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WILSON AND EUROPEAN POLICY IN ALBANIA (1918-1920)

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To complete a peace treaty with countries that had lost the war, and to settle outstanding differences in their interests, five of the major victorious powers organized a Peace Conference, which was opened on 18 January 1919 in Paris.¹ “England, France, the USA, Japan and Italy tried with all diplomatic and political tools to influence each other to adopt their respective interests. Thus, the major states, whose voices had been heard by many, addressed from their own perspectives and interest the issue of Albania, its borders, and its governmental structure”.² With the formation of the Committee for the Greek and Albanian issue in February of 1919, Greek territorial claims found full support from England and France, as well as enjoying the partial support of the United States. British diplomats urged the French also to change the

¹ *The dawn was heavy and cold, with snowflakes that cascaded down like jelly and folded in the paving stones. For days Paris has felt the anguish of waiting for the much desired day when world leaders, or at least those of the winning powers, would gather to start drafting a peace agreement, which will be imposed on the defeated. In the painted buildings of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France, which faces the river Seine, they were preparing the first plenary session of peace talks, to begin before the late sunrise this day, a frigid winter morning. The building is surrounded by a heavy railing, with peaks of coated iron shining in the lights. Within the great hall, the Salle de la Paix with windows six feet high, workers had set up a giant U-shaped table where each delegate would be placed. Here will be Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau of France, then President Woodrow Wilson of the U.S. delegation, and British Prime Minister David Lloyd George with the British Delegation. A conference monitor—a correspondent from the Associated Press Agency—Charles Thomson noted the delicate features he had to present of two presidents—Wilson and Poincarre, and of nine prime ministers. At this point the conference was in great contrast with the Congress of Vienna, where the emperors controlled the fortunes of European royalty. David A. Andelman, *Peace of the Ruins, Versailles in 1919, and the Price they pay Today* (Tirana: Le Debut, 2008), 29.*

² *History of Albania* (1986), 193.

political boundaries of south Albania by favoring Greece. The main speaker of the Peace Conference, the Council of heads of Government and Ministers of Foreign Affairs, decided in the meeting of 4 February 1919 to establish a special commission to review decisions with regard to Greece. The commission was to consist of representatives of the four powers: the U.S., Britain, France, and Italy.

The immediate formation of the Committee for review of the Greek demands demonstrated a political seriousness. Thus, according to a "summary report", the work of the Committee from 12 February until 21 March 1919, respectively, occurred in 12 sessions. So, it seems that these big powers were disposed to assess and to prefer Greek claims.

Issues having to do with Albania's southern border were discussed in the lengthy debate, respectively in the seventh session of the Commission, from 12 February to 6 March.³ After the first session of 12 February the opinions of the representatives of the Great Powers were already well known. This new discussion began with the explanation made by Venizellos about old claims over southern Albania. The President leading the session, Kambon Thyl, a Frenchman, after making some general assessments of the case of meeting them in the East, highlighted the territories of the former Ottoman Empire. As a basis for adjudication of the case, he thought that religious affiliation should be made: "The Church was what characterized nationality".

While the other French representatives Gout and Laroche took a direct approach, without any diplomatic construction, it became clear that they had accepted the Greek position. In the wake of the confrontation of different views, representatives of France brought arguments in favor of Greek attitudes, particularly focusing on the formation of "autonomous vorio epirus". Zografos argued that the wish of the people of these territories was to be united with Greece.

But these positions met with those of other members of the Committee, who were of the opinion that the government does not represent Epirus. This certainly did not, for example, represent the wishes of the people of southern

3. Puto Arben, *Diplomatic History of the Case of Albania* (Tirana, 2003), 227. 4 - AMPJ. Letter lvi. Konicës, M. Breeding of M. Frashëri addressed to the President of the Paris Peace Conference. File no. 10, 1919 14prill, 739 document (French), copy. 5- AQSH. Memorandum, which was sent to the President of the Peace Conference in Paris, Klërnansosë, on 20 July, from ZZ. Dako Kristo, M. Grameno: Rights and searches for independence of Albania and the whole country. Fund Kristo Dako, aosja no. 7, January 18, 1919, the year 1918 to 1920, p 108 (copy) 6 - On March 2, 1914 in the South, the former foreign minister of the government of Athens.

Albania. In these regions, according to the Italian representatives, one saw simply an inhuman massacre, organized by forced evacuations of parts of their population from their regions.

This session was also notable for the somewhat lackadaisical attitude of the British representative, Sir Eyre Crowe. After a long silence, this representative asserted that he would pronounce after the expected results that would emerge after a detailed treatment of the case. But he also added, "The impression that in these regions there is a feeling of a clear sympathy, especially in the coast, in the favor of Greece".⁴

At this summary there occurred a preliminary exchange of ideas and of views but, in fact, there were two distinct groups: one represented by the French and the English, who seemed clearly in support of Greek interests, and the other, which was led by the American representative Day. He said that it was difficult to accept the possibility of choice according to the version of the border issue proposed by Venizellos because, in his opinion, political boundaries do not coincide with ethnic boundaries.

De Martino, Italy's representative, was considered highly knowledgeable about the problem, and put forth a series of arguments that challenged the Greek position. His approach seems now to have been very precise when he stated, among other matters, that the Albanian nationality cannot be determined easily, and religion in Albania was not a determinant element: "In the north there are Catholics who are Albanian, and Albanians of the Orthodox religion in the south. In regard to the statistics, we put at the disposal of the commission some works carried out recently by the Italian authorities who occupied the province, which is requested by the Greeks. This comes with a warning by the American and British delegations, that we must listen not only to certain interested parties but also to persons who have traveled in these parts and who are able to express a serious and acceptable opinion".

There was considerable weight given to the fact that Kastoldi was part of the Commission. He defended the view that religion should be excluded as a criterion of nationality-based elements, based on tying the Commission first of all to language. Records and maps were defined on this basis, explaining the trends which showed the relationship between population change with the Orthodox and Muslim faiths.

⁴ On 2 March 1914 in the South, the former foreign minister of the government of Athens.

In the second session, on 18 February 1919, the American delegation reduced the reference to a line on a special map.⁵ This came as a strand in two principles:

- The first principle was intended to keep open the ways of communication for Albanians and Greeks. The former had Vlora in one direction, while the latter had a path to Ioannina.
- The second principle had to be shared by two peoples' boundaries composition.

But it seems that the American delegation came to the conclusion that the population of northern Albania was fixed, while the southern part of Greece it also knew, and thus here appeared the importance of Gjirokastra. But the U.S. delegates' difficulties were categorical. So, it was necessary, according to the delegation, for the general interests not to give anything to Greece without studying the problem in its entirety.

The British delegation was of the opinion that Himara, Gjirokastra, Delvina, and Saranda were completely Greek in language and feelings, that the Florence Protocol had caused objections and Greek propaganda, and that the Albanian southern population wanted unification with Greece. On the other hand, the British felt that the Leskovik districts, Kolonje and Korca were comprised in the majority by ethnic Albanians.

Opinions arose that it would again be impossible to hold the border of the Florence Protocol. This is simply because the opposition had found this border because of Greek propaganda abroad. Therefore, these opinions were based on the argument that there was a significant part of southern Albania that wanted union with Greece. The line they wished to establish was a combination of the desires and interests of the Albanian and Greek population.

The Italian delegates brought to the commission arguments related to the population of the regions under discussion. They referred to statistics compiled by the Austro-Hungarian consulate in Janina, but also to recent Italian statistics, from 1918. Comparison of the relevant documents resulted in the downsizing of Muslim numbers, "explained by the persecution of the Epirote regime" that by changing the religious identity, aiming to change also the ethnic composition. It seems that the Italian delegation was close to the truth. Here is how this issue was formulated by the technical Italian attaché in

⁵ AQSH. Fund Kristo Dako, file no. 7, 1918-1920 year, f 1. Nicholas Ivanajt study: The mandate over Albania.

Paris: "I do not deny that in Gjirokastra district there is a Greek population of 15,000 persons, but it is connected to a mass of 152,497 Albanians. This concern lies in a desire for change, to confuse quality with that of Greek Orthodoxy."

But, according to Kastoldi, it was impossible to change ethnic identity, because all Muslims were so indisputably Albanians, and the Christians were undoubtedly Greek. The Italian Delegation protected political borders set in 1913 which generally approximated a fair division between Albania and Greece. This boundary corresponded to ethnicity and only that could secure a lasting peace. The French delegation considered as a "good omen" the creation of a majority comprised of the Commission, to enable the determination of one of the most important provinces ("Northern Epirus") in favor of Greece. According to the French, the basic criterion for resolving the issue should be only the religious element. Religious conflicts, however, were not the Epirotes nature, which does not mean that no religious propaganda appeared from the outside. Therefore, in solving the problem they looked at the matter of religious separation. Those who were Muslims had to be on the Albanian side, while those who were Christian were to be on the side of Greece. But according to the delegation, an essential problem to which attention had to be given was the fate of Saranda.⁶

At the 26th session in 1919, the diminishment of the Albanian issue was even worse. The President presented the issue of whether the Albanian delegation should even be heard. The French judged that there was not an official Albanian delegation, let alone a recognized Albanian government. According to them, it was just a *de facto* government "which cannot be placed in positions equivalent to the Greek government". This was rejected by the American delegation, which demanded that the Albanian delegation also be heard. It is important that the representatives of the Great Powers heard the voice of the Albanians. This was an historic moment that should be evaluated, because it was one of the first steps in the diplomatic engagement of the Albanian factor for the recovery of the state after the First World War. Precisely this is the origin of a diplomatic battle to save Albania from a potential partition.

In the session of 4 March 1919 the American delegation made concessions for the province that lay between Drinos and Vjosa so that the lines suggested by the Americans met with the line proposed by France and England.

⁶ Puto Arben, *Albanian Diplomacy*, 283.

The American delegation agreed that Gjirokastra be left to Greece. While the northern boundary line was positive, not accepting the proposed line from the French delegation to involve Korça, the British delegation admitted that at disputable sites there were more important Albanian elements from the point of view of population. They thought that a policy should be adopted in accordance with the interests of these territories, "in order to support Greek demands" even if it happened that the population had no desire for union with Greece. Here, regardless of other reasons, the British delegation argued, that it "should not be forgotten -- the large capacity of assimilating of the Greek people".

The Italian delegation, reiterating that the proclamation of Gjirokastra had to do with a defense under the conditions of war, and saw it as a momentary act of a military authority. The Italian delegation found the opportunity to plan for Albania in its new circumstances in a new time, regarding the care of a different power in Albania, solely in terms of foreign relations. This referred to Italian politics of the secret Treaty of London, which charged Italy with representing Albania in foreign relations.⁷ The session of 6 March 1919 heard the views of the Great Powers that included the problematic issue of "Northern Epirus". The Italian delegation compared the population of this region between Muslims and Christians, which was in favor of Muslims; simultaneously, there was no lack of Albanian national feeling among the majority of the Christian population. Albanians had "shown more than once their connections with the idea and national language". According to the British and French delegations, however, the statistics that were offered did not provide "a reliable criterion for population". The numbers, in their opinion, were based only on data of religion and language, the first of which were unfavorable for Albanians, while the second were not right for the Greeks. The delegation of the United States of America thought it could not accept a sufficient test history of the Albanian state disputes, which were defined by foreigners. Instead, the conclusions were based on observer reports and statistics available to them.

Another issue was the status of Albania after the war. During the debate on the southern border the Great Powers expressed doubt regarding the capability of the Albanians for self-governance. Consequently, discussions considered placing Albania under the care of one of the powers. It was thought that Italy would be suitable. This was being clearly defined as the concept of a mandate, similar to the form of control that the Great Powers would decide on for some of the former colonies in Africa. This was an unacceptable result for the

⁷ Ibid., p. 300.

Albanians. Immediately they responded that "Albania will accept only a custodian who will help it to take the first steps on the path by itself."⁸

Wilson, in the Memorandum of 14 April 1919, seeking autonomy for the different states that had once been integral parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, stated "My view is that now they had left these different peoples in the regions to decide their fate and their political relations. And they, enjoying sympathy throughout the world, chose to function as independent states." While meeting with Wilson on 17 April 1919, Yugoslavia's open policy was expressed through the slogan "The Balkans for the Balkan People" because according to them, this would make possible the removal of Italian interests from Albania. Yugoslav representative were trying to win the backing of Wilson for a customs, political, and military union of Yugoslavia with Albania. Both Italy and Yugoslavia hoped to be recognized as influential political factors in the Balkans.

Under these conditions, on 23 April 1919, Wilson announced a clear proposal on the establishment of a "new rule of law and justice ". Wilson proclaimed that the Council could not judge the new states which evolved from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Balkan states by separate principles. There was disapproval of lines marked by the Treaty of London that followed a large irregular number of islands of the eastern Adriatic coast, despite the fact that in not all of these islands and coasts were there people with Italian blood groups.

According to Wilson, the new plan aimed to establish "a new order based in Europe and the League of Nations", in which new states would form in this region, they would accept the limitation of armaments, which would in turn avoid and would make aggression impossible. Yet the atmosphere at the Peace Conference was tense between Italy and the U.S. because of Italian interests in the Adriatic. In the U.S. there was commitment to resolve problems by trying to exclude old rules of diplomacy, and it called upon Italy to accept a neighborhood now of friendly countries, to show free nations noble feelings of amity, generosity and preference for fairness in place of their own interests. France and England, however, tended to support the state of Yugoslavia and then use it as a counterweight to Italy. According to Krou, Yugoslavia would use Albania as a lever in order to extract quite legitimate concessions from Italy. Yugoslavia hoped to draw benefits from a possible disintegration of Albania, and in May-June 1919 had presented to the Great Powers a note that urged the Yugoslav-Albanian border to cross the Black Drin to where it merged with the White Drin River and thence where it flowed to the Adriatic.

⁸ Mujn Cami, *War of the Albanian people from 1918 to 1920*, pp. 219-220.

Two other notes, on 27 May and on 10 June, repeated the assertion that if Italy were to be present in Albania, Yugoslavia would assert its right to annex Albanian territory on the right side of the Drin. On 30 May 1919 Colonel Mere invited the Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian delegation to a meeting attended by members of the American delegation, with the exception of President Wilson, where the American delegation presented a project to solve the issue of the Adriatic.

The main point of this project was to establish a temporary independent state that would be a state-buffer between the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and the Kingdom of Italy. The final fate of these territories would be resolved by plebiscite after fifteen years. This project was called "Project Tardie".⁹ The Colonel declared expressly to the Serb-Croatian-Slovenian delegation that the project did not come from President Wilson. But, he asserted, if the states of the Serbo-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom and Italy would agree on the basis of this project, the President would not reject it.

At the end of June 1919 the first phase of the Peace Conference, which treated the northern Adriatic conference matter that had resulted in Italian-Yugoslav conflict, concluded.¹⁰ In fact, the Albanian Southern Adriatic issue appeared again on stage. Tomasso Titoni, the Italian Foreign Minister, entered into agreement with the Greek Prime Minister Venizellos and signed a treaty on 29 July 1919. This treaty made it possible for Italy to abandon opposition to the earlier Greek claims on southern Albania, and Greece was free to pursue its claims. The two countries agreed to support each other in the Peace Conference to provide Italy a mandate over Albania and Greece to rule "Vorio Epirus". But this movement between the two neighboring states of Albania had its effect. England and France concerned about the issue of the southern Adriatic, which threatened to spin out of control, joined the U.S. and issued a common Anglo-Franco-American memorandum on 9 December 1919.¹¹ According to the memorandum, Italy would assume a mandate over Albania

⁹ Act referred to, f 52, (Le project Tardieu).

¹⁰ The work continued at a low level, in the range of foreign ministers to England and France, while the U.S. was last with a representative. Matters were discussed but should receive the approval of superiors in London, Rome, Washington. Arben Puto, *Albania Politics* (Tirana, 2009), 200.

¹¹ Known as the Anglo-Franco-American Memorandum, Paris December 9 1919, with respect to determining the future state of Albania. Dislocate parts of this memorandum relating to the mandate limits and Italian: "... 5.To Italy will be given by the League of Nations mandate for the administration of the independent state of Albania. This memorandum is attached to a project on the form of this term, as three representatives think below. Albanian borders to the north and east will be those that are defined by the Conference of London in 1923. Southern boundaries will be set through negotiations.

through the League of Nations. The Great Power signatories recognized the independence of the Albanian state but, on the other hand, added that Albania would have need for administrative assistance and advice from the Great Powers. Consequently, according to their own geographical location and the economic capacities of Albania, the document defined Italy as a custodian and allowed it directly to take full sovereignty of Vlora and its hinterland.

A very great favor was done for Greece, in that the southern border issue was left open and was to be the subject of further discussions, calling it a temporary arrangement. So, this memorandum does not change many of the treaties before the First World War. It seems that this was an unexpected development for Wilson, however, and the bitter taste for him was allowing reference to Albanians being not mature enough to form a state which consequently legitimized the intervention of the international community.

Meanwhile, the Italians did not delay in answering the Anglo-Franco-American memorandum, and responded with a memorandum on 3 January 1920, demanding freedom of action concerning the problem of borders and tenure.¹² It focused the attention of Italy upon two elements: first, the top law enforcement officials would be imposed and given mandatory power; secondly, Italy would maintain its presence in Albania for a period of five years. But the issue would take a new twist after the 14 January 1920

Yet, not delaying the overhauling of the talks of this problem, the following temporarily detailed agreement can be applied: - Greece is invading, west and south, lands of the demarcation line that runs along the border points that are given on Austrian maps: From Mount Tomba, located on the eastern border of Greece, in the west direction to the peak of Nëmërkë in Vjosa mountain. Therefore following the river flowing through Tepelena as well; to the south, passing through the villages Dhemblan Martalloz and, therefore, going through quotas in 1840 and E2225; to a point located about three miles southeast of quota in 1225, therefore in the northwesterly direction, passing the Pojjanit immediately, therefore towards the southeast up to quote 1669; therefore towards the west and western quota in 2025, therefore in terms of southwestwards, to quote which is immediately situated in the south of the Aspri road. The triangle included between the line that runs from 1998 quotes Vjosa River (between Babes and Sinanaj) to Lake Maliq, northeast; the line that runs from north to south of Lake Maliq to the Greek border and referred demarcation line which above shall be determined finally after negotiations to develop further with them on *one side all the representatives of the following allies, Greece and Italy 'on the other hand, three representatives of the allies would act in the name and on behalf of Albania.* Frank Polk and Ejr A. Krou, *Struggle for the liberation of the Albanian people 1918-1920*

¹² Protectorate is a dependency more stable than the mandate, decided in Bilateral agreement between the big powers paraclete and the small state being protected. Arben Puto, *International Public Law*, pp.124-127.

agreement among the Italian Prime Minister Nitin, Lloyd George and Clemenceau. (In this deal the American representative did not take part). The purpose of this agreement was to regulate the "case of the Adriatic" and focus on the problems dividing Rome and Belgrade. According to the agreement, Italy would take the League of Nations' mandate over Albania, the northern part would be granted to Yugoslavia (including Shkodra, Shengjin and the Drin valley), and south of Gjirokastra Korça would be given to Greece. With this agreement the Albanian position sustained a heavy blow and the territory of Albania was divided among the three neighboring states, and Albania would lose its independence. This agreement brought about a crisis in relations between the American delegation and those of Britain and France, because of their different views about the so-called "issue of the Adriatic". The early issues represented a sharp and special conflict among the powers.

Since this matter was related directly to the fate of Albania, we consider it extensively here. The project was an inconvenient option for solving the Albanian national issue. Trumbiçi, in mid-January 1920, was concerned, and thought that if it would be put into effect, Albania was destined to become the starting point for offensive actions against Yugoslavia. On 20 January 1920 the Yugoslav government proposed that "the administration of Albania be left to a local government-without the intervention of a foreign power."¹³ However, Belgrade provided another option "if this solution were not accepted and if Albania was partitioned, Yugoslav would require its northern border"¹⁴

The U.S. government, in a memorandum of 20 January 1920 addressed to Lloyd George and Georges Clemenceau, made remarks that it would not recognize any decision that violated U.S. policy and the problems created by regulation should be arranged by diplomacy. The prime ministers of France and England responded on 22 January, stating in relation to the administration of Italy, Yugoslavia and Greece, that these were not developed yet, but that in the future the feelings and interests of the Albanian people would be taken into account.¹⁵

Wilson, on 10 February 1920, addressed the prime ministers of France and England, and regarded this as a throwback to the Secret Treaty of London and made clear he considered that the principle to which the U.S. had committed

¹³ Puto Arben, *Political Albania* (Tirana, 2009), p. 204.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ La Question, Recueil de documents officiels, Paris 1920, Imprimerie Tipographique, rue de pondichery, (3 (xve), f.118

itself and for which it had fought, was that no government had the right to decide the political affiliation of a particular nation.

The governments of France and England tried to justify their stance by asserting the incapability of the Albanians for self-governance, and stated that responsibility should be given to Yugoslavia and Italy. Wilson, through notes of 25 February 1920, had introduced an even stronger position to protect Albania, explaining that a division of Albania into three parts, as was predicted by the Franco-British agreement, would be accepted by Yugoslavia. The American government, however, rejected "a solution that could damage the Albanians to please Yugoslavians, and a solution that might affect the interests of Yugoslavia to the benefit of Italy."¹⁶

On 26 February 1920 the prime ministers of France and England accepted that President Wilson rejected the previous formulas, and sought the help of the U.S. to take part in drafting a formal proposal in order to oblige the governments of Italy and Yugoslavia to negate all previous proposals. On the 6 March 1920, Wilson recommended that it be left to the Italian and Yugoslav governments to choose between their borders, but that they must not skip the Albanian question. It was declared that they would not accept any plan by which Yugoslavia would be granted any territorial compensation in northern Albania.

So, Albania was the place where they were used to link and differentiate from each other two opposing systems. For this we are referring to Henry Kissinger, in his philosophy of European political leaders in which he suggested that they did not have the category of thought to understand such views. Neither European domestic institutions nor their international order are based on political theory focusing on the essential goodness of man. Rather, they were created based on human selfishness expressed in the service of a higher good. European diplomacy did not preach the peaceful nature of the countries, but rather their penchant for war, which must either be discouraged or balanced.¹⁷

¹⁶ Puto Arben, *Albanian Issues*, 249. L-Recueil Question Adriatique documents officiels de-Paris in 1920, 3, rue de Pondichery, 3 (xve) f, 1552-155 *

¹⁷ Final rule should be based on what constitutes justice for each particular case and repairs to be very accurate, in order to obtain a definitive peace. 2. People and provinces should not be exchanged between governments as if they were chess figures, even when it comes to this it's called to discuss the balance of forces. 3. Instead, each territorial adjustment that occurs because of this war, should be carried out in interest and great utility of these peoples question. Not just a simple clause or adjustment, nor compromise between the ambitions of rival states. 4. Must enjoy good all well-defined national aspirations, must be avoided the introduction of new elements or divisive and

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