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Pudar Draško • Pavlović • Meka

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Editors:
Gazela Pudar Draško
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Section 4: Serbian-Albanian Enmity

Božica Slavković

The Yugoslav State and the Idea of the Greater Albania in the Interwar Period

The project of creating the Greater Albanian state was based on the national idea from the late 19th century that all Albanians should live in one state (Borožan 2001:1). The idea of solving the Albanian question was awakened by the “League for the defense of the rights of the Albanian nation” founded in Prizren on 10 June 1878 (read more in Borožan 2001: 21; Skendi 1967: 88; Bogdanović 1980; Hadži Vasiljević 1909; Vojvodić 1989: 1-21).¹ The League, although it was abolished by the Turkish authorities, permanently influenced the main directions of the struggle for territorial and ethnic Albania

1 The program of the League was created in cooperation with Albanian intellectuals and Turkish politicians, and included the following: 1. that all areas inhabited by Albanians in the Balkan part of Turkey make a unique Albanian Vilayet, 2. the administration in such vilayet is to be entrusted to Albanians 3. that the Albanian language is the official language in schools and court 4. recruits are to perform military duties only in the territory concerned and 5. the local budget is mostly aimed at the needs of this vilayet. Vilayet is supposed to extend to the territory of Skadar, Janjina, Bitola and Kosovo, as well as the Thessalonica Vilayet. In this region a little less than 44% of the population were Albanians, with the rest being Serbs, Montenegrins, Macedonians, Turks, Greeks, Vlachs, Romani, Armenians and others.

(Bogdanović 1980: 181). Thus, the next Albanian League, founded in Peć in 1899, followed the principles of the Prizren League, except for the fact that in the meantime the idea of territorial and ethnic Albanian unification was firmly incorporated in the strategic vision of the great powers (Borozan 1995: 44-45). With the creation of Albania led by Ismail Kemal (28 November 1912), the idea of the Greater Albania expanded with the support of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Avramovski 1992: 39).² The Albanian government sent to the London conference in early 1913 a memorandum in which it expressed their pretensions to a maximum of territorial variants included in the program of the Albanian movement (Peć, Mitrovica, Priština, Skoplje and Tetovo and surroundings) (Borozan 1995: 58). As a result of a compromise between Austro-Hungarian and Russian diplomats, a border between Montenegro and Serbia with Albania was created, which ran from the Adriatic coast along the river Bojana, including part of the Skadar Lake, while Plav, Gusinje, Peć, Dečani and Djakovica were added to Montenegro, and Prizren, Debar and Ohrid to Serbia. Also, the diplomats have created an autonomous, independent and hereditary Principality of Albania, headed by Wilhelm Vida opposite the unrecognized government of Ismail Kemal in Vlore (Vojvodić 1989: 149-161). Along with the Albanian diplomatic struggle for the expansion of the territory, there was an uprising among the Albanian refugee population from Kosovo in Albania, whose organizers were Hasan Priština, Isa Boletini and Bajram Curi (Hrabak 1988: 33-38). Although they withdrew, the government of Ismail Kemal sent a message that it should be kept in mind that “Kosovo was and will remain Albanian” (Borozan 2001: 19).

In World War I the Austro-Hungarian Empire had supported Albania, primarily in order to open the second front in

2 After 30 May 1913, by the Treaty of Peace with the Balkan countries, Turkey has lost all rights to the territories west of the line Enos – Midia.

Serbia (more about the Austro-Hungarian policy towards Albania: Mitrović 1990: 79-104). That has helped the Committee for the Defense of Kosovo, formed in 1912, led by Hasan Priština, Isa Boletini and Bajram Curi (Borozan 1995: 67). The Austro-Hungarian Empire clashed with Bulgaria during the war (more in: Mitrović 1981: 61-131) because it supported the Greater Albania plans and their claims to Kosovo and Metohija.³ Meanwhile, Italy began to intensively get involved in the Greater Albania plans, in particular with the weakening of the Austro-Hungarian power, when the Italian general Ferraro declared independent reunification of Albania under the protectorate of Italy in Djirokastra. Also, Italy has helped the formation of the Committee for the Liberation of Kosovo in November 1918, which was renamed the Kosovo Committee and had significance in all political matters (Antonić 2006: 30; Borozan 1995: 75)⁴. Finally, with the help of Italy, the new Albanian government Turhan Paša Permeti requested at the Paris Conference in 1919 that the composition of the future Albania includes the eastern parts of Montenegro, Peć, Kosovska Mitrovica, Priština, Gnjilane, Uroševac, Kačanik, Skoplje, Tetovo, Gostivar, Kičevo, Debra, the area south of the Ohrid and Prespa lake to the Greek mountain Gramos; hence, the border would stretch to the Preveza bay, whereby the idea of the Greater Albania was displayed again. (Borozan 1995, 80; Dimić, Borozan 1998: 632-633; Mitrović

3 With new boundaries Prizren, Priština, Uroševac, Gnjilane and Kačanik were added to Bulgaria, and Peć, Djakovica, Kosovska Mitrovica and Vučitrn to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, while the Albanian border has not changed.

4 The objectives of the Committee were to fight fervently for the defense of the territorial integrity of the country, the restoration of the Albanian League of Prizren, as well as freeing Kosovo and other Albanian territories from “the occupiers”. Chairman of the Committee was Hodža Kadriu, and at the heads were Hasan Priština, Bajram Curi, Sali Malići and Sotir Peci.

1990: 242). Hasan Priština, one of the leaders of the Kosovo Committee and the main figure in the activities against the Yugoslav state, also forwarded some requests to the great powers at the Paris Peace Conference. The withdrawal of the Yugoslav army from Kosovo was requested and was to be replaced by English-American troops, after which a plebiscite on the status of Kosovo would be executed leading to its merging with Albania (Dimić, Borožan 1998: 632-633). In late June 1919, Priština was in Durres and received a support from General Pjacentini for the Albanian troops to attack with the aim to expel the Serbs from the area to the right of the river Drim up to the border of Macedonia. Also, Priština was staying with an Italian poet and politician D'Annuncio in occupied Rijeka (Mitrović 1990: 242).

Kosovo Committee has promoted the idea of the Greater Albania primarily in Drenica, Istok and Peć's district, and worked with the IMRO's right-wing Makedenstvujuščih⁵. Thus, in Albania in 1920, Aleksandar Protogerov signed a protocol in the name of IMRO with the leadership of the Kosovo Committee on organization *kachaks* and *komites*⁶ from bases in southern Albania (Borožan 1995: 92). In order to organize its structure and financing, the members of the Committee met frequently⁷. President was Sali Vučitrnac, and vice president

5 The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization was a revolutionary national liberation movement in the Ottoman territories in Europe, that operated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

6 *Kachaks* is a term used for the Albanian bandits active in the 19th and early 20th century in northern Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo and Macedonia, and later as a term for the militias of Albanian revolutionary organizations against the Kingdom of Serbia (1910–18) Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918–24), called the “Kačak movement”.

7 Command of the Third Army Region has reported that on 26 June 1932 a meeting of the Committee was held in the Kosovo village of Droc (near Tirana and Kavaja), which was attended by Abdurahman Kros, Redžep Jema, the mayor of Tirana, Muharem Barjaktar, Sali Vučitrnac,

Muharem Barjaktar, but in the reports of military attaché in Albania another person was often mentioned as the head of the committee (Šacir Cur, Ahmed beg, Ćerim beg, Feriz Salković, Mehmed Ali)⁸. They printed and distributed pamphlets and brochures with their ideas with the help of the Italian publisher⁹, and by canvassing the areas along the Yugoslav-Albanian border reminded people “not to forget the enslaved Kosovo”.¹⁰ The Albanian consulate in Skoplje and Prizren had a major role in spreading the Albanian propaganda. The Consulate in Skoplje had a map on which the cities that were supposed to belong to Albania were marked, from Peć to the east in the direction of Podujevo, Vranje, Pčinja river and Vardar river to the Greek border. Due to this role, we can assume that the statement of the Albanian deputy in Belgrade, who complained to the Yugoslav government in 1932 that the secret police was spying on

Naki beg Starova, Jusuf Efendi Bešir and an Italian (Military archives (hereinafter referred to as MA), listing (hereinafter referred to as l) 17, a box (hereinafter referred to as b) 27, No.47 / 1, 5.august 1932).

8 MA, l. 17, b. 95 g, folder (hereinafter referred to as f) 2, Report on Macedonian, Croatian and Kosovo committees for January 1934. by military Attaché in Albania, 13.February 1934; MA, l. 17, b. 95 g, 7, f. 2, page (hereinafter referred to as p) 1, General Headquarters to Military Attaché in Albania of March 1934 .

9 Albanian professor and a member of the Kosovo Committee Mehmed Vokši issued a brochure in Albanian language in Rome named “Arbanija and Arbanasi 42 years – one language and one fatherland” in 1930, and Italian version in early 1931 “Tutt al’Albania di tutti gli Albanese” (“Whole Albania all Albanians”), in which the idea of Kosovo Committee were represented. According to his vision, the borders of Albania went from the Adriatic coast from the Bay of Spiez, in the north of Bara, following the direction of the northeast, Lake Skadar, Trgoviški hills, Skadar, Hoti, Gruda, Gusinje, Plav and Peć, the whole highland in the north of Mitrovica, to Kuršumlja and Prokuplje, south to Kumanovo, Skoplje, Bitolj, Kastoria and Preveza in the Adriatic. (MA, l. 17, b. 95 a, f. 2, the General intelligence Department).

10 MA, l. 17, b. 95 a, f. 2 The reports for July, August and September 1931.

Albanian consulate in Skoplje and hindering normal operation, was true (Avramovski 1986: 92).

In 1932, there was a rise in incidents on the Yugoslav-Albanian border, which the Albanian government was warned about. The British believed that these raids were only a consequence of the economic issues on the border (Avramovski 1986: 92). According to *Vreme* a large number of Albanians fled to the Yugoslav territory, reporting as reasons the unbearable situation, fiscal levies, hunger and terrorizing by the police authorities, because many were suspected of maintaining ties with the Albanian emigrants to the Yugoslav territory (*Vreme*, 6. July 1932).

In early 1934, in the January report, military attaché of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Tirana, stated that the Albanian authorities had banned any gatherings or illegal crossing to the Yugoslav territory, so that „there could be no larger and severe *komites-kachaks* crossings”. There were individual passes for the purpose of robbery and blood feuds. Albanian authorities, at the order of King Zog, conducted energetic confiscation of weapons from the people and they had orders to prevent any activity.¹¹ However, 1934 was marked by the interest of the Albanian Government to prevent the emigration of Albanians from Kosovo and Metohija and Macedonia to Turkey and Albania. Kosovo was being promoted as part of Albania which increased the propaganda of the Kosovo Committee (Borožan :124-125)

In addition to rising propaganda¹², Kosovo Committee organized frequent incursions by rebel groups from Albania and

11 MA, I. 17, b. 95 g, f. 2, No.1, General Headquarters to attaché of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Tirana for March 1934.

12 MA, I. 17, b. 24, no. 6/1, reg. 111, 112 and 113, Report for November and December 1937; Archives of Yugoslavia (hereinafter referred to as AY), the Ministry of Justice, City Hall of Peć, City Police Guard, 4 October 1937.

delivering weapons, which was reflected in the results of the investigation of weapons in Djakovica county. There were about 600 rifles and ammunition, and the weapons were sent from Drenica, Kosovska Mitrovica, Kačanik and Podrima districts¹³. Also, there were reports that the main channel of the Committee was from the Djakovica district, partly in Istok, including parts of Drenica, through Žabare municipality in which the Committee had the support of Mayor Šaban Redža. From here, channel continued to Kosovska Mitrovica to supporters of Ferat beg Draga, and where another fraction of the committee existed consisting of Džafer Deva, Šaban Mustafa and Mustafa Alijević from Mitrovica. After Mitrovica, the channel went to Šalja, Vučitrn, Priština, Uroševac, Kačanik, Skoplje-Albanian consulate.¹⁴

The problem that had increased the Albanian discontent and aggravated the situation was the process of agrarian reform and colonization. The Albanian population considered that distribution of land was unfair and that the land was being taken away from them, although the Yugoslav government tried to divide uncultivated state land, abandoned plots and the land confiscated from the renegade *kachaks* (Jovanović 2002: 125, 225). In response to the dissatisfaction of Muslims that their land was taken „to such an extent that they will all become homeless”, the Yugoslav authorities argued that „they do not carry out any violence, but implement limitations to the land for purposes of colonization under the provisions of the Law on Settling the Southern Parts, which was not specifically directed against the Muslims, but was implemented on both the Muslim and Christian population, and there was no intention to forcibly drive anyone to move out of Yugoslavia”. It was also emphasized that „80% of the Albanian population was not

13 AY, The Ministry of Justice on 1 August 1938.

14 MA, l. 17, b. 95a, f.2, No.1.

covered by the agrarian reform because they had no more than 0.40 ha per capita¹⁵.

The second issue that exacerbated Yugoslav Albanian conflicts was the matter of education. It was, both for the state and for national minorities, one of the crucial ones. In order to suppress the national movement that had spilled over from neighboring Albania to Kosovo (particularly through the Albanian schools), Yugoslav state had planned to open several central schools with boarding in areas with a majority of Albanian population (Dimić 1997: 101). Thus about 1,400 schools were opened, 486 school buildings constructed, about 100 libraries formed and around 2,000 teachers and other education workers employed.¹⁶ Albanian historian Ali Hadri claims that the Serbs made progress while nothing was done for the Albanian national minority. He stated that the problem was that the teaching in public schools was held in the official state language, so the Albanian children rarely attended, which led to their high illiteracy (over 90% in 1939).¹⁷ However, the Yugoslav education authorities have sought for Muslim and Orthodox children to learn together, in order to increase religious tolerance. Provincial school authorities strictly forbade anyone from jeopardizing the national identity of Turkish and Albanian children (such as removing caps in school).¹⁸ Muslim customs and religious rituals were to be tolerated, because „Albanians or Turks could

15 AY, 37-42-297, 6 August 1938.

16 School year 1929/30: in schools in Vardar Banate in purely Albanian classes there were 4,092 male students and 148 female students (Dimić, knj.3, 1997: 128). School in the village of Gornje Ljubinje was the first one built in a purely Muslim village (AY, 66-1406-1589, 4 April 1930).

17 School year 1940/41: in primary schools there were 24,914 Serbian and Montenegrin children and 11,876 Albanians, and in high schools 2% of Albanian children (Hadri 1967: 80-83).

18 AY, 66-746-1201, 14 October 1929.

not be turned into Serbs or Croats“ and it was to be worked on “the development of affection towards Christians and the common state, the king and the royal government“.¹⁹ In the villages and cities schools were opened for Muslim children called “Sibijan mektebs”, in which the Koran was the basis of learning, Albanian primers were used and all explanations were given in their native language. The Yugoslav educational authorities considered these schools to be “nationally harmful institution” because the educational function was performed by the imams and muftis who did not know Serbian well. However, in order to solve educational problems in the south, by the decision of the Minister of Education dated 3 March 1931, opening of these institutions was officially allowed.²⁰ Despite the decision, the Muslim authorities opened these schools without the knowledge of the Ministry of Education, although each new opening should have been regularly reported.²¹

The situation in Kosovo and Metohija depended on the relations between Yugoslavia and Italy, as well as the relations between the two countries with Albania. Yugoslavia and Italy signed an agreement in 1937 that guaranteed the Albanian independence, mutual respect for the borders, protection of the interests in the case of threat and aimed to promote trade. The signing of the Yugoslav-Italian treaty signaled a change in the state of relations between Yugoslavia and Albania, as well as Italy and Albania, but Count Ciano assured king Zog that the Italian-Albanian relations will not be affected (Avramovski 1963: 26).

The external political situation affected the expansion of activities of the Kosovo Committee. For its expansion, the Kosovo Committee took advantage of Yugoslav policy to move a

19 AY, 66-1401-1589.

20 AY, 66-22-51.

21 AY, 66-1407-1589, 19 Oktober 1931.

large number of Albanians from the Yugoslav territory to Albania, considering it to be in the interest of Yugoslavia. Albanians were received and “inhabited where they wanted”, governed by the Department of Agrarian Reform, led by Sali Vučitrnac.²² Also, Ferat beg Draga, through his agents kept in touch with Murat beg from Peć, who after fleeing to Albania became one of the officials of the Kosovo Committee, and organized secret courts that represented the local offices of the intelligence service through which ties with Albania were maintained. The leaders of this courts were Bećir Miftar from Ponoševac, Ali Ali from Riznić, Aziri Sadik, Aslan Bajrami from Vokša, Arif Hodža from Morina, Hodža Avdul from Batuša, Ahmet Sulejman and Nek Aslan from Ponoševac and Malj Bajram from Šišman.²³ Prominent role in organizing the Greater Albania propaganda in the Djakovica district had Bećir Miftar and Ali Adžija, presidents of Ponoševac and Riznić municipalities, Djakovica’s imam Afiz Guta and Albanian emigrant in Prizren Kadri Memet, who asked to be transferred there. What is most interesting, as emphasized by Yugoslav senator Andra Kujundžić, it is that all the agitators were the most energetic supporters of each current government and its party, such as MP Mustafa Durgutović, Šerif Voca and Beca from Suva Reka and mayors in Podrima district.²⁴

The Committee additionally activated after the Munich crisis in September 1938. The commander of the Third Army Region, Milan Ječmenica, wrote on that occasion, to the General Headquarters that “Albanian population raised its head and Albanian irredentism stepped up its propaganda, spreading voices

22 MA, I. 17, b. 27, no. 40/3, 29 February 1936; MA, I. 17, b. 94, f. 3, no. 1; MA, I. 17, b. 94, f. 3, no.1, 26 January 1937; MA, I. 17, b. 94, f. 1, no.16, 22 March 1938.

23 MA, I. 17, b. 94, f. 3, No. 1.

24 MA, I. 17, b. 94, f. 3, No.1, 26 January 1937.

that Metohija and regions inhabited Albanians will be back to Albania” (Avramovski 1964: 126). Albanian books, brochures, leaflets and badges were shared on market days with a picture of the Albanian royal couple, primarily in Djakovica and Prizren county. Albanian couriers, under the guise of small shops, passed on the messages and advice from Albania on market days. They were divided regionally – in the former Sanjak of Novi Pazar, the chief commissioner was Akif from Novi Pazar, originating from Djakovica, for Kosovo and Drenica the former president of Drenica Sedlar Banuš who fled to Albania, for Podrima (Orahovac and the surroundings) the chief commissioner was Bejzad Durgutović, a trader from Orahovac.²⁵ In the county of the Sharr Mountain Albanian primers were distributed, and in December 1938 130 brooches were transferred from Peshkopi and Kukes.²⁶ Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija took an Albanian flag with a slogan “Long lives the Kingdom of Albania” as a symbol of their organization. These flags were kept in the houses of prominent Albanians and displayed only when meetings were held.²⁷ Messages and encouragement were coming from Odza and Sehler dervishes of Prizren, Orahovac, Djakovica and Peć, with the support of Albanian younger generation. Through religious schools, Sibijan mektebs, the message that Albania “will expand to Kačanik with Italian help” also spread out.²⁸ These messages were spreading through the frequent visits of Albanian citizens, mostly teachers, to Djakovica and Prizren.²⁹

In Korča, the demonstrations where participants demanded the unification of “unliberated Albanian province”

25 MA, l. 17, b. 94, f. 1, No. 16, 1938

26 MA, l. 17, b. 94, f. 1, No.16, 26 December 1938.

27 MA, l.17, b. 94 f. 1, No. 16, General Headquarters, 24 October 1938.

28 MA, l.17, b. 94, f. 3, No. 1, 26 January 1937

29 MA, l. 17, b. 94, f. 1, No .16, General Headquarters, 27 August 1938.

Kosovo and Epirus with Albania, erupted.³⁰ In southern Serbia, there were widespread news that the Albanians were preparing for an uprising that would make a “slaughter of the Serbian population, and especially the settlers.”³¹ In addition, prior to the end of 1938 rallies were prepared by the leaders of Kosovo emigration, who required the intervention of the Albanian government and the major powers with the Yugoslav government to give minority rights to the Albanians in Yugoslavia. The Albanian government did not want to participate in this because it feared that Italy, in the event of an outbreak of the war in Europe, would seize the opportunity to attack Albania, but after the crisis had passed it continued agitation in the Yugoslav areas inhabited by Albanians (Avramovski 1964: 128). In light of this, the Committee was supported by providing arms, that was distributed in two directions – border towards Prizren, Suva Reka and Uroševac and the second towards Djakovica, Orahovac, Drenica, Priština, which showed that they were counting on Albanians in Yugoslavia along the border. The main depot for the transfer of weapons was near the Albanian border in Tropoje from where the weapons were transferred to Batush and Morrish in the district of Djakovica. In Vlahnja in Albania was a depot for the transfer of weapons to districts of Has, Podrima and Podgora.³² Albanians were concealing weapons which was confirmed by the results of the search of the Albanian population near the border. In the district of Gnjilane two thousand guns and more bombs were handed over and in district of Nerodimlje eight hundred rifles and grenades. In other districts which are close to the Albanian border, this collection and surrender of weapons went a lot slower because the chiefs and gendarmerie, according to Senator Kujundžić, “loosely

30 MA, I. 17, b. 76, f. 2, No. 17.

31 MA, I. 17, b. 94, f. 1, No. 16, 1938.

32 AY, 37-53-54, 19 February 1938.

acted”, as was the case in Podrima and Podgora district, where “Muslim MPs and mayors encouraged people to conceal weapons and surrender to the authorities only the useless” because the Albanians from Albania sent a message to “keep guns at the cost of life, because they will soon need them”.³³

The following 1939 continued with the Greater Albania propaganda. This happened in accordance with the foreign policy circumstances. Italy led the negotiations with Yugoslavia over Albania, where its division was being considered (Stojadinović 1970: 517-518). This is indicated in a study of 30 January 1939 which was done by Ivo Andrić, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.³⁴ Inspired by these events, the activities of the Kosovo Committee were continued in various ways. Lieutenant and trader from Kukes, Rešad Dida, served as an intelligence agent in Prizren. Since he often went to Prizren, he received instructions in Albanian boxes of cigarettes and answers returned in boxes of Yugoslav cigarettes.³⁵ Among the Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija Albanian flags were observed³⁶ as well as the first public distribution of the Greater Albania maps with parts entering the Yugoslav and Greek territory. Yugoslav Ministry of Interior banned this but the map was still sold at a price of 0.50 francs per share. The official response from the Yugoslav and Greek side was lacking and this encouraged separatist movement. Military attaché in Tirana held that the map

33 AY, 37-53-56-58, 21 May 1938.

34 The study also noted that “the division of Albania would erase an attractive center for Albanian minority in Kosovo that would assimilate more easily. We could possibly get 2-300.000 more Albanians but they are mostly Catholics whose relations with the Muslims have never been good. The question of emigration of Albanian Muslims to Turkey would also be performed under new circumstances, because there would not be any stronger action to prevent it” (Krizman 1977: 89).

35 MA, I, 17, b. 31, No. 47/1-1, 10 January 1939.

36 MA, I, 17, b. 31, No. 43/1-1, 5. January 1939.

“The real and the true Albania” was solely the work of the Albanian government, which approved all the manifestations of the Greater Albania by Kosovo emigration.³⁷ Also, the Albanian military authorities passed a large number of weapons and ammunition to certain areas of northern Albania. Between 15 and 30 January 1939, about 200 Italian *carbines* were brought to the village Šištevac in Albania, and in Tropoje about 100. These weapons were to be gradually transferred to Yugoslavia and divided to Albanian population, for which Dem Idris Cecaj from the village Djoc, in the district of Djakovica was responsible.³⁸

The leaders of the Kosovo Committee used every suitable moment to confirm Italy’s support to win over Kosovo, especially after the Italian occupation of Albania. So Ismet Krieziu beg, the brother of Gani beg Crnoglavčić from Djakovica, and Avni Giljani addressed Benito Mussolini³⁹ in relation to Kosovo and Metohija during the stay of the Albanian government delegation in Rome of mid-April 1939 for handover of Albanian crown to the Italian king.⁴⁰ Soon after this, former Albanian deputy in Belgrade Tahir Štila, tried to address the same issue in an interview with Count Galeazzo Ciano⁴¹ (Avramovski 1964: 132-133). They never received any specific answers, because of the forthcoming visit of Yugoslav Prime Minister Aleksandar Cincar Marković to Italy, and Count Ciano wrote in his diary that first “Yugoslavs should be lulled” and Kosovo should be “dealt with later”, which would “keep alive an irredentist

37 MA, I. 17, b. 518, f. 5, No. 30, February 1939.

38 MA, I. 17, b. 31, no. 30/2-1, 18. April 1939, b. 31, 30/2-2, 18 March 1939.

39 Benito Amilcare Andrea Mussolini was an Italian politician, journalist and leader of the National Fascist Party.

40 MA, I. 17, b. 518, f. 5, no. 30, February 1939.

41 Gian Galeazzo Ciano, was Foreign Minister of Fascist Italy from 1936 until 1943 and Benito Mussolini’s son-in-law. Ciano wrote and left behind a diary.

problem in the Balkans” and constitute a “knife aimed at the back of Yugoslavia” (Ciano 1948: 69).

In May 1939, Italy started its activities in order to prevent the Yugoslav influence in northern Albania. Former envoy in Tirana, Jakomoni, gathered about 200 chiefs from the Debar region, gave them financial assistance, promised economic and cultural advancement (opening schools, building roads, draining marshes) and gave them permission to carry weapons.⁴² Therefore, the Albanian leaders, especially Tahir Zaimi and Bećir Maloku, were able to continue activities in order to create the Greater Albania (Avramovski 1964: 136). Ferat Draga began working on restoring *Džemijet*⁴³, and in Belgrade the activity of the student organization *Besa*⁴⁴ was increased (Terzić 1983, 188; Imami 1998: 147).

Meanwhile, Albania had become an Italian corporate state. Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs had instructed its bodies to initiate an action in Kosovo and Metohija, which was

42 AY, 4, 1-2 / 39, Bulletin of the Department of Civil Protection in the Ministry of the Interior, 13.

43 *Džemijet* was a political party of the Muslim population in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. It represented Albanians, Muslims and Turks in what was then “Southern Serbia” (Macedonia, Kosovo and Metohija, Sandjak). It was formed in August 1918 and officially constituted in Skoplje in late 1919. The party participated in the 1920 and 1923 elections, in which 8 and 14 representatives respectively were elected. In January 1925 the party’s leader Ferhat Draga, an Albanian nationalist who had previously served as mayor of Mitrovica, was arrested and soon after the party was disbanded (for more information: Krivokapić-Jović 2002: 163-165).

44 Organization *Besa* was founded in 1935. The main organizer was Sermet Džadžuli, Secretary of the Albanian Embassy in Belgrade, and since 1937 consul in Skoplje. At the beginning of June 1939 financing of *Besa* was claimed by the Italian mission in Belgrade (MA, I, 17, b. 518, f. 6, No.7, General Headquarters Command of the Third Army Region, October 11, 1939).

supposed to take place in three phases – “general propagan-
da activities on cultural and religious grounds, a public orga-
nization in this field and a secret military organization that
collaborated with Italian army in case of outbreak of inevita-
ble Yugoslav crisis” (Ciano 1948: 96). Head of the Italian mili-
tary intelligence service for Albania was Angelo Antika, based
in Kuks. In parallel, the Fascist Party of Albania was founded
(Borozan 1995: 202-203). One of the leaders of this party was
Kole Biba, who had spent some time in Yugoslavia. Chiefs of the
Kosovo Committee relied on the support of the Italians and put
themselves at their disposal.⁴⁵ They were contemplating the for-
mation of “a border committee” that, using petitions addressed
to the international community, demanded that Italy takes the
Albanian minority in Yugoslavia under protection.⁴⁶ In activat-
ing these issues, Ferat beg Draga, Mustafa Durgutović, Adem
and Asim Marmulaku, Asim Ljuz⁴⁷, Bajazit Boletini and Džafer
Deva were particularly engaged.⁴⁸

Italian officials in their visits to Albania promised an
increase in territory (Borozan 1995: 189).⁴⁹ Based on the sup-
port of the Italians, Albanian leaders pronounced that Koso-
vo and Metohija will be merged with Albania, which will cre-
ate the Greater Albania.⁵⁰ In July 1939, Šefket Vrlaci, President
of the Albanian government, asserted that “Albania was joined
with Italy in order to help to annex the entire South Serbia to
Albania”.⁵¹ In the same month, the Yugoslav General Head-

45 MA, I. 17, b. 7, No.7/3-1, Report for June 1939.

46 MA, I. 17, b. 22, No. 49/10

47 MA, I. 17, b. 22, No. 49/10, 1.

48 MA, I. 17, b. 519, f. 1, No.17, 24 July 1939.

49 AY, 14-23-56, Bulletin of the Ministry of Interior for August and
September 1939.

50 MA, I. 17, b. 22, No. 49/10, 3.

51 MA, I. 17, b. 22, No. 49/10, 3.

quarters report highlighted that 18 renegades in Rugova gorge distributed flyers with the speech of the Albanian Minister of Education, Kolici, which emphasized Mussolini's promise of the Greater Albania with Kosovo and Metohija.⁵² To this end, they held frequent meetings. In Kosovska Mitrovica, Arslan Rustem, a merchant from Suvi Do, "a demagogue who had influence on the Albanians", held meetings in shops and mosques and sent a message that Albanians should "hold united to expel Christian people from their Albanian Kosovo".⁵³ In July 1939 in Peć, Muja Boljetinac met with leaders: Selim Šaban from the village Istinić, Ali Adžija, President of Rznić municipalities, Suljo Azandarović, former judge, as well as with Mamutbegović and Crnoglavić. According to the reports of the General Headquarters Command, they all cooperated with and worked in the Kosovo Committee.⁵⁴ Salih Kadri, a lawyer from Gostivar and former Member of Parliament, was also likely to cooperate with the Kosovo Committee. He was a friend of Ferat beg Dragga, and in August 1939 he traveled through all the border districts of Albania.⁵⁵

Germany's attack of Poland in early September 1939 influenced an increase in Albanian activities. Members of the Committee all worked within the organization "Black Hand", the executive body of the Kosovo Committee, aided by agents of the Italian⁵⁶ and German agencies following the agreement in Berlin (Borozan 1995: 203). In Djakovica and Peć there were meetings of the Albanian leaders, led by Rifat Mahmutbegović, rentier from Peć, Mehmet Jajagić, President Peć Municipality,

52 MA, l. 17, b. 518, f. 5, No. 43, General Headquarters, Command of the Third Army Region, July 27, 1939

53 MA, l. 17, b. 519, f. 1, No. 17, 16 June 1939.

54 MA, l. 17, b. 519, f. 1, No. 17, 24 July 1939.

55 MA, l. 17, b. 95 6, f. 4, No. 10.

56 MA, l. 17, b. 31, No. 2/2, 23 January 1939.

Asim Ljuz, deputy of Drenica district, and in the district of Djakovica particularly thanks to Sulejman beg Kriezju. *Džemijet* was restored, in which beg Ferat Draga, Ilijaz Aguš, Ćerim Zeinović, Šerif Voca, Dačić Jahia, Jusuf Imerović, Adem Marmulaku, Sadik Kurtović and Asim Murteza were engaged.⁵⁷ Ferat beg Draga especially urged the Albanians not to leave their homes and that Albania “is soon to be annexed territory up to Niš”, and so called leaders Sali Kadri from Gostivar, Ilijaz Aguši from district of Nerodimlje, Asim Murtezi from Drenica, Mustafa Durguti from Podrima district and beg Zejnel Stracimir from Kačanik district were told to transmit instructions about increased political engagement at a meeting in Prizren.⁵⁸

Italian support for the idea of Greater Albania was continued in 1940. Italian envoy in Belgrade Mameli sent an act to consul in Skoplje that he will support every action of Albanians in favor of Italy (offered 120,000 dinars), and then two boxes of promotional materials in which they emphasized the benefits of what Italy has done for the Albanian people.⁵⁹ Also, in Rijeka has printed 10,000 leaflets and brochures that were to be spread among the Albanians.⁶⁰ The Yugoslav Command of Debra reported that from Burelja and Kukes the Italian *carabinieri* who knew Albanian will be sent, dressed in Albanian local clothing and with permits designed to enable short stay in Prizren, Djakovica, Struga, Ohrid and Debar.⁶¹ Also, when the Italian army moved from southern and central Albania to Elbasan, and those from Shkodra to Kuks and Tropaja, it was widely rumored among the Albanian population in western Macedonia, Kosovo

57 MA, I. 17, b. 7, No. 27/3-1, Report for October from 4 November 1939.

58 MA, I. 17, b. 22, No.16/3-1, The report of 20 August 1939; The same, No. 17 / 3-1, Report of 30 August 1939.

59 MA, I. 17, b. 95 6, f. 4, No. 9, 1. May 1940.

60 MA, I. 17, b. 95 6, f. 4, No. 8, 1940.

61 MA, I. 17, b. 31, No. 3/4-1, 2 April 1940.

and Metohija that *Kosovars*⁶² with the support of the Italian intelligence service were to organize a rebellion near Prizren, Djakovica and Peć.⁶³ Albanian political emigrants had also been very active, especially in the district of Djakovica. Gani Bey Krieziu, the leader of Albanians near Djakovica, who collaborated with Serbia⁶⁴, arrived in Djakovica and talked with the local Albanian chiefs, when he pointed out that his efforts created the possibility that “all Albanians will soon be in one state”.⁶⁵ Yugoslav Command of the Kosovo division is drawing attention to the Yugoslav government that “more committed work in relation with the Albanians would lead to reduced Albanian discontent”. This implied suppressing secret and clever propaganda of Albanian leaders by restricting their movements, controlling local authorities, changing corrupt officialdom and reviewing the agreement on local border traffic.⁶⁶

When Italy entered the war against France in June 1940 it strengthened Albania’s expectations for the expansion of the territory.⁶⁷ Yugoslav General Headquarters received a report that news were spreading among Muslims in Metohija that Italy “would try to cause large-scale riots on Yugoslav territory as soon as possible” and “it would use the Yugoslav

62 Emigrants from Kosovo or Southern Serbia were known in Albania under the general name *Kosovari*, moved away mainly for political reasons, because they were Turkish clerks and officers, influential chiefs and educated people, then criminals and military fugitives (MA, l. 17, b. 26, f. 39/2, doc.1)

63 MA, l. 17, b. 31, No. 3/4-1, 2 April 1940.

64 MA, l. 17, b. 95 b, F.4, Third Army District Headquarters to Chief of General Headquarters, 28 June 1940.

65 MA, l. 17, b. 26, f. 4, No. 31, Report on the situation in South Serbia.

66 MA, l. 17, b. 519, f. 3, No. 45, May 1940.

67 MA, l. 17, b. 26, f. 3 Report of 19 June 1940; AY, 370-22-538, 7 March 1940.

renegades located in Albania”. For such action weapons were being prepared, which was located near the Yugoslav border in Albania.⁶⁸ Due to spreading news that the Yugoslav political and military circles prepared incursions of Albanian emigrants from the area of Metohija in northern Albania, Angelo Antika started organizing riots in Djakovica and Prizren, giving money to *Kosovars* (six napoleons a month) and buying “besa” of the chief of the border.⁶⁹ Also, he met in Tropoja with Sadik Rama and his son, Zećiri Radži, and Hisen Seid from Junik and deliberated with them to transfer *kachaks* to work for Italy. In Tirana, a new committee was created under the leadership of Ćerim Mahmudbegović from Peć.⁷⁰ Šefket Vrlaci in August 1940, took the opportunity during his visit to Kuks to declare that the time has come to unite the Albanian people and to join Kosovo and Metohija, as well as other cities in Yugoslavia and Greece where Albanians live, with Albania.⁷¹

In the second half of 1940, the situation in Kosovo and Metohija aggravated. Ferat Draga beg worked on ways to organize all the Muslims from Metohija, Kosovo, Sanjak, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina into a Muslim community.⁷² Agents from the Djakovica and Prizren districts were active in submitting data on schedule and strength of the Yugoslav army in Kosovo and Metohija. The propaganda particularly came to the fore when the British bombardment of the Italian bases in Albania brought panic among the Albanian population that Italy will not be able to keep its promises.⁷³

68 MA, I. 17, b. 95 b, f. 4, No. 12.

69 MA, I. 17, b. 31, 40 / 4-1, June 14, 1940.

70 MA, I. 17, b. 26, f. 3.doc 4.

71 MA, I. 17, b. 26, f. 4, No. 33/3, 22 August 1940.

72 MA, I. 17, b. 95 b, f. 4, No.14, 1940; MA, I. 17, b. 25a, No.5/3-1; b. 31, No.57/4-1.

73 MA, I. 17, b. 26, f. 4, no. 35/3, 14 August 1940.

In October 1940, in the report of Yugoslav Minister of the Army and Navy, it was noted that the situation in Kosovo and Metohija was becoming “very serious and worrying” and that it was “a result of improper conducting of systematic internal policies over the past 20 years”.⁷⁴ It was also noted that the Albanian Muslims were more loyal to the interests of the Yugoslav state and were hesitant towards Italy, who gave primacy to Albanian Catholics. Accordingly, the district chief of Vučitrn reported that the Albanians did not show sympathy for the Italians, because they had heard that the Italians want to intern their youth in Abyssinia, and he stressed that “Albanian population would remain loyal as long as we can be firm and strong”.⁷⁵ Also, many prominent leaders in northern Albania have resisted the Italian regime, such as Djon Lješi from Mirdita, Muharem Nezir and Muharem Bajraktar.⁷⁶

At the end of our study, we can conclude that the enmity of Yugoslavia and Albania that manifested itself above all in Kosovo and Metohija was a result of the policy of the Yugoslav state and the Albanian disagreement with that. The Yugoslav state was faced with a large number of Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija (in the interwar period, about three-fifths, or 60% of the population). Although it proclaimed provisions for the protection of the rights of the Albanian minority, the Yugoslav state held them to a minimum. These provisions, since the Congress of Berlin (1878) and Saint-Germain contract (1919), included the equality of citizens. The problem with the Albanian side was that they opposed to the organized government because they were accustomed to their tribal customs and law of Leka Dukagjin but also because they lost the privileged position

74 AY, 138, 7-725-727, 3 December 1940.

75 MA, I, 17, b. 95 6, f. 4, no.14, 1940.

76 MA, I, 17, b. 26, No. 29/3.

they had in the Ottoman Empire. One of the reasons for the poor neighborly relations were Yugoslav-Turkish negotiations about the emigration of Albanians by which the Yugoslav state pressured the Albanian population to move out from Kosovo and Metohija. This further contributed to the Kosovo Committee conducting intensive activities on propaganda against emigration. However, statistics from 1929 to 1939 show that 16.885 inhabitants of Yugoslavia emigrated to Turkey and 4.322 to Albania (*Statistički godišnjak Kraljevine Jugoslavije* 1941: 137). This data does not specify the nationality of emigrants, and the population was moving out not only from Kosovo and Macedonia, but also from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Vojvodina. This shows that the migration of Albanians was not the only case. On the contrary, the greatest decrease in the Turkish population in Yugoslavia was in the years between the wars. The total number of Yugoslav immigrants to all countries of the world was 20-30.000 in one year. Therefore, the number of twenty thousand emigrants in Turkey and Albania for thirteen years (between the wars) cannot be considered a mass phenomenon. Of great importance in the Yugoslav-Albanian relations was the educational policy of the state towards the Albanian national minority, which had not yielded the expected results. The obligations of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia to national minorities to provide education in their mother tongue remained unfulfilled, because the Kingdom was ignoring this matter. It was explained by the vital interests of the state and nation, as well as the lack of desire of the Albanian population to be educated. Albanian society was very conservative and was not ready to accept the educational policy of the country. The patriarchal customs, tribal consciousness, remains of feudal production and archaic concepts led to isolation of the Albanian society. Islamic religious community also contributed to separation of the Albanian population from the country because they wanted

to spread religious principles of Islam through education. Additional factors in the troubling situation were irredentism – defection from the state and the government repression. Attempts by the Yugoslav government to cooperate with Albanian leaders of the emigrants, to establish better relations with Albania and calm the unstable Yugoslav-Albanian border, were not entirely successful. The idea of the Greater Albania, aided by actions of the Kosovo Committee and the financial support of Italy, was je jedan od the cause of bad neighborly relations, and therefore the constant illegal border crossings by Albanian rebels and clashes with Yugoslav border guards. Activities of the Kosovo Committee were becoming more open and more significant, resulting in the creation of the Greater Albania during World War II.

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