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VOJISLAV G. PAVLOVIĆ



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AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN IMPERIAL PROJECT AND ITS RIVALS (1912-1914)

Dušan Fundić

Defining the Imperial Project

In 1912, during and after the Ottoman collapse, the Ballhausplatz made plans to establish political and economic hegemony in the post-imperial Balkans.¹ Albania, as an exclusive Austro-Hungarian sphere of influence, was to form part of an anti-Italian and anti-Slav barrier. The political elites, both in Vienna and in Rome, considered the establishment of an Italian strategic foothold in the city of Vlorë with the island of Sazan as the beginning of Adriatic hegemony. Also, Albania's existence was supposed to thwart the ambitions of Serbia, Montenegro and Greece to expand and achieve their foremost goals of incorporating an Adriatic seaport, Shkodër and "Northern Epirus" respectively. The Dual Monarchy's other rival, especially after 1913, was the "Committee for Unity and Progress" (The Young Turks) whose members plotted to install a Muslim ruler in Albania, using popular dissent among the Albanian Muslims after the end of Ottoman rule. During the crisis that developed during and after 1912, every Austro-Hungarian plan envisaged the Dual Monarchy as a "dominant political force in the Balkans".²

I understand the imperial project as "the influence of Great Powers on the process of formation of nation-states in the 19th and 20th centuries."³ Empires could develop such projects within their borders or in a particular sphere of influence. Their primary aim was to create a new state that would serve either as a buffer zone towards another Great Power or to restrain the rise of a potential regional rival. The case of Albania in Austro-Hungarian foreign policy belonged to the latter group. From the 1890s the Dual Monarchy focused

¹ Ballhausplatz has often been used as a metonym for the Austro-Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

² S. R. Williamson, *Austria-Hungary and the Origins of the First World War*, London, 1991, p. 122.

³ Concept developed by A. Miller and A. J. Rieber (eds.), *Imperial Rule*, Budapest – New York, 2005, also, A. Miller and S. Berger (eds.), *Nationalizing Empires*, Budapest – New York, 2015.

on supporting individuals and organisations committed to creating an autonomous or independent Albania.⁴

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The Ottoman defeat of 1912 had a precursor in the equally unsuccessful Libyan War which ended in the Italian taking control of Tripolitania Vilayet and the Dodecanese Islands. The conflict in Libya, which ran in parallel with a series of Albanian revolts, caused a reaction among the Balkan countries that led to an agreement between Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece and Montenegro. To stop further changes and conflicts, the Austro-Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count Leopold von Berchtold, tried to intervene in order to achieve a favourable outcome of the crisis. In a note of August 13, 1912, sent to the capitals of the Great Powers, Berchtold proposed a decentralisation of the Ottoman Balkans which was to start in Albania as a further model for the Balkan Christians. Berchtold's proposal also had the intention to keep the Balkan states in check.⁵ It was a failed attempt by the Monarchy's Foreign Minister to counteract the instability of the Ottoman Empire and take control of events that seemed to slip out of his country's hands. Russia and France rejected the proposal, suspecting it to be more than merely a strategy to establish an autonomous Austro-Hungarian-backed Albania, while the Balkan states became even more concerned.⁶ By mid-October 1912, the Balkan League started its victorious war, an outcome which had not been expected by Great Powers.

It is important to underline that the Dual Monarchy's imperial project in Albania was not the same as creating the Albanian nation-state. The key difference was that Austro-Hungarian decision-makers' policies were shaped by the need to establish a country strong enough to survive but not enough to challenge the Monarchy as an overlord; Albanian nationalists wished to create a country as large as possible, encompassing everything they imagined as "Albanian lands".

⁴ D. Fundić, "Austro-Ugarska i oblikovanje Albanije 1896-1914", PhD thesis, University of Belgrade, 2018.

⁵ *Österreich-Ungarns Aussenpolitik von der bosnischen Krise 1908 bis zum Kriegsausbruch 1914: diplomatische Aktenstücke des österreichisch-ungarischen Ministerium des Äusseren* (ÖUA), Wien-Leipzig, 1930, vol. IV, Nr. 3687.

⁶ ÖUA, IV, Nr. 3687; D. Djordjević, *Izlazak Srbije na Jadransko more i Konferencija ambasadora u Londonu 1912*, Beograd, 1956, p. 20-21, E. C. Helmreich, *The Diplomacy of the Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, Cambridge, 1938, p. 107-108.

The Austro-Hungarian Aims in Albania and the London Conference of Ambassadors

The course of military operations was unanticipated by the Austro-Hungarian authorities. It was believed in Vienna that the war would be long and so there would be enough time to achieve the interests of the Dual Monarchy.⁷ The course of the war soon proved them wrong. Serbian troops defeated Ottoman armies in Macedonia, Montenegrin troops besieged Shkodër, the Bulgarians were in front of Edirne and the Greeks marched into Thessaloniki. The war was practically over in just over a month.

At several meetings of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vienna between October 25 and 30, 1912, Ballhausplatz diplomats were adapting the Monarchy's policies to the new circumstances. They abandoned the idea of territorial expansion and focused instead on establishing Albania as a zone of exclusive Austro-Hungarian influence. The Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry intended to push back Serbia from the Adriatic and to establish close economic ties with her and Montenegro, and also to direct Bulgarian ambitions towards Constantinople in order to provoke a conflict between her and Russia.⁸ Serbia's ambition to gain an outlet to the sea was unacceptable to the Ballhausplatz decision-makers. Instead, they were willing to offer Serbia a railway connection with the Adriatic, through Bosnia, or with the Aegean Sea, via Thessaloniki, with economic compensations guaranteed by a pledge of friendly relations with the Dual Monarchy. On the other hand, Montenegro's enlargement was acceptable, but the price was to be a customs union with Austria-Hungary and a strategic border correction at Mtn. Lovćen.⁹ Contrary to their stance, Serbia and Greece expected to divide Albania among themselves with the border on the Shkumbe River.¹⁰

In the months that followed, Austro-Hungary tried to achieve her goals in various ways, from diplomatic manoeuvres to war threats. Serbia was threatened with war, Great Powers, prompted by Vienna, conducted a naval intervention against Montenegro, while Greece received warnings not to expand too close to Vlorë.¹¹ The Dual Monarchy's attempts to make Romania a more reliable ally, by demanding compensations for her at Bulgaria's expense, revealed the uncertainty of Austria-Hungary's position. Finally, after initial

⁷ E. C. Helmreich, *The Diplomacy of the Balkan Wars...*, p. 166.

⁸ ÖUA, IV, Nr. 4025, 4118, 4128, 4170, 20-21; B. F.-J. Kos, *Die politischen und wirtschaftlichen Interessen Österreich-Ungarns und Deutschlands in Südosteuropa 1912/1913: Die Adriafragen-, die Saloniki und die Kavallafrage*, Vienna – Cologne – Weimar, 1996, p. 51-52.

⁹ ÖUA, IV, Nr. 4170.

¹⁰ D. Djordjević, *Izlazak Srbije...*, p. 53. M. Ekmečić, *Ratni ciljevi Srbije 1914*, Beograd 1990 (1st ed. 1973), p. 373.

¹¹ B. Kondis, *Greece and Albania 1908-1914*, Thessaloniki, 1976, p. 93.

cooperation in Albania, Italy, her other official ally, would turn out to be her principal rival in the struggle for influence in the newly-created country.

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After an armistice between the warring parties during December 1912, the Great Powers convened the London Conference of Ambassadors. Their respective representatives worked into the next year, with a central question being the borders, status and internal organisation of Albania. Under the peace treaty concluded on May 30, 1913, the Ottoman Empire was forced to cede all lands west of the Enos–Midia line to the Balkan League except Albania. Following further negotiations, the ambassadors decided on the establishment of Albania (July 29, 1913) as a sovereign principality.¹² Even though Austria-Hungary financed the stay of the Albanian delegation in London, she had no intention of fully supporting their claims. The primary goal was a country large enough to thwart the ambitions of other interested parties.¹³ Therefore, the negotiations resulted in accomplishing the primary aim of October 1912. The Great Powers confirmed the existence of Albania.

During the negotiations, in January 1913, Berchtold instructed the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador in London, Count Albert von Mensdorff, to treat Peć, Prizren and Ohrid as objects for compensation, but to support their incorporation into Albania for as long as possible. In that way, he sought to secure Shkodër for Albania. The Austro-Hungarian consul in Belgrade received instructions to direct Serbia's ambitions towards the east and south so as to provoke her rift with Bulgaria.¹⁴ Even though the process seems complicated, a simple look at the decisions of the Conference shows that Albanian borders were the result of an Austro-Russian compromise. Austria-Hungary, supported most actively by Italy, achieved her chief goal. Between February and April 1913, Berchtold gave in to pressures from Russia and her allies over several Serbian-Albanian border towns, which finally secured Shkodër for Albania.¹⁵ The last crisis that the Great Powers resolved during the Conference was the resistance of King Nicholas of Montenegro to withdraw his troops from Shkodër. After the joint pressure of Great Powers, who had been trying to end the Montenegrin siege for months, the naval blockade and the threat of military intervention

¹² H. C. Löhr, *Die Gründung Albaniens: Wilhelm zu Wid und die Balkan-Diplomatie der Großmächte, 1912-1914*, Frankfurt am Main – Vienna, 2010, p. 112.

¹³ Österreichisches Staatsarchiv Wien, Haus-, Hof-, und Staatsarchiv, Politisches Archiv (hereafter: HHStA PA), XII, Kt. 418, Nr. 36B, Mensdorff to Berchtold, London, 4 April 1913.

¹⁴ ÖUA, V, Nr. 4957, 4974; V. Čorović, *Odnosi između Srbije i Austro-Ugarske u XX veku*, Beograd, 1992 (1st ed. 1936), p. 455, E. C. Helmreich, *The Diplomacy of the Balkan Wars...*, p. 255-256.

¹⁵ ÖUA, V, Nr. 6230, 6247, 6262. S. R. Williamson, *Austria-Hungary and the Origins...*, p. 134. In the meantime, Italy decided to give up the idea of ceding the largest Albanian city to Montenegro.

resulted in the entry of joint troops of a European concert into the city on May 17, 1913.¹⁶

In the following months the Statute of Albania, proposed by the representatives of Austria-Hungary and Italy, envisaged the creation of an independent and hereditary principality of Albania. The new country's was to be guaranteed by the Great Powers, but it was not to have any ties with the Ottoman Empire.¹⁷ Therefore, Albania had limited sovereignty under the effective protectorate of the European Powers embodied in the International Control Commission composed of one representative of each Power and one Albanian. However, almost 400 thousand people whose mother tongue was Albanian remained outside the new country's borders.¹⁸

Italy's support during the diplomatic struggle for Albanian borders was a product of her interests both in Montenegro and in Albania.¹⁹ During the negotiations about the renewal of the Triple Alliance (1901/2), Austria-Hungary continued the policy of refusing to recognize Italy as a power equal to her and Russia in the Balkans.²⁰ In the words of the Italian Foreign Minister, Antonino di San Giuliano, in March 1913, should Italy let Austria pursue her goals in Albania all alone, Italy's fate in the Adriatic would be the same as the fate of France had been in Egypt in 1882.²¹ The joint Austro-Italian effort in London 1912/13 was the start of an unstable cooperation in Albania. The decades of "propaganda wars" – a political, economic and almost every other type of rivalry in Albania – took a serious toll on relations between the two countries. The Austro-Hungarian Consul in Shkodër, Zambaur, saw the reconciliation of "our and the Italian parties" among the Albanian Catholics as necessary, especially among local teachers.²² Decades of imperial competition left obvious consequences in Northern Albania. The years of undermining each other's interests hindered the intended joint work.

¹⁶ M. Vojvodić, *Skadarska kriza 1913. godine*, Beograd, 1970, p. 179-181.

¹⁷ E. A. Frantz, *Prinz Wilhelm zu Wied und Albanien – der Versuch einer Herrschaftseinrichtung von außen*, Munich, Mag. 2003, p. 19-20.

¹⁸ H. C. Löhr, *Die Gründung Albanien's...*, p. 100-105.

¹⁹ In their view, a Serbian or Montenegrin port in the Adriatic could easily become a Russian port, F. R. Bridge and R. Bullen, *The Great Powers and the European States System 1814-1914*, London, 2004 (1st ed. 1980), p. 317; A. Hannig, "Austro-Hungarian Foreign Policy and the Balkan Wars", in D. Geppert, W. Mulligan and A. Rose (eds.), *The Wars before the Great War: Conflict and International Politics before the Outbreak of the First World War*, Cambridge 2015, p. 235.

²⁰ L. Monzali, "The Balkans and the Triple Alliance in Italian Foreign Policy, 1882-1903", in V. G. Pavlović (ed.), *Italy's Balkan Strategies (19th–20th Century)*, Belgrade 2014, p. 76-77.

²¹ R. J. B. Bosworth, *Italy, the Least of the Great Powers: Italian foreign policy before the First World War*, Cambridge, 2005 (1st ed. 1979), p. 225.

²² HHStA PA XII Kt. 421, Nr. 59, Zambaur to Berchtold, Skutari, 30 June 1913.

The Question of the Sovereign and Centres of Political Power in Albania

However, following the suppression of the aforementioned Serbian, Montenegrin and Greek territorial claims in Albania, the rivalry between Austria-Hungary and Italy gradually increased. The two countries clashed on almost every question concerning Albania: the question of the ruler, of the capital city, of the influence among local power-holders. Despite an in-principle willingness of both sides to cooperate, they also suspected each other of operating covertly.

In Albania, the Vlorë government of Ismail Qemali, in power since the proclamation of independence on November 28, 1912, succeeded in establishing control mostly in the south with only weak links with Shkodër. The most powerful of local rulers in Northern and Central Albania was Essad Pasha Toptani, a former Ottoman officer and a man who surrendered Shkodër to the Montenegrins. Skilfully manoeuvring between Great Powers and his compatriots, Toptani marched his troops from the north to areas around Tirana, the power base of his landowning family. From there he influenced the country's politics, aspiring to become the ruler of Albania.²³ Taking steps to consolidate his rule, Essad Pasha established the Central Albanian Senate (Pleqësia e Shqipërisë së Mesme) on October 12, 1913,²⁴ thereby giving a certain official framework to his influence. As an influential landowner of Central Albania, with many supporters between Tirana and Durrës, he wanted to impose himself as an unavoidable factor in Albanian politics before the ruler's arrival.

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During October Albania proved to be an important factor in the implementation of Austro-Hungarian foreign policy in the Balkans. After the failed Albanian invasion of Serbia and subsequent revolt, the Dual Monarchy forced the advancing Serbian army to withdraw from Albania, presenting itself as protector of the Treaty of London.²⁵ Having received Vienna's ultimatum to

²³ Essad Pasha Toptani wanted the future Albanian capital to be Durrës, a coastal town in central Albania, where he was in control, claiming that the local population in Vlorë had "too much influence on the government". The translation of Essad Pasha's letter from Turkish into German, HHStA PA XII Kt. 417, Nr. 234, Hornbostel to Berchtold, Durazzo, 10 September 1913. Toptani was also an anti-Austrian politician and he would keep that orientation during the First World War, D. T. Bataković, "Essad Pasha Toptani, Serbia and the Albanian Question (1915-1918)", in V. G. Pavlović (ed.), *Italy's Balkan Strategies (19th–20th Century)*, Belgrade 2014, p. 155-156.

²⁴ M. Schmidt-Neke, *Entstehung und Ausbau der Königsdiktatur in Albanien (1912-1939): Regierungsbildungen, Herrschaftsweise und Machteliten in einem jungen Balkanstaat*, Munich, 1987, p. 31.

²⁵ The dissatisfied notables of the former Kosovo Vilayet, now exiled in Albania, had been asking for Austro-Hungarian support from the first half of 1913. When Berchtold cancelled the Dual

withdraw from Albania on October 18, 1913, the Serbian government accepted its terms and complied with them during the following week.²⁶ The instability of Albania's borders and the internal situation required a stepped-up state-building process. First of all, there was not yet a suitable candidate for the vacant Albanian throne.

As early as January 1913, the Romanian Minister in Vienna proposed Wilhelm von Wied, the nephew of Romanian Queen Elizabeth, to Minister Berchtold.²⁷ That was why during 1913, among other great powers, the Romanian King "lobbied" for Wied.²⁸ After many candidates, more or less serious, Wied received support from Austria-Hungary and Italy. The new sovereign was a Protestant and so the multi-confessional Albanian population could accept him more easily than an adherent to any one of their faiths. Before Wied's arrival, the International Control Commission suppressed the Young Turks' conspiracy to install Izzet Pasha, an Ottoman general of Albanian origin, on the Albanian throne.²⁹ With the support of Ottoman authorities, propaganda in favour of the election of a Muslim ruler spread in Albania, especially in the central parts of the country. Minister Berchtold believed that the Dual Monarchy should certainly be hostile to such "pan-Islamist initiatives" prone to stir up "Muslim fanaticism" in Albania. It would not be premature, the Minister said, to consider joint Austro-Italian patrolling the Albanian coast to prevent possible Young Turk action.³⁰

There were multiple reasons for rejecting a Muslim candidate for the throne of Albania. Berchtold and his associates considered the election of a "Muslim ruler in 20th-century Europe as primitive and backward", which was a

Monarchy's help, they accomplished their plan with the help of the pro-Bulgarian IMRO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization), HHStA PA XIV Kt. 422, Nr. 20, von Rudnay to Berchtold, Durazzo, 27 February 1913; *ibid.*, Nr. 157, von Rudnay to Berchtold, Durazzo, 16 May 1913; HHStA PA XII Kt. 420, telegram, Lejhanec, Valona, 6 July 1913. *Dokumenti o spoljnoj politici Kraljevine Srbije 1903-1914*, vol. VI-3, ed. by K. Džambazovski, Beograd 1983, doc. 305, 311, 312. See also, G. Demeter and K. Csaplár-Degovics, "Albanian-Bulgarian Relations during the Balkan Wars and the Albanian-Macedonian Uprising (Third Balkan War, 1913)", in B. Meta (ed.), *100 Years of Independence: Speeches of the International Scientific Conference*, Tirana 2014, p. 271-290.

²⁶ V. Čorović, *Odnosi između Srbije...*, p. 548, H. C. Löhr, *Die Gründung Albaniens...*, p. 132-139.

²⁷ E. A. Frantz, *Prinz Wied und Albanien...*, p. 42; H. C. Löhr, *Die Gründung Albaniens...*, p. 116.

²⁸ HHStA PA XII Kt. 418, Nr. 856, Ambrozy, Rome, 12 November 1913.

²⁹ Austro-Hungarian Ambassador in Constantinople, Johann Markgraf von Pallavicini, wrote that the Ottoman ruling circles made a plan for domination over autonomous Albania: the Young Turks, through their Thessaloniki Committee, counting on "Muslim fanatics" and promoting an Ottoman army general of Albanian origin as candidate for the throne would be actual rulers of the country, HHStA, PA XII Kt. 452, Nr. 77A, Pallavicini to Berchtold, Constantinople, 8 December 1913.

³⁰ HHStA PA XII Kt. 452, Nr. 87, Berchtold to Merey/Petrović, Vienna, 29 November 1913.

part of Orientalist discourse on the Islamic world. In the same discourse, the practical consequence of choosing a Muslim ruler could “endanger the stability” of Albania since that would make her “a Turkish province” in the eyes of the other Balkan states.³¹

The Young Turk action was a complete failure due to the fact that the news of it had spread long before it even commenced. The Ottoman officers were arrested upon their arrival in Durrës. The consequence of the conspiracy was an action of the International Control Commission to remove two most important power-holders in the country in order to pave the way for the arrival of the Prince. Under the Commission’s pressure, heads of two most influential governments in Albania, Ismail Qemali and Essad Toptani, resigned in January and February 1914 respectively.

Notwithstanding their growing rivalry, Austro-Italian cooperation in Albania continued in the economic field. Beyond political clashes, two banks, one based in Milan (Banca Commerciale d’Italia), the other in Vienna (Wiener Bank Verein), were given concessions by the Ismail Qemali government. They established the Albanian National Bank in September 1913. The agreement ensured the Bank’s monopolies in Albania similar to the Moroccan Bank founded in 1911, a tool of French imperial policy.³²

The Austro-Hungarian Ambassador in Berlin, Count László Szögyény, believed that Prince Wilhelm was not a good choice as Albania’s sovereign. After talking with him, the ambassador described Wied as a person of good will but not up to the task ahead of him.³³ The Albanian delegation led by Essad Toptani, who conditioned his resignation on being given this honour, offered the crown to Wilhelm on February 21, 1914.³⁴ The Prince finally arrived in Durrës from Trieste on March 13, 1914.³⁵

Muslim Revolt in Central Albania

According to the Austro-Hungarian consul’s reports, the Catholics welcomed Prince Wilhelm with positive excitement, whereas the Muslims were reserved.³⁶ Prince went to the mosque, where there was a prayer for him in

³¹ HHStA, PA XII Kt. 452, Nr. 565, Berchtold to Pallavicini, Vienna, 29 November 1913.

³² A. Tambora, “The Rise of Italian Industry and the Balkans (1900-1914)”, *The Journal of European Economic History* 3-1, 1974, p. 108; N. Guy, *The birth of Albania: ethnic nationalism, the great powers of World War I and the emergence of Albanian independence*, London – New York, 2012, p. 77; L. Dushku, “Provisional Government of Vlora, the Albanian National Bank and the Great Powers”, in *Money and Banking in Albania, from Antiquity to Modern Times. First Conference of the Museum of the Bank of Albania Proceedings, 14-15 June 2017*, p. 139-144.

³³ HHStA PA XIV Kt. 55, Nr. 20, telegram, Szögyény, Berlin, 11 January 1914.

³⁴ N. Mehmeti, *Shqipëria...*, Tirana, 2018, p. 54.

³⁵ H. C. Löhr, *Die Gründung Albaniens...*, p. 189, N. Guy, *The birth of Albania...*, p. 71-72.

³⁶ HHStA PA XIV Kt. 53, Nr. 124, Halla – Berchtold, Scutari, 9 March 1914.

Arabic, and the next day the archbishop held a *Te Deum* service in his honour.³⁷ The very first days of Wied's reign confirmed how unstable the Austro-Italian alliance in Albania was. During the service at the cathedral, there was a reassuring picture of the princely couple with their entourage. However, the newly-appointed Austro-Hungarian Minister to Albania, Heinrich von Löwenthal, took the seat of honour opposite the ruler himself and in front of the altar,³⁸ whereas the representatives of the other Great Powers and Albanian authorities were behind him. This symbolic move was meant to emphasise the importance of the Dual Monarchy in Albania and therefore provoked sharp protests by Italy, whose representatives felt humiliated. Austro-Italian relations in Albania went from cooperation to the realization that Albania had become "a veritable apple of discord".³⁹

Although the Young Turk intervention failed, the idea of a Muslim ruler took roots in Central Albania. Since late 1913 and early 1914 several separate movements promoted this idea, causing instability. The Serbian government supported Arif Hikmet in the northeast of Albania in order to create an autonomous puppet state and broaden its influence after its attempts to expand territorially towards the Albanian coast had been stopped twice.⁴⁰ Essad Pasha also spread the idea of a Muslim ruler while publicly professing his loyalty to Prince Wilhelm.⁴¹ Finally, the remaining Young Turk officers organised and instigated a revolt against the Albanian monarch. The rebellion that broke out in Central Albania would endanger and ultimately bring down the entire system established during 1913/14.

Also, the nationalists protested against the new government of Turhan Pasha Përmeti. They called its ministers "foreigners" because of their past as Ottoman administrators. For example, Prime Minister Turhan Pasha had served as *vali* of Crete in the 1890s and ambassador to Russia in 1908-1912. Albanian nationalists also saw it as being full of foreigners because a significant number of ministers had lived outside the country for a long time, reserving the label "Essadists" for the ministers who used the Turkish language.⁴² Përmeti's government took office on March 17, 1914 without adequate finances or public

³⁷ HHStA PA XIV Kt. 53, Nr. 95, tel., Hornbostel, Durazzo, 13 March 1914.

³⁸ HHStA PA XIV Kt. 45, Nr. 6/P A-B, Löwenthal to Berchtold, Durazzo, 24 March 1914

³⁹ F. R. Bridge, *From Sadowa to Sarajevo: the foreign policy of Austria-Hungary, 1866-1914*, London – Boston, 1972, p. 365.

⁴⁰ HHStA PA XIV Kt. 58, Nr. 52, Hornbostel to Berchtold, Durazzo, 16 February 1914. Arif Hikmet had Serbian support to spread the idea of autonomy for Mati and Malësia in central and eastern Albania like the one in Epirus, *Dokumenti o spoljnoj politici Kraljevine Srbije 1903-1914*, vol. VII-2, ed. by V. Dedijer and Ž. Anić, Beograd 1980, doc. 32, 36, 46, 51, 64.

⁴¹ HHStA PA XIV Kt. 58, Nr. 12/P, Halla to Berchtold, Scutari, 12 January 1914; *ibid.*, Nr. 25, telegram, Petrović, Valona, 12 January 1914.

⁴² D. Heaton-Armstrong, *The Six Month Kingdom: Albania 1914*, London – New York, 2005, p. 26-27.

security and with an ongoing conflict in Epirus where pro-Greek population revolted against Albanian rule.⁴³

According to the report of the Austro-Hungarian member of the International Control Commission, August von Kral, there was dangerous agitation in Central Albania. “Fanatical Muslim agitation”, organised probably by Essad Pasha or a neighbouring state, opened the area to the ideas of a Muslim ruler and of the need to resist “Christian authority”. Such ideas, Kral wrote, had Serbian, Greek and Young Turk support. Serbia wanted to establish a more favourable border in certain strategic places, Greece wanted to cause a Muslim-Christian rift in Albania and attract the Albanian-speaking Orthodox population in Epirus and the Young Turks had their old goal of installing a Muslim prince.⁴⁴

As the rebel-controlled area gradually expanded, Berchtold and San Giuliano met in Abazzia (April 16-19, 1914). The ministers agreed on an independent Albania, but apart from friendly statements, they found no way to overcome disagreements and deepened rivalry between the two countries.⁴⁵ The analysis of two strategic documents from the Ballhausplatz, on school and cultural policies in Albania, shows a growing rivalry. While the first of them, drawn up in 1912, “School Action in Albania”, envisaged raising cultural level as the best way to offset Slavicisation and certain Italian policies, the one from January 1914 had a clear anti-Italian note and perceived Italy as the most important rival.⁴⁶

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The rebels operated northeast of Tirana and the government in Durrës soon received confusing news from the part of the country that was gradually lost to rebels. According to Fuad and Murat Toptani, the rebellion was another “double play” of their relative and opponent, Essad, and represented the preparation for the coming of the Muslim ruler. They argued that Muslim landowning beys in Central Albania were not against the agreements about special status for Northern Albania or Epirus if they kept their dominance in the rest of the country under Essad Pasha’s control, either with Prince Wilhelm, or more preferably, a Muslim ruler.⁴⁷ Although Essad as both Minister of War and

⁴³ N. Mehmeti, *Shqipëria...*, p. 67

⁴⁴ HHStA PA XIV Kt. 62, Nr. 180, tel., Kral, Valona, 2 April 1914.

⁴⁵ R. J. B. Bosworth, *Italy, the Least of the Great Powers...*, p. 119; L. Monzali, *The Italians of Dalmatia: From Italian Unification to World War I*, Toronto 2009, p. 296.

⁴⁶ HHStA Sonderbestände Nachlass (NI) Szapary 4-9, Die Schulaktion in Albanien, Wien, Juli 1912; HHStA NL Szapary, 4-1, Aufzeichnung über die Konferenzen 28-29. Jänner 1914. betreffend unsere kulturelle Aktion im autonomen Albanien.

⁴⁷ HHStA PA XIV Kt. 60, Nr. 423, telegram, Löwenthal, Durazzo, 13 May 1914. Austro-Hungarian representative in Albania Heinrich von Löwenthal described several factions in Albania: Young Turks, Italo-Essadist, Serbian-Greek and Wied’s loyalists scattered in pockets all over Albania, HHStA PA XIV Kt. 62, Nr. 488, telegram, Löwenthal, Durazzo, 28 May 1914.

Internal Affairs allegedly held events under control, the Austro-Hungarian representatives convinced Prince Wilhelm that he was a part of the rebellion together with Italy. The next step was his arrest and exile in Bari.⁴⁸

The Failure of the Austro-Hungarian Imperial Project

Between May and September 1914, Wied's loyalists tried to stop the rebels. Their task became especially difficult after the decision of the International Control Commission, influenced by its Italian member, to treat the rebels defensively without taking any proper actions against them.⁴⁹

Even though the situation became increasingly difficult, Berchtold still refused the idea of a Muslim on the Albanian throne. According to him, that would be an anachronism in Europe, and a Muslim would have problems both with the Orthodox South and the Catholic North. Also, while the Dual Monarchy's goal was pacification and empowerment of Albania, Italy was not ready to accept that approach. It is not clear on what the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister based his assessment that Albania's predominantly Muslim population (70%) would accept a Christian ruler. His analysis was narrowly focused on the strategic needs of the Dual Monarchy.⁵⁰

Commissioner August von Kral learned of the rebels' demands by the end of June. Their leaders' foremost demand was the abdication of Prince Wied, after which they wanted to discuss the question of his successor. The fact that Muslims in Albania were a majority was to be a guideline in the election of a new ruler. They also demanded the resignation of the government and a new one that would include "capable people, not only of landowning beys". The other demands were the establishment of a control commission for the state's financial affairs, respect for all three religions, guarantees of the Great Powers and security of Albania's borders, but only using diplomatic means, the inclusion of a "Turkish member" into the International Control Commission and the opening of religious schools.⁵¹ The rebels had an obvious intention of establishing Muslim control over Albania, in order to reverse the changes that had taken place in the post-Ottoman Balkans.

Amid the July crisis that followed the Sarajevo assassination, on June 28, 1914, representatives of the Dual Monarchy seemingly lost patience as they tried to calm the rebellion in Albania. Commissioner Kral reported about the dangerous situation in Albania and the exhaustion of troops loyal to Wied as the

⁴⁸ N. Mehmeti, *Shqipëria...*, p. 102-103.

⁴⁹ HHStA PA XIV Kt. 62, Nr. 274, telegram, Kral, Valona, 28 May 1914.

⁵⁰ HHStA PA XIV Kt. 66, Nr. 688, telegram, Berchtold to Meroy, Vienna, 24 June 1914.

⁵¹ HHStA PA XIV Kt. 63, Nr. 133/P, Kral to Berchtold, Durazzo, 30 June 1914.

uprising spread across most of the country.⁵² In the competition between the two Great Powers, Italy apparently destabilised Albania by sending money and emissaries to rebels against Prince Wilhelm.⁵³ Ignoring all reports that showed that the situation in Albania was unstable and that the government struggled to survive, the Ballhausplatz used some loyal government forces against Serbia after the formal declaration of war and the beginning of the First World War.

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The action against Serbia continued in spite of all internal difficulties in Albania. On July 26, 1914, Minister Berchtold instructed Kral to spread the word that Austria-Hungary had already invaded Serbia, that the Serbian King and government had left Belgrade, that there were no Serbian troops in Kosovo and that the forces of the Dual Monarchy had already crossed the border.⁵⁴ The key problem was, again, that the Monarchy was unable to make an alliance with the rebels against Serbia because they would not accept Wied as a leader.⁵⁵

During August, the last structures that kept Wied in power disappeared. After the outbreak of war between the Great Powers, the first to withdraw from the International Control Commission, on August 1, was the British representative, and the Austro-Hungarian and German representatives did the same in the following days. The crucial moment was probably the departure of the Dutch gendarmerie officers entrusted with the defence of the city by the Prince. Already on September 1, Vlorë fell. As a result of the loss of Vlorë and the cancellation of the loan promised to Wied by the Great Powers, the Prince handed power over to the Commission, which still existed officially, and left Albania aboard an Austro-Hungarian ship.

The key reason for the failure of the Austro-Hungarian imperial project was an insistence on pursuing a policy without an agreement with either Italy or one of Albanian neighbours. Austria-Hungary decided to have an independent sphere of influence in Albania without the interference of any major power or any Balkan state. She tied the fate of her imperial project to the elected ruler of Albania, Wilhelm von Wied, and all the while, her representatives were wasting their strength to provide him with loyal subjects. As if the Dual Monarchy did not find solutions to the ever more complicated situation in the Balkans during

⁵² HHStA, Nr. 137/P, Kral to Berchtold, Durazzo, 11 July 1914. The concession to the Pro-Greek rebels and the creation of the Autonomous Region of Northern Epirus under the Corfu Agreement of 17 May 1914 did not bring stability to the Albanian government, B. Kondis, *Greece and Albania...*, p. 131-132.

⁵³ M. B. Fried, "The Cornerstone of Balkan Power Projection: Austro-Hungarian War Aims and the Problem of Albanian Neutrality, 1914-1918", *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 23-3, 2012, p. 27.

⁵⁴ HHStA PA I Kt. 936, Nr. 192, telegram, Berchtold to Kral, Vienna, 26 July 1914; A. Mitrović, *Srbija u Prvom svetskom ratu*, Beograd, 2004, p. 185.

⁵⁵ HHStA PA XIV Kt. 65, Nr. 65B, Löwenthal to Berchtold, Durazzo, 4 August 1914.

1912-1914 while the “ambitions of regional states and the interests of the great powers clashed”.⁵⁶

The foreign policy of the Dual Monarchy (1912-1914) found itself wedged between different Albanian factions and conflict with Italy. The “Albanian equilibrium” was difficult to achieve for the Ballhausplatz. If they relied only on North Albanian Catholics, they would lose southern and central Albania, possibly to Serbian or Italian protectorate. An agreement with the rebel Muslims would open a crisis in Shkodër and the possibility of those areas turning to neighbouring Montenegro or being pushed into secession. That is why the struggle for a sustainable Albania was the only solution for Austria-Hungary. Faced with too many adversaries and too few allies, the Dual Monarchy failed to achieve its goals.

It turned out that Italy’s solution was more pragmatic and better suited to the political situation in Albania itself. Essad Pasha Toptani, as an ally, and support for the Muslim rebels of Central Albania were a more reliable approach. Also, even though the authorities in Vienna were aware of the chaotic situation in the country, they wanted to use Albanian troops against Serbia as they prepared to invade that country in the summer of 1914. To summarise, between November 1912 and September 1914 Albania went from early stages of state-building into the state of civil war, which brought about the ultimate failure of the Austro-Hungarian imperial project. When the Imperial-Royal Army occupied the area between Shkodër and the Vjosa River in January 1916, Austria-Hungary based her policies on different premises from those before 1914.

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⁵⁶ Ž.-P. Bled, *Franz Ferdinand*, Beograd 2013, p. 258 (Serbian ed. of J.-P. Bled, *Franz Ferdinand*, Paris, 2012).

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