

The Question of the Albanian Throne in 1913 and the Conspiracy of Bekir Grebene

Ilirjana KACELI (DEMIRLIKA)* Haxhi ADEMI **

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ABSTRACT

On July 29, 1913, after long talks at the Conference of Ambassadors in London, it was finally decided on the status of Albania. This decision gave Albania its independence, with the guarantee of protection from the six Great Powers. With the proposal of Austria-Hungary and Italy, they appointed the German Wilhelm zu Wied as Prince of Albania. The Ottoman Empire, which had recently relinquished sovereignty over Albania, planned to install an Ottoman Prince of Muslim descent on the throne in order to maintain its influence while countering Serbia and Greece's growing influence. Another significant development was the attempt at an alliance between Albania and Bulgaria's attempt to form an alliance, which was linked to the Beqir Grebene conspiracy. The purpose of this study is to address the efforts made by the Great Powers and the Ottoman Empire regarding the appointment of the leader of the new Albanian state. Based on an analysis of information obtained from archives and documentary sources, we aimed to highlight the challenges faced by Albania in order to maintain independence and build the structures of the new state. Through this study, an overview of international and local dynamics is presented based on archival sources.



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Keywords: Albanian throne, Great Powers, Prince Wied, Alliance, Ottoman Empire.

1913'te Arnavutluk Tahtı Sorunu ve Bekir Grebene Komplosu

ÖZET

29 Temmuz 1913'te Londra'daki Büyükelçiler Konferansı'nda yapılan uzun görüşmelerden sonra nihayet Arnavutluk'un statüsüne karar verildi. Bu karar, altı Büyük Güçten korunma garantisıyla Arnavutluk'a bağımsızlığını verdi. Avusturya-Macaristan ve İtalya'nın önerisiyle Alman Vilhelm zu Wied'i Arnavutluk Prensi olarak atadı. Arnavutluk üzerindeki egemenliğinden yeni feragat eden Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, nüfuzunu korumanın ve Sırbistan ile Yunanistan'ın artan nüfuzuna karşı koymanın bir yolu olarak tahta Müslüman kökenli bir Osmanlı prensi geçirmeyi düşünüyordu. Bir diğer önemli gelişme ise Bekir Grebene komplosuna bağlı olarak Arnavutluk ile Bulgaristan arasında ittifak kurulması girişimiydi. Bu çalışmanın

* (Corresponding author) Prof. Asoc. Dr., University of Shkodër "Luigj Gurakuqi" Faculty of Social Sciences Department of History, E-posta: ilirakaceli@gmail.com, ORCID Id: 0000-0002-8228-9789.

** Prof. Asoc. Dr., Senior Research Associate, "Ali Hadri" Institute of History, Pristina, E-posta: ademihaxhi@hotmail.com, ORCID Id: 0009-0003-0165-6247.

amacı, Büyük Güçler ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğu tarafından yeni Arnavut liderinin atanmasıyla ilgili yapılan çabaları ele almaktır. Arşivlerden ve belgesel kaynaklardan elde edilen bilgilerin analizine dayanarak, Arnavutluk'un bağımsızlığını korumak ve yeni devletin yapılarını inşa etmek için karşılaştığı zorlukları vurgulamayı amaçladık. Bu çalışma aracılığıyla, arşiv kaynaklarına dayalı olarak uluslararası ve yerel dinamiklerin bir genel görünümü sunulmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Arnavutluk Tahtı, Büyük Güçler, Prens Wied, İttifak, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu.

INTRODUCTION

The Albanian National Movement, initiated in the 1830s, primarily sought Albania's autonomy within the Ottoman Empire. The triumph of the Young Turk revolution in 1908 was met with enthusiasm by Albanians, who anticipated that the Sublime Porte would address their demands for cultural, linguistic, and administrative rights. Nevertheless, it quickly became evident that these demands would be disregarded, resulting in a succession of uprisings in Albanian regions, culminating in 1911–1912. The onset of the First Balkan War in October 1912 exacerbated the situation, posing a significant threat to the territorial integrity of Albanian lands and the viability of the Albanian question in the international sphere.

According to Albanian historiography, the rapid advance of the First Balkan War in favour of the Balkan allies intensified talks on the division of the Ottoman territorial heritage. Further talks took place in late October when the great Powers withdrew their previous attitude and declared the status quo in the Balkans that was broken. However, the Balkan states were not satisfied with just the right they carried to unite the territories under Ottoman rule with the mother state. They also sought to deny and take hostage the rights of other population that had not yet established an independent state, such as Albanians and Macedonians (Milo, 2013).

To implement such a policy, the Balkan allies immediately launched attacks to occupy claimed territories in the vilayets of Rumelia, informing the great powers on the matter. The attacks did not allow the Ottoman army to reorganize. At the end of October, in only few days, the Serbs occupied Pristina, Ferizaj, Mitrovica, Skopje, and Prizren. The Montenegrin army occupied Peja, entered Malesi (Highland of Northern Albania), and moved toward Scutari.

About 28.450 regular Ottoman troops fought to defend Scutari; which were dispersed from Lezha and continued toward the border with Montenegro. At the head of the Ottoman garrison was Hasan Riza Paşa (1912-1913 Balkan Savasında İşkodra Savunması, 2007), along with a division of Albanian soldiers led by Esat Paşa Toptani (İşkodra Savunması ve Hasan Riza Paşa, 1987). The Greek army imposed a naval blockade that stretched from Arta Bay to south Igoumetnisa. On November 3 Greek troops captured Preveza, and then besieged the Castle of Janina and bombed, Igoumetnisa and Saranda (ASA, Instituti I Historisë, 2017).

In these moments, the Albanians were under pressure from rapid diplomatic, political and military developments. Their positions were as delicate as it was dangerous ((Demirlika), 2024). A considerable part of the population shared the Islamic faith, especially the privileged calls of civil, judicial, and military administrators, and identified themselves with the Ottomans. A large part of the Islamic population, especially those privileged classes of civil, judicial, and military administration, equated themselves with the Ottomans (Paskal Milo, 2013).

Those who still believed in the liberating mission of the Balkan armies, just as others, were willing to mobilize in the ranks of the Ottoman army. The ottoman past was a legacy that could not be easily forgotten (Milo, Politika e Jashtme e Shqipërisë (1912-1939), 2013.)

However, their unification with the Ottomans gave the Balkan governments strong arguments against the Great Powers and plans to partition. Albanian territories as purely Ottoman territories. The Albanian could not withstand the wave attacks of the Balkan Allies on their own.

One Ottoman officer emphasized that the Albanians' situations was critical if not impossible, to "fight the enemy only with (their) fists" (Hamdi, 1920), showing their inability to withstand attacks by the Balkan allies.

In the unfolding situation in the Balkans, many believed that the only way for Albanians to survive was the create an independent Albania state.

The Declaration of Independence constituted the principal resolution of the Vlorë Assembly, which effectively embodied the collective will of the nation and established itself as the supreme authority of the Albanian state, the custodian and articulator of state sovereignty. This act held the significance of constitutional decisions that affirmed the Albanian people's desire to secede from the Ottoman Empire and establish an independent state (Omari, 1994).

The political situation was exceedingly challenging due to the occupation of a portion of the territory by the Balkan powers. The authority of the Provisional Government of Vlorë initially encompassed a limited region, including Vlorë, Fier, Lushnjë, Berat, and Gjirokastër. On December 17, 1912, the London Conference of Ambassadors from the six Great Powers, chaired by Edward Grey, was convened to address the Albanian issue. The ambassadors represented the two opposing factions of the "Tripartite Alliance" and the "Entente". The conference persisted until July 29, 1913, culminating in the Conference of Ambassadors in London, where definitive resolutions were reached on three matters: a. the political status of the Albanian state; b. the delineation of borders c. the internal structure of the Albanian state.

First, according to the agreement, "Albania would be declared an autonomous, sovereign and hereditary principality, its existence guaranteed by the Great Powers" (Rushiti, 2004).

Second, the Conference of Ambassadors in London decided to define the boundaries of an independent Albania after concluding the talks. Following protracted and contentious discussions, a conciliatory resolution was ultimately reached among the Great Powers, resulting in the delineation of Albania's current borders, which excluded nearly half of the territories populated by Albanians in Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia, and Greece. Thus, the entity referred to as "London Albania" was established" (Luarasi, 2018). The disintegration of Albania and its concessions were rationalised by the necessity to "maintain peace" in Europe.

Following the resolutions of the Conference of Ambassadors in London, the Albanian state was allocated an area of 28,748 km² and a population of approximately 740,000 individuals, representing merely 34.24% of the total ethnic Albanian territories. The state was weak and would, over time, confront the inadequacy of both surface and subterranean resources to satisfy the demands of its populace (Rushiti, Rrethanat politiko-shoqërore në Kosovë 1912-1915, 1986).

However, the declaration of Albanian independence in 1912 represented the culmination of a process that overcame numerous obstacles and affirmed a robust national identity, rooted in the shared language and cultural heritage of the Albanians. This accomplishment served as a fundamental basis for the subsequent development of the Albanian state and the establishment of national identity in the ensuing decades (Clayer, 2007). This signified that Albania would attain independence and sovereignty, with its liberty safeguarded by the six Great Powers.

Third, as part of the Great Powers' compromise, an International Control Commission (ICC) was established to oversee the Albanian state's activities for a period of 5 to 10 years (Zaharia, 24 mars

2003). Furthermore, one stipulation of the agreement dictated that the Ottoman Empire would forfeit its authority over Albania. The Conference also determined the structure of Albania's monarchical regime, which would be governed by a prince selected by the six Great Powers. The candidate was to be chosen by consensus between Austria-Hungary and Italy, securing the endorsement of the other states involved in the conference. The selection of the prince was intricately connected to the new governmental structure that Albania was to adopt, which would also alter its geopolitical alignment. This model resembled the strategies employed by the Great Powers for other Balkan nations at the close of the 19th century. This decision sought to guarantee favourable outcomes for the obligations of the Great Powers and for Albania's advancement. Nonetheless, at the conclusion of the agreement, another significant issue arose: the identity of the prince who would ascend to the Albanian throne.

1.THE SELECTION OF THE PRINCE OF ALBANIA

Furthermore, one of the agreement's provisions stated that the Ottoman Empire would lose its right to govern Albania. The Conference also determined the structure of Albania's monarchical regime, which would be led by a prince chosen by the six Great Powers.

The Entente delegated the choice of the prince of Albania to the "Tripartite Alliance", particularly to the two Adriatic powers invested in Albania. The Entente exhibited indifference as Albania did not fall within its sphere of influence, and a prince from the Entente nations was deemed unacceptable to Austria (Kocaqi, 2015).

The candidate had to be chosen by Austria-Hungary and Italy through consensus, and the other states in the Conference had to approve it. The selection of the prince was closely related to Albania's new form of government. This model was similar to what the Great Powers had implemented in other Balkan countries at the end of the nineteenth century. This decision intended to ensure positive outcomes for both the Great Powers' commitments and Albania's progress. However, at the conclusion of the agreement, another important issue arose, that is, the name of the prince who would succeed to Albania throne.

There were numerous applicants for this position. Some people volunteered for the throne, while others were proposed by the Great Powers, Austria and Italy, which hoped that by selecting the candidate, they would secure a prince who would represent their interests in Albania and thus ensure their influence in the region.

Initially, Ahmed Fuad Paşa, an Egyptian Prince of Albanian origin, was the most mentioned and preferred candidate for this role. Ahmed Fuad Paşa was a well-known and respected figure, and his name enjoyed significant support (Prince Fuad-il Principe Fuad, 1913). However, the process of selecting a prince for Albania was complex and influenced by various international interests, making the decision slow and fraught with diplomatic challenges. On December 13, 1912, Nabi Bey, the Ottoman Empire's ambassador in Rome, sent a telegram to the Ottoman government explaining the situation surrounding the Italian government's choice of the Prince to the Albanian throne. In the telegram, Nabi Bey emphasised Fuad Pasha's determination and his efforts with the Italian government to secure this position. The Ottoman Minister of Foreign Affairs responded with instructions and stated that "an Ottoman Prince would be more suitable for the throne of Albania." They did, however, suggest that an Egyptian Prince, such as Ahmed Fuad Paşa, would be better suited to lead the vilayet of Macedonia, which was set to be established soon. This suggestion reflected a strategy to maximise Ottoman influence in the region, using popular and trustworthy figures to maintain stability and Ottoman interests in the Balkans (Bayur, 1991).

During that time, Ahmed Fuad Paşa had given several interviews to the Italian press in which he pointed out his perfect knowledge of the Italian language, the military education he had received in Turin, as well as his sympathy for Italy; this was reason enough for Austria-Hungary to reject his candidacy (Bartl, 2017).

Sürya bey Vlora and Ekrem bey¹ Vlora agree in their assessment of this candidacy, describing in detail the Italian support. According to Sürya Bey, "Prince Fuad attended the same class as Victor Emmanuel III. The Italian consulate preferred him. In contrast to Austria-Hungary, the Italian government did not support a Catholic Sovereign and, amidst Catholic kings, did not support an Orthodox Sovereign. Italy did not dare to support him universally, but was satisfied with the propaganda created around him." (Syrja Bey Vlora, 1913).

While analysing the abilities of the Prince of Egypt from a political standpoint, Ekrem bey Vlora concluded that the Prince "had modest qualities as a statesman and as a leader and was a good connoisseur of state bureaucracy. He enjoyed some sympathy in Italian circles and could emerge as Italy's candidate; he was of Albanian descent. Despite the fact that he possessed these skills in Albania, governing proved difficult because his abilities 'would not be enough to win over the large and very strong Albanian feudal families'" (Vlora, 2010).

His candidacy, which will be strongly supported by the Albanian colony in Egypt, persisted throughout 1913 and will continue to strongly support Prince Ahmed Fuad Paşa for the Albanian throne. Albanians living in Egypt strongly supported his candidacy and helped to promote him to the position. In addition to assisting the Albanian colony in Egypt, the Albanian press played an important role in this endeavour. On November 13, 1913, the newspaper Taraboshi in Shkodër published an article on the front page dedicated to Prince Fuad. The author declared that "in the name of Prince Fuad, we see a bright goal; we see the union, brotherhood and progress of the nation". On the other hand, the author addressed the Albanians with the opinion that the people should choose "the regime that they are begging for and not wait for Europe, which they love so much, to throw whatever face-cloth from heaven" (Prince Fuad-il Principe Fuad, 1913). The author of this article praised Prince Ahmed Fuad as a deserving candidate for the Albanian throne, emphasising his qualities and achievements. The article expressed strong support for Ahmed Fuad Pasha and helped to influence public opinion and international decision-makers on the election of the new prince of Albania.

According to a report from the Austro-Hungarian ambassador in Rome, Ahmed Fuad Paşa's candidacy was gaining traction and was becoming known not only as a potential contender for the Albanian throne, but also as the official candidate of the Tri-state. According to this report, Ahmed Fuad Paşa was gaining significant support and was becoming a preferred candidate for the role (HHSt.A,PA, A)Vj- 22-9- 928, 30.12.1912).

However, according to an Austrian diplomat, Austria-Hungary did not accept Ahmed Fuad Paşa's candidacy.² Austrian diplomats viewed Prince Ahmed Fuad as untrustworthy and an Italophile

¹ Ekrem Bey Vlora (Avlonya) is the eldest son of Syrja Bey Vlora, a former deputy of Vlorë in the Ottoman Empire. He himself was also one of the prominent figures of that time in Albania. He personally knew Prince Fuad and also served in Prince Wied's government. He left behind several written works on Albanian history, the most important of which is *Memoirs 1885–1925*.

² Prince Fuad was considered by Count Berchtold, the Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, as a potential heir to the Albanian throne. Count Berthold had changed his mind, fearing that Prince Fuad would take a pro-Italian stance now that he had finished his military training at Turin. The Austrian Kaiser was not fond of this candidate either.

(Bucherberk, 1972). They were concerned about Ahmed Fuad Paşa's influence on regional politics and his proximity to Italian interests, which they saw as a ruthless factor for Austrian interests in the Balkans. This was a significant obstacle to Austria-Hungary accepting his candidacy and one of the main challenges in the process of electing a new prince of Albania (Bucherberk, 1972).

The researcher Salleos expresses significant scepticism regarding the Egyptian prince, stating that "besides the opposition faced by the candidatures of Prince Fuad and Burhaned from the Great Powers, it is probable, in his estimation, that 'there were also those who exhibited minimal interest in such an uncertain endeavour (Salleo, 2001).

Alongside Austrian diplomacy, Emperor Franz Joseph of the Habsburgs conducted enquiries into his persona and communicated to Foreign Minister Count Berchtold that Ahmed Fuad could not be accepted due to his affiliations with Italy. The emperor stated, "Ahmed Fuad received his military training in the Italian army; thus, his Imperial Highness deemed this solution exceedingly perilous." He believed that other candidates without ties to Italy should be evaluated (HHStA,PA,A, Vj.22-9-920, 2012).

Then, other princes from Germany, France, England, Romania, and Turkey appeared on stage as contenders for the Albanian throne (Bartl, Albanians from the Middle Ages to our days, 2017). These included some important and sensitive names for the international interests of the time, such as the Prince of Montpensier, Juan Pedro Aladro y Kastriota (Oruç, 2023), Duke Wilhelm Karl von Urach, Prince Karl von Hohenzollern, Prince Albert Ghica of Romania, Roland Napoléon Bonaparte, Ferdinand François Bourbon Orlenas-Montpesier, Marki Castriota, Essad Toptani, Şehzade Mehmed Burhaneddin Efendi (third son of Abdülhamid), and Ahmed Izzet Paşa, etc (Birecikli, 2016). Some of the candidates were announced, while others were self-proclaimed, but Wilhelm zu Wied was another name that had garnered significant support.

Istanbul sought to claim the Albanian throne by presenting three prospective candidates with personal ties or Albanian heritage: Prince Abdül Mecit, Burhanneddin, and Minister of War General Ahmet Izzet Paşa (Krasniqi, 2009).

Germany precisely balanced the demands of Austria and Italy. Consequently, the only option available was for the prince to be German.

Italy proposed the candidature of Prince Wied, which Austria accepted without objection to expedite the resolution of the Albanian question. In September 1913, Germany declined to endorse Wied's candidature. The German Kaiser held a favourable view of the Albanians; however, he opposed placing a German on the Albanian throne because of Albania's issues and the Prince's lack of involvement in governance.

In his memoirs regarding the Albanians, he stated, "Up to the time of the Balkan war many Albanians entered the Turkish service, where they rose to high importance, being greatly prized on account of their diligence and keen intelligence, as well as their tenacious energy. They supplied the Turkish administration with a large number of officials, also with a certain percentage in the diplomatic corps and the army. The young Albanians nobles were proud to serve in a splendid company of palace guards of the sultan, which scarcely had an equal for size, martial appearance, and manly beauty. These were partly relatives of the sultan, since the latter used to have noble Albanian women of the principal clans in his harem in order that he-protected by blood

brotherhood might be safe from the “vendettas” of the class, and also, that he might find out everything that might serve to influence the feelings of the Albanian chieftains” (R.Ybarra, 1922).

The desires of the Albanian which reached him by this for instance, as to supplies of arms and ammunitions, school houses, building of high haws etc, were there upon granted in an inconspicuous manner. Thus, the sultan was enabled to keep the usual turbulent Albanian quiet and loyal by means of ‘family ties’.

With this knowledge of the state of affairs as a foundation, i sought to bring my influences to bear toward having a Mohammedan Prince chosen, if possible, perhaps an Egyptians Prince not forgetting that he should have a well-lined purse, which is an absolute necessity in Albania. My advice was not heeded by the “Aeropagus of the Powers”, whose members were not bothering themselves with the interests of the Albanians, but seeking, first of all, for pretexts and opportunities for fishing in the troubled Albanians waters in such a way as to benefit their own countries (II, 1922).

On November 28, 1913, the one-year anniversary of Albania's declaration of independence, Austria-Hungary and Italy recognised Wilhelm zu Wied as Prince of the Albanian Throne. Wilhelm zu Wied was a figure with important international connections. He was the grandson of Queen Elisabeth of Romania (Milo P. ,2013) and the great-grandson of Emperor Wilhelm II of Germany.

This decision was influenced by two major factors that made Wilhelm zu Wied a viable candidate for the Albanian throne. First, he practiced Protestantism, which was significant in an Albanian religious structure that included Muslims, Catholics, and Orthodox. This helped to avoid inter-religious conflict while also projecting the Prince as neutral and impartial. Second, he was of German descent, and at the time, Germany was not directly involved in Albania's internal affairs, so Wilhelm zu Wied was regarded as necessary for maintaining regional neutrality and stability.

Initially, the Prince exhibited a lack of enthusiasm when presented with the offer of the Albanian throne. In his memoirs, Wied stated: “When the Great Powers selected me as the sovereign of Albania at the suggestion of Austria-Hungary and Italy, I initially declined.” I was acutely aware of the immense challenges faced by the Prince of this nation (Wied, 2008). Amidst the dilemmas and enquiries occupying his thoughts, Austria-Hungary and Italy intensified their pressure on the Prince, who believed that after assessing the circumstances in his prospective monarchy, he could confront numerous challenges. However, the two powers assured the Prince of financial and military security and guarantees. Wied consented to depart for Albania solely after he solicited and obtained an advance of 10 million francs for the 75 million loan secured by the six Powers (Wied, Memorandum përmbi Shqypënie, Wilhelmi mbret I Shqypënies , 2008).

The patriotic Albanian elite of the time welcomed the Great Powers' decision, seeing the German Prince as a symbol of Albania's independence (“Kush asht Princi Wilhelm de Wied”, 1913). They saw his accession as an opportunity to preserve the new Albanian state's integrity and strengthen its positions in the international arena, making him a viable option for the country's stability and development.

2. THE OTTOMAN GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS TO INSTALL AN OTTOMAN PRINCE ONTO THE ALBANIAN THRONE

The deteriorating situation in the Balkans, the presence of Greek troops in southern Albania, and the division of the country into two local governments (the Provisional Government of Vlora and the government of Essad Paşa Toptani in Durrës), on the one hand, the ICC and the rivalry of the

two Great Powers, Italy and Austria-Hungary, on the other, necessitated an urgent resolution to the country's leadership issue.

Many candidates were proposed by the Great Powers. Alongside them, the Ottoman Empire, which had reluctantly renounced the sultan's sovereignty over Albania, presented a proposal at the Bucharest Conference to install a Prince of Muslim origin, possibly from the Ottoman dynasty, onto the Albanian throne (Bey, 2007).

In the spring of 1913, Turkey aimed to build a strong Albania to counter Serbia and Greece's growth. For this purpose, the Istanbul government, particularly the unionists (Union and Progress Party- authors' note), floated the idea of installing an Ottoman (Muslim) Prince onto the Albanian throne, with former Ottoman Minister of War Ahmed Izzet Paşa, who was of Albanian descent, emerging as a suitable candidate. During this time, his name was rumoured in the Ottoman press as a possible Prince of Albania (1914). The Ottoman government denied the possibility. However, according to Izzet Paşa, the Sublime Porte and Albanian nobles in Istanbul made an offer, which was conditionally accepted by Ismail Kemali and approved by Essad Paşa (Toptani).

To spread this candidacy, which was opposed to that of Prince Wied, appointed by the Great Powers, the Young Turks began to make propaganda in his favour. In addition to the arrival of some Turkish emissaries and young Turkish officers of Albanian origin (Vlora E. B., 2010), Istanbul newspapers published propaganda. Thus, in one of its issues, the newspaper "Tasvir-i Efkâr" featured pictures of Prince Wied and Ahmed Izzet Paşa with an eagle clutching a caption that said, "On whose head will it be placed?" (i.e., the Albanian crown, my note). (1329).

For its part, the Albanian press was keenly interested in following the events as they unfolded. According to Vlora government official gazette "Përlindja e Shqipërisë" (lit. "Birth of Albania"), Ahmed Izzet Paşa told the "Neve Freie Presse" correspondent in Istanbul that he was unaware of the public statements revealing his candidacy for the Albanian throne" (Bello, 2015). Rather than abandoning the plan midway, the Young Turks dispatched Major Bekir Fikri Grebene to make propaganda throughout Albania, both in the north and south.

Many soldiers from the Young Turk groups, who were joining the revanchist Turkish-Bulgarian alliance against Greece and Serbia, entered and exited Albanian territory during the autumn of 1913. Todor Pavlov, a Skopje native and former Ottoman deputy, became the first Bulgarian diplomat in Albania when he was appointed consul general in Vlora. According to Bulgarian sources, he met Ismail Kemali for the first time on October 30, 1913 (Panchev, 2021,).

Though completely ceremonial, Pavlov felt that the Provisional Government was prepared to build "strong and continuous ties with Bulgaria" during this meeting. After this, Bulgarian attention turned to forging an alliance with the Albanians and the Ottomans, which would then need to take action against Serbia and Greece. It was believed that this alliance was connected to the convention they signed on January 25, 1914 (Puto, 2010).

Following the Second Balkan War, Greece and Serbia gained more territory, which led to the formation of their alliance. Putting in place the necessary conditions for a Turkish Muslim Prince to ascend to the Albanian throne was the alliance's first step to achieving its goal. Since the Prince had not yet been appointed by the Great Powers, the Young Turk emissaries, led by Major Bekir Grebene and backed by their Albanian followers, started to organise a movement in favour of a Turkish Prince. Grebene met a lot of Albanians who would welcome Ahmed Izzet Paşa in their country. In fact, Ismail Kemali wrote a letter to the Ottoman cabinet (Vukela Heyeti) requesting to meet with Ahmed Izzet Paşa in a European city (Ayışığı, 1997).

Having served as an Ottoman parliament deputy and knowing members of the Young Turks, Essad Paşa Toptani was able to quickly establish a rapport with the Turkish officers that arrived, particularly Beqir Grebene, who welcomed him as a friend into his home. He planned to dissolve the Vlora government through Bekir Grebene. On the other hand, Bekir Grebene had different ideas. Not only did he start negotiations with Essad Paşa Toptani, but he also asked Ismail Kemali “for his assistance in freeing Macedonia from the Greek and Serb occupation. Bulgaria would assist the initiative. The freed areas would ally themselves with Albania (Halkakondil, 1934).

This alliance could help Albania, which was struggling to survive, by allowing it to reunite the lands that were left outside of its borders following the decisions made at the London Conference. This is likely what drew the attention of Ismail Kemali, who consented to hold secret negotiations with Turkey and Bulgaria because it was believed that he was in favour of the movement being driven by the concessions that his government would secure.

In his memoirs, Syrja bey Vlora claims that while he was in Istanbul, representatives of the Young Turks committee approached him with just such a proposal. However, he rejected and disapproved of them. He had written to Count Berchtold and Prince Wied, respectively, informing them of the Young Turks' plans (Bey, 2009). He reports from Istanbul that the Young Turks were preparing to launch an offensive against the Greeks and Serbs by signing a secret treaty with the Bulgarians, according to which they would send 500 soldiers, 15 machine guns, and 15 mountain cannons to Albania. They intended to use them to seize control of our nation's government, counting on the fanatical element's inclinations towards the Ottomans to stop the arrival of a Christian Prince in Albania (D, 30, 1914). Bulgaria was also in favour of this intervention because it was in competition with Romania.

3. THE ATTEMPTED ALLIANCE WITH BULGARIA AND THE CONSPIRACY OF BEKIR GREBENE

As a neutral state during the Balkan War, Albania was not allowed to interfere in treaties or conventions, so the Young Turks asked that Turkish and Bulgarian detachments pass through its territory under the pretence of attacking the Serbian and Greek rear detachments. Albania was promised Kosovo and Chameria by the Young Turks as a reward for its cooperation at the end of the war, and based on diplomatic sources; it is even thought that Ismail Kemali approved of the secret agreement (Puto, Albanian Independence at the Tables of Diplomacy (1912-1914), 2008). The other reason was presumably the impact on Ismail Kemali and a few of his associates who persisted in keeping secret ties and contacts with the Young Turks as members of the Turkish military structures (HHSt.APA.A, Vj.24-11-1176., 7.1.1914).

It is important to emphasise that Bulgaria began dispatching military missions in the first few months of 1913, from January to March. The Provisional Government of Vlora and Bulgaria had not yet been able to achieve developments of mutual interest during this time, according to official sources in Sofia. The first recorded meeting between Ismail Kemali and official representatives of Bulgaria occurred at the start of April 1913, during his diplomatic visit to Vienna, according to researcher Anton Panchev. The head of the Albanian Provisional Government visited the Bulgarian legation on April 11, 1913, and Ambassador Slabashev reported this visit to E. Geshov, the Bulgarian Minister of Foreign Affairs.

At the meeting, he had conveyed Albania's deep sympathy for Bulgaria, characterising it as “the most correct, civilised, and strongest country of all the Balkan states.” Ismail Kemali had also expressed his expectations that “Bulgaria would support Albania in the future and will not refuse its help in Albanian right efforts”. He had bemoaned the injustices that Serbia and Greece inflicted upon Albania by stealing its most fertile territories. Even though Albania had to accept its fate at

that moment, thoughts of Peja, Prizren, and Gjakova would never leave Albania (Panchev, Ismail Kemali Vlora and the International Institutions that operated in Albania during 1913, 2021).

By late November 1913, word had gotten through about the Young Turk envoys' activities to Vienna. Alarmed, Berhtold started working the diplomatic apparatus to extract more information about this rumoured conspiracy. In order to coordinate positions, he also notified San Giuliano, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs. M. Pallavicini, Vienna's ambassador to Istanbul, warned the Turkish prime minister and the Young Turks' leader on December 1, 1913, that "the Turkish government would take upon itself a great responsibility if in any way it would be involved in such a movement" (HHSt.APA.A,Vj, 23-20-2078, December 1, 1913).

The Vienna representative in Sofia was authorised to inform the Bulgarian authorities on the same day that Bulgaria had a natural interest in Albania becoming a factor that needed to be considered in the future in the Balkans and that it was in Bulgaria's interest to oppose the actions taken against Prince Wied (HHSt.APA.A, Vj, 23-20-2080, December 1, 1913).

Vienna and Rome urged Bulgarian Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Vasil Radoslavov to desist from supporting the activities of the Bulgarian-Macedonian nationalist movement in the early days of December 1913 (Paskal Milo, *Politika e Jashtme e Shqipërisë (1912-1939)*, 2013).

In this sense, not even the Ottoman Empire was left behind. As the Minister of the Interior Myfid Libohova notified the Elbasan prefecture that the Public Security office had reliable information that certain Albanians connected to the "Union and Progress" Party desired to visit Albania. He claimed that their intentions were to work against national independence and to spread propaganda in support of Ottoman sovereignty (A-IV-335, 16 May 1913).

Major Bekir Grebene, of Albanian origin, was assigned to this mission and was to lead the Young Turk forces. This information can be found in the Dutch archives in a letter written by Dutch Major Thomson on February 6, 1914, explaining Bekir Grebene's confession during his ICC trial (Tútúncú, 2017).

Bekir Grebene trial demonstrated that the Young Turks saw Albania as a potential wartime threat to Greece and Serbia. Istanbul therefore gave him orders to propagate the idea that Wilhelm zu Wied should not be the King of Albania but rather a Muslim. He would therefore use all of his might to clear the path for Ahmed Izzet Paşa, the former Ottoman Minister of War, to ascend to the throne of Albania.

He was given 5,000 Napoleonic gold coins (1,500 of which ended up in our possession - the author continues). These would be used to entice people to his side, carry out diplomatic negotiations, and secure a code to enable secret correspondence with Istanbul. In November 1913, he passed through Budapest and Sofia. After visiting Durrës, he wrote a letters secret to Istanbul requesting the dispatch of troops and ammunition to Durrës. He writes in this letter that all of Albania, with the exception of the south, wanted Izzet Paşa to be the king of Albania. He also demands that Mauser, guns, cannons, and ammunition be sent to the Port of Durrës in order to fulfil this demand. After that, he would travel to Vlora to persuade Ismail Kemali, the leader of the Provisional Government, that Albania and Turkey should form an alliance in the event of a future conflict and that they were attempting to install Ahmed Izzet Paşa onto the Albanian throne ((Demirlika), *Albania and Turkey 1912-1939, From Separation to Friendship*, 2022).

In his memoirs, Ekrem bey Vlora recounts the incident and claims that a letter was sent to the ICC by an Austrian Lloyd employee. The ship "Meran" would carry soldiers and officers with Turkish passports as well as merchants and soldiers from Albania on January 7, 1914. They would claim that the war had ended in order to return to their native country. Their plan was to land during

the night, seize the initiative, and declare Ahmed Izzet Paşa Prince of Albania (Süheyl Izeet Furgaç-Yüksel Kanar, 1992).

In the view of foreign representatives at the ICC, the Young Turk officers' arrival was intended to set the stage for the ascension of a Prince to the throne and, in the event of a Greek-Turkish conflict, to incite anti-Greek and possibly even anti-Serbian sentiment (Duka, British Documents on Albania and the Albanians (January-December 1914), 2012). However, the International Control Commission uncovered the conspiracy (Ekrem Bey Vlora, 2003).

However, as soon as the International Control Commission learnt of the incident, it directed the Dutch officers, who were in charge of policing and gendarmerie, to inspect the ship and prevent the suspicious individuals from setting foot on land.

Meanwhile, as arranged, Major Bekir Grebene and his six officers aboard the first ship requested to go straight to Prime Minister Ismail Kemali Bey when the ship arrived at the coast (Kanar, 1992).

But Bekir Bey and his six companions were detained by the international gendarmerie in Albania right away, and they were not allowed to leave the ship (Luan Malltezi, 2019). The detained Turkish officers admitted under questioning that their sole purpose for travelling to Albania was to back Izzet Paşa's candidacy for the Albanian throne. Following the search, a list containing the names of 202 individuals was discovered along with a sizable quantity of Turkish gold and dynamite. Following the conspiracy's discovery, all 202 soldiers returned to Trieste aboard the same ship, while the six officers and Bekir Grebene - who went by the pseudonym Besim Elbasanlı Efendi - were arrested and given the death penalty.

The correspondence discovered belonging to Bekir Grebene demonstrates the Ottoman government's involvement. Bekir Grebene sent the Ottoman Consul of the Empire in Brindisi a telegram containing the Grand Vizier's instructions. According to this telegram, Izzet Paşa and Ismail Kemali should meet somewhere in Europe. The Turkish consul in Brindisi is thought to have sent the coded message requesting this meeting (Duka, British Documents on Albania and the Albanians (January-December 1914), 2012). Furthermore, the telegraph that the German ambassador in Istanbul sent to Winckel, his country's ICC representative, suggested that Istanbul was responsible for organising this conspiracy.

According to Sürya bey Vlora's memoirs, Myfid Bey Libohova, the Albanian representative in the International Control Commission, informed the Commission about the Young Turks conspiracy (Bey A. S., 2009).

The International Control Commission (ICC) investigation of the documentation and actions taken demonstrated, among other things, that Bekir Fehmi Efendi was the principal Young Turk agent assigned to the mission and that he had also met and reached an understanding with Ismail Kemali.

Ismail Kemali's opponents immediately launched a campaign of defamation against him, claiming that the head of state had ordered Turkish forces to overthrow the current government, install a Turkish Muslim Prince in power, and reunite Albania with Turkey. Ismail Kemali was forced to resign as a result of this news and the developments of the legal proceedings against the Ottoman officers, which directly implicated the head of the Provisional Government of Vlora. The International Commission of Control assumed control of the nation's governance.

The ICC also asked Essad Paşa Toptani, the head of the Durrës Elderly Senate, to take the same action. Essad Paşa agreed to accept it on the proviso that he, in the capacity of head of the Albanian

delegation to Noivid, accompany Wilhelm zu Wied and deliver him the crown by announcing Wied as Prince to the Albanian throne.

About the “Bekir Grebene's conspiracy” issue, we believe that the Austrian, French, and English documents of the ICC, along with the reports exchanged between the representatives of the Great Powers and their governments, need to be closely examined and verified in order to draw the right conclusions about this conspiracy. The inspiration, planning, and actions taken by the Young Turks to carry out their conspiracy will all be covered in detail in these reports.

According to British documents, this conspiracy began as an agitprop in the most remote parts of the provinces of Mokra and Golloborda against the recognition of a Christian Prince. Furthermore, in an attempt to advance the notion of installing a Muslim Prince onto the Albanian throne, Jemal Bey and Talat Bey had sent Major Bekir Grebene to Albania accompanied by a sizable contingent of supporters. However, they claimed that the primary objective of the Young Turks was to start an autonomous movement in Macedonia, with Albania acting as their base (Valentina Duka, 2012). Their strategy was to select a prominent figure amidst the populace.

Second, by examining the testimony regarding this issue that Izzet Paşa personally provided to Johann Markgraf von Pallavicini, the Austrian ambassador in Istanbul, it is thought that there were two attempts by the Albanians in Istanbul with relation to the offers made to him, as a prominent figure. These ideas were a desperate attempt that failed due to their lack of organisation, while the movement was exposed because the public did not support these ideas enthusiastically. Even Izzet Paşa himself “could not do anything contrary to the will of the Great Powers,” especially “without the consent of Austria-Hungary and Italy (Merenglen Verli, 2012).”

Furthermore, Izzet Paşa insisted he had no such contact with the Turkish government or anyone else, and he had nothing to do with the events in Albania that led to the misappropriation of his name.”

Finally, Bekir Grebene, the primary character of this story, in his memoirs “Mefkure-i Vatan” (Ideal Homeland), will recount how he fought an idealistic war for freedom and his homeland during the Ottoman Empire.

He would later write in his memoirs that he was among the original members of the “Union and Progress” committee from the outset. As one of the top commanders in the western armed forces, on December 17, 1912, he led a company of 600 soldiers in combat in the provinces close to Ioannina. Following the Vardar army's departure from our nation in June–August 1913, most of its forces left via the Seman Pier and a small portion via the Harbour of Vlora. He considered travelling to Bucharest, the site of the second Balkan War's Peace Treaty negotiations.

He left Vlora with another Young Turk officer, heading first for Brindisi and then Bucharest, where he would discover that the treaty was strengthening the Empire's position. This offered him and his allies hope that, as they abducted Edrene, they would be able to restore the territories that had been unjustly taken from Albania by Greece and Serbia. He had previously explained these reasons to Müfid Bey Libohova on April 15, 1913 in Vlora.

There will even be proof of a letter from Müfid Bey to him in the French documents, in which he wishes him luck with Edrene, informs him that Sürya Bey is leaving for Istanbul, and offers to speak with him about “familiar issues (Letter from Krajevks to the French delegate in ICC).”

Essad Paş Toptani, a well-known figure in Albania during that time, also backed Beqir Grebene's conspiracy. In a telegram he had sent off for Istanbul, he even informed his allies that Austria and Italy were against the movement of the detachments he would be leading against Greece.

At the trial, before receiving the sentence, Beqir Grebene was questioned about his sources of support. In response, he said that during his time in Durrës, Essad Paşa had instilled in him the hope that the Albanians would aid him; however, Essad Paşa had ultimately withdrawn for reasons that were only known to him.

The revelation of Bekir Grebene's conspiracy had a significant impact on the political landscape of the Vlora government. Following the revelation, Ismail Kemali was forced to step down on January 22, 1914, and cede control to the ICC until the Prince arrival.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, the royal throne issue in Albania in 1913 and the Beqir Grebene conspiracy signify a tumultuous and intricate era in Albanian history. These events reflect the complex internal and international tensions that accompanied the establishment of an independent Albanian state following the declaration of independence in 1912. The Great Powers, at the Conference of Ambassadors in London, resolved the fate of Albania, establishing it as an autonomous, sovereign, and hereditary principality, led by a foreign prince, Wilhelm zu Wied (Prince Wied). The appointment of a Christian prince to rule a predominantly Muslim nation faced significant resistance from factions advocating for the restoration of Ottoman influence, as well as from influential local leaders.

The Beqir Grebenesa conspiracy, which sought to place an Ottoman prince of Muslim descent on the Albanian throne, exemplified the Young Turks' persistent endeavours to sustain their influence in the Balkans. This initiative received backing from prominent individuals, including Essad Pasha Toptani, who navigated a disjointed political landscape. Consequently, the nation was immersed in an unstable environment, characterised by internal strife and external interference that severely undermined the consolidation of the Albanian state. The exposure of this conspiracy, orchestrated and funded by foreign entities, highlighted the vulnerability of the nascent Albanian institutions and their incapacity to withstand contemporary pressures. This resulted in Ismail Kemali's resignation and the intervention of the International Control Commission (ICC), which assumed temporary governance of the country until Prince Wied's arrival.

This historical context is intricately linked to another significant period: the six-month governance of Albania by the German prince Wilhelm Wied, from March 7 to September 3, 1914. The experiment with a foreign prince in Albania, despite backing from the Great Powers and a model akin to that of Greece, Romania, and Bulgaria, was unsuccessful. Numerous scholars ascribe the failure to internal factors, including insufficient popular support, political fragmentation, and the opposition of local elites, as well as external factors, such as the alteration of international dynamics following the onset of World War I. This war terminated the consensus among the Great Powers regarding Albania and undermined efforts to establish a stable monarchical regime.

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