

## **THE ACTIVITIES DELEGATION OF THE ALBANIAN COLONY OF TURKEY IN THE PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE 1919**

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### **Abstract**

It was at the end of the First World War, in 1919, that a Peace Conference in Paris was made possible to be convened. The Peace Conference finally opened a new page in the history of international relations. Albanian people were wholly and directly focused on the proceedings of the Paris Conference from the very beginning, hoping that there they would find solutions to their problems and concerns regarding the national question. In the framework of these efforts and fully aware of the danger that threatened the country, the Albanians had to raise their voice and make known the national cause at the Conference meetings considering that, at the time, the territory of the Albanian state was occupied and the Albanians could not depend on the support of any of the triumphant post-war States. They believed that displaying their demands at the Conference convened to establish world peace would be a good opportunity to defend their rights and the injustices inflicted to them. Therefore, in addition to the delegation of the National Government from the Congress of Durres, whose purpose was to represent the Albanian people in the Conference, there were other representatives from the Albanian diaspora. One of them was the delegation of the Albanian Colony of Turkey. The purpose of the activity of this Albanian representation was the protection of the independence of Albania, the protection of the territorial integrity of the Albanian state from the danger of a new fragmentation and the efforts for the recovery of the country. The delegates of the Albanian colonies worked together carrying out many activities in aid of the national cause, as well as propagating the right of existence of this nation through the press, meetings with various personalities or through memoranda sent to major states. The article dwells on the diplomatic and political activity of the representatives of the Albanian Colony of Turkey at this conference. Despite the difficult circumstances, the representatives of the Albanian Colony of Turkey believed in the idea that the Albanian state would rise again. Their activity marked the historical period of the Albanian people.

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### **Öz**

#### **Paris Barış Konferansı'nda Türkiye Arnavut Kolonisi Heyetinin Faaliyetleri 1919**

Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nın sonunda, 1919'de Paris'te bir barış konferansının toplanması mümkün kılındı. Barış Konferansı nihayet uluslararası ilişkiler tarihinde yeni bir sayfa açtı. Arnavut halkı, en başından beri, ulusal soruna ilişkin sorunlarına ve endişelerine orada çözüm bulacaklarını umarak, tamamen ve doğrudan Paeris Konferansı'nın işleyişine odaklanmıştı. Bu çabalar çerçevesinde ve ülkeyi tehdit eden tehlikenin tamamen farkında olan Arnavutlar, o sırada Arnavut devlet topraklarının işgal edildiğini ve göz önünde bulundurarak Konferans toplantılarında seslerini yükseltmek ve ulusal davayı açıklamak duyurmak zorunda kaldılar. Arnavutlar, müzaffer savaş sonrası devletlerin hiçbirinin desteğine güvenemezlerdi. Dünya barışını tesis etmek için toplanan Konferansta taleplerini ortaya koymanın, haklarını ve kendilerine yapılan haksızlıkları savunmak için iyi bir fırsat olacağına inanıyorlardı. Bu nedenle, amacı, Konferansta Arnavut halkını temsil etmek olan Durres Kongresi'nden Ulusal Hükümet delegasyonuna ek olarak, Arnavut diasporasından başka temsilciler de vardı. Bunlardan biri de Türkiye'nin Arnavut Kolonisi heyetiydi. Bu Arnavut temsilciliğinin faaliyetinin amacı, Arnavutluk'un bağımsızlığının korunması, Arnavutluk devletinin toprak bütünlüğünün yeni bir parçalanma tehlikesinden korunması ve ülkenin toparlanması için çaba gösterilmesiydi. Arnavut sömürgelerinin delegeleri, basın yoluyla, çeşitli şahsiyetlerle yapılan toplantılar veya büyük devletlere gönderilen muhtıralar aracılığıyla bu ulusun var olma hakkını yaymanın yanı sıra, ulusal davaya yardımcı birçok faaliyet yürüterek birlikte çalıştılar. Zor şartlara rağmen, Türkiye'nin Arnavutluk kolonisi temsilcileri, Arnavutluk devletinin yeniden yükselleceğine inanıyorlardı. Faaliyetleri, Arnavut halkının tarihi dönemine damgasını vurdu.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Paris Barış Konferansı, Türkiye Arnavut kolonisi temsilcileri, Muhtıra, Avrupa*

### **Introduction**

Following the proclamation of independence on November 28, 1912, and the subsequent separation of Albania from the Ottoman Empire, there was a notable surge in the emigration of Albanians to foreign countries. This occurred due to the challenging political and economic circumstances that the Albanian lands were subjected to between 1912 and 1920. Amidst the Balkan wars, Albanians were compelled to relocate from their territories, primarily due to the influence exerted by neighbouring nations such as Greece, Serbia, and Montenegro. Consequently, a significant portion of the Albanian population was compelled to establish new residences in Turkey. An Albanian colony, which was founded prior to and during the proclamation of independence on November 28, 1912, resided and worked in this country<sup>1</sup>. The number of Albanian emigrations worldwide expanded significantly during the first two decades of the 19th century, following the previous forced migrations. These emigrations were mostly driven by economic motives and had already commenced in the 19th century.

Nevertheless, the emigration history of Albanians predates this period, with documented evidence dating back to the 16th century, indicating the migration of Albanian tribes towards Anatolia. Many of these immigrants obtained employment in

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<sup>1</sup> *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, 2007, p.510.

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agriculture as field labourers and security personnel for local landowners<sup>2</sup>. In his memoirs, Evliya Çelebi recounts the presence of Albanians in Istanbul, Karesi (Bahkesir), Hüdavendigar (Bursa), dating back to the 17th century. He mentions the existence of Albanian communities in Bursa and a village named Arnavutköy in the district of Karacabey<sup>3</sup>. In the 19th century, there was a significant rise in the emigration of the labour force, leading to the departure of many Albanians and other Balkan residents to Anatolia, Istanbul, Romania, Egypt, and other regions, either temporarily or permanently.

Due to their impoverished and illiterate status, as well as their occupation as day labourers, this group of individuals faced mistreatment within the diaspora. The majority of them were employed as shepherds, artisans, labourers involved in loading and unloading, and in certain cases, farmers.

Among them were those who were unable to secure employment. In order to provide mutual assistance and convene meetings, they congregated in groups within the urban area. The local authorities, along with the central government in Istanbul, harboured suspicions towards these unemployed Albanian groups, fearing the potential turmoil that could ensue from the presence of this large number of individuals aimlessly roaming the streets. As a result, certain sultans enacted decrees prohibiting Albanians from migrating and seeking employment in the imperial capital.

Another cohort consisted of individuals who received their education from the most prestigious Ottoman institutions. This group held the highest-paying positions and commanded significant respect throughout society. Based on historical sources and statistical data, it is evident that they successfully assimilated into the Turkish government and society, occupying prominent positions in both the administrative and military sectors.

Albanians from various regions such as Korça, Gjirokastra, Delvina, Skrapar, Mat, Dibra, Manastir, Tetova, Prilep, Skopje, Kumanova, Lipjan, Ferizaj, Prizren, Peja, Janina, Follorina, Kosturi, etc., migrated from Albania and the old Albanian vilayets<sup>4</sup>. Based on Ottoman records, any Albanian individual seeking to establish residence in the Ottoman Empire simply needed to file a formal request to the Ottoman consul, who would promptly issue them an identity card known as *Tezkere-i Osmanî*<sup>5</sup>.

During this period, Albanians were compelled to establish themselves in isolated regions of Anatolia, specifically in the vilayets of Konia, Ereğli, Karağaç, Illgën, Akşehir, Saidli, Karaman, and others. Between Sivas and Diyarbakır, there were a total of 64 inns that were occupied by Albanian immigrants. Upon receiving reports from local officials regarding the existence of vacant villages in the region, the Ottoman government deemed it suitable to relocate the Albanians who had arrived to these villages. He promptly implemented methods to arrange their placement, ensuring they were positioned in distinct places while being kept apart from one another. Further

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<sup>2</sup> Faroqhi, 1984, p.271.

<sup>3</sup> Celebi, 2001, 146, 147.

<sup>4</sup> Buzhala, 2011, p.70-71.

<sup>5</sup> BOA, DH.SN. THR. 69, 41.

evidence of this strategy of segregation is provided by a telegraph dispatched by Talat Pasha. On October 1, 1915, Talat Pasha, the Minister of the Interior of the Ottoman Empire, issued a directive to the emigration department in the vilayet of Hüdavendiğar, instructing them 'to divide and settle Albanians and Bosnians among the Turkish population in a proportional manner, but not to unite them'<sup>6</sup>.

In 1917, during the First World War, the Young Turks enacted a decree titled "*Albanians and their settlement*" in response to the ongoing influx of Albanian immigrants to Turkey. The edict asked three things: firstly, to prohibit non-Muslim Albanians from entering the Ottoman realm; secondly, to deny them permission to reside in major towns; and thirdly, to conduct a census in Istanbul and Izmir to determine the precise number of arrivals<sup>7</sup>.

However, in 1918, the Ottoman government, compelled by both domestic circumstances and external influence, was obliged to announce amnesty. Following the declaration of amnesty, the Albanians promptly established themselves in numerous significant regions of Turkey, particularly in the vicinity of cities such as Istanbul, Tekirdağ, Bursa, Edrene, Kütahya, Izmir, Ineboli, Kırklareli, Sakarya, Aydın, and others. Residing in various districts of these cities, they established their livelihoods and commenced engaging in a range of economic, commercial, and personal endeavours, while also assimilating into the societal fabric of their host country.

In light of the country's current situation and the perceived threat to Albania from neighbouring countries, as well as the goal of unifying all Albanian territories that were not included in the Albanian state following the London Treaty of July 29, 1913, the Albanians residing in Turkey initiated further efforts to voice their opposition against the perceived injustices that endangered the Albanian nation.

Disastrous events such as the Balkan Wars and the First World War brought many suffragettes to the Albanian nation, pushing the Albanians of Turkey to organize to loudly voice and address the injustices against Albania. Under these conditions, the diplomatic tables of the Paris Peace Conference (held between 1919-1920) would be a decisive factor to further mark the fate of Albania: whether Albania would recover as an independent country or definitely disappear from the political map of the Balkans. Therefore, the Albanian diaspora and, among them, the Albanian colony of Turkey would play an important role in the framework of successive efforts and wars in many directions of the Albanians for national unification.

### **1. The establishment of the Albanian Colony in Istanbul**

In the mid-20s of the twentieth century the estimated number of Albanian sliving in Turkey was 250,000-300,000, of whom 60,000 were found in Istanbul<sup>8</sup>. These emigrants had reached Turkey mostly from the regions inhabited by Albanians in Serbia and Montenegro. According to the roughly estimated numbers, over half a million

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<sup>6</sup> BOA, DH. SFR.54-A/357, *Iskan-ı Asair ve Muhacirin Müdüriyeti'nden Ankara Vilayeti'ne çekilen 17 Eylül 1331 (1 Ekim 1915) tarihli cevabi telgrafi.*

<sup>7</sup> Dündar, 2001, p.112-113.

<sup>8</sup> *Kalendari Kombiar*, Tiranë: 1928, f.44.

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Albanians had been displaced by these regions between World War I and World War II<sup>9</sup>. Turkey was the only country where Albanians – both Muslims and Christians – would, at the time, find refuge so they began to organize more efficiently and to make their voice heard against the injustices that threatened the Albanian nation.

On January 1, 1918, a group of Albanian personalities in Istanbul decided to establish an association called the "*Auxiliary Association of the Albanian Colony in Turkey*". The main purpose of establishing this association was to strengthen the close relations between Albanians. All the Albanians of Turkey, wherever they were, would unite and coordinate efforts for moral, human, commercial and wellbeing needs.

In order to achieve this goal, the Albanians of Turkey had to make sure they could provide their compatriots with every possible patriotic service<sup>10</sup>. Each member was assigned duties and obligations and in order to sign up for membership they had to be over 21 years of age. A year later, in order to strengthen mutual feelings of love and sincerity among Albanian compatriots and heighten their connection with the motherland (Albania), on March 3, 1919, the entire Albanian community of Turkey was reunited under an association called "*Albanian Association*"<sup>11</sup>.

The status of this association consisted of 54 articles, whereby the duties and rights of each member as well as the way of organizing the colonies were defined<sup>12</sup>. The statute stated that: "*the purpose of this Albanian association is the unification of the Albanian lands; assistance to any compatriot; the connection to the national ideal; and the Albanian protection and propaganda*".

On March 15, 1919, a request in the form of an entreaty was sent to the Ottoman Ministry of Internal Affairs notifying the latter about the establishment of the association and seeking permission for the recognition and legalization of the association. The Albanian denomination of the association in the official application reads "*Committee of the Albanian Colony in Turkey*". The headquarter of the association was Hani of Turkey (Türkiye Hanı), located behind the building of the New Post Office in Istanbul<sup>13</sup>. The founders and leaders of the Committee were: Nezir Bey, Hasan Hysein Bey Tetova, Selman Ulvi Bey, Mustafa Bey, Imam Xhemaletin Efendiu, Dr. Ihsan Fevzi Bey, Hasan Hajdar Bey and Hysejin Fuat Prishtina.

The purpose of the Committee of the Albanian colony according to the official request of the establishment is explained as follows: "*to take the necessary initiatives for the unification of the Albanian lands that were left outside the borders of the country (Albania) in the London Conference, (article 5), to make efforts to strengthen the loving bond between Albanians everywhere, to ensure national unity and to help people in*

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<sup>9</sup> McCarthy, 2017, p.170-171.

<sup>10</sup> AQSh, Fondi.101 (Shoqëritë shqiptare në Turqi), Dosja. 4, viti.1921, *Statute of the Albanian Colony of Istanbul, on the internal organization of the colony and its branches*.

<sup>11</sup> AQSh, Fondi.101, Dosja 5, viti 1919, f.9-14. The Ministry of Interior is notified on the establishment of the company named "Albanian Society", 3/4/1919.

<sup>12</sup> AQSh, Fondi. 101, Dosja 4, viti 1921, *Statute of the Albanian Colony of Istanbul, on the internal organization of the colony and its branches. Aid Society of the Istanbul Colony*:

<sup>13</sup> Tunaya, 1986, p. 452.

*need (Article 6), as well as to make propaganda to protect the interests and rights of Albania”<sup>14</sup>.*

After the Ottoman government approved the recognition of the Albanian Association in Istanbul as a non-political association, the members of the Association began to come together even more, trying to open branches of the Association in different cities of Turkey, where their compatriots were located. The Albanians of Istanbul of the "*Albanian Relief Association*" (Arnavut Teavün Cemiyeti) following its creation converged and elected the Elders or the Central Administrative Council<sup>15</sup>.

Members of the elected Elders were: Halil Pasha Gjirokastra, Fuad Bej Dibra, Fuad Pasha Prishtina, Fejzullah Libohova, Sezaji Libohova, Shefqet Fishti, Hasan Selim Delvina, Syrja Gjirokastra, Nazif Voshtina, Shan Tepelena, lawyer Benoit Blinishti (Shkodra), Kalkandeleni, and others.

Following this action, the leadership of the Association had called on all compatriots wherever they lived and worked in the cities of Turkey, to open branches of "*Arnavut Teavun Cemiyeti*" (Albanian Relief Association). This Association, in principle, was democratic, and its main work was based on the ability to help all Albanian emigrants in need. Branches of this Association were later opened in Tekirdağ, Edrene, Bursa, Inegol, Izmir, Aydin, and other cities.

All Albanian clubs in Turkey were connected with each other as well as with the central club of Istanbul and furthered the cooperation between them.

## **2. The activity of the Albanian Colony delegation at the Paris Peace Conference**

January 18, 1919, marked the beginning of the Paris Peace Conference. The Conference works would address the fate of Albania, as such, the attention of the Albanian people was entirely directed to the works of this Conference since its very start, hoping that the Conference would propose fair legislative solutions to their national demands<sup>16</sup>. This view stemmed from statements made by the Great Powers and in particular the United States, which asserted to be supporting small nations.

Knowing the intentions of the war-winning states, especially Italy's annexation of the provinces of Albania and its rivalry with Serbia for their expansion to the detriment of the Albanian borders, the Albanians made an urgent request for the formation of an Albanian government.

The formation of this government was finalised by the Congress of Durres, held on December 25, 1918, with the participation of representatives from many provinces of the country, mainly from those of the Italian occupation zone. The Congress decided to form a government that would represent the country both in the domestic and international arena. They elected Turhan Pashe Permeti as the Prime Minister. Turhan

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<sup>14</sup> Özcan, 2011, p. 50.

<sup>15</sup> AQSH, Fondi. 101, Dosja 5.V.1919 . Qendrës së Përgjithshme të Shoqërisë së Shqiptarëve të Turqisë në Stamboll.

<sup>16</sup> *Historia e Shqipërisë*, Vëllimi III, Botim i Akademisë së Shkencave dhe Institutit të Historisë, 8 Nëntori, Tiranë 1984, p.193.

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Pasha was a well-known figure in the diplomatic circles of the time, who was distinguished not only for his capacity as a diplomat, but also for his managerial ability to resolve crises in difficult situations<sup>17</sup>

The government that emerged from the Congress of Durres would send a delegation to defend the Albanian cause in the Peace Conference and would also strive for the establishment of "national borders" and for the "full independence of the Albanian state"<sup>18</sup>.

The delegation left Albania on February 12, 1919 under the leadership of Turhan Pashe Permeti, followed by the members of the delegation: Mihal Turtulli, Mehmet Konica, Luigj Gurakuqi, Luigj Bumçi, Gjergj Fishta, Mid'hat Frashëri and Mustafa Kruja<sup>19</sup>.

Representatives of the Albanian colonies of America and Romania would later follow the government delegation in Paris. In this context, the Albanian colony of Turkey, on January 30, 1919 decided to elect its representatives to the Conference in Paris as well: Halil Pasha Alizoti (Gjirokastra), Father Julio Bonati, Benoit Blinishti, Male Shane Tepelena, Suleyman Fehmi Delvina and Fuad Dibra<sup>20</sup>.

The Albanians residing in Turkey diligently endeavoured to further fortify the pre-existing bond of unity and fraternity among themselves. An attempt was made to offer assistance to pay the substantial costs that the Turkish Albanian delegation will incur during their visit to Paris, with the aim of promoting propaganda in support of the Albanian national cause. We urge all Albanians and affiliates of the "(Albanian Relief Association)," residing and working in Turkey to assist in registering their fellow countrymen in the host country, as they possess accurate knowledge of the Albanian population and first-hand understanding of the challenges faced by their compatriots<sup>21</sup>.

The representatives of the Albanians of Turkey left Istanbul on 7<sup>th</sup> February<sup>22</sup> and arrived in Paris around February 24, after almost 20 days of travel<sup>23</sup>. It consisted of five members and Halil Alizoti was elected Chairman. From the first polls conducted in the French capital, the Albanians who came to Turkey directly assessed the risk of Italian pretensions. Therefore, they joined other Albanian delegation's protests on the first sessions of the Conference against the Secret Treaty of London of 1915. These representatives were not oriented towards the Italian diplomacy. The Italian High Commissioner in Istanbul, Carlo Sforza, had been informed of such representation by his superiors in Rome, when he had given his approval for the departure of the delegation to Rome<sup>24</sup>. From the meetings with the representatives of Rome they had understood that Italy adhered to its plans in Albania, especially in Vlore. In these circumstances, they did not agree with the political position of the Durres delegation so

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<sup>17</sup> Egro, 2014, no.1-2, p. 242 .

<sup>18</sup> Çami and Verli, 2015, p .77.

<sup>19</sup> *Albania before 1919*, p.7-13.

<sup>20</sup> Kruja and Markagjonaj, 2006, p179-181: Selenica, 1928, p.16.

<sup>21</sup> AQSh, F.1010, D.5, Viti 1919-1923, *Procesverbal i Kolonisë Shqiptare të Stambollit* 3.1.1919.

<sup>22</sup> Gazeta "Populli", *Delegacioni i Stambollit*, 8 March 1919, no.2, p.2.

<sup>23</sup> Gazeta "Populli", *ibid*, p.2

<sup>24</sup> DDI, 1914-1918, *Seria VI, Vol II, Doc.117, Doc. 164, Rome 1954.*

far, which had remained silent against the claims of Italy and which was reluctant to openly oppose the Italian diplomacy. Therefore, the Albanian representation refused to further cooperate with this delegation, though they had not previously considered the idea in the first days when they left for Paris. Albanian representatives began to act independently in the hope that this approach might bring benefits to the cause they had been charged with.<sup>25</sup>

In this context, on March 7<sup>th</sup>, 1919, the chairman of the Albanian representation in Turkey addressed a memorandum to the representatives of the United States, praising them as delegates of a country that was free from the obligations of the Treaty of London. The main focus of this memorandum was the risk posed by the Treaty related to the question for the future of Albania. In addition to the request that the U.S oppose the implementation of points 6 and 7 of this Treaty, the Albanian representation in Turkey came up with another proposal to the American delegation. Albanian representatives expressed their desire that the United States take Albania "under protection", since, as emphasized in the memorandum, they considered this protection as the only means to end foreign interventions and invasions in Albania. Moreover, the representatives of the Albanians of Turkey regarded their proposal of March 7<sup>th</sup> as being the true expression of the feelings of all Albanians.<sup>26</sup> In addition to these actions, members of the Albanian representation in Turkey were active even in other directions.

After the unfavourable results the Albanian representation received from the representatives of Italy, Albanians started knocking on the doors of the delegations of Greece and Serbo-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom, as two countries that had their claims to Albania on one hand, but had contradictions for Albania's partition with Italy on the other.

One of the meetings with the representative of these countries took place on March 12, 1919. The meeting was between Halil Pasha Alizoti, as head of the representation of the Albanian colony of Turkey, and the Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos. Halil Pasha Alizoti was accompanied in the meeting by Mihal Shani. According to the latter, the head of the Greek delegation had clearly stated that Greece could not cooperate with the Albanians against Italy, so the Albanian representation did not get any hope from the Greek counterpart.<sup>27</sup>

The Albanian colony in Istanbul, and in all Turkey, followed with great attention and concerns all the stages of the Paris Peace Conference, giving its contribution towards the reconfirmation of national independence and the protection of Albanian territories from a new partition.

In addition to their efforts at the Conference in Paris, the Central Committee of the Albanian colony tried to organize and hold meetings with foreign missions working in Istanbul<sup>28</sup>. At the same time, making use of the printed press of Istanbul, the Central Committee of the Albanian colony addressed to all Albanians to contemplate about the

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<sup>25</sup> *Gazeta "Populli"*, *Letër nga Parisi*, Shkodër 29.08.1919

<sup>26</sup> *Memorandum confidential de la delegation de la Colonie Albanaise de Turquie à messieurs les délégués des Etats-unis Amérique à la Conferenca de la Paix à Paris*. Paris: 7.3.1919, p.172.

<sup>27</sup> Kadria, 2020, p.337.

<sup>28</sup> *Gazeta "Populli"*, *Shqiptarët në Turkie*, Shkodër 9 tetor 1919, f.2.

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issue of Albania, because great propaganda was articulated in the international circles against Albania.<sup>29</sup>

Through the published articles the Committee sought the moral and intellectual support of a large and rich state, located as far away from the Albanian coast as possible, and having no political or commercial interests towards Albania.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the Committee even insisted on this power "*to be no other power than the United States of America.*" On April 15, 1919, all Albanian colonies delegations sent a joint memorandum addressed to the presidency of the Peace Conference<sup>31</sup>, where the delegation openly denounced Italian policy, opposed its claims in Albania, denounced its weakness, protectorate and intentions for the annexation of Vlore.<sup>32</sup>

The joint memorandum of the delegations of the Albanian colonies of April 15, 1919, which openly denounced the Italian policy, opposed the position of the delegation of the government of Durres, which still adhered to the line of agreement with Italy. At the same time, Halil Pasha Gjirokastra, Benedikt Blinishti, Pandeli Evangjeli, and Parashqevi Qiriazzi sent a letter to Turhan Pasha, the head of the Durres government delegation, requesting that the people's representatives coordinate their political movements and be able to sustain the same attitude to the national question in Paris.

Having different convictions for resolving the national question, different groups of delegations had led to discrepancies between one-another. Some of the representatives of the Turkish delegates had held debates and contradicted openly the delegation of the Durres government. One example of these disputatious representatives who was also the loudest to spur debate was Halil Pasha Gjirokastra.<sup>33</sup>

Fuad Dibra, the primary patron of the Turkish colonial delegation, as well as other Albanians, advocated for a strictly nationalist agenda, which was also supported by international individuals who were supporters of Albania. Fuad Dibra has engaged in patriotic endeavours to protect Albania, while also investing significant funds to publish pieces in newspapers and promote Albanian propaganda in the western media<sup>34</sup>.

Mehdi Frashëri states that "the Turkish representatives consistently employed a confrontational tone, particularly when interacting with Italians." The author emphasised that "while the invasion of Vlora was indeed the primary cause of Albania's separation, the use of language did not resolve the national issue. Instead, it further antagonised Italy, which could have potentially shown support for cities like Shkodra, Korca, and Gjirokastra"<sup>35</sup>.

In April 1919, the discussion on the Albanian issue reached a critical point. The Albanian delegates from all the colonies saw it necessary to initiate a political campaign aimed at exposing and publicly condemning Italian policies in these circumstances.

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<sup>29</sup> *AQSh*, Fondi no.101, *Shoqëritë e Stambollit*, Dos.2, V.1919, p.68. Koncept deklaratë frengjisht.

<sup>30</sup> Gazeta "Dielli", Boston Massacuset, e enjte , 3 prill 1919.

<sup>31</sup> *Historia e Shqiptarëve gjatë shekullit XX*, 2017, p.563.

<sup>32</sup> *The Struggle* 2020, pp.166-168.

<sup>33</sup> Frashëri, 2003, p.66.

<sup>34</sup> Vllamasi, 1995, p.284.

<sup>35</sup> Frashëri, 2003, p.171.

There were two main reasons for Italy's actions: firstly, Italy wanted to establish its control over Albania and take over the city of Vlora. Secondly, Italy's policies directly undermined the objectives of the Albanian National Movement in European political circles<sup>36</sup>. The Albanian issue had a wide-ranging impact, not only on the Albanians themselves, but also on the Balkans as a whole, thereby influencing the interests of European nations.

Instead of serving the Albanian cause, these delegates quarrelled with each other, arguing on petulant issues such as the way they drafted various memoranda and requests to be sent to the Peace Conference<sup>37</sup> for the Albanian rights. Some delegates were altercationing in chatty tones, some others in harsher tones, but all tended to express ideas in mere confusion; it was obvious their intention was not to serve Albania but to bring further damages.<sup>38</sup>

The news and continuous disputes among the delegates of the Albanian colony of Turkey, especially with Turhan Pasha, head of the government delegation, pushed the administrative Council of the Istanbul Colony to send lawyer Sulejman Delvina<sup>39</sup> to Paris, on April 28, 1919. Sulejman Delvina would be appointed as head of the Albanian delegation in Turkey in place of Halil Pasha<sup>40</sup>. Sulejman Delvina was a renowned political figure who was to be elected Prime Minister of Albania by the Congress of Lushnja a few months later, in January 1920. Changes in the composition of the delegation had, at times, led to changes in perspectives. Thus, the main reason that the Albanian colony of Istanbul sent Sulejman Delvina to Paris was to defend the interests of Albania on the colony's behalf, and definitely resolve the disputes that had arisen with other Albanian representatives at the conference.<sup>41</sup> Delvina was also charged with a special mission: he had the right to make any necessary changes among the representatives of this colony had he found that someone "*was pursuing a policy contrary to the interests of the country, as stated in the act of his delegation.*"<sup>42</sup>

At this time, the representations of the Albanian colonies of Romania, USA and Turkey had undergone changes since March and April 1919.

In June 1919, news that "the Conference was considering of giving Italy the mandate for Albania" was published on the newspapers. However, based on the information at their disposal, the delegation of the Albanian colony of Istanbul did not confirm the news.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> AMPJ, Fondi MPJ, viti 1919, dos.18, p.30-34.

<sup>37</sup> The Paris Peace Conference opened on January 18, 1919 at the castle of Versailles in Paris.

<sup>38</sup> Qiriazzi, 1970, f.39.

<sup>39</sup> Kuke, 2004, f.25.

<sup>40</sup> AQSh, F. 101, D.59, V.1919. The decision of the Albanian Club "Diturak" for the dismissal of Halil Pasha from the head of the delegation and the appointment of Sulejman Delvina.

<sup>41</sup> Fjalori Enciklopedik Shqiptar, Akademia e Shkencave e RPSSH, Tiranë: 1985, p.177.

<sup>42</sup> AQSh, Fondi no. 688, (Sulejman Delvina), Dosja 1. Decision dt. 28.04.1919 of Albanian colony of Turkey for sending Sulejman Delvina to Paris:

<sup>43</sup> AQSh, Fondi.no. 101, D.7, p.1, Report sent to the presidency in Istanbul by Halili, Bonati, Fuadi, Shani, Blinishti. Paris, 2 qershor 1919

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Still, the news prompted Halil Pasha Alizoti, one of the Albanian representatives of the Albanian colony of Turkey, to send a letter to the U.S President Wilson. In the letter, Halil Pasha thanked President Wilson for the help the U.S had given to the Albanian people and expressed his regret that Wilson was leaving Paris without finally resolving the Albanian issue.<sup>44</sup>

Throughout all their stay in Paris, the representatives of the Albanian colonies had one main principle: to protect the Albanian interests, attainable not only by exchanging ideas but also by drafting projects and protests, and joint memoranda together with other delegations.

On July 4, 1919, the same spirit of cooperation was evident in the letter jointly drafted by the delegates of the Albanian colonies of Turkey, Romania, Egypt and America, and sent to Tiron, the head of the Italian delegation to the Peace Conference. Through this document, they aimed to thank "*the Italian state that had saved the Albanians from the attacks of the Serbian and Greek armies. Albanians also consider this to be their most sacred duty and will do their best to maintain their respect and friendship towards the noble Italian nation*"<sup>45</sup>.

They demanded the creation of an independent state, including all territories that had been unjustly annexed to Montenegro, Greece and Serbia. But the main obstacles were the "*clauses of the treaty of London, as suggested by the already completely changed circumstances.*"<sup>46</sup>

Through the ideas expressed, we deduce that all Albanian delegations along with the representatives of the Albanian colony in Istanbul sought the solution of the Albanian issue as a whole, through friendship and diplomacy, which seemed to be achieved with a large country such as Italy. Meanwhile, Italy, on its behalf, constantly insisted on Vlore and the protectorate, and even entered into talks with Greece for the partition of Albania.

On July 29, 1919, an agreement, known as the Titoni -Venizelos agreement, was reached between Italy and Greece. The agreement dealt with all the problems that divided Italy and Greece at that time, and the main focus was the division of the territory and spheres of influence in Albania.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, the main scope of the Italian-Greek agreement was to have the respective countries present themselves before the Peace Conference speaking a common language.<sup>48</sup>

Putting Albania under Italy's control would be a cause for political unrest in the Balkans. In order to save Albania from the Italian control, the Albanian political personalities tried *in primes* to reconcile their thoughts and actions through the Albanian delegations. Mithat Frashëri stated that the delegations of Romania, Turkey, the

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<sup>44</sup> Silajdzić, 1999, p.111-112.

<sup>45</sup> AMPJ, Viti 1919, Dosja no.9, Paris, 4 korrik 1919, f.227/ Letter from the envoy of the Albanian Colony of Turkey, President Halili. The Mission of the Albanian Colony in Romania, signed by Pandeli Evangjeli, the Mission of the Albanian Colony to the USA, signed by Mrs. P. Qiriazhi.

<sup>46</sup> AMPJ, Dos. 9, *ibid*, p.228.

<sup>47</sup> Puto, 2010, p.290.

<sup>48</sup> *Historia e Popullit, idem*, p.141.

Political Party and Vatra present in Paris were all united in “a common thought, in other words, the self-government and the integrity of the paternal land, not allowing Italy to have all Albanians on the hook.”<sup>49</sup>

On September 11, 1919, an article entitled "About Albania" was published in the newspaper "Vakit". This article stated that "Epirus and Chameria will remain within the borders of Albania, as the London Conference had stated in 1913, since 85% of the Albanian population lives in these two provinces as Mr. Titoni claimed and, as it turned out at the end of the investigation, the American commission had also claimed on their behalf".<sup>50</sup>

After being acquainted with Titoni's statements in the Italian parliament, the delegation of the Albanian colony in Turkey thought there was a probability that a plebiscite would take place to save Northern Epirus as a last resort. The delegation would therefore ask the Administrative Council to investigate on the number of Muslims in Istanbul and other parts of Turkey such as in Korça, Kolonja, Përmeti, Tepelena [Tepedelen], Gjirokastra, Kurveleshi, Delvina and Himara (as *kaza*). In addition, they requested statistics to be sent as soon as possible, indicating the number of Albanians living in Turkey who had already reached the age of 19, the number of inhabitants of Epirus living in Turkey, and the number of those willing to go to Albania if the need arose.<sup>51</sup> It seemed that the plebiscite was highly desired by the delegates of Istanbul, who hoped to resolve the issue of Korça and Gjirokastra through the plebiscite. They finally demanded that this task be kept very secret, not be spread, and make the Greeks unable to take other measures against.

In addition to the efforts at the Paris Peace Conference, the club in Istanbul tried to organize and hold meetings with the American, British and French representations working in Istanbul.<sup>52</sup> In a letter sent to the newspaper "Populli", one of the activists of the colony showed how the central Albanian society was organized in Istanbul. He further addressed the ties they maintained with foreign authorities in Istanbul, as well as the letters sent to Lord A. Herbert, a friend of the Albanians.

Conversely, Halil Pasha Alizoti, in the interview given to the newspaper "Le Petit Parisian" said that: "We demand that the Albanian state include the provinces that have been separated from the country in its borders, since they (the provinces) are ours, and have the majority Albanian population (living there) ..."<sup>53</sup>

In the framework of this interview, Mehmet Bey Konica and Halil Pasha Gjirokastra also met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of France Pishon; the latter stated that: "The Conference does not intend to change the map of Europe; it will only repair the borders of the beneficiary states. The Conference thereby decided that no

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<sup>49</sup> Gazeta "Albania", Worcester, 28 February 1919.

<sup>50</sup> *Vakit*, "Armavutluk Hakkında", 11 Ekim 1919.

<sup>51</sup> *AQSH*, F.101, D.7, f.24. On the efforts of the Albanian delegation with foreign delegations. 4 nandor 1919.

<sup>52</sup> Gazeta "Populli", "Shqiptarët në Turkiye", Shkoder, 9 Tetor 1919.

<sup>53</sup> Gazeta "Populli", "Një intervistë e Halil Pashës", dhënë gazetarit Maurixë Prax". 3 Tetor 1919, no.35, p.3-4.

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*lands shall be separated from the allied states and given to others. If any delegation made promises of this kind, they have not told you the truth".*<sup>54</sup>

In addition, in another meeting held with the presence of Mr. Polk, the first American delegate to the conference, they informed the American representative on the borders of Albania, explaining the issue of Gjirokastra and Korça based on the geographical map, and explained that an Albania deprived of these two provinces had no possibility to exist.<sup>55</sup>

In early January 1920, the Albanian representatives of the colonies of Turkey, the U.S and Romania at the Conference had reached a joint agreement to protest against the project of the Supreme Council of the Great Powers, calling on them to keep their promises since they "*fought in the name of principles such as nationality and liberation of oppressed people*".<sup>56</sup>

In this call, they considered the fragmentation of the Albanian nation an injustice even for the fact that "*it (Albania) is one of the most ancient nations of Europe*"<sup>57</sup>. Furthermore, the call stated below that this fact would suffice for the Great Powers to judge with cold-mindedness and even more not to decide to "*assassinate the national life*"<sup>58</sup>.

Following the news published in the local and foreign newspapers, in February 1920, the delegation of the Turkish colony sent a letter from Paris to the Istanbul club, in which the delegation would describe the situation created at the Conference, after the project of January 13-14, 1920 known as "the Nit compromise."

At the heart of this project was the "Adriatic issue", related to the Albanian cause, as well as the rivalry between Italy and the Serbo-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom over this issue. The rivalry and desires of the neighbouring states would soon be rejected by the Albanian people themselves.

From January 20 to January 31, 1920, the Congress of Lushnja convened and rejected all the plans of foreign states to the detriment of Albania. This Congress overthrew the government of Durrës and elected the new government headed by Sulejman Delvina.<sup>59</sup>

The new government elected new delegates to represent the Albanian people at the Peace Conference. This government delegation would represent all Albanians all

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<sup>54</sup> *AQSH*, F. 101, D.7, viti 1919, f.24. On the efforts of the Albanian delegation with foreign delegations. 4 Nëntor 1919.

<sup>55</sup> *AQSH*, F. 101, D.7, viti 1919, Izmir 18 shtator. Letter sent to the General Center of the Albanian Society in Istanbul.

<sup>56</sup> *AQSH*, Fondi no. 30 (Kristo Dako), dos.nr.7, 15 janar 1920, f.59-60. The Great Powers from the delegation of the Albanian Colony of Romania, America, Turkey, addressed to Mr. Clemanso, President of the Paris Peace Conference. (Pandeli Evangjeli, Halili).

<sup>57</sup> *AQSH*, Fondi no. 30 (Kristo Dako), dos.nr.7, 15 janar 1920, f.59. The Great Powers from the delegation of the Albanian Colony of Romania, America, Turkey, addressed to Mr. Clemanso, President of the Paris Peace Conference. (Pandeli Evangjeli, Halili).

<sup>58</sup> Ahmetaj, *Albania*, 2012, p.210.

<sup>59</sup> *AQSH*, F.101, D.7, shkurt 1920. The delegation's protest and its actions in Paris. Formation of the Albanian cabinet under the chairmanship of Sulejman Bey Delvina.

over the world whereas the mission of the delegates of the Albanian colonies of Turkey and other colonies came to an end and the delegates returned to the cities where they worked and lived.

### **Conclusion**

The Turkish Albanian colonies' delegation at the Peace Conference initially advocated for a clear and consistent stance in favour of an independent ethnic Albania. Their objective was to reclaim the regions that had been wrongfully seized by the Great Powers. Nevertheless, certain delegations that took part in the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 encountered difficulties. Despite their notable dedication and enthusiasm, their political readiness and the disunity among some representatives appeared insufficient to present themselves with the desired level of dignity in the eyes of European politics. The rift among them and the divergent viewpoints they had resulted in a reduction of their political endeavours and a failure to accomplish their goals.

To conclude, the Albanian colony of Turkey had its representatives sent to the Paris Peace Conference. The program and the expressed views of the representatives of this body on the Albanian cause were clearly designed with anti-Italian and pro-American overtones; this was also clear in their cooperation mode both with the official delegation as well as the representatives of other colonies. Through protests, joint declarations, interviews provided for various newspapers and the contact with foreign politicians, representatives of the Albanian colony in Turkey attempted and managed to sensitize the Peace Conference decision-makers, especially the American delegation, regarding the unjust decisions taken in relation to the borders of Albania. This delegation was voluntarily funded by representatives of the Albanian colonies in Turkey and other countries.

The official conclusions of the proceedings of the Paris Peace Conference on January 21, 1920, demonstrated that the European diplomacy had not managed to have a unified to the Albanian issue. In European chancelleries, the fate of Albanians remained an issue of debate and disagreement, despite the Albanian mobilization, the determination they demonstrated to be united and to, again, respond united to the attitude of the time of European powers. The way the Albanian issue was tackled by the European powers during the Paris Peace Conference, at the same time, highlighted the contradictions among the European political systems, which, in turn, paved the way for the creation of a new world order. Despite

Despite the hard work of the Albanian representations, the official conclusion of the work of the Paris Peace Conference on January 21, 1920, failed to unify European diplomacy on the Albanian problem. This problem remained open and will find a solution only in 1921, after Albania's membership in the League of Nations, thanks to the brilliant speech of Fan Noli and the decisive support given by the American President Wilson to the solution of the Albanian issue.

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