-Yugoslavia relations.

The scientific novelty. The dynamics of diplomatic efforts for cooperation between Tirana and Belgrade, as well as the moments of their political crises, such as the Gjurashkoviç question in 1927, are presented. The role of Italy as a neighbor whose diplomatic activity played a significant role in diplomatic relations between Tirana and Belgrade in 1925-1928 is analyzed. Peculiarities of Albanian diplomacy headed by Zogu and its ability to maneuver in relations with Rome and Belgrade, while overcoming internal crises and striving to preserve the state's sovereignty, are uncovered. The authors have identified all the most important factors that determined the diplomatic relations between Tirana and Belgrade.

Conclusions. Diplomatic relations between Tirana and Belgrade in 1925-1928 developed depending on various internal and external factors. A characteristic feature of Albania-Yugoslavia relations, as in all previous periods, was mutual distrust and constant mutual accusations regarding several sensitive issues: Shën Naumi and Vermosh (1925), the uprising of Loro Caka (1926), the First and Second Tirana Pacts (1926-1927), and especially, the Gjurashkoviç question (1927).

However, the main factor in Albania-Yugoslavia relations was Italy, whose active diplomacy was decisive in those relations. As a result, despite Belgrade's restoration of Zogu's power in 1924, performing to their advantage, Rome's influence forced the Albanian state to distance itself from the Kingdom of Yugoslavia with reorientation towards Italy.

An important factor in diplomatic relations between Tirana and Belgrade was the issue of the relocation of the Albanian population from Kosovo and other Albanian territories, as well as implementing of state violence and terror by the Kingdom of Yugoslavia against Albanians. That occurred due to the fact that while official Tirana and Albanian intellectuals raised their voices in defense of Albanians in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, officials in Belgrade accused Tirana of interfering in their internal affairs.

Keywords: Albania, Italy, Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, diplomatic relations, Ahmet Zogu

ДИПЛОМАТИЧНІ ВІДНОСИНИ АЛБАНІЇ З КОРОЛІВСТВОМ СЕРБІВ, ХОРВАТІВ І СЛОВЕНЦІВ (1925-1928)

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АНОТАЦІЯ

Метою статті є характеристика дипломатичних відносин між Албанією та Королівством сербів, хорватів та словенців у період 1925-1928 років і визначення впливу Риму на албансько-югославські відносини.

Наукова новизна. Представлена динаміка дипломатичних зусиль до співпраці між Тираною та Белградом, а також моменти їхніх політичних криз, наприклад питання Гюрашковича у 1927 р. Аналізується роль Італії як сусіда, чия дипломатична діяльність відіграла значну роль у дипломатичних відносинах між Тираною та Белградом у 1925-1928 рр. Розкрито особливості албанської дипломатії на чолі із Зогу та її здатність маневрувати у відносинах з Римом і Белградом, долаючи внутрішні кризи та прагнучи зберегти суверенітет держави. Автори визначили всі найважливіші чинники, що визначали дипломатичні відносини між Тираном і Белградом.

Висновки. Дипломатичні відносини між Тираною та Белградом у 1925-1928 рр. розвивалися в залежності від різних внутрішніх і зовнішніх факторів. Характерною рисою албансько-югославських відносин, як і в усі попередні періоди, була взаємна недовіра та постійні взаємні звинувачення щодо низки делікатних питань: Шен Наумі та Вермоша (1925 р.), повстання Лоро Чакі (1926 р.), Перший і Другий Тиранські пакти (1926-1927 рр.) й особливо питання Джурашковича (1927 р.).

Однак головним чинником в албансько-югославських відносинах була Італія, чия активна дипломатія була вирішальною у цих відносинах. У результаті, незважаючи на відновлення Белградом у своїх інтересах влади Зогу в 1924 р., вплив Риму змусив албанську державу відсторонитися від Королівства Югославія та переорієнтуватися на Італію.

Важливим чинником у дипломатичних відносинах між Тираною та Белградом було питання переміщення албанського населення з Косова й інших албанських територій, а також застосування державного насильства та терору Королівством Югославія щодо албанців. Це пов'язано з тим, що у той час, як офіційна Тирана й албанські інтелектуали піднімали свій голос на захист албанців у Королівстві Югославія, офіційні особи Белграда звинувачували Тирану у втручанні у внутрішні справи.

Ключові слова: Албанія, Італія, Королівство сербів, хорватів і словенців, дипломатичні відносини, Ахмет Зогу

INTRODUCTION

An objective study of diplomatic relations between Albania and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (KSCS) during the 20th century, especially during the period of 1925-1928, has not been comprehensive for several reasons, among which the most prominent is the communist period (1945-1990), which significantly influenced history not being regarded as a science but rather as a tool for ideological propaganda in Albania and nationalist ideology in Yugoslavia/Serbia. Another equally powerful reason is the issue of Albanians outside the political borders of Albania. The state violence and terror committed by Serbia in Kosovo and other Albanian areas have produced continuous tensions between Tirana and Belgrade, culminating in the years 1998-1999 during the Kosovo War. Even after two decades since the end of the war, relations between Albania and Serbia remain strained and superficial. This interstate relationship has also influenced the academic world. Therefore, in Serbian historiography in particular, the treatment of historical and diplomatic issues concerning Albania and Albanians has not been treated objectively, as Belgrade's politics and the Serbian Orthodox clergy have been and continue to be determinants of scientific criteria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of diplomatic relations between Albania and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes during the period 1925-1928 has been elaborated by a range of Albanian scholars (Paskal Milo, Emine Arifi-Bakalli, Fatmire Musaj, Lush Culaj, Kaliopi Naska), as well as Yugoslav scholars (Živko Avramovski, Bogdan Krizman), among others. These scholars, either directly or indirectly, have dissected the internal and external factors that were crucial in determining diplomatic relations between Tirana and Belgrade.

Thus, one of the researchers of the Albanian-Yugoslav relations, Paskal Milo, in his studies on this issue¹, among other things, emphasizes the fact that the relations between Albania and the SKS Kingdom have been almost always dependent on the relations of these two countries with Italy. Therefore, according to him, the proposal of the Conference of Ambassadors for the Albanian-Yugoslavian border was accepted by the Yugoslav government, among others, due to the political rivalry of the SKS Kingdom with Italy. For official Belgrade, the signing of the agreement was seen as an important act for the improvement of relations with Albania, in which Italy's influence was increasing day by day.

Some of the questions addressed in the works of the Skender Lutfiu are: the relations between Albania and Yugoslavia during the Republic period (1925-1928); the problem of Saint Naum and Vermosh and their reflection on Albanian-Yugoslav relations; the treatment of the Albanian issue in Yugoslavia at the League of Nations, etc².

The researcher Emine Arifi-Bakalli³ also emphasizes that Italy was a determining

¹ Milo P. Shqipëria dhe Jugosllavia 1918-1927. Tiranë: Shtëpia Botuese Enciklopedike, 1991; Milo P. Politika e Jashtme e Shqipërisë. Vol. I. Tiranë: Toena, 2013.

² Lutfiu S. Çështja e shqiptarëve në Jugosllavi në sfondin e marrëdhënieve ndërmjet Shqipërisë dhe Jugosllavisë. Prishtinë: Instituti i Historisë, 2021.

³ Arifi-Bakalli E. Qeveria demokratike e Fan Nolit dhe qëndrimi i Mbretërisë SKS ndaj saj. *Gjurmime Albanologjike. Seria e shkencave historike*. 1982. Nr. XI/1981. 239-261; Arifi-Bakalli E. Çështje nga historia moderne dhe bashkëkohore shqiptare. Prishtinë: Instituti Albanologjik, 2013; Arifi-Bakalli E. Përballje historiografike. Prishtinë: Instituti Albanologjik i Prishtinës, 2015.

factor in Albanian-Yugoslav relations. According to her, in order to break the Italian influence in Albania, the Yugoslav diplomats, in particular the Minister Plenipotentiary in Albania, B. Lazarević (Branko Lazarović) thought that Tirana should be helped in its efforts to withstand the Italian pressure, by means of support through loans, November 27, 1926 armaments and concrete interstate agreements.

Another position is taken by the researcher Fatmira Musaj⁴, who in her works has elaborated, among other things, the diplomatic relations between Tirana and Belgrade. According to her, Albanian-Yugoslav relations during the years 1925-1928 were mainly conditioned by Italian-Yugoslav contradictions for possession in the Adriatic and influence in Albania. She emphasizes that Belgrade, in addition to this major issue for its foreign policy, paid little attention to the development of diplomatic relations with Albania. In contrast to the researchers mentioned above, who emphasize that relations with Tirana were of great importance for Belgrade, always to balance the Italian influence, for researcher Musaj, diplomatic relations with Albania were of no particular importance.

A very delicate issue that determined the relations between these two countries was that of Saint Naum and Vermoshi, which was closed in 1926. Therefore, it has been elaborated extensively by researchers such as Lush Culaj⁵ and Kaliopi Naska⁶. Thus, according to the researcher Culaj, the Yugoslavs were interested in ending this matter as soon as possible, since they had noticed the Albanian government's approach to Rome. Therefore, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ninčič declared: "We are all of the opinion that it is in our interest to normalize our relations and establish a constructive policy with this country"⁷. Even the researcher Kaliopi Naska in her work Saint Naum and the diplomacy of the time emphasizes Albania's reasons for agreeing to enter into talks with the Yugoslav side for the solution of the issue of Saint Naum and Vermoshi, which were left to Albania by the international authorities⁸.

A somewhat different attitude is held by Yugoslav researchers such as Živko Avramovski⁹, Bogdan Krizman¹⁰, etc., who in the works we have elaborated, reflect the Albanian-Yugoslav relations from the perspective of the relations of the Great Powers. According to Avramovski, after the signing of the First Pact of Tirana (November 27, 1926), alongside Belgrade, it was London that strongly reacted against this agreement. So, according to Avramovski, the British not only did not welcome the signing of this bilateral agreement, but had previously made efforts to prevent its signing. The reasons for this were related to the fear of the aggravation of Italian-Yugoslav relations and the possibility of the outbreak of a conflict between them that would lead to the disruption of the balance in the Mediterranean and in

⁴ Musaj F. Republika shqiptare 1925-1928. Tiranë: Akademia e Studimeve Albanologjike-Instituti i Historisë, 2018.

⁵ Culaj L. Shqipëria dhe problemi kombëtar 1918-1928. Prishtinë: Instituti Albanologjik i Prishtinës, 2004.

⁶ Naska K. Shën Naumi dhe diplomacia e kohës, Trajtesë dhe dokumente. Tiranë: KRISTALINA-KH, 2012.

⁷ Culaj L. Shqipëria... P. 226.

⁸ Naska K. Shën Naumi... P. 22.

⁹ Avramovski Ž. Italijanska ekonomska penetracija u Albaniji od 1925 do 1929 godine. *Istorija XX Veka. Zbornik Radova*. Vol. V. Beograd, 1963. P. 137-224; Avramovski Ž. Britanci o Kraljevini Jugoslaviji. Knjiga Prva (1921-1930). Zagreb: Arhiv Jugoslavije, Globus, 1986.

¹⁰ Krizman B. Vanjska politika jugoslovenske države 1918-1941: Diplomatsko-istorijski pregled. Zagreb: 1975.

South-Eastern Europe, which would harm their interests. An issue that clashes between Albanian and Yugoslav historians is that of the continuous Yugoslav intervention in Albania's internal affairs. One of these moments is the case of the Loro Caka uprising in November 1926, where the leaders of the uprising entered the Albanian state through the territory of the SKS Kingdom.

Albanian researcher such as Bejtulla Destani¹¹, etc., provide information that the Yugoslavs were involved in this uprising, while the Yugoslav researcher, Živko Avramovski, denies the fact of official Belgrade's involvement in this matter. To support this position, he quotes the communique of the Yugoslav MFA, in which it is stated that "the SKS Kingdom sees these developments as internal issues of Albania, the peaceful development of which it sincerely desires"¹². While researcher Bogdan Krizman emphasizes the fact that in Albanian-Yugoslav relations, Yugoslav diplomacy has been correct in relation to Albania, but that, according to him, Ahmet Zogu had forgotten the support given by the Yugoslavs on the occasion of his return to power in December 1924¹³. So, this is the success of their work which has served as a good basis for us to write and complete this paper.

However, based on documents and bibliographic sources, as well as new interpretations and advanced scientific methodologies, other facts emerge, thus enriching the background knowledge on Albanian-Yugoslav diplomatic relations. These relations, as in all historical periods, were accompanied by a lack of mutual trust and consecutive crises, especially during the years 1925-1928.

The comprehensive and objective treatment of diplomatic relations between Albania and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes during the mentioned period has been prolonged by several crucial factors, such as: the studies of the communist period, influenced by ideology and lacking objectivity; the absence of archival sources, especially from Yugoslav archives, which have been restricted to Albanians, particularly those from Kosovo, since the 1990s; the historical background of Albanian-Yugoslav relations and the political context, which often impacted the objective writing of history and diplomatic relations between these two states. All of these factors, along with others, have contributed to the incomplete and biased portrayal of diplomatic relations between Albania and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in the years 1925-1928 in Albanian and Yugoslav historiography. Nevertheless, these relations were influenced or tensed depending on the involvement of Great Powers' diplomacy, particularly Italy. The above mentioned factors have influenced the studies so far to have obvious shortcomings that have, in any case, affected the real and complete reflection of the relations between Albania and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in the above-mentioned period.

As a result, due to our disagreement with the presented scientific and theoretical positions, as well as the lack of a real presentation of the factors influencing diplomatic relations between Albania and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, we have decided to address this issue with the aim of offering new scientific results based on a completely different and highly objective approach. Based on the achievements of previous studies, it appears that diplomatic relations between Tirana

¹¹ *Destani B.* Hasan Bej Prishtina, Dokumente historike nga arkivat italiane. Tetovë: Qendra për Studime Shqiptare-Londër, 2018. P. 159.

¹² *Avramovski Ž.* Britanci o Kraljevini Jugoslaviji... P. 372-373.

¹³ *Krizman B.* Vanjska politika jugoslovenske države... P. 47.

and Belgrade depended on Albanian-Italian or Yugoslav-Italian relations at the regional level, and on relations between Rome and London and Rome and Paris at the international level. According to reviewed studies, whenever there was a crisis in relations between Tirana and Rome, Belgrade sought to exploit it to advance its interests towards the Albanian state. However, when Rome was in agreement with Tirana, Yugoslav diplomacy sought support in London and Paris, as well as in the League of Nations, which lacked a mechanism to enforce its decisions on states.

Almost all the scholars we have discussed are of the opinion that diplomatic relations between Albania and the KSCS, were influenced by several factors such as: historical background and the issue of Albanians in the KSCS, internal political crises in Albania, etc., at the domestic level, and the influence of Italian diplomacy at the international level. Regardless of these factors, there have been moments of mutual cooperation that have marked small but meaningful steps in bringing these two countries closer together.

DIPLOMATIC CLASHES BETWEEN TIRANA AND BELGRADE REGARDING THE RESOLUTION OF THE SHËN NAUM AND VERMOSH QUESTION

Diplomatic relations between Albania and the KSCS, after Ahmet Zog's return to power, continued to be relatively good, as he managed to regain power in Tirana with the support he received in Belgrade. In fact, after the proclamation of the Albanian Republic, Zogu excluded the Albanian elite from Kosovo and other areas in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes from the political scene, as they were his political opponents. Furthermore, he appointed close collaborators from Belgrade to high state positions such as the Minister of Internal Affairs, Ceno Bej Kryeziu, who later became the ambassador to Belgrade. According to the Belgrade newspaper 'Novosti', Zogu declared in August 1925 that he had eliminated a number of political opponents who had also been a problem for the Yugoslav government¹⁴. In these circumstances, diplomatic relations between Tirana and Belgrade resumed, although they initially started off more relaxed due to the reasons mentioned above, they soon encountered numerous problems, including unresolved of the Shën Naum and Vermosh question.

Thus, efforts for the final resolution of the Shën Naum and Vermosh question continued with increased intensity by both parties from the beginning of 1925. Both Tirana and Belgrade wanted to resolve this issue as soon as possible based on their interests. The Albanian side's desire to resolve this issue as soon as possible is evidenced in the letter that the Albanian Legation in Paris sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on January 2, 1925, stating, among other things, that: "Albania needed to resolve the border issue with the Kingdom of SHS as soon as possible, as it has been a problem for years, causing political instability in the state's political life [...]"¹⁵. Although all international instances such as the Conference of Ambassadors in Paris (December 6, 1922); the Permanent Court of International Justice (PCIJ) in The Hague (September 4, 1924); the Council of the League of Nations (October 6, 1924); and the renewed decision of the Conference of Ambassadors (April 27, 1925)¹⁶, had decided that Shën Naum and Vermosh would remain with Albania, Belgrade insisted on

¹⁴ *Rushiti L. Lëvizja Kaçake në Kosovë (1918-1928)*. Prishtinë: Instituti i Historisë, 2016. P. 269-270.

¹⁵ Arkivi i Ministrisë për Evropën dhe Punët e Jashtme të Republikës së Shqipërisë, Tiranë (AMEPJ) [Archives of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania]. File 131, Year 1924. P. 514. Telegram from the Albanian Legation in Paris, Paris, January 2, 1925.

¹⁶ AMEPJ. File 107, Year 1925. P. 146. The attribution of Saint Naum to Albania, Paris, April 29, 1925.

resolving this issue in its favour. Perhaps the reason for this insistence was the agreement between Zogu and Pashiqi, in August 1924, which, according to sources, although not signed, is said to consist of 16 points. If we analyze it in detail, this agreement was highly detrimental to the Albanian cause. To prove this, it suffices to look at point 10, which states: "At the Conference of Ambassadors in Paris, the Albanian government must declare that it relinquishes its claims to sovereignty over Manastiri and Shën Naum and the Kelmend district of Vermosh, which will remain part of Yugoslavia"¹⁷. This secret agreement between Zogu and Pashiqi, who at the time did not hold high state positions, has been found as a translated agreement-document¹⁸, but not as an authentic document¹⁹.

Since the beginning of 1925, the initiative to resolve the above-mentioned issue was taken by the chairman of the Conference of Ambassadors, Herriot²⁰, who invited both the Albanian and Yugoslav parties to reach a satisfactory agreement as soon as possible. The government of Ahmet Zogu did not agree with this proposal but sought international mediation for the final resolution of border issues. He accepted the stance of English and French diplomacy, which strongly advocated for reaching an agreement between Albania and Yugoslavia and resolving the contentious issues regarding their border²¹. Therefore, the Conference of Ambassadors demanded that in the bilateral negotiations between the two neighboring states, an agreement must be reached through compromise.

Following this decision, Albanian and Yugoslav diplomacy were highly activated to reach an agreement, but always aiming to be in favor of their interests. Thus, in the telegram Zogu sent to the Albanian legation in Rome on January 11, 1925, in which he requested Mehdi Frashëri to be informed, among other things, he expressed: "We are absolutely against any change by Vermosh because we consider this issue settled [...]. Also, you should not accept any suggestion regarding a direct agreement between us and the Kingdom of SHS for a possible solution to the issues just mentioned"²².

Meanwhile, the Yugoslav government, specifically the Yugoslav envoy, Marinković, presented Zogu with the idea of compromise and compromise, as well as the separation of the issue of Shën Naum and Vermosh and their separate resolution from each other at the end of January 1925. However, the Albanian government informed the Belgrade government on February 21, 1925, that it saw the problem of Shën Naum and Vermosh as its own problem, a view supported by the Conference of Ambassadors. The Yugoslav party's demands for territorial exchange were not accepted by Tirana²³ and vice versa, the demands of the Albanian party were not accepted by Belgrade²⁴.

¹⁷ *Imami P.* Serbët dhe shqiptarët ndër shekuj. Vëllimi I. Beograd: Samisdat, 2016. P. 435; *Arifi-Bakalli E.* Përballje historiografike. Prishtinë: Instituti Albanologjik i Prishtinës, 2015. P. 127-129; *Kristo F. Ahmet Zogu.* Vështrim historik. Tiranë: "IIB", 2014. P. 4.

¹⁸ AMEPJ. File 105, Year 1925. P. 4-5. The translated text of the 'Sixteen Points'.

¹⁹ *Arifi-Bakalli E.* Përballje historiografike... P. 129.

²⁰ Herriot was the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of France.

²¹ *Culaj L.* Shqipëria dhe problemi kombëtar 1918-1928. Prishtinë: Instituti Albanologjik i Prishtinës, 2004. P. 219.

²² AMEPJ. File 107, Year 1925. P. 50. Telegram from MPJ in Tirana to the Albanian legation in Rome, Tirana, January 11, 1925, cited in *Musaj F.* Republika shqiptare 1925-1928... P. 271.

²³ *Ushтеленca I.* Diplomacia e mbretit Zogu I. Tiranë: Ermir, 1997. P. 97.

²⁴ Arkivi Qendror Shtetëror i Republikës së Shqipërisë, Tiranë (AQSH) [Central State Archives of the Republic of Albania]. Fund 251, Dossier 107, Year. 1925. Note from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Albania to the representative of the Kingdom of SHS in Tirana, February 21, 1925.

Nevertheless, when official Belgrade sensed the rapprochement of the Albanian government with Rome, it began to understand that it was in its interest to close this issue as soon as possible. For this reason, the Yugoslav Foreign Minister Ninčić wrote to the Yugoslav delegate on the Border Commission: "We all agree that it is in our interest to normalize our relations and establish a constructive policy with this country [...]. Its importance to us is much smaller than the damage we would have if the issue remained open"²⁵.

However, on the other hand, official Tirana was also interested in closing this long-standing open issue with the Yugoslavs as soon as possible. Thus, on February 8, 1925, the dispatch of a commission represented by Mehdi Frashëri was approved, which would also be the representative of the Albanian government at the Border Delimitation Commission. Similarly, Zogu agreed to enter into negotiations with the Yugoslavs, although according to documents at the time, until February 21, 1925, he still supported the implementation of the decision of the Conference of Ambassadors regarding the resolution of the Shën Naum and Vermosh question²⁶. The Yugoslav diplomacy was interested in restarting bilateral negotiations, aiming to transform this problem from an international one into an Albanian-Serbian problem so that after obtaining Shën Naumi and Vermosh, Albania would not be able to lodge complaints to the League of Nations²⁷.

Moreover, as evidenced by diplomatic documents, the Yugoslav side believed that if this question was not resolved by March 15, 1925, they would seek an extension from the Conference of Ambassadors in order to discredit the Albanian government before them, creating the impression that the Albanian side did not leave the fate of the border in the hands of the Great Powers and the League of Nations.

Since both parties did not sway from their positions during direct negotiations, this round of talks did not yield concrete results, so they were discontinued at the end of March 1925. The Albanian side requested the Conference of Ambassadors to find a solution judging in the spirit of justice, while the Yugoslav government began exerting various pressures and threats against Zogu²⁸. Simultaneously, the Yugoslav government made its position known in the press. Thus, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ninčić, declared that "of the three areas requested for compensation by Zogu, only a small part south of Prizren could be accepted and hoped that the negotiations could be successful"²⁹. He also reiterated that no Serbian government would withdraw from Shën Naum, for which it claimed, according to documents recently discovered in Cetinje, that Austrians had recognized this monastery, which should be included in the territory passing to Serbia³⁰.

The Conference of Ambassadors resumed its work in Paris on April 20, 1925, to reconsider the proposals of the delegates and resolve the existing disagreements

²⁵ *Culaj L. Shqipëria...* P. 226.

²⁶ *Naska K. Shën Naumi dhe diplomacia e kohës. Trajtesë dhe dokumente.* Tiranë: KRISTALINA-KH, 2012. P. 22 (XXII).

²⁷ AMEPJ. File 107, Year 1925. P. 97-97/1. Telegram from the Albanian Legation in Belgrade regarding the issue of Saint Naum. Belgrade, March 10, 1925.

²⁸ *Culaj L. Shqipëria...* P. 221.

²⁹ The National Archives, London (TNA) Foreign Office (FO) 371/10655 [C 2591/127/90]. Report by Young addressed to Chamberlain, Belgrade, February 26, 1925, cited in *Musaj F. Republika shqiptare 1925-1928...* P. 274.

³⁰ *Musaj F. Republika shqiptare 1925-1928...* P. 274.

between Albania and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The negotiations were extremely difficult because the parties presented diametrically opposed views. While the Albanians demanded from the Conference 'Please implement the decisions you have made yourselves', on the other hand, the Yugoslavs insisted by stating, "We will not yield an inch of our land because Shën Naum is ours, and Vermosh is of Montenegro as well". This steadfast stance from both sides led to disagreements even between the International Boundary Commission and the Conference of Ambassadors. However, the Commission remained undeterred in its viewpoint and stance, expressing readiness to negotiate with the delegates to agree on mutual concessions. Although the Conference could not deny the decisions, it demanded that the Commission make decisions on its behalf, which did not happen. Negotiations were further complicated, as noted by the French officer André Ordioni, also because of the Yugoslavs, who "delayed negotiations with excessive and unrealizable demands, but maneuvered in a way to blame the poor Albanians who couldn't..."³¹.

In these circumstances, the Conference of Ambassadors, due to the lack of willingness and mutual understanding between Albania and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and relying on the decisions of the PCIJ in The Hague, which the Council of the League of Nations had communicated on October 6, 1924, decided to determine the border line between Albania and Yugoslavia. This decision was made public on April 27, 1925, when Aristide Briand, President of the Conference Council and Minister of Foreign Affairs of France, informed Xhafer Villa, Albania's representative in France. According to this decision, "the border line determined by the Conference of Ambassadors in this sector left Shën Naum to Albania but offered a border 750 meters east of the monastery, while the village of Peshkopi was left to the Kingdom of Serbia Croatia and Slovenia"³².

However, at the time when a final solution to the border issue was expected to be reached, the Albanian government withdrew its delegation from the International Court of Justice (ICJ), arguing that this issue still needed to be discussed in Tirana. Consequently, the ICJ negotiations on the Albanian-Yugoslav border issue were blocked. Therefore, the Conference of Ambassadors urged the Albanian government to return its delegation to the ICJ and exerted continuous pressure to resume negotiations to reach a bilateral agreement between Albania and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Additionally, the Albanian legation in Paris informed the Albanian government that the Border Commission would come to Albania, and the Albanian government needed to welcome them and provide for their needs³³.

During this period, the Albanian government, under pressure from Yugoslavia and without the support of the Great Powers, which suggested reaching a bilateral agreement to resolve the issue, changed its stance³⁴. Zogu, facing pressure from the

³¹ *Déserts D.D.* Një oficer francez në Ballkan 1917-1925. Vëllimi I. Shqipëria dhe Maqedonia. Tiranë: Papirus, 2014. P. 460-461.

³² For further details on the decision of the Ambassadors' Conference in Paris regarding the determination of Albania's border line, see: AMEPJ. Dossier 107, Year 1925. P. 147. Letter from Aristide Briand to Xh. Villa, Paris, April 27, 1925.

³³ *Musaj F.* Republika shqiptare 1925-1928... P. 279-280.

³⁴ *Arifi-Bakalli E.* Drejt eliminimit të faktorit shqiptar në Ballkan, Qëndrimi i Jugosllavisë ndaj Shqipërisë dhe shqiptarëve 1935-1939. Prishtinë: Instituti i Historisë, 2023. P. 32; *Meta B.*, et al. Historia e shqiptarëve gjatë shekullit XX (1925-1939). Vëllimi III. Tiranë: Akademia e Studimeve Albanologjike-Instituti i Historisë, 2022. P. 97.

Great Powers, the Yugoslav government, and the Albanian public opinion, which considered the issue of Shën Naum and Vermosh closed and confirmed several times by the highest international authorities, sought to shift the discussion to parliament, trying to avoid individual responsibility³⁵. For this reason, Zogu, in his capacity as the President of the Republic of Albania, on July 16, 1925, addressed the Presidency of the Chamber of Deputies with a request to discuss the Albanian-Yugoslav border issue in a joint session of both legislative chambers. In this meeting, it is worth mentioning that the Foreign Minister and the Albanian delegate to the ICJ detailed the entire process of determining the border with the Kingdom of Yugoslavia³⁶. The meeting continued the next day, on July 17, behind closed doors, where the Senate President, Eshref Frashëri, presented the report of the Foreign Affairs Committee of both legislative chambers. Among other things, he emphasized: "Since the Yugoslav government attaches religious and moral importance to the Monastery of Shën Naum, it proposes that this Monastery be left to it up to the hill with an altitude of 961, and towards this, the village of Peshkopi, which consists of 60 purely Albanian families, should be given to Albania"³⁷. As for the area of Vermosh, the Yugoslav delegation abandoned all claims, except for a forest in the west of Vellopoja. Additionally, it granted Albania another mountain range between Libovica and the peak of Bojsa to Lubraja.

As depicted in the report of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies, there were several reasons that led them to maintain this stance, among which were: firstly, in the areas to be given to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, there were no Albanian residents; secondly, the failure to resolve the issue with the Yugoslavs posed significant material and moral damage to Albania, which was politically quite fragile; thirdly, compromising with the Yugoslavs created conditions for concluding economic agreements with the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which the Albanian state needed; fourthly, perhaps the most important reason was that international institutions and the Great Powers, which had previously supported Albania, had suggested to the Albanian government that the issue of the Albanian-Yugoslav border should be resolved in an agreement between the two states³⁸. Based on these and other reasons, the Foreign Affairs Commission proposed to the Legislative Assembly to accept the exchange proposals. Therefore, the Legislative Assembly, by a large majority vote, in principle accepted a territorial exchange between Albania and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, authorizing the government to enter into negotiations³⁹. However, since the agreement involved a territorial exchange, it was requested that this issue be resolved constitutionally. Firstly, intervention was needed for an amendment to Article 2 of the Fundamental Statute⁴⁰, the amendment of which was made according to the procedure specified in Article 141 of the statute⁴¹.

³⁵ Ibid. P. 280.

³⁶ AQSH. Fund 146, File 97, Year 1925. P. 1-8. Joint meeting of both chambers of parliament, Tirana, July 16, 1925.

³⁷ *Culaj L. Shqipëria...* P. 222-223.

³⁸ *Musaj F. Republika shqiptare 1925-1928...* P. 281.

³⁹ *Culaj L. Shqipëria...* P. 223-225.

⁴⁰ 'The Republic of Albania is independent, indivisible, its territorial integrity is inviolable and its land is inalienable'. AQSH. Fund 146, Dossier 97, Year 1925. P. 1-8.

⁴¹ Ibid. P. 1-8. "The change of the status was to be made with 2/3 of the votes of both legislative chambers". For more on voting in the Constitutional Assembly, see also: *Dervishi K. Historia e shtetit shqiptar 1912-2005. Organizimi shtetëror, jeta politike, ngjarjet kryesore, të gjithë ligjvënësit, ministrat dhe kryetarët e shtetit shqiptar. Tiranë: Shtëpia botuese 55, 2006. P. 247-248.*

The official agreement between the Albanian government and the Yugoslav one was signed in July 1925, based on which St. Naum and Vermosh remained outside the territory of Albania. Based on this bilateral agreement, the chairman of the Conference of Ambassadors A. Briand, on August 6, 1925, sent both parties a declaration canceling its previous decision and providing details for the new decision on determining the border line, according to which: "The border line between the two countries underwent the agreed change by both delegates, leaving St. Naum to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia"⁴². Thus, the issue of determining the Albanian-Yugoslav border ended on August 6, 1925, through the signing of the agreement for the 'exchange' of territory between the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the Albanian government led by Zogu⁴³. This agreement clearly defined the border between the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the Republic of Albania. The Final Protocol was signed on August 30, 1925, in Paris, an agreement reached between Tirana and Belgrade, after lengthy negotiations and oversight by European powers. This document was signed by representatives not only from Albania⁴⁴, Yugoslavia, and Greece but also by the ambassadors of Great Britain, France, Italy, and Japan, as members of the Conference of Ambassadors.

Regarding the agreement with the Yugoslavs, the full-power delegate to the CNK, Mehdi Frashëri, gave several reasons that, according to him, forced the Albanian government to make an agreement with the Yugoslav government, always based on the state's interest: first, Albania, being created and guaranteed by the Great Powers, could not ignore their demands; the Kingdom of Yugoslavia had allies among some of the Great Powers (such as France), which did not see it reasonable to take harsh measures against it, so any opposition to their policy could have irreversible consequences for Albania, and other reasons⁴⁵. The proposal of the Conference of Ambassadors for the Albanian-Yugoslav border was also accepted by the Yugoslav government because it realized its claims to take St. Naum and Vermosh, as two strategic points for its interests. But there was another reason, related to the political rivalry of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia with Italy. For official Belgrade, the signing of the agreement was seen as an important act to improve relations with Albania, where Italy's influence was growing day by day⁴⁶.

However, even after reaching this agreement, from the end of November 1925, negotiations resumed in Florence between the Albanian delegate, Iljaz Vrioni, and the Yugoslav delegate, Jovanović, for the signing of the final protocol on the border between Northern Albania and Yugoslavia. These negotiations ended on July 26, 1926, when in Florence, the final protocol of the CNK was signed for the delimitation of the border of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia with Albania, by the members of the International Commission and representatives of the interested states⁴⁷, approved by

⁴² *Naska K. Shën Naumi...* P. 23 (XXIII).

⁴³ *Imami P. Serbët dhe shqiptarët...* P. 437.

⁴⁴ Although Mehdi Frashëri was the head of the Albanian delegation, from July 15, 1925, in Florence, to sign the border agreement, Iljaz Vrioni, the extraordinary envoy and plenipotentiary minister in Paris, went to sign the border agreement, and now he had full authority as the delegate of the Republic of Albania for the signing of the border demarcation. The reason for this substitution was that Mehdi Frashëri took on the mission to go to Athens to negotiate the Trade Treaty with Greece. See: *Déserts D.D. Një oficer francez në Ballkan...* P. 482

⁴⁵ *Culaj L. Shqipëria...* P. 227.

⁴⁶ *Milo P. Shqipëria dhe Jugosllavia 1918-1927.* Tiranë: Shtëpia Botuese Enciklopedike, 1991. P. 372.

⁴⁷ The full document of the Protocol on the demarcation of borders, consisting of 10 annexes, approved on July 26th in Florence, can be found in: *Naska K. Shën Naumi...* P. 661-666; *Imami P. Serbët dhe shqiptarët...* P. 438.

the Conference of Ambassadors at its plenary session on July 30, 1926⁴⁸, where in the presence of representatives of Albania and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the final act of the delimitation of Albania's borders was signed in Paris, which was registered in the Secretariat of the League of Nations⁴⁹.

We can observe that despite all decisions of international bodies regarding Shën Naum and Vermosh being assigned to Albania⁵⁰, after Zogu's return to power in Tirana (December 1924), the situation reversed, and consequently, the situation slid in favor of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, largely because Zogu pursued a double policy. On one hand, he defended Albania's right regarding the Shën Naum and Vermosh question, while on the other hand, he covertly and quite cleverly accepted the demands of the Yugoslav side for these territories to remain with the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The reason for this stance was to peacefully detach from their influence and to align with the Italians. Thus, based on the sources of the time, it is clear that Zogu precisely had this goal in mind: to achieve a peaceful agreement with the Yugoslavs, so that later he could break free from Belgrade's pressure and consequently have the freedom to orient himself towards Italy. Indeed, high-ranking diplomats in Belgrade, including Pashiqi, saw this while Zogu was preparing to return to Tirana in December 1924. And their suspicions turned out to be accurate, as Zogu's stance towards the Yugoslavs changed significantly from 1925 onwards.

THE EFFORTS OF YUGOSLAV DIPLOMACY FOR DOMINANCE IN ALBANIA

In addition to the Shën Naumi and Vermosh question, which was resolved as discussed above in favour of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, diplomatic relations between Tirana and Belgrade continued to be tense and thus quite fragile. Therefore, despite Tirana's signals for cooperation with Belgrade, based on diplomatic documents of the time, it is evident that the Yugoslav government was dissatisfied with the Albanian government, as the latter was generally rather than closely aligned with the government in Belgrade. Yugoslavs criticized the Tirana government due to the influence of the Great Powers, especially that of England, and because of the support for Albanian insurgents in Kosovo, known as 'kaçakëve'. This stance was presented in a meeting attended by the appointed envoy in Belgrade, Gjergj Pekmezi, along with Yugoslav diplomats Jovo Marković (Assistant Foreign Minister) and Cincar Marković. Among other things, Yugoslav officials told the Albanian diplomat that 'the Albanian government provides offices and salaries to the bandits'. However, the Albanian diplomat, with evidence, has proven that the Albanian government desired to have friendly relations with the government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia⁵¹.

Despite this stance, official Belgrade continued to express its indignation over what the Yugoslav side perceived as Albania's intervention in the parliamentary elections of 1925 held in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Thus, in the newspaper 'Novosti', published in Belgrade, Albania was accused of exerting influence on Albanians in Kosovo and other ethnic areas to vote for the Radical Party and its leader, Nikola

⁴⁸ *Déserts D.D.* Një oficer francez... P. 500.

⁴⁹ *Naska K.* Shën Naumi... P. 682-683; *Meta B.*, et al. *Historia e shqiptarëve gjatë shekullit XX... Vëllimi III.* P. 107.

⁵⁰ We await the blessed hour. *Dajti newspaper* (Tirana). 1925. No. 88, July 31. P. 3-4.

⁵¹ AMEPJ. File 106, Year 1925. P. 21-23. Telegram from the Albanian legation in Belgrade to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Albania, Belgrade, May 25, 1925.

Pashiq. According to this article, external interventions influenced the outcome of these elections, leading to the victory of parties that serve Pashiq and his party. It is even stated that this state of the parliament is bitter, but true⁵².

For the relations between Albania and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, clashes have occurred not only in the press but also in the Yugoslav parliament between the government and the opposition. Thus, in the session of May 9, 1925, opposition deputy Mihajlović addressed the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ninčić, stating that now in Albania, there is no complete trust in any party or group. This observation was opposed by a deputy from the Radical Party, who among other things said, "Yugoslavia has much more trust in Albania than the opposition thinks"⁵³. Furthermore, another deputy from the ruling party declared that unlike Bulgarians who are barbarians, Albanians, at their core, are people.

Yugoslav diplomats, especially the Minister Plenipotentiary in Albania, B. Lazarević (Branko Lazarević), believed that Tirana should be helped in its efforts to withstand Italian pressure through loans, armament, and concrete intergovernmental agreements. According to Lazarević and his faction, all these steps, along with the decoration of Zogu, would influence him to break away from Italian influence⁵⁴.

The Yugoslav position and the stance of the Plenipotentiary Ambassador in Albania, Lazarević, regarding Albania influenced greatly the improvement of Albanian-Yugoslav relations in the October-December 1925 period. Perhaps among the main reasons, as reported in the 'Pravda' newspaper, were "the low level of trade exchange between Yugoslavia and Albania and the desire for political and economic reasons for this situation to improve". In these favorable circumstances, the Yugoslav government was preparing to negotiate several conventions with Albania, the most important of which was the Trade Agreement⁵⁵. Indeed, the focus of relations between Albania and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in the period 1925-1928 was on economic and trade matters, the signing of consular and extradition treaties, as well as the protection of the rights of Albanians in Kosovo and other Albanian areas in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia⁵⁶.

However, three main problems could not be avoided: *firstly*, political issues with a historical background; *secondly*, Italy's economic power, which affected Albanian-Yugoslav economic and trade relations to be less intensive than with Italy, regardless of efforts from both sides; and *thirdly*, the issue of the rights of Albanians in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which remained one of the unresolved issues in bilateral relations.

This was the reason that during the years of the republic, the Albanian government paid close attention to the treatment of Albanians in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, especially their forced expulsion from Kosovo and other areas inhabited

⁵² AMEPJ. File 112, Year 1925. P. 2-3. An infamous and treacherous act. Article from the newspaper 'Novosti'. Belgrade, March 18, 1925.

⁵³ AMEPJ. File 112, Year 1925. P. 130-131. Events in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia's policy in the Balkans before the Yugoslav parliament. Belgrade, June 12, 1925.

⁵⁴ Meta B., et al. Historia e shqiptarëve gjatë shekullit XX... Vëllimi III. P. 107; Arifi-Bakalli E. Drejt eliminimit të faktorit shqiptar... P. 34.

⁵⁵ Bislimi M., Ibrahim I. Çështja e Shën Naumit. Dokumente amerikane-raporte të legatës së Shteteve të Bashkuara të Amerikës nga Beogradi dhe Tirana lidhur me marrëveshjen shqiptaro-serbe të vitit 1925 për Shën Naum. *Studime Historike*. 2012. Nr. 1-2, viti LXVI (XLIX). P. 288.

⁵⁶ Musaj F. Republika shqiptare 1925-1928... P. 256.

by Albanians. Regarding this problem, the Albanian legation in Belgrade informed the government in Tirana about the efforts of the Yugoslav government at the beginning of 1925, which was seeking means to remove the Albanian population to Turkey and to settle Serbian colonists in their lands. Although no such agreement was confirmed, the Albanian government instructed its legation in Belgrade to increase efforts with the Yugoslav government to allow the opening of Albanian consulates in Kosovo. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Internal Affairs was tasked with taking all measures to deal with the risks posed by a potential large wave of Albanian population from Kosovo towards Albania⁵⁷.

Despite the problems and difficulties in diplomatic relations between Tirana and Belgrade, the Albanian government made efforts through diplomatic channels to negotiate agreements with the Yugoslav side that would somewhat improve the position of Albanians in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The negotiations initiated in Belgrade in April 1926 were represented by Milto Tutulani, Xhafer Villa, and Kol Mjeda on the Albanian side. Tirana was interested in opening Albanian consulates in Skopje and in some other cities in Kosovo. Their opening was of great importance to Albania because through them, information could be gathered about the economic circumstances, thus allowing for the safeguarding of the position of the Albanian population⁵⁸.

Not only was the opening of Albanian consulates in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia not allowed, but from June 1926, Albanian-Yugoslav relations began to deteriorate further. This change was reflected in the Belgrade newspaper 'Politika' dated June 10, where it was written, among other things, that Ahmet Zogu, forgetting the services rendered to him and Albania by the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, violated the principles of good neighborliness and collaborated with foreigners who were not concerned about Albania's independence and order in the Balkans. Furthermore, Zogu has recognized the 'Committee of Kosovo', accepting its leaders and resuming activities after two years of interruption. Moreover, the newspaper states that Zogu's Kosovar agents have printed and distributed postcards to the population near the Albanian border, depicting Ahmet Zogu and Cena Beu liberating Prizren, Gjakova, and then all of Kosovo⁵⁹.

Despite numerous disagreements between the Albanian and Yugoslav sides, on June 22, 1926, in Belgrade, three agreements were signed: the Albanian-Yugoslav Trade and Navigation Agreement; the Extradition Agreement; and the Consular Agreement. These agreements were approved by the Albanian Parliament on November 25, 1926, and by the Yugoslav Parliament on October 19, 1928⁶⁰.

TREATIES OF TIRANA AND THE ATTITUDE OF THE KINGDOM OF SHS TOWARDS THEM

Despite the signing of these agreements, relations between the two countries deteriorated rapidly after the signing of the First Treaty of Tirana, the Italian-Albanian agreement of November 27, 1926. According to the main clause of the Italian-Albanian Pact: "Any disturbance against the political, legal, and territorial

⁵⁷ Ibid. P. 260-262.

⁵⁸ Meta B., et al. Historia e shqiptarëve gjatë shekullit XX... Vëll. III. P. 131-132; Musaj F. Republika shqiptare 1925-1928... P. 258-259.

⁵⁹ Bislimi M., Ibrahimi I. Çështja e Shën Naumit... P. 290.

⁶⁰ Arifi-Bakalli E. Drejt eliminimit të faktorit shqiptar... P. 35.

status quo of Albania will be considered contrary to the mutual political interests of both states. Both powers pledge not to enter into eventual alliances with other powers in the political or military interest of the other party"⁶¹. This agreement was reached through highly secretive and hidden negotiations, especially by the Yugoslavs⁶², who were the most interested and thus their reaction was the most severe. Regarding the reaction to the Italian-Albanian Pact, we encounter data from a highly secret and urgent circular sent by the Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs to its diplomatic representations in European capitals such as Berlin, Vienna, Brussels, Warsaw, Budapest, Istanbul, and Bucharest. Through it, their diplomats were instructed: "due to the situation created, you must keep us informed every day of any preparations that may be made against our country. Always keep in mind the main thesis that the Tirana Pact is dangerous for the Balkans [...]. All this cannot leave us calm and indifferent"⁶³.

From the powers at the time, it was London officials, which not only not welcomed the signing of this bilateral agreement but had also made previous efforts to prevent its signing. London's concerns were linked to the fear that after the signing of such bilateral agreements, relations between Italy and Yugoslavia would be strained, and the outbreak of a conflict between them would lead to the disruption of the balance in the Mediterranean and Southeastern Europe, which would undermine its interests⁶⁴.

However, as emphasized above, the harshest reaction came, as expected, from the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. This was for at least two reasons: 1. Firstly, because, as stated by Duča, Article I of the Italo-Yugoslav Pact of January 27, 1924, where it was officially sanctioned that "the two contracting parties undertake to communicate reciprocally, after prior agreement, the agreements that interest their policy in Central and Southern Europe..."⁶⁵; had been removed. 2. Secondly, due to the KSCS's interest in Albania, which aimed to incorporate it within its framework. In fact, Belgrade was so upset that on February 1, 1927, the Yugoslav Foreign Ministry had prepared a plan for the occupation of Northern Albania. However, due to pressure from the Great Powers on the government in Belgrade, Yugoslav military intervention in Albania was avoided⁶⁶.

Although the aforementioned agreement strained Yugoslav diplomacy, it was King

⁶¹ *Hasani M.* Rrethanat socio-ekonomike në Shqipëri 1912-1939. Prishtinë: Instituti i Historisë, 2023. P. 481; *Déserts D.D.* Një oficer francez në Ballkan... P. 516; *Dervishi K.* Historia e shtetit shqiptar 1912-2005... P. 257.

⁶² According to the Slavic scholar Dragan Bakić, this treaty was preceded by a secret military agreement in August 1925 reached between Italy and Albania. According to this agreement, Italy had pledged to support Albania in its territorial ambitions towards the Kingdom of SHS (Kosovo and other Albanian territories in the Kingdom of SHS, etc.). See: *Bakić D.* Great Britain, the little entente and security in Danubian Europe, 1919-1936. (Ph.D Degree). London: The University of Leeds, School of History, 2010, P. 140.

⁶³ Yugoslav Archives-Belgrade (AJ). Ministry of Internal Affairs (MID). Urgent regional documents, top secret sent to Istanbul, Rome, Bern and London, March 25, 1927, cited in: *Gashi I.* Albanian-Serbian relations between 1918-1929 according to Serbian diplomatic documents. *Вопросы истории*. 2019. № 12 (3). P. 40. DOI: 10.31166/VoprosyIstorii201912Statyi53

⁶⁴ *Avramovski Ž.* Stav Britanske diplomatije prema sklapanju Balkanskog Sporazuma (1933-1934). *Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest Filozofskoga fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu*. 1983. Vol. 16. P. 140.

⁶⁵ *Déserts D.D.* Një oficer francez... P. 517.

⁶⁶ *Meta B.*, et al. Historia e shqiptarëve gjatë shekullit XX... Vëll. III. P. 134; *Arifi-Bakalli E.* Drejt eliminimit të faktorit shqiptar... P. 39.

Alexander who, feeling the advice given to him, downplayed his reaction, expressing his indignation but to a certain extent, always awaiting the effects of this agreement. However, there were significant clashes in the political scene in Belgrade, where the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ninčić, resigned, and the staff of the two embassies were called to Rome, including the Yugoslav poet Rakić, who was the Yugoslav ambassador to Rome, and General Bodrero, who was the Italian ambassador to Belgrade⁶⁷.

The most disturbing for Belgrade was perhaps the other Italian-Albanian pact known as the Second Treaty of Tirana (November 22, 1927⁶⁸), which, upon its signing, had internal effects in the KSCS. This pact, consisting of 7 articles, was a defensive alliance between Albania and Italy for a term of 20 years, followed by annexes and registered at the League of Nations on January 3, 1928⁶⁹. Particularly, the reaction came from the Yugoslav military circles, which were in a difficult situation due to several shortages, four of which were: 1. Lack of various military resources; 2. Small number of soldiers; 3. Finances; and 4. Lack of new leadership in the high military command. This situation in the Yugoslav army created tension and insecurity. The Chief of the Yugoslav General Staff, Peshiq, admitted that: "plans for defending the border with Albania, which until now were based on strategies against the actions of the bands, now must adapt to possible confrontations with regular Italian troops"⁷⁰.

In addition to problems with its army, Belgrade was in an unfavorable position because it could not rely on Zogu's government, which was already primarily oriented towards Italy. Also, it felt threatened by the actions of Albanian nationalists, opponents of Zogu, who lived beyond the borders of Albania but worked to undermine the oppressive policies pursued by Belgrade towards the Kosovar Albanians⁷¹. Seeing this as a direct threat to its interests, Yugoslav diplomacy closely monitored Zogu's political struggle with his opponents, who now lived and operated in different countries. Through their service, Yugoslavs tracked the movements of nationalist and anti-Zogist emigrants, keeping the Belgrade government constantly informed. Thus, Serbian diplomatic documents reveal that "Albanian nationalists in Brindisi, who once supported Fan Noli, no longer support him, while they continue to oppose Zogu, whom they consider a vassal of the Yugoslavs"⁷².

Although the Yugoslavs initially supported Zogu's return to power, he later did not continue the policy of submission to them, as Albanian emigrants had anticipated. The truth was quite the opposite, as Zogu was now a vassal of the Italians, leaving Yugoslav diplomacy in a precarious position. The spread of Italian influence in Albania is further confirmed by a telegram from the Italian legation in Vienna, sent to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on May 1, 1927, which states, among other things: "The combined political organization of Albania that operates in favor of the Italian sphere against the Yugoslav one, has about twenty people, among whom are Hasan Bey Prishtina, Kiasin Cosul [Qazim Koculi], Nina Omar [Omer Nishani], Mustafa

⁶⁷ Ibid. P. 517-518.

⁶⁸ For more on the First and Second Treaties of Tirana, see: *Hasani M. Rrethanat socio-ekonomike...* P. 477-489.

⁶⁹ *Dervishi K. Historia e shtetit shqiptar 1912-2005...* P. 268.

⁷⁰ *Avramovski Ž. Britanci o Kraljevini Jugoslaviji, Knjiga Prva (1921-1930)...* P. 443.

⁷¹ *Gashi I. Albanian-Serbian relations betëeen 1918-1929...* P. 40-41.

⁷² Ibid. P. 41-42.

Kruja, and other important figures”⁷³. Mussolini was aware of this and even expressed his readiness to support this organization: “Please inform Mazzoti⁷⁴ that I approve the idea of creating a political organization of Albania in the Italian sphere that should be referred to Hasan Bey Prishtina, Mustafa Kruja, and others, and that should detach the best elements of Albanian nationalism, both from Moscow and from Belgrade [...]”⁷⁵.

Belgrade’s efforts to find pro-Yugoslav elements in the political scene in Tirana had never ceased. One of them was Ceno Bey Kryeziu⁷⁶. The fact that Ceno Bey was favored by Belgrade is evidenced by an article in the local newspaper ‘Nasa Stara Srbija’, in which it was stated, among other things: “Ceno Bey’s behavior has always been friendly towards us [...]. In Albania, there are two different currents: one led by Ceno Bey, who was inclined to cooperate with us, and the other led by Ahmet Zogu, who was oriented towards Italy”⁷⁷.

EFFORTS BY BELGRADE TO DESTABILIZE THE SITUATION IN ALBANIA

The aforementioned circumstances, being unfavorable for Belgrade, forced Yugoslav diplomacy to seek alternative ways, always in its own interests. Thus, during this period, the Yugoslavs made efforts to organize a revolt in Kosovo. For this purpose, Beni Puka was in Gjakova with about 150 armed Albanians who, together with Ceno Bey’s followers, ‘could recruit around 500 forces’. For this attack, Mussolini informs through a letter the royal legation in Durrës where, among other things, he writes: “The plan for the revolt organized by the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes is always the same [...]. While the main attempt to strike will be from Dibra and Struga with about two thousand rebels. Another column should march from Pogradec. The attacking forces do not exceed 4,000 people, including the tribes of Shala, Shoshi, and Puka. The Yugoslavs apparently believe in the desertion of the soldiers of Dibra, currently paid by Ahmet Zogu. Sali Ohri is in Belgrade”⁷⁸.

Based on Yugoslav documents, it emerges that Belgrade had previously intervened in Albania, such as in the case of the uprising of Loro Çakë in November 1926, where the leaders of the uprising had entered the Albanian state through the territory of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes⁷⁹. Although the Yugoslavs, on the one hand, incited the uprising and supported it with the aim of destabilizing the political situation in Albania, on the other hand, in the communication of the Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it was emphasized that “the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and

⁷³ *Destani B.* Hasan Bej Prishtina, *Dokumente historike nga arkivat italiane*. Tetovë: Qendra për Studime Shqiptare-Londër, 2018. P. 116.

⁷⁴ Mazzoti was the Italian ambassador in Vienna.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* P. 132.

⁷⁶ Ceno Bey Kryeziu was a controversial figure who entered politics in 1912. He held various positions, the most important being ambassador to Belgrade (1926-1927). However, due to his pro-Yugoslav stance, he was appointed ambassador to Prague in October 1927. But he did not manage to hold this position because on October 14, 1927, he was targeted in an assassination attempt by Albanian student Alqviadh Bebi from Elbasan. For more on the life and work of Ceno Bey Kryeziu, see: *Osmani J.* *Atentatet në Pragë 1927-1928* (Sipas burimeve arkivore). Prishtina, 2013; *Musaj F.* *Republika shqiptare 1925-1928...* P. 236-243; *Meta B.*, et al. *Historia e shqiptarëve gjatë shekullit XX...* Vol. III. P. 136-137.

⁷⁷ AQSH. Fund 163, Dossier 50. Year 1926. P. 1. The Report of the Royal Consulate in Skopje regarding Ceno Bey’s trip, July 31, 1926.

⁷⁸ *Destani B.* Hasan Bej Prishtina... P. 126.

⁷⁹ For more details on this uprising, see: *Dervishi K.* *Historia e shtetit shqiptar 1912-2005...* P. 251-256.

Slovenes sees these developments as internal matters of Albania, the peaceful development of which it sincerely desires⁸⁰. According to the researcher Emine Arifi-Bakalli, the Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs had found that some individuals in the Intelligence Service of the Yugoslav Army had connections with the insurgents⁸¹.

While Albania was under constant threat from the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, the Albanian political scene was highly divided. Some of the most prominent figures in Albanian political life, especially Hasan Prishtina and Fan Noli, despite their common opposition to King Zog, still lacked the courage to coordinate their efforts to overthrow him. In fact, Prishtina vehemently opposed Noli's efforts to collaborate with the Yugoslavs to overthrow Zogu. This stance is evident from a report dated May 26, 1927, between Hasan Prishtina and Vittorio Mazzotti, which stated: "Although they will remain in the national program with nationalist nuances and declaring their opposition to the government of Ahmet Zogu, we feel the need to inform the public opinion of their complete detachment from Fan Noli's group, which has sided with Moscow and will be against those who organize plots with the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes – the sworn enemies of the Albanian nation and people". Therefore, Prishtina openly expressed to Mazzotti his opposition to Noli's views and informed him of the sympathy towards Italy, which, according to Prishtina, was guaranteed by the Treaty of Tirana and was seen as an absolute guarantee of Albanian independence⁸².

The fact that Belgrade was entangled in Albania's internal political problems is evidenced by a letter dated June 7, 1927, released by Mazzotti in Vienna, stating: "The Belgrade government now gives more importance to National Unity than to the Korça group [...]. There is strong mutual distrust and great antipathy between the two groups that has intensified in recent days, despite the intervention of personalities and officials dispatched by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to resolve the conflict and reach a common agreement on the selection of men who should govern the country once Zogu is overcome"⁸³.

According to documents of the time, the Kingdom of SHS intervened in Albania in various ways, continuously seeking to destabilize it and overthrow President of the Republic, Ahmet Zogu⁸⁴. However, their methods and tactics varied depending on the circumstances. Therefore, they did not want to act directly by organizing bands but rather provided the means to insurgents, naturally giving them to Albanian leaders who were refugees in Yugoslavia⁸⁵. Italy was also aware of Yugoslavia's intervention in Albania. Thus, from a telegram sent by the Italian Royal Legation in Belgrade to the

⁸⁰ Avramovski Ž. Britanci o Kraljevini Jugoslaviji... P. 372-373.

⁸¹ Arifi-Bakalli E. Drejt eliminimit të faktorit shqiptar... P. 37.

⁸² Avramovski Ž. Britanci o Kraljevini Jugoslaviji... P. 149.

⁸³ Ibid. P. 158.

⁸⁴ One attempt by the Kingdom of SHS to destabilize the political life in Albania was also through exploiting the card of religion, specifically sectarian rivalry and clan mentality. In addition, Belgrade aimed to achieve this goal through cooperation with political emigration in the Kingdom of SHS, Italy, Greece, etc. Therefore, contacts were established with well-known figures such as K. Tasi, R. Shala, Dom Loro Caka, M. Kruja, Xhevat Korça, Jusuf Dibra (Ohri), and especially with the former Minister of Internal Affairs, Ceno Bey Kryeziu, who in 1927 held the position of ambassador in Belgrade and had criticized the Albanian government regarding the Albanian-Italian agreement. See: *Musaj F.* Republika shqiptare 1925-1928... P. 223, 231.

⁸⁵ *Destani B.* Hasan Bej Prishtina... P. 159.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome on July 25, 1927, we understand the advice Ambassador Bodrero gave to diplomats in Rome. In this document, among other things, it says: "Allow me to inform His Excellency again that only by removing control over Albanian refugees from the Kingdom of SHS can the permanent risk of disturbances in Albania be eliminated because this way, the main weapon used by Belgrade to threaten peace in Albania will be taken away".⁸⁶

THE QUESTION OF GURASHKOVIÇ AND THE INTERRUPTION OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN TIRANA AND BELGRADE IN 1927

The crisis in diplomatic relations between Albania and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia reached its peak precisely in 1927, the year in which diplomatic relations between these two countries were severed. Some of the fundamental reasons preceding the tension in relations between Tirana and official Belgrade, which ended in rupture, were: the continuous efforts of the Yugoslavs to destabilize the Albanian state⁸⁷ and the signing of the Albanian-Italian Pacts, known as the Tirana Pacts (1926-1927). Meanwhile, the trigger for the diplomatic clash between Tirana and Belgrade was the arrest of an Albanian citizen of Montenegrin origin, Vuk Gjurashkoviç (Vuk Djurašković), by local authorities in Durrës, on May 27, 1927. The reason for the arrest was his alleged work as a translator at the Yugoslav embassy in Tirana, and therefore he was presumed to have diplomatic immunity. However, after thorough scrutiny of his activities, it turned out he was not an employee of the Yugoslav embassy. According to the consulate administration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, this directorate had not received any request from the Yugoslav side for Gjurashkoviç's employment as a translator at the legation, nor had it given its approval for such a thing, a procedure that was applied in bilateral relations. So, Gjurashkoviç did not have diplomatic immunity because he did not officially enjoy the status of an employee of the Yugoslav embassy⁸⁸. Furthermore, during the raid at his home, documents/letters were found, many of which were compromising and of political significance⁸⁹.

For his arrest, the Yugoslav government reacted very harshly. Ceno Beu informed Tirana that the arrest of Gjurashkoviç had made a bad impression in political circles in Belgrade. As a result, the Chargé d'Affaires of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Tirana, Suhkoviç, sent a protest note (ultimatum) to the Albanian government for the immediate release of Gjurashkoviç. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Belgrade threatened armed attack, while Ambassador Suhkoviç ordered the suspension of diplomatic relations with Albania. However, since official Tirana was convinced, it was right, it did not yield to this note and continued to maintain its stance. Through its minister in Belgrade, it informed the Yugoslav government that Suhkoviç's initiative could lead to the breakdown of relations between Albania and the Kingdom

⁸⁶ Ibid. P. 14.

⁸⁷ That Albania was threatened by the intervention of the Kingdom of SHS is also evidenced by the note that Mussolini sent to the British government in April 1927, in which he pointed out the movement of the Kingdom of SHS against Albania. Among other things, he expressed: "Its goals are clear: to annul the Italo-Albanian agreements, to disrupt the peaceful and civilizing work that Italy is carrying out in Albania, and to make Albania a political and economic vassal of Yugoslavia [...]". For more see: *Musaj F. Republika shqiptare 1925-1928...* P. 228.

⁸⁸ Ibid. P. 233.

⁸⁹ *Arifi-Bakalli E. Drejt eliminimit të faktorit shqiptar...* P. 41.

of Yugoslavia⁹⁰. It was even said that the responsibility for what had happened lay with the Yugoslav legation, which had never informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tirana about the appointment of Vuk Gjurashkoviç to the Yugoslav legation as a translator⁹¹.

After the steadfast stance of official Tirana, diplomatic relations between the two countries remained frozen. Following several unsuccessful attempts, on June 5, 1927, Belgrade withdrew its personnel from Albania. The right was on the side of the Albanians, and these diplomatic maneuvers by the Yugoslavs were merely to test their influence in Albania, as evidenced by Serbian diplomatic documents themselves. Thus, in one correspondence from the Serbian diplomat in Istanbul sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Belgrade, it is stated that even other states saw this incident as instigated by the Yugoslav side. In this correspondence, among other things, it was said: "The interruption of diplomatic relations between our kingdom and Albania was almost the headline of all major Turkish newspapers. In all the articles, it is stated that the Albanian government was right in how it dealt with its citizen"⁹².

Regarding the case of Gjurashkoviç, it is important to reflect on the conversation that Marinkoviç had with Jevtiq, who was expected to return to Tirana as a Yugoslav representative. Among other things, Marinkoviç had said: "Although Gjurashkoviç is an Albanian citizen, although it is not clear whether he had presented himself to the Albanian authorities as an interpreter, tell Ahmet Beu that this is not how things are done in international relations. Tell him that my friends and I brought him to power and that I have always supported him. I least expected this from him"⁹³.

The severance of diplomatic relations prompted Zogu to inform all accredited diplomatic corps in Albania through a circular. He also notified the League of Nations and the chancelleries of the Great Powers, informing them of the latest events in Albanian-Yugoslav relations. The Great Powers sided with Albania, as it was legally in accordance with international law. Therefore, they increased pressure on the Yugoslav side, and on June 23, 1927, they sent a note to both Tirana and Belgrade requesting the Yugoslav government to modify the note of May 30 from the Yugoslav minister in Tirana, while the Albanian government was asked to release Gjurashkoviç. The Gjurashkoviç question was resolved after the Yugoslav government, faced with pressure from the Great Powers, withdrew the offensive note, while the Albanian government released Gjurashkoviç. Under these circumstances, on August 4, 1927, diplomatic relations between Albania and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia were restored⁹⁴.

After the Gjurashkoviç case, which directly influenced the severance of relations between the two countries, another issue that could reignite diplomatic clashes between Tirana and Belgrade was the case of Zeqir Rexha, who was taken to Belgrade

⁹⁰ Bogdan K. Vanjska politika jugoslovenske države 1918-1941. Diplomatsko-istorijski pregled. Zagreb: 1975. P. 47; Musaj F. Republika shqiptare 1925-1928... P. 233.

⁹¹ AMEPJ. Dossier 116, Year 1927. P. 22-23. Report of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Albania on the Gjurashkoviç incident (May 27-July 2, 1927), Tirana, July 1927.

⁹² AJ. Ministry of Internal Affairs (MID), Report sent by the General Consulate in Istanbul to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs-General Political Directorate, Ref. no. 224, doc. no. 370-22-328, Istanbul, June 10, 1927, cited in: Gashi I. Albanian-Serbian relations between 1918-1929... P. 9.

⁹³ Bogdan K. Vanjska politika jugoslovenske države... P. 47.

⁹⁴ Musaj F. Republika shqiptare 1925-1928... P. 235, 237; Meta B., et al. Historia e shqiptarëve gjatë shekullit XX... Vëll. III. P. 136; Dervishi K. Historia e shtetit shqiptar 1912-2005... P. 263-265.

by Ceno Bej Kryeziu. From a telegram sent by Tahir Shtylla working in Belgrade, we understand that Zeqir Rexha was sentenced to death by Yugoslav authorities, but he was not arrested as he was sheltered in the Albanian legation in Belgrade. Regarding this issue, Shtylla visited Jovanović. The latter, among other things, expressed that relations between Albania and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia were deteriorating. However, the non-arrest of Zeqir Rexha, who was sentenced to death by Yugoslav courts for crimes, was a sign of friendship extended to Ahmet Zogu. Furthermore, he added that if his arrest were to happen, this issue would become even bigger than the Gjurashkoviç case⁹⁵. Although the Gjurashkoviç case was overcome, in October of this same year, interstate relations were strained again due to the assassination of the Albanian ambassador to Prague, Czechoslovakia, Ceno Bej Kryeziu, by Albanian student Alqiviadh Bebi, an agent of Belgrade⁹⁶.

Although the problems of the year 1927 were overcome, diplomatic relations between Albania and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia continued to be characterized by mutual distrust, ongoing tension, and intermittent confrontation. Although Zogu initially was favored by the Yugoslavs due to his clashes with the leaders of the Kosovo Committee, diplomatic relations between these two countries were almost always tense. One of the issues that greatly concerned Belgrade during the year 1928 regarding Albania was Zog's title 'King of the Albanians', which was followed by efforts to oppose this title on the international stage⁹⁷.

Below you will find listed the diplomatic corps of Albania stationed in Belgrade (tabl. 1) and the diplomatic corps of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia stationed in Tirana and Shkodër (tabl. 2) in during 1925-1928.

Tabl. 1. The diplomatic corps of the Albanian state stationed in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1925-1928)⁹⁸.

Gjergj Pekmezi	Ambassador	Belgrade	1925-1926
Stavro Stavri	Ambassador	Belgrade	1926
Ceno Bej Kryeziu	Ambassador	Belgrade	1926-1927
Tahir Shtylla	Ambassador	Belgrade	1927-1928

Tabl. 2. The diplomatic corps of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia stationed in Albania (1925-1928)⁹⁹.

Branko Lazareviq	Ambassador	Tirana	1925-?
Sahkoviq	Ambassador	Tirana	? - 1927
Trajan Zhivkoviqi	Consulate	Shkodër	? - 1927

⁹⁵ AQSH. Fund 416, File 15, Year 1927. P. 4. Letter from the Albanian legation in Belgrade to the President of the Republic of Albania, titled: To His Excellency, the President of the Republic. Belgrade, October 12, 1927.

⁹⁶ *Hasani M.* Rrethanat socio-ekonomike... P. 483.

⁹⁷ *Arifi-Bakalli E.* Drejt eliminimit të faktorit shqiptar... P. 43.

⁹⁸ *Imami P.* Serbët dhe shqiptarët... P. 431.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* P. 431-432.

CONCLUSION

This article has analyzed the dynamics of diplomatic relations between Albania and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia during the period of 1925-1928, a period in which these two countries experienced continuous struggles in their relations. We can conclude that diplomatic relations between Tirana and Belgrade during this period evolved depending on various internal and external factors. A characteristic of Albanian-Yugoslav relations, as in all previous periods, was mutual distrust and continuous accusations and counter-accusations between Tirana and Belgrade regarding issues, the resolution of which they saw in opposing directions. Among the most delicate issues that have challenged diplomatic relations were the matters of Shën Naumi and Vermosh (1925), the uprising of Loro Caka (1926), the First and Second Tirana Pacts (1926-1927), and especially the Gjurashkoviç question (1927), which for several months led to the interruption of diplomatic relations between Tirana and Belgrade. However, we can conclude that the main factor in Albanian-Yugoslav relations was Italy, whose diplomacy was not only very active but also decisive in these relations. This was the reason that despite Belgrade's efforts to restore Zogu to power, which they later claimed to use for their interests, the influence of Rome led him and the Albanian state to detach from any influence from the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and primarily orient themselves towards Italy.

The issue of the displacement of the Albanian population from Kosovo and other Albanian territories, and the use of state violence and terror by the Kingdom of Yugoslavia against them, was also an important factor in diplomatic relations between Tirana and Belgrade. This is because while official Tirana and Albanian intellectuals raised their voices in defense of Albanians in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Belgrade officials accused Tirana of interfering in its internal affairs.

Note: Some of the achievements of this work are published in the book: Skender Lutfiu. *The Issue of Albanians in Yugoslavia against the Background of Relations between Albania and Yugoslavia 1918-1939* (Prishtina: Institute of History, 2021).

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