

The Policy of the Provisional Government of Vlora between December 1912 and April 1913

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Abstract:

As to the period between November 28, 1912 and April 24, 1913, quite little information has been published on the conditions of operation of the Provisional Government, on the direct effects and consequences of the independence proclamation and on the foreign and domestic policy of the government. Present study aims to fill in this gap through the investigation of Austro-Hungarian and Albanian (archival) sources. The paper focuses attention first of all on the local conditions of the Provisional Government and on his policy towards the Ottoman troops, and the armies of the Balkan Allies.

Key Words: Balkans, Albania, Albanian independence, Balkan Wars

The proclamation of independence and Albania's secession from the Ottoman Empire were undoubtedly the most important moments in the 20th century history of the Albanian nation. Soon after the proclamation commenced the self-organisation of the state with the Vlora Provisional Government being its most important body headed by Ismail Qemali.

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As to the period between November 28, 1912 and April 24, 1913, quite little information has been published on the conditions of operation of the Provisional Government, on the direct effects and consequences of the proclamation and on the foreign and domestic policy of the government. The present study aims to fill in this gap through the investigation of Austro-Hungarian archive sources.

Both the Albanian and international experts agree that the territory controlled by the Provisional Government spread across approximately 4.000 km² (approximately a sanjak) with a population of 250-300.000 people as of November-December 1912, out of which 30-35.000 could be Turkish soldiers taking refuge in the region,¹ practically in the Vlora-Lushnja-Berat triangle. The other Albanian-inhabited areas were occupied by the Balkan allies, while this remaining territory was isolated by blockades and frontlines. Austro-Hungarian sources suggest that it was only the presence of the Ottoman army that prevented the Balkan allies from invading this bit of land also. As the Ottoman troops represented the empire, the Vlora-Lushnja-Berat triangle is to be regarded as such an area where, in December 1912, *co-existed* the “new Albanian power” and the ruins of the “old Ottoman rule”.² To put it differently, both the Provisional Government and the remains of the already defeated Ottoman army, unable to perform frontline battle were in control of the area. This concept is further supported by the fact that in November-December 1912, the areas south of Shkumbi still had direct contact on land with the Ottoman army that was successfully defending Ioannina. And this army was still fighting for the Empire.³

¹ Vlora, Ekrem Bey. *Lebenserinnerungen*. Bd. 2. München: Oldenbourg, 1973. 3; Puto, Arben. *Historia diplomatike e çështjes shqiptare*. Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave, 2003. 124; Schmidt-Neke, Michael. *Entstehung und Ausbau der Königsdiktatur in Albanien (1912–1939). Regierungsbildungen, Herrschaftsweise und Machteliten in einem jungen Balkanstaat*. München: Oldenbourg, 1987. 25; Puto, Arben. *Shqipëria politike 1912–1939*. Tiranë: TOENA, 2009. 44f; Gurakuqi, Romeo. *Shqipëria 1911–1914*. Tiranë: UET-Press, 2012. 463–466.

² Kriegsarchiv Vienna (KA), Militärkanzlei Seiner Majestät (MKSM), 18–1/7, Thomas, Bruno. *Bericht über Albanien. I. Die gegenwärtigen Verhältnisse in Albanien 1913*, 2. 14. and *ibid.* Hofmann, Johann. *Bericht über Albanien 1913*, 10–11.

³ KA, MKSM, 18–1/7, Thomas, *Bericht über Albanien*, 2. 14. and *ibid.* Hofmann, *Bericht über Albanien 1913*, 10–11.

In the months following the declaration of independence, the Provisional Government exercised direct influence only in Vlora and its surrounding countryside.⁴ Gjirokastra, Tepelena and Përmet recognised Ismail Qemal Vlora as Prime Minister in the winter of 1912–1913. Only after the spring of 1913, along with the slow retreat of the Serbian army and the Anatolian troops shipping home, could the other Albanian administrative districts recognise the rule of the Vlora Government.

The independent Albania led by the Provisional Government faced grievous problems. The majority of the great houses declined submission to the new power; according to centuries-old traditions their members formed parties and controlled their followers from the centre of their estates: the Toptanis from the Durrës–Tirana–Kruja triangle, the Vrionis from Fier and Muzeqe and the Vloras from Vlora. The remainder of the Albanian-controlled southern territories belonged to the Libohova and the Delvino families. Every such party could mobilize an army of one to three thousand people. The Muslim landlords of the area had no aversion to national sentiments, but many of them was still nursing hopes of attaining a well-paid office in the Ottoman administration. In the winter of 1912–1913, their best interest was to promote the stabilization of the Albanian situation and the restoration of order. Interestingly, most of them expected not of Istanbul but of the great powers with Adriatic interests to achieve these ends and to reorganise the political and economic life (construction of schools and establishment of banks etc.): mainly of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy that had already proved its capability in Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁵

The local officials were mainly agha and bey families the majority of whom withdrew to their estates with their soldiers and there sought to wait and see how the events would eventually turn out. Most of them like the members of the intelligentsia pledged loyalty to one of the major houses and thus hoped for a better future.

⁴ *Qeveria e Përkohëshme e Vlorës dhe veprimtaria e saj – nëndor 1912 – janar 1914*. Edited by Dhimitër Kotini. Tiranë: Drejtorja e Përgjithëshme të Arkivave Shtetërore, 1963. 15.

⁵ KA, MKSM, 18–1/7, Thomas, *Bericht über Albanien*, 2. 1–5, 14, 21; idem Hofmann, *Bericht über Albanien 1913*, 10–22, 29 and idem. Adrario, Karl. *Bericht über meine Reise durch Süd-Albanien*. 5.

By late autumn of 1912 the countryside population had been left without any higher authority to control them. Anarchy set in, and due to the war conditions and the lack of state control, waves of violence ensued. Robberies, murders and showdowns continued to go unpunished. The rivalry between interest groups increased which prevented these groups to pursue a policy along their joint interests. The only organisations that still worked were the troops gathering around the great houses and the bey families.

The deluge of Albanians from the Central Balkans fleeing from the Serbian army only worsened the situation. As to their numbers, only estimations are available, as part of them was always on the move because of the Serbian advance, and because after the Greek blockade had been lifted in early April, many Muslims must have shipped to Istanbul so that they could settle down in Anatolia. The refugees set up their temporary shelters around major Central and Southern Albanian towns such as Durrës, Berat and Vlora. They numbered approximately 60.000 in the Durrës and Elbasan Sanjaks respectively, and about 5000 around Vlora.⁶

The government was also hard put, because the Ottoman empire, and the army, the strongest local representative of the empire's power, considered the declaration of independence as treason. The Ottoman military leaders who were fighting in the West Balkan only received word with many days' delay of the events of 28th November, 1912. Pasha Esat Halasti assumedly ordered that Qemali be arrested and dragged to Ioannina. However, Myfit Bej Libohova, former member of the Ottoman Parliament managed to convince him that with such a move he would only put in jeopardy the loyalty of his Albanian troops. After their discussion Pasha Halasti decided to order the officials who were loyal to the empire to cooperate with the Qemali administration.⁷ A few days later, on the 2nd of December it was already his autonomous decision to send a telegram to Vlora, ordering Qemali to organise the independent Albania. The Pasha also

⁶ Österreichisches Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv (ÖStA HHStA), Politisches Archiv (PA), XII/422/6n, report by Rudnay, Durazzo, 31.03.1913., No.109. and telegram by Rohm, Corfu, 09.03.1913., No.1182.

⁷ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/417/6c, letter by Lejhanec, Valona, 03.12.1912., No.71 and *ibid.* 6a, telegram by Rudnay, Durazzo, 26.11.1912., Nr.5908.

indicated however, that any kind of independence inspired by the Monarchy or Italy, was out of the question.⁸

It was only on 3rd December that the Grand Vizier received detailed information about the 28th November Vlora events from the father of independence. Qemali announced that he and the delegates of the Albanian nation formed the Provisional Government, because, as he pointed out, the empire could no longer defend the Albanian-inhabited territories against the external adversaries.⁹

Grand Vizier Kâmil's response arrived on 9th December. Hardly could Kâmil Pasha conceal his bafflement, as he thought that the declaration of independence had been no less than an uprising against the empire. He deemed the new arrangement rather unfortunate, as it meant that there were no longer such power that could prevent the partition of Albania between Serbia, Montenegro and Greece. Kâmil Pasha attempted to influence the Provisional Government by claiming, that the Ministers' Council of the Young Turk Government resolved on 23th October to give complete autonomy to Albania under the leadership of an Ottoman prince, and the relating decree was already being prepared.¹⁰ He warned Qemali that the events might turn out for him much as they previously did for the Crimean Khan, who declared independence but still lost his power to Russia.¹¹ Qemali thanked the Vizier for the offer, but found it belated, as independence had been declared which entitled the London Conference of Ambassadors to determine the future of the country.¹²

Two weeks after the receipt of the Grand Vizier's letter 200 Turkish riders set out for Vlora on unknown initiative. Qemali sent 50 soldiers to hold them at the Linec Pass (26 kms from the Southeast of Vlora),¹³ but an armed conflict was in the interest of neither of the parties.¹⁴

⁸ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/417/6c, telegram by Lejhanec, Valona, 1912.12.04., No.753; Nr. 49. telegram by Esat Halasti to Nazim Pasha to Valona, 2.12.1912., *Qeveria e Përkohëshme e Vlorës*, 54.

⁹ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/417/6c, telegrams by Lejhanec, Valona, 04.12.1912., No. 753. and 06.12.1912., No.1187.

¹⁰ Vlora, *Lebenserinnerungen 2*, 26.

¹¹ ÖStA HHStA PA/XIX/Berchtold/1, Bd.IV. 11.12.1912., 466.

¹² Vlora, *Lebenserinnerungen 2*, 26.

¹³ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/417/6c, telegram by Lejhanec, Valona, 12.12.1912., No.2552.

¹⁴ *Qeveria e Përkohëshme e Vlorës*, 11.

Qemali sent another letter in Turkish to the Grands Vizier on 18th December, 1912. The letter was written in a conciliatory tone and emphasised the motifs behind the declaration of independence: the Albanians wished to avoid foreign control and the partition of their fatherland. Qemali argued, that it was also in Istanbul's best interest to support a friendly Albania that could act as a balancing power among the hostile states of the peninsula, an idea which was also promoted by the great powers' policy.¹⁵ Another argument to support the foundation of the new state was the nationality principle which was promoted by the Balkan allies and was also accepted by the great powers. Qemali said, it would be a shame not to capitalise on these benefits, and he requested [!] the Grand Vizier to grant him the freedom necessary to establish a government that might satisfy both states.¹⁶ There is no knowing if this letter was ever answered. After this, however, the Ottoman authorities also blocked the telegram and mail traffic in Vlora, and thus contributed to the isolation of Qemali and the town.¹⁷

The Ottoman army in Central and Southern Albania

¹⁵ Demeter, Gábor. *Kisállami törekvések és nagyhatalmi érdekek a Balkán-háború idején (1912–1913)*. Debrecen: Hungarovox, 2007. 167–177.

¹⁶ ÖStA HHSStA PA/XII/417/6c, telegram by Lejhanec, Valona, 18.12.1912., No.4019.

¹⁷ ÖStA HHSStA PA/XII/417/Jänner-März 1913, telegram by Rudnay, Durazzo, 27.02.1913., No.3772.

In November-December 1912, three Ottoman army groups and a few minor independent corps were present in Central and Southern Albania. Around Ioannina, the Albanian Esat Halasti Pasha and his brother, Vehib Halasti Pasha led an army of 30-40.000 men (out of which, according to Myfit Libohova the Albanian soldiers could number around 12.000¹⁸), while the 5th army group and the remains of the Vardar army controlled the territory between the Shkumbi river and Berat.¹⁹ It was the latter two that posed a real threat to the Vlora government, as the Halasti brothers were unable to send considerable reinforcements if they were to hold Ioannina.

The 5th army group under the command of Kara Said withdrew from Kumanovo to the region of Berat. Only 12.000 people were still alive of the army group out of which approximately 4.000 were stationed around the town. These troops were disciplined and maintained good relationship with the local population as well. They were no longer fit for front battle: in early January, 1913 one battalion was for example complemented with 1.000 local insurgents and a machine gun, and was ordered to Himara. One day later the battalion turned insubordinate and turned back. Kara Said established a more or less operating military administration, which also tolerated the presence of the Provisional Government representatives on the territories it controlled. It was this Ottoman army that prevented the Serbian troops from crossing the Shkumbi river. Due to the desertion of the Albanians, only 6.000 Turkish troops had remained of the army group by January 1913.²⁰

A sovereign division of the Vardar army fled to Albania under the leadership of Cavid Pasha, who originally defended the sanjak of Novi Pazar. The Serbian army was chasing him when reached the Adriatic at Durrës. Cavid Pasha had approximately 5.000 men left. They set up camp in the Vlora region and until May 1913, when the

¹⁸ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/417/6c, telegram by Lejhanec, Valona, 03.12.1912., No.568.

¹⁹ Source of the data and military events of the Ottoman forces: KA, MKSM, 18–1/7, Thomas, *Bericht über Albanien*, 2. 10–14. and idem. Hofmann, *Bericht über Albanien 1913*, 8–10, 28.

²⁰ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/415/5r, telegram by Lejhanec, Valona, 07.01.1913., Nr.3848.

troops were finally shipped home, they had posed a constant threat for the Provisional Government.²¹

To the south of them in Delvino there were 4-5 battalions stationed, comprising partly Albanians under the leadership of Mehmet Ali Delvino Pasha. The Albanian landowner marched his troops from Bitola to his homeland, where he introduced military administration. In early December at Saranda about 500-1.000 underequipped Greek soldiers disembarked who, on their way to Delvino, unsuspectingly walked into the imperial army armed with a machine gun and four quick firing mountain guns. Mehmet Ali Pasha pushed them into the sea and thus he prevented for months the Greek occupation of this part of South-Albania. The Pasha never supported Qemali's policy but neither did he threaten him with attack. With his forces he covered Esat Halasti from the coast, kept the çamër territories under surveillance, and successfully protected his family estates as well.

The hostile attitude of the Ioannina Ottoman army against Qemali was due not only to the proclamation of independence, but also to the fact that the head of the Provisional Government sent messages to the Albanian soldiers in the army urging them to desert. On the one hand, Qemali saw the imperial army as a threat, and therefore tried to weaken it by all means. On the other hand, he visioned peaceful relations with the Balkan states – and so, in the name of the independent Albania, he objected to all armed conflict whatsoever. Thirdly, he firmly believed that when setting the final borders, the great powers would not take into consideration where the troops of the Balkan allies are being stationed, that is, he found it senseless for the Albanian soldiers to shed their blood in the Ottoman army.²²

The Premier's messages made thousands of Albanians desert from the Ottoman forces along with their officers, taking their weapons and ammunition. Although after 20th December the Provisional

²¹ Mikić, Djordje. 'The Albanians and Serbia during the Balkan Wars.' In *East Central European Society and the Balkan Wars*, edited by Béla K. Király and Dimitrije Djordjević, 174. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987; Sax, Carl. *Nachtrag zur Geschichte des Machtverfalls der Türkei*. Wien: Manzische k.u.k. Hof-,Verlags- und Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1913. 642.

²² ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/417/6b, telegram by Berchtold to Mérey, Vienna, 18.12.1912., Prot.Nr.3986.

Government sent no more such messages, Qemali's propaganda still demoralised the remaining Albanian troops of the Ottoman army in the long run.

As to the desertion the Ottoman field officers were helpless: they applied martial law and amnesty but to no avail.²³ Only after Musa Hamit Demi's visit were the relationship between Qemali and the Ottoman military leaders settled: there were no more messages urging the Albanians to desert, and the Ottoman leaders took cognizance of the Provisional Government (see later). The Provisional Government had not much business to do with the Ioannina high command. All that passed between was that from early 1913 a few members of the Provisional Government sent a number of telegrams to the Ioannina Ottoman forces in connection with Çamëria among other things, in which they ordered the forces led by Halasti to look after the general defence of the southern territories.²⁴ Qemali, however, had no mind to provide active support for the Ottoman forces to this end.

Owing to Qemali's propaganda approximately 3-4.000 Albanian soldiers deserted from Berat until March 1913. In Ioannina only 2 of the original 12 Albanian redif battalions held their ground, the rest fled for home. The majority of the Albanian regulars of the nizams however, kept their position and continued to fight until the ceasefire. It is important to note about those who deserted from Ioannina, that most of them went to Çamëria to fight against the Greek attackers in their fatherland while others gathered around Gjirokastra and Delvino and returned under the leadership of Esat Halasti.²⁵

The Ottoman troops stationed in Middle Albania posed much more significant threat for the Vlora government in the long run than Esat Halasti Pasha, as these troops indeed had the opportunity to forcefully abolish the Provisional Government which, from an imperial point of view, was simply considered rebellious. The Turkish commanders of Berat had a basically hostile attitude towards Qemali's

²³ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/417/6c, telegram by Lejhanec, Valona, 26.12.1912., No.5354.

²⁴ Pl. Nr. 119. telegram by Myfit Libohova to Esat Halasti Pasha to Ioannina 27.12.1912., *Qeveria e Përkohëshme e Vlorës*, 88–89.

²⁵ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/420/6f, report by Bilinski, Ioannina, 04.03.1913., No.9. 3-4.

policy, but at the same time they were very much aware of their real situation: their troops were unfit for battle and besides, they had to pull through in Albanian-inhabited territories. Therefore, in order to survive the war, they did not risk an armed conflict.²⁶

Virtually all Albanian troops deserted from Berat to Qemali's summons. Those few who remained, with some officers among their numbers pledged loyalty to Qemali in a letter and undertook to provide information for the government in Vlora.²⁷ The Premier strove to keep the remaining Turkish military away from the port and its vicinity and tried to encumber their efforts to get supplies. He also attempted to persuade the high commanders in Berat to capitulate and lay down their arms. Furthermore, he sent telegrams to the governments of the Adriatic great powers in which he urged that those troops be shipped home to Anatolia.²⁸

The Provisional Government and the Armies of the Balkan Allies

Although the Provisional Government did not participate directly in the fight against the Greek, according to the Albanian historiography, between December 1912 and March 1913 the government was mostly preoccupied with how the Greek could be driven out from the country.²⁹

During this period a minor Greek force (1-3.000 soldiers) stationed in Himara and posed a constant threat to the city of Vlora.³⁰ To the south, fights continued in Labëria and Çamëria mainly along the road leading from Ioannina to Vlora and along the coastline. The Greek free corps here, led by trained officers and equipped with machine guns and cannons, fought against irregular Albanian insurgents. Resistance proved to be successful until the fall of Ioannina, as the siege prevented the Greek royal army from directly supporting Epirotean and Cretans Greek bands. In mid-December Eqrem Bej Vlora, whom

²⁶ *Qeveria e Përkohëshme e Vlorës*, 11.

²⁷ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/417/6c, telegram by Lejhanec, Valona, 18.12.1912., No.4008.

²⁸ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/417/6c, telegrams by Lejhanec, Valona, 01.12.1912., No.204., and 03.12.1912., No.568. and No.598.

²⁹ *Qeveria e Përkohëshme e Vlorës*, 65–66, 71–72, 76–78, 83, 86–88.

³⁰ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/420/6f, report by Bilinski, Ioannina, 1913.03.04., No.9, 4.

Qemali consequently denied supplies and other support, travelled to the spot to support the Albanian free corps (the Premier declared on more than one occasion that the independent Albania wishes to live in peace with her neighbours). The position of the Greek troops was further weakened when thousands of armed Albanian soldiers appeared between Delvino and Prevesa (cca. 6.000). It is almost certain that they deserted from Ioannina in order to fight here.³¹

The Greek blockade became efficient following the fall of Ioannina.³² The control of the sea was expanded as far as Durrës, because on the Adriatic sea unexpectedly turned up one of the strongest Ottoman cruisers, the *Hamidie*, and the Greeks worried that arms and ammunition might be loaded ashore from her.³³ Athens lifted the blockade on 14th April, 1913 after the first agreements on the shipping home of the Anatolian troops had been concluded. Until the end of March, the Greek warships successfully prevented Qemali from travelling to London and participating in the conference of ambassadors.

The Serbian army that invaded Middle-Albania to the Shkumbi had no indirect connection with the Vlorë government. They occupied the long sought after marine port and then their attention shifted to the siege of Shkodra and the invaded territories of the Middle-Balkans. In South Albania there was no threat of a Serbian-Albanian clash.³⁴

The first semi-official contact between Qemali and the Serbians took place in February 1913. The Premier could less and less tolerate his being locked up in Vlorë and the negative attitude of the Adriatic powers as to his European travel. He started negotiations with the Serbian authorities so that these would not keep him from traveling.³⁵ The Beograd government took advantage of Qemali's approaching

³¹ Godin, Marie Amelie. *Aus dem neuen Albanien. Politische und kulturhistorische Skizzen*. Wien: Roller, 1914. 61; ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/417/6c, telegram by Lejhanec, Valona, 11.12.1912., No.2343.

³² Demeter, Gábor. *A két Balkán-háború hadtörténete (1912–1913)*. Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 2008. 282–294.

³³ KA, Militärkanzlei Franz Ferdinand (MKFF), Akt. 106/40–41, Türkischen Kreuzer *Hamidié*, 07.03.1913., Nr.1917.

³⁴ Lalaj, Ana. 'Shpallja e pavarësisë dhe disa aspekte të veprimtarisë së qeverisë e Vlorës.' *Studime Historike* 51, Nr. 1–4 (1997): 101.

³⁵ KA, MKSM, 18–1/7, Thomas, *Bericht über Albanien*, 2. 18.

them and started a new Albanian policy. Živojin Balugčić, the former Serbian consul in Salonica who had decades of experience about the Albanians, was sent to Durrës, and colonel Paunović was appointed the military leader of the port city. The arrival of the Serbian diplomat and the new commander mitigated the tension between the Albanians and Serbians in Middle Albania as both of them sought to maintain good relationship with the Muslim landowner and bey families.³⁶ Contact was made through Hamdi Bej Toptani from Durrës. His task was to organise a secret meeting somewhere around the Shkumbi river between Balugčić and Qemali. Eventually the meeting failed to take place, as the Premier only wanted to speak about his traveling to Italy, while the Serbian diplomat wanted to win the Vlora government over for the ideas of his own government.³⁷

The Beograd government sent not only Serbian diplomats to Middle Albania but also Macedonian Albanians, such as Fehim Bej Zavalani, the leader of the Bitola Albanian Club, who was also a follower of the Young Turk ideology.³⁸ To put it differently: the Serbian military authorities managed to gain for their ideas the support of a Muslim who had acquired quite a name for himself in the national movement. Until 1913, the Zavalani held negotiations with Serbian government authorities on a number of occasions and supposedly he also drew a monthly allowance from Beograd.³⁹ Fehim Zavalani, along with other Albanians from Bitola, arrived in Durrës at the end of February, 1913, and there joined Hamdi Toptani.

The task of Zavalani and Balugčić was to gain Qemali's support for a temporary Serbian occupation of smaller Albanian territories (as for example in the case of Berat sanjak), or possibly for a Serbian-Albanian personal union or for the idea of an independent Albania under Serbian supremacy. In return they promised to promote the

³⁶ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/422/6i, telegram by Rohm, Corfu, 03.03.1913., No.8/201.

³⁷ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/417/6c, telegram by Mérey, Rome, 08.03.1913., No.1049. and ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/422/6i, telegram by Rohm, Corfu, 23.02.1913., No.3176.

³⁸ Fehim Zavalani Bey (1859–1935). Elsie, Robert. *A Biographical Dictionary of Albanian History*. London – New York: Tauris, 2013. 498f.

³⁹ ÖStA HHStA PA/VII/Fasz. 423, report by Halla to Pallavicini to Constantinople, Monastir, 04.05.1913., No.48; *ibid.* XII/422/6i, telegram by Rohm, Corfu, 03.03.1913., No.8/201.

Premier's travel in Europe.⁴⁰ During the negotiations the bey of Bitola tried to act as a personal mediator between Qemali and the Beograd authorities.⁴¹

The head of the Provisional Government refused to participate in any negotiations that could possibly affect the future of Albania. He still expected the great powers to decide about the fate of his country and never relinquished his idea to personally take part in the great powers' negotiations leading his own delegation. For Qemali, the negotiations between Albania and Serbia finally became irrelevant when the *Mekong* arrived in Vlora on 28th March, 1913 (see later).

The Qemali government aspirations in domestic policy

In the months following the proclamation of independence, the Provisional Government started to operate in almost impossible conditions: due to the Greek maritime blockade and the fact that the telegram cable connecting Vlora with Bari had been cut off, the town became totally isolated.⁴² The central bureaucratic system and the administration in general collapsed, and in the countryside total chaos ensued. What is more, the new state law situation created new problems.

Until the great powers in London decided on a finalised organisational framework, the government aimed to build out a temporary public administration. The first attempt at this was made in the aforementioned Vlora-Lushnja-Berat triangle.⁴³ The objective was not merely to restore order and collect taxes, but the government also wanted to demonstrate the self-organising and self-administering skills of the Albanians.

In the country the reorganisation of the administration could only be attempted at such places where no imperial or other invasion forces were stationed. Such places were growing in number (until April 1913 especially in the former Berat, Elbasan and Durrës

⁴⁰ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/422/6i, telegram by Rohm, Corfu, 03.03.1913., No.8/201. and report by Bilinski, Ioannina, 15.03.1913., No.17.

⁴¹ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/422/6i, telegram by Rudnay, Durazzo, 21.02.1913., No.2893.

⁴² ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/415/5r, telegram by Lejhanec, Valona, 07.01.1913., Nr.3848.

⁴³ Puto, *Historia diplomatike*, 124.

sanjaks).⁴⁴ Apart from some territorial reorganisation, the administration of the Provisional Government retained the Ottoman system of sanjaks and kazas. Basically, a part of the former officials everywhere tried to restore office routine on their own. Qemali either ratified the appointment of the former functionaries or later approved certain changes, or from his Vlora office he appointed officials from the local aristocrats.⁴⁵ He could provide no more support. Thus in Vlora and its vicinity the Provisional Government kept operating the former administrative system.⁴⁶

Interestingly enough, Durrës established its own administrative system in December led by Hamdi Bej Toptani right after the Serbian invasion. The locals already in the first days of occupation informed the Serbian military authorities that they came under the legislation of the Provisional Government and not that of the Ottoman Empire. It is however important to note, that the town only namely acknowledged the authority of the Provisional Government; Ismail Qemal Vlora gained no influence whatsoever over the port town.⁴⁷ During the winter the inhabitants laid the foundations of a municipal system which was assigned to take over the control of the town and its vicinity following a possible Serbian withdrawal. The civilian-administrative, juridical and police bodies organised by Hamdi Bej Toptani never planned to further acknowledge the authority of the Vlora Government after the withdrawal of the invasion forces.⁴⁸

The Provisional Government had no sufficient domestic income to operate the administration. On the land, the imperial army used up all available resources, while the Greek blockade prevented the port from profiting from the tariffs. Formerly the latter had been the most

⁴⁴ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/417, Jänner-März, telegram by Lejhanec, Valona, 25.04.1913., No.24.

⁴⁵ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/417/6c, letter by Rudnay, Durazzo, 03.12.1912., No.78. and letter by Lejhanec, Valona, 03.12.1912., No.71.

⁴⁶ KA, MKSM, 18–1/7, Thomas, *Bericht über Albanien*, 2. 3–4, 7–9 and Hofmann, *Bericht über Albanien 1913*, 11, 29; Puto, Arben. *Pavarësia shqiptare dhe diplomacia e fuqive të mëdha (1912–1914)*. Tiranë: 8. Nëntori, 1978. 116, 139.

⁴⁷ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/417/6c, reports by Rudnay, Durazzo, 05.12.1912., No. 82. and 06.12.1912., No.83.

⁴⁸ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/417, Jänner-März 1913, report by Rudnay, Durazzo, 03.02.1913., No.35, Beilag.

important income for the town of Vlora: it amounted to a monthly 120-140.000 French francs.⁴⁹

The government basically could rely on two domestic income source: the saltworks in the port and the taxes collected in and around Vlora. The former yielded nicely in peacetime, the equipment and the buildings alone were worth as much as 5.000 Turkish liras. Qemali placed one of his confidants in charge of the works, so he could directly obtain the profit.⁵⁰ Indirect tax collection was executed in accordance with the tax obligations prior to 28th November, however, this time the amount was used not by the imperial bureaucracy but by the Provisional Government. While the government held office, the population never failed to pay the due taxes.

Ismail Qemali founded his actions on the hope that the fate of Albania will be decided by the great powers. It was they whom he expected to mark the final borders of his country and to stop the Serbian and Greek armies, and so he considered any kind of struggle as unnecessary and aimless. Basically this was the reason why he kept demoralising the Albanian soldiers fighting around Ioannina during the winter of 1912-1913.⁵¹

Yet he needed his own armed forces to protect his government, maintain order and defend against possible Albanian rivals and against Ottoman, Serbian or Greek attacks.⁵² The first such remarkable force at his disposal comprised the warriors of two Kosovarian warlords, Isa Boletini and Riza Bej Gjakova. These fighters were well-armed and had gained considerable battle experience while fighting against the Turkish and Serbian regular forces. They were also disciplined, "psychologically strong" and according to the contemporary Austrian spy, First Lieutenant Johann Hofmann, they were also known for their self-confidence and courage. Both Boletini and Riza Bey assured that they were never wanting in discipline: they kept drilling their soldiers on the fields around Vlora. The only problem with these warlords was that there was only one thing that

⁴⁹ Vlora, *Lebenserinnerungen* 2, 6.

⁵⁰ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/419/6e, report by Lejhanec, Valona, 07.05.1913., No.32.

⁵¹ „We have nothing to do with the war of Turkey" he stressed on a number of occasions. Godin, *Aus dem neuen Albanien*, 60.

⁵² KA, MKSM, 18-1/7, Thomas, *Bericht über Albanien*, 2. 10.

made them loyal to the government: they expected it to liberate Kosovo vilayet. The two leaders behaved like two medieval knights: due to their authority they possessed the right to do whatever they pleased and nobody dared to order them around. Hierarchically speaking they were on a level with the government rather than under it. It is true however, that they never took advantage of their position and indeed stood ready to protect the Provisional Government.

Qemali already started to organise his own armed force in December 1912. Soldiers could be recruited from three places basically: from the former policing crew of the empire (eg. gendarmerie), from the Albanian soldiers who had deserted from the Ottoman army and from the volunteering insurgents. The Premier also called to arm men from the colonies (e.g. Boston), but to no real avail.⁵³

In December 1912 Ismail Qemal Vlora originally meant to set up an army of 3.000 comprising deserting soldiers and officers whom he expected to come over to the Vlora government along with their equipment taken from the imperial army. He established a secret committee with the assignment to enlist the soldiers and win them for the cause of the independent Albania. To set up the army he also requested the Adriatic powers to provide a support of 100-200.000 Kronen. At that time, however, Vienna and Rome did not support the idea of an independent Albanian army.⁵⁴

Finally, he managed to enlist around 100 people with some Anatolian Turkish gendarmes serving in Albania among their number as well. As the deserting soldiers were well equipped with weapons and ammunition, and the army warehouses had been raided earlier, most of those enlisted entered service carrying their own weapons. Everybody had a rifle, handgun and bandoliers with 100-200 pockets for ammunition.

The scope of authority for the gendarmerie operations ranged as far as Lushnja, Berat and Gjirokastra (i.e. as far as the Albanian banner

⁵³ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/417/6c, telegram by Lejhanec, Valona, 05.12.1912., No.1171; *ibid.* XII/417, Jänner-März 1913, telegram by Nuber, New York, 19.02.1913., No.2677.

⁵⁴ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/417/6c, telegrams by Lejhanec, Valona, 12.12.1912., No. 2503. and 26.12.1912., No.5354.

represented the Provisional Government), but first of all they were stationed on the southern roads leading to Ioannina in posts set up every 10 kilometres. 20-50 of the gendarmes kept guard on the Llogara pass so that they could observe the Greeks landed in Himara. The gendarmes were responsible for maintaining order, patrolling and, in principle, apprehending deserters, but due to the free corps ravaging the region they hardly ever left their blockhouses.

Qemali's elder son, Edhem Bej Vlora, inexpert in military matters, became in charge of the gendarmerie of the Provisional Government, but occasionally the Premier himself acted as their commander. Minister of war, Mehmet Dërralla had no influence whatsoever over the corps. Besides the gendarmerie bigger towns also retained their police force of a few dozen people. These operated in accordance with the old regulation and were led by the local kadis. In Vlora, Minister of justice Poga also issued a few orders to the police.

Ismail Qemali's greatest Albanian rival in South-Albania was undoubtedly Eqrem Bej Vlora and his party at that time. While the young bey accepted his uncle's position and the situation in aftermath of the proclamation of independence, he tried to limit his opponent's possibilities to his best abilities. Eqrem did not strive to secure the power for himself, partly because he believed that his uncle would be able to overcome his personal feelings, partly because he was well aware that due to his strong sympathy with the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy he would fail to secure the necessary support. In the contemporary context his youth was also regarded as a disadvantage (he was 27 years of age at the time).⁵⁵

Eqrem Vlora however found political allies, namely Vice Premier Nikollë Kaçorri⁵⁶ and Murat Bej Toptani.⁵⁷ Although his contemporaries voiced several reasons for their opposing Qemali, the primary pretext for the confrontation was that Qemali had failed to organise the armed resistance against the armies of the Balkan states and had hindered those wishing to fight, not to mention his letters in which he had urged the Albanian soldiers of Ioannina and Berat to desert. His rivals made Qemali responsible for the Greek occupation

⁵⁵ Vlora, *Lebenserinnerungen* 2, 15.

⁵⁶ Nikollë Kaçorri (1862-1917). On his life see Elsie, *A Biographical Dictionary*, 228f.

⁵⁷ KA, MKSM, 18-1/7, Hofmann, *Bericht über Albanien 1913*, 4-6.

of South-Albania. The confrontation was mainly expressed verbally, through background intrigues. Unlike Eqrem Vlora, Myfit Bej Libohova⁵⁸ supported Qemali and he also emphasised that offering resistance would have been utterly senseless.⁵⁹

The Muslim Tosk aristocrats who participated in the defence of Ioannina also held Qemali accountable for the lack of armed resistance as in Çamëria and around Ioannina during the winter of 1912-1913 intense clashes continued between the Albanians and the regular and irregular Greek forces. The Muslim aristocrats and the fighting Albanian soldiers joined forces to organise defence. They were very much aware of the fact that they would lose to Greece those kazas and sanjaks where the Albanians were in minority compared with the Greek populace, but they also regarded Ioannina as the natural capital of South-Albania which was to be defended at all cost - either for the Empire *or* for an independent Albania.⁶⁰ The hostility Qemali and the Provisional Government displayed deeply embittered them, but they also resented the inhabitants of the northern, Catholic, tribal territories for not offering resistance. The Albanian free corps were on their own, the Provisional Government denied them any direct support between 28th November and 15th-18th December, which further fuelled the rumour that the Premier obeys Athens only, and means for Epirus and Himara to be parts of Greece.

The Tosks were generally disappointed in the Adriatic powers, with special regard to the Monarchy as they passively witnessed the events of the Balkan war. Although the various South-Albanian aristocratic groups sent several letters and telegrams to Rome and Vienna (the nobles of Çamëria even requested Austria to grant them access into the monarchy), they always received a negative or an evasive answer.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Myfit Libohova (1876-1927). On his life see Elsie, *A Biographical Dictionary*, 280–282.

⁵⁹ ÖStA HHStA PA/VII/Fasz. 429, report by Lejhanec, Constantinople, 20.02.1913., No.8; Vlora, Ekrem. *Lebenserinnerungen*. Bd. 1. München: Oldenbourg, 1968. 275.

⁶⁰ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/417/6b, telegram by Berchtold to Mérey, Vienna, 18.12.1912., Prot.Nr.3986, 4.

⁶¹ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/417/6b, telegram by Berchtold to Mérey, Vienna, 18.12.1912., Prot.Nr.3986. 5.o. and ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/420/6f, report by Bilinski, Ioannina, 04.03.1913., No.9, 1–5.

The Tosk aristocrats who had come from Ioannina, Gjirokastra and Serfice sanjaks and lived in Ioannina during the siege, decided in early December that they would personally call Ismail Qemali to account for his telegrams and messages in which he had urged the soldiers to desert. They selected Musa Hamit Demi and sent him to Vlora to demand answers from the Premier. It was also one of Demi's task to persuade the Provisional Government about the necessity of the armed resistance. After their meeting Qemali altered his policy and sent no more such messages. Demi could also convince the Premier that the Ottoman corps in Ioannina under the leadership of Esat Pasha Halasti actually defended the potential southern borders of Albania and they prevented the Greek army from invading the remaining Albanian territories, therefore dividing the defence would not prove to be a good idea. At the same time Qemali, in the name of the Provisional Government, refused to launch a joint Turkish-Albanian action against the Greek.⁶²

On 20th December, 1912, Ismail Qemal Vlora sent a congratulating telegram to the Ottoman high command in Ioannina for their victory over the Greek troops.⁶³ Musa Hamit Demi, after spending a week in Vlora, also returned to Ioannina. He was accompanied by one of the ministers, Mithat Bej Frashëri whose was entrusted with the task of heartening the soldiers to keep on fighting. During Frashëri's stay in Ioannina the Albanians of the town even toyed with the idea of overthrowing Qemali and putting a new Premier in power. This however never happened, as the local Austro-Hungarian consul warned the conspirators against an open Albanian-Albanian clash and its possibly dire consequences.⁶⁴

From the perspective of domestic policy, the government proved unsuccessful between December 1912 and March 1913: it failed to create an operating administration and to maintain order. Practically

⁶² ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/415/5r, telegram by Lejhanec, Valona, 07.01.1913., Nr.3848.

⁶³ Nr. 105. telegram by Qemali to Esat Halasti Pasha to Ioannina, 20.12.1912., *Qeveria e Përkohëshme e Vlorës*, 80–81.

⁶⁴ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/417/6b, telegram by Berchtold to Mérey, Vienna, 18.12.1912., Prot.Nr. 3986. 1–4.o. and *ibid.* Jänner-März 1913, report by Bilinski, Ioannina, 12.02.1913., No.4.

it operated as a city administration, while it was the one and only organisation that aspired to legitimately represent the interests of Albania outside the country. The government had not much influence in the countryside either: unoccupied territories remained under the control of the leaders of the great houses or under that of the Ottoman troops.

When assessing the performance of the government, one must not forget however, that under such circumstances even the most prepared body of experts would have been bound to fail. Foreign governments considered the Qemali administration as illegitimate and thus the Provisional Government so much depended on the decisions taken at the London conference and on the daily events of the Balkan that it was impossible for it to start any significant domestic reforms from the beginning. The only task the government could perform was to represent internationally and, to a smaller extent, domestically that *Albania has a government*.⁶⁵

The foreign policy of the Provisional Government

The Government, isolated in Vlorë, maintained “proper” relations with the Adriatic great powers only, through their local consulates. Though neither Vienna nor Rome supported overtly the Albanian government, for their own interests they maintained their diplomatic presence in Vlorë which greatly contributed to the stabilization of the region.⁶⁶ Their influence was based on the Albanian policy they pursued in former decades and on the fact that it was these consulates through which any information from the outside world could reach the port town. Their prestige was further increased by the Albanian expectations, as both the Provisional Government and the population expected these two great powers to drive out the invading troops. It is important to note however, that the maritime blockade also hindered these two consulates, as they could only send sporadic reports to their Ministries of Foreign Affairs, and thus neither the Ballhausplatz nor

⁶⁵ Godin, *Aus dem neuen Albanien*, 71; Puto, *Historia diplomatike*, 124; Gurakuqi, Romeo. ‘Principateua shqiptare dhe Mbretëria e Greqisë në kontekstin e marrëdhënieve ndërkombëtare 1913–1914.’ *Hylli i Dritës* 29 (2010): 96.

⁶⁶ Godin, *Aus dem neuen Albanien*, 106; Puto, *Shqipëria politike*, 45–47.

the Consulta had exact information as to the South-Albanian situation.⁶⁷

It was this lack of information and the communicational difficulties that necessitated that the two Adriatic powers dispatch spies and agents into Albania. While the Greek blockade never ceased to control the shore, with proper determination both the Italian and the Austro-Hungarian warships could anchor along the coast. As to the Italian agents, no archive sources have so far been published. It is known however, that Conrad, Chief of General Staff of the Monarchy dispatched at least seven intelligence officers to Albania whose tasks he liaised with the joint Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These agents were required not only to collect information but also to promote the (military) interests of their home countries. To be more exact, they had to plan a possible contraband of arms, organise Austro-Hungarian friendly Albanians. Qemali often protested against the latter activities.⁶⁸

The most important link between the Adriatic powers and the Provisional Government was undoubtedly the fact that Vienna and Rome provided the operating funds necessary for the Qemali government. In the first half of December 1912, Qemali applied to the great powers for a contribution of 100-200.000 Kronen to support the Albanian national aspirations.⁶⁹ Both ministries of foreign affairs were willing to provide the loan, but they also expressed their desire to control how this sum was being used.⁷⁰ So far no information has surfaced in the Vienna archive sources as to whether the Monarchy provided any funds for Albanian governmental purposes between December 1912 and March 1913, and if so, how much. What is known is that the Qemali family, in order to maintain power, drew regular allowances from Vienna (for example in March, 1913 they received 5.000 francs) and presumably from Rome as well. It is also a fact, that the Albanian Premier, during his travels in Europe, received 20.000

⁶⁷ Godin, *Aus dem neuen Albanien*, 108.

⁶⁸ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/422/6g, telegram by Berchtold to Mérey to Rome, 20.02.1913., No. 210. and ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/422/6m, telegram by Rohm, Corfu, 19.02.1913., No.2590; Vlora, *Lebenserinnerungen* 2, 17.

⁶⁹ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/417/6b, Tagesbericht, Vienna, 15.12.1912. [No. n/a]

⁷⁰ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/417/6c, telegram by Mérey, Rome, 16.12.1912., No.3363.

francs in the capitals of both great powers for governmental purposes, which amount he spent in total during the travels.⁷¹

Significantly higher amounts were spent supporting the refugees in the Albanian territories controlled by the Provisional Government. Vienna and Rome liaised the organisation of humanitarian aid on equal terms down to the most meticulous detail: the assigned diplomatic offices assessed the needs in joint reports, requested financial support and foodstuff together, received aid of equal amount and value and distributed it together according to jointly received orders. Although the foreign armies present and the poor infrastructure posed significant difficulties, the Austro-Hungarian and Italian consuls conscientiously travelled the region and strove to compile exact and detailed lists, statistics and assessments of the circumstances, conditions and needs.⁷² To a lesser extent, help was needed by those hundreds who wanted to ship to Anatolia from the Albanian harbours,⁷³ and to a greater extent by those fleeing to Middle-Albania from Macedonia and Kosovo.

In March, 1913, following a brief liaising, the Ballhausplatz and the Consulta agreed to allocate a daily amount of 500 Kronen to the refugees in and around Vlora as long as the Greek blockade would last. The aid was not merely of financial nature, but also meant shipping corn, wheat, flour, salt and beans to Albania.⁷⁴ However, the humanitarian support continued after the Greeks lifted the blockade on 14th April: both parties offered a further amount of 20-20.000 francs. The distribution was assigned to a committee comprising employees of the Italian and Austro-Hungarian consulates and officials of the Provisional Government. This aid was also meant for the refugees around Berat.⁷⁵ At the end of April an Italian and an Austro-Hungarian warship set out for Vlora, with 20-20.000 francs

⁷¹ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/421/60, telegram by Berchtold to Mérey to Rome, 17.04.1913., Prot.No.3056.

⁷² ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/422/6n, report by Rudnay, Durazzo, 31.03.1913., No.109.

⁷³ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/417/6c, telegram by Lejhanec, Valona, 26.12.1912., No.5354.

⁷⁴ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/422/6n, telegram by Rohm, Corfu, 09.03.1913., No.1182. and a handwritten draft telegram by Berchtold to Mérey to Rome, Vienna, 15.03.1913., No. 275.

⁷⁵ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/422/6n, report by Lejhanec, Valona, 15.04.1913., No.15.

worth of medical equipment (medical instruments, medicine, tents, blankets), foodstuff and ready money aboard.⁷⁶ The Vlora government was not the only beneficiary of this shipment: the Ottoman military commands of Fier and Berat also received their share, thus the aid reached the remaining Ottoman troops as well.⁷⁷

The conditions in Vlora proved to be almost unbearable for Ismail Qemal Vlora. He had served for decades as an Ottoman chief official, where he had got used to being respected and to a certain due distance between himself and the ordinary people. In the house of Xhemal Vlora however, anybody could walk up to him and present the most insignificant problems. Such were the “physical” circumstances under which the Premier was struggling to influence the policy-making of the great powers.⁷⁸

The most important objective for his government was to properly represent the Albanians before the great powers and the other Balkan states. Accordingly, Qemali and a few other members of his administration started planning a European tour as early as December, 1912. The Premier originally intended to visit the capitals of the great powers with a delegation of 3-8 members carefully selected on the basis of religious equality, and wanted to finish his tour in London so that he could officially represent Albania at the Re-Union negotiations where the final decisions were taken.⁷⁹ Qemali would have welcomed representatives of all Albanian-inhabited regions, like Hasan Bej Prishtina and Nexhip Draga as representatives of the Albanians of the Middle-Balkans.⁸⁰ Another objective of the tour was to secure credits for the new state.

⁷⁶ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/422/6n, letter by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Austrian Monarchic Red Cross [sic!], 1913.04.21., No.1808. and telegram by Mérey, Rome, 07.05.1913., No.1912.

⁷⁷ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/422/6n, report by Lejhanec, Valona, 07.05.1913., No.31.

⁷⁸ Godin, *Aus dem neuen Albanien*, 94.

⁷⁹ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/417/6c, telegram by Lejhanec, Valona, 03.12.1912., No.568. and letter by Lejhanec, Valona, 03.12.1912., No.71. vertraulich; furthermore ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/418/6d, telegram by Lejhanec, Valona, 17.12.1912., No.766.

⁸⁰ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/418/6d, telegram by Lejhanec, Valona, 20.12.1912., No.4525. and ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/417/6c, telegram by Lejhanec, Valona, 09.12.1912., No.1852.

In principle, Vienna and Rome never opposed to an Albanian delegation taking a European tour (via their consulates in Vlora they even assured Qemali that they would provide all necessary means, such as interpreters, etc.), but both great powers insisted that the Premier must not be among the members of the delegation.⁸¹ Accordingly, Italian consul de Facendis and Austro-Hungarian consul Lejhanec were ordered to retain Qemali in Vlora by all means and convince him that he was far more needed in Albania than in London.⁸² The experts of both great powers were absolutely positive that in the event of the Premier's leaving, Albania would surely lose any remaining illusion of order.

However, Qemali kept insisting (as Austro-Hungarian sources suggest "rather stubbornly") all along on his leading the delegation. He argued that he was the only Albanian who had diplomatic relations and adequate experience, what is more, his leadership would greatly stabilise his government and consolidate the situation in Albania. He even tried to win the support of the Adriatic powers by delegating members who expressly had a friendly disposition towards Italy and Austro-Hungary – but to no avail.⁸³

In February-March, 1913, Qemali once again made efforts to travel Europe. As the great powers still declined to provide any support, Qemali started negotiations with the Greek commanders in charge of the blockade at Vlora and with Balugčić, Serbian diplomat who had arrived in Durrës and asked them for support. In return, he offered certain concessions.⁸⁴ These offers, however, only served to buy Qemali time: he only made them to gain support for leaving the country, as he himself expected answers to all questions from the London conference. It is proven by the fact, that once the *Mekong* appeared, Qemali immediately suspended all negotiations with the Balkan allies.

⁸¹ ÖStA HHStA PA/XIX/Berchtold/1, Bd.IV., 1912.12.04., 446–447.

⁸² ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/418/6d, telegram by Berchtold to Lejhanecnek (No. 24.), to Mérey (No. 284.), Vienna, 20.12.1912. and Puto, *Pavarësia shqiptare*, 354.

⁸³ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/417/6c, telegrams by Lejhanec, Valona, 09.12.1912., No.1852.; 28.12.1912., No.5731. and telegram by Mérey, Rome, 31.12.1912., No.6207.

⁸⁴ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/417/6c, telegram by Rohm, Corfu, 09.03.1913., No.1185. and ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/417, Jänner-März, telegram by Berchtold to Mérey to Rome, Vienna, 24.02.1913., No.216.

The yacht of Ferdinand François Bourbon-Orleans,⁸⁵ Prince of Montpensier and descendant of Skanderbeg broke through the blockade and made a surprise appearance in the port town. In early March, the prince and his henchman, Albert Ghica⁸⁶ were still staying in Trieste and there caused quite a stir among the Viennese and Roman diplomats when they announced the prince's claim to the Albanian throne. After his visit to Trieste Montpensier anchored in various Italian ports and planned to contraband a shipment of arms into Vlora and in return to request the Provisional Government to proclaim him the monarch of Albania; thus he wished to present a fait accompli to the European great powers.⁸⁷ However, the regular and aggressive control and threatening harassment of the Italian civil and military authorities and the increased presence of imperial and royal warships on the Adriatic Sea made him reconsider and abandon the idea.⁸⁸ On 27th March Montpensier's yacht appeared along the shore of Corfu, and the next day the ship - with the prince standing aboard clad in British navy officer uniform - broke through the blockade and cast anchor in Vlora.⁸⁹

On his arrival the French prince and his yacht with the Albanian flag on the mast were cheered upon by the crowd gathering in the port. After disembarking he donated 1000 francs to the poor and distributed hundreds of postcards depicting him and fliers with Albanian captions about him. He behaved as a future monarch albeit he never said if it was the antant or the Balkan allies or a third party that supported his ambitions.

Qemali and Montpensier contacted each other without hesitation. Although the Italian and the Austro-Hungarian consuls warned the prince that the two Adriatic powers did not regard favourably Qemali's trip to Europe, Montpensier still started negotiations with

⁸⁵ Ferdinand Montpensier (1884-1924). On his life see Elsie, *A Biographical Dictionary*, 317f.

⁸⁶ Albert Ghica (1868-1925). On his life see Elsie, *A Biographical Dictionary*, 167.

⁸⁷ KA, B 1450 Nachlaß Conrad, Akt. 82, telegram by Manussi to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Trieste, 01.03.1913., Geh.Nr.93/1.

⁸⁸ ÖStA HHStA, XII. Türkei, Kt. 419. 6e., Herzog von Montpensier, report by Citterich Brindisi, 19.13.1913., No.17. and telegram by Mérey, Rome, 22.03.1913., No.3357.

⁸⁹ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/419/6e, Herzog von Montpensier, report by Lejhanec, Valona, 31.03.1913., No.9; Puto, *Shqipëria politike*, 86–88.

the Premier. Although he was not proclaimed monarch, he received certain promises, that the Provisional Government would favour him as a likely candidate in London.⁹⁰ The negotiations soon drew to an end: the prince agreed to transport the delegation to Italy. The three most important members of the committee were Qemali (the politician), Luigj Gurakuqi (the intellectual) and Boletini (the soldier), but Qemali's two sons (Edhem and Qazim) and Boletini's sons (7 altogether) were also aboard. The Premier did not let anybody have their say when selecting the members of the delegation: only his henchmen could participate. Before his departure he issued orders to remove from the government all those in his opposition whom he perceived as a potential threat: Kaçorri, Mithat Frashëri and Abdi Bej Toptani.⁹¹ The delegation set out with 900 Turkish lira for travel expenses.

They arrived in Brindisi on 30th March, whence Ismail Qemali immediately travelled to Rome, while his companions went to Bari.⁹² The Premier negotiated with San Giuliano, the Italian minister of foreign affairs and two days later with Kajetán Mérey, Austro-Hungarian ambassador in Rome. Both diplomats received Qemali with mistrust and endeavoured to convince him to return home as soon as possible.⁹³ Neither party offered any promises or encouragement.

The delegation arrived in Vienna on 10th April. Here the representatives of Ballhausplatz and also the heir presumptive Franz Ferdinand contacted them, the latter attempting to get them to acknowledge Prince Urach's claim to the throne. In Vienna negotiations took place not only with the Albanian Premier: the

⁹⁰ Kemal, Ismail. *The Memoirs Ismail Kemal Bey*. Edited by Sommerville Story. New York, 1920. Reprint 1997 by Renzo Falashi. 374f; Vlora, *Lebenserinnerungen* 2, 17.

⁹¹ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/419/6e, Herzog von Montpensier, report of Lejhanec, Valona, 31.03.1913., No.9. and telegram by Lejhanec, Valona, 30.03.1913., [No. illegible]

⁹² Musaj, Fatmira. *Isa Boletini (1864–1916)*. Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave, 1987. 171.

⁹³ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/421/6o, telegram by Berchtold to Mérey to Rome, 01.04.1913., No.333. and handwritten report by Mérey, Rome, 10.04.1913., No.24.

general staff and the joint minister of war made enquiries with Boletini about the military situation and a possible cooperation.⁹⁴

The negotiations in Rome and Vienna clearly indicate that what worried the Adriatic allies was that Qemali's delegation might support the claims of Montpensier while the Ballhausplatz and the Consulta took all possible efforts to eliminate those claims. Qemali however took interest primarily in the future borders of Albania and in acquiring as much information as possible.⁹⁵ It was presumably during these negotiations that the head of the Provisional Government developed the principles he wished to represent in London: 1. Albania must utterly break away from the Ottoman Empire; 2. the future monarch may not be Muslim, the final decision as to his person is to be taken later; 3. the borders of Albania must be justly set, that is, the country cannot lose many important towns (although it remains unknown which towns he meant exactly); he however agreed that Ioannina come under the control of Greece; 4. guarantees of great powers are necessary, but these cannot overinfluence the shaping of the future administration.⁹⁶

As Qemali was aware that every important decisions would be made in London, he soon left Vienna for Paris and then arrived in the British capital. During his travels he gave several interviews and did his best to win the European press to the cause of Albania. In London, the delegation was courteously received. Although the members might have no say in the matters discussed at the conference, they could freely get in touch with Grey, minister of Foreign Affairs as well as with the representatives of the Triple Alliance.⁹⁷

In London however, Qemali radically modified his concepts of domestic politics. Soon after he had left Paris he came to know that his greatest opponent, Esat Toptani Pasha had surrendered Shkodra and with his army of thousands of troops he had set out for the South. For the Premier this arrangement spelled disaster.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Musaj, *Isa Boletini*, 173.

⁹⁵ Vlora, *Lebenserinnerungen* 2, 19.

⁹⁶ ÖStA HHStA PA/XII/421/60, telegrams by Mérey, Rome, 01.04.1913., No.178. and 03.04.1913., No.387.

⁹⁷ Musaj, *Isa Boletini*, 176; Puto, *Shqipëria politike*, 91–94.

⁹⁸ Kemal, *The Memoirs Ismail Kemal*, 376.

The news on the fall of Shkodra on 24th April brought about a radical change in the Albanian domestic policy. For the politically active Albanians the surrender of the fort town signified not the fall of the last Ottoman fortress in Europe, but the emergence in an already troubled domestic political atmosphere of the powerful Esat Toptani Pasha who, considering his influence and the capability of intrigue was equalled by Qemali only. In return for Shkodra Esat Toptani struck a deal with Montenegro and Serbia: the withdrawing troops could retain their weapons and ammunition and the two Slavic countries would support the Pasha's hegemonic aspirations in creating his own principality in Middle-Albania. Esat Toptani and his army of 10.000 soldiers set out for the South at the end of April and planned to personally adjust the future fate of Albania to his own political ambitions.

The conflict between Ismail Qemali and Esat Toptani marked the onset of a new phase in the history of the independent state. While the events of the London conference were taking place, the relationship between the two most influential Albanian politicians rapidly deteriorated. The only reason why they could avoid the outbreak of a civil war in September 1913 was that the Albanian and Macedonian refugees from the Middle Balkans who were staying in Albania at the time attacked the territories that had been annexed by Serbia. The two politicians' duel ended when Bekir Agha made an unsuccessful coup attempt, which allowed the International Commission of Control to overthrow Premier Ismail Qemali and to take over the control in the country. Upon Qemali's downfall the first national government of the independent Albania also resigned.

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