

**Araştırma Makalesi/Research Article**

**THE ALBANIAN NATIONAL RENNESAINCE AND THE CREATION OF  
THE ALBANIAN STATE**

**ARNAVUTLUK ULUSAL RÖNESANSI VE ARNAVUT DEVLETİNİN İNŞASI**

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**ABSTRACT:** Albanians are among the oldest and most autochthonous people in Balkan. Known as the "Illyrians", "Albans", "Arberesh" and "Albanian", the Albanian people are among the founders of the Balkan Peninsula and among the most authentic contributors to the culture and civilization of the European continent. Historians and great scholars of the world and Albanian scholars such as Thuman, Hahn, Shuflai, Stipcevic, Hosch, Çabej, Buda, Zheliskova have confirmed with their historical and linguistic studies the autochtonity, authenticity and contribution of Albanians in this region of more than three thousand five hundred years. This study investigates the early period of the Albanian National Renaissance and its repercussions on the establishment of the Albanian Nation State. Felt alone and without any support from international protection of any Greater Power and especially from the Othoman Empire, Albanian National Identity started to be seen as one of the main idea, which remained to be proclaimed by Albanian Renaissancers. So the Albanian National Renaissance movement began later than all the other Balkan peoples and not well-prepared in its political projects. In the cultural, civilizational and spiritual plan, the Albanian National Renaissance was as broad and western as many other peoples of the region. This paper will study the efforts, challenges and in general the elements in the context of creation of the Albanian nation, by bringing the main elements, which characterised this period of time.

**Keywords:** Albanian Renaissance, Balkan Peninsula, Ottoman Empire, Great Powers.

**ÖZ:** Arnavutlar, Balkanların en kadim yerli halklarından biridir. İliryalılar, Arnavutluklular, Arnavutlar ya da Arbereshler olarak da bilinen Arnavutluk halkı, Balkan Yarımadasının kurucuları arasında olup, Avrupa kıtası uygarlıklarına ve kültürüne en ciddi katkıları yapan halklardan biridir. Tarihçiler, araştırmacılar ve Thuman, Hahn, Shuflai, Stipcevic, Hosch, Çabej, Buda, Zheliskova gibi Arnavut bilginler, tarih ve dilbilim çalışmaları aracılığıyla, Arnavutların 3500 yılı aşkın süredir bu bölgeye yaptıkları katkıları, bu halkın kadimliğini ve özgünlüğünü ortaya koymaktadır. Bu çalışmada, "Arnavut Ulusal Rönesansı" olarak bilinen dönemin nasıl başladığına odaklanılmakta ve bu dönemin, Arnavut Ulus Devletinin kurulması

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üzerindeki etkileri irdelenmektedir. Herhangi bir büyük gücün, özellikle de Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun desteği ve uluslararası himayesi olmaksızın giderek yalnızlaşan Arnavutlar, Arnavut Ulusal Kimliğini bir ide olarak görmeye başlamış ve bu düşünce, Arnavut Rönesansı destekçilerinin temel savlarından biri haline gelmiştir. Arnavut Ulusal Rönesansı, Balkanlardaki tüm diğer halklarınkine kıyasla, çok daha geç yaşanmış olup, siyasi anlamda yeterince hazırlıklı bir yapı arz etmemektedir. Kültürel, uygarlaşma ve ruhani planlama açısından ise Arnavut Ulusal Rönesansı bölgedeki diğer halklarınki kadar kapsamlı ve batılı bir nitelik sergilemektedir. Bu çalışma, söz konusu dönemi niteleyen temel unsurları bir araya getirmek suretiyle, Arnavut kimliğinin inşasına yönelik çabaları ve karşılaşılan zorlukları incelemektedir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Arnavutluk Rönesansı, Balkan Yarımadası, Osmanlı Devleti, Büyük Güçler .

## 1. INTRODUCTION, FIRST ALBANIAN IDEAS FOR THE CREATION OF ALBANIAN NATION

I will start this article with a quote of well-known Albanian renesaaincer, Sami Frasheri, who said that "*The nations are like the fish that eat one another. – sorry for the weak ones*". The creation of the Albanian Nation marks the greatest Albanian efforts and a very difficult period that most Albanian intellectuals and Albanian population devote their entire energy to this cause. There were no religious, inter-ethnic, regional, linguistic differences or other differences that made this process difficult, but were the interests and calculations of foreign powers, which were as diverse as possible and as a result hampered this natural process of Albanians. Some foreign authors says that ‘..the prevailing of the Muslim religjion among Albanians iso ne of the main reason for their national delay’<sup>1</sup> And the very importance of this paper consists in studying the efforts, challenges and in general the elements in the context of creation of the Albanian nation, which proces continues to be in the minds of the Albanians even in the recent times. And this article will bring a big question mark, whether the process of creation of the Albanian Nation is finished or remains open and will continue for a long period of time, until reaching the very natural goal of the Albanians, which is the national unity in a single political unity?. Although it can be said that the Albanian issue was created by the Great Powers, who were always the influencers of the Albanian cause, they normally had to solve this problem, but the Great Powers did not address the issue of such solutions without their own interests,

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<sup>1</sup> Nano Hristov & Marian Ninov, *People’s character as a prerequisite for the Albanian Naional Delay*, Proceedings of SOCIOINT 2018- 5th International Conference on Education, Social Sciences and Humanities, 2-4 July 2018- Dubai, U.A.E. p. 1.

but this kind of initiation for such a solution have to be addressed by the national factor itself. The solution of this issue was actualized several times, and it still remained to be solved. Although the problem was very complex and complicated, the solution to the problem consists in the final solution of the Albanian national issue. The creation of the Albanian Nation as a process has been and became especially popular lately also to the other peoples, where apart from the Albanians there are approximately 600 million people belonging to the nations, who do not participate or partially participate in state control.<sup>2</sup>

Although earlier attempts had been made about the nationalization and the Albanian problem, it still remained an unwritten problem, as one of the initiators of the Albanian National Movement, Sami Frashëri said in the title "Albanians always for the world and never for itself". He argues that Albanians have always fought and were killed all over the world, but with their blood has benefited others, and not Albanians, which statement can be also proved with CIA report of 1953<sup>3</sup>, where it is explained clearly how independence of Albania during the London conference and how Kosovo was ceded by Serbia, which remains then for almost 100 years within Yugoslavia. But the idea of nationalization does not belong to an ancient past, it begins with the Albanian National Renaissance. These Renaissance ideas were based on the aspirations of Albanians to politically and institutionally organize themselves to be divided from Turkey and any other danger coming from outside, but especially from its neighbors. Albanians found under the Ottoman Empire were somehow wastefully and in search of their identity. Taking into account these circumstances, it was natural the insistence of militant Albanian nationalist in the sphere of Albanian consciousness for the consolidation of the Albanian nation that was wastefully and in search of its own identity. Such attempts by Albanian nationalists were calling for Albanianism as a common identity. It should be noted that the identification with religious elements for the creation of the Albanian Nation has not been ever part of changing nationalist ideas.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ukshin Hoti, *Filozofia politike e çështjes shqiptare*, Ribotim me plotësim nga Partia e Unitetit Kombëtar, Prishtinë, 1986. p. 75.

<sup>3</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, report of 7 January 1953. "Albanian minority in Yugoslavia". U.S.A., Sanitized Copy Approved for release on 24/01/2011, p. 9.1-2.

<sup>4</sup> Ismail Hasani, *Vetëdija fetare dhe kombëtare tek shqiptarë*, Universiteti i Prishtinës, Prishtinë, 2001. p. 157-158.

The national Renaissance ideal did not come from heaven or fall from the sky, but as such was elaborated by prominent personalities of archeological patriotism, like: Jeronim De Rada, Dara Plaku and Gavril Dara I Riu, Zef Serembe, FA Santori, Zef Skiroi, Naum Veqilharxhi, Thimi Mitko, Jani Vreto, Dora d'Istria, Pashko Vasa, brothers Sami, Naim and Abdyl Frasheri, Ismail Qemali, Zef Jubani, PN Luarasi, Gjergj Fishta, Faik Konica, Philip Shiroka, Ndre Mjeda, Fan Noli and many others, who prepared the common platform of the National Renaissance not only of Albanians but also of Arbëreshs and prepared to fight for their freedom and rights, education, Albanian-language, schools, culture, national culture and literature, with Albanianism, regardless of religious differences, because the awakening of Albanians depended on the domestic developments of the Albanian people, but also those of Italy, even of progressive Europe.<sup>5</sup>

The Albanian Renaissance, influenced by French Iluminism, considered that religious dogmas and religion in general is the product of human imagination, which is confirmed by the fact of identifying God with nature. Influenced by the rationalism of iluminism, the Albanian Renaissance, part of their activity has oriented towards the education and education measures to achieve national emancipation, making it from Istanbul, Bukuresht, etc, because in their opinion national liberation can only be achieved through the emancipation of the masses.<sup>6</sup> Unlike the conformists, one of the premises and postulates of the Albanian Renaissance was that the Ottoman Empire did not represent the main danger and enemy of the Albanians. This was also, because Albanians were having high rank positions in military, courts, central and local administrations, by being as integral part of the Othoman authority.<sup>7</sup> Their conclusion came in view of the fact that the Ottoman Empire was falling and that its collapse was inevitable. Rather, they saw the risk of their neighbors and their plans as a result of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and that the last was ceasing to protect the interest and identity of the Muslims in the southeastern part of Europe, which also make the

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<sup>5</sup> Akademia e Shkencave dhe Arteve të Kosovës, *Studime 21*, Revistë për studime filologjike, ASHAK, Prishtinë, 2014, p. 88.

<sup>6</sup> Ismail Hasani, *Vetëdija fetare dhe kombëtare tek shqiptarët*, Universiteti i Prishtinës, Prishtinë, 2001. p. 161.

<sup>7</sup> Antonina Zhelyaskova, *Albanian Identities*, International Centre for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations (IMIR), Sofia, 2000, p. 23.

movement for national identity to be raised among the Muslims.<sup>8</sup> This way of reasoning is found in the basic documents of the League of Prizren, in the work of Pashko Vasa and especially in the article of Sami Frashëri “Shqipëria ç’ka qenë, ç’është e ç’do bëhet”/Albania – What it was, what it is and what it will become<sup>9</sup>, which was seen as political manifest for the Albanian nationalism and independence<sup>10</sup>, through criticism of the Ottoman Empire of that time and by advocating for an independent Albania.

This initiative of the Albanian factor in this period was developed in two centers: in the center of the Ottoman Empire, where many high Albanian personalities were in the central institutions of the Empire and benefited from these positions to represent and protect the Albanian people and the Albanian Diaspora, thus far from Istanbul, from Egypt, Bucharest, Sofia, Italy where personalities, writers, publishers and Albanian committees and associations began to rise and work for the Albanian Renaissance. Within Albania, Renaissance started with education, knowledge, school, book of Abetare, national awareness, gradual political shaping, and increased military resistance. In order to force this statement, many Albanian well-known figures of the Albanian science have also tried to bring facts that the Albanian Renaissance was not only one moment of life to do something for the national cause, but it was like a “...concept’ that the National Renaissance in general means an entire historical era, with multi-faceted and uninterrupted political and military activities, historical and cultural, educational and linguistic of a long time. It means, a deep turning point in the history of the whole nation, because the National Renaissance is not a single fact, but it is a historical era that starts at least in the beginning of the XIXth century and continues conventionally, until 1912, with the declaration of independence and the creation of the Albanian state”.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Florian Bieber, *Muslim Identity In The Balkans Before The Establishment of Nation States*, Liberal review, Discussions – Europe, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905990050002434>, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Hysamedin Feraj, *Skicë e mendimit politik shqiptar*, Logos-A, Shkup, 1999, p. 111.

<sup>10</sup> Balkanologie VII (2), Bülent B., *Sami Frashëri or Šemsedin Sami? – Mythologization of an Ottoman Intellectual in the Modern Turkish and Socialist Albanian Historiographies based on “Selective Perception”*. 30 / décembre 2003, p: 19-46.

<sup>11</sup> Akademia e Shkencave dhe Arteve të Kosovës, *Studime 21*, Revistë për studime filologjike, ASHAK, Prishtinë, 2014, p. 85.

## 2. THE COMMITTEE OF ISTANBUL AND SENZITATION OF THE ALBANIAN ISSUES

I will start this part of my article as well with a quote of well-known Albanian renaaaancer, Pashko Vasa, who said that "*Do not look at churches and mosques, as the Albanian religion is Albania*". For the sensitization of the Albanian national issue, a special role has been played by the so-called "Istanbul Committee", whose most prominent members were Pashko Vasa, Abdyl Frasheri and Sami Frashëri. It is exactly Pashko Vasa who, through a letter, presented to the British Embassy in the capital of the Ottoman Empire – Istanbul, a letter in which he presents the recent events, where among others it is said that "A new issue is being raised – The Albanian issue". He also emphasized on behalf of the Albanian people that if it was right for Slavic peoples to have the right to form their own independent or autonomous states, then it is clear that Albanians can not enjoy such a rotten administration as they have had so far. These ideologues of the Albanian League were convinced and demanded a special administration that responded better to their needs and traditions.

Thus, in the context of the Eastern Crisis after the notorious Berlin Congress, when the Great Powers were dropped over the Ottoman Empire to break up for their benefit and the various Balkan dynasties, the Albanian issue was born and the Istanbul Committee raised the issue of Albanian autonomy. This committee saw more clearly than anyone else the great risk that was threatening the Albanian people from its enemies, and for this reason this committee created close ties with the country's patriotic movement. This committee made efforts to safeguard the national rights by trying to sensitize it in front the foreign public opinion. On May 30, 1878, this committee proclaimed in Istanbul a proclamation stating, among other things, that Albanians wanted to live in peace with all their neighbors: Montenegro, Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, where the members of this committee always spoke in the name of their people (Albanians) and they (Albanians) did not seek, did not want anything from them (neighbors) but were totally determined to protect everything what was belonging to them. At the same proclamation, the leaders of this committee on 20 June 1878 addressed to the Foreign Minister of Austro-Hungary, Cont Andrash, demanding that the legitimate rights of the Albanians have to be taken into account.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Vehbi Bala, *Pashko Vasa (Portret – monografi)*, Redaksia e botimeve "Rilindja", Prishtinë, 1989, p. 129-163.

### **3. THE IDEAS OF PASHKO VASA AND SAMI FRASHERI FOR THE PROCESS OF CREATION OF THE ALBANIAN NATION**

Pashko Vasa, not only within the Istanbul Committee, but also as a renowned political figure, takes on his own the initiative and makes various attempts at foreign public opinion to understand and hear the legitimate national rights of Albanians. Thus on October 20, 1878, he visited Cont, Zihi - the Ambassador of Austro-Hungary in Istanbul to tell him the story of the Albanian people and the real situation on the ground. Mr. Zihi, while listening the story, recommended to Pashko Vasa that he should write all this on the letter and submit it as soon as possible. The ideas of Pashko Vases presented in these documents remained some of the best things accomplished by him, both from the conceptual ideas as well as from his styles and broad culture presented on these letters.

In his scientific work "The Truth about Albania and the Albanians", Pashko Vasa, besides arguing the antiquity of Albanians, traditions, culture, common language since ancient times, he also presents the current situation of the Albanian people. He for the current bad situation has accused the Ottoman administration, while demanding the stand under it. He sought first of all the unification of the Albanian people within Albania by overcoming the religious divisions. He stressed that Albanian Muslims are Albanian as Christian Albanians that are Albanians, they speak the same language, and they follow the same customs and the same traditions. Among them, according to him, there has never been hatreds or hostilities. In addition, he urged the Ottoman Empire to make reforms by which the country would develop. This strong reorganization with a united people would create the conditions for the future formation of the administrative autonomy and would further lead to full independence of the country. The reorganization, according to Pashko Vasa meant economic development that Albania was able to develop living resources. He criticized the administration on that time for the territorial divisions such as vilayet, which have ignored some important criteria that often led to conflicts. Written to clarify the Albanian issue to the foreign public opinion, his scientific work "The truth about Albania and Albanians" was a further extension of the Albanian article "Albania and Albanians", and a crisis where the author was supported for compiling his reminders and submissions of different letters and requests to the Great Powers.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Vehbi Bala, *Pashko Vasa (Portret – monografi)*, Redaksia e botimeve "Rilindja", Prishtinë, 1989, p. 129-163.

Some of the ideas about that situation, the divisions and the aspirations of the Albanians later were discussed also by Sami Frashëri in his major work “Shqipëria ç’ka qenë, ç’ është e ç’do bëhet” / (Albania – What it was, what it is and what it will become). This work marks the highest degree of development of the political and social thinking of the Albanian National Renaissance, which is considered also as one of the best books of Sami Frashëri and among the best works on the time of Albanian National Renaissance.<sup>14</sup> It still preserves the value of the document of the most progressive and fair positions of the Albanian National Renaissance. His work is divided into three parts: Albania's old past, its present and its future<sup>15</sup>, which book was praised as well by other Albanian nationalist, like Luigj Gurakuqi<sup>16</sup>, who tried to give its attention also in different international press in Italy, Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey. In this book Sami Frashëri for the first time openly stipulates that Albanian Independence (autonomy on that time) cannot be achieved with desire from Turkey, but that can be achieved only through weapons.<sup>17</sup>

In the title "How Albanians are today", Sami spoke about the bad situation of the Albanians, for suffering in comparison with other nations. He insisted that although on a low level of education, Albanians are able to govern themselves, because they have enough people capable of doing that.<sup>18</sup> He said that for any man there is nothing more beloved than the nation. He insisted that every man should love the nation as his own parents and the country he was born, while he or she who does not love his country and his mother is traitor, wicked and as such can not be called a human being. He said that a true Albanian is killed for his nation and could not hear someone else to break the country. Unlike other nations who have faith (religion) before the nation, only

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<sup>14</sup> Zija Xholi, *Sami Frashëri, Jeta dhe Veprat*, Tiranë, 1978, p.69.

<sup>15</sup> Akademia e Shkencave e RPS të Shqipërisë, *Njoftime dhe shpjegime rreth veprës “Shqipëria ç’ka qenë, ç’është e ç’do bëhetë”*, Tiranë, 1988, p. 29-78.

<sup>16</sup> Balkanologie VII (2), Bülent B., *Sami Frashëri or Şemsedin Sami? – Mythologization of an Ottoman Intellectual in the Modern Turkish and Socialist Albanian Historiographies based on “Selective Perception”*. 30 / décembre 2003, p: 19-46.

<sup>17</sup> University of Korça, *“Lidhjet Kulturore dhe Historike Shqiptaro – Rumune”*, Bashkim Jahollari, *Shqipëria dhe Rumania në Luftë për çlirimin e tyre kombëtar – Pushtimi Turk i Ballkanit*, International Conference, 2013, p: p. 152-164.

<sup>18</sup> Sami Frashëri, *Shqipëria ç’ka qenë, ç’është e ç’do bëhetë*, Redaksia e botimeve Rilindja, Prishtinë, 1978. p. 52.



Albanians have faith (religion) in the second place and place of the nation is always in the first place. Albanians being Muslim, Catholic or Orthodox are first of all Albanians. By elaborating on the important elements of the Albanians in general to the nation, he makes a rhetorical question: How is the nationality of a nation maintained? Earlier with his language... language is the greatest sign of nationality. He claimed to have tried to advance the language even further, because only then the Albanian nation could live with all those enemies around them.<sup>19</sup> According to Sami, Turkey was coming to an end, so like all the nations under its rule, Albanians had to be organized in order not to fall apart with Turkey. Albanians, according to him, only needed to unite with each other and they would then be helped by others, especially from Europe, to remain free.<sup>20</sup> In the title "The purpose of the Albanians," he said that the only purpose of Albanians have is to protect Albania from foreigners, to protect their language that is endangered by neighboring countries.<sup>21</sup> According to Sami, language was the first element to tighten the power of time to remove the limitations, so that Albanians can learn their language. The second element according to him was the removal of the church from the leadership of the priests of Greece and Bulgaria so that the Albanians had their own priests. But to do all this, they needed a government of the country to work for the needs and rights of Albanians. According to him this was the goal of the Albanians. The formation of this government, but under Turkey would enable the Albanians the existence even if Turkey will be removed from the countries they were keeping under occupation.<sup>22</sup>

As can be seen, the main issue that characterizes it is the involvement of all Albanian territories and Albanian population, national unity in a common state. Such a conclusion is derived from the premise that with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Albanians could be known as an autonomous or independent political entity, but would not match the unity of the nation, because the Ottoman Empire would collapse and for Albanians are likely to be recognized an independent state, but what is jeopardized is the requirement for this state to include within itself all the Albanian

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<sup>19</sup> Sami Frashëri, *Shqipëria ç'ka qenë, ç'është e ç'do bëhetë*, Redaksia e botimeve Rilindja, Prishtinë, 1978. p. 54.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 69-73.

<sup>21</sup> Sami Frashëri, *Shqipëria ç'ka qenë, ç'është e ç'do bëhetë*, Redaksia e botimeve Rilindja, Prishtinë, 1978. p. 79.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 79-80.

territories and its population. To argue that the religious identity was second in terms of national identity and characterized the Albanian intellectuals during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as mentioned above. These tendencies often refer to the verses of Albanian poet Pashko Vasa, which are the main motto of the national awareness raising project "Do not look at churches and mosques, as the Albanian religion is Albania". Cooperation between intellectuals with different religious affiliations eg. Fan Noli - Writer and Archbishop of the Albanian Orthodox Church, Luigj Gurakuqi - Catholic poet from Shkodra and Bajram Curri - Muslims from Kosovo shows that religion was left aside comparing to the national identity and national cause of Albanians. These personalities that represented a progressive political stream had opposed conservative associations that also belonged to different religious communities.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

As seen from all previous periods, the process of nationalization of Albanians has been a very difficult process and also a process, which differs a lot from other nations. Although it was a difficult process, in fact this process has never been complicated by Albanians or Turkey, but it was complicated by the Great Powers themselves, because Albanians possessed all the elements that identified them as a nation.

The process of nationalization of the Albanians had to be an easier process compared to other nations, precisely because the social-religious divisions did not pose problems as to other nations. It is important to note that from the beginning of ideas for the creation of the Albanian nation there were no chauvinist or radicalist ideas in terms of territorial expansion towards other nations and territories, and interethnic aspects were highly respected within the territory that were aimed at nationalization.

Although ideas for the creation of the Albanian Nation have started around 50 years later than in other places around the Albanian lands, countries that had already created their own states, namely Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria, Greece etc. were already functional states, while Albanians still were trying to create their own country. So in the creation of the Albanian Nation it was not only the time when this idea started, but the problem was that all other states had territorial claims towards Albanian lands.

Having in mind all these difficulties, and also the Balkan Wars during the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Albanian Renaissance managed to save, what was possible

to save and create new country of Albanians – Declaration of Independence of Albania on 28 of November 1912, which declaration was made under the attack from all sides towards the Albanian territories. At the end the Albanian country was recognized in London Conference and of course as was expected left more than 2/3 of the Albanian territories outside the ethnic Albanian territories, which of course left the Albanian issue open for more than 100 hundred years.

Today, Albanians have two countries, Albania of 1912 and the Independent Kosovo from Yugoslavia, which proclaimed its independence in 2008, thus creating two Albanian states in the region of Balkan Peninsula. Somewhat second part of XXs century and the beginning of XXIst century made Albanians to receive better rights in different countries, where Albanians are living, like in Northern Macedonia, Serbia, and Montenegro.

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