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THE POSITION OF BULGARIA WITH REGARD TO THE ALBANIAN FACTOR IN MACEDONIA DURING THE LONDON CONFERENCE OF AMBASSADORS

DOI: [10.2478/seur-2014-0012](https://doi.org/10.2478/seur-2014-0012)

At the beginning of the 20th century, Bulgaria's principal goal, and the national ideal of the state and the Bulgarian people was the liberation to all Bulgarians under the Ottoman Empire and the creation of a united Bulgaria. Most important for Bulgaria was the Macedonian question and unification of Bulgarians in these lands with the Bulgarian state. To realize this goal, the institutions in Sofia always took into consideration the ethnic structure in Macedonia particularly in its western parts. Because of that focus there is much Bulgarian evidence and many documents which detail the political, economic, and social situation in the western lands of Macedonia. Bulgarian information concerning Albanians at the beginning of the 20th century comes from many sources including:

- a. Bulgarian consuls and representatives in some Macedonian towns sent many reports about processes concerning Albanians to Sofia;
- b. The leaders of Bulgarian revolutionary organizations took into consideration the development of the activities of the Albanian liberation movement and had contacts with the Albanian leaders in the 1880s and 1890s. VMORO's documents and the memoirs of its leaders are very important source for the history of the Albanian liberation movement;
- c. Many interesting facts were presented by Bulgarian scientists who researched the east Albanian lands in this period. We should mention the reports of teachers, school inspectors, priests etc.

The goal of this document collection was to present detailed facts concerning Albanians in Macedonia and about all processes among them,

which was to be used for elaborating Bulgarian politics. Bulgarian statistics about the number of Albanians in Macedonia showed Bulgarian authorities that the Albanian factor couldn't be overlooked and had to be taken into consideration when creating political and military plans¹.

Following the failure of reforms in the Ottoman Empire in the 1908 – 1910 period, Bulgaria began to analyze seriously the military option for resolving the problem with the Bulgarians in Macedonia and the Adrianopol region. Beside preparing military plans and equipping of the army, Sofia looked for allies for the future war against the Empire. During this period of time, the crucial role for determining Bulgarian foreign policy, and particularly the role of attempting to resolve the Bulgarian national question, belonged to King Ferdinand. His regime controlled Bulgarian governments, which together with Parliament, had their place in the “making” of Bulgarian policy. Their role in the formation of Bulgaria's position was influenced by the General staff and VMORO, which presented statistics and analyses concerning the processes in Macedonia.

Initially, the idea for cooperation with the Albanians was promoted in the military plan from 1908 in preparation for war against the Ottoman Empire. In this period, officials on the Bulgarian General Staff in a concrete way examined the possibility that the Albanians could be drawn in as allies in the war for the liberation of Bulgarians in Macedonia and Thrace². This opinion

¹ About Bulgarian statistics: Кънчов, В. Македония. Етнография и статистика – 1900 г. Избрани произведения. С., 1970, Т. 2, 552–562; Шопов, А. Българското културно дело в Македония в цифри – Българска сбирка, 1911, кн. 5, 310–311; Стойчева, С. Българската екзархия за етнодемографския облик на Македония (1908–1912). – Независимостта на България 1908 г. – поглед от XX век. Сборник доклади от международната конференция, проведена в София на 19–20 септември 2008. С., 2010, 290–300; Петров, П. Научна експедиция в Македония и Поморавието 1916. – Д. Гаджанов. Мюсюлманското население в новоосвободените земи. С., 1993, 260–265.

² Georgiev, G. Ideja për marrëveshje shqiptaro-bullgare gjatë Luftërave Ballkanike. – Konferenca Ndërkombëtare “100 vjet Pavarësi”, Tiranë, 26-27 Nëntor 2012. Dorëshkrim, f. 2-3; Shihni edhe: ЦДА (Arkivi qendror shtetëror), ф.176К, оп. 2, а.е. 173, л. 1–7.

was supported by some diplomats and leaders of VMORO,³ and King Ferdinand himself shared this opinion for a time⁴.

But the possibility of drawing the Albanians in as allies was ultimately rejected by the King and by the responsible political actors in Sofia, because the Albanians lacked armed military force, and because of the conflicting visions of the two nationalities in Macedonia. Thus, in 1911 Ferdinand decided to ally with the other Orthodox states in the Balkans under the umbrella of Russia.

Understanding the complicated situation in the northwestern parts of Macedonia, the King and the government separated Macedonia into two zones – the “indisputable” zone in the south and the east from the line of Kriva Palanka – Lake of Ohrid, populated mainly by Bulgarians, and the “disputable” zone, that included the western and northwestern parts of Macedonia, where the Bulgarian element as a whole constituted a relative majority vis-a-vis the Albanians only in some regions.

The changing position of Bulgarian institutions with regard to an alliance with Albanians can be seen clearly at the London Conference of Ambassadors. At the beginning of the Conference, the Bulgarian delegation was passive towards the Albanian question and preferred that this problem be resolved by the Great Powers. But in January 1913, Bulgaria prepared and submitted a memorandum to the Great Powers insisting on the application of the ethnic principal for determining borders. According to Sofia, the border between the Bulgarians and the Albanians in Macedonia must be determined by a census of the population, conducted at the point when refugees had returned⁵.

The changes in the Bulgarian position towards the Albanian factor began to happen when, following military victory in the autumn of 1912, Sofia understood that it would lose the parts of Macedonia occupied by the Serbs and the Greeks, who would not keep the agreements made between them. The position of official Sofia changed definitely in the winter and in the spring of

³ Дипломат [Никола Ризов]. Албанското възраждане. С., 1909, 5–7; Божилова, Р., Б. Бобев. България и албанският въпрос в началото на XX в. – ИПр, 1982, № 4, 23–41; Марков, Г. Към предисторията на Балканския съюз (март – септември 1911 г.). – ВИСб, 1987, № 6, с. 97, 99–101, 103–106; Славов, Сл. Албанското освободително движение и македонският въпрос в докладите на българските дипломати (1910 – 1913 г.). – Един завет, 2010, № 1 (70), 26–28; I njëjti. Революция и политика: ВМОРО и българската държава в навечерието на Балканската война. – ИПр, 2011, № 1 – 2, с. 44, 58, 69 etj.

⁴ Ibid. and see: ЦДА, ф. 3К, оп. 8, а.е. 1654, л. 173, 176, 185, 186.

⁵ Данев, Ст. Мемоари. С. 1992, с. 182–183.

1913 when it was seen clearly that the Serbs and the Greeks used terror against the Bulgarians and Albanians in Macedonia. The news and notices from Bulgarians and Albanians concerning Serbian repression forced Bulgarian officials to take measures to protect their compatriots⁶.

The difficulties in which Bulgarians and Albanians found themselves after foreign occupation reanimated plans for joint action. As a result, negotiations and missions for reaching an agreement among the two nationalities were reactivated. The first initiative came from VMORO which had very good contacts with some Albanian leaders. The leaders of VMORO made attempts to establish contacts with Albanian representatives in Trieste and later in Vienna⁷. On the Bulgarian side, the most active in these attempts were the voivodes Peter Chaulev and Pavel Hristov, as well as the diplomats Todor Pavlov and Dimitar Rizov, while from Albanian side Dervish Hima, Faik bej Konica and others were involved.

According to Bulgarian sources, the Albanian congress in Trieste accepted the possibility of creating a Bulgarian-Albanian border, but the mission presenting VMORO's leaders tasked with developing detailed negotiations for achieving an agreement for cooperation failed because of political and personal circumstances⁸. Delays in Bulgarian-Albanian negotiations failed in confirming cooperation in Macedonia. The Bulgarian delegates, lead by Stoyan Danev, met with Ismail Qemali only in May 1913 in London. They talked about the possibility of a Bulgarian-Albanian agreement for common action in Macedonia. Albanians wanted support for the consolidation of an Albanian state from the Bulgarian side. After exchanging assurances of good feelings between the sides⁹, on 19 May the Albanian delegates at the London Conference of Ambassadors, proposed to St. Danev that they operate together against the Serbs¹⁰.

At the end of May and during the first days of June 1913 Ismail Qemali continued conversations in Rome with Major Ganchev, the Bulgarian military representative there, and in Vienna with Ambassador Ivan Salabashev.

⁶ Георгиев, Г. Българо-албанското въстание в Македония през 1913 г. (политически и военни аспекти). – Македонски преглед, 2010, № 1, с. 20 – 21.

⁷ Ibid. and see: ЦДА, ф. 1909К, оп. 2, а.е. 297, л. 1–4.

⁸ Георгиев, В. Охридското въстание от 1913 година през погледа на неговия главнокомандващ Петър Чаулев. – ИДА, кн. 72, 1999, с. 169.

⁹ Марков, Г. България в Балканския съюз срещу Османската империя 1912–1913. С., 1989, 405–406; Трайков, В. България и възникването на албанската държава. – ИПр, 1992, № 10, с. 49.

¹⁰ ЦДА, ф. 176К, оп. 2, а.е. 1369, л. 140.

Despite progress in bilateral negotiations, the promises of Ismail Qemali with regard to participating in a future military conflict between Bulgaria and the other countries from the former Balkan Alliance were not realistic, because of the political and military unpreparedness of Albania¹¹.

The leaders of VMORO and the General Staff of the Bulgarian Army who believed that a war among the former allies was unavoidable, called for further action. The Bulgarian General Staff informed the new prime minister, Stoyan Danev, that it was prepared to supply Albanians with arms and ammunition¹². The representatives of VMORO and the General Staff made attempts to create a Bulgarian-Albanian alliance on the eve of Second Balkan war. These attempts included the missions of Bulgarian revolutionaries Yane Sandanski and Grigor Oshavkov to negotiate with Albanian leaders, with plans to encourage detachments of VMORO and the units of Macedonian-Adrianopolitan volunteers to raise the Bulgarian and Albanian population in Macedonia against the Serbian and Greek armies, and undertake armed activities on the Thesaloniki – Skopje line of advance to join Bulgarian forces¹³. These attempts failed for many reasons and Bulgaria started the war isolated.

The reasons for the failure to reach a concrete agreement between Bulgaria and the Albanian actors are varied. Sofia did not believe that the newly created Albanian state had the military capabilities for effective action against Serbs and Greeks; Bulgaria had hopes until the last moment of the London Conference that the conflict among the allies would be resolved through the mediation of Russia and the Entente; the claims of Bulgarians and Albanians for the same parts of western Macedonia put in doubt the sincerity of Bulgarian-Albanian friendship; the internal problems and conflicts in the Albanian state, as well as disagreement in Sofia concerning the direction of Bulgarian policy, all had a negative influence on the reaching of an effective agreement. In conclusion it should be underlined that the defeat of Bulgaria in the Second Balkan war, as well as and Serbian repression in occupied Macedonia pushed ahead Bulgarian-Albanian conversations in the summer of 1913. Thus, the earlier conversations prepared the basis for the September 1913 uprising when many Bulgarians fought together with Albanian rebels against Serbian occupation.

¹¹ Салабашев, Ив. Спомени. С., 1943, 477–480, 484.

¹² Ibid, f. 484.

¹³ Матов, М. За премълчаното в историята на ВМОРО. Спомени. Съст. М. Бошнакова. С., 2007, с. 206.

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