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IDEOLOGY AND BIBLIOGRAPHY: THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS AND ALBANIA AFTER 1923

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Writing in his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle observed that all men make use of what he called ‘the mode of persuasion’ in order to help convince others of their views¹ This also applies to institutions and organisations, and its most modern manifestation is the cultures of government propaganda, in undemocratic states, advocacy in democratic states, and ‘spin’ and media manipulation in almost all. This may at first sight appear to be a recondite and academic issue, far removed from the realities of Balkan power politics in the late-Ottoman period and the time of Albanian independence but this is not the case. The languages of all the Balkan peoples, other than Greek, were only known to a tiny number of people outside the Balkans in most of the nineteenth century, and the emerging Balkan states depended for communication of their views and policies on the use of other languages, generally those of the Great Powers in Europe, English, French and German. Greek is something of an exception, and was much more widely understood, as it was the language of commerce over large areas of the late Ottoman Balkans, and the special position of the Greek maritime industry in the British imperial system, and the Greek trading communities in Asia Minor and Egypt gave it a wider credence than the small population and economy of pre-1913 Greece might seem to justify.

When Albania achieved independence just before the First World War what rhetoric did it have? What rhetoric was available to help its government and sympathisers articulate its place in the world? Was there a language available to allow it to put its case in the outside world? The foundation of the new state depended on its emancipation from the collapsing Ottoman Empire, and most important use of the language of politics was articulating the rights of the new small nations of the Balkans after their release from the burden of the Ottoman governmental system. This was most strongly embodied in the

¹ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, (trans W.D. Ross), Oxford, 1959, P. 5

support of the United States for the dissolution of the old empires and the end of the imperialist rivalries that had led to the First World War and the new international order after World War I embodied in the foundation of the League of Nations. The United States, of course, talks and writes in English, but the language of international relations and diplomacy remained French. But was French providing a usable rhetoric with a solid future? The language and alphabet of Albanian had itself only recently been codified, in the period immediately before the First World War, and many of the Albanian elite were more at home in French or Italian or Turkish as a means of formal official communication than they were in their own language.

Yet French was, in a sense, a negative rhetoric, and its international importance was based on diplomatic convention and the ideology of nineteenth century liberalism with its ultimate roots in the French revolution. It was still absolutely valid for Albania, as it had been for Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria and other Balkan nations seeking to escape the Empire, but it was a wasting asset, with the Empire now no more, and the burgeoning power of the United States after 1918 and existing British imperial power consolidating the influence of English. There is also the question of state ideological capacity. The nascent Balkan states in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not have much capacity to create an ideological state apparatus, in the Althusserian sense.

The main institution creating this reality in the northern Balkans was the Church, in the new Christian nation states, and with it the church school. A state such as Yugoslavia, after the Versailles treaty period, had a specific identity as a Christian state and its practical political rhetoric was heavily influenced by this. The Yugoslav construct was of a specifically Christian identity, under a Christian monarchical dynasty based in Belgrade. By contrast, the Albanian state was fragile and appallingly underdeveloped with many survivals in the social order from the remote past, mass illiteracy and only very limited trade and infrastructure capacity. The capital was tiny, and without a stable political and economic elite. It was also a victim of the pattern of international events. The Muslim religious majority played an important part in preserving a dominant political rhetoric and visual iconography from the Ottoman recent past. In contrast, Yugoslavia appeared not only as a 'Christian' political and military ally, but as a force for modernity, notwithstanding the fact that much of its territory in the south, and in Bosnia was occupied by Muslims, and in the west by Roman Catholics who while generally happy with the state identity- at least in the early stages- were very unhappy when it began to exclude them from key positions and generally deny their national and religious rights.

The First World War, which started a hundred years ago, had seen the arrival of the Serbian army in Albania and a direct physical military threat to the national existence of Albania. Serbia was an ally of Britain against the Central Powers who were allied with the Kaiser's Germany and Serbia was in a position to capitalise on this new favour in the eyes of the British population, and similar, if perhaps less intense feelings, swept through France and the other anti-German powers. Serbia had found rhetoric of freedom, it seemed and during the latter half of the 1914-1918 periods, the Serbian national anthem was sung alongside 'God Save the King' in British cinemas. Numerous works of Serbian and South Slav folk culture had been published, and Serbian culture became a culture that was knowable if not easily accessible in that period, although the Diaspora community in France and Britain was very small (unlike in the Hapsburg lands and northern Italy), and Serbia had little academic profile in British universities until the foundation of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies in London University in 1915. In contrast few of those in the European political elites who laid claim to some knowledge of Serbia had ever heard of Albania or knew it existed. But they probably did know that Serbian soldiers were fighting arm in arm with the British regiments in the campaign on the Macedonian front north of Salonika. To this day a ceremony of remembrance of the dead is held in the Serbian cemetery in the northern Greek metropolis.

The characteristic rhetorical and ideological problem that faced both Yugoslavia and Albania after the Treaty of Versailles period was how to find a method of persuasion in the new world of the League of Nations, which was dedicated to the international order and the avoidance of military methods in avoiding conflicts. Albania had a practical existence, but it needed a stable state and rhetoric to use in international discourse. The results of the London conference period and the First World War had seen Albanians' natural lands split between neighbouring countries and some, such as Greece, were still refusing to ratify existing borders that had been laid down after national independence under the provisions of the 1913 Protocols of Florence and were to be soon called into question at the Paris Peace conference². The London Conference of Ambassadors was a geostrategic defeat for the Albanians, the consequences of which have echoed up and down the corridors of diplomacy in twentieth century history.

The geostrategic results of the WW1 period were also important; the new state of Yugoslavia, the Kingdom of the Serbs, the Croats and the Slovenes had come into being, and it was very directly sponsored and created by Britain

² See N. Petsalis-Diomidis, *Greece at the Paris Peace Conference 1919*, Thessaloniki, 1978 for a summary of the Greek position

and France as the victorious Powers at Versailles. Albania was in a very different position. Without the stalwart support of the United States, it is questionable whether an Albanian state would even have survived the Versailles negotiations. American support enabled the Albanian representatives at Versailles to defeat the Greek-Serbian plan to partition the country along the Shkumbini River. Thus the London Conference had consciously or unconsciously set the stage for the creation of the Yugoslav entity and its dominance of the Balkan peninsular for three generations, first embodied in the Royalist state and then as its communist successor³.

Language is obviously the practical basis of rhetoric. This has always been so; the ancient historian Averil Cameron has shown in her book 'Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse'⁴ how the new religious language of Christianity became a means of social control and power in the Roman Empire, and the same process has happened in many societies since, such as the embodiment of Lutheran biblical German into the political language of the European Protestant states in the early modern period. The metalanguage of the post Versailles League of Nations period was French. Always the language of diplomacy and international negotiations by tradition, its international monopoly in diplomatic and political discourse and wider hold had begun to weaken after the Congress of Berlin with its concomitant domination by Bismark. It had weakened further with the rise of the United States into a major force in the international arena and the massive influence over the Versailles process coming from Woodrow Wilson's Washington.

But the League offered an opportunity for revival. The new institution was centred in French-speaking Geneva in Switzerland, and US President Woodrow Wilson and his successors certainly saw it as an agent of influence to advance United States general interests under a banner of internationalism. In many of these contexts, Britain and the British Empire was a main target of American rivalry, and as the prominent economist J.M Keynes noted in his diaries, the British had successfully hoodwinked the US in the World War I financing into believing Britain would give up its Empire when in practice it had little or no intention of doing so⁵.

³ For a discussion of the wider issues, see Robert C. Austin *Founding a Balkan State, Albania's Experiment with Democracy 1920-1925*, Toronto, 2012 and Michael Schmidt-Neke *Entstehung und Ausbau der Königsdiktatur in Albanien (1912-1939)*, Munich, 1987

⁴ Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire, The Development of Christian Discourse*, Berkeley CA, 1991

⁵ See Robert Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes Hopes Betrayed 1883-1920*, Oxford, 1981

It suited the United States to advance a little the cause of France in the League of Nations, and of French language use. French language and culture had been the dominant foreign language in Serbia for many years and links between the French military and Serbian military were particularly close in World War I. German was seen in international relations discourse as the language of ‘macht’, practical power in Central Europe until 1914, but after the defeat of Germany by 1918 and the end of the Hapsburgs, this no longer was the case. In the Wilsonian settlement as viewed from the United States in its more idealistic mode, internationalism was to replace the threat of German nationalism, and languages of rationality and state dialogue would be used for dialogue within the new international settlement, those being English and French. The Balkan languages then (and some would say now) offered little opportunity for dialogue. Balkan peoples do not generally learn the languages of their neighbours at school, or at work afterwards, with again an element of Greek exceptionalism in that *gastarbeiters* from the poorer neighbouring countries like Albania and Bulgaria have often learned some Greek while working there. Any dialogue, like that promoted between the elites in ‘peace processes’ or among the educated young tends to take place in English. Smaller nation Balkan languages, such as Slovene, or internal minority languages like Vlach have no presence at all in these structures. Thus, some nations have an ideological state apparatus with rhetorical coherence, and others do not. In the study of the strong hold of Serbia upon the British and French elite in several different periods in twentieth century history, this is an important factor.

This brings us to the issue of literary persuasion and of the rhetoric of textuality. French and France has always been seen in some quarters in the United States as a ‘modern’ nation in a way Britain was not and this goes back to figures such as French army General Lafayette and his and other French input into the anti-British American Revolution. The United States and France are republics, and had removed monarchical government, which Britain had not. Britain and America were rivals in many imperialist contexts, most notably in terms of influence over the oil-rich countries of the emerging Middle East.

A work such as the standard Bibliography of the post-League of Nations establishment literature indicates this⁶. Out of the hundreds of works that were published in the immediate aftermath of the League of Nations establishment, on economics, legal framework, political institutions and so on in the new post-Versailles set up mentioned in this book, over ninety percent were

⁶ See ‘Bibliographie Balkanique’, Paris, 1931

published in French, or in France, and among those that were not some were written by noted Francophiles like the prominent British writer and journalist Wickham Steed.

The rhetoric of French suited Serbia very well, with its many historic links dating back to the nineteenth century, the very close military links and the proclivity of Belgrade intellectuals to be educated in Paris or elsewhere in France. It did not suit Albania. Albanian cultural links were strongest in the United States, overwhelmingly, in Italy and in the German speaking world in Central Europe, the losers in the recent international conflicts. France seemed to embody the progressive ideology that would help the new Yugoslavia find its place in the world, most importantly as a barrier to the spread of German influence in the new post-1923 Balkans.

Thus the scene was set for the word and the book to speak for Yugoslavia and in international affairs in the region, with the ideals of the League. But they withered away, and this left a rhetorical absence which was soon filled, by the sound of Italian and the marching legions of Italian fascism that were soon to invade and occupy Albania, in complete and open defiance of the ideals of the League of Nations.

It is instructive to examine in a little detail the nature of the productions of the Albanian government in the early years in terms of rhetoric, and to compare Albanian government texts with a text reflecting the rhetorical assumptions of the 'international community' of the time. Modern public relations and 'spin' were unknown in the Versailles Treaty period, but in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution and the First World War political elites knew that the passive complicity of populations in ruler's political projects could not be automatically assumed. It was necessary to at least try to inform other elites, if not the general population, about political and economic realities in each country. A typical early Zogist production is the volume 'Shqipëria më 1927 e Illustruar'/'L'Albanie en 1927', published in the Albanian capital in Tirana in 1928⁷. It is, overwhelmingly, a book of photographic images, of the famous personalities of past and present in Albania and the notable monuments, churches, mosques and other secular buildings. There is very little written text, in any language, but where it does appear, it is in Albanian, as a heading, often only a single line of Albanian

⁷ T.Selenica, *Shqipëria e Illustruar / L'Albanie Illustree*, Tirana, Shtypur ne Shtypshkronjen "Tirana", 1928. The general timing of the publication of the book coincides with the stabilisation of the Zogist proto-state and the elimination of all significant political opposition to Zog. For background, see J. Tomes *King Zog. Self Made Monarch of Albania*, Stroud, 2003, and the writings of Michael Schmidt-Neke, Op Cit

text, but followed by a paragraph or more in French of explanatory material. It is a book that could in many ways have been published in Belgrade, apart from the nature of the content images. It stresses practical modernity, with numerous photographs of new bridges, improved roads, and so on. The photographs of government ministers and officials are shown in western suits and ties and might at a glance be government ministers or officials in Paris or New York. The government of King Zog was in reality a government of Muslim *beys*, many of whom lived as feudal lords in their own localities, wearing traditional dress and ruling over an almost entirely illiterate population, but this was a hidden world in the French language text of this book. Their traditional society with the survival of many archaic modes of production and thought did not seem to them to need modernity or a modern state. Later productions of a similar kind from the Tirana government stressed monarchical consolidation, like '10 Vjet Mbretni 1928-1938' (Tirana, 1938), a very large volume with numerous photographs of the King and his family and a much fuller written text glorifying very uncritically the achievements of the period in question, and postulating entirely specious links between the family of the King and his line of descent from Skanderbeg.

Yet outsiders did not look at the nation in the same way. The rhetorical and practical absence is not difficult to establish. A characteristic volume is the 'Near East Year Book and Who's Who (1927)', which was published in London that year, at exactly the same time as the Zogist government volume, and edited by the British expert on Romania, H.T.Montague Bell. This is in essence a practical encyclopaedia and contains some commercial advertising and a mass of statistics which nowadays would be obtained by most people on the Internet or from publications such as the 'CIA World Factbook'. The work is generally of a high scholarly standard and clearly draws on material published as open source intelligence in various official volumes during and immediately after 1918. The salient point is that Albania, as a nation, is not shown to exist at all in it. The nine hundred or more pages are exclusively dominated by lengthy and quite learned sections on Yugoslavia (254 pages), Romania (169 pages), Bulgaria (143 pages), Greece (132 pages), and Turkey (97 pages). British commerce saw the Balkans as illuminated by a powerful Yugoslav sun, with substantial planets like Bulgaria circulating around it, and Albania did not exist at all in this cosmology. So the French of the League of Nations and its offshoots was perhaps not such a handicap to Albanian national aspirations as it might appear to be at first sight. It did at least embody in its language the legal and recognised existence of the state, and by extension, the human rights of its people. In terms of normal business rhetoric in English, Albania did not yet exist, in fact in some realities; it existed less than it did prior to World War I. In an era before passenger air transport,

shipping was all important, and the only reference sections giving information on getting to Albania involved the use of Yugoslav ports and shipping services.

Perhaps I can conclude by recalling Aristotle's thoughts on a related issue. He wrote that he thought that things which are true and things that are just have a natural tendency in rhetorical practice to prevail over their opposites⁸. But he was inevitably unaware of the power of the modern state, as the recent revelations of US 'whistleblower' Edward Snowden have shown. It is interesting to speculate on what the philosopher might have thought of these current developments. A prominent modern classical scholar has said that he regards Aristotle's greatest achievement as his ability as an intellectual to identify real problems. That would not have been difficult in the realm of modern state rhetoric. In the recent period, Albania has emancipated itself from its previous isolation and joined the international mainstream and uses English as a common metalanguage. Yet it will have to face the issue of the survival of all small country languages under globalisation.

⁸ Aristotle, *Op.Cit.* Book 1, 13.

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