



Department of History and Civilization

**THE IDEA OF NATION DURING THE ALBANIAN
NATIONAL MOVEMENT
(1878-1912)**

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to explore the way the Albanian nationalist intellectuals of the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century articulated the existence of an Albanian nation. The existence of such a nation assumed the recognition of certain values and, therefore, the entitlement to enjoy certain rights. The thesis concentrates on the work of four leading Albanian intellectuals and Ottoman imperial statesmen. It is thus a contribution to the study of the intellectual history and political thought as regards to the development of nationalism as an idea and ideology. The study of the nation in the Albanian context is intended to enhance an understanding of the dynamics of nationalism in the context of the decaying Ottoman Empire at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. The study also has a wider theoretical dimension. It employs Western ideas on nationalism to study the particular dynamics of the Albanian national movement. But ideas developed in the west do not always correspond to the particular circumstances of the emergent Albanian national movement. As such the thesis offers a critical examination of some of the main Western theories on nationalism and through an examination of the Albanian case poses the need for a rethinking of some of the basic conceptions as regards to the development of the nationalist movements, in the context of a decaying multi-national empire, and in the context of backwardness where the national idea had to be constructed, and in which the role played by intellectuals was especially important.

The articulation of the idea of the nation implies not only how these intellectuals look upon their nation, but also how they consider themselves in relation to it. In this sense we have also an identity problem involved or more accurately a problem of identities. The process of the articulation of the nation brings with itself a kind of temporary, intermediary phase, along which old, traditional identities intermingle with the newer ones, co-habit, clash, or became detached from each other. The examination of this process of differentiation and adaptation is another objective of the thesis. It is important as it provides an indicator of the degree of influence of the imperial Ottoman context, but also of the European one as well in shaping the conception and sense of Albanian nationalism.

The problem of the national movements, on behalf of a would-be nation, could be the work also of people with multiple identities, whose main objective was not necessarily the demolition of the old imperial state. The plurality of identities among nationalist intellectuals

was the product of a specific political cultural environment, such as the Ottoman one at the turn of the nineteenth-twentieth centuries. Though apparently paradoxical, it is possible for people with overlapping identities to pursue the project of a culturally homogenous nation. In this study the nationalist activity of the Albanian intellectuals is seen as a movement seeking in first place to secure to the would-be nation a safe place in the framework of the old imperial state. In this respect, as the thesis will try to demonstrate, the perspectives of survival of the old imperial state became the landmark which determined the success, or the failure, of the younger national identity vis-à-vis the older imperial one.

The thesis considers both options of the above dynamic, i.e. the prevailing, or failure, of the national identity over the imperial one, as part of an open-ended process that was not predestined to favor the national paradigm. Starting from the position of the present, we are tempted to view national history, in the expression of Nathalie Clayer, through “linear” and “finalist” optics,¹ and as the natural ultimate destination of historical processes. Therefore, we often look at political entities, such as empires and nation-states, as two incompatible realities. The imperial states are often taken as a lower and outdated political forms, in contrast to the more emancipated and progressive nation-state. Hence, we judge the multi-cultural character of empires and the multiple identities of their elites as an anomaly, which had to be adjusted to the emerging nation-states, which imposed its homogenous national culture and ‘normalized’ and ‘legitimized’ the national identity. In our specific case, such a point of view generates the assumption that the devotion to an Albanian nation was a long and conscious sought-after desire of Albanian nationalist intellectuals.

The thesis holds that one of the major ideological sources of Albanian nationalism originated from within the Ottoman Empire. Albanian nationalist intellectuals were affected by many influences coming from diverse directions: from Italy, where an Italian-Albanian community lived, from the Balkan countries, particular Greece, but at this point an important modernizing influence came from Istanbul. The thesis challenges the conventional image of a moribund Ottoman Empire, half feudal that emitted only a smell of putrefaction, suffocating the ‘national liberation movements’ of the Balkan people and becoming the symbol of an empire in an advanced state of decay, causing headaches and many troubles to the Great Powers who sought to resuscitate it for their own interests. This is the image that European and Balkan historiography has traditionally produced. Instead, the Sublime Porte was a gigantic bureaucratic state machine, which had been in decline since the seventeenth century,

¹ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais. La naissance d'une nation majoritairement musulmane en Europe* (Paris 2007), pg. 14.

but resolved to reinvigorate/modernize its mechanism throughout nineteenth century after European models. Its modernization processes, the cultural fermentation in its cosmopolitan center, such as Istanbul, the expansion of denser education networks and state administration presence in the province, an ever growing secular trend first in the state administration and then in the field of culture and education, were all development favoring the upsurge of new vistas to state employees and intellectuals. Of course this was a process with its own setbacks and lacunas, while unevenly spread over the Empire. These major changes would face the problem of the survival of the Sublime Porte in a Balkan peninsula swept by the rise of nationalism, in a period of an ever growing European penetration in the European dominions of the Empire.

Nonetheless, such an atmosphere made Ottoman culture more open towards Western influences, such as secularism, romanticism, constitutionalism, the growth of press, and language standardization that gave precedence to the vernacular. Ottomanism as a secular ideology and state policy, but propagated also by Ottoman intellectuals closely linked to the state, for whom the survival of the imperial state was among their major concerns, affected the first Albanian nationalist intellectuals operating in the territory of the Ottoman Empire during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This group of intellectuals was a primary actor in the development of nationalist activities in the late nineteenth century. The use of the term “Albanian movement” is not intended to imply a unitary political movement with common political strategies. It corresponds to what Miroslav Hroch identified as the initial phases in a nationalist movement: phase A (scholarly interest in the nation) and phase B (efforts to spread the national idea). As we will show in the introductory chapter on the historic background of the Albanian movement, Albanian independence came mostly as a result of the dynamic of European geo-politics and it was not among the top priorities of the national movement. At this point we may say that the Albanian movement emerged as a reaction against the dangers posed by the dissolution of the Empire.

In the time of Congress of Berlin (1878) the Albanian nationalist intellectuals addressed to the concert of the Great Powers (Great Britain, France, Russia, Austria-Hungary, Germany and Italy) their demand to recognize the Albanians as a nationality in its own in the framework of the Ottoman Empire.

From the last quarter of the nineteenth century, two of these powers, namely Austria-Hungary and Italy, became the most interested European powers on the Albanian affairs, and at the same time harsh rivals between them. Their intention was to increase their influence and dominion in the Western Balkans, and especially in the lands inhabited by the Albanian

speaking populations. During all the time-span stretching from the Congress of Berlin (1878) to the proclamation of the Albanian independence (1912), Vienna and Rome agreed to sustain the status quo of the Ottoman rule in the Balkans, as a means to avoid the supremacy of one over the other.

Until the end of the nineteenth century, these powers would engage mostly in education policies, opening their own schools in some Albanian towns. After the Ottoman state entered a new period of heavy political crisis, one of them being the Macedonian problem in 1897, and starting from the first decade of the twentieth century, their presence would rise and extend, reaching other important Albanian urban areas through their consular and client networks. The Austrian and Italian policies would involve in more concrete matters, and more related to the patriotic activities of the locals, such as the setting of an alphabet for the Albanian literary and standardized language, the support to various Albanian patriotic newspapers. The final aim was to increase their proper influence and prestige amongst Albanians and be ready for replacing the Ottomans after their eventual retreat from the Balkans

Consequently, in the first decade of the twentieth century, even the Albanian patriotic circles would have their own pro-Austrian or pro-Italian tendencies, depending on their own interests and support they managed to get. A clear example are two of the figures examined in this thesis, Ismail Qemali and Faik Konitza, who had an intense political activity in the early years of twentieth century, the first being friendly to the Italian policies and the second an ardent supporter of Vienna. In the very end, there were the Austrian and Italian interests on Albania, which made possible the creation of an Albanian state at the London Conference of Ambassadors (1913) with the actual borders. The interests of the Slavic Balkan states, and Greece, backed mainly by Russia, aimed at a much reduced Albanian state, claiming territories in the north and in the south of the Balkan space inhabited by Albanian speaking populations.

Theoretically the Albanian movement is difficult to categorize. No single existing theory is able to encompass the variety and the diverse conditions in which this national movement occurred. A combination of different theories helps to better elucidate different facets of this development. Maria Todorova in “The Trap of Backwardness: Modernity, Temporality, and the Study of Eastern European Nationalism”² provides in outline a valid theoretical framework, which challenges the widespread belief that the Balkans were a simple

² Maria Todorova, “The Trap of Backwardness: Modernity, Temporality, and the Study of Eastern European Nationalism”, *Slavic Review*, (Spring 2005), nr. 1, pg. 140-164.

late recipient of nationalist ideas from the west, which was more advanced and had progressed further. The basic idea describes nationalism as coming from the west and transplanted into an alien Eastern soil and, consequently, producing a degraded offspring of the original version.³

Todorova argues that certain nationalist movements in the Balkans, notably the Greek and Serbian in the early nineteenth century, preceded the national movements in Germany and Italy. She suggests a perspective of a “relative synchronicity of Eastern and Western Europe within a “longue durée” framework”, in order to avoid the overstressing of the Western origins of nationalism and Eastern backwardness. Her alternative approach suggests a basic similarity among societies affected by nationalism, even in those cases when there was no direct contact between them, as witnessed by the similarity of the national imagination embodied mainly by the nation-state. According to Todorova, this was favored by the similarity, rather than differences, between pre-modern societies. She maintains that the timing of the national movements in the Balkans should be seen in the framework of the history of modernity taken as a process of “rearrangement of group solidarities in human society, as a global social process that is itself a by-product of urbanization, bureaucratization, the revolution in communication, and so on; in a word, it is intimately linked to modernity”.⁴

In this sense the cultural and ideological influences of one part of the continent on other parts should not be seen as organic traits of a certain culture, in our case the Western one holding the authorship, and the Eastern part, which in turn generates only degraded versions. They should be seen instead as interchanges taking place in the context of modernity, of a definite temporal context, when different societies became apt to communicate. What is important in Todorova’s perspective is the rejection of the idea of west and east as two distinct spaces with their own “separate flow of time”, whose nature of interrelations in terms of spread of nationalism are simply those of the donor and the recipient. Her standpoint refutes the notion of “cultural traditions as impediments or promoters of development”.⁵ In this context should be placed the Western influences penetrating the Ottoman Empire, mostly in the second half of the nineteenth century.

This thesis assumes that the Ottoman Empire, in particular in relation to the Albanian movement, was not an obstructer due to its inherent ‘oriental’ cultural deficiencies. It was

³ Ibid., pg. 147.

⁴ Ibid., pg. 150.

⁵ Ibid, pg. 146.

rather an agency that translated in its own way these influences and became a source of diffusion of ideas which affected the new Balkan intelligentsia. Quite often, in the studies on Balkan national movements in general, and on the Albanian movement in particular, the lack of economic development and the absence of a bourgeoisie is blamed for the belatedness of nation-building processes. These studies elide the importance of the role of intelligentsia and the modernization, centralization, and rationalization of the state bureaucracy, which do not occur necessarily in the condition of fully Western type industrialized economy. It was not by chance that among the most important leaders of the Albanian Movement were high Ottoman statesmen and intellectuals, like Pashko Vasa, Ismail Qemal bej Vlora and Shemsedin Sami Frasheri. They perfectly reflect the modernization of the imperial administration, bringing about the rise of a bureaucracy and intelligentsia closely linked to the state and its westernizing processes. Among others, it had to do also with a more secularized, materialist and rational outlook, which compounded with the structural changes in the Ottoman Empire, led to the conceptualization of an Albanian “nation”.

Miroslav Hroch’s “Social preconditions of national revival in Europe”⁶ is of great help in understanding the role played by the intelligentsia in the national movements of the small European nations. Hroch identifies in the members of the ruling state elites, taking part in the reforming of the old state, potential and important actors in the national movements. In time of crisis, and because of the reforms undertaken, members of the state elite undergo a process of identity transformation. Old identities are placed in question, especially among the elite groups with an adequate degree of education, and the nation is offered as a collective identity which better fits into modernity.⁷

Hroch defines also a time-frame to characterize the stages in the development of the national movements, based mostly upon the role played by nationalist intellectuals. These phases are divided depending on the degree of spread among people of the nationalist activities. Phase A is the period of scholarly interest in the “nation”, phase B, the period of patriotic agitation, and phase C, the rise of a mass national movement. However, Hroch’s schemes cannot fully cover the specificities of the national movements in small countries. His theory generally views small nationalities as oppressed by the dominant ones, which are

⁶ M. Hroch, *Social preconditions of national revival in Europe. A comparative analysis of the social composition of patriotic groups among the smaller European nations* (New York, 2000).

⁷ *Ibid*, pg.xiv-xv.

ethnically distinct from the subjected one.⁸ An imperial framework cannot always have this division of power, i.e. small and ethnically diverse ethnies oppressed by bigger ones.

In the Ottoman Empire, the Albanians, as Moslems, were part of the Ottoman ruling community. The millet system was the pillar of the internal structure of the Ottoman Empire, which divided people into Moslems and Christians, the first being more privileged than the second. Most of the Albanian speaking populations were Moslems, therefore part of the ruling imperial community. On the other hand, not all the Albanian speaking populations were of the Moslem faith. There were also Orthodox and Catholic Albanians. This condition of the Albanian speaking populations cannot be fully explained following Hroch's scheme, which also places great emphasis on the development of capitalism as a precondition for the rise of modern nationalism. Within the Ottoman Empire the distinguishing factor was not capitalist industrialization of the country, rather the modernization of the state administration and of the school system which opened the way to secularization and rationalization processes inside the Empire. These trends had an impact on the Albanian national movement.

But, Hroch provides a good definition of the patriotic activities of the intellectuals of the 'would-be nations': "Individuals who consciously, of their own volition, and over a long period of time, devoted their activities to the support of the national movement, endeavoring in particular to diffuse patriotic attitudes".⁹ If Hroch's theory is of help in highlighting the role of the nationalist intelligentsia closely associated with the state, or the ruling classes, as in the Albanian case through the participation in it of high Ottoman dignitaries, it omits, nonetheless, the relevant role of the Diaspora intellectuals in articulating the idea of "nation". As we will see in the first chapter of the thesis, the first Albanian nationalist activities came into being among the Albanians of Italy, the oldest Albanian community settled from centuries in the Apenine peninsula, and the recent ones, such as the ones in Bulgaria, Romania, Egypt, U.S.A., etc. In the case of the old Albanian-Italian community, the preservation of some old feudal/ecclesiastical privileges, the impact of European Romanticism and the XIX century's revolutionary ideas on the "nation", made possible the interest and the formulation of the Albanian "nation" and the reconceiving of the 'motherland' in terms of an "ethnie"/"nation", based upon language, blood relations, etc. With regard to the other more recent Albanian Diaspora communities, the living into an alien environment and the confrontation with other cultures, the changes of the modern era, the shattering of pariochalism of the traditional and patriarchal societies, of religious

⁸ Ibid, pg. 25.

⁹ Ibid., pg. 14.

legitimacies, bringing along an identity crisis, and in the words of Ernest Gellner, the living in an emergent “mobile, anonymous and centralized mass societies”, made possible the articulation of the Albanian people as a “nation” in its own.¹⁰

The thesis will focus upon intellectuals with overlapping identities. These intellectuals were simultaneously members of the high ranking state, or cultural, Ottoman elite. In this sense it is better to speak about “identities”, rather than “identity”. National identity was not an identity normally interiorized by these figures, nor was it the predestined end of their activity. The book, edited by H.Haupt, M.G.Muller and S.Wolf, “Regional and National Identities in Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries”¹¹ provides important theoretical references in this respect.

The editors of this book argue that operating with the term “identities” “has the advantage of combining individual and collective aspects and thus referring, in the study of nationalism, to the need to go beyond processes of social definition to pay more attention than hitherto to individuals’ responses to national symbols and rituals”.¹² This approach accepts that the idea of nation and national identity is a collective allegiance, which does not necessarily prevail over other allegiances, regional, religious, social, and that different individuals, with different backgrounds might have specific reactions. Different individuals, and groups, in different period of times and contexts, have propagated the need for ideologies that stimulate collective identities, in our case the national one. But, these collective belongings cannot be exclusive, one-dimensional, and nation-centric, as advocated by the narrative of the national historiographies of the nation-states. The national identity of the nationalist intellectuals of the nineteenth century could be well intertwined with other ‘national’, political, religious, and professional identities. The thesis aims to show the transformation of “national identity” into an important collective identity, after a time when it co-habited with other identities. Nation-building processes in the nineteenth century, and their conditions, are often viewed from present day perspectives of the nation-state, from the idea that the nation-state has been an unavoidable trajectory of the development of humanity, a more progressed organizational order of societies. Haupt, Muller and Woolf point to the idea that multi-national states are a valid context to study national-building processes and cannot be considered, as has been done up to now, simply as “obstacles to the emergence of nation-state, or simply as a backdrop to successful or abortive national movements”. They

¹⁰ E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, (London, 2002).

¹¹ H. Haupt/M. G. Muller/S. Woolf (eds) *Regional and National Identities in Europe in the XIXth and XXth Centuries* (Florence 1998).

¹² *Ibid.*, pg. 3-4.

argue that the main reason behind this consideration was “because they were multi-national, they have been regarded as working against the identification of nation and state in a specified territory”.¹³

Another important theoretical contribution is provided by John Breuilly’s “Nationalism and the state”.¹⁴ Breuilly categorizes the functions that ideology might play in the national movements, namely coordination, mobilization and legitimation. According to the author a) “coordination is the part ideology plays in bringing together a set of diverse political interests into a single movement by providing them with a unity of values and purpose, b) mobilization is the part ideology plays in bringing new groups into politics and providing them with political objectives and justifications, c) legitimation is the part ideology plays in presenting an acceptable image of a political movement to outsiders”.¹⁵ Breuilly defines nationalist ideologies as neither an expression of national identity nor the arbitrary invention of nationalists. “It arises out of the need to make sense of complex social and political arrangements. But that need is itself shaped both by intellectual traditions and the sorts of responses which any intellectual scheme evokes when it is activated in some way or another”.¹⁶ Such a definition of nationalist ideology allows us to examine the formulations of the Albanian nation in its diversity, depending upon cultural and political contexts in which the activists operated. On the other hand, the above division of functions of this ideology helps us to better grasp the nature of a specific national movement, in our case the Albanian one. The Albanian national movement regarded itself in relation to the Ottoman Empire, as a reactive movement against its dissolution rather than as a separatist nationalist response. Breuilly, it should be noted, constructs his categories having in mind only separatist movements from imperial states.

Ernest Gellner’s “Nations and Nationalism”¹⁷ and Benedict Anderson’s “Imagined Communities”¹⁸ both seek to explain the way nationalism dominated the world in the period of modernity. Gellner emphasizes the importance of the industrialization of society, the rise of a market economy, and the rise of the modern centralized state, which needed a national homogenous culture. According to Gellner, nationalism was supported by essentially economic cause, which saw the development of “industrialized societies”. It had emerged by the late seventeenth century in some parts of Europe and in the nineteenth-twentieth centuries

¹³ Ibid., pg. 8.

¹⁴ J. Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Chicago 1993).

¹⁵ Ibid, pg.93.

¹⁶ Ibid, pg. 63.

¹⁷ E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford, 2002).

¹⁸ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London-New York, 1991).

in the rest of the world. The link between nationalism and industrialization, for Gellner, is explained by the fact that economic development requires certain forms of political and cultural organization. The most convenient is the “nation-state”, which produces a homogenous “national” culture as a precondition for the functioning of an industrialized society. Agrarian and feudal societies, with their linguistic and cultural diversity, were not suitable for an industrialized society. Gellner’s theory presents a visible weak point as pertains to the Albanian case. Taking industrialized society as the necessary condition for the development of nationalism, Gellner does not foresee cases when nationalism arises in pre-industrialized societies, as in the Albanian case in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Unlike Gellner, Benedict Anderson does not take nationalism as functional, with an industrialized society being a condition for nationalism. Anderson asserts a connection between nationalism and material and psychological conditions. One of these conditions is provided by the rise of print capitalism, which makes possible the spread of a standardized language and culture through dictionaries and literature in general. It leads to the “imagination” of nation from groups of people and gives birth to linguistic nationalisms. For Anderson the birth of nationalism was eased by other modernizing processes, such as scientific discoveries and exploration of the world, which shattered the old world visions and fragmented the union of the Moslem and Christian worlds with their international languages, Latin and Arabic. Anderson thinks that in a time when religion is in decline, nationalism gains an attractive power and turns into a cultural system with religious traits. Though Anderson considers also the pre-industrialized societies as propitious settings for the study of nationalism, his theory is not fully adequate for the Albanian case. The birth of print capitalism does not inevitably favor particular nations: it may also destroy different languages that, for one reason or other, haven’t yet reached the stage of a written language. This was the case of the Albanian language in the nineteenth century, when it was still at the oral stage. Albanian nationalist intellectuals saw the spread of written Greek and Ottoman-Arabic as an obstacle to the development of a written Albanian language. On the other side, nationalism does not always replace religion, but in many cases they play together an important role for the elaboration of the idea of the nation.

However, these theories set a close link between the historical development and the emergence of nationalism in various countries of the world and different periods of time, giving a temporal and spatial dimension to nationalism.

Anthony Smith's "The Ethnic Origins of Nations"¹⁹ presents ethnicity as the forerunner of nationalism and tries to analyze the shift from ethnies to nation. For Smith modern nations amplify, deepen and make more efficient the ways members of ethnies come together and communicate between themselves. Smith thinks that nations do not bring new elements and neither do they modify the objectives of human communities. Smith stresses the continuity between ethnic belonging and the conditions that make possible the birth of nationalism. At this point, his position departs from that of Gellner and Anderson, who underline the novelty and modernity of nationalism. Smith asserts that the "imagined communities", through which the individuals achieve national consciousness, are not novel phenomena in the history. He refers to Ancient Greece and Rome. Nationalism is much more interested in state power than ethnicism, which is less political. National myths, ancient languages, are the essentials of nationalism, not less so than communication and modernizing education. Smith's view that between ethnies and nation "there is continuity, but not identity" is more valid for the Albanian case. That fact that Smith does not condition the emergence of nationalism with industrialization makes his theory more appropriate for this case.

Anthony Smith has also pioneered the examination of the role of myths, and more specifically of 'Golden Age' in nationalist ideologies.²⁰ Smith sees in the use of the 'Golden Age' by the nationalist intellectuals another connection between ethnies and nation. In the same way as in the pre-modern communities, this notion is used in the process of nation-building to bring people together, to mobilize them and direct their energies towards a 'historical destiny' through strengthening the unity of the community and in modern times propagating the 'rebirth of the nation'. Smith thinks that the 'Golden Age' must not be a pure invention, but it has to be historically verifiable, in order that this notion can be long-living and efficient. Myths in the intellectual discourse 'connect' the old times with the new history of the would-be nation, as important instruments for the cultural reproduction of communities.

The historical background to the transformation of nationalism in the period 1880-1914, is analyzed by Eric Hobsbawm in his "Nations and Nationalism since 1870. Programme, Myth, Reality."²¹ This explores the intellectual climate and cultural atmosphere in Europe which shaped the emergence of the new nationalism. This was also the period which saw the appearance of the Albanian national movement. New criteria such as ethnicity,

¹⁹ A. D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford, 1999).

²⁰ A. D. Smith, *The Golden Age' and National Renewal* in G. Hosking/G. Schöpflin (eds) *Myths and Nationhood* (London, 1997), pg. 36-60.

²¹ E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge 2002).

language and race, gained more and more ground in contrast to the liberal era and its threshold principle, i.e. “sufficient size to form a viable unit of development, building of nations as a process of expansion and not separation, the existence of a long-established elite, possessing a written language, and a capacity for conquest”.²² Hobsbawm argues that in the second half of the nineteenth century, the romantic passion for folklore led to the discovery of small peoples and to the study of their vernaculars and the valorization of the linguistic and ethnic criterion. These concepts were further promoted, from a ‘scientific’ point of view, by the concept of ‘race’. Concepts such as ‘ethnie’, ‘race’ and ‘language’ started in this time to be used as synonyms, due also to the Darwinist evolutionary theories. Social Darwinian evolution theory supposedly provided a ‘scientific’ basis to the notion of a pure ‘nation/race’, from which derived also the demands for the purification of national languages as closely linked to the ethnic particularity against the ‘others’. In the last instance, Hobsbawm explains that the affirmation of the “national character” for particular people aimed at securing for them the right of self-determination and later the right to have a sovereign state over a distinct territory.

The technique Hobsbawm uses to analyze the semantic evolution of the term “nation” applies also to the Albanian case. After examining this term in various dictionaries, Hobsbawm concludes that the concept of nation, as we know it today, is a late-comer. Its initial etymology indicated a restricted territory, which mostly identified the origins. In a later period of time it would take the meaning we know today, i.e. a community of people, inhabiting a territory and under the rule of a centralized state which imposes its own homogenous culture. The appliance of such an analyze in the Albanian case shows that the notion of nation has followed a trajectory which goes from family, blood relations in a tribe, and finally up to the political sovereignty and the emergence of a common culture.²³

The Albanian national movement cannot be fully understood without the Ottoman context of the time, or the modernizing processes of the second half of the nineteenth century, better known under the name the “Tanzimat period”. These changes are scarcely referred to by Albanian historiography, and the impression is that for the Albanian people the worst is coming: political subjugation is further intensified. In short, the Ottoman Empire is depicted as the biggest obstacle to the national affirmation of the Albanian people. In this sense, the thesis has another objective. It aims to examine the development of the Albanian national

²² Ibid, pg. 37-38.

²³ A. Puto, “Evoluimi semantikor dhe përfitesa ideologjike e fjalës “komb” [The semantic evolution and the ideological connotation of the term “nation”], in *Përpyekja*, ser. XI, nr. 21, (Tirana 2005), pg.25-40.

movement in close relationship with events in the Empire and beyond. It argues that this movement found in the Empire spaces to develop due to these changes. It passed through periods when it was officially encouraged and when it was restrained and placed under control. However, this dynamic relation points to important political and cultural processes, which could not be confined only to the sphere of measures to centralize the political power in the Empire and to suppress the nationalities.

The studies by Turkish historians of this period are of primary importance in providing a complete panorama of the events in the Empire. Historians such as Halil Inalcik,²⁴ who among many works has written also on the social effects of the Tanzimat reforms; Serif Mardin²⁵ on the emergence of the first Ottoman intellectual group which, in the middle of the nineteenth century, demanded the reforming of the absolutist regime of the Sultan; Kemal Karpat²⁶ on the transformation of the Ottoman millets and the birth of nationalisms in the Empire; Selim Deringil on the efforts of the Empire to civilize its peripheries on the model of a colonial empire²⁷; the French historian François Georgeon²⁸ on Turkish nationalism in the late XIX century, provide the basic literature for understanding the modernizing processes in the Empire. These processes had a direct impact on the Albanian nationalist intellectuals, who were part of the Ottoman state establishment, and of the Ottoman elite.

Of particular importance are the works of Niyazi Berkes and Sukru Hanioglu. Berkes analyses the reforms of the Ottoman state through the nineteenth century up to the creation of the Turkish republic in the 1923.²⁹ The focus of Berkes' work is the struggle to secularize a monarchic and absolutist state, in which Islamic religion had a predominant position in politics, in the judiciary, in culture and social life. The book includes aspects of political and economic reforms, which made the Ottoman Empire more open towards the outside world, to European cultural influence, and first of all the French one, in the political, cultural spheres, but also in the literature, linguistics and the constitutionalist movement, the ever stronger penetration of the Western influences of the Ottoman intelligentsia, the rise of the scholarly

²⁴ H. Inalcik, "Application of the Tanzimat and its social effects", in *Archivum Ottomanicum*, nr.5, (Wiesbaden 1973).

²⁵ S. Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, (Princeton 1962).

²⁶ K. Karpat, *An Inquiry into the Social Foundations of Nationalism in the Ottoman State; From Social Estates to Classes, from Millets to Nations*, research monograph No.39 of the Center of International Studies of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, (Princeton, 1973).

²⁷ S. Deringil, "They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery": The Late Ottoman Empire and The Post-Colonial Debate", *Society for Comparative Study of Society and History*, 2003.

²⁸ F. Georgeon, *Aux origines du nationalisme turc. Yusuf Akçura (1876-1935)*, (Paris, 1980).

²⁹ N. Berkes, *The development of secularism in Turkey* (London, 1998).

interest over the Turkish element in the Empire. During this time Ottoman intellectual circles became more dynamic. This is in stark contrast with the simplistic paradigm of a backward Asiatic state that is diffused in the narratives of Balkan historiographies and in Albanian historiography in particular.

Sukru Hanioglu in his study of the Young Turks³⁰ dwells on the transformation of this small opposition group at the end of the nineteenth century, striving to restore the Ottoman Constitution of 1876, into a central element of Ottoman politics until it captured power in the revolution of 1908. The activities of this group are important as among its ranks it numbered members of various ethnies of the Empire, among which were also Albanians. The book illustrates the main political groupings inside the Young Turk movement. Besides this political aspect, Hanioglu explains also the influences of modern sciences on the new Ottoman intelligentsia, the new streams of thought such as materialism, concept of the ‘race’ and nationalism, which slowly were making their way into the mentality of a more secularized elite.

Therefore, the thesis will show that an imperial state was not necessarily an oppressive and obstructionist agency as regards the development of the national movements. It will also challenge the frozen schema and dogmatic approaches to Albanian historiography in the history of this period. Still today Albanian historiography remains utterly nationalistic and stuck to reductionist vision about the Albanian National Movement, and perpetuates a highly ideological view with regard to the Ottoman Empire, depicted as the emblem of ‘oriental autocracy and obscurantism’.

The creation of the Albanian historiography, as an academic discipline, coincided with the advent to power of the communists after the Second World War. Albanian historiography has produced a great number of studies of the Ottoman period from the fifteenth until the twentieth century. They encompass a relative wide range of works, but mostly related to the political history of the Ottoman period.

The author has written an overview on the perception of the Albanian socialist historiography on the Ottoman period, or as it calls it “the period of Ottoman/Turkish occupation”.³¹ This study focuses on two main aspects in the treatment of the era of Ottoman of rule over the Albanian speaking regions, a) the Ottoman ‘occupation’ of the lands of the Albanian speaking populations, and b) on the problems of conversion of Albanians to Islam.

³⁰ S. Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (Oxford 1995).

³¹ A. Puto, “Disa aspekte të perceptimit të periudhës osmane në historiografinë shqiptare të periudhës së socializmit” [Some aspects of the perception of the Ottoman period in the Albanian socialist historiography], *Përpjekja*, ser..IX, nr. 18, (Tirana 2003).

The study analyzed selected texts, such as the official “History of Albania” (editions of 1967 and 1984) and the articles of some Albanian scholars, which can be considered as representative of the general tendency followed by other Albanian scholars.³² The conclusion of the study was that in most cases Albanian historiography in the period of communist regime considered the Ottoman period as the main cause of economic backwardness of the country and generally equated Orient, in our case the Ottomans, with underdevelopment. Albanian studies maintained the thesis that Ottoman repression had also caused the delay of the Albanian National Movement which, in comparison with the other Balkan national movements, started much later, only emerging in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

In general, Albanian studies were imbued with a romantic and patriotic sense in the writing of history, where the Albanians pose as the main actor and the master of their own destiny. The Ottoman context is lacking, or in those cases when it is mentioned, the stress is on its negativity, describing it as an antinomy to the efforts of the Albanians to liberate themselves from the foreign ‘Ottoman yoke’. The Ottoman Empire was the “East” and its negative portrayal was typical of an ideological reaction against the culture of “the other”. This kind of explanation found a propitious ground to flourish in the socialist Albania, where the isolated country was ‘at war’ with the rest of the world and when its propagated mission was that of leading human society towards the highest stage of its development, i.e. communism. The “good” and the “evil” were clear cut notions and were very much used at the time. The history of Albania was then perceived as a harsh battle of ‘Europe’ (Albanians) against the ‘Orient’ (Turks). Writing history has been essentially Albanian-centric. Cultural homogeneity and a uniform national identity were judged as a measure of the healthy condition of the nation. The presence of other non-Albanian cultural influences, like the Ottoman culture, was simply obscured, or at best underestimated. These were un-authentic and did correspond with the Albanian ‘national’ essence.

This national-romantic mentality has survived in Albanian studies until today. Since the time of the independence of the country (1912), Albanian society has been ruled by totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, and since 1990 has been trapped into a prolonged post-

³² *Historia e Shqipërisë*, [History of Albania] (Tirana 1967); *Historia e Shqipërisë*, [History of Albania], (Tirana 1984). A. Buda, “Mbi disa aspekte të njësisë dhe të ndryshueshmërisë në historinë e popullit shqiptar dhe të popujve të tjerë ballkanikë” [On some aspects of the uniformity and variability in the history of the Albanian people and of the other Balkan people], *Shkrime historike*, vol.1, (Tirana 1986). A. Buda, “Problemi i shteteve mesjetare në Shqipëri” [The Problem of the Albanian medieval states in Albania], *Studime Historike*, vol.4, (Tirana 1990). S. Pulaha, “Tradita dhe ndryshimet në marrëdhëniet ekonomiko-shoqërore në tokat shqiptare gjatë shekujve të pare të pushtimit osman”, [Traditions and changes in the economical-social relations in the Albanian lands during the first centuries of the Ottoman dominion], *Studime Historike*, vol.3, (Tirana 1990). S. Pulaha, *Lufta shqiptaro-turke në shekullin XV* [The Turkish-Albanian war in the XV century], (Tirana 1968).

communist transition. This period has coincided also with the period of modernity of the Albanian nation, which needed a certain ideological support. A nationalist mythology tainted with romantic pathos, in which there was no room for any cultural diversity, was the best device to promote national consciousness. During the post-communist transition nationalism remains useful as a tool to preserve the collective identity of a small nation in the conditions of an open world changing faster than during the Cold War. These changes are perceived as a ‘threat’ to the national culture of a small country having behind it a long tradition of isolation from the outside world. Therefore, today in the era of globalization, when the contacts between different cultures are increased, a collective national identity is very often articulated through xenophobic and exclusivist discourses. Nationalism is recycled and turned into an instrument to defend the “unique traditional national culture”, which now is restored to its dignified position after being disregarded by an “internationalist communist ideology”.³³

The succeeding post-communist studies have not yet brought substantial departures from the socialist historiography. The exceptions here are rare.³⁴ In the publication of the new volume of “Historia e Shqipërisë” [History of Albania],³⁵ which is the official version of Albanian history, still a remnant from the communist period, the history of the Albanian National Movement (1878-1912) is seen through historicist and linear optics. Moreover, it is still influenced by an economic determinism, typical of Marxism that connects the birth of nation with the consolidation of capitalist relations. One of the clichés and nationalist dogmas present in this volume is the fact that the Albanian nation is taken as a consolidated ethnies since the Middle Age, which was transformed into a nation during the period of the National Movement.³⁶ This Albanian unified ethnies was forged during the centuries-long struggles against the Ottoman Empire, where Albanians are described as an oppressed population which reacts *en bloc*. The agenda of the Albanian National Movement is equated to the political programme of a single party, where the first stage was the achievement of autonomy and then independence from the Empire. Both these objectives are conceived as part of a strategy that enjoyed wide popular support.³⁷

³³ For more A. Puto, “Fryma romantike dhe nacionaliste në debatin për “identitetin shqiptar” [The romantic and nationalist character of the debate over the “Albanian identity”], *Përpykja*, ser. XII, nr.23 (Tirana, 2006), pg.113-133.

³⁴ See for example E. Sulstarova, *Arratisje nga Lindja*, [Fleeing from East], Botimet (Tirana, 2006). P. Misha, *Arratisje nga burgjet e historisë* [Escaping from the prisons of history], (Tirana, 2008).

³⁵ *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar* [History of the Albanian People], (Tirana, 2002).

³⁶ *Ibid*, pg.18.

³⁷ *Ibid*, pg. 22.

The social forces taking part in the National Movement are divided according to a scheme which recognizes a progressive role to a new Albanian bourgeoisie interested in dismantling the Ottoman feudal order. With regard to the religious problem, the Albanian people are supposed to suffer a three-fold oppression, i.e. of the Islamic faith, of the Orthodox Patriarchate and of the Catholic Papacy. This is an occasion to confirm that, nevertheless, the Albanian people had a stronger feeling of nationality, which made them resist religious assimilation. According to this narrative, the other major consequence is that the Albanian Movement based its political program not on religion, as the other Balkan people did, but on a pan-Albanian project of unity overcoming religious divisions. Such a fact is particularly stressed to note the difference between the Albanian Movement and the other Balkan people which aims to depict the Albanian project as more modern, more progressive as it was not related to a traditional value such as religion, but to a modern national one.³⁸

The official position of the post-communist Albanian historiography tries to be more moderate with the role played by the Great Powers towards the Albanian question. If during communism their role was simply labeled as imperialist, now their policies are presented in softer terms. Nevertheless, there is still a sense of portraying the Albanians as the victims of history, and Albanian studies point to the delay of their political emancipation from the Ottoman Empire, compared to other Balkan people, which confirm that the Albanian question did not receive the same international support which other nations of the region enjoyed.³⁹

An important reason why Albanian historiography still reproduces these dogmas is that during its short 50 years old existence, it has been gravely abused by the political power of the state, and was required to develop in the conditions of acute intellectual and political isolation. One of the actual consequences of this is that history cannot be understood as a scientific discipline separate from politics. After the fall of communism a kind of 'revisionist' intellectual process emerged, but it is still superficial and very simplistic. This 'new' approach has gone as far as the period of monarchy (1928-1939) and the Second World War. It is more a political reaction to the historiography written under communism, which in fact had heavily stigmatized the non-communist forces during the Second World War, while describing the period of monarchy as the most negative period of Albanian modern history. In short, most of the historical 'rewriting' is motivated by political passions having a direct tie with actual political parties, that see themselves as heirs of old political actors, i.e. the communists and the nationalists. Meanwhile there is a bipartisan consensus over the period of

³⁸ Ibid., pg. 28.

³⁹ Ibid., pg. 30.

the National Movement (1878-1912), because it has been considered as the ‘brightest period of the nation’, the time when the whole nation was united and the highest moral value was to wrest its own political sovereignty from the Ottoman Empire. It is envisaged as a ‘Golden Age’ that should be preserved as it is.

Albanian scholars who worked outside communist Albania had more academic freedom to write their studies on this historical period. One of these was Stavro Skëndi, who after the Second World War worked in the USA. His major studies are first of all “The Albanian National Awakening”⁴⁰ and “Balkan Cultural Studies”.⁴¹ The first book is a history of the Albanian National Movement, but it includes important elements such as the analysis of the religious differences among Albanians. The author emphasizes the important role played by Austria-Hungary and Italy in promoting Albanian “national consciousness”. Skëndi does not exclude the role that the Sublime Porte played in particular periods in stimulating the Albanian Movement, and the common interests shared by the Albanians and the Young Turks after the Revolution of 1908 and the reinstatement of the Constitution. But, as the title of the book indicates, the author considers Albanians as a relatively coherent ethnic entity, which during the National Movement had undergone a ‘national awakening’.

Stavro Skëndi’s second book, “Balkan Cultural Studies”, is a collection of his articles on topics such as language, folklore and history. Its importance lies in the fact for the first time Albanians are seen in a Balkan framework. In his study on the Balkan modern languages, Skëndi explains that the problem of the national languages stood high on the agenda of all Balkan national movements. This position is important, as the Albanian historiography developed inside Albania, have presented Albanians always as a unique case: Balkan people were related to their Orthodox faith, which favored their national cohesion and national awareness, while the Albanians were more attached to their language, given their religious division into three communities. However, the author persists in some generalizations, and essentialism, on the “national character” of Albanians and in maintaining that Albanians were not a very “religious people”. On the other hand, Skëndi stressed the natural necessity for the Albanian nation to have its own language, when, as the thesis shows, the Albanian speaking populations, until the early twentieth century, did not perceived themselves as belonging to such a nation.

In 1968, Peter Bartl published his book “Myslimanët shqiptarë në lëvizjen për pavarësi kombëtare (1878-1912)” [The Albanian Moslems in the movement for national

⁴⁰ S. Skëndi, *The Albanian National Awakening 1878-1912*, (Princeton, 1967).

⁴¹ S. Skëndi, *Balkan Cultural Studies*, (New York, 1980).

independence].⁴² In this work, the author analyses the role of the Albanian Moslems in this national movement, highlight the fact that the Albanians were the only Moslem people in the Empire that during the nineteenth developed a national consciousness. The author underlines also the common interests between the Ottoman Empire and the Albanian movement. This aspect has been considerably minimized in the Albanian historiography even nowadays. According to the author, the Albanians were a not “very religious people”, unlike the other Balkan people under Ottoman dominion, because they had stronger national feelings, either as Moslems or Christians. This conclusion is surely an exaggeration, because as we will see in the following chapters the Albanian nationalist intellectuals did not exclude religion from their nation-building discourses. They were aware of the fact that religious feelings were important for Albanians. Albanian ‘non-religiosity’ was a myth created by the nationalist intellectuals, who aimed precisely to avoid the competing strength of the religious allegiances vis-à-vis the nation.

Being a small country and, ruled by an orthodox communist regime that isolated it for decades, Albania attracted only limited attention among foreign scholars. After the fall of the regime, the increased possibilities to visit the country and to consult its archives marked a turning point. These latter studies are of a higher quality. Two works referred to in the thesis deserve special note. The book “Albanian Identities, Myth and History,”⁴³ edited by Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers and Bernd Fischer, is a collection of papers from a conference held in London in 1999. The book is divided into 5 sections: a) the history of Albanian myth production, b) myths in communist politics, society and culture, c) nationalist historiography, or friends, foes and heroes, d) myths and contested boundaries, e) myths of democracy, development and the future. The principal aim of this book was to deconstruct prevalent political or historiographic Albanian myths, from the Ottoman period to the present. For the first time this conference gathered foreign and Albanian historians, who shared a common vision of the nation as being based on ideological construction and not an essentialist and organic reality. The other contribution of this book is that it places the history of Albania into a wider context, marking a departure from the hitherto self-referential and nation-centric positions.

The most complete and deeply researched book on the period is Nathalie Clayer’s “Aux origines du nationalisme albanais. La naissance d’une nation majoritairement

⁴² P. Bartl, *Myslimanët shqiptarë në lëvizjen për pavarësi kombëtare (1878-1912)*, [The Albanian Moslems in the movement for national independence], (Tirana, 2006). The original title of the book is *Die albanischen Muslime zur Zeit der nationalen Unabhängigkeitsbewegung (1878-1912)*, (Wiesbaden, 1968).

⁴³ S. Schwandner-Sievers and B. Fischer (eds) *Albanian Identities. Myth and History* (London, 2002).

musulmane en Europe”.⁴⁴ This book sees the Albanian National Movement in different contexts. It dwells on the role of the Albanians in Italy, as the precursors of Albanian nationalism, and the framework provided by the Italian unification process of the Risorgimento. An important part is devoted to the influence of Hellenism, as a stimulating and competing project to “Albanianism”, amongst Albanian nationalist intellectuals. On the other hand, Albanian nationalist activities are considered in close relationship with the Ottoman context, either of state policies regarding the Albanian question, or the cultural Ottoman influences. Another essential element of the book is the methodological position of the author, who looks at the Albanian nationalist discourse as composed of different levels: the dominant nationalist discourse on the Albanian nation, but also particular formulations. The dominant discourse implied to define a notion of the “Albanian nation” acceptable to as many Albanian speaking populations as possible, in spite of their religious belongings. The particular definitions of the Albanian nation pertained to the imagery of the nation produced by the different communities, Moslems, Orthodox, and Catholic. Such a methodology allows us to understand that there was not a unitarian vision on the Albanian nation, as diffused by Albanian historiography. The Albanian nation was a concept that was articulated in symbiosis with the religious values, and we have an Orthodox Albanian nation, as we have a Moslem and a Catholic one. Furthermore, the Albanian nation is seen in correlation with the Ottoman cultural and ideological streams, such as Ottomanism, Moslem reformism, Young Turkism, etc. This approach helps us to look at the figures of the Albanian nationalism not simply as Albanians, as described by the traditional and romantic narrative of the Albanian historiography, but also as Ottoman actors in important political and cultural processes in the Empire.

Structure of the thesis

The period of the Albanian National Movement is one of the most important in Albanian modern history, but it is also as one of the most mythologized. The time limits 1878-1912 should be seen as conventional borders, and they do not mean that the “national

⁴⁴ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais* (Paris 2007).

idea” becomes a driving force and a popular mass activity at the end of the period indicated above, or, in Hroch’s terms the phase C of the Albanian national movement. It is the period when the existence of the Albanian speaking populations became for the first time visible in the international arena and in the Balkans, when after important events for the Ottoman Empire and its dominion in the Balkans, such as Congress of Berlin (1878), the Macedonian question (1897-1903), the Young Turk revolution (1908), the Albanian problem could no longer be avoided in the reordering of the peninsula. This period coincided also with important modernizing processes in the Empire, with the gradual retreat of the Sublime Porte from its European territories, and with the ‘Golden Age’ of the birth of nationalities across Europe. It was the period when protagonists of the Albanian question became the Albanian speaking community in Italy, high ranking Ottoman officials, members of the Ottoman academic and cultural elite, members of important Albanian families, which had traditionally been pillars of the Ottoman rule in the Balkan. It was also the time when the idea of an Albanian nation made its way and spread beyond the borders of the Empire, in important centers such as Sofia, Bucharest, Cairo, and the USA.

In the territorial space of the present day Albanian state the idea of nation remained unfamiliar to the majority of the population still in 1912, the time of Albanian independence from the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁵ Albanian independence was not the ‘coronation’ of the national movement. On the contrary, it was the starting point of a long chain of efforts to carve an Albanian national “imagined community” out of the previous Albanian Ottoman millets. This task would be taken on firstly by the Albanian King Zog (1928-1939), to be finished by the communist rule of Enver Hoxha (1944-1990). Only then can we speak of an interiorization and normalization of a national feeling among not only Albanian speaking populations, but, instead, of Albanian citizens. The romantic narrative of Albanian historiography considers the period 1878-1912 as the period of “Rebirth”, which means that the Albanian nation awoke from its centuries long slumber under the Ottoman yoke and under the example of the victorious battles of the national hero Gjergj Kastrioti Skenderbej (1405-1468) started to challenge the rule of the Sultans. Therefore, the thesis aims to deconstruct the historical myths of this period. I think this is important as these myths are still today a solid storage of nationalist ideology, which sees Albanians either as victims of history or as misunderstood heroes. One of the fundamental myths is that of the ‘Ottoman night’, or of the obscurantist period of the ‘Ottoman occupation’, which is often depicted as the ‘Turkish occupation’. For

⁴⁵ Eqrem bej Vlora, *Kujtime 1885-1912* [Memoirs], vol.I, (Tirana, 2001), pg. 279-280; 286.

a nation-centered historiography, for which the national unilateral dimension is the primary one, the complexity of the Ottoman dominion means simply the imposition of an alien, backward and ‘Turkish yoke’. According to this logic, the arrival of the “Turks” in the Albanian lands had as a first effect the freezing of the natural development of the nation. As will be explained, the Ottoman context was far more complex than this stereotyped picture allows. Another myth is that of treating some of the figures of the National Movement as simply Albanians. Albanian studies have failed to look at the complexity of their activities, their involvement in Ottoman culture and politics, because they cannot find common points between a liberating Albanian movement and a foreign Ottoman occupation. The solution here is to ignore these aspects. The thesis challenges the generalized characterization of Albanians as a ‘non-religious’ people and the assertion that the Albanian nationalist discourse was ‘free from religious references’. The conceiving of the Albanian nation as separated from religion has a long history. This intentional separation was part of the modernizing projects of the Albanian King Zog (1928-1939) striving to put the religious communities under the authority of a laic state, which was a way to counter the compartmentalization of a small and poor state along religious lines. This policy was pushed to the extremes by the orthodox communist regime of Enver Hoxha, who in 1967 proclaimed Albania as the only “atheist state” in the world by banning religious practices and closing down all religious institutions. In this way the history of Albanian “Rebirth” conformed to the exigencies of communist ideology: religion had historically been against the unity of the Albanian nation.

The thesis opens with a chapter on the historical background of the national movement. The latter will be placed in the context of the events of the Ottoman Empire during the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. It will include a survey of the modernizing reforms of the Tanzimat and the most important political events in the Empire. It will describe the most important Ottoman ideological streams of the period, as well as the major political achievements of the Albanian nationalist intellectuals during this time. The problem of the Albanian alphabet, for its own specificity, not only as a linguistic problem, but also as an aspect of political interferences and cultural influences, will have a special place. In the end, we examine the role played by the European powers in the Albanian question, and explore how their involvement differed as regard to their involvement with other Balkan national movements.

The following four chapters of the thesis have been conceived as four histories, or intellectual biographical case studies, related to leading figures of the Albanian movement. The intention has been to make a choice which could present as far as possible the diversity

of their social positions, religious and professional belonging. It is impossible in such a study to exhaust the diversity of the Albanian actors involved in nationalist activities, but such an approach permits us to see how the idea of the Albanian nation was articulated in different periods of time, in different places and cultural contexts, and thus enable us to see the similarities and differences in their works. The choice over the following four figures fell due to the fact that they are among the most important ones in the Albanian movement. The first three, Pashko Vasa, Shemseddin Sami Frashëri, Ismail bej Qemali (Vlora), are almost icons of the Albanian historiography and for that reason it is very challenging for a historian to break their monumental profiles and make them object of a more nuanced study. They are known to the public only from a national Albanian point of view, leaving in the shadows other facets of their more complex personality, and their particular social positions in the Ottoman imperial elite. The fourth, Faik Konitza, has been until recently quite unknown, though being one of the most interesting intellectuals of the time. On the other hand, their choice offers us a good ground to explore and compare how the idea of nation was articulated among members of the Ottoman intellectual-political elite, like Vasa, Frashëri and Qemali, who lived and worked in an imperial environment, the Ottoman Empire, commonly held as incompatible, backward and inimical to the “national development” of various people, with the concept of a cosmopolitan and westernized Albanian intellectual, like Konitza, who passed his life almost entirely in the West, characterized as the most propitious space for the thriving of the “principle of nationality”.

Their choice is also motivated by the decisive role played by intellectuals in every national movement. The most widespread idea of the nationally minded intellectuals of the nineteenth century was that “nations” were natural units of human society, which was based upon these culturally unique cellules. From a methodological point of view, the thesis will combine context and discourse. The chapters will include a more specific critique of the Albanian historiography with regard to the studies done so far on these figures.

The second chapter deals with Pashko Vasa (1825-1892), a high ranking Ottoman dignitary, an activist of the Albanian movement, a writer and poet, from the Catholic community of the Northern town of Shkodër. The focus of the chapter will be on two booklets by him on the Empire, written from the position of an Ottoman official and two other essays on the Albanian nation. The writings on the Albanian nation will have a topical division, dividing it into sections, where Vasa speaks about the ancient origins of the Albanian nation, the Albanian national hero, regional and religious divisions. The last section will be a short critical overview of the studies on Vasa.

The third chapter will examine Shemseddin Sami Frashëri (1850-1904), Ottoman journalist, writer and Ottoman linguist, but also an important Albanian activist, one of the architects of the alphabet of written Albanian, with a Moslem (Bektashi) background from Southern Albania. The sources for the chapter are some of his articles in Ottoman newspapers, two booklets on the Islamic civilization and a political treatise on Albania. The chapter on Sami will include sections on his contribution to Ottoman and Turkish culture, his Ottoman and Turkish allegiances, his Islamic discourse on the Albanian nation. His treatise on Albania will be divided along these topics: Moslem Albanians as part of Europe, Albanian language, religion among the Albanians, homogeneity of the Albanian nation and its glorious past. The part of the chapter devoted to present his contributions on the Ottoman culture is completed also with a critique on the Albanian studies on Sami.

The fourth chapter will be on Ismail Qemali (1844-1919), a high official of the Ottoman administration, a member of one of the wealthiest and landowning families in the Albanian lands, which was one of the pillars of Ottoman dominion in the area. Qemali was a supporter of the Young Turk movement, later an opponent of it, as well as the father of the Albanian independence. The analysis of this figure will be based upon his memoirs, which make possible the tracing back of his Ottoman career and the process of fading away of his Ottoman identity and the prevailing of his Albanian one. As a high Ottoman official the chapter examines his views as shaped by the political context of the Empire.

The three cases mentioned above are interesting as they present the problem of the double identity, i.e. the Ottoman and the Albanian one and it is important to follow the process of unity and differentiation of the two identities. The fifth chapter is on Faik bej Konitza (1876-1942), who is somehow an exception to the category of the above mentioned figures. He was an Albanian intellectual, journalist, editor, writer, coming from a wealthy Moslem family of Southern Albania, but who studied and lived in the West. Konitza provides a good comparison with the other protagonists, as he belonged to another and younger generation of Albanian intellectuals, but also because he was a westernized intellectual and he did not go through the double Ottoman-Albanian identity experience and he did not have direct contact with the Ottoman Empire. The literature used for this chapter are an essay of his on “natural” and “artificial” languages, and a series of articles written by him in his journal “Albania” (1897-1909). The division of the chapter on Konitza tells of his life long and constant devotion to the work of constructing a standardized language. The chapter includes sections on the Albanian language, the Albanian alphabet, the role of dialects,

religion and Albanian nation, and the concluding part on the Albanian studies on Faik Konitza.

Chapter I

Historical background of the Albanian National Movement

The lands inhabited by Albanian speaking populations were situated in the Western part of the Balkans, extending along the Adriatic and Ionian coast and its hinterland, and today are located in the territories of Albania proper and within the boundaries of Greece, Macedonia, and of the new off-springs of the ex-Yugoslav Federation, Montenegro and Kosovo. They fell under Ottoman domination in the fifteenth century, and this lasted until the eve of the First World War. Albanian Independence was proclaimed by Albanian patriots in November 1912, but only in July 1913, was it officially recognized as an independent neutral principality by, and under the auspices, of the European Great Powers convened in the Conference of Ambassadors in London. The Albanian state, carved out of the previous Ottoman Balkan territories, incorporated populations that were far from being culturally and ethnically homogenous. Large portions of the Albanian speaking population were left outside of its borders, while non-Albanian speaking populations became part of the would-be Albanian “nation”. The Albanian speaking populations incorporated into the new state were marked by a cultural diversity, including religious communities of Moslems, Orthodox, Catholics, and a linguistic divide reflecting two main dialects, the Northern *Geg* and the Southern *Tosk*, which symbolically designated two major geo-ethnographical areas, the Northern *Gegëri* and the Southern *Toskëri*. The north was more mountainous than the south, which was characterized by a population living in lowlands, closer to the communication channels with the outside world. But, even these large areas were internally fragmented into more open urban spaces and remote mountainous niches, leaving their imprint on the development of the local societies.

During the period of Ottoman domination, the Albanian inhabited lands knew a series of administrative rearrangements due to the peculiarities of the Albanian environment and the fluctuating priorities of the Ottoman state ruling over them. They were the remotest part of the Western border of the Empire and, as such, parts of them enjoyed special status, e.g. exemption from the taxes, regulation according to traditional customs, etc. In 1865, when the Ottoman administration law was applied, the Albanian territories were divided into three *vilayets* [provinces], local governments in direct connection with the Sublime Porte: Shkodër,

Janina and Monastir.¹ Just before the Congress of Berlin (1878) a fourth vilayet was formed, that of Kosovo, including not only Albanian territories but others like Niš [present day Serbia], inhabited principally by Slavs, or Novi Pazar, which always constituted part of Bosnia, while Larissa [present day Greece] in Thessaly was united with southern Albania.

However, the Ottoman administration did not fully control the Albanian Northern and Southern mountainous regions. The mountain people of Himara [south Albania], Dukagjin [north Albania], Mirdita [north Albania], Malësia [north-west Albania], resisted the military regime. The Ottoman governors judged it prudent to come to terms with these remote regions rather than subdue them by force. Consequently, these regions were exempted from the *timar*- system, which the Ottomans established after their arrival in almost all lowlands and more easily accessible areas of the Balkans.

In order to have a better understanding of the context of the Albanian National Movement (1878-1912), it is necessary to give a general overview of the important political, social, cultural and ideological transformations taking place at this time in the Ottoman Empire.

1. Tanzimat reforms (1839-1876) and Young Ottomans

The end of the seventeenth century and the defeat of the Ottomans in Vienna (1683) marked the beginning of the decline of the Empire. In brief, what resulted in the eighteenth and for a good part of nineteenth century was the consequence of the process of transformation of state land properties, the *timars* into private ones, the *çifliks*. When Ottoman rule was established in the Albanian inhabited territories in fifteenth century all the land became the property of the Sultan and the new ruler abolished all the rights of the old local aristocracy over the land. Instead, the land was distributed to the new soldier-administrators [the *timarlis* or the *sipahis*] in the provinces as a means to secure control over the territory, but having in exchange troops for his military campaigns. The *timarlis* were not owners of the land. They only used it to extract taxes to be paid to the central government and to sustain their living expenses.² This was to secure the control of the Sultan over the wide stretching territories of the Empire, while keeping a tight grip over his governors in the

¹ Z. Shkodra, *Shqipëria në kohën e Tanzimatit* [Albania at the time of Reforms], (Tiranë, 1959), pg.37.

² S. Skëndi, *The Albanian National Awakening 1878-1912*, (Princeton University, 1967), pg.5.

localities. As the Ottoman armies were no longer victorious and military campaigns ceased to be a source of revenue, there were less and less incentives for the *sipahis* to take part in the wars, often in disregard of even the Sultan's order.

The transformation of the *timars* into *çifliks* was followed by the emergence of a new social group, the *ayans*, the new powerful local lords, who not only became owners of huge estates but, in order to increase their own profits, they sought to avoid their obligations towards the central government, weakening their ties with it and acting more and more independently. They gradually ceased to be officials of Constantinople and became almost indigenous governors in *pashalics* [entire provinces ruled by powerful local lords], which did not correspond to any Ottoman unit. Then, gradually the most powerful local families made their authority hereditary.

The Porte lost the firm hold which it had previously exercised over its provinces. Some detached as autonomous and independent units, like Serbia (1804) and Greece (1821). New local forces emerged and infringed on state control forcing it to enter into negotiations or compromises with them. This process gave to them a kind of legal acceptance and created a precedent for resisting even more strongly the later efforts of the Sublime Porte to establish its authority in the area. On the other hand the Sublime Porte could not afford to allow these local rulers to become too powerful. Although initially unsuccessful by the late 1820s, it managed to reinstate its authority.

In Albania, by the end of eighteenth century, the mass of small *pashalics*, merged into two huge *pashalics*: the first in Northern Albania with Shkodër as its center and ruled by the strong feudal family of Bushati (1757-1831) and the second in Southern Albania with Janina as capital and ruled by Ali Pasha of Tepelena (1787-1822).³ Both these rulers during their reigns created principalities almost independent of the Sultan. It was unavoidable that their existence as powerful local lords would come into conflict with the centralizing policy of Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839), who finally crushed them in between early 1820s and early 1830s.

The new centralizing policy was initiated with Sultan Mahmud II. Under his rule the Empire entered a long period of reforms aiming to produce a new and more efficient administration able to cope with the challenges posed by the local centrifugal forces and an aggressive and expanding Europe. The most remarkable step in the reorganization of the Empire was the promulgation on 3 November 1839, under the reign of the new Sultan

³ Ibid., pg.21-22.

Abdulmecid (1839-1861), of the famous Noble Rescript of the Rose Chamber, known as the *Tanzimat*- the Reorganizations.

The *Tanzimat* edicts were based on principles such as the security of life, honor, and property of the subject, the abolition of tax-farming and all the abuses associated with land properties, regular and orderly recruitment into the armed forces and equality of persons of all religions in the application of these laws. These reforms culminated in the proclamation of the first Ottoman Constitution of 1876. In short, the *Tanzimat* reforms aimed at “centralizing the Ottoman administration, modernizing the state apparatus, westernizing the society and secularizing, though with much restrictions, the law and education”.⁴ In 1856, the Ottoman government issued a second Reform Edict, by which it reaffirmed the rights granted by *Tanzimat* and the need to fully carry them out. The most important aspects were the complete freedom to exercise all religious beliefs and rites, a guarantee to preserve all ancient privileges and spiritual immunities granted to the non-Moslem religious communities, equal treatment of the adherents of all creeds in matters such as education, appointment to government posts; administration of justice, taxation and military service, the reform of judicial tribunals and the creation of mixed tribunals, bringing together Moslems and Christians alike. The introduction of these reforms was uneven and it did not proceed smoothly.⁵ This era of state renovation coincided also with insurrections, internal dissidence and with a rising nationalism in different parts of the Empire, primarily in the Balkans, which prompted ever growing interference by the other European powers in the region.

The main characteristic of the new *Tanzimat* regulations was their secularism. They tried to detach state administration from the religious sphere, though religion and state could not be separated so easily after a centuries-long tradition of cohabitation. The means envisaged by Ottoman reformers to reach these ends were the creation of a new bureaucracy and a new army which depended economically upon a central fiscal system, a system of schools to train the necessary personnel, and a series of new economic and social measures and regulations which amounted in fact to the establishment of a new system of laws. In that period the Ottoman government introduced a series of new laws based on French legislation, such as the Penal Code (1858), the Commercial Code (1860), the Code of Procedure of the Commercial Courts (1861), the Code of Maritime Commerce (1863). All these codes

⁴ N. Berkes, *The development of secularism in Turkey*, (London, 1998), pg.145.

⁵ H. Inalcik, “Application of the Tanzimat and its social effects”, in *Archivum Ottomanicum*, nr.5, (Wiesbaden, 1973), pg.97-127.

contained secular provisions, though not fully freed from the Şeriat's influence. Intensified contacts with the West pushed the Ottoman leaders to recognize the need to set up a new civil code.

Hence, the *Tanzimat* reforms had their impact on the traditional internal organization of the populations of the Empire. The *millet* system assumed the division of populations according to their religious belonging.⁶ The Ottoman state recognized three *millets*, the Rum *millet* [Orthodox], the Jewish *millet* and the Armenian *millet*. All Moslems were commonly designated by the “umma”, which was the ruling community of Islam. Of all the other millets, the largest and the most important was the Rum *millet* with at its top the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople. According to this scheme, the Albanian speaking populations were divided into “Turks” [Moslem Albanians] and “Greek”, or “Rum” [Orthodox], while the Albanian Catholics were put under the Austrian *Kultusprotektorat*, i.e. the rights the Sublime Porte ceded to Vienna in the seventeenth century over the Ottoman Catholic people. The *millets* were religious communities recognized by the Ottoman state, which had charge of the administration of the populations under its jurisdictions, with regard to the respective religious faith, preserving its moral code, in conformity with the laws of the state. The *millets* had the right to subsidize its own institutions, such as religious courts, schools, hospitals, etc.

The *millet* linked the individual to the ruling authority as far as basic administration was concerned and was the substitute of social estates in the religious-cultural fields. Nevertheless, as Maria Todorova has observed, first and foremost, “the Ottoman empire was an Islamic state with strict religious hierarchy where the non-Muslims occupied the back seats”.⁷ Consequently, the Ottoman Empire, particularly in the centuries under consideration, never achieved a strong social cohesiveness or a high degree of social integration. On the other hand, “Ottomanism”, an ideological blueprint of *Tanzimat*, was intended to bring a relative unity to the people of Empire. Ironically, instead of unity, the *Tanzimat* secularizing and rationalizing reforms unleashed ‘national awakening’ processes amongst the Christian and Moslem groups by transforming them into majorities and minorities. The idea of “Ottomanism”, i.e. the recognition of equal legal status to all subjects in the form of modern

⁶ G. Castellan, “Facteurs religieux et identité nationale dans les Balkans aux XIX-XXe siècle” in *Revue Historique*, 1984, 27(I), pg.136.

⁷ Maria Todorova, “The Ottoman Legacy in the Balkans” in *Imperial Legacy, the Ottoman imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East*, (New York, 1996), pg.47.

citizenship, required the Ottoman government to identify itself culturally, religiously and linguistically with a specific ethnic-religious group and to legitimize the use of authority accordingly. Consequently, the “Christians were reduced to the status of a minority and were called *raya*, which now no longer meant “peasant”, but exclusively “Christian”.⁸ The disruption of the traditional corporate religious-communal identity made the Ottoman subjects see their government under a new religious-national identity. With the application of the *Tanzimat* reforms the sense of religious difference acquired a political meaning the Christian populations began to consider the Ottoman government as “Turkish” and equivalent to rule by a Moslem majority. This is clearly seen in government censuses. The first population’s censuses of 1831 and 1844 classified the population according to religious groupings. After 1870-71 the population tended to be classified according to religious, linguistic and ethnic affiliations.

Equally important was the *millet* reforms proposed in 1856 and enacted in 1862. The Ottoman government reorganized the old Christian *millets* and allowed the establishment of a series of new but smaller *millets*, which came to resemble more closely the ethnic communities. Thus, the large Rum or Orthodox *millet*, run by Greek prelates, was now divided into smaller ones, like that of Bulgarian, Serbs, and were put under the direction of local clergy. The hope was to break the power of the upper Greek Orthodox clergy and in part to forestall European criticism of “ill treatment” inflicted on the Christians by the Ottoman government. These millets facilitated a more intense communication inside the same linguistic-religious group, which inadvertently sharpened the idea of nation and nationality.

Tanzimat brought major contributions in the area of culture. Various French literary works were translated during this time inculcating among the Ottoman intellectuals new revolutionary ideas such as the “supremacy of reason over superstition” and “the importance of enlightenment and education”. The most preferred authors from French literature were Voltaire, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Fénelon, Fontenelle and Volney.⁹ One of the most important ideological phenomenon of the time was the emergence of the group of the Young Ottomans.

⁸ K. Karpat, *An Inquiry into the Social Foundations of Nationalism in the Ottoman State; From Social Estates to Classes, from Millets to Nations*, research monograph No.39 of the Center of International Studies of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs of Princeton University, 1973, pg. 84.

⁹ N. Berkes, *The development of secularism in Turkey*, pg.199. S. Mardin, *The genesis of Young Ottoman thought*, (Princeton University Press, 1962), pg. 404-405.

Ottoman liberal intellectuals, or the Young Ottomans (1856-1876), such as Ibrahim Şinasi (1824-1871), Namik Kemal (1840-1888), Ali Suavi (1838-1878), etc, were among the first to initiate the difficult task to create a public opinion in the empire and to make it sensitive to political and social issues. The Young Ottomans were a group of intellectuals, who, in the 1860s and 1870s, concerned by the political, economic, and cultural crises that afflicted the Empire after the introduction of the *Tanzimat* reforms, aimed at changing the political regime in the country. Pushed also by the Eastern Crisis and the policy of the European Powers in 1870s, to bring changes and to diminish the territorial presence of the Empire in the Balkans, they thought that the best measure to reverse the situation was to turn the Empire into a constitutional monarchy. They maintained that the misdeeds of the *Tanzimat*, and the weakness of the Empire, derived from the concentration of all powers, executive, legislative and judiciary, in the hands of the government, combined also with the arbitrary rule of the Sultan. The ideology propagated by the Young Ottomans was not a homogenous one. It emphasized the virtues of a constitutional regime, the natural rights of man and the representation of the people. Though bearing clear European influences, it remained essentially anti-Western, because of the Young Ottomans' suspicion that the Europeans were supporting only the non-Moslem populations of the Empire and thus pushing for its dissolution. They saw in Islamic faith, or, more accurately in the original Islam, a strong device to prevent such an eventuality. Therefore, they tried to espouse constitutional projects within the Islamic tradition, which resulted in ideas for the rejuvenation of the Empire to be carried out by returning to old Islamic precepts, which did not clash with modernity, as their core contained constitutional principles.

The Young Ottomans contributed to the development of the press and to its simplified language and style. They introduced new concepts and ideas in their communication with the public. Among these were the idea of progress, the idea of “fatherland” and that of the “nation”. Namik Kemal was the one among the Young Ottoman intellectuals who went furthest in elaborating the idea of the “fatherland” and “nation”.¹⁰ The liberal Ottoman thinkers of the time were aware that the Empire was a mosaic of people and that its survival depended on a better uniting and binding together of its composing elements, instead of assimilating them. Thus, “union” meant cohabitation of various cultures under the political

¹⁰ S. Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, pg.320-331.

umbrella of the imperial Ottoman state. In this scheme, the Moslem people were in a more central position, but the Christians were invited to stay and not pushed out of it.

The other field where the Tanzimat brought important novelties was in the system of education. Throughout the 1860s the Ottoman government made efforts to found a secular education system, to establish inter-confessional secondary schools, to open a university for the teaching of sciences, administration and law, and propagating in the last instance a secular concept of “Ottoman nationality”. This “Ottomanist” policy, in the precarious political context of the rebellion of Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1860s, aimed to render more harmonious Moslem and non-Moslem relations, and nurturing the hope for a political fusion.¹¹ Here it should be noted that “Ottomanism,” as a state policy, did not intend to create a single ‘nation’, expressed in cultural-national terms, but rather a common feeling of belonging to the Ottoman state, despite different faiths. It should be viewed mostly as a political union, of distinct “populations/communities/tribes”.¹²

The *Tanzimat* reforms were ended by the abrogation of the Ottoman Constitution of 1876, by Sultan Abdylhamit II in 1878, at the height of the Eastern Crisis. The obverse side of the medal was that these reforms opened the country to European economic penetration, and, due to heavy debts to foreign capital, they brought the country’s finances to the brink of collapse. The implementation of its centralizing administrative policies fomented a series of upheavals in the Balkan provinces, which were turned to good advantage by the Great Powers to impose on the Sublime Porte decisions which would lead to a gradual reducing of its Balkan dominions and to the final retreat from the region after the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913.

Nevertheless, the reforms of the nineteenth century, though incomplete and not very successful, opened the way to later and deeper modernization processes. The major achievements of the reforms were in the field of education making possible the emergence of a new elite, which became the main supporter of future changes. In brief, the *Tanzimat* would pave the way to important social and political transformations that turned the Ottoman Empire into the modern Turkey of the twentieth century.

¹¹ On the measures the Ottoman government undertook in the provincial education system of that time see M. Todorova, “Midhat Pasha Governorship of the Danube Province”, in *Decision making in the Ottoman Empire*, C. E. Farah (ed), (Kirkville, 1993), pg.115-128.

¹² For more see A. Vezenkov, “Reconciliation of the spirits and fusion of the interests. “Ottomanism” as an identity politics”, in *We, The People. Politics of National Peculiarity in Southeastern Europe*, D. Mishkova (ed.), (Budapest, New York, 2008), pg. 62.

1.2. The major political events of late nineteenth and early twentieth century (1878-1912)

The Ottoman Empire of the 1870s was caught in an adverse and controversial situation. It tried to centralize and modernize itself using Western models, employing then in a struggle to quell internal turmoil, either from political traditionalism, or from the reaction of various populations who opposed this process. On the other hand, it had to endure the intervention of those European Powers pushing for 'reforms'. Consequently, the period under question marked also an ever more growing penetration of the Great Powers to the Empire's affairs, serving their political and economic interests through the support they gained to the 'national liberation' of their own favoured Balkan nations.

The Eastern Crisis (1875-1878) that broke out, due to rebellions in various parts of the Balkans, particularly in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Bulgaria, led to the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877 and ended in early 1878 with the Treaty of San Stefano (March 1878), which registered the defeat of the Sublime Porte. Previously, in an exasperating move to impede the intervention of the Great Powers (Great Britain, France, Germany, Austro-Hungary, Russia and Italy), constantly pressing for more reforms, the Sultan Abdylhamit II promulgated the First Ottoman Constitution in 1876, which was soon abrogated in 1878, in the conditions of war with Russia. However, the military defeat was followed by the severe decisions of the San Stefano Treaty, lavishly remunerating the winner, the Russians. The creation of a Great Bulgaria, including also large portions of Albanian inhabited lands, was to give Russia primacy of influence in the Balkans. In the meantime, Serbia and Montenegro, but also Romania, were declared independent.

The decisions of the San Stefano Treaty were not accepted by the other European Powers, in particular Great Britain and Austro-Hungary, which convened the Congress of Berlin (June 1878) with the aim to curtail Russian supremacy in the Balkans. It decided to reduce the size of the Bulgarian principality, which remained under the Sultan's suzerainty, while creating in its Eastern part another autonomous province called Eastern Rumelia. The Congress confirmed the independence of Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, and the

autonomy of Bulgaria. It awarded Montenegro territorial compensation of Albanian inhabited lands on her Southern borders [the borders of present day Albania with Montenegro and Kosovo]. Austro-Hungary, which was coming out as the staunchest adversary of Slav expansionism in Balkans, made a fierce resistance to further concessions in the Southern Balkans. Vienna's main ambition was to secure a maritime outlet, through the Albanian inhabited lands, to the Aegean Sea. On the other hand, the Dual Monarchy took under its own administration Bosnia-Herzegovina, while Great Britain put its hands over Cyprus.¹³

The Congress of Berlin opened the way for further Ottoman territorial concessions in the following years in the Balkans, and elsewhere. A good part of Thessaly was granted to Greece in 1881, parts of Eastern Rumelia went to Bulgaria in 1885. The heaviest blow was inflicted on the Ottoman Empire by two European Powers after the Congress of Berlin (1878). Great Britain and France, until that moment the allies of the Empire and the defenders of its territorial integrity took advantage of the weakness of Sublime Porte and, firstly, France took possession of Tunisia in 1881, and then Great Britain took Egypt in 1882. The loss of Egypt had far reaching consequence for the prestige of the Empire. The Ottoman Sultan had become Caliph and the symbol of Moslem unity when Sultan Selim I (1512-1520) occupied Egypt in 1517. The loss of Egypt, which constituted the most solid guarantee of the Empire's position in the world and her right to the Caliphate, as well as the Suez route, was of considerable gravity for the future of the Empire.¹⁴ The defeat of the Ottomans in the Russian war 1877-78 brought to an end the *Tanzimat* liberalism.

These political reverses revived concerns that the Empire was well on the road to its ultimate dissolution and its withdrawal from its Balkan territories. The "Macedonian problem" of the mid 1890s, the Armenian question of the mid 1890s added substance to these concerns. The Empire took recourse to quelling the Armenians' revolt by force. The Armenians had asked for the introduction of reforms, most of all an organic statute regulating their communities in the provinces where the Armenians had a considerable presence. The troubles continued with the Cretan rebellion of 1896 and its autonomy in 1897, sanctioned by an organic statute suiting the local traditions of the island. All these events further shook the internal stability of the Empire, and made the country more exposed to the intervention of the Great Powers.

¹³ For more see *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar* [History of the Albanian People] vol.II, (Tiranë, 2002), fq. 161-166. Also S. Skëndi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, pg. 31-54.

¹⁴ F. Georgeon, "Lo Stato ottomano dopo il Trattato di Berlino 1878-1908", in *Storia dell'Impero Ottomano*, R. Mantran and P. Dumont (eds), (Lecce, 1999), pg.565.

The Rumelian, or “Macedonian” problem, was to have direct repercussions on the Albanian question of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. From the point of view of the Sublime Porte there was no Macedonia. Its lands were parts of the three vilayets of Rumelia [European Turkey]: Thessaloniki, Monastir and Kosovo. Macedonia was a multi-ethnic province, inhabited by Bulgarians, Serbs, Valachs, Greeks, Albanians and Turks, and with various independent churches at odds with each other, Bulgarian, Serbian and Greek. Thus, it was unavoidable that this province would become a permanent source of conflict. On the one hand, the Christian populations of this province, backed mostly by Russia and the Slav Balkan states, aimed to free themselves from Moslem Ottoman rule, while, on the other, the predominantly Moslem Albanian populations strove to hold back the danger to themselves of being placed under a new Christian rule.

This part of European Ottoman territories became thus a battlefield, where Bulgarian, Greek, Albanian and Serbian nationalisms, fought each other to gain influence and territorial advantages. The main contenders were Bulgarians and Greeks who first fought each other for cultural dominance. Each side strove to have its church and schooling system prevailing in the region. Soon this cultural battle was turned into military actions. In 1903, Macedonian revolutionaries, close to Sofia, organized the Illinden rebellion to end the Ottoman presence. The rebellion was crushed and harsh reprisals followed. The situation on the ground was further complicated when in 1903 the European Great Powers, Austro-Hungary and Russia, with the intention to put an end to the troubles inflaming this Ottoman province, set out a program of reforms, called the Mürzsteg reforms, after the Austrian city where the Austrian and Russian emperors met to discuss the issue in October of that year.

The program of the Powers urged the Sublime Porte to carry out a “fairer” territorial division of Macedonia, following the ethnic character of the populations inhabiting it, namely Bulgarian, Greek and Serbian. Consequently, the interest of each side was to expel from his assigned zone elements of rival ethnies. Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece, in order to expand their own Macedonian territorial spaces soon began to promote the creation of armed bands, which was soon followed by the formation of Albanian bands. The activity of the bands was used to bring more territory under their control and to impose their nationality on the inhabitants. This situation and an eventual territorial rearrangement of Macedonia increased also the Albanians’ concern for their lands being partitioned, if the reforms were to be enforced. Due

to harsh resistance by the Albanians, the Powers decided in 1904 to exclude from the reforms some territories inhabited in their majority by Albanian speaking populations.¹⁵

Looking at the example of the Cretan affair, to which the Sublime Porte conceded autonomy in 1897, ceded due to the intervention by the Great Powers, and continuous disorders in Rumelia, the Moslem populations in general, and the Albanian ones in particular, received clear signals that in the future the Ottoman Empire might not be able to protect them from a Slavic Orthodox rule. It should be recalled here the developments in other parts of the Empire by the end of 1880s. For example, a Syrian Partie Constitutionnel was created making “explicit expressions of a “Syrianist” current that sought the integration of ethnic and religious groups within Greater Syria around a regional identity within the Ottomanist framework”.¹⁶ Though the Arab ethnically based political organizations of that time still perceived their activities as a striving to preserve regional identities within a larger Ottoman imperial community, they were an indication that the interests of communities were increasingly gaining ground in the Empire.

The most serious blow to the almost thirty years old autocratic rule of Sultan Abdylhamit II came with the victory of the Yung Turk revolution in 1908, which marked also the beginning of the second period of constitutionalism in the Empire. The Young Turks, known under the name “Committee of Union and Progress” [CUP], wanted to re-establish the 1876 Constitution abrogated by Sultan Abdylhamit II in 1878 and upheld the idea of an Ottoman “nation”. Nevertheless, they were divided as to the ways to reach these important goals. One group was for a liberal decentralization of the Empire, recognizing the fact that its survival would be possible only if the cultural peculiarities of the non-Turkish and non-Moslem populations were recognized and organically regulated. The other group saw the reinvigoration of the Empire through authoritarian centralization, conceding to a later date a leading role to the Turkish population. The more liberal and centralist groups were divided also with regard to the role that Europe should play in Ottoman affairs: the first was for European support that would push reforms ahead, while the second was for the non-interference of the Powers, as according to it, they wanted to achieve only the subservience of the Ottoman Empire to their imperialist interests. The Young Turk movement was “a link in

¹⁵ *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, [History of the Albanian People], vol.II, pg.315. See also S. Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, pg.204.

¹⁶ H. Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks, Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918*, (University of California Press, 1997), pg.42.

the historical chain of Ottoman westernization and bureaucratic modernization” and the representation of “the modernist wing of the Ottoman intelligentsia and bureaucracy”.¹⁷

The establishment of the Constitution after the Young Turk revolution in 1908 brought significant changes in the Empire and also with regard to the nationalist movements of the various ethnies. The constitutionalist era made possible the emergence of political parties, committees, patriotic clubs, etc. These parties did not necessarily represent the desires of the whole population they claimed to stand for. The Albanian Geg Northern notables and Albanian Kosovo ulema (Moslem clergy) remained faithful to the ancient regime. Similarly the Ottomanized Armenian and Bulgarian communities of Istanbul, who disliked the nationalist politics or political bands of their country fellowmen, supported the old order. Nonetheless, the Young Turk revolution and the proclamation of the Constitution brought the fight for the political rights of various people of the Empire onto the public stage and witnessed a proliferation of political parties, nationalist associations and the propagation of constitutional rights’ ideas.¹⁸ We will see in the next section that the Albanian nationalist activities were intertwined with the Young Turks policies, and that “Albanianism” was not necessarily a project running against “Young Turkism”.

Though the policies of the Young Turks were essentially directed at saving the Empire from dissolution, its “Ottomanist” policies, in turn, were more and more viewed by the non-Moslems and non-Turks as a Turkification policy, as a tool to oblige the various ethnies composing the Empire to remain under its political umbrella and hindering them from seeking salvation outside of it. The CUP found itself in a paradoxical situation, as on the one hand its constitutional regime gave a freer rein to autonomist and separatist forces from the non-Moslem and non-Turkish communities, but, on the other, it strove to find a binding force to contain them from leaving the Empire. Its centralizing policies tried to build up an equal Ottoman ‘citizenship’, regardless of religion or ‘race’. The Young Turks’ policies could not be nationalistic, as the Empire was composed of several nations, but, all the more, Islamic faith was becoming problematic in its own right. The Young Turks could not reject it as it was the faith of the Moslem majority of the people, Turkish and non-Turkish, while it was viewed with suspicion by the Christian populations.¹⁹

¹⁷ S. Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, (Oxford University Press, 1995), pg.7.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, pg.317.

¹⁹ N. Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, pg.332.

These dilemmas of Young Turk rule was clearly exemplified in their Balkan policy. Their centralization course met harsh resistance from the local populations, which put up a fierce resistance, determined not to give up their old privileges sanctioned by the traditional policies of the previous sultans, such as in the case of the Albanian Northern mountainous regions. But, it was also reflected in an increase of revolutionary separatist national activities of various Balkan people. With this respect, as we will see it in the next section, though the Albanian ‘national’ activities were on the rise, they were not advocating a separatist solution.

The precarious situation in the Balkans, and the evident powerlessness of the Young Turks to cope with it, pushed Balkan countries to act and to put into practice their dreamed-of partition of the European dominions of the Empire. The situation became more opportune when the Italians declared war on the Sublime Porte and occupied Tripolitania [Libya] in October 1911. The Italian-Ottoman war made the Ottoman position in the Balkans even more precarious. It showed that the *status quo* principle in relation to the Ottoman territories, to which the European Powers had been abiding, in first place Austro-Hungary and Italy, did not hold any more. The first to move were Serbia and Bulgaria, signing an agreement in March 1912. According to this agreement Serbia and Bulgaria would divide Macedonia between them, recognizing to Bulgaria the greater part, while Serbia would take, besides Serbian inhabited lands in Macedonia, also parts of northern Albanian lands, with the aim to acquire an outlet to the Adriatic Sea. The latter’s claim directly clashed with the Balkan policy of Austro-Hungary, which strove hard to prevent Serbia and Montenegro blocking its own advancement towards the south. Therefore Vienna was the strongest opponent of a Serbian outlet to the Adriatic Sea, and consequently to the Serbian ambitions to annex Albania’s northern regions. Another agreement was signed in May 1912 by Bulgaria and Greece, which stipulated that both parties would help each other in case of an Ottoman attack. This alliance was followed by a formal treaty between Serbia and Montenegro in October 1912, which allowed the latter to be the first to wage hostilities against the Sublime Porte in October 1912.²⁰

The Balkan War administered the coup de grace to the Ottoman dominions in the Balkans. It would make the Great Powers, especially those directly interested in the Balkans, such as Austro-Hungary, Italy and Russia engage in another fight between them to find another equilibrium of forces, each one trying to benefit the most from the ‘death’ of

²⁰ See *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar* [History of the Albanian People], pg.502-503; also S. Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, pg.448-449.

Ottoman rule in the Balkans. From the ashes of Ottoman rule would emerge a small Albanian independent state, under the form of a neutral principality, recognized by the Powers in their Conference of Ambassadors in London in July 1913. Its birth was due to many factors, the most important being the hard work of rival powers, in particular Austro-Hungary and Italy, to strike a balance between their own interests to support the creation of an Albanian entity in the Western Balkans and obligatory compromises with their contenders.

1.3. The Hamidian regime and the most important ideological streams: Westernization, Turkism and Young Turks

The situation of the Ottoman state in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, where the Albanian question evolved and gained more and more momentum, would be more complete if we give a characterization of the reign of the Sultan Abdylhamit II (1876-1909) and some of the main ideological and cultural currents of the time.

The “constitutional absolutism” of Sultan Abdylhamit II, in the words of Niyazi Berkes, was a regime “crying for its establishment, it was a true reflection of the conditions prevailing not only in Empire, but throughout the Islamic world”.²¹ We have already touched upon the meager results achieved by the Tanizmat reforms, especially in economics. It was the period of grave economic debacle, i.e. the financial bankruptcy of 1875, due to external debts and the collapse of the economical measures of the Tanzimat in general. Concomitantly with the efforts to modernize the country through foreign aid, the reforms had placed the domestic economy under the tutelage of the West. The economic failures were compounded also by an abortive constitutional experiment in 1876 and by a grim overall situation of the Moslem people from Central Asia, India, Egypt, North Africa, which, by the second half of the nineteenth century, were falling under European domination.

Therefore, the autocratic and traditionalist regime of Abdylhamit II radiated its own appeal to the masses of the Empire, but to the Moslem world under Western domination as well. Following a gradual and more hostile switch of English policy towards the Sublime Porte, especially in 1876 after the British purchase of the Suez Canal, the Sultan inaugurated

²¹ N. Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, pg.253.

a policy of isolation from the West. Its autocracy and the prevalence of religiosity of his regime gave Sultan Abdylhamit II the appearance of a Moslem ruler able to resist Western encroachments. In the last decades of the nineteenth century he was increasingly seen both in his stature as Sultan, the head of the Ottoman dynastic family, but also in his standing as Caliph of the Moslem world, subdued by the West and in need of a symbol of independence and prestige.²² As a result Pan-Islamic ideas triumphed over the Ottomanist views of the Tanzimat as regards to the survival of the imperial state. Pan-Islamism was seen as a political union of all Moslems, not only of the Empire, but also of those Moslem populations outside that were dominated by Western powers. The Caliphate was not anymore “a spiritual power, it was a state and Islam was not merely a religion; it was a nationality, a political community, a civilization”.²³

Nevertheless, this was the most visible part of the story, because the time of the reign of Abdylhamit II was not only of tyranny, obscurantism and traditional immobility, as, it is always characterized in Albanian official historiography.²⁴ Even if the Sultan inaugurated a policy of isolation from the West, it could not hold back the European capital flowing into the Empire. It resulted in an increase of European investments, especially in public works, in railways, roads, telegraphic lines, and a more intense exploitation of the natural resources of the country. Various parts of the country were better connected between them than during the previous Tanzimat period. Moreover, the Ottoman state started to extend the schooling network, and though the elementary education system remained under strong religious influences, the secondary and the high school’s curricula were completed with subjects such as mathematics, physics, biology, political economy, history and above all French language. Among the most important schools founded during the time of Abdylhamit were the School of Administration, the School of Law, the French Galatasaray Lycée in Istanbul, the School of Medicine, the latter being also the hearth of the Young Turk movement. In fact many leaders of that movement studied in this institution. The widening of the network of the state Ottoman schools was deemed also as a response to the more numerous schools opened by foreigners, or by the non-Moslem communities, following the prerogatives of their local

²² Ibid., pg.255.

²³ Ibid., pg.268.

²⁴ *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar* [History of the Albanian People], pg. 229.

religious communities. These different schools were providing their audiences with different views of the Empire.²⁵

These changes in the educational system, though not of the same intensity and quality in all parts of the Empire, would lead to a further centralization of the state and the building up of a rationalized administration, which in turn would be more numerous and more diversified in its functions. Both the development of the education system and the state administration increased the state's presence in the Ottoman provinces. One of the most important social consequences was the emergence of a "middle class" of state employees, which was not necessarily recruited from the ranks of the grand notable [bej] families, but also from more humble layers. More and more young people attended the state schools, making also possible the use of modern knowledge as a social capital in occupying various posts in the administration and competing with the most traditional generation of administrators, whose positions in the state were mostly due to their family status and connections. This 'class' was mostly composed of teachers of state schools, employees of the administration in the provinces, people belonging to the emerging merchant petit bourgeoisie of the towns.²⁶ In a way, due to a more extensive and more secularized educational system, the social basis of the new Ottoman intelligentsia exposed to Western ideologies, or cultural influences, either in the center, or in its provinces, was expanding.

Though the regime of Abdylhamit II was oppressive and utterly religious, the Western influences, nevertheless, reached higher levels than before. One indication was the rise of a press, which, notwithstanding to the harsh censorship on political topics, started to spread knowledge that was not fully in conformity with Islamic precepts. It communicated to the reader information about scientific achievements in the West, about technological inventions and this kind of inquiring, secularized press raised the interest in reading and promoted an increase in literacy. Moreover, the language of this new press, using mostly translations from French, was becoming more and more vernacular, much simpler than the obscurantist and rather sophisticated religious texts.

During Tanzimat, the Ottoman intellectuals debated mostly on political issues, hoping that the constitutionalism they were fighting for would solve cultural problems too, i.e. the efforts of the Ottoman culture to open up and to catch up with modern civilization. Instead,

²⁵ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais. La naissance d'une nation majoritairement musulmane en Europe*, pg. 348.

²⁶ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais. La naissance d'une nation majoritairement musulmane en Europe*, pg.364-365. Also *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar* [History of the Albanian People], pg.317.

the intellectuals of the time of Abdylhamit II were more materialists in their belief. They despised the Sultan's regime, which was identified with the revival of traditions and of a spirit of religiosity impeding cultural contacts with the outside world. Niyazi Berkes has defined the ideology produced by this generation of intellectuals as "utopian individualism", which was a blend of Western influences such as naturalism, realism, evolutionism, realism, but translated into the Ottoman context. He connects this train of thought with the emergence of the literary school known as the "New Literature" (1896), which gathered critics, poets, writers around the magazine "Servet-i Funûn".²⁷ The main characteristic of the Western influences of this period was a stronger secularist mindset among intellectuals.

One of the ideological currents of the time, taking shape in the last decades of the nineteenth century, was Moslem reformism, which had to do primarily with the attempt to make the Islamic faith compatible with modernity. This focused on a pure and original Islam, the Islam of the Prophet, from whose foundations, its proponents maintained, Moslems had deviated in later centuries. To reform meant to base it upon the need of man for research and study, and not inspired by the blind obedience to tradition and the transcendental. The reformers of Islam pushed for laic thinking, detached from transcendental truths, for the observation of nature and facts, and the study of history. People propagating Moslem reformism were influenced by materialism, economic determinism, but also Darwinism.²⁸

In the nineteenth century, Turkish culture, and Turks as a particular ethnic group, became a topic of research undertaken by European historians and linguistics, such as Arthur Lumley Davids (1811-1832), Arminius Vambéry (1832-1913), Léon Cahun (1841-1900), etc. Turkism, as cultural nationalism, gained more momentum by the end of the nineteenth century, when the findings of European researchers on Turkish culture, as a culture in its own right related to a specific ethnic group among the Moslem populations in the Empire, and beyond, sparked a vivid interest amongst local intellectuals.²⁹ Turkism as an object of research had a particular importance, as the ethnic principle in the Ottoman Empire was not a valid category for classifying cultures and people. As we have seen, according to the traditional *millet* system the populations were divided only according to their religious faiths. In this sense even the pre-Islamic Turkish culture was somehow 'forgotten' behind the long centuries of the existence of the Ottoman state and its dominant Islamic religion. The

²⁷ N. Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, pg.295.

²⁸ F. Georgeon, *Aux origines du nationalisme turc*. Yusuf Akçura (1876-1935). (Paris, 1980), pg.17.

²⁹ *Ibid*, pg.18.

discovery of such an old culture led some Ottoman intellectuals to single out the Turks as a particular and important people of the large Ottoman Moslem community and to think in ethnic terms.

The transformations of the concepts that Ottoman intellectuals, of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, held with regard to the survival of the Empire, is best exemplified by Yusuf Akçura (1876-1935). He became known after he published in 1904 his article under the title “The three systems”.³⁰ According to him the three systems were a) “Ottomanism” coinciding with the Tanzimat policies (1836-1876), aiming to forge an Ottoman ‘nation’ out of the “nationalities” composing the Empire, b) “Pan-Islamism” identified with the Sultan Abdylhamit II policies to strengthen the Ottoman state through the Moslem brotherhood and solidarity with the other Moslem people living outside the Empire’s borders, and c) “Pan-Turksim”, which tried to build up a political Turkish “nationality” based on the concept of ‘race’. Akçura was skeptical about the feasibility of the “Ottomanist” project, which could not provide any solid basis for a ‘fusion’ of various ethnies in the Empire, while “Pan-Islamism” was a complicated project due to European and Russian dominion over most of the Asian Moslem populations. What was left was “Pan-Turkism”, i.e. “the development of Turkish national awareness”.³¹ This was the task that Akçura set himself to elaborate. The most obvious barrier to the “Pan-Turkism” project, which aimed to secure the survival of the Ottoman Empire based upon the solidarity of the Turkish speaking populations, was that traditionally, on the basis of the millet system, the Turks had never conceived themselves in “ethnic” terms, and even less in “political” ones.

Influenced by social Darwinism [the survival of the Turkish people in the Empire], by a political realism [the survival of the Ottoman state], he conceived the Turkish “nation” as composed by “race, language and traditions”. We have here a shift from the Tanzimat “Ottomanist” concept of nation, based upon “the people’s will” to a more German version, “the objective nation”. He himself would later show a predilection for German culture.³² The birth of the Young Turk movement at the end of the nineteenth century added to this ideological ferment. The two ideological mainstays of the Young Turk movement were science and progress. The debates over science and progress outdid any other discussions among them in the formative years of the movement. Their mental outlook was so pervaded by the idea of science and progress, in a biological-materialist and Darwinist vein, they

³⁰ Ibid., pg.7.

³¹ F. Georgeon, *Aux origines du nationalisme turc*, pg. 24.

³² Ibid., pg.28-29.

believed that human society could be deciphered and regulated only according to science.³³ We will dwell more on the views of the Young Turks to the achievement of a constitutional and stable Ottoman state, namely de-centralization versus centralization policies, in the chapter on Ismail Qemali.

The Young Turks were committed to the modernization and westernization of the Empire, starting from the basis that the Muslim masses of the Empire were backward. For that they thought it would be better to introduce modern reforms if presented in the form of Islamic concepts. In this sense they considered it important to instill this new spirit into the masses by enlightened Muslim elites. Unlike the Young Ottomans, who tried to present the modern European ideas as rooted in Islam, the Young Turks did not try to reconcile Islam with modern sciences, but, as Sukru Hanioglu has written, they elaborated a kind of positivist-materialist ideology misinterpreting Islam and created “a brand new ideology presented as Islam”.³⁴ Their name should not lead us to understand their position as a manifestation of Turkish nationalism. The Young Turks were Empire-savers and their Turkish proclivity would become more accentuated in the second decade of the twentieth century. Their common view was that the masses should be educated and led onto the road of progress, which was incompatible with the autocratic rule of Sultan Abdylhamit II.

2. The Albanian question in the nineteenth-twentieth centuries

2.1. Albanian lands before and during the Tanzimat reforms

Albanian official historiography has in general described the Tanzimat reforms as aiming to modernize the Empire, but failing miserably. It tend to see the structural changes from an Albanian point of view, claiming the reforms were enforced to strengthen the state’s central rule over the Albanians, which resulted in an increasingly oppressive regime hindering them from developing their “nationality”. Its main argument is that the Empire did not want to recognize the Albanians as a “nation” in their own right and, intentionally, furthered their division into distinct religious communities, Moslems, Orthodox and Catholics. This was reflected in the *Tanzimat* policies to officially grant to its subjects belonging to various *millets* the rights to have their own schools. For the Albanian

³³ S. Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, pg.7.

³⁴ *Ibid*, pg.202.

historiography, the Albanians were deprived of having a “national” education, with Albanian as a language of instruction, as they were obliged to attend Islamic schools for the Moslem part of the population, where Ottoman-Arabic was used, Greek Orthodox schools for the Orthodox, and Latin ones for the Catholics.³⁵ Other studies, though more moderate, while recognizing the regional peculiarities of the *Tanzimat policies*, are trapped in a discourse over ‘national awakening’, in the sense that due to Ottoman policies, i.e. establishing schools only in terms of a religiously divided populations, the Albanians had a harder path to traverse to attain their ‘national’ affirmation, as they found themselves divided into Moslems, Orthodox and Catholics.³⁶

The situation on the ground was much more complex and it had its impact on the way Albanianism and the articulation of an Albanian nation was shaped. Both approaches neglect the Ottoman state’s outlook and its rationale with regard to the Albanian question at the turn of nineteenth-twentieth centuries, which make them to resort to wishful thinking and explaining the events of one century ago from an actual national standpoint. Albanian historiography fails to put the Albanian inhabited lands into a wider Ottoman context, or dwells on it only to describe Manichean relations between the Ottoman oppressor and the oppressed Albanian people.

From an Ottoman’s viewpoint, there were no ‘nationalities’, only religious communities [millet]. The *Tanzimat* reformers were not nationally-minded governors. They were Empire-saviours, who aimed to consolidate the state. The Empire embarked upon a process to salvage its territories and any Albanian policies were dependent on political circumstances, which in certain periods allowed for boosting Albanian nationalism or, conversely, to contain or repress it. It had to do also with the position of the Moslem people in the Empire, and Albanians being in their majority Moslems should be attached to the Sultan Caliph.

It should be stressed that the Albanian ‘national’ identity was far from being a collective identity among the Albanian speaking populations of that time. It was, instead, a discourse formulated among educated elites, whose regional, religious, cultural and professional positions made possible the overlapping of various identities, either a traditionalist one, as in the north, or the more urban Southern versions, but also Ottoman, Young Turk, as well as being Moslem, Catholic and Orthodox etc.

³⁵ *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar* [History of the Albanian People], pg.75-78.

³⁶ S. Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, pg.24-27.

Beside the centralizing policies over territories that had been ruled for long according to traditional customs under a markedly decentralized Ottoman system, the Ottoman reformers were deeply concerned to bring these populations on the track of ‘civilization’ with the aim to increase the people’s loyalty to the Ottoman centre. The ‘civilizing’ policies of *Tanzimat* meant in the first place to try to codify the laws governing the provinces, where Albanian speaking populations were present, making efforts to adapt old customs to modern laws as envisaged by the reforms, which aimed at creating a more cohesive Moslem-Christian cohabitation, and to widen the network of primary and secondary schools. The ‘civilizing’ mission which the Sublime Porte had for their populations of the borderlands was a deeply entrenched conviction, not only out of political reasons, to maintain its authority as far as its territories stretched, but it was also conceived as a necessity of the time. It influenced its policies vis-à-vis the tribal and remote populations throughout the nineteenth century.³⁷ The westernizing *Tanzimat* policies envisaged not only the reinvigoration of the state apparatus, but implied also that Ottoman populations could not remain in a state of stagnancy and not being won over to the government’s side, now in the conditions of modernity and competition with the Western powers that were expanding eastwards. They had to be mobilized under an “Ottomanist” spirit, whose primary aim was the preservation of the Ottoman state.

The new high schools opened in the Empire in the 1850s-1860s, mentioned above, with a more secularized curricula, became centers which opened new horizons to a young Moslem generation and eased their contact with Western culture.³⁸ This generation of intellectuals and politicians would be greatly affected by the “Ottomanist” doctrine of the Young Ottomans, by their view to secure a viable Empire through the co-habitation of various religious communities and people inside of it. Pashko Vasa and Ismail Qemali display a “*Tanzimatist*” and “Ottomanist” point of view in their discussions on the fate of the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina, or the Armenian affair.

Members of this generation of Albanian Moslem students, and in a later date re-known Ottoman intellectuals and Ottoman statesmen, but also proponents of the Albanian “nation”, such as Qemali and Sami were graduates of the famous Greek Lycée “Zosimea” of Janina [north of present day Greece], which knew its heydays during the *Tanzimat* era. This school hosted also other Christian Albanians, who were to be among the first nationalist

³⁷ S. Deringil, “They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery”: The Late Ottoman Empire and The Post-Colonial Debate”, *Society for Comparative Study of Society and History*, 2003, pg.311-342.

³⁸ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg. 220.

intellectuals, such as Jani Vreto (1822-1900), Konstantin Kristoforidhi (1826-1895). We will see in the following chapters how these Ottoman and Albanian personalities were influenced by the education received at this Lycée, with its Classicist lessons (history of Ancient Greece, Rome), and foreign languages such as Latin, Greek, French, Italian, which offered good opportunities for contact with Western culture.

As Nathalie Clayer has argued, these schools of the *Tanzimat* era stimulated in these Moslem educated intellectuals, and amongst Albanian Christian peers attending the same institution, an interest in the culture of their own “nation” through a dynamic of “association and reaction.” Their Albanian “nation” was articulated in association to Hellenism, i.e. as it endeavored to write the Albanian language with a Greek alphabet and contemplating a future “Greek-Albanian” bi-cephalous autonomous principality. But, the reaction to Hellenism bore its fruits in efforts to erect an Albanian Pantheon of “national” heroes since antiquity, or to reject Greek letters for written Albanian. All these dynamics would engender fierce ideological battles to claim supremacy over a territory disputed by both Albanian and Greek nationalisms. This territory was the vilayet of Janina, inhabited in its most part by Greek and Albanian speaking populations.³⁹ As we will see in the following chapters, many arguments used to articulate the Albanian “nation” by the nationally minded Albanian intellectuals targeted the difference between Albanians and Greeks.

2.2. The League of Prizren (1878-1881)

The creation of the League of Prizren (1878-1881) is by far the most celebrated event of the whole Albanian National Movement (1878-1912) in Albanian historiography. Accordingly, it is assigned a special place in studies, as the first public pan-Albanian manifestation of a ‘national’ movement gaining ground, and making Albanian affairs an international issue. It is also a cause of national pride, which has attracted much attention among Albanian scholars dealing with this period of Albanian history. As such, the League has been subjected to a kind of iconization, reflecting rather romantic and nationalistic approaches. The romantic paradigm presents it as an event of a ‘national’ dimension and as

³⁹ Ibid, pg. 104-119.

the ‘natural’ outcome of the progressive political maturation of the Albanian nation becoming increasingly ‘aware’ of its rights. Moreover, the image of Albanians is that of a distinct community acting *en bloc* transcending cultural, regional and religious differences. It is one of those moments of national narratives where the academic accuracy does not have clear boundaries and merges into a broader and much more ‘appealing’ project, in the words of Anne Marie-Thiesse, turning it into a “pedagogy of the masses”. The latter should be informed about their history from a uniform national and romantic spirit and vision.⁴⁰

We will not analyse the history of the League in detail, but, instead, only note the factors which helped it to appear on the international stage and so projecting the Albanians as a vector to be reckoned with in the further arrangements of the Ottoman Balkan territories. Through a better contextualization of the League we can better understand its assumed ‘national’ dimension and see it not as a one-sided Albanian phenomenon.

We have already mentioned the decisions of the San Stefano Treaty and the Congress of Berlin in 1878 concluding the Eastern Crisis (1875-1878) after the Russian-Ottoman war (1877-1878), which ended with the defeat of the Ottomans. Both these international conferences, though the Congress of Berlin revised the previous San Stefano Treaty, allotted Albanian inhabited lands to the newly founded Balkan states, Serbia and Montenegro. Therefore, the territories of the Albanian speaking populations, in the majority Moslems, were to be divided among the Christian Balkan states. This prospect aroused major concerns among local populations.

The proclamation of the Ottoman Constitution in 1876 made possible the gathering of some Albanian intellectuals in the capital Istanbul, the real center of the Albanian political activities together with the Southern vilayet [province] of Janina.⁴¹ The first Albanian reactions were the creation of a group, latter known under the name “Committee of Istanbul” in early 1878, composed of Albanian employees in the Ottoman administration, notables from south and north, who set out their requests in a memorandum which asked for the creation of a single Albanian province inside the Ottoman Empire.⁴² The major figures who played a significant role in formulating the political demands on behalf of an Albanian “nation” were Abdyl Frasheri (1839-1892), and his brother Shemseddin Sami Frasheri (1850-

⁴⁰ *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar* [History of the Albanian People], pg.226-228. K. Frasheri, *Lidhja Shqiptare e Prizrenit, 1878-1881* [The Albanian League of Prizren], (Tiranë, 1997), pg. 419-425. A. Buda, *Shkrime historike* [History writings], vol.3, (Tiranë, 2002), pg. 345-355.

⁴¹ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg. 247.

⁴² S. Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, pg.37.

1904), from a Moslem family of the vilayet of Janina, Pashko Vasa (1825-1892), a Catholic from Shkodër [north Albania], who held important positions in the Ottoman Empire, Jani Vreto (1822-1900), an Orthodox Christian from Berati [south Albania], Mehmet Ali Vrioni, a Moslem also from Berati, Zija Prishtina, Ymer Prizreni, Sylejman Vokshi, Shaip Spahiu, Moslem notables from the Northern Albanian lands of the vilayet of Kosovo.

In the conditions of a weak Ottoman rule in the Balkans, and an Ottoman administrative division of the region in areas with a conspicuous mixture of populations in religious, linguistic and ‘ethnic’ terms, the Albanian leaders deemed it important to move towards the unification of the Albanian inhabited territories in a single administrative unit inside the Empire, serving as a preventive barrier to their partition among the Slav Balkan countries and as a measure to define a ‘national’ territory and setting claim over it.

It was also at this time, early 1878, when discussion on the Albanian ‘nation’ became for the first time a public political discourse. Abdyl Frasheri one of the Albanian leaders of the time wrote some articles in the Ottoman and the European press. He defined the Albanians as the oldest people in the Balkans, using the theory of the descendents of the Pellazgs, one of the oldest populations inhabiting Europe.⁴³ This argument was also used by other Albanian authors, as it indicated the supremacy of claims over the territories inhabited by other Balkan populations, such as the Greeks, Slavs, Turks, etc. The Albanian “nation” was an old one, having a linguistic, territorial and cultural unity, apart from its historical rights, and therefore should be recognized as a “nationality” in its own right. Frasheri mentioned the fact that Albanians were Moslems, different for the Orthodox Greeks, who had a religious affinity with the Orthodox Russians, who were the major threat to Europe. In exchange, Frashëri asked from Europe to grant to Albanians the same treatment as the Greeks had received half a century earlier: to be recognized as a separate nationality. Always pointing to the anti-Slav role in the Balkans, and the benefits the Sublime Porte would have from it, Frasheri suggested that the Ottoman government should reassess the administrative division of its Balkan provinces, so as to gather all the Albanian lands into a single province.⁴⁴

Albanian historiography has presented the role of the Porte in a negative light. It insists on calling the League as “The Albanian League of Prizren” and to invest it with a pan-

⁴³ Ibid, pg.250.

⁴⁴ K. Frasheri, *Lidhja Shqiptare e Prizrenit*, pg.68-79. See also *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar* [History of the Albanian People], pg. 152-153.

Albanian ‘national’ character, and partly to suppress a kind of frustration because of the Islamic vein of its founding documents, due to the participation of Moslem notables from Bosnia-Herzegovina in its early stages.⁴⁵ The League was created in June 10, 1878, just a few days before the Congress of Berlin, with the clear intention to present before the European Powers the refusal of the Albanians to accept territorial concessions to Montenegro and Serbia. In its first documents it expressed its decision to defend the Albanian inhabited territories in the Northern parts and pledged loyalty to the Sublime Porte and making common cause with Moslem Bosnians, whom territories were also threatened by possible European interventions. The document reflected the composition of its first union that was dominated by Moslem notables of high Albania, and the fact that the Sublime Porte gave its consent to its creation. The Sultan saw in it a useful factor on the ground to maintain the argument that any decisions infringing upon Ottoman territories in this part of the Balkans would be faced with fierce resistance from the local populations.⁴⁶

The period of the “League of Prizren” saw a series of demands coming to the Sublime Porte with regard to the Albanian lands. They varied and were not of the same tenor. The most traditional elites of the Northern parts of the Albanian territories were for the preservation of their local privileges, while the more nationally minded Albanian intellectuals of the Southern vilayet of Janina gave a more ‘national’ connotation to the memoranda, but still holding to the attainment of an autonomous status for their territories inside the Empire, deemed as a shelter from the expansionism of the Balkan countries. The requests ranged from the need to recognize an Albanian nationality inside the Empire, to introduce laws in accordance with the ethnic-regional peculiarities of these lands, to the creation of a single Albanian vilayet under the suzerainty of the Sultan, to the introduction of the Albanian language as the administrative language of the would-be Albanian vilayet and appointment of employees knowing local problems and habits.

In Albanian studies these different point of views have been explained through an aprioristic social division of people who took part in the activities, or, to put it differently, on a class interests’ basis. According to this approach the most ‘reactionary’ social strata were the big landlords, the high ranking employees of the Empire and the high Moslem clergy, who were not for a ‘national’ state, but were inspired by Islam and therefore focused upon the fate of Moslems only. They gave a “Sultanist, Ottomanist taint” to the movement, which was

⁴⁵ *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, pg.157-161.

⁴⁶ S. Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, pg.43. See also P. Bartl, *Myslimanët shqiptarë në lëvizjen për pavarësi kombëtare (1878-1912)*[The Albanian Moslems in the movement for national independence], (Tiranë, 2006), pg. 146. The original version of the book, in German, was published in 1968.

not “warmly supported by the mass of the people”. On the opposite side, we have the “radicals”, those members of the Albanian activists who favoured autonomous projects, and whose political ideas were expressively “nationalist Albanian”. This group has been indicated as emerging from the new bourgeoisie.⁴⁷

The above assumptions and simplistic scheme do not match with events, as we find among the most influential Albanian Moslem notables the first Albanian activists. What could be defined as a characteristic of the time was a distinction between the Southern and Northern areas of the Albanian inhabited lands. But, it derives not from any class divisions, but rather from cultural, regional particularities and state policies’ reasons. We have touched upon the fact that the Southern territories were better linked to the rest of the Empire through a network of schools and of a more widespread state administration. People were more educated and were better integrated and therefore more exposed to Western secularist influence. Moslem Albanians were better integrated in an administration through rationalization and centralization policies that differed from the more traditionally and religious one that was preponderant in the Northern areas.

The activities of the League should not be taken as an exemplary expression of Albanian nationalism, in the sense of a well-coordinated ‘national’ movement involving large parts of the populations. Most of the actors were pushed or involved in it by different interests, going from national projects of a single autonomous Albanian vilayet [province], to the preservation of local privileges and Islamic solidarity and loyalty to the Sultan/Caliph. It was also an expression of the resentment towards the Sublime Porte, which due to its weakness submitted to the pressure of the European Powers and increasingly placed the Albanian lands under the threat of Orthodox Balkan rule.

Anyway, the stiff resistance of the Albanians compelled the Great Powers to modify their decisions taken at the Congress of Berlin, especially with regard to the territories that were to be given to Montenegrins. When the Sublime Porte yielded to the Powers, as it was the case of the town of Ulqin [south of present day Montenegro] delivered to Montenegro in autumn 1880, some fringes of the League radicalized their positions and pressed in clearer terms for an autonomous status for the Albanian lands and took actions to substitute Ottoman employees. After that Istanbul settled the impending territorial disputes with its Balkan neighbors in 1880-1881, it couldn’t allow another Albanian rebellion to challenge its authority. It crushed it by sending in its armies in April 1881.

⁴⁷ K. Frasheri, *Lidhja Shqiptare e Prizrenit*, pg. 72-73.

For the Sultan, it was difficult to suppress a movement that he had at first tolerated. Anyway, the Albanians should be put in a wider context of his policies. It was a time, after the *Tanzimat* reforms, when the Sultan was investing in his pan-Islamist policy and in his image of the Caliph of the Moslem umma [Moslem world]. A protracted conflict with a predominantly Moslem people, such as the Albanians, could harm such an image. His centralizing general trend of policies could not afford challenges to the authority of the Sublime Porte. The case of the League was also the first case of a movement of a Moslem population with autonomist aspirations. Thereafter, the Albanians drew the attention of the Sultan and of the Great Powers in any future rearrangements of the Ottoman Balkans.

3. Cultural influences

3.1. Foreign Albanian studies. Albanians of Italy and Greece

As with other Balkan people, including here also the Turks, the Albanians were firstly ‘discovered’ as a particular ‘nation’ by Western scholars.⁴⁸ At the turn of the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries, Romantic young writers, poets and travelers, linguists and diplomats, in search of Ancient Greece and their heirs in the Balkans, turned also their eyes in the direction of other people nearby, the Albanians being one of them. Besides mere literary interests informed by the adventurous spirit and Romantic inspirations, and the general development of the linguistics and comparative philology, these researches were also the result of the precise political interests of the European Powers to ‘know’ better these Ottoman dominions in this area of the Old Continent.⁴⁹

The techniques of discovery followed somehow the same patterns for each of the nations inhabiting the region. They established a direct link between the people of ancient history, such as the Greeks, Epirotes, Macedonians, Illyrians, etc, and the actual, modern day populations. Among the most relevant factors of this reconstruction process going in the inverse direction back to history were a) the very ancient origins of these people, either shared or in competition with other Balkan peer aspirants, b) an ancient language, needing to be elaborated, standardized and updated in order to provide these people with a tool to attain civilization and moral advancement, not least infusing a common spirit of belonging to the

⁴⁸ See A. Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales*, (Paris, 1999), pg.83-100.

⁴⁹ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg. 160-170.

same community. The Western studies were instrumental in supplying these Balkan would-be 'nations' with a particular inner essence and an outside look, matching not only their ancient and glorious history, but also serving as assets to enter the modern European family of nations.

Among the most important Western authors that wrote on Albanians' origin and language were Malte Brun (1775-1826) with his "Géographie universelle" (published posthumously), Johann Thunmann - "Untersuchungen über die Geschichte der oestlichen europäischen Völker" (1774), F.C.H.L. Pouqueville, French consul to Janina- "Voyage dans la Grèce" (1820-1821), W.M.Leake, a British traveler- "Researches in Greece"(1814), J.Xylander- "Die Sprache der Albanesen oder Schkipetaren" (1835), Johann Georg von Hahn, the Austrian consul to Janina, who in 1854 published his "Albanesische Studien", the German physician of the Greek navy C.H.T. Rheinhold- "Noctes Pelasgicae" (1855), Franz Bopp- "Über das Albanesische in seinen verwandtschaftlichen Beziehungen" (1854).⁵⁰ The westerners laid down also some lines on which their local colleagues, at a later date, would follow in the reconstruction of their "national" histories.

The above findings were to impress the Albanian nationalist entrepreneurs. The firsts to exercise this new 'national' apprenticeship, the discovery of the 'nation', were the Albanians of Italy. From the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century onwards, they appropriated and diffused the 'theories' on the ancient origin of the Albanians. These 'theories' would then be echoed, especially in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, by other Albanian communities in the Ottoman Empire and abroad. One of the most important was "Pellazg" theory. According to it, the Albanians were the heirs of the "Pellazgs", the oldest populations settled in the European continent moving westwards from Asia, some 2.000 years B.C. All the most known ancient peoples, such as the Greeks, Illyrians, Macedonians, derived from the "Pellazgs".

These Western discoveries 'confirmed' the autochthony of the Albanians in the Balkans, in competition with other Balkan nationalisms. Sometimes the "Pellazg" origin was used to argue a common descent between Albanians and Greeks. This narrative argued that Greeks were 'detached' from the "Pellazg" core becoming "civilized" by writing their language, while the "Pellazg-Albanians" remained in a kind of state of nature, without a written language, but keeping fast to their "ethnicity" and living in mountainous secluded areas more as a warrior people. Another consequence of the "Pellazg" theory was to pinpoint

⁵⁰ S. Skëndi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, pg. 113-114. N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg. 160-170.

the idea that Christianity, Orthodoxy and Islam were not fully interiorized by them. The “Pellazg-Albanians” were ‘pragmatic’ and used the monotheist religions to save their freedom against the invading Empires and Emperors. These assumptions were made to indicate the Albanians, though religiously divided into Catholics, Orthodox and Moslems, practiced religions in their own way: they were a kind of ‘popular’ version of religion that could not overwhelm their ‘ethnicity’.

This latter ‘argument’ was of worth, as it turned Islam, a more recent faith, into a kind of ‘superficial’ religion, constructing thus an image of the Albanian’s ‘tolerant’ Islam. The ‘tolerant’ Albanian Islam would be a thesis used not only by the Albanian Christian intellectuals, for whom it was easier to refute the Asiatic Islam of the Turks, but also by the Albanian Moslem intellectuals. For the latter, it became important by the late nineteenth century to articulate an Albanian Moslem nation more ‘tolerant’, more European than the Asiatic ‘fanatic’ Turkish Islam. Here, the spread of Bektashism, a blend of Shi’a and Sufi concepts, among Southern Albanian speaking populations was taken as a sign of this Albanian otherness against the more ‘fanatic’ and official Sunni Islam of the Ottoman Empire. This construction was useful at a time when the Ottoman Empire was giving signs of its withdrawal from the Balkans, and they could be expelled as Moslem populations. Thus, they had to define themselves as a European people, ‘culturally’ and ‘ethnically’ different from the Asiatic Turks. This claim was compounded also by the other theory of the Indo-European origin of the Albanian language.

The other Western contribution to the image of the Albanian nation was its division into two main geographical-cultural areas: the Northern one, where the Albanian *Gegs* were living, and the Southern part of the Albanian inhabited territories, or the *Tosk* area. The Northern *Gegs* were held to be more a warrior, epic and mountainous people, against the Southern *Tosks*, who were more open and more urban. The Geg pattern implied also being ‘proud’, ‘unyielding’, ‘stubborn’, but also ‘backward’, ‘isolated’ and ‘fanatic’ in terms of religious affairs. By contrast the Tosks were more ‘skilful’ urban players, more ‘open minded’, and religiously ‘tolerant’.

Living in a Western country, the Italo-Albanians were influenced by the works of Western scholars on the Albanians and Romanticism. The Italo-Albanians were a community of around 200.000 people, which had settled mainly in the Southern Italian regions of Calabria and Sicily in the fifteenth century, following the Ottoman seizure of the Albanian inhabited territories. Since the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the Italo-Albanian intellectuals started to study the language of their ‘motherland’, its “very old culture”, and to

collect local folklore, much in an Ossian-like fashion. Among the most distinguished Italo-Albanians in this aspect were Angelo Masci (1758-1821) who wrote the book “Discourse on the origins, rites and the actual state of the Albanian nation”, Giuseppe Crispi (1781-1859) who in 1831 published a book on the antiquity of the Albanian language, Jeronim de Rada (1814-1903) with his book “Antiquity of the Albanian nation” (1864), “Rhapsodies of an Albanian Poem” (1872) and Vincenzo Dorsa (1823-1885) who in 1847 published the book “On the Albanians. Researches and thoughts”, Demetrio Camarda “Essay on a comparative grammar of the Albanian language” (1864), Giuseppe Schiró (1865-1927) wrote “Albanian Rhapsodies” (1887), etc. The Italo-Albanians published also the first Albanian newspaper, in Italian and the local Albanian dialect: “L’Albanese d’Italia” [The Albanian of Italy] (1848), and “Fjamuri i Arbërit” [The Albanian Flag] (1883-1887) were published by Jeronim De Rada, “Arbëri i rii” [The young Albanian] (1887) by Giuseppe Schiró, “La Nazione Albanese” [The Albanian nation] (1897-1924), by Anslemo Lorecchio (1843-1924), etc.

They constructed an Albanian nation in contrast to the Greeks. For Italo-Albanians it became a matter of concern to differentiate themselves from the Italo-Greek community in order to preserve their specific Uniate ecclesiastical-educational privileges in the Kingdom of Naples in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. As we will see in the following chapters, the Albanian intellectuals used this thesis of the Italo-Albanians in the context of the Eastern Crisis (1875-1878) in the Ottoman Empire to disqualify the claims for expansion of Greek nationalists and confirm Albanian supremacy over the much disputed and mixed populated vilayet of Janina in the Ottoman Balkans. The Italo-Albanians constructed an old Albanian nation, with “Pellazg” origins dating back to 2.000 years B.C, and their territories stretching from Greece, Albania and far westwards to Italy and Sicily. The most important consequences of this discourse was to present the Albanian language as the oldest in the region, especially older than Greek, and as proof to this the Italo-Albanians used Albanian modern etymology to ‘decipher’ the meaning of the names of the ancient Greek deities.

The Italo-Albanians reinforced the internal division of the Albanian nation, between a Northern mountainous part, ‘racially’ and ‘ethnically’ purer, and a Southern one exposed to a greater ethnic mixture, of Albanians and Greeks, but also more open to the outside world. The Albanians of Italy were also the first builders of a national pantheon, which included Philip and Alexander the Great of Macedonia, the king Pirro of Epirus (IV century B.C.) and the actual Albanian national hero Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg (1405-1468).⁵¹

⁵¹ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg. 170-180.

The Albanians of Italy took part in the Italian Risorgimento in their two-fold quality as Italians and as members of the Italo-Albanian communities of Southern Italy. This last meant primarily expressing through their intellectual and literary production the aims a) to restore the independence of their motherland abandoned in the XV century after the Ottoman occupation and b) their return to the land of their ancestors. After the unification of Italy in 1860 the Italo-Albanians found themselves in a new context, that of Italian irredentism and plans for expansion in the Balkans, and its projects for a Balkan cooperation against the Ottomans.⁵² So far, we do not have specific studies on the ideological influence of the Italian Risorgimento on the thought of the Albanians of Italy. All we can say it is that we have reactions to the new conditions created after the political unification of the Apennines, and the new twist of Italian policy towards the Balkans. Anyway, this political atmosphere did not have a uniform impact over the Italo-Albanian elite.

A possible indication of the Mazzinian influence would be the idea of the liberation of the motherland from the Ottoman occupation and its perception as a mission. This mission was a kind of a mystical and religious concept and in the works of Jeronim De Rada, one of the major Italo-Albanian intellectuals, was seen as the word given to God to return to the motherland, after its abandonment by the Catholic Albanians in front of the Moslem Ottoman occupation.⁵³ While for De Rada the unification and self-government of Italy were positive premises, he favoured the creation of an Italian federation, as he was convinced that the interests of the Italo-Albanians (their religious rites and their particular cultural traditions) would be better preserved. At this point he was closer to the thought of known figures of Risorgimento like Carlo Cattaneo (1801-1869) and Vincenzo Gioberti (1801-1852), who were for Christian values and for a federalist project.⁵⁴ Such a federalist project De Rada envisaged also for the organization of the future Albania, when in correspondence with Shemseddin Sami Frashëri in 1880, he suggested the creation of an Albanian federation, composed of three parts following the religious division of Albanians into Moslems, Catholics and Orthodox.⁵⁵ We should add here that the political thought of De Rada was contrary to the Italian expansionist projects into the Balkans, which aimed at the “liberation” of the region from the Ottoman “occupation”. De Rada thought that the Ottoman Empire

⁵² Ibid, pg. 204.

⁵³ G. Schiro, “Shqipëria ideale e Jeronim De Radës”, [The ideal Albania of Jeronim De Rada], in *De Radës në 100 vjetorin e vdekjes* [To De Rada in the 100th anniversary of the death], (Tiranë, 2003), pg. 106.

⁵⁴ A. Varfi, “Rreth ideve politiko-shoqërore të jeronim De Radës”, [On the political-social ideas of Jeronim De Rada], in *Jeronim De Rada*, (Tiranë, 1965), pg.82.

⁵⁵ Letter of Sami Frashëri sent to Jeronim De Rada, Istanbul, 20.02.1881. In the Albanian State Archive (AQSH), Fond 51, file nr.4, pg.1-2.

would be a protector for Albanians against the territorial aims of their neighbors, in the first place the Greeks.⁵⁶ This was not a stance shared by all Italo-Albanian intellectuals. Some of them were for a Greek-Albanian federation in an anti-Ottoman alliance.⁵⁷

Nevertheless, the idea of the Albanian nation of De Rada, and other Italo-Albanian intellectuals, followed modalities rather common for European culture in the nineteenth century, influenced by Herderian spirit, i.e. through studying folklore, the language, ancient history, etc.

The other Albanian Diaspora, which played its own role in these initial phases of a discourse over the Albanian nation, was that of the Albanians of Greece. Less numerous and less compact than the Italo-Albanians, some intellectuals from this community were influenced by Western studies on the Albanians and Greeks. As mentioned above, European Romanticism directed the interest of scholars and writers to ancient Greece and their modern heirs, and to the history of the other ancient people and their languages as the most vivid expression of the ‘soul’ of these nations. This interest sparked in Greek-Albanian intellectuals the need to search for a past and a future for their nation too. The other factor which raised this interest on Albanians were the political interests of the newly founded Greek state, which envisaged its territorial enlargement in the direction of the Ottoman Balkan dominions, partly inhabited by Albanian speaking populations. In this sense, the discourse of the Greek-Albanian intellectuals would be articulated through the discussion on the question of the writing of the Albanian language, the civilizing of the Albanians and their political future in the aftermath of an eventual dissolution of the Ottoman Empire.

The main figures were Anastasios Pykaios Byku, who in 1860 published in Greek his journal “Pelagos” and in 1861 a grammar book for the Albanian language using Greek letters, Anastas Kullurioti who in 1882 published a primer, and Panayotis Koupitoris, who expressed an interest in the Albanian language and nation and in 1879 published “Albanian Studies”.⁵⁸ Unlike the Italo-Albanians who conceived the Albanian nation as different from the Greeks, the Greek-Albanians saw in the future a union between Albanians and Greeks, as two people derived from the same ancestors, the “Pellazgs”, and having a linguistic affinity. The Greek-Albanians saw the advancement of the Albanians towards civilization through the use of Greek as a more elaborated language of culture.

⁵⁶ J. De Rada, *Autobiografia* [Autobiography], (Tiranë, 2002), pg. 155.

⁵⁷ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg.206-207.

⁵⁸ S. Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, pg.127. N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg. 196-203.

Albanian official historiography has mostly praised the contribution of the Italo-Albanians for their researches on the ancient history of the Albanian nation, “to confirm the autochthony of the Albanians in their land and to further the Albanian question before international public opinion of the time, as a nation fully entitled to enjoy its national rights”. But, this approach has been careful not to consider the works of the Italo-Albanians as the originators and initial promoters of a discourse on the Albanian nation. It holds that the Italo-Albanians were only echoing the development of a ‘national awareness’ inside Albania. The concern here is not to present the Albanian National Movement as having started abroad, but, instead, indicating the Albanian inhabited lands as the locus of an important thriving of ‘national efforts’ to liberate the country from the Ottoman yoke.⁵⁹

3.2. Albanian Diaspora of Romania, Cairo, Sofia and USA

The Albanian Diaspora was spread also in some European countries and in the US. The Albanian Diaspora of Romania played an important role in publishing Albanian books and creating patriotic societies at the end of nineteenth century. The activity of the Albanian Diaspora of “Bucharest”, as it is often known, should be placed in the Romanian context of the time. The country hosted mixed emigrants’ communities, such as Aromanian [old Valach populations of the Balkans], Greeks, Slavs and Albanians. Many among the Albanians were emigrants from Southern Albanian, mostly from Korça.⁶⁰ The Romanian government tried to use these communities to further its own Balkan policy, which meant to secure a privileged position in the region by contending with Greek and Slav nationalisms. In this sense Albanians and Aromanians of the region could be of a good use and Romania promoted their joint actions. Those who supported this option considered both Albanians and Aromanians as Latin people and propagated the need to introduce the Albanian language into the schools and in the Orthodox churches and neutralizing the danger posed by Greek and Slav influences. This was the position of the “Sqipëtari/Albanezul” newspaper which was published in late 1880 in Bucharest and tended to place the “national feelings” over the Orthodox faith. It allowed the publishers of this newspaper to refer to the Albanian Moslems as the “other part of the nation”, which had not forgotten its national traditions.⁶¹ This group of Albanian

⁵⁹ *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar* [History of the Albanian People], pg. 101-102.

⁶⁰ R. Qosja, *Prej tipologjisë deri te periodizimi* [From typology to periodization], (Prishtinë, 1979), pg.151.

⁶¹ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg. 304.

patriots was more benevolent towards the Ottoman Empire and tended to view the political future of the Albanian temporarily inside the Empire. They were also in contact with Albanian intellectuals in Istanbul, primarily Naim and Sami Frashëri. For financial and sometimes political reasons, the Istanbul based intellectuals used to publish their works in Bucharest. The publication of these books was done using the Latin “Istanbul” alphabet through the contribution of associations such as “Drita” [Light] (1884) and “Dituria” [Knowledge] (1885). The “Bucharest” Diaspora founded the first Albanian printing house, which published works by Moslem and Orthodox Albanian intellectuals from Istanbul. It also played an important role in smuggling Albanian books into the Albanian territories. From 1888 and up until Albanian independence in 1912, the Albanians of Bucharest published many newspapers, such as “Shqipëria” [Albania] (1897), “Ylli i Shqipërisë” [Star of Albania] (1898), “Përlindja Shqiptare” [Albanian Renaissance] (1909), “Atdheu” [Fatherland] (1912). From a literary point of view, the Bucharest Albanian writers were much influenced by Romanian literature and through it by French and German ones, and created Symbolist and Parnassian inspired works, which marked a departure from the more spread Romanticist literature of the other Albanian communities.⁶²

But the “Bucharest” Diaspora was not homogenous in its social composition and ideas. The rich Albanian merchants were pro-Greek in their opinions, and, thus, opted for a closer collaboration with Greece. This group believed that Albanians and Greeks derived from “Pellazgs”, that there were linguistic affinity between Albanian and Greek and that Greece could serve as a better support for the Albanian cause.

Another important Albanian Diaspora was that of Cairo. Among the main figures of this Diaspora were Thimi Mitko (1820-1890), who in 1878 published a folkloric collection with the title “The Albanian Bee”, Filip Shiroka (1859-1935), Andon Zako Cajupi (1866-1930), Loni Logori, Spiro Dine, etc. The peculiarity of this Diaspora was the collection of folklore and in this it was similar to the Italo-Albanians. As in Romania, this Diaspora included rich merchants, who supported Albanian newspapers in favor of a Greek-Albanian union, and in the context of the Macedonian question in early twentieth century, it was seen in an anti-Slav function. From their side, the Albanian intellectuals who had already rejected Hellenism as the only cultural denominator available for the Orthodox, tried to depict a united Albanian “nation”, including Moslems and Orthodox alike. For this purpose they put forth the image of Moslem Albanians as not “fanatic believers” who moreover had preserved

⁶² R. Qosja, *Prej tipologjisë deri te periodizimi*, pg. 154; 156.

their “nationality”. Like Sami Frashëri, as we will see in the chapter on him, here it was the superficiality of Islam which became an argument to convince the Orthodox Albanians not to view their Moslem co-nationals inimically.

The Albanian Diaspora of Sofia, in Bulgaria, was another pole of nationalist activities. Here we have a larger participation of Moslem Albanians with their most important figures being Shahin Kolonja (1865-1919), Dervish Hima (1872-1928), Lumo Skendo (1880-1949), and the Albanian Orthodox Kristo Luarasi (1875-1934), the owner of the most famous Albanian Printing House “Mbrothësia” [Progress], which published the most important “Drita” [Light], newspaper (1901-1908) edited by Shahin Kolonja. This Printing House published various Albanian newspapers also from other Albanian Diaspora, such as that of Cairo, and gave birth to the Albanian short prose and to translations into Albanian of famous authors of world literature.⁶³ The Albanians of Sofia were in close ties with those of Istanbul and this is seen also in the image of the Albanian nation. The Albanians were the descendents of the “Pellazgs”, inhabiting the Balkans much before the arrival of the Greeks, who in a later date were mixed with some of the “Pellazgs”. The core of the “Pellazgs” remained in the Albanian inhabited territories. In relation to Albanian Orthodox they were firstly “Albanians” and then Orthodox, and if they had taken part in the Greek Revolution (1821), they did so out of the feeling of a common religion, but not as their co-nationals. This clear division of religion versus nationality was in function to a common project for the future Albanian nation-state, where Albanians of all religious creeds would live together.

The Albanian Diaspora of the USA was a newer community compared to the previous ones. The Albanians of the New World, mostly Orthodox emigrants from the Southern Albanian lands, started to organize themselves in the early twentieth century. They founded some associations and opened their newspapers, the most well known was “Kombi” [The Nation], and the still existing “Dielli” [The Sun]. The most renowned figures of this community were, among others, Sotir Peci (1873-1932), the founder of “Kombi”, Faik Konitza (1875-1942), the director of “Dielli”, whom we will deal in the last chapter, Fan S. Noli (1882-1942), the first Head of the Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church and a short-lived prime minister in independent Albania in the 1920s. As in other Albanian communities in Romania and Egypt, the US based Albanian Diaspora had to come to terms with the much richer and better organized Greek networks of cultural, social solidarity associations, and above all with the Greek Orthodox Church. Under the example of the other

⁶³ R. Qosja, *Prej tipologjisë deri te periodizimi*, pg.166.

Balkan people, which had “nationalized” their respective churches during the nineteenth century, by introducing into their services the vernaculars, and detached them from the ecumenical umbrella of the Patriarchate of Istanbul, the Orthodox Albanians resolved to undertake the same initiative. The creation of an autocephalous Albanian church was deemed as a measure against the Greek “denationalizing” cultural influences over the Albanian Orthodox emigrants, as the preaching language would be Albanian in place of Greek. This move was intended to have wider repercussions. A further boost for creating an Albanian Orthodox “identity” came from the decision of the Sublime Porte in 1905 to recognize the Orthodox Aromanians as a distinct community. The creation of the Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church in spring 1908 in Boston was preceded by debates among Albanian intellectuals over the fate of the Orthodox and Moslem Albanian communities, whose religious institutions did not use the Albanian language and, according to Albanian intellectuals, were a hindrance to their “nationalization”.

3.3. Romanticism

In South-Eastern Europe, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Romanticism marked the beginning of the new ‘national’ literatures. More than a simple literary trend, Romanticism in South-Eastern Europe stirred a passion for ‘national’ history and folklore. Consequently, Romanticism had an important role in the construction of literary cultures, literary languages, and studies on popular cultural heritage, and finally the rehearsal of the popular culture at the level of high culture. Most of the Balkan national figures were at the same time the first writers of their ‘national’ literatures, the first teachers of their nation, laying the foundations of their alphabets and literary languages, and of the ‘national’ schools.⁶⁴ The Romantic emotions of the literary works were permeated also by the idea of

⁶⁴ For more see E. Çabej, “Romantizmi ne Europe lindore e juglindore dhe ne literaturën shqipe” [Romanticism in the Eastern and South-Eastern Europe and in the Albanian literature], in *Shqiptaret midis Perendimit dhe Lindjes* [Albanians between West and East], (Tiranë, 1994), pg. 69-113. See also Stavro Skendi “The emergence of the Modern Balkan literary languages-A comparative approach”, in *Balkan Cultural Studies*, (New York, 1980), pg. 3-22.

‘national’ freedom. The arrival of Romanticism in the Balkans coincided also with the time of the National Movements among the Balkan nations, whose central goal was to detach themselves from the Ottoman Empire, to individualize the ‘national’ characteristics of the nations, and endow the respective peoples of the region with their own national states. The most natural idea to the Balkan Romantic writers was that people should have a unique national character and that national states should be the embodiment of such a condition.

Among Albanians Romantic literature was firstly developed by the Albanians of Italy, whose main figure was, the already mentioned, Jeronim De Rada (1814-1903). In 1836 he published his first collection of verse, in Italian and Albanian, under the title “Poesie albanesi del secolo XV. Canti di Milosao, figlio del despota di Scutari” [Albanian poetries of XV century. Songs of Milosao, the son of the despot of Scutari]. Another important work of De Rada was “Rapsodie d’un poema Albanese” [Rhapsodies of an Albanian poem], published in 1866, while in 1848 he had already published the first Albanian newspaper “Albanese d’Italia” [The Albanians of Italy]. In 1895 and 1897, De Rada was the initiator of the two congresses of Italo-Albanians in Calabria, whose main task was to define a national alphabet for the Albanian language. De Rada’s Romanticism was characterized by a) his reference to the Golden Age of the Middle Ages, the Albanian ‘national hero’ Gjergj Kastrioti Skenderbej, the longing for the beloved motherland, i.e. the distance in time and space and b) by the collection of poems. In short, De Rada’s literary work was much influenced by the Italian Romanticism of the nineteenth century, with its passion for gaining freedom and independence of the Italian lands, but also by a Herderian inspiration with regard to the collection of the popular songs, as the source of the ‘national’ spirit.

In the Ottoman Empire the influence of Romanticism came more from French influences. The French revolution brought there the idea of freedom, of the nation as the source of the political sovereignty. The *Tanzimat* reforms greatly influenced the Albanians in the Ottoman administration. Amongst those, Naim Frasheri (1846-1900), Sami Frasheri’s brother, was another important figure of Albanian Romanticism. Among other works, he wrote “Baqeti e Bujqesi [Cattle and Crops] in 1886, “The true desire of the Albanians”, written in Greek and published in 1886, “Histori e Skenderbeut” [History of Skenderbej] in 1898, “Tehajlyat [The Dream] written in Persian in 1885, “O Eros” [O Love] written in Greek, “Gjuha jone [Our language], “Ti Shqiperi me jep nder” [You Albania, you give me honor]. Through his work Naim Frasheri wanted to a) to revive the ‘national awareness’ of his people, b) to create an alphabet for the ‘national’ language, and c) to cultivate a written language, which would be an instrument for the cultivation of a ‘national’ culture. Naim was

influenced also by Greek-Roman classicism. He translated Homer's "Iliad" and his verses "Cattle and Crops" was clearly influenced by Virgil's "Bucolics". His religious devotion and pantheism, his contemplative poetry influenced by Persian culture, his pessimism and idea of death that haunt him in some poems, make his literary works a combination of influences, going from the classicism of ancient times, of Oriental culture as well as European Romanticism.⁶⁵

The influence of Romanticism should not be taken only as the influence of a literary stream. It was a "way of life that derived from the disrupted harmony of the world".⁶⁶ The need to return to a splendid past had to do precisely with the feeling of insecurity in the present. The past 'Golden Ages' were set in contrast to the gloomy present. Romanticism fostered also a historicist vision of the world, where the connection of the previous older communities, i.e. as genealogical 'national' continuity became very important. This interest in the past of a designated community led to the discovery of the folk, of the common people, of those standing apart and living in remote places uncontaminated by the degrading effects of modernity. These common people were depicted as the embodiment of noble values and made possible the construct of the "noble savage".⁶⁷

The interest in the community and the feeling of belonging and identification occurred at a time heavily afflicted by political, social and economic conflicts, e.g. 1848 revolutions, the Eastern Crisis (1875-1878), the Macedonian question (1896-1903), etc. It was a period when religious dogmas were seriously challenged by a more rationalist vision of the world and the concept of "nation", a community where the individual could be free, implied a sovereign body with political rights, and not a mere subject to a divine rule. This kind of community could provide for the lost security as it could guarantee the continuity from the historical roots of the nation to a promising future. It was not by chance that during Romanticism the evolutionary normative description of the history of humanity followed the 'Golden Age' of the past, the misery of the present, and the bright future, the 'Rebirth'. The Romantic emotionally loaded 'Golden Age' was combined by Albanian intellectuals with efforts to rationalize and diffuse knowledge, by standardizing the language, and promoting literacy and the 'enlightenment' of the masses.

⁶⁵ E. Gjikaj, "Konteksti ne marrëdhëniet letërsi shqiptare-letërsi perse" [The context in the relations Albanian literature-Persian literature], *Revista Perla*, nr.1, (Tiranë, 2007).

⁶⁶ M. Hroch, "National Romanticism", in *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and South-East Europe (1770-1945)*, Balazs Trencsenyi and Michal Kopecek (eds), (Budapest, New York 2007), pg. 5.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, pg. 6.

3.4. The Albanian alphabet

One of the great challenges facing Albanian intellectuals in the nineteenth century was to find a proper alphabet for the Albanian written language. Until the early nineteenth century the Albanian language was not a written language. The literate Albanian speaking people used different scripts, according to the religious and cultural influences. In the north, the Catholic Albanians used the Latin alphabet. In the south, the Orthodox Albanians used the Greek alphabet and language, while Moslems used Arabic orthography of Ottoman-Turkish, which was also the official language of the Ottoman Empire.

The first initiatives to write down the Albanian language were undertaken by the protestant mission of the *British and Foreign Bible Society*. In the first decades of the nineteenth century this mission entered into contact with some learned Albanians to translate the Gospel into the vernacular. The main aim was to render the Holy Scriptures accessible to the common people. The same initiatives were also undertaken for the other Balkan people, such as the Serbs and Greeks. At first, the protestant missionaries singled out the Albanian language as a separate one among other Balkan idioms and suggested writing it with Greek letters, as this alphabet was widely used by the literate Albanians in the south, Orthodox and Moslems alike.⁶⁸ The first translations in Albanian, but with Greek letters, were completed by the end of the 1820s. The initial translations had the merit to show to learned Albanians that their language could be written and to draw their attention to find the most suitable alphabet for it. The works of the protestant mission would gain further impetus at the end of 1860s and early 1870s when the *Bible Society* translated into Albanian the New Testament and published it in Istanbul. The translator was Konstandin Kristoforidhi (1827-1895) and he used two versions: the Southern Tosk Albanian dialect, with Greek letters and the Northern Geg Albanian dialect with Latin letters.

The fact that these publications were done in the Ottoman capital shows that the Sublime Porte was not indifferent to this affair. Depending on the political situations, mostly

⁶⁸ S. Skendi, "The History of the Albanian Alphabet: A Case of Complex Cultural and Political Development", in *Balkan Cultural Studies*, (New York, 1980), pg. 214. N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg. 180-181. F. Trix, "The Stamboul Alphabet of Shemseddin Sami Bey: Precursor to Turkish Script Reform", in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 31 (1999), pg. 255. *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar* [History of the Albanian People], vol.II, pg. 129.

to hold back the advance of Hellenism among Southern Albanians, the Ottoman government gave its consent to the activities to agree an Albanian alphabet. An Albanian alphabet different from the Greek one would mean a barrier to the Greek cultural influences in this part of the Empire. During the 1860s and 1870s, Albanian intellectuals and Ottoman employees of Albanian origin gathered several times in Istanbul to discuss the question. It was mostly Albanian Moslems, and a small number of Christians, who participated in these activities. The choice was between the use of Latin, Greek, and Arab letters, or the devising of a specific alphabet for the Albanian language.⁶⁹ Many versions were debated. The secularized Moslem Ottoman high employee Ismail Qemali joined the Catholic Ottoman employee Pashko Vasa for the adoption of the Latin alphabet, as the most appropriate and practical to imprint. While the Orthodox Jani Vreto, one of the major Albanian activists in a latter day for the promotion of the Albanian language, defended the Greek alphabet. As for the Arab alphabet we have in the late eighteenth and early decades of the nineteenth century, popular literary verses written with Arab letters, and in the end of the 1860s, we have the publication of a primer for Albanian in Arabic.⁷⁰

Beyond cultural and religious influences, identified with Latin alphabet for the Catholics, and the Greek one for the Orthodox, the preferences for a specific Albanian alphabet had political grounds too. The adoption of a Latin alphabet would mean a further confirmation of the European ‘character’ of the Albanian people and a barrier to the expansion of the Hellenism. This option attracted also some Albanian Moslem activists from the south, as we will see in the following paragraphs. On their part, the proponents of the Greek alphabet saw the Albanians and Greeks, sharing common ancient roots derived from their common Pellazg ancestors.

Although tolerating these activities, the Ottoman government tried to control them and it did not view with a favorable eye Moslem Albanians adopting a Latin script, different from the Arab one in use by the other Moslem people of the Empire. This was considered as a harmful influence from the Christian West and could turn a cultural question, the spread of literacy among people in their vernacular, into a political problem and fuel the growth of autonomist tendencies among a Moslem population.

A further boost to these activities came in the aftermath of the Congress of Berlin (1878). An Albanian “Society for the Printing of Albanian Letters” (1879) was created to

⁶⁹ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg. 223-224. Also *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar* [History of the Albanian People], pg. 211.

⁷⁰ S. Skendi, “The History of the Albanian Alphabet”, pg.214-215.

define a distinct Albanian alphabet and to fix it for publications in the Albanian language. It numbered 28 members, comprising 10 Moslems, 4 Catholics and 14 Orthodox. From the Moslems there were members of the big landowning Albanian families, such as Mehmed Ali Vrioni, Ibrahim Dino, Ferit Vlora, but also learned Albanians such as the leader of the League of Prizren Abdyl Frasheri and his brother Sami. The Society was headed by Sami.⁷¹ Most of the members of the society, namely Moslems and Orthodox, came from the vilayet of Janina. The basis of the program of the “Society for Printing Albanian Letters” stood for the principle that “all enlightened nations have been...civilized by writings in their own language”.⁷²

The Society accepted in 1879 the alphabet devised by Shemseddin Sami Frasheri, and it was later called also the “Istanbul alphabet”. The “Istanbul alphabet” was a specific alphabet, based upon Latin letters mixed with some Greek, Cyrillic and specific letters, diacritic and modified Latin and Cyrillic, created by Sami. Sami followed the principle of one letter for each sound. In the multi-ethnic setting of the Ottoman Empire, a distinct alphabet would mean also a distinct Albanian “nation”, not to be confused either with the Greeks, or with the Slavs. The Ottoman census, in the late quarter of the nineteenth century, despite the traditional religious categories for classifying peoples of the Empire, referred also to the existence of particular alphabets as an indication for communities using them, such as Greeks, Armenians, Bulgarians, Jews, non-Moslem gypsies, etc.⁷³ The favoring of the Latin alphabet revealed also the concern of the Albanian nationally-minded intellectuals to present Albanians of all religious creeds not only as a single “nation”, but, all the more, as an “European” one.

In 1899, an Albanian literary society “Bashkimi” [Union] was formed in Shkodër by the Franciscan Monsignor Preng Doçi, abbot of Mirdita [a Northern Catholic region]. “Bashkimi” society created its own alphabet that was totally based on Latin characters, assigning digraph [dh, th, ch, etc.] letters for special Albanian sounds. “Bashkimi” alphabet remained limited to Shkodër.⁷⁴ Another group of Catholic clergy of Shkodër, headed by the Jesuit Dom Ndre Mjeda, founded in 1902 a new literary society “Agimi” [The Dawn]. They produced their own “Agimi” alphabet. It was entirely based upon Latin letters too, but in contrast to “Bashkimi”, it used one letter for one sound, making use of diacritical marks for

⁷¹ Ibid, pg. 119. *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar* [History of the Albanian People], pg. 211-212.

⁷² As cited by S. Skendi in “The Albanian National Awakening”, pg. 120.

⁷³ F. Trix, “The Stamboul Alphabet”, pg.262.

⁷⁴ S. Skëndi, “The history of Albanian alphabet”, pg. 218.

sounds particular to Albanian [ğ, ñ]. It was inevitable for both Catholic societies to enter in competition to gain the supremacy.

The problem of the Albanian alphabet could not stay out of the Austro-Hungarian political intention to bring about an accord among Albanian intellectuals. Vienna saw the alphabet question as instrumental for the promoting and consolidating of an Albanian ‘national’ awareness, which in turn could better serve its aims to forge an Albanian union under its influence. The Italians, on their side, did not stand with crossed hands in this matter. They tried to use the Italo-Albanian community (see in the chapter on Vasa) in the years 1895 and 1897 held two linguistic congresses, whose major aim was to create an Albanian unified alphabet. However, notwithstanding a certain interest shown by the Catholics of Shkodër, the Latin alphabet they produced was ignored by both Moslem and Orthodox Albanians.⁷⁵

The Young Turks revolution in July 1908, and the proclamation of the Constitution, saw a lifting of the official ban on Albanian “linguistic activities”. The issue of the Albanian alphabet and language were again publicly debated. In November 1908, the Congress of Monastir [present today Macedonia] organized by the Albanian patriotic society “Bashkimi” of the town, invited delegates from the most important Albanian societies operating in the Balkans. Its major objective was to choose a single alphabet for the Albanian language. At the end, and due to divergences, it decided on a compromise solution to this question. It resolved to use two alphabets: that of “Istanbul”, because of it being used for long, and a new Latin alphabet, almost identical with “Bashkimi” alphabet. The Albanian schools should teach both to their students.⁷⁶ After 1912, the year of Albanian independence, the Latin alphabet prevailed, leaving “Istanbul” alphabet to fade away and to gradually fall into disuse. The Latin alphabet served also as a symbol of the “Europeaness” of the Albanian people having severed its ties with the oriental Ottoman Empire.

After its triumph in July 1908, the Young Turks gradually shifted in favour of advocating a strongly centralist state. Thus the Young Turks tried to gain control over Albanian activities and to dominate them. The Young Turks tried to promote and impose an Arab alphabet on the written Albanian language, as a means to keep the Albanians attached to other Moslem populations of the Empire who used the same script. They used the local Moslem clergy to invoke the religious bonds between Albanians and the Ottoman state, and thus preventing harmful “foreign influences” on Ottoman unity, such as the Latin alphabet.

⁷⁵ Ibid. pg. 220.

⁷⁶ *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar* [History of the Albanian People], pg. 391-396.

The confrontations on the question of the Albanian alphabet had also its own impact over the way the Albanian “nation” was formulated by the contending camps, the supporters of the Latin and Arab letters. As Nathalie Clayer has argued, the Albanian identity could well be intertwined with an “Ottoman”, “Moslem”, or a “European” allegiance, an identity without forcibly being separatist.

For the supporters of the Latin alphabet the Albanian nation was a European one. Such a formulation was to create an Albanian-Turk contrast, as the epitome of the clash between progress-backwardness, the latter identified in the supporters of the Arab letters. Nevertheless, the “Latin group” did not reject Ottomanism as an expression of loyalty to the Ottoman state and as a means to defend the Albanian inhabited territories from the Balkan neighbors. For them the Albanian “nation” was a part of the Ottoman “nation”, but “being Albanian” had a priority in the hierarchy of their collective identities. As we will see it also in the chapter on Ismail Qemali, those in favor of Latin letters were inclined to distinguish between “Ottoman” and “Turk”, in the sense of a “positive” loyalty to the Ottoman Empire, seen as an association of people, versus the centralist policies of Young Turks taken as a “Turkifying” course.⁷⁷

On their part, the supporters of the Arab alphabet, in their discourse on the Albanian “nation”, stressed its Moslem character and were not keen to mention the differences between “Ottoman” and “Turk”. These activists stressed the long common history that bound the Albanians to the Ottoman Empire. For them “religion” and “nation” were of equal value, as they preserved the unity of the Ottoman Empire against “foreign interferences”, whose aim was in the first place the adoption of Latin letters.⁷⁸

In Albanian historiography the question of the Albanian alphabet has been seen as “a clear signal” of the “need” that Albanian patriots felt to make known the Albanian nation and to bring it as close as possible to the various Albanian religious communities. The cultural divergences among Albanian activists are treated as a consequence of the dividing policy of the Sublime Porte to hinder the Albanian National Movement. The overall position of the Ottoman government is seen as hostile as those of the Balkan neighbors.⁷⁹ It assigns a secondary role to the initial and important contribution of the protestant mission, in order to highlight the “more important” role of the Albanians in this question. For Albanian historiography, the translations of the Holy Scriptures were part of a ‘long-term strategy’ of

⁷⁷ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg. 652.

⁷⁸ Ibid, pg 643.

⁷⁹ *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar* [History of the Albanian People], pg.127.

the Albanian patriots to create the Autocephalous Albanian Orthodox Church and to halt the expansion of Hellenism in the Albanian lands.⁸⁰ In fact, the adoption of the Albanian Latin alphabet was not an obvious choice. It resulted from the interplay of a series of factors, where the Ottoman context was quite relevant. The Albanian alphabet was a construct with ideological and symbolic connotations. It was a means to propagate and create the Albanian ‘imagined community’, but it was also an indication of the existence of a ‘unique’ Albanian nation. The denial by Albanian historiography of the Ottoman context has forcibly put the Albanian National Movement on a one-way road, inevitably leading to the proclamation of impence in 1912, and depicts the Albanian nation-building process as though it progressed in a vacuum, devoid of the complexity of factors influencing it.

With regard to the Young Turk period, Albanian official historiography tends to deny the commonality of Albanian-Young Turks interests in preserving the Ottoman state. Instead, it sees in the overthrow of the regime of the Sultan Abdylhamit II only ‘a tactical compromise’ between Albanians and Young Turks.⁸¹ The Albanian National Movement is presented as a monolithic and well coordinated movement with a clear political schedule, i.e. first autonomy and then independence. In fact, not only the Albanian patriots, but even the Young Turk committees had loose connections between them and acted more on the spur of local necessities and various circumstances, rather than responding to a nationally concerted movement. The only division that is accepted is that of the “radicals”, intended as “progressive Albanians”, the new intelligentsia with clear national independence goals, and the “moderate ones”, drawn from Ottoman employees and members of the landowning “class” that was hesitating to choose between the “national” interests and its owns.⁸²

3.5. Different faiths and different formulations of the “nation”

The Albanian nation was a notion that was shaped also according to its divergent religious and cultural affiliations. The symbiosis between the Albanian nation and Islam will be dwelt with in the chapter on Shemseddin Sami Frashëri. Here we present the Catholic and Orthodox discourses to show that the Albanian nation was not a homogenous notion. The Albanian Catholics of Northern Albania had their own specificities. They were conditioned

⁸⁰ Ibid, pg.129.

⁸¹ Ibid., pg. 372.

⁸² *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar* [History of the Albanian People], pg. 378-379.

by religion, by the external influences exerted by the European powers and the feeling of belonging to a certain region. This region, mostly mountainous part of Northern Albanian territories implied a certain geo-policy with regard to their Balkan neighbors, such as Orthodox Montenegro, Serbia, and cultural relations with the Catholic Croat and Dalmatian populations. The centre was the town of Shkodër [north of present day Albania], a cultural Catholic and Moslem center, and the only entirely Catholic Albanian mountainous region of Mirdita [north of present day Albania]. Shkodër was the seat of the Albanian Catholic clergy with its institutions, such as churches, seminaries and schools. The Catholic clergy of Shkodër had distinguished itself since the second half of the nineteenth century, and mostly in last quarter of it, in spreading the Albanian language through various religious and secular publications. The town had Franciscan and Jesuit missions, which by the end of the nineteenth century became part of the political projects of Vienna and Rome over these Balkan territories. We have already mentioned above the role of the Albanian Catholics with regard to the Albanian Latin alphabet.

Under the guidance of its clan chiefs, Mirdita was a semi-autonomous region enjoying from the eighteenth century the *Kultusprotektorat* of the European Catholic powers, such as France and Austro-Hungary, and the authority of the Sublime Porte over it was basically nominal. Depending also on the circumstances and political intricacies, the Abbot of Mirdita Preng Doçi (1846-1917) and the chieftain family of Bib Doda became by the end of the century a factor to reckon with, either by the Sublime Porte to fight the Orthodox Montenegrins, or conversely by the Montenegrins to challenge the Moslem authority of the Sultan.

This cultural and political protagonistic position, the ties of this region, through Catholicism with the West, would be translated into a certain regionalism in the discourse over the Albanian “nation”. Imagining their community as the most ‘emancipated’ part of the Albanian “nation”, the Albanian Catholics ascribed to themselves a leading role in guiding the whole “nation” in the way of progress. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the Catholics published religious works, but also grammar books for the Albanian language and dictionaries in the vernacular.⁸³ In the first period the Catholic intellectuals involved in nationalist activities came from the ranks of the clergy. Preng Doçi, Ndoc Nikaj (1864-1951), Ndre Mjeda (1866-1937), Gjergj Fishta (1871-1940), Shtjefen Gjeçovi (1874-1929), contributed to Albanian linguistics, publishing periodicals, but also in collecting folklore.

⁸³ A. Puto, “Evoluimi semantik dhe përfesa ideologjike e fjalës “komb” [The semantic evolution and ideological tenet of the term “nation”], in *Përpyjekja*, v.XI, nr.21, (Tiranë, 2005), pg. 80-90.

This last aspect indicates an intellectual affinity with the Italo-Albanians and the European influence of the Ossian epopee, which was missing in the Albanian intellectuals operating in the Ottoman Empire. Their projects went from confederative union among Albanians of different faiths, with the Catholics holding the lead to a future pan-Albanian state, to a more inclusive Albanian nation. If the first was linked to the role of the Catholic clergy, the second was also an expression of a new generation of laic intellectuals from the Catholic community of Shkodra which appeared on the public scene.⁸⁴ Filip Shiroka (1859-1935), Luigj Gurakuqi (1879-1925), Hilë Mosi (1885-1933) were young people who had studied in Italy and Austria and had close ties with the Italo-Albanians. Their demands were for an autonomous Albanian principality including all four Ottoman Balkan vilayets.

Albanian official historiography is not of much help here, as religious issues have always been a frustrating topic for it. It is simply judged as a situation pertaining to the common people, and on which the Albanian patriots all shared the same opinion: religion was damaging to the national union and they unanimously held it as irrelevant for creating a “national united community” as they had already identified the language as the most important element that bound Albanians together.⁸⁵

The articulation of the Albanian “nation” among the Orthodox Albanians was shaped under the strong cultural influence of Hellenism and of the situation in the Ottoman Empire, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The advocates of Hellenism advanced projects to include the future Albanian state into a kind of joint federation with the Greek state, in case of the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans. This option was not considered by merely Orthodox Albanians, but also by Moslem Albanians of the vilayet of Janina, who went through the Greek gymnasium “Zosimea” and who saw in an eventual Greek-Albanian union the solution to prevent the Slav advance in the region. By means of a common religion, and the supremacy of the Greek Patriarchate, as the ecumenical authority over the Orthodox in the Ottoman Empire, Hellenism had its effect on the efforts of Albanian intellectuals to find an alphabet for the written language. We have seen already the debates on the Greek letters for the Albanian alphabet.

The advocates of Greek characters for the Albanian language were mainly the Albanian Orthodox from the vilayet of Janina, and some members of the old Albanian Diaspora in Greece. Initially, some of them, Thimi Mitko (1820-1890), Jani Vreto (1822-1900), Anastas Kullurioti (1820-1887) and Anastas Byku espoused the thesis of the common

⁸⁴ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg. 526.

⁸⁵ *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar* [History of the Albanian People], pg. 27-28.

“Pellazg” origin for the Albanians and Greeks, offering thus a ‘historic’ argument to a possible Greek-Albanian union. For political and cultural reasons, i.e. the existence of the Greek state and the ancient Hellenic civilization, they recognized Greece and the Greek language as superior compared to Albanians. However, the union with Greece was seen also as a means for Albanians to gain their sovereignty within a Greek-Albanian federation. On the other hand, the preferences for the old Hellenic and Greek language implied recognition of the fact that the Albanian language was a “barbaric” and “not elaborated” one, which had in the Greek language an emancipatory reference. Under the example of the Albanians of Italy, some Orthodox Albanians engaged in the collection of the Albanian folklore, such as Thimi Mitko, Anastas Kullurioti, Spiro Dine (1846-1922), etc.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the town of Korça [southeast of present day Albania] became an important center for the activities of Orthodox Albanians in the propagation of the Albanian written language. The town saw the opening of the first schools in Albanian language (1887) and it played a part in replenishing an Albanian Diaspora, mainly in Romania, with a growing flow of emigrants. However, by the turn of the nineteenth-twentieth centuries the Albanian identity and the spread of the Albanian language in the town was still a marginal phenomenon. Such an identity was not attractive to the majority of the population, but only to a limited number of ‘enlightened’ Albanian emigrants who had frequent connections with their birthplace.

At the beginning of the 1880s, an American, and later an English protestant mission, took initiatives to spread the Albanian written language in the Southern Albanian lands, including Korça as well. Its distribution was carried out through publishing in Albanian religious and school texts and opening schools where Albanian was used. The Qiriazi family, the two brothers Gjerasim (1861-1894), Gjergj (1868-1912), and the two sisters Parashqevi (1880-1970) and Sevasti (1871-1949), were promoters of these activities. With the support of the Albanians of Istanbul, such as the Frashëri brothers, Naim and Sami, the Albanian Protestants published their books in the Albanian language using the “Istanbul alphabet”, thus turning from writing Albanian with Greek letters to Latin ones. Members from this tiny community, such as Grigor Cilka, Kristo Dako and Fillomena Bonati took part in the Congress of Manastir (1908), which decided in favour of the two Albanian Latin alphabets.

4. European Powers and the Albanian question. Austro-Hungary and Italy

During the last quarter of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Albania was part of the Balkan politics of European Powers, and in particular of Austro-Hungary and Italy. But, Albanians were of interest also to the Greeks, Serbs, Montenegrins, and Romanians. For Vienna and Rome, the Albanian inhabited lands were targets for their expansionism into the Balkans. In order not to trip each other up in their race for supremacy the Austrians and Italians formally abided by the preservation of the *status quo* of the Ottoman rule in the Balkans. From 1882 onwards, Italy together with Austro-Hungary and Germany stipulated an accord to safeguard the *status quo* in the Balkans.⁸⁶ But, on the other hand, the gloomy perspective of the Empire made both European powers develop their antagonism underground.

From the end of nineteenth century, Austro-Hungary increased its diplomatic representatives, aiming at, in first place, the “cultural development and the cultivation of the national feelings” among Albanians. As mentioned above, Vienna became involved in the efforts of the Albanian nationalists to codify the Albanian Latin alphabet, in the publication of Albanian books. The ultimate goal was to secure “a national union of Albanians”, including as much Albanian-inhabited land as possible, under Austrian influence. In 1897 Austro-Hungary extended its sponsorship of the network of Albanian schools, including also those regions with Moslem populations. If Vienna would make use of its *Kultusprotektorat* over the Catholic Albanians of the north, Rome had another instrument in its hands that would strengthen its influence over the Albanians: the old Italo-Albanian community in the south of the Apennines and Sicily, which has been very active since early nineteenth century.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Austrian diplomatic presence covered the most important Albanian inhabited towns, including Shkodër, Durrës [west], Vlorë [south], Janina, Monastir, Skopje [Macedonia], Prizren [Kosovo], and Mitrovicë [Kosovo]. It should be noted here that the Austrian consuls were very rooted in the local societies as they often mastered the local language. They had close connections with the most influential local actors, such as the bejs, and educated people of the Ottoman administration. The Austrians were active in the publication and distribution of Albanian books. They were also involved in cultivating contacts with the Albanian Northern highlanders as they saw in them an efficient armed force to bar the Montenegrins and Serbs.

⁸⁶ S. Skëndi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, pg. 240.

A number of important newspaper of the first decade of the twentieth century saw the light due to Austrian subventions, including “Albania” (1897-1909) published by Faik Konitza in Brussels and London, “Kombi” [Nation] published in Boston by Sotir Peci, and “Drita” [Light] (1902-1908) published in Sofia by Shahin Kolonja. These periodicals propagated the “cultural development of Albanians”, the “unification of the Albanian alphabet”, the “opening of the Albanian schools”, and the “development of an Albanian literature” and in line with Austrian policy, the preservation of the *status quo* in the Balkans. The books financed by Austro-Hungary stressed the existence of a “united” Albanian nation that transcended religious and regional divisions. A telling example is the “Albania” of Faik Konitza, whom we will examine later, which published articles by Moslem, Catholic and Orthodox Albanian authors alike, from the north and from the south, and from the diaspora.⁸⁷

Rome adopted a similar strategy. It used the Albanian Catholic clergy to promote Italian influence. The newspapers under Italian influence presented Italy as a “natural ally” for the Albanians. These influences would divide the Catholic Albanian clergy into two factions, those supporting the Italian action and the rival group backing Austrian policy. The same dividing lines were noted also among Albanian activists and intellectuals. An example is the father of the Albanian independence in 1912, Ismail Qemali, who held friendly contacts with Italian and Greek political circles. He thought Italy offered better chances for the “raising of a national consciousness”, for the “Albanian schools” and for the “attainment of independence”.⁸⁸ On the other hand, the publicist Faik Konitza regarded Vienna’s support as essential for “national salvation”. In his review he made clear the positive role of Vienna in defense of the Albanian nationality and language. At first, Konitza thought it wiser to concentrate on the “intellectual development” of the Albanian people, the elaboration of a written language, the opening of schools, paving thus the way in the future to an Albanian administrative autonomy under the Sultan, but also under Austrian auspices. The local supporters of each power would try to discredit the rival’s projects on grounds of “threatening” the future of Albania and caring about their own interests.

Such a situation made competition inevitable among Albanian activists striving to gain control over the Albanian movement. The reasons to support either Vienna or Rome involved subventions or the possibilities for personal career, cultural/educational background, i.e. people who have studied in Austria or in Italy, personal rivalries in the local social setting, or even simply political considerations regarding Austrian or Italian Balkan projects.

⁸⁷ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg. 417-419.

⁸⁸ S. Skëndi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, pg. 269.

A sign of this rivalry was also the question of the Albanian Latin alphabet, as mentioned earlier, when Austrians backed “Agimi” alphabet of Ndre Mjeda, while the Italians supported Abbot Preng Doçi’s “Bashkimi”.

The role of the European powers, namely the Conference of the Ambassadors held in London [December 1912- July 1913], was of paramount importance to critical issues related to the survival of the newly born Albanian state, such as those of a) the status of the Albanian lands, after the Ottoman defeat in the Balkan Wars 1912-1913, b) the state organization of these territories, and c) the definition of the borders of the future Albanian state.

With regard to the status, the European ambassadors modified their stance and from the initial autonomous project for the Albanian inhabited lands (December 1912) moved to agree on the complete independence from the Ottoman Empire. In July 1913 Albania was recognized by the European Powers as a neutral and independent principality. This came mostly as a result of the Austro-Hungary and Italy’s persistence and of the situation on the ground. The Ottoman military defeat in the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) interrupted the territorial continuity between the Empire and its former Albanian inhabited lands. The question of the state organization found its solution with the decision to institute an International Control Commission of the European powers, whose duty was to lay the foundations of an Albanian civil administration and judiciary system and acting as the supreme authority in the country for a transitory period, until a monarch would be elected from the European royal houses. After the international commission was installed in Albania, the provisional government led by Ismail Qemali resigned in January 1914. This first Albanian government was issued from the National Assembly of Vlora on November 28, 1912.

The most intricated issue was that of the borders of the future Albanian state, as it involved the opposite interests of European Powers to dominate the post-Ottoman Balkans, but also the rivalries of Balkan states to expand their territories and bar each other from gaining the upper hand in the region. Throughout the period from the last quarter of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, a time that coincided with the Eastern Crisis (1878) and the further deepening of the disintegrating processes inside the Ottoman Empire, and of the weakening of its rule over the Balkans, we do not have a clear and concrete plan of the Albanian patriots as related to the Albanian territorial claims for the future Albanian state. The reasons pertain to two main factors: a) following a Balkan tradition, for the Albanian leaders it was clear that the question of the borders would be decided by the European Powers, and there were their interests which would have the final say on this matter; b) the

four Balkan Ottoman vilayets [provinces], those of Shkodër, Monastir, Kosovo, and Janina, were inhabited by mixed populations. The prevailing opinion among Albanian patriotic circles was that Albanians lived in the majority of the territories of the four Ottoman vilayets. The main demand of the Albanian nationalist intellectuals was to unite into a single administrative unit the Albanian inhabited lands comprised in these four Ottoman vilayets. But, this request was never materialized on the ground. As said above, it was intended as a means to prevent the fragmentation of these ‘Albanian’ lands among the Balkan states.

In its memoranda presented before London Conference in January 1913, the provisional Albanian government asked from the Powers to grant to the Albanian state the following borders: in the north, the actual border with Montenegro, in the north-east, the most part of Kosovo, including the towns of Peja, Mitrovica and Prishtina [present day Kosovo], in the west, the Western part of the Ottoman vilayet of Monastir, including here the towns of Skopje and Monastir [present day Macedonia], in the south, most part of the province of Epirus, up to the town of Preveza [present day Greece]. These territories measured a territorial space almost twice as bigger as the actual Albanian state borders.⁸⁹

The arguing of the Albanian side considered Albanians as the most compact ethnic group in the Balkans, homogenous, and distinct from the other “races” of the region from its particular language, traditions, and character. Following these ‘arguments’, the Albanian delegation claimed that the above borders were the “natural” ones, which should be imposed as a right solution due to ethnic conditions of the Balkans and to ‘the right’ of the Albanians as the ‘first inhabitants’ of the region.

The Greek and Serbian governments presented their arguments in the conference. They asked for a much reduced territorial space for the Albanian state, claiming for themselves the rest of the territories. They based their claims upon the historical rights of their respective people, referring to the medieval Serbian state, or the glorious past of the Hellenic civilization, which should lead the European Powers to grant them territorial compensation after the Ottoman retreat. “The consciousness and will” of the populations in the region, especially the Orthodox ones, were another argument used by the Balkan states to convince the Powers to take decisions in their favor, and not allowing these populations be included into a predominantly Albanian Moslem state.

⁸⁹ A. Puto, *Çështja shqiptare në aktet ndërkombëtare të periudhës së imperializmit* [The Albanian question in the international documents of the imperialist period], (Tirana 1987), pg. 192-193.

In the end, the final definition of the Albanian borders in July 1913 were the result of the compromise struck between the Austro-Hungarian and Italian interests, on one hand, and the interests of the Balkan states, supported by Russia, on the other.

4.1. Balkan countries

Montenegro, Serbia and Greece were among the Balkan countries most interested in the Albanian question. Supported by Russia, Montenegro aimed at a territorial enlargement into the Northern Albanian territories, and in particular to the Northern town of Shkodër. In this sense this small Balkan state had also an anti-Austrian role to play, which from time to time was encouraged by Italy. For this reason Austrians responded by materially helping the Albanian Northern populations and trying to cultivate their “national feeling” by opening schools in their lands.

Serbia’s principal target in the region was the vilayet of Kosovo, or Old Serbia as it was called by Serbian nationalists. This territory was considered to be the Serbian cultural cradle, and it also hosted Serbian populations. The situation in the vilayet of Kosovo became exacerbate in the early twentieth century at the time of the Macedonian question. Serbia sought to use Kosovo vilayet to secure an outlet to the Adriatic Sea by constructing a highway linking the towns of Mitrovica [north of present day Kosovo], Prizren [south of present day Kosovo], and Shkodër, in the north of the Albanian lands. This plan also ran counter to Austrian interests in the area.

As the Congress of Berlin (1878) left open the question of the common borders between the Ottoman Empire and Greece, mostly centered on the vilayet of Janina, populated by Albanians among others, Athens sought to make use of the Albanian element. By the late nineteenth century some joint Greek-Albanian committees were created on Greek soil, such as the “Corfu Committee” (1883), “Blood-brother Albanians” (1884) and the “Albanian Union” (1900).⁹⁰ These organizations included in their ranks also Greek-Albanians, the

⁹⁰ S. Skëndi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, pg. 303.

Arvanites. For this reason Greek-Albanian political circles were invested in the question of the Albanian alphabet favoring the Greek letters as a means to ease the process of Hellenisation of the Albanian speaking populations. They implied also specific considerations over Albanians as a people lacking “civilization” and “culture” for whom Greek assistance was propagated as necessary.

However, Balkan influences over Albanian nationalism were not confined solely to the realm of politics. It offered a political model to the Albanian nationalist to follow their path towards political independence, i.e, firstly autonomy inside the Empire and then full independence, the nationalization of the Orthodox Churches. However, Balkan nationalism bore noticeable similarities to Albanian nationalism, and exerted other cultural influences, which have been hitherto either dismissed as harmful, or ignored by Albanian official historiography.

Balkan nationalisms, as was also the case for the Albanian one, strongly emphasized the importance of national language and all national Balkan written languages went through similar paths towards their standardization. These languages were all products of the Balkan national movements of the nineteenth century and Balkan national intellectuals undertook this enterprise conceiving the written national language as a means to enlighten their own people and thought of it as one of the most organic constitutive elements of the nation.⁹¹

In almost all cases in the Balkans, the choice fell between two alternatives, i.e. an old language and the spoken vernacular, as in the Greek case, or between an old medieval Church language and the vernacular, as in the cases of Serbia and Bulgaria. The Albanian case represents a kind of mid way, i.e. the choice would fell upon one of the two major dialects, pertaining to two geographical-cultural areas, the north and the south. In this respect the Albanian case is closer to the Bulgarian one, which had to select between the Eastern and Western vernacular. However, the Albanian case is unique as the linguistic selection had also to choose an alphabet from among Latin, Greek and Arab letters. Many Balkan intellectuals conceived of the shaping of a literary language as a mission pertaining to learned people, and they derived their inspirations for such a task from their stays abroad, mostly in the West, and, as in the case of Bulgaria and Albania, going through Greek secularized schooling system. Greek ancient history and the period of Romanticism in Europe made these national entrepreneurs to think in historicist terms about the history of their own people.

⁹¹ S. Skëndi, “The Emergence of the Modern Balkan Literary Languages- A Comparative Approach”, in *Balkan Cultural Studies*, (New York, 1980), pg.3-4.

Albanian studies have stressed that Albanian nationalist intellectuals chose the Albanian language, as a binding element of an otherwise religiously divided Albanian populations, and put this issue on a plane of a ‘scientific thought’ or on epistemological grounds. They maintain that Albanian intellectual were led by “a scientific thought”, the most advanced of the time, and that the “national language was the first among the fundamental markers of a nation”.⁹²

The main problem with such an approach is that it takes the national language as an innate expression of the ‘national existence’, and finally the ‘nation’ as being intentionally suppressed by the Ottoman policies over centuries. Finally, it reflected also a certain trend in Albanian studies to present it as a very particular case in relation to the other Balkan countries, as if by stressing this ‘particularity’ the Albanian nation would appear as better deserving its own place in history. They do not take the national idea as a project, while adopting either religion, or language and descent were all ‘maneuver tools’ to realize that project, i.e. the nation. It is also true that these ‘tools’ had to be the appropriate means to fit a certain historical and local context. For Albanian intellectuals, the language could provide binding cement among the religiously divided Albanian people. But, on the other hand, they did not discard religion from the ‘national assets’. Religion was a very important cultural component and a strong element of collective identity in the nineteenth century and not only for the Balkan people. Therefore, language, race, origins, should be seen in the context of a search for meaningful criteria to select among the most appropriate ‘raw materials’ to be used for the building up of the nation. Often the concepts of religion, language, and descent were intertwined with each other.

The concepts of “people” and “race” were another tool used by Balkan nationalist intellectuals to forge a nation, and common to their discourses is the sense of “a practical category, ideology, narrative, cognitive schema and a way of thinking, talking and framing claims, and a tendency to naturalize, to essentialize and to emphasize “the tie of blood”.⁹³ The ever growing intensity of the national battles in Europe in the second half of nineteenth century led to a further tendency to differentiate people on “racial” grounds. It was coupled also with the rising influence of the theories of evolution and social Darwinism, which made “people” and “race” closely related notions embodying essential traits. In the Bulgarian case, Stefan Detchev argues the term “race” was used by the late nineteenth and early twentieth

⁹² *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar* [History of the Albanian People], pg.80.

⁹³ S. Detchev, “Who are Bulgarians? “Race”, science and politics in fin-de-siècle Bulgaria”, in *We, the People. Politics of National Peculiarity in Southeastern Europe*, Diana Mishkova (ed), (Budapest, New York, 2008), pg. 240.

century, next to the notions “people” and “nation”, which had identical meanings, following a more general tendency of European discourses. Faik Konitza, the Albanian writer who lived in Western Europe reflected this shift in his writings by using “race” as an indication of sameness and otherness. Among Albanian intellectuals who worked in the Ottoman Empire, Sami Frashëri and his brother Naim Frashëri used it when, by the end of the nineteenth century, they started to envisage a future destiny of the Albanian people outside the Empire, when it became important to distinguish the Moslem Albanians from the Moslem Turks, as two very different “people” who could no longer live under the same roof of the Ottoman “nation”.⁹⁴

In the field of literature we have already spoken before on the importance of Romanticism, but there are cases where the direct influence of Balkan writers on Albanian intellectuals is evident. This is the case of Father Gjergj Fishta (1871-1940), considered the second Albanian national poet, after Naim Frashëri. In 1904 Fishta published his acclaimed epic poetry “Lahuta e Malësisë” [The Lute of the Mountains]. Fishta was influenced by Croat Catholic Andrija Kačić Miosić (1704-1760) and in particular by his “Agreeable Discourse of the Slavic People” (1756). Both writers wrote epic verse inspired by old folk songs and by local environments where still this kind of poetry was alive. If Kačić exalted the deeds of princes, and knights fighting against the Moslem Turks, Fishta echoed the fights of the Albanian national hero Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbej (1405-1468). Nevertheless, as Stavro Skëndi has argued, though the model of Fishta was similar to that of the Croat poet, the differences lay in the contents of their verse. If for Kačić the central theme was the battles that Christian Slavs fought against Moslem Turks, in Fishta’s epic poetry the war was waged by Albanian highlanders against Slavs. Fishta paid attention to the Albanian highlanders not for their religious affiliations, namely Catholic and Moslem, but as a distinct people different from the Slavs and who swore not to surrender their territories to their enemies as stipulated by the Congress of Berlin (1878). Nonetheless, both Fishta and Kačić tried to write in verses the history of their countries highly praising heroes and national events. Their works were appealing to people, who still enjoyed in oral epic poetry, as they were a blend of history with legends.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ In particular, see the books of Sami Frashëri written in 1899 “Albania what it was, what it is and what it will be” and Naim’s “History of Skanderbeg” (1898). For the latter see E. Sulstarova, *Arratisje nga Lindja. Orientalizmi shqiptar nga Naimi te Kadareja* [Fleeing from East. The Albanian orientalism from Naim to Kadare], (Tiranë, 2007), pg. 52-64.

⁹⁵ Ibid, pg. 118.

In general, in the Balkan countries, which did not have a written tradition, epic poems did ‘replace’ history, but at the same time, fitting to the Ossian fashioned European intellectual inclinations of the nineteenth century, they provided ‘useful’ data in favor of the ancientness of respective people. The epic was not only used to incite the pride of the people to their old history, but also to claim an old European and pre-Ottoman culture of these people. As Milica Bakic asserts, epic has a considerable populist appeal and its themes are easily politically appropriated.⁹⁶ Therefore, while in the Serbian epics of the battle of Kosovo (1389) there is a clear religious dimension, the moral supremacy of the Christian Serbs over the Moslem Turks, though the latter were victorious on the battlefield, in Fishta’s “The Lute” the religious affiliations are blurred for the sake of an Albanian “nation” undivided. But, both narratives invoked a kind of historical memory, which explained and legitimated a ‘national’ history with the purpose of political mobilization and devotion to the idea of nation.

Besides these similarities, the “national” identities in the Balkans were articulated in different political and social context. By the end of nineteenth century, Romania, Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and Montenegro, had already embarked upon the way to construct their state institutions, after obtaining either autonomous status or full independence from the Ottoman Empire. In this sense the articulation of the idea of “nation” in these countries was elaborated against the background of other debates on the modernization of the state institutions, agrarian and social reforms.

As we will see in the following chapters, Albanian intellectuals would join their Balkan colleagues in the project to modernize and to secure the survival of their “nations”, while demonstrating that they were able to assimilate the European nation-state model of political organization. The arguments of the “egalitarian, democratic, patriarchal” society, under the form of the “councils of the elders”, the theme about which social strata could better represent the nation were all debates that took place under specific circumstances.⁹⁷ In the Albanian context, by the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, more than the social reforms, these debates had much to do with providing convincing evidences that the Albanian nation existed and deserved the same attention as the other Balkan states, i.e. a political existence in its own, firstly autonomous and then political independence from the Ottoman Empire. In this respect it was also a Balkan project.

⁹⁶ M. Bakic-Hayden, “National Memory as Narrative Memory: The Case of Kosovo”, in *Balkan Identities. Nation and Memory*, Maria Todorova (ed), (London, 2004), pg.31-32.

⁹⁷ Diana Mishkova, “The Uses of Tradition and National Identity in the Balkans”, in “Balkan Identities. Nation and memory”, Maria Todorova (ed.), pg.269-294.

Chapter II

Pashko Vasa: Ottoman governor and Albanian romantic writer

Pashko Vasa (1825-1892) was an important figure of Albanian National Movement of the nineteenth century. His name is closely linked to the political creed of the National Movement that was “the religion of Albanians is Albanianism”. This was a phrase from the poem “Lament for Albania” written by Vasa in 1880 that exhorted Albanians to leave aside religious divisions and to regard each other as brothers. It was the period right after the Congress of Berlin (1878) when unity among all Albanians was considered by Albanian leaders of the time as an element of first-hand importance in resisting the expansionism of the Balkan states.

Pashko Vasa was a member of the “Association for the Printing of Albanian letters”, founded in 1879 in Istanbul whose aim was to publish books in the Albanian language. His own contribution in this field includes the publication of handbooks such as “L’alphabet latin appliqué dans la langue albanaise”, Istanbul (1878) and “Grammaire albanaise à l’usage de ceux qui désirent apprendre cette langue sans l’aide d’un maître”, London (1887). He published several studies on the history of the Albanian people such as “Esquisse historique sur le Monténégro d’après les traditions de l’Albanie”, Istanbul (1872), “La vérité sur l’Albanie et les Albanais”, Paris (1879). In the last book he expounded his views on the Albanian question in the conditions of the Eastern Crisis of the mid 1870s, reaching its height with the Ottomans’ defeat at the hands of the Russians in early 1878, which firstly ended with

the San Stefano Treaty (March 1878), mostly favoring Russia's interest in the area, and then pushed the European Powers to convene the Congress of Berlin (June 1878).

Pashko Vasa published also a series of poems in 1873, written in Italian, with the title "Rose e Spine" [Roses and thorns]. He wrote one of the first novels in Albanian literature, "Bardha e Temalit" [Bardha of Temal] which was published in Paris in 1890. He occupied high rank positions in the Ottoman administration and from 1883 until his death in 1892 he was the Governor General of Lebanon. As an Ottoman official, Vasa wrote on Ottoman legislation and official missions in the Balkan provinces of the Empire. The most important were "La Bosnie et l'Herzegovine pendant la mission de Djevdet efendi", (Constantinople, 1865) and "Reflexions sur la legislation en Turquie", (Constantinople, 1869).

1. Life of Pashko Vasa

Pashko Vasa was born into a Catholic family of the Northern Albanian town of Shkodër in 1825. We still do not have a detailed biography of him. All we can use is a short book on his life and literary work, preceded by an introduction, which was published in Tirana in 1978 and 1987.¹ Vasa pursued his first studies in his native town and then very young, in 1842, he started to work as secretary for the British consulate in Shkodër. In the short book about his life and in the introduction of his literary work it is written that "he attended a foreign school of the town" without mentioning the type of school and to whom it belonged.² We have already explained in the introduction the situation of the Albanian schools in Shkodër, as the center of Catholicism and Austrian and Italian influences over the local clergy.

It seems that an Albanian school was run until 1855 by lay teachers in Shkodër and only in later period was aided by Franciscan missionaries. Pashko Vasa in his memorandum "The Truth on Albania and the Albanians" recalls that the Italian Franciscan friars were the first to open schools in Shkodër, where the Albanian language was taught alongside Italian.³ To further deepen their rooting into the local population the Franciscans introduced the vernacular into the school curricula. Probably, Vasa attended one of these schools where

¹ V. Bala, *Pashko Vasa* (Tirana 1978); Pashko Vasa, *Vepra letrare* [Literary Works] (Tirana 1987).

² *Ibid.*, pg. 5.

³ *Ibid.*, pg.103.

lessons were given in both languages. Later, he demonstrated a complete mastery of Italian writing some of his literary works in that language. The kind of education he received in his hometown doubtlessly played a role in making him aware of his ethnic affiliation. After leaving Venice, in a letter that he wrote to an Italian friend in 1850, he made it clear that he had joined the Italian cause, but he was an “Epirote” speaking his own language.⁴ In 1848, Vasa took part in the anti-Austrian rebellion of the Venetians that followed the European revolutions of the same year. He fought on the side of the Italian patriots striving to liberate Venice from Austrian rule and to unite it with the Italian kingdom. Once the city was seized by Austrian troops in August 1849 he was obliged to flee Italy for Istanbul as he was an Ottoman citizen.

After a short period of unemployment, Vasa started his career as a public employee firstly in the tram company of Istanbul, moving later on to the Translation Office of the Ottoman Foreign Ministry, which trained a good number of reformist Ottoman employees of the time. The historian Serif Mardin stresses that many of the Young Ottomans, intellectuals seeking reforms in the Empire, had passed through the Translation Office and “most of them had thus been given the opportunity to acquaint themselves with European political systems as well as with the way the foreign policy of the empire was being conducted”.⁵

In 1861, Vasa was appointed to work in Aleppo, Syria. From 1863 to 1864, he took part in a political mission of the Ottoman government to Bosnia Herzegovina and served as secretary-translator to the Ottoman envoy and leader of the mission, Djevdet Effendi. The aim of the mission was to sound the ground for future reforms to be undertaken in these rebellious provinces. After the mission he wrote the report mentioned above. In early 1870s, he was involved, together with other future leading figures of the Albanian National Movement living in Istanbul, such as Shemseddin Sami Frashëri, Jani Vreto, Hasan Tahsini, in various activities to found an Albanian patriotic association.

At the time of the Congress of Berlin of 1878 several important figures of the National Movement created in Istanbul the “Central Committee for the Defense of the Rights of the Albanian people” and Pashko Vasa was one of its members. The basis of this program

⁴ Ibid., pg.157. Epirote was a denomination used by Albanian intellectuals of XIX century to indicate the ethnic community to whom they belonged. Epirus is a geographic entity that lays between northern Greece and southern Albania, and whose celebrity is linked to the Kingdom of Epirus in III century B.C., considered by Albanian national leaders of that time and by Albanian historiography in general to be an Illyrian political organization and as such a creation of the Albanians’ ancestors.

⁵ S. Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought* (Princeton University, 1962), pg.11-12. See also N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg.239.

was the establishment of a single Albanian autonomous vilayet [province] within the Ottoman Empire, instead of four Ottoman Balkan vilayets comprising Albanian and other populations.⁶ As a member of the committee, in October 1878, he met the Austro-Hungarian ambassador in Istanbul, to whom he presented a memorandum on the history of the Albanian people and on the Albanian question after the Congress of Berlin. This memorandum was later elaborated and published in 1879 as a handbook with the title “The truth on Albania and Albanians”. In the next part of this chapter we will focus upon this study in analyzing the way Vasa presented the Albanian nation. The same year, he published in Istanbul “The Latin Alphabet applied to the Albanian language”.⁷ In publishing this handbook, Vasa wanted to provide the Albanian language with a common alphabet, which could facilitate the standardization of the language.

In June of 1878, just when the Great Powers convened the Congress of Berlin, and when the League of Prizren was created, it became an urgent matter to make known to the European powers the existence of the Albanian people and to promote the writing of the Albanian language that could further entitle this people to claim the right of being considered “a nation in its own”. In 1879, Pashko Vasa took part in the “Society for the Printing of Albanian letters”, headed by Sami. This organization, as mentioned earlier, undertook the task of printing Albanian textbooks, journals and literary books and standardizing an alphabet for the Albanian language.⁸ In the same year, Vasa published “Spelling book” and the study “Albania and Albanians”, which was a kind of survey of the history of the country and its people. From 1881 to 1883, he withdrew from Albanian patriotic activities and was appointed adviser of the vilayet of Edrene. In June of 1883, he became Governor General of Lebanon.

The information on his life is sparse. All that is known about him is that his family was neither rich nor poor. The family possessed a small fief close to the town of Shkodër. Vasa seems to have been a talented young man who learned several foreign languages and who acquired a wide knowledge in various fields (arts, literature, journalism, economy) through long self-study.⁹ Being from the Catholic community of the town, attending a school where Italian was taught and working as secretary for the British consulate of Shkodër, all this may have been instrumental in initiating the young Vasa in the ideas of nineteenth

⁶ *History of the Albanian People* [History of the Albanian People], pg.145.

⁷ P. Vasa, *Vepra Letrare*, vol.I, pg.7.

⁸ *History of the Albanian People*, [History of the Albanian People], pg.210-211. S. Skëndi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, pg.119-120.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pg.13.

century European romanticism. The “nationalities” principle emerged after the 1789 French Revolution and gained considerable popularity after the 1830 Revolution. All over Europe movements such as “Young Italy, Young Germany, Young Turkey, Young Ireland and Young Switzerland proceeded to utilize the romantic spirit to create social and cultural cohesion”.¹⁰ These international currents and events did not escape the attention of young intellectuals in the Balkan region, who were eager to show their modernity by adapting themselves to the ideological currents of the time. Vasa as a young Albanian intellectual influenced by these new ideas might have been sensible to the events occurring in the Apennine peninsula. The participation in the battles between the Venetian population and the invading Austrian troops in 1848 greatly impressed him about the right of people for freedom, national justice and an independent political existence.

After his revolutionary experience in Venice he wrote in Italian his memoirs with the title “Mia prigionia” [My imprisonment] that was published in Istanbul in 1850. This small book describes the period that Vasa spent in prison when he was unjustly charged with plotting against the anti-Austrian resistance.¹¹ According to his memoirs, Vasa became a young revolutionary permeated with the ideas of liberty, the right of people, national honor and unity. Though not directly mentioning Mazzini, his ideas on liberty, equality, on the importance of “the homogeneity of all nation’s components as a precondition of its progress”, the political union of the nation, that “humanity should rest on the mutual respect of all its founding cellules, the nations”, and hereby that all nations which are not recognized as such are “entitled to take on the revolutionary struggle to attain their freedom”, are referred to throughout Vasa’s text.¹² The fact that his memoirs were published in Istanbul led him to hail the hospitality of the Sultan in sheltering the fugitive Italian revolutionaries and in blaming Christian Europe for having strangled Venice’s fight for freedom.¹³

2. The Ottoman Governor into an evolving context

As indicated above, in the position of a high Ottoman employee, Pashko Vasa wrote two booklets “La Bosnie et l’Herzegovine pendant la mission de Djevdet Effendi” (1865) and

¹⁰ V. Roudometof, “Nationalism, Globalization, Eastern Orthodoxy, unthinking the ‘Clash of civilizations’ in Southeastern Europe”, in *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol.2, nr.2, (1999) pg.239.

¹¹ P. Vasa, *Vepra Letrare* vol.1, pg.135-295.

¹² See “La mia prigionia”, in P. Vasa, *Vepra Letrare* vol.1, pg.162; 240-241; 243; 247.

¹³ *Ibid*, pg.166-167.

“Réflexions sur la législation en Turquie” (1869).¹⁴ The first was a report on the mission of a high Ottoman governor to Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1864, whose main aim was to establish law and order in those peripheral provinces and make them more amenable to the Sublime Porte central government. Pashko Vasa was the interpreter and the assistant of the Ottoman head of the mission, as he knew the Slav language. His second study was a kind of commentary on the introduction of new legislation in the field of judiciary and civil affairs in the modernization of the country. These documents are important as they reveal a parallel identity of Vasa, that of an imperial employee, and his vision on the progress and civilization of the populations of the Empire, which he considered as his own country.

The temporal context of these works can be located somewhere in the last part of the Tanzimat period (1839-1876). The subduing of the remote and border territories of the Bosnian provinces and the enforcement of the centralizing reforms into them remained a bitter thorny matter for the Sublime Porte, throughout the period going from the proclamation of the Tanzimat reforms up to and culminating in the Eastern Crisis in 1875-1878 and ending with the Congress of Berlin. The Tanzimat reformers, by the edicts of 1839 and 1856, tried to further the position of the Christians making them, at least officially, equal with the Moslems, safeguarding their property and assuring their equal treatments, most of all in the judiciary and in the army, and despite their faith, were all recognized as subjects of the Empire. This was not to pass easily, as after the traditional and long living Islamic order, which had regulated public life in the Empire the Moslems enjoyed a higher status than the Christians. This was an additional reason for the Moslem Bosnian landlords to see the Tanzimat reforms of the central government as detrimental to their traditional position.

The Bosnian unrest in the 1850s and 1860s generated by the resentment and steady resistance of powerful Moslem local landlords, who had become used to enjoying relative autonomy in exercising their rule, were now required to abide by the centralizing Tanzimat reforms, which meant also a reduction of their financial and political powers in the provinces. The remedy of the plight of the Christian peasantry suffering the unbearable burden of taxes, which brought about various violent reactions to the abuses of the local powerful Moslem beys acting as tax-collectors, was a matter of concern for the Tanzimat statesmen of the period. That situation set the Ottoman central government in continuous conflict with

¹⁴ Pasco Wassa Effendi, *La Bosnie et l'Herzegovine pendant la mission de Djevdet Effendi*, Constantinople, Imprimerie du “Courrier d’Orient”, 1865; Pasco Wassa, *Réflexions sur la législation en Turquie*, Constantinople, Typographie et Lithographie Centrales, 1869.

Bosnian local factors. The Sublime Porte had considered the political stability and direct control over Bosnia-Herzegovina as of great relevance, being the most advanced border of the Empire in Europe in front of the hostile Christian Powers.

In the introduction to the booklet on Bosnia, with its panegyric lauding the Sultan and his government, as custom demanded, Vasa described the mission of the high Ottoman employee as proof of the will and determination of the Ottoman state to ameliorate the living conditions of its populations and to do justice by sanctioning the equality of all before the laws, regardless of their social standing or religious affiliations. The enthusiasm of the imperial employee reporting to the center the successes of the mission is revealed by his way of describing the “reversal” of the precarious conditions in the province: everything changed for much better as the imperial mission headed by Djevdet Effendi passed from one place to the other in the rebellious Bosnia-Herzegovina, leaving behind a population feeling a sense of relief from the past injustices and hoping for a common future, as if all problems were adjusted by a magical touch.

According to the author, the situation on the ground was chaotic in every walk of life. Firstly, he dealt with the more problematic province of Herzegovina, but, though for him the situation in Bosnia was somehow better, he credited the central government with rectifying a whole chain of irregularities here too. He mentioned here the relations between Moslem beys [local lords] and their Christian peasants, the latter living in humiliating conditions as the former were de facto absolute rulers of the province who disregarded the central government as they pleased. Public education was in a deplorable state. Whilst the religious courts were more or less functioning, the civil courts were partly abandoned. The failure to draft local youngsters into the Ottoman army had become routine. To this gloomy picture, the author added the strained relations between the religious communities and an ever more rising corruption.¹⁵

Referring to the local assemblies, due to rule the province, Vasa described in this way their alienation:

“Les medjlis [local assembly] étaient composés d’hommes dont le plus souvent les sentiments n’étaient guère à la hauteur de leur mission. Loin d’éclairer les agents du gouvernement sur les besoins du pays, loin de les aider à rendre bonne justice, ils ne faisaient que des intrigues pour s’assurer une certaine suprématie sur les masses, et pour pouvoir vendre impunément la justice au plus offrant. Il n’y avait pas d’affaire, où l’argent ne

¹⁵ P. Vasa, *La Bosnie et l’Herzegovine pendant la mission de Djevdet Effendi*, pg. 142; 143; 148.

jouât son rôle: on payait pour obtenir justice, pour demander protection, pour présenter une requête; les employés ne se croyaient en devoir d'agir que d'après les impulsions de l'intérêt et du gain."¹⁶

For this precarious situation Vasa blamed the incapacity and corruption of local officials, both civil and military, which had created a deep gap between the center and province, but also the expansionist foreign policies of the neighbors, Austro-Hungary and Montenegro. The province left at the mercy and in the hands of the beys required urgent help, and this help could only come from the central government. Therefore, the aim of the mission of the Sultan's high envoy was to reform from top to the bottom the administration in Herzegovina and to instill a spirit of confidence between the local populations and the government, which they have long since been lost.¹⁷

In Vasa's report, the Ottoman state, through the mission of its high employee, was seen as an agency for providing justice, modernization and civilization. The author vested a paternalistic role in the imperial state too. This implied the recognition of the fact that the local populations were underdeveloped and they could not find by themselves the road toward "a new modern order". Only the strong and generous hand of the central government could fulfill that task. Vasa's report was careful about highlighting the successes of Djevdet Effendi mission and presenting it as being on the side of the weakest and more vulnerable social strata. First and foremost, it had to do with the policy towards the Christians. According to Vasa, social justice was high on the agenda of the high Ottoman envoy. Many times Vasa hinted at the protection yielded to the poor Christian peasants, who were suffering from the heavy taxes they were obliged to pay to Moslem local landowners. The government mission decided to reduce the taxes which the Christian peasants had to pay and to establish more righteous relations between them and the Moslem landowners.¹⁸

On the other hand, both in Herzegovina, and in Bosnia, the author says, the imperial mission took all measures to reverse the state of monopoly with regard to the land property. According to the old laws, only Moslems could have the right over landed property, leaving the Christians in a social inferior status. For Vasa, the imperial mission established the right for the Christians to have their own farms as, by doing this, "the land property unites the interests of the population with those of government and annihilates any ground for

¹⁶ P. Vasa, *La Bosnie et l'Herzegovine*, pg.149.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pg.152.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pg.163-164; 167-168.

rebellion”.¹⁹ The introduction of these changes was designed to give the image of a state treating its subjects with equity, which in turn could make possible a closer attachment of the populations between themselves and in their relations to the imperial state.

“L’animosité séculaire qui existait entre les différentes communautés du pays, fait place peu à peu à une entente qui permet de bien augurer de l’avenir. Les nouvelles améliorations appuyées par les actes de justice de la mission impériale ont été des arguments puissants pour assurer le peuple que le gouvernement, loin d’être son ennemi, comme il l’avait cru jusqu’alors, veut le bonheur de tous et la prospérité du pays en general. Aujourd’hui, les populations, en se rapprochant les unes des autres, se rapprochent en même temps de l’autorité, dont les actes ne sont plus considérés comme des pièges, ni comme une oppression contre laquelle il faille réagir”.²⁰

Vasa presented Djevdet Effendi’s mission as a turning point in the history of Herzegovina, as the Ottoman state, despite having Islam as a state religion, was already a just protector for all religious communities. This was seen in the exhortation to the Christians to take part in the local assemblies, and the provision of grants to build churches.²¹ The modernization of justice, which guaranteed equality before the law for Moslems and Christians alike, was considered by Vasa as a departure from the feudal order. Thus, the local Christian populations had the doors opened to enter a new and prosperous era.²² The other aspect of modernization in the judiciary was its separation from the authority of the Moslem religious courts, the Shariat. This involved abolishing from the courts the use of oral testimonies to corroborate property claims, the introduction of a new Code of Commerce, drafted on the model of European ones, which would settle disputes based on written documents only, the creation of courts, composed by both Moslems and Christians, which would judge on penal matters based upon a Criminal Code. The establishing of the latter institution sanctioned the right of Christians to act as witnesses in the courts on an equal base with Moslems.

The civilizing role of the imperial state was seen in its concern to improve the education system in the province and to make it accessible for both communities. This was considered not only an indispensable condition for the people to civilize themselves and enter the era of progress, but also as favoring good relations between the religious communities. In this respect, Vasa repeatedly stressed in his report the efforts done by the imperial mission to convince Christians to send their children to the new Ottoman schools. This would allow the

¹⁹ Ibid, pg. 193.

²⁰ Ibid, pg. 181.

²¹ Ibid, pg. 165; 175

²² Ibid, pg.165-166.

Christians to enjoy, together with the Moslems, the benefits of civilization, to educate and prepare themselves to take part in the common state institution as useful subjects for the country and the government. Vasa wrote that the participation of the Christians in the state schools was important as the new generation would study the Turkish language which, if spread in the province, would be a victory against “the prejudices and the fanaticism of our populations”.²³

In fact this civilizing mission of the imperial envoy went hand in hand with its centralizing aims. The new institutions, the judiciary, the reforms in the land property, the reorganization of the local gendarmerie, the constructions of roads and bridges, and the development of the education system had as a primary task to put these Balkan provinces under a uniform legislation and securing a closer control of the central government. This sense of bringing the provinces under the control of the central government is seen when Vasa tackled the problem of the military recruitment of the young Bosnians into the Ottoman army. He presented it not only as a success of the imperial delegation, but also as something welcomed by the local population.

“Bien que le gouvernement ait toujours reconnu la nécessité d’assimiler cette province aux autres et de la soumettre au recrutement, certaines considerations lui en firent ajourner la mise à execution, car elle pouvait donner lieu à des complications regrettables. Ce fut Djevdet Effendi qui le premier étudia cette question et qui, sans contrainte et sans violence, parvint à lui donner une solution conforme aux vues du gouvernement. Aujourd’hui la Bosnie, comme toutes les autres provinces de l’Empire, Scutari d’Albanie excepté, s’est soumise à la conscription, en l’acceptant avec reconnaissance”.²⁴

To make this new centralizing trend of the Sublime Porte’s policy appear beneficial to the local population, Vasa considered it as a return to the old heydays of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as if the roots of the past glory stood in the close relationships of these provinces with the Empire. Therefore the actions of the central government were presented as a necessary restoration, aimed at pulling these provinces out from stagnation and backwardness and opening the road to progress and prosperity.

That the Ottoman state was well-intentioned in its reforms, according to Vasa, was reflected also in its paternalistic care to cure the private sphere of its Bosnian subjects. It had to do with marriage local customs. Vasa wrote that many Moslem families were ruined due to the exaggerated wedding expenses. In order to avoid these expenses, the parents of the girls

²³ Ibid, pg.188; 205.

²⁴ P. Vasa, *La Bosnie et l’Herzegovine*, pg. 208.

often refused to give their consent for the marriage “leaving no other way out” to the future son in law but to kidnap his would be wife. Vasa wrote that these clandestine marriages, which were damaging public morals, were so numerous that they were already the general rule. The head of the Ottoman mission Djevdet Effendi convened the local nobility and, after declaring himself against the waste of money for wedding ceremonies, decided that in future these expenses should be determined in accordance with the economic means of the families. The Ottoman envoy couldn’t fail to bring order, civilized manners and decency even into the private matters of the locals and this made the author of the report to write of the happy conclusion of his mission:

“Aujourd’hui, les parents, n’étant plus obligés de se ruiner à cause des mariages de leurs enfants, accordent plus facilement leur consentement, et ainsi les unions rentrent peu à peu dans une voie régulière; la morale publique y gagnera et la fortune des habitans sera mise à l’abri de ces folles dépenses qui plongeaient dans la misère tant de familles”.²⁵

Some years later in 1869, Pashko Vasa wrote in French a commentary on the new legislation introduced in the empire, “Réflexions sur la législation en Turquie”. Vasa wanted to present the new centralizing legislation in the Ottoman Empire as a necessary reform for the country and its populations to abandon the feudal past and join the developed Western countries.²⁶ To present the new legislation as an urgent need, he presented the Ottoman populations as still living a primitive and stagnant existence regulated by ancient popular customs and traditions. The example brought here to illustrate those living conditions was that of the northern Albanian Catholic highlanders, among whom vendetta was a powerful institution with its punitive and social functions. For Vasa, the survival of this “natural, but wild state” was a consequence of the fact that the Ottoman Empire exercised weak control over its population. For centuries the Empire limited itself to imposing its occupation rules over the territories and its peoples, implying loose center-periphery ties, which could not extinguish the diversity of the “national elements” composing its body.²⁷ Vasa described the Moslem laws, imposed on the occupied peoples after the establishment of Ottoman rule, as too tolerant to erase the diversity of ‘national’ characteristics and the traditional customs of the former.

²⁵ Ibid, pg.195-96. The imperial mission extended its benevolent supervision also over the Orthodox families. Many of them allowed the marriage of their girls only against receiving a certain sum of money. As Vasa wrote, this habit was abolished as not being in conformity with “the spirit of the century”. Djevdet Effendi invited the Bosnian archbishops to give a hand to carry it out. Ibid, pg.196.

²⁶ P. Vasa, *Réflexions sur la législation en Turquie*, Constantinople, Typographie et Lithographie Centrales, 1869. I could not find the original copy of the booklet in French, so my quotations will be translated from the Albanian into English.

²⁷ Ibid, pg.159.

Vasa perceived this as out dated, for modernity required a stronger liaison between center and periphery. This derived from his conviction of the major role of the government, as “the most illuminated part of the society”, to introduce a uniform and centralizing legislation and to lead the peoples of the Empire toward progress and development.²⁸ The introduction of such laws was imperative as the Ottoman Empire was becoming part of the community of European states, and because of the more intensified contacts the Ottomans now had with the European peoples. Lastly, the reforms would prevent revolutions and brutal changes, as had occurred elsewhere in Europe in the nineteenth century, which Vasa defined as reactions against “the slowness of the old world”.²⁹ His model was the Napoleonic Code, whose state organization principles Vasa considered as compatible with the “practical and positive spirit of our times”.³⁰

The introduction of the new laws such as the new Civil Code, the Penal Code, the Commerce Code, laws dealing with the agricultural properties, the statute on the vilajets [Ottoman provinces], the creation of the State Council, the Supreme Court, Court of Appeal, laws of land registering, were for Vasa the best expression of the government’s intention to declare the equality of the civic and political rights of all people, regardless of ethnic and religious belonging, to separate the judiciary from the executive and to approximate Ottoman legislation to that of the most civilized European countries.³¹

To justify these changes Vasa had resort to the natural changing of the whole society, of the relentless evolving of the human intelligence, which influenced both civil and religious domains. Referring to history Vasa wrote:

“Ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome perished because they didn’t know how to choose. The present day China, the biggest ever empire that man could build up, is day by day corroded because of the degrading action of its immobility”.³²

In the Ottoman Empire the judiciary had been traditionally an exclusive domain of the Moslem clergy, the *ülema*, Vasa alluded that time has come to strip the monopoly of the latter and to place it under civil control. One of the major achievements in this sense was the drafting of a Civil Code. However, when Vasa dealt with problems related to the role of the Moslem clergy in society and the necessity to laicize the judiciary sector, he used a tortuous

²⁸ Ibid, pg.158.

²⁹ Ibid, pg.161.

³⁰ Ibid, pg.161.

³¹ Ibid.,pg. 163. I bring here the translation in English as I did not find the original in French, but only the Albanian one.

³² Ibid, pg. 162.

language which indicated that the Islamic institutions were still strong in the empire. He presented the badly needed changes as deriving from the Ottoman inexhaustible legislative source, which could engender modifications in full compliance with new temporal contexts. In fact the formulations of the *Tanzimat* state policy always took care to present the reforms as based upon Islam, as Islam was “tolerant towards others”, because Islam was not “against innovations”, etc. Vasa continued that this openness and capacity of the Ottoman legislation to change, was declared by the prophet Mohammed, “one of the sagest and wisest legislators in the world”, who had foreseen much before the ever rising progress of the society through time.³³ This phrase is very indicative of the degree of conformity of a Catholic employee within the state policy of a Moslem state. He further argued that the new laws should be detached from abstract political and religious notions. According to him, the newly introduced laws aimed at the wellbeing and progress of man and, therefore, they should be intimately linked to the “natural and logical truths” and the ever rising needs of society. By contrast the religious courts were fit only for the simplicity of the traditional laws and primitiveness of most of the Ottoman peoples.

Vasa advocated gradual implementation of these laws, as the Ottoman populations were not yet ripe to understand overly sophisticated legislation. The new legislation should follow the evolution of the society and not be arbitrarily imposed.

“For certain it is necessary that laws should be the same and common for the entire Empire, because otherwise it would be impossible to govern based upon healthy and just foundations, and it would be impossible to get the people living in Turkey closer to each other or to make them converge toward a unique center. However, if on one hand the unification of the laws is necessary, it is nonetheless necessary to adjust them to peoples’ capacity to understand them”.³⁴

In his commentary Vasa repeatedly stressed that the new centralizing legislation should be carried out and implemented in accordance with the character of the populations of the empire.

“I do not believe that I am raising here a problem that could be refuted, while I emphasize that laws and codes should observe our national character- we can not be French, nor Germans; we are Ottomans; our virgin population, full of vitality, can not change its type with another one that it is not its own. It is true that to become a big nation we must follow the modern civilization to its highest principles, but, we should also care that the civilization can not confuse our characteristics; because from the moment we lose our particular type we would fall into a disparate situation; we will be the faintest copy of the original we wanted to follow”.³⁵

³³ Ibid, pg. 162.

³⁴ Ibid, pg.167.

³⁵ P. Vasa, *Réflexions sur la législation en Turquie*, pg. 173.

The new laws here are considered to be too advanced for the Ottoman society. Again he suggested the gradual application of the reforms and not to hurry up unless the Ottoman people will understand and be aware of their usefulness. For securing their successful implementation it was expedient to extend the system of education throughout the Empire, in order to “have a step by step progress of our civilization, to have a compact people, a strong and committed administration in conformity with the needs of the time”.³⁶

Niyazi Berkes has considered the *Tanzimat* reform as “the earliest constitutional document in any Islamic country”, which culminated in the proclamation of the first Ottoman Constitution of 1876.³⁷ To render more centralized the Ottoman state meant to reinvigorate and make it able to preserve its imperial dominions, its internal cohesion and resist the territorial expansionism of Russia and the Western Powers. As Şerif Mardin has put it:

“Both “Leviathan”, the form of the government which emerged in the West in the middle of the seventeenth century, and the later nation-state had a role to play in the development of Ottoman institutions. At first they were seen as rivals who were beginning to excel in precisely those areas where the Ottomans had traditionally prided themselves for achievement. Eventually, however, during the process of modernization, the Ottomans looked at these new forms of the state as models for reform in their own government”.³⁸

Anyway, the introduction of these reforms was uneven and it did not proceed smoothly.³⁹ This era of state renovation coincided also with insurrections, internal dissidence and with a rising nationalism in different parts of the Empire, first of all in the Balkans, which was followed with an ever growing interference by their European tutors.⁴⁰

We have touched upon the main characteristic of the new Tanzimat regulations being their secularism. They tried to detach state administration from the religious sphere, though religion and state could not be separated so easily after a centuries-long tradition of cohabitation. According to Niyazi Berkes:

“The changes in the economic and political conditions pointed up the inadequacy of the traditional laws and procedures under modern conditions. The new economic and political forces necessitated the replacement of a non-formal, moral-religious legal system by one based upon formal and positive statutes. The Tanzimat brought law codification rather than parliamentary legislation as its distinctive feature. Its attempts at

³⁶ Ibid, pg.173.

³⁷ N. Berkes, *The development of secularism in Turkey*, pg.145.

³⁸ Ş. Mardin, “Center-Periphery Relations: A key to Turkish Politics?”, in *Post-traditional societies*, (New York, 1974), pg.169.

³⁹ H. Inalcik, “Application of the Tanzimat and its social effects”, in *Archivum Ottomanicum*, nr.5, (Wiesbaden, 1973), pg.97-127.

⁴⁰ P. Dumont, Il periodo dei Tanzimat (1839-1878), in R. Mantran (ed.), *Storia dell’Impero Ottomano*, (Lecce, 1999), pg. 494-500.

codification constituted the first such experiment in a Muslim country in the modern era... The Tanzimat Charter had declared loyalty to the Seriat. At the same time, it had declared with greater emphasis the necessity of framing new laws. It stated that the major cause of misrule, injustice and disorder was the lack of laws as written instruments, declared and accessible to the public. Neither Seriat nor the kanuns fulfilled these conditions. The Seriat was not a codified or written law comprising civil, commercial and penal provisions”.⁴¹

The two booklets of Pashko Vasa, written in 1865 and 1869, clearly relate to the Ottoman state’s secularizing, centralizing and modernizing policies targeting, among others, the judiciary and the education sectors in the 1860s. In that period the Ottoman government introduced a series of new laws modeled on French legislation, as mentioned earlier. All these codes contained secular provisions, though they were not fully freed from Seriat influence. One of the most difficult phases of law codification was the attempts to elaborate a secular Civil Code, as “this concerned the area in which the Seriat was particularly sensitive and also especially well equipped”.⁴² This was the reason why the efforts to codify this code encountered strong resistance from the clergy and from a part of the Ottoman administration who favored a compromise solutions between the new secular and traditional religious legal systems. The more modernist wing opted for borrowing Western legislation. The ever more intensified contacts with the West pushed Ottoman leaders to recognize the need to set up a new civil code.⁴³

In Vasa’s texts there are three points which should be highlighted. Firstly, his stress on the need to have a Civil Code as a precondition that Ottoman people enter to a “new and modern order” and his reference to the Napoleonic Code makes him a supporter of the modernist approach.⁴⁴ Secondly, Vasa argued, through an ambiguous language, that the drafting of the Civil Code would make Ottoman laws similar to those “of the most civilized European nations”, but it would also make easier the understanding of the religious laws too.⁴⁵ For him the evolution of the society could not be followed only by the religious laws, hence the need to have a Civil Code. Vasa considered the monopoly of the clergy over the judiciary as pertaining to a bygone age.⁴⁶ In order to appear not too radical, Vasa stressed the necessity to gradually introduce the reforms in the Empire due to the “primitiveness” of the

⁴¹ N. Berkes, *The development of secularism in Turkey*, pg.160.

⁴² Ibid, pg. 166.

⁴³ In his memorandum of 1867, the Grand Vezir Ali Pasha laid stress to the badly needed reform of the Civil Code and mentioned the adoption of the French Code. N. Berkes, *The development of secularism in Turkey*, pg.167.

⁴⁴ P. Vasa, *Réflexions sur la législation en Turquie*, pg.161-163.

⁴⁵ Ibid, pg.163.

⁴⁶ Ibid, pg.169.

Ottoman populations and their scarce ability “to digest” too modern laws. He viewed the Ottoman populations as having just awoken from the lethargy and hibernation of the old immobile world.⁴⁷ Thirdly, due to the clash between the modernists and traditionalists on this question and to temper his choice of the French Civil Code, Vasa argued the need for the new laws to comply with the Ottoman people’s character. Though such approach could be a device to appease attacks from the religious and traditionalist circles, it also alluded to the influence of European thought. The publication in French of Vasa’s booklet may be considered as an attempt, on the one side, to make widely known the government’s commitment to the reforms and, on the other, to win over Western support.

During the *Tanzimat* era many French literary works were translated into Turkish. Rousseau’s ideas had a bearing on Vasa’s commentary on the new Ottoman laws. In the short introduction to his booklet, Vasa described primitive man as unable to do justice to his own will. On the contrary, it required that society, as a whole, should progress.⁴⁸ Though primitive, Vasa saw Ottoman populations as full of vitality, whose character was not spoiled by modernity. Parallels can be also drawn between Vasa’s idea of the need for the reforms to suit the Ottoman character of the populations and Montesquieu’s theory on the necessity that laws should be shaped by the physical circumstances, the inherited traditions and customary institutions of a given people and nation, thus meaning the elements from one people should not be imported at random into another.⁴⁹

The other field where the *Tanzimat* brought in important novelties was the education system. Throughout the 1860s the Ottoman government made efforts to found a secular education system, to establish inter-confessional secondary schools, to open a university for the teaching of sciences, administration and law, through which a “secular concept of Ottoman nationality would be formed and propagated”.⁵⁰ This “Ottomanist” policy, in the precarious political context of the rebellious Bosnia-Herzegovina during the 1860s, aimed to render more harmonious relations between Moslems and non-Moslems, and nurture the hope for a political fusion.⁵¹ This was the reason why Pashko Vasa in his report stressed the creation of common secondary schools for both Moslems and Christians, and the need to

⁴⁷ P. Vasa, *Réflexions sur la législation en Turquie*, pg.165.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pg.155-156.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pg.172-173.

⁵⁰ N. Berkes, *The development of secularism in Turkey*, pg.179.

⁵¹ On the measures the Ottoman government undertook in the provincial education system of that time see Maria Todorova, “Midhat Pasha Governorship of the Danube Province”, in C. E. Farah (ed), *Decision making in the Ottoman Empire* (Kirkville, 1993), pg. 115-128.

sanction the right of Christians to own land as it would encourage a convergence of their interest with those of the government.⁵² Vasa's position as an Ottoman employee falls into what Serif Mardin has called "the bureaucratic style" of imperial officials, for whom the preservation of the state was their major concern.

"What I have described as the "bureaucratic style" of government was the product of a special attitude among a group of secular officials who concentrated on the power dimension of social relations as the most important aspect of life. They were hard-headed, empirically minded and pragmatic. Their ideology was that of the "reason of state". This stance was in great part the result of their training, which differed from that of the *ülema*".⁵³

In Vasa's discourse, "Ottomanism" is not taken in 'cultural-national' terms, but referred to a common feeling of belonging, or allegiance, to the Ottoman state, despite different faiths. It should be viewed mostly as a political union, of distinct "populations, communities, tribes".⁵⁴ As we will see also in the case of Sami Frasheri and Qemali, by affirming that he was "an Ottoman" Vasa displayed a sense of belonging to the "Ottoman Empire" which did not clash with his "Albanian" identity. One of reasons was the awareness of an empire made up of different people, whose prosperity would be guaranteed if the imperial state would be able to stand on its own feet. Not least also the interest the Sublime Porte had in moments of deep political crisis, as it was the case of the Eastern Crisis in the 1870s, to favor and promote expressions of an "Albanian" identity to counter the advancement of the Balkan nationalisms into its dominions in the area, namely the Albanian inhabited lands.

3. The article "Albania and the Albanians" and the memorandum "The truth on Albania and the Albanians"

The essay "Albania and the Albanians" was published as the introduction to the "Albanian Language Spelling Book" that was a product of a collective work of Albanian national leaders living in Istanbul. The situation pertaining to the Albanian alphabet and written Albanian was similar to that faced by the Balkan nationalist intellectuals endeavoring

⁵² P. Vasa, *La Bosnie et l'Herzegovine pendant la mission de Djevdet Effendi*, pg.188-189; 192-193.

⁵³ S. Mardin, *Religion and secularism in Turkey*, pg.194.

⁵⁴ For more see Alexander Vezenkov, "Reconciliation of the spirits and fusion of the interests. "Ottomanism" as an identity politics", in Diana Mishkova (ed.) *We, The People. Politics of National Peculiarity in Southeastern Europe*, (Budapest, New York, 2008), pg. 62.

to bring various dialects of the vernacular as close as possible and to shape a literary national language.⁵⁵ As indicated earlier, the Albanian nationally minded intellectuals until 1908, the time of the Young Turk Revolution, used three alphabets for printing their literary productions. The Istanbul alphabet created by the “Society for the Printing of Albanian Letters” (1879), the alphabet of the Catholic Albanian Literary Society “Bashkimi” [Union], founded in 1899 in Shkodër, and the alphabet of the Catholic Albanian patriotic society “Agimi” [Dawn], which was created in 1902 in Shkodër.

In unifying the alphabet of the Albanian language, the Albanian nationalist intellectuals sought to create a tool for the development of a national consciousness that would best serve to unite the Albanians of different confessions. The question of the alphabet was inextricably linked to the main political demands of the League of Prizren (1878-1881), which laid stress upon administrative autonomy for Albanians, the opening of Albanian schools and the use of written Albanian. Therefore, it is not by chance that Pashko Vasa used the introduction of a spelling book for elementary schools to present the history of the Albanian people and their country. The short essay “Albania and the Albanians” is a romantic and patriotic exposé of Albanian history. One scholar of Albanian literature of the nineteenth century has considered Vasa’s essays as “an historical and literary prose”, whose functions were mainly propagandistic and mythologizing.⁵⁶

Vasa’s essay is divided into twelve short sections. Most of the sections deal with the ancient history of the Albanian people, as a kind of reconstruction of the Albanians’ genealogy from antiquity to the Middle Age. The last three sections cover what is considered to be the ‘Golden Age’ of Albanian history, the period of the national hero Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbej (1405-1468). Vasa ended the essay with Skënderbej’s period with the conscious aim of trying to exhort his co-nationals to make up for the lost time and to recover the glorious past by learning the native language and civilizing themselves. This article provides useful information about his perception of the “Albanian nation”, which was further completed by his most known memorandum “The Truth about Albania and the Albanians” published in Paris in 1879.

⁵⁵ M. Todorova, “Language as a cultural Unifier in a Multilingual Setting: The Bulgarian Case During the Nineteenth Century”, in *East European Politics and Societies*, vol.4, no.3, Fall.1990, pg.442. See also A. Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales*, pg. 67-83.

⁵⁶ R. Qosja, *Historia e Letërsisë Shqipe- Romantizmi* [History of Albanian Literature-Romantism], vol.II, Rilindja, (Prishtinë, 1984), pg.316-318. The editor of the collection of Vasa’s literary works remarks that the above article “should not be taken as an historical research, but as a publicist’s article for the readers of the “Spelling Book”, as in many cases the fantasies replace the argument and the legends take the place of the fact”, P. Vasa, *Vepra Letrare*, pg.18.

Vasa's second book was a longer and more detailed work than the first essay. This study was divided into fourteen sections and its major part covered the ancient history of the Albanian people and stressed the continuity of the Albanian presence in the region since antiquity. In the short introduction of his study, Vasa drew a theoretical conclusion according to which the history of the people follows always the same dynamics: after the splendor comes decay and then rebirth. Until the seventh section Vasa wrote about the Albanian predecessors in the Balkans and here he included the ancient Macedonians, the Epirotes, and their famous kings, Philip of Macedonia, Alexander the Great and King Pirro of Epirus (IV century B.C.). He used language, traditions, habits and old symbols of a primitive religion to create a set of common linkages between modern Albanians and the ancient populations of the region. From the seventh section to the eleventh Vasa described the contemporary state of the Albanian people, its political organization, its regional division, but also pointed out the misery, its state of abandonment and ignorance, where once the 'dignified Albanian nation lay'. In the last two sections Vasa dealt with the political aspirations of the Albanians and outlined what he considered the most adequate political organization for his co-nationals, which could favor their progress and prosperity.

I will analyze simultaneously both texts dividing them by topics.

3.1.Ancient origins

Vasa began both writings by constructing the genealogical tree of the Albanian people with a view to establishing their territorial legitimacy in the Balkans. He thought that the roots of their origin could be traced back to very ancient times. In his first study "Albania and the Albanians" Vasa wrote about "a nation coming from Asia, a lot of people who later will be divided up into more groups and who came by boats to land on the Greek coast".⁵⁷ They were the "Pellazgs" that according to him firstly were "wild illiterate people" who gradually learned a more "human living", tilling the soil, cultivating plants, shepherding their flocks and to live together with each other in the villages and urban centers. The same scene of the dawn of humanity is found also in his second study. Vasa divided antiquity into two main periods, the first one being that of "legends" and the second the period of "history". The first one can be based only on legends as it is the remotest time in history. The second, which

⁵⁷ P. Vasa, *Vepra Letrare*, pg.43.

according to Vasa began from IX century B.C. onwards, was better known by humanity. Vasa continued his examination of ancient history by making another division. For him people can be classified into three main groups, a) those who have been assimilated by stronger and larger populations and have lost their inherent qualities, b) those that have completely disappeared, and c) those people who managed to survive and preserved their main characteristics up to recent times. For the author the Albanians belong to a third group.⁵⁸ Vasa wrote that his study would be further completed by later generations of scholars. However, he was convinced that the habits, language and traditions of the Albanian people were something that had resisted the erosion of time and was something that recalled the very ancient people who inhabited the region since time immemorial.⁵⁹ As noted above, Vasa had an evolutionary concept of the history of his people, which could be summarized in the following phases, a) settlement of old populations in the territory, b) their glorious period as a powerful people in the region, c) decline and d) rebirth in the future.

Speaking about the functions of the ‘Golden Age’ and its appropriation by the nationalist leaders Anthony D. Smith says that:

“This is essential to an evolutionary perspective that sees nations as developing from small, original and pure beginnings in some distant time to a first pristine flowering in the golden age, followed by decline and ossification - until it experiences a second birth at the hands of the nationalists. The very distance of that pristine epoch lends to the community and its history an aura of mystery and an immemorial quality; conversely, the immemorial existence of the nation is a guarantee of its authentic nature, its original, unmixed and uncontaminated personality”.⁶⁰

Vasa conceptualized the old Albanian nation as being a large one, which gradually became diminished in size and power. It was a kind of slow and gradual shrinking process. He wrote that:

“The language, the habits, the intimate beliefs, in a word everything has remained Pellazgian from one corner of Albania to the other, not being changed by the civilization and by the centuries that have followed each other and from the uncertainty that can occur in people’s life”.⁶¹

To prove his case he constructed a direct link between the “Pellazgs” and the Albanians through the explanation of ancient toponymy into Albanian language and etymology of deities and primitive rites, which were still alive among the Albanians.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pg.69.

⁵⁹ Ibid, pg.70.

⁶⁰ A. D. Smith, “The Golden Age and National Renewal” in G. Hosking/George Schopflin (eds) *Myths and Nationhood*, pg.49. See also A. D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, (New York, 1986), pg.191.

⁶¹ Ibid, pg. 88.

According to Vasa, the names of the places, where this old population was settled in the region, can be explained by Albanian names. For him, one of the places where the “Pellazg” population lived was called “Ematia” that can be explained with the name of Mat, a northern region in Albania. He considered this name as being the initial name of Macedonia.⁶² The other argument that Vasa used to support his theory was the language. Vasa maintained that the study of the Albanian language could explain the names of the deities venerated by the ancient Greeks. These deities were firstly created by the “Pellazgs” and later on were appropriated by the Greeks. This was the reason why their names could be explained with Albanian names. After giving some examples and inventing possible translation into Albanian of the names of these deities such as Zeus [i zgjuar - clever], Chronos [kohë - time], Athens [e thëna - the word of Providence] Vasa wanted to underscore that the Albanian language was far older than any other language and thus proof of the antiquity of Albanian nationality:

“These examples are more than enough to strengthen the assertion and to ultimately confirm the right of the Albanian language and nationality to be considered as the oldest one among the other European languages and nationalities”.⁶³

The arguments used by Vasa on the ancientness of the Albanian language, through the etymology of the names of Greek deities, were not his own. He was influenced by the ideas of the Austrian consul Johan Georg von Hahn, in his “Albanesische Studien” (1854), and by the ideas of many, already mentioned, foreign scholars, who constructed the image of the Albanians as being a people of free warriors, having a kind of pragmatic approach to religion, embracing it for practical purposes, being a mountainous people who, due to isolation, still lived with their very old pagan customs surviving.⁶⁴ According to Noel Malcolm, Johann Georg von Hahn was the first who firmly established the theory of “Pellazg” origins for the Albanians.

“The theory quickly established itself among Albanian writers: one of the first Albanian weekly papers (printed in Albanian and Greek, and published in the Greek town of Lamia in 1860-1) was entitled Pellazgu; Pashko Vasa devoted the opening pages of his influential pamphlet *The Truth on Albania and the Albanians* (1878) to the Pelazgian story, and another magazine called Pellazgu was published by the Albanian community

⁶² Ibid, pg.72.

⁶³ Ibid, pg.84.

⁶⁴ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg.167-168.

in Cairo in 1907. The primary function of this Pellazgian theory was, of course, to establish a claim of priority.⁶⁵

The survival of primitive rites among the Albanians was another sign of their descent from the “Pellazgs”. Like the “Pellazgs”, the Albanians adored pure nature in its simplest forms - earth, sky, fields, mountains, water, fire, stone, the sun, etc. Their religious beliefs were essentially animistic. Vasa held that these worshiped objects were still more important for the Albanians than Jesus Christ and Mohamed. Other elements that, according to Vasa, made the Albanians the heirs of the “Pellazgs” were the swearing in front of a stone, the vendetta and the particular way of predicting events, divination based on scrutinizing the bones of animals, on examining the flight of birds and on dream interpretation.⁶⁶

Vasa considered these beliefs and traditional practices as typical for a population that was not educated and did not possess the ability for exerting itself in the fine arts. Such a population was a genuine one and civilization had not altered its character. But, for Vasa this was the most fascinating feature of the Albanian people, its ability to preserve its ethnic essence untouched throughout centuries. In fact, Vasa discerned in the Albanian highlanders the very core of the descendants of the ancient populations, and it was they whom he thought preserved the closest links with the ancient populations of the region. The highlanders were also depicted as survivals of a larger ethnies, which was pushed into the highlands by later arriving populations that usually were described as intruders and invaders. On this basis, Vasa argued, that the Albanians were not only the first to live in this part of Europe, but also a much more numerous population occupying a larger space than the present day habitat. Everything that happened, the reducing of their number and territory, was due to the pressure of foreign populations that came to seize their place. Smith says that:

“What has mattered to ethnies is the possession, or at least association with a “homeland”- a territory which they and others recognize to be theirs by historical rights and from which they are felt to stem. This is more important than compactness of territory and defensibility of frontiers”.⁶⁷

Thus, Vasa conferred on the Albanian inhabited territories in the Balkans not only a meaning of location, but also that of ancient origin. He thought that the establishment of the

⁶⁵ N. Malcolm, “Myths of Albanian National Identity: Some Key Elements, as Expressed in the Works of Albanian Writers in America in the Early Twentieth Century”, in S. Schwandner-Sievers and B. J. Fischer (eds), *Albanian Identities, myth and history*, (London, 2002), pg.76.

⁶⁶ P. Vasa, *Vepra Letrare*, pg.89.

⁶⁷ A. D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, pg. 93.

ancient kingdoms of Epirus, Macedonia and Illyria, considered as the Albanians' predecessors, were the result of the withdrawal of the old "Pellazg" populations, first into the remote plains and later into the mountains. Their move into more remote spaces was due to the persistent advance of foreign people, namely the Eolians, the Ionians and the Dorians that Vasa considered to be the Greek's ancestors.⁶⁸

"We Albanians are the sons of those Pellazgs that came from Asia to settle on Greece's soil. The Greeks by force threw the Albanians out of the place they had. We Albanians have resisted for more than three thousand years, and we have kept the language and mentality, the character and bravery, love and freedom that our ancestors have left us, just those Pellazgs who were settled in the kingdoms of Epirus, Macedonia and Illyria".⁶⁹

Vasa was a Catholic from Shkodër, a center strongly influenced by Italian culture. He was a self-made polyglot and he knew Italian. Besides the findings of the Western Albanology, he might have been in contact with the works of the literate people from the Albanian community of Italy. People such as Giuseppe Crispi, Jeronim De Rada, Demetrio Camarda, in their works used the "Pellazg" theory to set a link between Albanians and these archaic populations, but also to the Macedonians, Epirote and Latin people.⁷⁰ Many of the Italo-Albanians were inclined to see a common descent between Albanians, Latins and Greeks, but they also strove to represent the Albanians as distinct and older than the latter. In this enterprise, namely the reconstruction of a national history and therefore a national character, Pashko Vasa, like other Balkan nationalist intellectuals, reflected what Anne-Marie Thiesse has called "intellectual cosmopolitanism".⁷¹ Local intellectuals appropriated techniques and 'scientific' findings from Western authors, who in this intellectual activity were pushed either by a Romantic spirit to discover people and places taken as reminiscences of Antiquity, or by geo-political aims of their respective governments, a major objective of which was to drive the Ottoman Empire out of South-Eastern Europe.

However, this was not a simple imitation as it might look at a first glance. Vasa borrowed from the Italo-Albanians the technique, so to say, but used his argument on the Albanian/Greek distinction in another context. If for the Italo-Albanians it became important to differentiate themselves from the Italo-Greek community for preserving their specific ecclesiastical-educational privileges in the Naples' kingdom, Vasa used the thesis of

⁶⁸ P. Vasa, *Vepra Letrare*, pg.46.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 47.

⁷⁰ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg. 175.

⁷¹ A. Thiesse, *La creation des identites nationales*, pg. 83.

Albanians being older than the Greeks in the context of the Eastern Crisis, i.e. the Ottoman presence in the Balkans and the Albanians' interests involved in it. Therefore the ideas coming from the West were not simply imitated by these Albanian nationalist intellectuals operating in the Empire. They were elaborated and selected to better fit the Ottoman context and their specific vision for the future of the Albanian "nation".

3.2. The past, the future and a national hero

Pashko Vasa used the past to show the grandeur of the Albanian nation and to counterpose this to the present time, which was usually depicted as the period of "Albanian nation languishing". Vasa used the past of the Albanians for two main purposes. The first was to give to the reader the idea of "an immutable Albanian nation in its quasi genetic qualities".

"Abandoned in its natural gifts, imbued with its old traditions instead of history and laws, without a literature of its own and strained by many hardships that have hindered its moral and material development, the Albanian people unfortunately have remained in backwardness like in primitive times of its exodus. This people, provided with a proud character and a deep love for its tribe and traditions, has not melted into other tribes and neither expanded its own existence; therefore, from the point of view of progress and civilization it has been surpassed by the neighbors, but, nevertheless, it didn't give up or lose its noble aspirations- to preserve its nationality, language, dignity and its rights".⁷²

The images of the Albanian "nation" produced by Western scholars during the first half of the nineteenth century are reproduced here again by Vasa. "Primitive" and "noble", "backward" and "ruled by old traditions", instead of having literature and laws, but still "pure" and feeling deep love for its tribe, these were the Albanians of the nineteenth century that should be induced to make a gigantic leap from the Middle Ages to modernity. According to Vasa, the qualities of the old Albanians are transmitted without interruption to modern day Albanians following a linear dynamic and not being influenced by surrounding cultures. The phrase "this people have not expanded its existence" signifies that the Albanian character had retained its core and has kept its original shape. The relationship between the past and the present was seen by Vasa in an a-historical context. The unalterable qualities of the Albanians over centuries and allegations such as "the Albanians have remained Pellazgs in their heart and origin and he is as much primitive as he was in ancient times" deprive his narrative of a sense of time.⁷³ There is no time that changes when Vasa wrote about the

⁷² P. Vasa, *Vepra Letrare*, pg.110.

⁷³ *Ibid*, pg.110.

Albanian character, there are no alterations and everything has remained fixed once and for all. For Vasa, the condition of primitiveness was not only an indication that the Albanian people were not a progressed and civilized people, but it was also taken as the precondition for the survival of some fundamental values such as nationality, language, dignity and rights. Like most nationalist intellectuals Vasa “hailed pagan religion and backwardness as evidence of purity and superior faith”.⁷⁴

This is a typical romantic approach to history having at its center the figure of the *noble savage*. Though Vasa established continuity between Albanians of ancient times and those of the present, in the end the author is concerned that the latter are not like the former, in terms of preserving their “national” values and character. The shortcomings of the present pushed Vasa to turn to the past, to an idealized past, full of virtues. In the discourse of Albanian intellectuals of the time, the “pure primitive” Albanians was mostly embodied in the figure of the “proud” highlanders of the remote, almost unreachable northern mountainous regions, who had retained a pure “Albanian” character. In fact the figure of the highlander had an ambiguous significance: it spoke about a low level of civilization or progress, but it was also an appropriate ‘device’ to contrast the present miserable and morally degraded context with a chivalrous past. The present context was that of the Eastern Crisis (1875-1878), which threatened to dissolve the Ottoman Empire, while the danger of the dismemberment of the Albanian inhabited lands among Balkan countries was looming large on the horizon. It was the time when Albanians had fallen into apathy as their national character was spoiled by ‘indolence’ and ‘stagnancy’. On the contrary, the people of that past, living in a nature state, were the representation of the noblest fundamental, universal human and national values.

The figure of the highlander was loaded also with other emotional connotations. The highlander was the best expression of the link of the nation with the soil. He symbolized the image of an old Albanian “nation”, warrior and un-subdued, a living fossil of the old populations, which had managed to survive due to such a protective environment, the high mountains. This surrounding protected him from foreign intruders, securing thus also a ‘racial purity’. The ultimate message of the Albanian romantic writers was that such a valiant population that had kept their original identity through centuries deserved to be recognized, firstly as a distinct ethnies and then its right to exert sovereignty over the territorial space inherited from its ancient predecessors. The preserving function of primitiveness, as in the

⁷⁴ A. D. Smith, *The Golden Age and National Renewal*, pg.46.

case of isolation, was of particular importance to Vasa. It helped the survival of the Albanian nationality, which at that time was far more important than developing the country. To indicate and defend the Albanian nationality was the most urgent and the primary goal to achieve. The development of the country was seen by Vasa as something possible and belonging to a later phase, when a national government would rule the country providing a better management of its human and natural resources. We will see in the following chapters how the other authors have used the *noble savage* image of the highlander.

Vasa referred to Albania and Albanians of the past as much more important factors than they were in the late nineteenth century. The past was a period structured around three main themes: antiquity, the deeds of the national hero Skënderbej and the much better political and economic situation of the country before the centralizing reforms of *Tanzimat* (1839-1876). The position of the ancient Albanians in antiquity was a central one, while the other populations seemed to occupy a peripheral place.

“From what has been said it clearly emerges that our roots and our tribe is the oldest of all and the good name and the Albanian honorable braveness are known throughout history and they shine everywhere like a sunbeam. Therefore it clearly comes that in ancient times Albania had not been such a poor country like today, but it had been big and prosperous, enjoying a good and great name that was honored all over the world”.⁷⁵

According to Anthony D. Smith one of the important functions of the ‘Golden Age’ is to establish a sense of continuity between ancient people and actual ones.

“The return to a golden age suggests that, despite the ravages of time and the vicissitudes of social change, we are descendants of the heroes and sages of that great age. This is achieved through the periodization of ethno-history...On that view, we can only grasp the “meaning” of later periods of a particular community’s history by studying earlier, heroic periods.”⁷⁶

Gradually, the grandeur of the past lost its initial dimensions first in very ancient times due to the coming of the ancient Greeks in the region who pushed the “Pellazgs” to leave parts of their lands and “being obliged to share the place with strangers” and later to suffer a much more serious blow because of the Roman occupation of the Illyrian regions that was followed by a general decay during the Middle Age.⁷⁷ But the splendor revived again during the glorious time of the national hero Skënderbej in the fifteenth century.

The very first meaning that the national hero Skënderbej should convey to his co-nationals was that of fraternity and internal union. Vasa asserted that Skënderbej was the son

⁷⁵ P. Vasa, *Vepra Letrare*, pg.54.

⁷⁶ A. D. Smith, *The Golden Age and National Renewal*, pg.50.

⁷⁷ P. Vasa, *Vepra Letrare*, pg.56-57.

of an Albanian landlord who was taken as hostage to the Sultan's court. He became an important commander in the Ottoman army, raised up and trained as a military man. The memory of his land and his blood caused him to abandon his high position in the Ottoman army and to return home to be among his people. A narrative of this kind stressed the appealing force that blood had for the Albanians of that time, and to show how they never forgot their country and their people. Thus presented the national hero was also a high moral figure. Skënderbej was not alienated by the high position achieved in the Ottoman army. He preferred to return home and to lead the Albanian liberation war against the Ottomans.⁷⁸ By liberating his country from the Turks, Skënderbej was described as an exceptional figure that redeemed the Albanian's honor.⁷⁹ Apart from his conspicuous moral side Skënderbej was also a military genius that made him really a unique human being. But, figures like Skënderbej can be found in past glorious times only, as the present is too gloomy to make possible the emergence of people like him. The uniqueness of Skënderbej was further confirmed by the fact that his death marked also the end of freedom for the Albanians and the country fell into the hands of the Turks.⁸⁰ Nobody was able to repeat his famous deeds.

“But men like Skënderbej are very rare and not everybody can have his good luck, it is difficult to find people in Albania to honor him and to die for the good of their land. Such a people were living once upon a time, and today you can't find their like anymore, because that heart does not exist and the love of Albanians for each other and for their country has died down, they didn't keep their old union”.⁸¹

The figure of Skënderbej was not the only one that Vasa used to illustrate the past glories of the Albanian nation. Vasa took the case of the Albanian powerful *ayans* [Ottoman local lords], like the Bushati family in Shkodër [north Albania] and Ali pashe Tepelena [south Albania], who managed to create real independent dominions from the authority of the Sublime Porte at the end of eighteenth and early nineteenth century. They were mostly used to depict Albanian vitality inside the Empire, their considerable military power, their role in unifying for a certain period the Moslem and Christian Albanians around an attempt to unite the Albanian inhabited lands. In clear contrast with the national hero Skënderbej, the Albanian powerful landlords of the nineteenth century had no great moral virtues. Their achievements were not the result of any love for the fatherland and the people, as in the case of Skënderbej. They built up their authority driven by political personal ambitions and they

⁷⁸ Ibid, pg.58-59.

⁷⁹ Ibid, pg.60.

⁸⁰ Ibid, pg. 64.

⁸¹ Ibid, pg.63.

were figures lacking moral qualities, being tyrants, despots and, in the end, they were abandoned even by their own people.⁸² In Vasa's narrative, Skënderbej had a pan-Albanian dimension, whilst the Albanian landlords had only a regional one and therefore were historically less significant. The selective work of Vasa in finding heroes and glorious moments in Albanian history followed the same path that was followed by the Italo-Albanians. They both highlighted the figure of Skënderbej as the most precious figure in the Albanian pantheon. However, Italo-Albanians discounted the Albanian Moslem pashas as they preferred a more Christian Albanian "nation", which was not the case for Vasa.

In general, the Albanians of the past, although under the rule of the Sultan, were considered to be pillars of the Ottoman Empire due to their special qualities as warriors. Here it is interesting to see how Vasa represented the Albanian element within the Ottoman Empire. When Vasa spoke about the past, he did it in a way to let people understand that the Ottomans did not really subjugate the Albanian people. It was true that after the death of Skënderbej the Ottoman armies invaded the country, but gradually the sultans started to appreciate the special characteristics of this people and offered them a particular place in the Empire. They were not really a subdued population, but rather a highly praised population producing functionaries and soldiers for the Empire. He mentioned the contribution of some high Ottoman dignitaries of Albanian origin as good administrators and military commanders that salvaged and strengthened the Empire throughout the centuries. Vasa saw the Albanian contribution within the Empire as a sign of Albanians' 'particular capabilities' and an aspect of their unquestionable 'moral integrity'. Their relations with the Empire turn to be a kind of contract of honor that Albanians, being loyal by their 'character', fully respected till the end.⁸³

On the other hand, the image of Albanians as 'a pillar' of Ottoman rule in Europe, and, vice-versa, of the Ottoman Empire as 'a shelter' for the Albanians defending them from the territorial claims of their neighbors, was promoted and propagated in the framework of the "Albanian policy" of Sultan Abdylhamit II in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.⁸⁴ The Eastern Crisis pushed the Sultan to set in motion his "Albanian policy", through the promotion of Albanian nationalism, tolerance towards the League of Prizren (1878-1881), the publication of materials on Albanian history, which could better counter the territorial claims of the Balkan neighbors at the time of the Congress of Berlin (1878). It aimed at further

⁸² Ibid, pg.95-96.

⁸³ Ibid. pg.120.

⁸⁴ For more see N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg. 259-272.

strengthening the links between the Sublime Porte and Moslem Albanians, but using also the Christian Albanians as an indication of the existence of another ethnies in its Balkan dominions other than the Greeks. This was seen more clearly after the Congress of Berlin, when the Sublime Porte tried to orient, to use, to contain and finally crush the autonomist activities of the League of Prizren (1878-1881), when it was pushing too far its demands and most of all once the danger of the territorial encroachment on its Balkan dominions had temporarily receded. The “Albanian policy” of the Sultan would revive whenever the Albanian factor in the Empire was judged as useful for protecting imperial interests in the region. The same conditions were repeated at the end of the nineteenth century with the Macedonian question, which will be discussed more in detail in the following chapter on Shemseddin Sami Frasheri. Nevertheless, Albanian intellectuals took advantage of these tactical changes in the policy of the Sublime Porte to formulate and publicly expound their cultural and political ideas. Therefore, Vasa’s ideas were almost in line with the official Ottoman policy and also matched his dual status, as an imperial employee, but also as an exponent of Albanian nationalism, who claimed for the Albanians the same rights as the other people in the region and considering the Empire as the only possible shelter. We will see in the following pages that even his book written in French was publicized by the Ottoman authorities.

Vasa’s vision of mutual Albanian–Ottoman ‘cooperation’ in the past seemed to be conditioned by what he thought to be the period when the Albanian lands were ruled by the local element. This is to say that the Albanians of the past were in a much better position than their present day descendants. The present time is depicted as the time of decay and degradation. According to Vasa, the cause of this lay in the implementation of the centralizing reforms of Tanzimat in 1839. Vasa considered these reforms doomed to fail as carried out by corrupt foreigners who did not understand the needs of the people and did not respect their traditions. Local elements were replaced by foreign employees, who introduced new laws that caused chaos, economic recession and increased the population’s distrust towards the government.

“Unfortunately, the change in the ruling system, a system that people charged with the administration of the country didn’t know or didn’t know how to replace it with the new system, has brought only chaos in the state structures and in the people’s consciousness... In front of such deplorable situation, the Albanian population started to feel distrustful towards the employees sent by Istanbul to govern it; the population has

taken them as foreigners, who didn't know the language of the people, neither its history nor its traditions and aspirations".⁸⁵

Vasa recognized that the Albanians' life was regulated by a primitive system, based upon rites and traditions, which needed to be modernized, but only in compliance with the characteristics of the Albanian people. The modernization of the country was conceived by Vasa as a process that should not destroy the "character of the Albanian people", its traditions, legends and its language. For Vasa, this was the crucial point where the reforms failed. The reforms had suspended a kind of autonomous self-rule, had introduced heavy taxes, and did not improve the education system.

"The old ignorance mitigated by the primitive virtues, the wellbeing and the respect for personal dignity was replaced by a sharp and unconscious ignorance coming from misery".⁸⁶

Where Vasa wrote on Bosnia-Herzegovina, we have seen that he had expressed the same concern for the reforms to respect the 'character' of the provinces and of their populations. This change in Vasa's discourse about the *Tanzimat* reforms (1839-1876), when in his earlier booklet on Bosnia-Herzegovina, he had praised them as an attempt to modernize the Empire, was due to the particular atmosphere created in the country during the Eastern Crisis of the 1870s and was in accord with the new direction the Sultan's regime was embarked upon. The abolition of the Ottoman constitution by the Sultan Abdulhamit II in 1878, whose proclamation in 1876 did not save the Empire from Russian intervention, the heavy economic situation due to the collapse of the *Tanzimat* policies, based mainly on foreign aids [financial bankruptcy of 1875], the decline of the domestic economy under competition from European industry, marked also the end of a period of rapprochement between the Ottoman Empire and the West. It also signified the end of the *Tanzimat* reforms, and the beginning of an era of autocratic rule of Sultan Abdulhamit II, which Niyazi Berkes has defined as "a time of reaction against the efforts as well as the frustrations of the *Tanzimat*", which was backed by foreigners and tried to install in the country imported Western institutions.⁸⁷

The past and the present time, in the texts of Vasa on Albania, reflect two different patterns of moral and material condition. The "ignorance", understood as a lacuna with

⁸⁵ Ibid. pg.120.

⁸⁶ Ibid, pg.121-122.

⁸⁷ N. Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, pg. 255.

regard to progress and civilization, has remained present in both periods and in this sense the reforms did not mark any advancement. But the past had the advantage of being morally and materially superior as in the end it guaranteed respect for personal dignity that was no longer possible under the rule of corrupt officials. The reason why Vasa glorified the past was related to the message that his works aimed to transmit. Vasa belonged to the generation of romantic writers of Albanian literature of XIX and his novels and his political writings bore a strong moralistic trend. As Rexhep Qosja has written about his essays:

“Like the others [Albanian romantic writers of the same period], he is overcome by the desire to hymn the history and qualities of his people, and in particular their heroism... Therefore the patriotism of Pashko Vasa in his prose, as in his poems, turns to be a publicist patriotism, which partly follows our literature of Romanticism.”⁸⁸

Vasa invited the Albanians to unite as they have done in past glorious times under the national hero Skënderbej and to remind them that it was a time when the Albanians enjoyed honor and a good name in the empire. Thus, they should not accept contemporary reality and the author exhorted them to perform a moral duty, to save the country by unifying. Speaking about another function of the ‘Golden Age’, Anthony D. Smith writes that:

“The quest for collective dignity has become a key element in national struggles everywhere, and the memory of a golden age affords a standard of comparison and evaluation in relation to both the past of the community and the histories of its neighbors. An appeal to the golden age elevates the inner, or “true”, essence of the community vis-à-vis both outsiders and the present degradations of the community...Memories of a golden age also proclaim an imminent status reversal: though at present “we” are oppressed, shortly we shall be restored to our former glory”.⁸⁹

The pessimistic picture of the present time is related to the disintegration of Ottoman rule in the Balkans especially after the Congress of Berlin. Vasa advocated the creation of a unique Albanian vilayet [province] including all the Albanian inhabited lands, which at that time were incorporated as part of various Balkan vilayets. This new Albanian administrative unit within the Empire should be ruled by locals. Vasa’s position, though not explicitly formulated, was close to the main discourse of Albanian National Movement that opted for the solution of the autonomy of the Albanian territories within the framework of the Ottoman Empire. This was considered the best choice for the immediate future as firstly the Albanians

⁸⁸ R. Qosja, *Historia e Letërsisë Shqipe- Romantizmi* [The History of Albanian Literature-Romanticism], (Prishtinë, 1984), pg. 318.

⁸⁹ A. D. Smith, *The Golden Age and National Renewal*, pg. 50-51.

were deemed not yet ripe for a complete independent life and all the more that a premature independence would expose the Albanians territories to the risk of being split up among the Balkan states. In this context the Ottoman Empire was considered as a temporary umbrella. This made possible, for some time, the convergence of the policy of the Sublime Porte, to preserve its rule in the Balkans, with the activities of Albanian patriots to resist the territorial claims of the Balkan states.

For Vasa, the fall of the Albanian territories under another foreign rule would mean the total alienation of the population, as it would lose its language, traditions and nationality. In this case “foreign rule” meant dominion by Balkan Christian neighboring countries, which for Vasa would be much worse for the Albanians than Ottoman rule. On the contrary, Ottoman rule was presented by Vasa as something that the Albanians were already habituated with and their living with the Ottomans as a kind of symbiosis.

“...the Albanians are convinced that their close union with the Ottoman Empire is their only chance for salvation; this union guarantees them a living according to their wishes and aspirations, as it does not harm the national idea, neither the language nor the traditions; it doesn't change the character of the people and doesn't threaten its existence from the point of view of blood and nationality... Albania cannot continue to live but under a rule that respects its existence, its habits, its traditions, its nationality and the Ottoman Empire has fulfilled so far these conditions”.⁹⁰

When Vasa spoke about the future he expressed some doubts as to whether the Albanians were really fit to govern themselves. He thought that the Albanians needed a strong hand to lead them.

“The Albanians know that in the actual situation as they are, divided into three faiths and with a educational system still in an initial phase, they would not easily come to terms with each other without a strong hand that would govern and rule them; they are in need of a power which would push them ahead or keep in according to the circumstances, which would refrain their impatience or stirring them to come out of the their indolence”.⁹¹

Vasa conceived of the future as a time regulated by the coordinating work of the ruler and not like the old times with its slow rhythms and dominated by emotional impulses. His image of Albanians in this sense was that of an impulsive people, acting on the spur of the moment and, if left alone, their behavior was not a guarantee for an independent state life.

⁹⁰ Ibid, pg.124. In fact Vasa instead of the term “blood” uses the term “tribe”. The literal translation into English does not give the very sense that this word bears in Albanian. “Tribe” in this case implies “blood links”, “family ties”, “kinship”, “relationship in a direct line” or in a more general sense “origin”. All the possible translations of the word “tribe” should indicate something pertaining to the very being of the Albanian or something essential.

⁹¹ P. Vasa, *Vepra Letrare*, pg.123.

The last conclusion served to support the idea of granting the Albanian populations administrative autonomy within the framework of the Ottoman Empire. Therefore Vasa heavily criticized the division of the Albanian lands into three different administrative units that incorporated not only Albanians but also other ethnic groups. For him the above administrative organization based on heterogeneous ethnic elements did not create an appropriate climate for progress because of the diverse interests and principles of those people:

“It is in the interest of all to unite Albania into a single vilayet [Ottoman province], to give it a simple, compact and solid organization, to allow the local element a wide participation in public administration and to inaugurate a period of union, good-understanding and fraternity for all the confessions. The union of all the citizens, this makes the power of an empire and guarantees its progress, prosperity and magnificence; the splitting up and the divisions lead to weakness, misery and degradation”.⁹²

The whole project of an administrative rearrangement of the Albanian inhabited lands was seen, as mentioned above, also as something in the interest of the Ottoman Empire itself. This was an effort to try to convince the European Powers that were in favor of preserving the Ottoman presence in the Balkans to favorably consider the Albanian interests. On the other side, Vasa’s concept of union, as an “ethnic union or union of the people of the same origin into a single administrative structure”, was identified with progress, while division was equated with regression and the unleashing of destructive forces. He described the period when he wrote the articles as “the era that pushes towards union” and union was taken as the natural course of events and a kind of natural law.⁹³

3.3. A collective name and regional divisions

Vasa paid particular attention to the importance of a collective name for the community. He said that the collective name of the Albanians derived from the king of the

⁹² P. Vasa, *Vepra Letrare*, pg.130.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pg.129. See also E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, pg. 38-39.

Epirotes, Pirro of Epirus,⁹⁴ who, on account of his bravery and his ability in battle was called “eagle” by his soldiers. From that time on, according to Vasa, the Albanians started to call themselves “Shqiptar” [sons of the eagle]:

“...the denominations “Epirus”, “Macedonia”, “Albania”, are completely unknown for the Albanians; in their language these words do not exist; they do not know each other but with the generic name “Shqiptar” and they do not think at all that their country might hold another name different from that they call it, “Shqipëri”. Denominations like Epirus and Macedonia are of foreign origin; the name “Albanian” is of modern origin; in the fifteenth century the Europeans gave this name to the country of “Shqiptar”... If you ask the first peasant you meet in the street: what are you? He will answer: I am Shqiptar [Albanian]. You can hear this answer both in Northern and Southern Albania, from Moslems, Catholics and Orthodox as well. If you speak to them about Epirus or Albania, they will think you are speaking Chinese or you are insulting them in a foreign language”.⁹⁵

There are two issues here that reveal the way Vasa constructed his “Albanian nation” through the use of the collective name. First, Vasa asserts that the name “Shqiptar” is something much more ancient than the denominations “Albania” and “Albanians”, which were of foreign use. He insisted that Albanians had their own way to identify themselves and didn’t have to wait until the foreigners came and identified them by other names. Besides an aspect of ‘awareness’ of their collective being, Vasa used the collective name of “Shqiptar” to denote also a sense of territorial grandeur and internal cohesion among the Albanians. The generic name “Shqiptar” was not only something old, but it encompassed three entities taken together, Epirus, Macedonia, Albania, which for Vasa were foreign appellatives for the “Shqiptar”. In the words of Vasa the name “Shqiptar” had the advantage of identifying the entirety of the Albanian population, while the foreign names seemed to refer to parts of the Albanian population. Vasa wanted to point out that the Albanians [Shqiptar] were the same large people, whose territory stretched along the Adriatic coast also extending deep into the Balkan hinterland. In later periods it was known under various names.

Thus, the collective name “Shqiptar” was used by Vasa with the intention to present a territorial claim on behalf of the Albanians, to prove their presence over a certain territory, which went from Kosovo, in its northern part, to Greece on its southern frontier. The collective name “Shqiptar” implied also a more organic cohesiveness between Albanians. Vasa held that the Albanians identified themselves primarily with their collective name

⁹⁴ Here it should be noted the Albanians in their language call themselves “Shqipëtar” [sons of eagle]. The name “Albanian” is used by the foreigners to indicate the Shqipëtar. Albanians call their country “Shqipëri” [the place of eagles].

⁹⁵ P. Vasa, *Vepra Letrare*, pg.77-78.

“Shqiptar” and not according to their religious faith. He described it as a phenomenon that pertained to the essence of the Albanians and not to something that he considered as an external aspect such as being Moslem or Catholic. When speaking about the importance of the collective name for the foundation of an ethnic community, Smith has written that:

“In general, however, collective names are a sure sign and emblem of ethnic communities, by which they distinguish themselves and summarize their “essence” to themselves- as if in a name lay the magic of their existence and guarantee of their survival...A collective name “evokes” an atmosphere and drama that has power and meaning for those whom it includes and none at all for the outsiders”.⁹⁶

Vasa thought of the Albanians in terms of a single and uniform community bound by the same language, traditions and character. He used always the name “Shqiptar” to indicate the sameness of the customs and language, while contrasting it with the Greeks, as a distinct nation from the Albanians. I will dwell more on this in the next section. Vasa divided the Albanian people into two main groups, the Gëgs living in the north and the Tosks living in the south. The way he presented these regional groups inside the Albanian people seems to suggest that he took them as geographical divisions rather than organic divisions. This was a perception, whose varieties we will explore also in later chapters. In their writings, the leading figures of the Albanian National Movement often tended to diminish the importance of religious and regional divisions and, instead, lent much more importance to the overarching cultural elements, such as language, shared descent and blood. In his study about the Albanian national poet Naim Frashëri (1850-1900), brother of Shemseddin Sami Frashëri, whose works we will analyze in the next chapter, and the moral messages that his poems conveyed to his co-nationals, Rexhep Qosja writes:

“... according to him [Naim Frashëri] Albanians must be brothers among themselves; they should not be religiously divided, as God is one and unique for all religions; that Gëgs and Tosks are only names of places and the way the brothers speak their language”.⁹⁷

In the text the Gëgs and the Tosks are used by Vasa to tell the reader what was the extent of the Albanian inhabited lands and to inform about Northern and Southern Albanians. Each of these major groups has its own sub-divisions. Here Vasa delineated a slight difference between the north and the south. According to him, the Southern Albanian populations, i.e. the Tosks, were the heirs of three ancient people living in Epirus (the Kaons,

⁹⁶ A. D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, pg. 22-23.

⁹⁷ R. Qosja, *The History of Albanian Literature*, pg.148.

the Thesprotes and the Mollos) that nevertheless he believed shared the same ethnic roots. Northern Albania was described as being divided into more restricted categories, such as tribes or clans that were like branches of a big family. It meant that the population of Northern Albania, living in a mountainous and more isolated region that had hindered their expansion, had remained still in its state of close kinship ties.⁹⁸ The establishing of this scheme, by which the Northern mountainous populations were ascribed characteristics as being ‘purer’ and tenaciously preserving the characteristics inherited from the ancestors, was firstly advanced by the Western Albanologues and then adopted and in a later date diffused by the Italo-Albanians.⁹⁹ However, all the description of these regional groups sound more like “variations in the bosom of the family” that have not altered the same “Albanian essence” and are used more in the sense of exploring the country and its population.

“The Gëgs and the Tosks are from the same family; they are brothers sheltered under the same roof and are warmed at the same hearth”.¹⁰⁰

The above statement was formulated against allegations that a traditional animosity and disagreement existed between the Gëgs and the Tosks. These regional differences, according to Vasa, were mostly due to the rivalry of various Albanian pashas at the beginning of the nineteenth century who, as indicated above, managed to rule their dominions in the Northern and Southern Albanian lands almost independently from the Ottoman central government. Thus, the Geg-Tosk division was explained by Vasa as something pertaining to the personal ambitions and rivalry of rulers and had nothing to do with the real popular sentiments which inclined, instead, towards fraternity and union.

The image of the common house for the country [Albania] and that of the extended patriarchal family for the community [the Albanians], where blood ties, old rites and traditions were strictly preserved by all members, were consciously elaborated metaphors that Vasa used to present the Albanian nation as being as cohesive as possible before the external threat coming from its neighbors. With regard to the model of patriarchal family used as a myth of kinship and shared descent Schöpflin says that:

“Among the functions of this myth is to impose a well-defined set of moral propositions on a group, usually a group speaking the same language that is in the process of being welded into a nation. The model of the family, customarily the patriarchal family, is employed to make sense of the very different wider world of modernity for those who make the symbolic journey from country to town and discover that an entirely new set

⁹⁸ P. Vasa, *Vepra Letrare*, pg.111.

⁹⁹ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg. 176.

¹⁰⁰ P.Vasa, *Vepra Letrare*, pg.119.

of cognitions is necessary in the new environment and that they and the fellow members of their language community share special characteristics because they are biologically related can provide the coherence that conditions demand”.¹⁰¹

The metaphor of the family to indicate the would-be nation has been an important sentiment evoked by nationalism. In this nationalist intellectuals sought to transform the family of the nation into something which overrides and “replaces the individual’s family, but evokes similarly strong loyalties and vivid attachments”.¹⁰²

3.4. Religious divisions and the Greek-Albanian dichotomy

The religious divisions within the Albanian community were explained by Vasa in the same vein. The fact that Albanians belonged to three different faiths, as Moslems, Orthodox and Catholics, was more a statistical fact than an internal breach in the community.

“This population that speaks the same language and has the same habits, the same traditions is divided into three faiths: Moslems, Orthodox and Catholic. The Moslems comprise about half of the people; the rest is made up by Christians- Orthodox and Catholics. The Moslems together with the Catholics comprising up to two thirds of the population; the Orthodox, compared with the whole, are only one third”.¹⁰³

It is curious that the Catholic Vasa saw the Moslem and Catholic communities together as a majority compared to the Orthodox Albanians. It might be possible that the author conceived the Orthodox Albanians as more prone to Hellenism, and therefore wanted somehow to confirm the loyalty of the majority of the Albanians to the Sublime Porte. It was also to indicate that the most dangerous challenge to the Albanian lands came from the territorial claims of Greece over the southern vilayet of Janina.

Vasa depicted the Albanians as a ‘tough’ people, with distinguished military capabilities, more ‘shepherd than farmer’ as the country was mostly mountainous and the Albanian was keen on arms and fighting. The Albanian was also a proud and exotic figure that lived in a kind of ‘patriarchal democracy’ based on equal rights for all members of the community, where tradition played the role of the law and where the most venerable things

¹⁰¹ George Schöpflin, The functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths, in George Schöpflin and Geoffrey Hosking (eds), *Myths & Nationhood*, pg.34.

¹⁰² A. D. Smith, *National Identity*, (London, 1991), pg.79.

¹⁰³ P. Vasa, *Vepra Letrare*, pg.112.

were honor and bravery. The leaders were elected from among the eldest of the community and they enjoyed the same rights as the humblest member.¹⁰⁴ The Albanian was not so much ‘interested’ in earthly things, he lived a simple life and he was very modest in his demands, but he had a ‘rich and powerful’ spirit. He ate corn made bread and was used to have poor meals, but he was able to love and hate to the highest degree; he drank only water and not wine nor grappa, but he was a poet and could be easily exalted by the idea of beauty and magnificence.¹⁰⁵ The idea of ‘simplicity’ and ‘moral’ dignity embodied in the common people was characteristic of a romantic narrative and Vasa was one of the most distinguished authors of the Albanian romantic literature.¹⁰⁶ The image presented here is very close to the image of the highlander, as noted earlier in this chapter.

In both of Vasa’s studies, a good part of the section on Albanian antiquity dealt with the difference between the Greeks and the Albanians. The author repeatedly stressed their dissimilarity and saw it as something largely unaltered which have accompanied both “nationalities” from ancient times to the present. This argument was stated and restated several times in his work to emphasize something on which Vasa was insistent: that the Albanians predated the Greeks in inhabiting the region and that the Albanians had nothing to do with the Greeks in terms of ‘nationality’. They were a people on their own.

The section on the antiquity of the “Albanian nation” and the arrival of the predecessors of the Albanians in the Balkans was intended not only to show that Albanians’ predecessors were the first populations to arrive in the Balkans, but to show that the Greeks, who came later to the region, pushed the Albanians’ ancestors out of their place. Thus, from the outset, Vasa created a definite image of both populations. The Albanians were the master of the ‘house’ [the region], and the Greeks were the intruders, the invaders, who came to take over the other’s place. If one looks carefully at the description of the arrival of the ancient populations it can be noticed that when the “Pellazgs” arrived from Asia they either found the place empty or “it was not certain if other populations were living in the region”. Vasa maintained that there were no records of an older human presence at the movement of these populations occurred in ancient times and when people did not know how to write.¹⁰⁷ Consequently, the predecessors of the Albanians had full claim to a legitimate territorial right. The ‘Albanian essence’ had always its negative Greek counterpart. This dichotomy

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, pg.114.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.pg.116.

¹⁰⁶ R. Qosja, *Historia e Letërsisë Shqipe- Romantizmi*, vol. III, pg.312, 337, 366.

¹⁰⁷ P. Vasa, *Vepra letrare*, pg.43; 71.

should indicate the otherness of the Greeks. The Albanians were the oldest, this people had retained their nationality and had never confused it with the religious allegiance. Schöpflin argues that:

“Each culture constructs its discourses in opposition to another and this allows the culture to see itself as enduring, as unique, as a bearer of moral worth. The element of comparison is vital here. Collectivities will monitor themselves against others, so that ethnicity is neither exclusively internally generated nor solely defined by its external boundaries. It is a perpetual interaction between the two”.¹⁰⁸

In developing his arguments to show that Albanians were different from the Greeks Vasa first used the language, the primitive and particular traditions and the “ethnic character” of the Albanians. For Vasa, the Epirotes, the Macedonians and the Illyrians, as Albanians’ predecessors, had a language that the Greeks could not understand. Here again, Vasa appropriated the ‘arguments’ advanced by the Italo-Albanians in the early nineteenth century, who, influenced by the theories of Malte-Brun and the French consul in Janina François-Charles Pouqueville held that the Albanians preserved the old “Pellazg” language, which was the common ancient idiom for the ancient Balkan people, such as Macedonians, Epirotes, Dardanians and Greeks. The latter elaborated their own more civilized language, which became different from the old “Pellazg” language, which survived among the mountainous Albanians, the direct heirs of “Pellazg”.¹⁰⁹

“...we hold the thesis that the Epirotes were different from the Greek people, that over the centuries they had their own language, the language of the Pellazgs that the Greeks could not understand at all, which for sure is the same language spoken today in the Epirus, in Macedonia, in Illyria, the same language that is called Arbëresh or Albanian”.¹¹⁰

The spreading of the Greek language in antiquity was seen by Vasa as something similar to the extensive use of French in the nineteenth century. According to him, the spread of the Greek language at that time was an undisputable sign of the glory, prosperity and progress achieved by Greek civilization. Nevertheless, he saw the use of that language as a phenomenon pertaining to the high social strata of the people. He considered ancient Greek as the language of politics and commerce. Therefore, the fact that the Greek language had such a use at that time did not mean that all people speaking that language were Greeks.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ George Schöpflin, *The functions of myth and a taxonomy of myths*, pg.28.

¹⁰⁹ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg. 174.

¹¹⁰ P. Vasa, *Vepra Letrare*, pg.77.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pg.80

“Therefore to draw a conclusion we can say that those people from Pellazg origin who were members of high society, although they preserved their own language which the Greeks considered a barbaric one, knew the superiority of the Greek language as an elaborated one, as the language of the scholars, which they learned and used with great desire. But, the common people, the heart of the nation, did not know it and did not speak it; the evidence here is undisputable”.¹¹²

Another aspect of the comparison between Greeks and Albanians concerns the position that each “nation” had with regard to religion. Vasa presented the Albanians as a more flexible people on religious matters and more conservative in terms of “preserving their nationality”. This peculiarity of the Albanians stands of course in clear contrast with the characteristics of the Greek people. Vasa constructed this Albanian particular way of being using four main pillars, namely blood, language, ancient traditions and institutions:

“Geographically, ethnologically and historically it is already proved that Epirus and Macedonia were never part of Greece: the blood links among the inhabitants, their language and their traditions, the civil, political and military institutions were totally different”.¹¹³

Vasa took the above-mentioned elements as something primordial for the Albanians and much more important than religion. Therefore, he repeatedly stressed that the ‘ethnic core’ among Albanians have been preserved untouched throughout the centuries despite their divergent religious allegiances. The Moslem and the Christian part of the population were from the same origin, blood and race. According to Vasa, this ethnic distinction between the Albanians and Greeks became more evident during the Middle Ages, when barbarian people came to destroy the Byzantine Empire and when the feeling of ‘nationality’ faded together with the love of motherland, to be replaced by religious fanaticism. Vasa conceptualized this historical period as the time of the clash between Moslems and Christians. It seems that for Vasa this period marked a negative change compared to Antiquity. If in the former period the main actors on the political scene were the ‘nationalities’, in the later period the relations between the people was based on religious division, with Moslems fighting against Christians and vice-versa.

In the words of Vasa, this epochal change had affected the Greeks, but not the Albanians, who, as always, preserved their ‘Albanian essence’. On the contrary, unlike the other people who were subdued by the Turks, the Albanians started in the fifteenth century

¹¹² Ibid., pg.108.

¹¹³ Ibid., pg.102.

their struggle against the Turkish invasion driven by ‘the patriotic idea’ and headed by the national hero Skënderbej.

“The Greek Christians melted with other Christians of the Empire and, after the first reversals caused by the Turkish invasion they went into commerce and handicraft. By contrast, the Epirotes, the Macedonians and the Illyrians, the people of Pellasg origin, which now in the modern times the foreigners call the Albanians, gathered around the patriotic idea in the fifteenth century in order to resist the Turkish invasion”.¹¹⁴

Vasa described Skënderbej’s resistance against the Turkish armies as a war of independence of Albania and a national movement involving the whole country. This ‘national war’ was in sharp contrast with the attitude of the Greeks who stood aside, remained indifferent and did not help. The distinction is further stressed by the fact that whilst the Albanians were honourably defending their country from the Turkish invaders the Greeks were engaged in business and commerce.¹¹⁵ There was a substantial difference between them and the Greeks in terms of race, origin, language and this distinction had been present and evident in all historical periods, from antiquity until modern times. The Albanian-Greek difference was considered to be a historical constant element.

The survival of the Albanian national character during the period of Turkish domination again was employed to accentuate this ‘strange’ and very ‘particular’ Albanian capability to resist assimilation and foreign influences. In this context, Vasa used the case of some Christian Albanian military leaders who participated in the Greek uprising of 1821 against the Ottomans that brought about the proclamation of the country’s independence. Vasa explained the participation of these Albanian leaders in the Greek rebellion as a mere individual act of people “pushed by their military spirit, thirsty for fighting” and who were used to have always guns in their hands.¹¹⁶ Vasa tried to consider their involvement with the Greeks as something which should be seen in the framework of a religious war, of some Christian Albanian leader fighting against the Moslem Turks. Vasa added that these Christian Albanians “took part in the revolts only as Christians and they didn’t look at this conflict as a national war”.¹¹⁷ This thesis, according to which the Albanians of Greece fought for Greece only because of their common religion, and not for the Greek ‘nation’, i.e. they did not

¹¹⁴ Ibid., pg.92.

¹¹⁵ In underlining the fact that the Albanians were the only population that was not alienated by the Turkish invasion and remained attached to its old characteristics Vasa writes that:” So, all those people who were not Albanians did not want to accept the task to defend the country with arms, and almost all of them became traders, craftsmen or soil tillers, like the slaves of the Middle Ages”, in P. Vasa, *Vepra Letrare*, pg.95.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., pg.96.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, pg.96.

confuse religion with ‘nationality’, was a discursive element taken up by Albanian nationalist newspapers of the early nineteenth century.¹¹⁸ It became important to build a kind of narrative to stress the eternal difference between Greeks and Albanians and to describe those moments of ‘common’ experience’, such as the Greek Revolution of 1821, as motivated by not very important factors, such as the religious ones. Following this line of thinking, only ‘national’ interests could trigger a wholly-hearted involvement. The author here took the opportunity to stress that the Albanian involvement in the Greek Revolution was represented by some Albanian leaders, and was careful to show that the rest of the Albanian Diaspora in Greece did not feel any solidarity with the Greek cause. The Christian Albanian leaders, according to Vasa, were conscious of their nationality and they were able to think in national terms, but, the war they were involved in was only a chance to prove their military prowess and adventurous spirit. The Christian Albanian leaders acted only as individuals in the Greek war for independence and one can easily note the ‘contrast’ between the Greek Revolution and the wide Albanian ‘national movement’ under the leadership of Skënderbej in fifteenth century when all Albanians took up the arms against the Turkish armies.

“On the other hand, it should be pointed out that all Albanians, who live in Greece and have become Hellenic citizens, have never stopped speaking their native language and from being a family on their own: religion and deportment that they have in common with the Greeks did not cause them to forget their origin, and to change their way of living. So, it may be possible to have Hellenic citizens from Albanian origin, but it is not acceptable to assert that Albanians are of the same origin with Greeks neither of the same nationality, nor to have the same aspirations”.¹¹⁹

Therefore for Vasa ‘nationality’ of the people was founded on native language, blood links and traditions, but religion was totally excluded from its constituent elements. Religion was equalized with deportment, with a certain way of behaving, while nationality was “how you are born, what your blood is and what are your traditions”. Vasa defined a kind of hierarchy of values, in which nationality came first, it was ‘the essence’, and religion came next, as it was ‘behavior’, a sort of external ‘coverage’. In Vasa’s text, Albanianness tended to be identified with nationality and Greekness with religion. This was in tune with the prevailing Albanian nationalist discourse throughout the period of the National Movement, which tended to favor language, blood links, origin over religion as a means to overcome the religious cleavages among Albanian speaking populations.

¹¹⁸ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg. 505.

¹¹⁹ P. Vasa, *Vepra Letrare*, pg. 97.

Vasa turned to the history of the Byzantine Empire and Ottoman Empire to stress that nationality was something older and more important than religion and to dismantle the confusion between nationality and religion. He considered this confusion as deriving from the internal organization of both empires based on religious communities rather than nationalities. Vasa thought both Empires were not national entities, but political and religious powers created out of a group of nationalities bound together by the same religion:

“...we have to accept that the denomination Greek Empire did not have a national connotation, nor to show its origin, it had only a religious sense; in abusing with the use and the meaning of this word it arrived at a point when under the denomination “Greek” were included not only those people belonging to the Greek nationality, but also the others who were from different tribes who used to follow the rites of the Greek oriental church”.¹²⁰

The same happened with the Ottomans, the successors of the Byzantine Empire in the fifteenth century, who used their Moslem religion to replace the nationality of the people of their empire and to create a powerful state based on this religious community.¹²¹ The way Vasa explained the creation of these empires served to provide a historical background to the primordial and essential values of nationality vis-à-vis the latter phenomenon of religion. The author described both the Byzantine Empire and the Ottoman one as political and religious power structures imposing their authority over already existing nationalities. The prevailing Orthodox and Islamic faith came to include in their area of influence different nationalities. The Ottomanist secularist vision of the Empire as a mosaic of people is evident here. Therefore, the religious denomination “Greek” or “Ottoman” was too general a denomination to be taken as identity markers.

“To consider the Moslems and Catholics as Albanians only because they do not belong to the Greek Orthodox Church and to pretend that the Orthodox population of this country is Hellenic, as they observe the doctrines of the Orthodox Church, this is according to our opinion only a desire to elevate the religious faith to the level of the national principle and to replace the tribe by the dogma, the fatherland by the religious rite, which is unacceptable”.¹²²

Vasa’s argument with regard to nationality and religion, and the related Albanian-Greek contrast, was connected to a concrete political situation in the region. Vasa wrote his studies during the years of the League of Prizren (1878-1881), which resisted with arms the decisions of the Congress of Berlin (1878). The major obstacle to the Albanian intellectual

¹²⁰ Ibid., pg.99.

¹²¹ Ibid, pg.100.

¹²² P. Vasa, *Vepra Letrare*, pg.102.

efforts was the refusal of the Great Powers at the Berlin Congress to recognize the existence of an Albanian problem and their continued attitude to consider Albanian inhabited lands as part of Ottoman territory. Consequently, the action of the Albanian patriots was channeled in two main directions: a) to make known to European opinion and diplomacy the existence of an Albanian nationality and b) to ask and urge the European powers and the Sublime Porte to grant autonomy to the Albanian territories by unifying them into a single administrative unit under the suzerainty of the Sultan. This concern derived from the awareness of Albanian nationalist intellectuals of the shaky structure of the Ottoman Empire and should the Sublime Porte lose its dominion over the Albanian inhabited territories in the south [next to the Greek border], the latter would be partitioned in favor of the Greek claims. Therefore the best option for them was to achieve a union of the Albanian people within the framework of the Ottoman Empire.¹²³

As noted, the preservation of Albanian inhabited territories was also in the interest of the Ottoman government, and it assisted and encouraged the action and the resistance of the League not to accept the decisions of the Congress of Berlin to deliver some of these territories to the Greeks.

The publication of Vasa's essay in 1879 coincided with the Turkish-Greek negotiations on the question of setting their common border, which involved the Albanian speaking populations living there. His work should be seen in the framework of the propagandistic activities of the League of Prizren, and its leading figures, to bring before the eyes of the European public opinion the existence of an Albanian nation in its own right, as a particular element of the complex Balkan picture that in no way should be confused with other people of the region. Albanian patriots considered this area as Southern Epirus, while for the Greeks the same territorial space was the Northern Epirus for the Greeks. Besides Moslem Albanians and Orthodox Greeks, this territory was inhabited by an Orthodox Albanian speaking population too. The Greek claims were based precisely upon this point, all the Orthodox populations were to be considered Greek and consequently they must be included within the jurisdiction of the Greek state.¹²⁴

In the view of the Albanian patriots, the situation was all the more problematic as the Greek Orthodox Church had preserved a monopoly of education over the Orthodox

¹²³ S. Skëndi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, pg.88.

¹²⁴ For more see also Evangelos Kofos, "Hellenism and the Settlement of the Berlin Congress", in *Der Berliner Congress von 1878*, (Wiesbaden, 1982), pg.463-469; Roderic Davison, "The Ottoman Empire and the Congress of Berlin", *Der Berliner Congress von 1878*, (Wiesbaden, 1982), pg.205- 223.

populations in the Albanian inhabited territories.¹²⁵ Thus, taking into account the same religious allegiance of a large section of the Albanian population with the Greek one, the influence of the Greek culture among the Orthodox community, Vasa may have thought it of primary importance to underline the ethnic distinction between Albanians and Greeks. In his essay, Vasa held that nationality, a notion based upon blood and descent, was a primary ‘scientific’ criterion to identify people. Considering the religious criterion as a false principle Vasa wrote:

“There are people who believe that all the followers of the Greek religion, who, as such, are obliged to learn the Greek language, are from Greek blood and descent. This is the ground over which the partisans of pan-Hellenism have based their claims over a part of the population of Epirus and Macedonia. But, after the proofs that we advanced here to support our arguments such claims are unacceptable; they can’t stand in front of history and the facts deriving from that”.¹²⁶

In his propagandistic efforts to make known the Albanian people and to disseminate his essay as widely as possible Vasa enjoyed the support of the Ottoman government, as he was among its high-ranked functionaries. Indeed, his essay was firstly published in French in Istanbul and then, through the intermediary of the Ottoman ambassador in Paris, it was published in London and Berlin. The Ottoman authorities saw it as a useful reaction from “the locals” to impress European public opinion, and to demonstrate their anti-Greek penchant, when the Great Powers were monitoring the Ottoman-Greek negotiations over the border question.¹²⁷

4. Some considerations on his literary works

Here we will briefly mention Vasa reputation as one of the first Romantic writers of the Albanian National Movement and of Albanian literature in general. He wrote in Italian and published in Istanbul in 1873 the collection of verse “Rose e Spine” [Roses and thorns]. These poems are centered on the themes of love, suffering, solitude and death in the traditions of European Romanticism. There are also two poems dedicated to the Italian poets of the Renaissance, Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374) and Torquato Tasso (1544-1595). The

¹²⁵ By 1878, in the three most important Albanian provinces of the south, Gjirokastra, Berati and Vlora, there were 80 Turkish schools and 163 Greek schools.

¹²⁶ P. Vasa, *Vepra Letrare*, pg.100.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, pg.260.

rest of the booklet is dedicated to his own personal life, his personal sorrows and deep distress after the death of four of his five children from his first wife.

In 1890, Vasa wrote the first novel of Albanian literature, “Bardha e Temalit” [Bardha of Temal], though the original was written in French. After Sami Frashëri's much shorter prose work “Taassuku Taalat ve Fitnat” [Love between Talat and Fitnete], “Bardha e Temalit” is certainly the oldest such novel with an Albanian theme. Set in Shkodër in 1842, this sentimental romantic tale tells of the tribulations of a married young girl Bardha and her lover Arad. The town is the center of the Albanian Northern provinces, held to be the hearth of the old patriarchal society. The town was strictly divided between Moslems and Catholics. This Romeo and Juliet-like story is intended as a sublimation of love, as the noblest of human feelings, but at the same time impossible and doomed, as it tried to go beyond religious and social divisions. It was also impossible as the story is placed in a patriarchal environment of Northern Albania of the mid nineteenth century, where things were run by the old canons, according to which women were treated as inferior beings. Consequently, young girls were obliged to accept prearranged marriages, without their consent, and therefore Bardha's love for Arad was doomed. The local primitive and patriarchal society deeply contrasts with the two young lovers. Bardha was beautiful, “as most of Albanian women”, full of aspirations for a happy life, while Arad was a young man thirsty to learn and read, nurturing the desire to follow the examples of the heroes in the verses of Italian Renaissance poets, such as Tarquato Tasso and Ludovico Aristo (1474-1533). It is probable that Vasa projected himself in the figure of Arad.

As a Catholic of Albanian northern town of Shkodër, his Italian experience in the Venice revolution of 1848-1849, Pashko Vasa was very much influenced by European Romanticism as a literary trend, but also as an approach to life. Though he referred also to Renaissance Italian poets, his verses, either thematically, or in their tonality, were visibly receptive to the models of European Romanticism. The sense of isolation, the noble feelings of an unlucky love, the pessimism for worldly joy and the failure to achieve it in this life, *le mal du siècle*, the woman portrayed as an object of admiration, the subjectivization of the personages [the author sees himself in them], the expulsion of the personages from their environment, the distance from a beloved person or a place, etc. Vasa is considered as one of the most important exponents of Albanian Romanticism.

Pashko Vasa verses and novels clearly fall into the Romantic trend of Balkan literature of the nineteenth century, both as a writer, but also as an Albanian nationalist intellectual. His literary production is almost similar to those of the Italo-Albanian Jeronim

De Rada and the Albanian national poet Naim Frashëri. He wrote verse, but he wrote also petitions, essays on Albanian history and the rights of Albanian to have their “national” existence. He wrote also grammar books for the Albanian language. The historicizing spirit, the search for a better world far away in time and space, in a ‘Golden Ages’, or to search for the ideal type of man among the ordinary people, were all elements of Romanticism, which are found also in the works of other Albanian writers of the time. Thus, it was not by chance that this kind of literature flourished precisely in the time of major political crisis, such as the Eastern Crisis of the 1870, which indicates the close relationship of the literary production of the time with the political activism of his authors. Anyway, the relations between Romanticism and the idea of nation, the Romantic approaches can be seen not only during the period of national movements, but also when a national state is well in place.

5. Pashko Vasa in Albanian studies

In general, the Ottoman aspect of the figure of Vasa has scarcely been taken into account by Albanian historiography. As we will also see in the case of Shemseddin Sami Frashëri and Ismail Qemali, these individuals are treated as one-dimensional figures. They were simply “Albanian” patriotic figures. Consequently, Albanian historiography fails to explain how it was possible for these figures, such as Pashko Vasa and Ismail Qemali, and among the most important Ottoman intellectuals such as Sami Frashëri, while being the “guiding leaders” of the Albanian National Movement (1878-1912), and despite their Albanian patriotic actions, nevertheless managed to survive in pursuing their official careers in the highest ranks of the Ottoman state bureaucracy.

This has to do precisely with the neglect of the Ottoman context where the beginning of the Albanian National Movement took place. It has to do with the simultaneous accommodation of the “nationalist” demands of these Albanian leaders into the Ottoman policy towards Albanians in the context of the Eastern Crisis, and the ensuing instrumentalization of their reactions by the Sublime Porte for preserving its frontiers from the Slav advancement [Montenegro and Serbia] in the Northern parts of the Albanian inhabited populations and the Greek threat in those of the Southern part of the Ottoman territories in the Balkans. The crisis of the Balkan Ottoman frontiers opened by the Congress of Berlin (1878) made it possible for these leaders to publicly articulate demands for the affirmation of the existence of an Albanian “nation” and for the reorganizing of the Albanian

territories into a single Ottoman province [vilayet] with the aim to better define its borders and to preserve them from partition among the newly founded Balkan states in an eventual dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. It was also in the interests of the Ottoman government to allow for a certain period the voicing of the Albanian demands, among others the pamphlet of Pashko Vasa on Albanians, to let know the Great Powers that the rearranging of the Ottoman borders in the Balkans, to the benefit of the Balkan states, was a complicated issue which should take into account also the Albanian populations. Once the danger was temporarily averted, the Ottoman government used a harsh hand over the activities of the Albanian patriots as it was the case of the crushing of the League of Prizren (1878-1881). After this period, the nationalist activities of the Albanian intellectuals took another direction that of striving to culturally prepare the Albanian “nation” through publication of text schools, of cultural magazines and pressing for the opening of Albanian schools in Albanian territories themselves. If we have another increase of these activities in the 1880s it has to do again with a change of the policy of the Porte towards the Albanians. In mid 1880s, in the context of the negotiations with Greece to define their new common borders, as stipulated by the Congress of Berlin, the Ottoman government saw it as convenient to use again the Albanians and their existence as a distinct people from the Greeks, to not deliver parts of its territories in Epirus [Northern Greece and Southern Albania]. Two Albanian magazines were published in Istanbul, “Drita” [The Light] (1884) and “Dituria” [The Knowledge] (1885) and the opening of the first Albanian school in Korça (1887) in south-eastern Albania, close to the Greek borders.

Pashko Vasa’s patriotic activities should be placed in that context. He was an Albanian nationalist intellectual and a romantic writer. As both an Albanian patriot and an Ottoman functionary he was publicly involved in the latter events of the League of Prizren (1878-1881). When the policy of the Sublime Porte changed in the 1880s, Vasa’s last publications were in the field of school text books and literature, “Grammaire albanaise à l’usage de ceux qui désirent apprendre cette langue sans l’aide d’un maître”, London (1887) and its novel “Bardha e Temalit” in 1890. On the other hand, he continued his official career as the Governor General of Lebanon from 1883 until his death in 1892.

The Albanian studies on the work of Pashko Vasa are divided into a literary critique of his literary production and an analysis of his patriotic activities. They are all more or less permeated by romantic and nationalist tones, which have transcended the socialist period and persist even today. He is depicted as a romantic writer and, like all the others, Vasa hymned the history of the Albanian people, its landscape, its heroism with a major concern in his

mind: to witness that Albanians were an ancient European people, which with its traditions and its culture deserved to be as free as other European nations.¹²⁸ Anyway, for some authors, unlike the majority of the Albanian romantic writers of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Vasa was well integrated in the highest ranks of the Ottoman administration. For them, this “opportunistic” and “pragmatic” official career made it possible for Vasa to write from the point of views of the Ottoman Empire, but taking advantage to further the Albanian cause which was his “ultimate” and greatest concern. This last peculiarity of the life Pashko Vasa has been seen by these scholars as a premeditated goal to address European public opinion on the history of the Albanian people, rather than aiming at local audiences.¹²⁹

However, there is a general consensus that Vasa belonged to the generation of the Albanian organizers and writers of the Albanian National Movement, who by their activities rendered a relevant contribution to “the national awakening” and “unification of the Albanian people”, to the “development and progress of his co-nationals”.¹³⁰ He is seen also as a representative of the national Enlightenment, which together with the National Movement tried “to awaken and strengthen the national consciousness of the Albanian people for freedom and independence”.¹³¹ Due to his patriotic poem, mentioned at the start of this chapter, Vasa, in particular, has been singled out as a pioneer of a laic form of religion, “Albanianism”, that meant inculcating among the Albanians the love for the nation as against their religious affiliations. Therefore, he was seen as an enlightener fighting against religious fanaticism in an obscurantist and oriental Ottoman Empire.¹³² The only criticism made on him was the fact that, being a high Ottoman employee, he could not sometimes ‘discern’ between the interests of a moribund Ottoman Empire and those of its oppressed people.¹³³ The target of this critique was most of the times his essay on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Albanian studies have stressed the importance of the political context of an Ottoman Empire, whose only major aspect was its unavoidable dissolution in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, implying continuous liberation rebellions of the Balkan people, and a steady interventionist militarism of the Great Powers. But, these studies have failed, on the other hand, to put the “national leaders” in the appropriate political and ideological context of

¹²⁸ R. Qosja, *Historia e Letërsisë Shqipe, Romantizmi*, vol.II, (Prishtinë, 1984), pg.314. See also Z. Xholi, *Mendimtarë të Rilindjes Kombëtare* [Thinkers of National Awakening] (Tiranë, 1987), pg.149-150. V. Bala, *Pashko Vasa*, (Tiranë, 1979), pg.7.

¹²⁹ R. Qosja, *Historia e Letërsisë Shqipe, Romantizmi*, vol.II, pg.307.

¹³⁰ V. Bala, *Pashko Vasa*, pg.7. Z. Xholi, *Mendimtarë të Rilindjes Kombëtare*, pg.126.

¹³¹ M. Stavileci, *Iluminizmi shqiptar*, (Tiranë, 2000), pg.139.

¹³² *Ibid*, pg.141.

¹³³ R. Qosja, *Historia e Letërsisë Shqipe, Romantizmi*, vol.II pg.308.; V. Bala, *Pashko Vasa*, pg.55..

the time, which has to do primarily with the processes of modernization, secularization, and centralization of the Empire. For the Albanian historiography, Pashko Vasa, and other Albanian leaders who like him were integrated in the Ottoman administration and Ottoman intellectual life, are venerated as important figures of the national pantheon and their Ottoman integration has been seen always as a kind of political concession made intentionally to better serve their Albanian “nation”. For the Albanian studies these figures had only one identity, it was the original national identity as they were born Albanians. Any other religious, professional, or social identity is either superseded by the sublime “national identity”, or it is simply discarded. The fact that Vasa’s Ottoman political imperial identity might have been large enough to accommodate his Albanian ethnic affiliation too has been simply left ‘unnoticed’, as it could damage his wholehearted Albanian patriotism. The national pantheon, where Vasa, Sami, Qemali stand in the first ranks, will be built up especially when an Albanian state will be created, as a more or less stabilized entity, in the 1920s and it would be an important tool in the framework of the nation-building policies. These policies would assume an all-pervasive dimension during the communist regime after the Second World War. In this sense the Albanian studies had the task to tailor the portraits of Albanian relevant figures of the period of the National Movement (1878-1912) suiting only to their Albanian patriotism, which didn’t allow for any ambiguity and complexity: they were to be only “Albanians” leaving outdoor their Ottoman allegiance.

Chapter III

Shemseddin Sami Frashëri, Ottoman-Albanian intellectual

Shemseddin Sami Frashëri (1850-1904) was a distinguished scholar of Turkish linguistic and a prominent figure of the Albanian National Movement (1878-1912). The role he played during the initial phase of the National Movement through his political and linguistic work, led to him being considered by Albanian historiography as the “ideologue of the National Movement”.¹ Albanian historiography has celebrated him and his two elder brothers Abdyl Frashëri (1839-1892) and Naim Frashëri (1846-1900), as the symbols of the Albanian National Movement. Abdyl Frashëri was a leading figure in the League of Prizren (1878-1881). Naim Frashëri wrote a series of romantic and patriotic verses in the late XIX century and through his important contribution in laying the foundations of an Albanian literary language he is accorded the title of the “Albanian national poet”.

Shemseddin Sami Frashëri was born in June 1850 in the small town of Frashëri in southeastern part of Albania to a family of small landowners.² His family did not belong to the Albanian nobility, whose main characteristic were big land tenures and high positions in the Ottoman state administration.³ Sami received his primary education in his hometown and his first teacher was a *hoxha* [Moslem priest] who taught him Arabic and Turkish.⁴ At that time, this was a common education for the children of the place. In the Ottoman Empire education has been a preserve of the *ulema* [Moslem clergy], though starting from the mid

¹ *Histori e Popullit Shqiptar* [History of the Albanian People], (Tirana, 2002), pg.290; Z. Xholi, *Sami Frashëri-vepra* [Sami Frashëri-works], vol.4, (Prishtina, 1978), pg.9; R. Qosja, *Prej tipologjisë deri te periodizimi* [From typology to periodization], (Prishtina, 1979); Sh. Çollaku, *Mendimi iluminist i Sami Frashërit* [The illuminist thought of Sami Frashëri], (Tirana, 1986), pg.11; see also the introduction by Abdullah Hamiti to *Sami Frashëri. Kush e prish paqen në Ballkan. Publicistika e Sami Frashërit në turqisht*, [Sami Frashëri. Who broke the peace in the Balkans. Sami Frashëri's journalistic articles in Turkish], edited by R. Ismajli (ed.), (Pejë 2000).

² K. Frashëri, “Sami Frashëri 1850-1904”, in *Buletin për Shkencat Shoqërore* [Bulletin for Social Sciences], nr.4, (Tiranë, 1955), pg.62. See also K. Frashëri, *Abdyl Frashëri*, (Tiranë, 1984), pg.42.

³ Eqrem bej Vlora, *Kujtime* [Memoirs], (Tiranë, 2001), pg. 165.

⁴ K. Frashëri, *Abdyl Frashëri*, pg.43. Also Z. Xholi, *Sami Frashëri- vepra* pg.10; H. Norris, *Islam in the Balkans, religion and society between Europe and Arab World*, (University of South Carolina, 1993), pg. 162.

nineteenth century the Ottoman government tried, in the framework of the Tanzimat reforms, to remove education from the jurisdiction of the clergy.

In 1865, the entire Frashëri family, five brothers and two sisters, moved to Janina, capital of the vilayet of Janina. The town was an important economic and cultural center in the Ottoman Balkan territories. It had different primary schools for boys and girls and also a rich Greek library and a printing house. Besides the Greek gymnasium, there were also state Ottoman secondary schools teaching in the medium of Turkish.⁵ In Janina, Sami attended the Greek “Zosimea” gymnasium, which was an important educational institution. This six years gymnasium, modeled on Western schools, had in its curricula mathematic, physics, history, astronomy, chemistry, ancient Greek, Latin, French, Italian, etc.⁶ It gave the students a sound knowledge of ancient Greek, Latin, and also French and Italian literature. He studied also with private professors Persian, Arab and Turkish. One of the topics, borrowed from the European schools, was geography. In “Zosimea”, Sami studied the geography of Epirus, which comprised in a large part those Albanian inhabited lands of his birthplace.⁷ The years passed at “Zosimea” gymnasium provided Sami with a solid classical and modern knowledge as well as of Western and Eastern languages.⁸ In 1872, Sami went to Istanbul, where, except for short periods of time, he lived and worked until his death in 1904.

Sami made an enormous contribution to Turkish linguistics. In relation to his dual contribution to two different cultures, Albanian and Turkish, Hasan Kaleshi wrote:

“L’analyse des oeuvres de Sami démontre que ses efforts sont dirigés dans plusieurs sens: introduction de nouveaux genres littéraires dans la littérature turque (roman, pièce de theatre, critique littéraire et surtout critique philologique), popularisation des resultats européens les plus modernes, lutte contre le primitivisme et le fanatisme religieux (15 ouvrage dans “Cep Kutuphanesi”), emancipation de la femme (ouvrage *Kadinlar* et revue *Aile*), propagation des acquisitions culturelles et scientifiques (travail sur l’encyclopédie), introduction des méthodes pédagogique les plus modernes dans l’enseignement de l’arabe, du turc et de l’albanais (nombreux manuels scolaires), renaissance culturelle et linguistique du peuple albanais (alphabet, manuel et grammaire) et, enfin, creation de la langue littéraire de deux peuple. Son travail fut complexe et, si l’on peut dire, synchronisé”.⁹

⁵ K. Frashëri, *Abdyl Frashëri*, pg.55.

⁶ Z. Xholi, *Sami Frashëri- vepra*, pg.10; R. Qosja, *Porosia e madhe* [The great wish], (Prishtinë, 1986), pg.18.

⁷ K. Frashëri, *Abdyl Frashëri*, pg.54.

⁸ Sh. Çollaku, *Mendimi iluminist i Sami Frashërit*, pg.12.

⁹ H. Kaleshi, “Le role de Chemseddin Sami Frashery dans la formation de deux langues littéraires: turc et albanais”, in “Actes du II Congrès International des Études du Sud-Est Européen”, Tome IV (Linguistique et littérature), (Athene, 1978), pg. 177-178. Apart of his approach to the Albanian National movement as a “cultural and national renaissance”, in this study Kaleshi has given an accurate analysis on Frashëri’s linguistic contribution to both Turkish and Albanian written languages.

In the following sections, we are going to provide a short overview of his works in Albanian and Turkish. In both countries, Turkey and Albania, he is known with two different names, Shemseddin Sami in Turkish and Sami Frashëri in Albanian. I will follow the example of Bülent Bilmez' study on Shemseddin Sami Frashëri who, in order to avoid "partisanship in this matter", used simply Sami.¹⁰ Sami is the part of his name accepted by both sides, and better fits his dual identity.

1. His "Albanian" contribution

The Albanian question acquired urgency after the San Stefano Treaty and the Congress of Berlin (1878). Sami's involvement in the Albanian 'cause' started in December 1877, when he became a member of the Albanian patriotic "Committee for the Defense of the Rights of the Albanian Nation", founded in Istanbul in December 1877, as mentioned earlier, and of the "Society for Printing Albanian Letters" (1879).¹¹ One of the foremost achievements of the "Society" was the drafting of an alphabet for the Albanian language, called the "Istanbul alphabet", or "the Frashëri alphabet" in recognition of the contribution of the Frashëri brothers in this undertaking. This alphabet "became the only Latin-based alphabet adopted by a largely Muslim people in the Ottoman Empire".¹²

In 1879, together with other Albanian patriots, including Pashko Vasa, Sami drafted the "Spelling book of the Albanian language", for which he wrote two chapters with the title "The Albanian language" and "Geography".¹³ He edited also the first magazines in the Albanian language, "Drita" [Light] and "Dituria" [Knowledge], published in Istanbul (1884-85), for which he wrote a series of articles. In 1886, Sami published another "Spelling book of the Albanian language" (1886), and a "Grammar of the Albanian language" (1886). In

¹⁰ B. Bilmez "Shemseddin Sami Frashëri (1850-1904): Contributing to the Construction of Albanian and Turkish Identities", in Diana Mishkova (ed), *We, The People. Politics of National Peculiarity in Southeastern Europe*, (Budapest, New York 2008), pg. 341-366.

¹¹ *History of the Albanian People* [History of the Albanian People], pg.143.

¹² F. Trix, "Stamboul alphabet of Shemseddin Sami Bey: Precursor of Turkish Script Reform", *Middle East Studies*, vol. XXXI, nr. 2, (1999), pg. 255-272.

¹³ K. Frashëri, "Sami Frashëri (1850-1904)", pg.68.

1888, he wrote “Geography” to meet the needs of Albanian schools for textbooks.¹⁴ He was the main protector of the first school that used the Albanian language, which was opened in Korça [south-east of present day Albania] in 1887, where his works were used as textbooks. In 1899, he published, anonymously, in Bucharest his best known book in the Albanian language “Albania, what it was, what it is, and what it will be”.¹⁵

2. His “Turkish” contribution

Sami was according to the Albanian historiography one of the leading figures of the Albanian ‘Rebirth’, but his major intellectual work was produced in Turkish. He left a huge linguistic and literary production in this language. If in Albanian he wrote 6 books he produced around 45 in Turkish.¹⁶ When he was 23 years old he became editor-in-chief of “Hadika” [Garden] newspaper, founded by Namik Kemal, one of the main figures of the Young Ottomans. In 1873, he wrote the first novel in Turkish “Taassuku Taalat ve Fitnat” [Love between Talat and Fitnete], while one year later, on account of his liberal opinions, he was exiled to Tripoli [Libya], where he stayed one year. In 1876, he wrote the first drama in the Turkish language “Seyyit Yahja” [Mister Yahja], and two others “Besa” [word of honor in Albanian] and “Gave” in 1877.¹⁷ The same year he opened the first daily Turkish language newspaper “Sabah” [The Morning], but one year later, when the Russian-Turkish war broke out, he was again exiled to Rhodos, the Greek island in the Aegean Sea. He served there as the secretary of the Ottoman *vali* [governor], Sava Pasha.

After returning back to Istanbul in 1878, Sami worked as the editor of the Turkish newspaper “Tercumani Sark” [Messenger of East].¹⁸ This newspaper was closed down in 1880 and in the same year Sami began publishing a series of booklets, which aimed to propagate scientific knowledge under the title “Pocket Library”. This series continued until 1895. The titles in this series included: “Yer” [Earth], “Insan” [Man], “Emsale” [Proverbs],

¹⁴ Z. Bakiu, “Bibliografi e zgjeruar e veprave të Sami Frashërit” [A broadened bibliography of the works of Sami Frashëri], in *Sami Frashëri, vepra*, vol.8, (Prishtinë, 1978), pg.17.

¹⁵ Sh. Çollaku, *Mendimi iluminist i Sami Frashërit*, pg. 20.

¹⁶ E. Reso, *Sami Frashëri- vepra*, [Sami Frashëri-works], vol. 2, (Prishtinë, 1978), pg.7.

¹⁷ K. Frashëri, “Sami Frashëri (1850-1904)”, pg.64.

¹⁸ Ibid, pg.66. He worked as editor and editor-in-chief for Turkish newspapers as well. Among them we can mention here “Sabah” [Morning] 1876, “Aile” [Family], “Hafta” [Week], etc.

“Genç İnsan” [New Man], “Lisan” [Language], “Islamic civilization”, etc.¹⁹ Sami wrote 7 books on Turkish and Arabic grammar. He published various studies on the first documents written in Turkish in the Middle Ages and on Turkish dialectology and its relations to Arabic.²⁰ With this regard Hasan Kaleshi wrote in his study that:

“Dans sa revue *Hafta* en 1880 déjà, Sami est le premier parmi les savants turcs qui écrit sur la langue et son origine, avec un aperçu particulier sur la langue turque ottomane. Cinq ans plus tard, il élargit cet article sur la langue et, en appliquant les résultats les plus modernes de la linguistique européenne, il rédige son oeuvre *Lisan* (La Langue). Il y donne un aperçu historique sur l’évolution de la linguistique, sur la linguistique comparée et la classification des langues, en se servant de nombreux exemples pris à différentes langues, sur les langues agglutinantes et flexionnelles, sur les origines et l’évolution de la langue, etc. Il fut le premier à apprendre aux Turcs quel est le groupe auquel appartient leur langue. Cette oeuvre représente la meilleure preuve à quel point Sami connaissait la linguistique européenne et les résultats de la turcologie contemporaine et avec quelle opportunité il a su embrasser cette matière et la présenter de la façon la plus simple.”²¹

Sami played a decisive role in shaping a literary Turkish language based on a purified and simplified vernacular.²² According to Bülent Bilmez:

“Indeed Sami was already at the center of Ottoman intellectual life in the last decade of the nineteenth century, especially after he had published his French-Turkish dictionary in 1883 and his Turkish-French dictionary in 1885. The start of publishing his major 6 volumes Encyclopedia, *Kamus-ul Alam* in 1888, which was completed in 1898, contributed very much to his reputation. Especially his dictionaries were very widely used and very much appreciated by the intellectuals of his time for whom, French was the primary language that opened a window to the Western world”.²³

He translated from French into Turkish, “A short history of France” (1873), “Les misérables” by Victor Hugo (1881) and “Robinson Crusoe” by Daniel Defoe (1886).²⁴ As said above, the importance Sami had for both countries, Albania and Turkey is reflected in the usage of two different names. Each of these historiographies have tried to present Sami as “one of the leaders of nationalism in each country, i.e. “Turkism” and “Albanianism”,

¹⁹ Ibid, pg.76.

²⁰ For a detailed list of these publications see K. Frashëri, “Sami Frashëri (1850-1904)”, pg.80. H. Kaleshi, “Le rôle de Chemseddin Sami Frashery dans la formation de deux langues littéraires: turc et albanais”, in “Actes du II Congrès International des Études du Sud-Est Européen”, Tome IV (linguistique et littérature), Athens 1978, pg.179. P. Bartl, *Myslimanët shqiptarë në lëvizjen për pavarësi kombëtare (1878-1912)*, pg. 167-169.

²¹ H. Kaleshi, “Le rôle de Chemseddin Sami Frashery dans la formation de deux langues littéraires: turc et albanais”, pg.178.

²² Ibid, pg.196.

²³ B. Bilmez, “Sami Frashëri apo Shemsedin Sami?”, [Sami Frashëri or Semsettin Sami?], in *Përpyjekja*, nr. 18, (Tiranë, 2003), pg.118. For his important role in the Turkish linguistics, journalism and culture in general see also Sh. Çollaku, *Mendimi iluminist i Sami Frashërit*, (Tirana, 1986), pg.28-31.

²⁴ K. Frashëri, “Sami Frashëri (1850-1904)”, pg.82. See also Sami’s book written in Turkish “Lisan” [Language], published in Istanbul in 1886.

respectively”. The case of Shemseddin Sami Frashëri is “a good example of the use of history and historical figures in the process of nation building in general”.²⁵ This study is based on Sami’s works published in Albanian on the “Ottoman” and “Albanian” nation. There is an extensive list of his works in Ottoman-Turkish, and these works are far more numerous and variegated than his Albanian contribution. A thorough study of these works is beyond the scope of this study. Use has been made of Sami’s texts on the articulation of the “Ottoman” nation which have recently been translated into Albanian. Though not numerous, they cover the main strands of his thought.

On the other hand, the size of the following sections, dealing with his Turkish and Albanian contributions, should not be taken as a measure of the importance of one side, Turkish, as against the other, Albanian, or vice versa. Here we focus on the simultaneity, or the synchronicity, in Sami’s works, when he tackled the “national” questions, Ottoman and Albanian, with the aim of analyzing it, while scrutinizing his way of constructing the respective “national identities”.

3. Educational and cultural background of Sami’s Ottoman and Albanian works

Sami’s Albanian patriotic activities were intimately related to and complementary, rather than contradicting, to his being an Ottoman intellectual. The Ottomanism of liberal Ottoman intellectuals of the late nineteenth century was, in a way, a cultural-ideological reservoir, ‘generous’ enough to feed the concomitant ‘scholarly’ articulation of various ethnic nationalisms. Albanian studies, as in the case of Vasa, have, with few exceptions, presented a quite a simplistic profile of him and considered Sami only as an Albanian patriot. As Bülent Bilmez says in his study on Sami, he was a remarkable case of using simultaneously the “we” concept to define two different collective identities, “Turkish” and “Albanian”.²⁶

In 1881, when he published his article on the Turkish language, Sami wrote a letter to the exponent of the Albanian Diaspora in Italy, Jeronim De Rada. What is striking in this letter is Sami’s idea for the future of the Albanian inhabited lands. He said that the main

²⁵ B. Bilmez, “Sami Frashëri apo Shemsedin Sami?”, pg.118.

²⁶ B. Bilmez, “Shemseddin Sami Frashëri (1850-1904). Contributing to the Construction of Albanian and Turkish Identities”, D. Mishkova (ed), *We, The People. Politics of National Peculiarity in Southeastern Europe*, (Budapest, New York, 2008), (Budapest, New York, 2008), pg. 365-366.

objective of the “League of Prizren” (1878-1881) was to fight for a unique autonomous Albanian province within the Ottoman Empire. But, he didn’t exclude even the option of full independence, depending on the course of events. Sami envisaged that in the future Albania would need neither a Moslem, Orthodox, nor a Catholic prince. The political organization that mostly suited Albanians was a kind of “democracy of the elders”, a kind of “Council of Elders”, which Sami described as an old Albanian tradition. For Sami, it suited the traditions of Albanian highlanders that still lived in complete liberty, but most of all, it would avoid religious friction within a “nation” belonging to three different faiths.²⁷

At first glance, this letter would seem very much to fit the schematic and simplistic representation of Sami in the official Albanian historiography, as a resolute Albanian patriot from his adolescence. Such arguments would also point to the “tough censorship” imposed by the regime of Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909) over intellectual activities in the Empire, a fact very much stressed by Albanian historians. According to Albanian official historiography, Sami’s Albanian patriotism, and his true Albanian character, can be seen only in his confidential correspondence with Albanian patriots.²⁸

Albanian scholars have never accepted a dual portrait for Sami. Instead, they have bluntly denied that Sami might have also been an Ottoman intellectual. This overestimates his Albanian contribution to the detriment of his much richer and larger Ottoman and Turkish intellectual works. For some Albanian scholars, Sami was deeply influenced by his childhood passed in his birthplace Frashëri and by his studies in the Greek classical gymnasium of Zosimea. Therefore, according to the Albanian studies, when he went to Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire, he had already made up his mind to think and work only for his motherland, Albania.²⁹ Others praise the Greek gymnasium Zosimea, which, with its occidental and oriental languages, provided Sami with a sound classical and modern culture. This enabled him to judge the destiny of the Albanian inhabited territories through a close examination of the conditions of the Ottoman Empire, “the internal factors, which along with the external ones, were quickly propelling the Empire into the abyss”.³⁰ Hitherto the position of Albanian studies in relation to Sami’s works falls into the classical nationalist pattern,

²⁷ Albanian State Archive (AQSH), Fond 51, file nr.4, pg.1-2.

²⁸ Among others see *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, [History of the Albanian People] (Tirana, 2002), pg. 289-293; Z. Xholi, *Sami Frashëri*, (Prishtina, 1978), pg.12-13; Z. Xholi, *Në rrugët e kulturës filozofike* [In the roads of philosophical culture], (Tirana, 2006), pg.75-79, 79-83; A. Hamiti, *Kush e prishi paqen në Ballkan*, [Who broke the peace in the Balkans], pg.10-11.

²⁹ Z. Xholi, *Sami Frashëri*, (Prishtina, 1978), pg.10-12.

³⁰ Sh. Çollaku, *Mendimi iluminist i Sami Frashërit*, [The Illuminist thought of Sami Frashëri], (Tirana, 1986), pg.12.

which nationalizes the life and work of historical figures, by assigning to them a single national identity. The following and direct consequence of this technique is the disregard for the complex context of the time, namely the political, ideological and cultural Ottoman environment.

However, studies on Sami that were carried out in the 1950s have stressed the influence on him of the new streams of Ottoman political and cultural movements in the second half of the nineteenth century. But as time went by the nationalistic and ideological grip on Albanian historiography became more exclusive. Therefore, they pushed further to the background his Ottoman and Turkish side, while polishing and rendering more radiant his “Albanianism”.³¹

The complex context of Sami’s idea of the “nation” was shaped initially by his education at the gymnasium “Zosimea” which provided him with access to modern ideas and scientific knowledge.³² The political situation in the Empire during the last quarter of the nineteenth century was also important in pushing young nationalist intellectuals to embrace the “national cause”. We have already mentioned the Eastern Crisis (1875-1878) and the following Congress of Berlin in 1878. Many Albanian nationalist intellectuals came from the vilayet of Janina, which had become a target of Greek expansionism, due to the presence of Greek and other Orthodox populations, including also Albanian speakers. In this sense the Greek culture received at school, compounded also by the Greek territorial claims over lands inhabited by the Albanian populations, greatly influenced the Frasheri brothers. Sami’s “Albanianism” was developed, as Nathalie Clayer argues, through “reaction and association” to Hellenism and its territorial claims of mid XIX century.³³

For Moslem Albanians, like Sami, the confrontation with Hellenism would render easier this process of differentiation. The way his Greek studies sparked Sami’s interest in his homeland is explained in a booklet written by Mid’hat Frashëri (1880-1949), Sami’s nephew and an important political figure during the interwar period (1912-1939).

³¹ K. Frashëri, « Sami Frashëri, (1850-1904) », pg.56-109. By the same author also “Shemseddin Sami Frashëri- Ideolog i Lëvizjes Kombëtare Shqiptare”, [Shemseddin Sami Frashëri- the ideologue of Albanian National Movement], in *Studime Historike*, nr. 2, (Tirana, 1962), pg.80-93. Though these studies provide reach information about Frashëri’s intellectual production in Turkish, they also sound like laying claim on Frashëri’s “Albanianess” as against his “Turkishness”. Later studies will restrict further more the scope of Ottoman influences on his works.

³² B. Bilmez, “Shemseddin Sami Frashëri (1850-1904). Contributing to the Construction of Albanian and Turkish Identities”, Diana Mishkova (ed), *We, The People. Politics of National Peculiarity in Southeastern Europe*, (Budapest, New York, 2008), pg. 344.

³³ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg.104-119.

“Studying in a Greek school did not inculcate into Naim Frashëri [Sami’s elder brother] the love for Greeks and Greece; but, looking at the pride this nation [the Greeks] had for their people and their country, Naim and his brother Sami, who were together in the same school, felt the desire to endow Albanians with something to be proud of; they searched throughout the history of Albania for people and deeds, who could be of credit to the country [Albania]”.³⁴

These young Albanians were also in contact with other communities in South-Eastern Europe.³⁵ From the end of eighteenth century, the processes of construction of “national identities” among Bulgarians, Serbs and especially Greeks had affected, in particular, orthodox Albanians of the regions of Korça and Janina. The common religious identity shared with Greeks, Romanians, etc, pushed some orthodox Albanians to embrace these new “collective identities”. According to Nathalie Clayer:

“Cependant, la dynamique de fusion et d’assimilation finit par entraîner une dynamique inverse, de différenciation. L’affirmation d’une identité commune, sur la base de la religion et de la culture, mit en évidence une alterité intra-communautaire sur la base des langues vernaculaires- sans que l’identité commune ne soit forcément remise en cause. Et ce processus alla en s’accroissant au fur et à mesure que les langues vernaculaires prenaient de plus en plus d’importance dans les constructions identitaires.”³⁶

Sami’s outlook was also influenced by the reform processes within the Ottoman Empire during the second half of the nineteenth century. The most important ones being its modernization, westernization, the breaking of the system of millets, the rise of Balkan nationalisms and an ever growing penetration of foreign European powers into the affairs of the Empire. These changes were embodied in the Tanzimat reforms already mentioned. Serif Mardin claims that the favorable attitude of the men of Tanzimat to the practical application of modern sciences in the schools extended the influence of “positivism” and “materialism”

³⁴ L. Skëndo *Naim Frashëri*, (Tirana, 1941), pg.12. Skëndo had previously published the book in Sofia in 1901 and Tirana 1923. In an article of his in August 1878 at the Ottoman newspaper “Terxhuman-i Shark” (Messenger of East), Sami Frashëri says that he did not betray his origin and nationality though he studied at a Greek gymnasium. In Sami Frashëri, “Who broke the peace in the Balkans”, op.cit, 192. See also K. Maloki, “Naim Frashëri, një studim” [Naim Frashëri, a study], in *Naim Frashëri 1925*, (Graz, 1925), pg.63. This is a book published by a group of Albanian students in Graz (Austria) on the occasion of the 25 anniversary of Naim Frashëri’s death. Speaking about the schooling influence over Frashëri brothers, Krist Maloki stresses in particular the ancient Greek historian Herodotus, and the Greek literature.

³⁵ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg.119-127; Noel Malcolm, “Myths of Albanian National Identity: Some Key Elements, as Expressed in the Works of Albanian Writers in America in the Early Twentieth Century”, in Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers and Bernd J. Fischer (eds) *Albanian Identities, Myth and History*, (London, 2002), pg.70-87; B. Bilmez, “Myths of Origin and Autochthony in Shemseddin Sami Frashëri (1850-1904) Texts Contributing to the Construction of both Albanian and Turkish “We’s”, paper presented at the Centre for Advanced Studies in Sofia in the framework of “We, The People” project, (Sofia, 2005). S. Skëndi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, pg.113-119.

³⁶ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg.138-139.

over Ottoman intellectuals at the end of the nineteenth century.³⁷ As mentioned also in the report of Vasa on Bosnia-Herzegovina, the secularizing and westernizing measures in the field of education in the 1860s were undertaken by the Tanzimat statesmen with the aim to achieve a political fusion between Muslims and non-Muslims. These policies were instrumental in founding a secular education through which the secular concept of Ottoman ‘nationality’ would be formed and propagated.³⁸

The Tanzimat era saw also the flourishing of intellectual life and amongst whose main achievements was the growth of the press and an increased interest in reforming the Turkish language,³⁹ in order to render it more readable for the population. The simplification of Ottoman Turkish, which had a combination of Arabic, Persian and Turkish words, had in its basis the concern of the intellectuals of Tanzimat time to spread knowledge to as wide an audience as possible. Thus, the new approach to language “indicated that the general reader and the man in the street were beginning to be given importance which they had not been able to acquire in the eyes of the intellectuals of a bygone social order”. With this regard Niyazi Berkes wrote:

“In contrast with the studied obscurantism of the official writings of the period, the unofficial written language came increasingly closer to earth under the influence of the popular literature. The language now reaching the tongues of the people was, so to say, freed from religious association. Many of those who gained literary fame, Ahmed Midhat, Şemseddin Sami, Ahmed Rasim, Hüseyin Rahmi, and Hüseyin Cahit, to mention some, served their literary apprenticeship translating popular books and articles from French. It appears that while doing this they acquired the habits of freeing the language from religious and ceremonial coloration”.⁴⁰

Sami’s intellectual activity in Istanbul was closely related to the ideological influence of the Young Ottomans in general, and of their leading figure Namik Kemal (1840-1888) in particular, with whom he had worked in 1873 in “Hadika” newspaper founded by the latter. As Serif Mardin explains, the ideas of Namik Kemal of the “fatherland” consisted:

“...on one hand, of the continuous mention of prowess of the ancient Ottomans which, according to Kemal, obligated succeeding generations to live up to it and, on the other hand, of suggestions regarding the

³⁷ S. Mardin “Religion and Secularism in Turkey”, in A. Kazancigil and E. Ozbudun (eds) *Ataturk: founder of a modern state*, (London, 1997), pg.198.

³⁸ N. Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, (London, 1998), pg.179. According to Berkes the direct outcome of such a policy was the opening in 1868 of Lycée of Galatasaray. In this school, where Muslim Turks, Greeks and Jewish were studying together, the language of instruction was French. The curriculum contained Turkish, Latin, Greek, history and sciences. However, Berkes writes that while the higher secondary education has undergone reforming and secularizing measures during Tanzimat (1839-1876), the primary education has remained under the grip of the Muslim clergy.

³⁹ N. Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, (London, 1998), pg.197.

⁴⁰ N. Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, pg.279.

building of a unified state and the establishment of the conception of an imperial Ottoman citizenship regardless of religion and race”.⁴¹

The period when Sami had his most fruitful intellectual production, the last quarter of the nineteenth century, coincided also with the rise of the ideological streams that marked the public life of the Ottoman Empire, namely Ottomanism, Moslem reformism and Turkism. It seems that Sami was influenced by the Ottomanist vision of an Ottoman “nation” made up of different populations and different religious communities, and based upon their political cohabitation. Sami displayed his Albanian political identity in various stages of his activity, but in clearer/stronger terms at the end of his life when he published his famous booklet “Albania, what it was, what it is, what it will be”. As an Ottoman intellectual, Sami did not see any important contradictions between the loyalty to the “general fatherland”, the Ottoman Empire, conceived as a political entity comprising various populations, and his “particular fatherland”, Albania, which was part of it.⁴² Moreover, the prevailing discourse of the Albanian nationalist intellectuals of the period favored administrative autonomy inside the Empire, as a means to protect it from the territorial claims of the newly founded Balkan states.⁴³ Turkism, materialism and scientism, as mentioned in the introduction, all left their imprints on Sami’s mental outlook. Sukru Hanioglu writes:

“Discussions on the conflict between science and religion abounded, while in many “scientific” books science appeared as the authority destined to replace religion and to ensure sounder guidance for mankind... Besides the glowing tribute paid to contemporary science, the notion of progress became a cornerstone of Ottoman thought, and the phrase “new progress” (*terakkiyat-i cedide*) became a watchword in every field... The impact of contemporary science on Ottoman intellectuals was so profound that many became convinced that in such a “century of progress” every aspect of life would be regulated according to science... Since the science that so deeply impressed Ottoman intellectuals was biological-materialist and Darwinist, and the aimed-for “progress” had a materialistic meaning, the Empire was soon flooded with a plethora of popular materialist literature, to the utter amazement of visiting foreign scholars... Darwinism and the theory of evolution also became major subjects of discussion in popular journals”.⁴⁴

Sami was deeply affected by this innovative spirit as reflected in his series of scientific booklets. In 1881 he wrote in one of the journals under his direction that:

⁴¹ S. Mardin, *The genesis of the Young Ottoman thought*, pg.331.

⁴² K. Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam. Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State*, (Oxford, 2001), pg.339.

⁴³ S. Skëndi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, pg.88-111.

⁴⁴ S. Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, pg.7.

“Today an educated man needs to know nothing other than science and technology. Today science has reached such a level that all things are knowable. Just as men were once distinguished by caste in older times in India and Egypt, today we see all men divided into three classes: Scientists, technicians, and workers”.⁴⁵

Quite similarly, a relevant role in discovering the Albanian people was played by Western scholars too.⁴⁶ In the introductory chapter, we mentioned the Austrian consul in Janina, Johann Georg von Hahn, the scholar Franz Bopp, Malte Brun, etc, as well as the Italo-Albanian intellectuals, such as Jeronim de Rada, Vincenzo Dorsa, Angelo Masci, etc. European researches also helped Albanian intellectuals to draw a ‘national portrait’ of the Albanians, as autochthonous and speaking a very old language considered to be the heir of the “Pellazgs”, or in other cases with the Illyrians along with the Macedonians and the Epirotes. Malte Brun and Hahn especially emphasized the “Pellazg” roots of the Albanian nation and saw it as the common source from where Greek and Latin people sprang. The language in particular was a means through which this link was demonstrated.

These elements are present in Sami’s texts written in Turkish on the Albanian people. In his *Kâmûs Al- A’lâm* [Dictionary of History and Geography], published in 6 volumes in Istanbul (1889-1898), Sami reproduced the above elements in describing the Albanian people in the entry “Albanians” in the above encyclopedia. Sami wrote that Albanians were among the first Aryan people to come from Central Asia to Europe, citing the authority of the Ancient Greek historian Herodotus and the Roman geographer Strabo. He explained the ancientness of the Albanian [Pellazg] language by arguing that many names of the Greek deities came from this language, using the same technique as Vasa did. At the end of the paragraph Sami wrote:

“He, who mostly made known in Europe the origin, language and the Albanian race, was dr. Hahn, the Austrian consul, who stayed for a long time in Janina and Scutari; Bopp, one of the most famous linguists, also the Albanian princess Dora d’Istria from Gjika family, which ran Romania with its princes; the Albanians of Italy, Dorsa, Crispi, Camarda, De Rada etc, who have written on this topic in German and Italian”.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Article written by Sami in the review “Hafta”, nr.19, December 1881, as cited by S. Hanioglu in his book *The Young Turks in Opposition*, pg.12.

⁴⁶ H. Kaleshi, “Sami Frashëri në letërsinë dhe filologjinë turke” [Sami Frashëri in the Turkish literature and philology], in *Gjurmime Albanologjike*, vol.I, (Prishtinë, 1968), pg.65.

⁴⁷ S. Frashëri, *Shqipëria dhe shqiptarët* [Albania and Albanians], translated and edited by Zyber Hasan (Tirana, 2002), pg.216. This book is a compilation of the translation into Albanian of those paragraphs from the Sami’s dictionary, where the author has written on Albania, Albanian cities, people and language.

In the above paragraph of his dictionary, after lavishly praising the Albanians, he tried to justify himself asserting that he was not exaggerating because he was “from this people”, but because the history has long “confirmed” their “glorious and ancient past”.⁴⁸

4. The allegiances of Shemsedin Sami Frashëri

The term “allegiances” in the title of this section is in plural, as Sami in his writings belonged simultaneously to different collective identities, the Ottoman “nation”, Turkish and the Albanian one. We will examine his Ottoman and Turkish allegiances mainly through his journalistic articles, but also through his essay on language and two booklets on Islam. The Ottoman “nation” of Sami is important in developing a better understanding of his Albanian “nation”, and of the way they were simultaneously articulated, reflecting the symbiotic existence in one person of two collective identities.

His journalistic articles have been partially translated into Albanian and have been recently published as a book.⁴⁹ This is the first compilation in Albanian of Sami’s articles written in Ottoman-Turkish. Therefore, it presents to Albanian scholars a new dimension of his work, which previously was unknown. However, it appears that the editors had always been cautious and sometimes they look at these articles through Albanian optics. The priority of the edition of the book, as stated in the preface, is to give to Albanian readers a selection of Sami’s articles, which, either explicitly or implicitly, are focused upon the Albanians.⁵⁰ The bulk of the articles deal with the Eastern Crisis 1876-1878, after the Ottoman Empire had been defeated by the Russian army and, as we have said, it was obliged to accept a new territorial reshuffling of its Balkan dominions as decided by the Great Powers at the Congress of Berlin (1878).

Sami’s articulation of the Ottoman nation is intertwined with other discourses as well and I have divided this section in subdivisions as presented in his articles.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pg. 207.

⁴⁹ S. Frashëri, *Kush e prishi paqen në Ballkan*, (Peja, 2000).

⁵⁰ See the preface written by Abdullah Hamiti to S. Frashëri, *Kush e prishi paqen në Ballkan*, pg.14.

4.1. The Ottoman and Turkish allegiance

The term “Ottoman” in Sami’s articles cited above indicates rather a political concept associated with the notion of cultural heterogeneity. His discursive construction of the Ottoman ‘nation’ was mainly centered on concepts related to a “gathering of populations of various ethnic and religious belonging”⁵¹ and the “territory where they lived”. As such the Ottoman “nation” was either a “big people”, “Osmanli”, that was the entirety of “various populations under the Ottoman rule”,⁵² or the “vatan” [fatherland in Ottoman], the territory of the fatherland, which was the Ottoman state.

In an article denouncing the “intrigues”, as he put it, of the Greeks and Bulgarians in the European Ottoman territories [Rumeli], Sami indicated the multiethnic character of the province. To make his arguments more convincing he wrote that it was impossible for the Greeks and Bulgarians to take over the above province, as the real important factors in it were the Turks, Albanians and Bosnians. These three “nations” shared a common Moslem religion and differed from that of the new Christian Balkan states.⁵³ The same approach comes out when he wrote about the need to carry out reforms within the Ottoman Empire in relation to its administrative division and to establish a new state apparatus complying with the needs and peculiarities of the various regions.

Sami’s argumentation here bears striking similarities with Montesquieu’s “L’esprit des lois”. Like Montesquieu, Sami referred to the need to set up an administrative body in the Ottoman Empire that would respect the diversity of conditions in which the various people’s character was forged.

“The regional division and administration of vilayets, sanxhaks, kazas and nahije [various levels of Ottoman administrative divisions] should be done according to the geographical position, the nationality of the population, and the nature of the lands. The local administration, the courts, the police and the communities

⁵¹ S. Frashëri, “Të dhëna statistikore mbi Epirin” [Statistical data on Epir], *Terxhuman-i Shark*, I year, nr.91, 1878, in S. Frashëri, *Kush e prishi paqen në Ballkan* [Who broke the peace in the Balkans], pg.115. In this article Sami used statistical data on the populations living in territories aimed by the Greeks. The data classified the populations according to language and religion. Sami used them to contest the Greek’s claims over the territory maintaining that three populations living there were: Albanians, Greeks, and Arumanians.

⁵² S. Frashëri, “Shënime politike” [Political Notes], in *Terxhuman-i Shark*, I year, nr.81, 1878, in S. Frashëri, *Kush e prishi paqen në Ballkan* [Kush e prishi paqen në Ballkan], pg.66.

⁵³ S. Frashëri, “Intrigat e sllavëve dhe grekëve në Rumeli”, [The intrigues of Slavs and Greeks in Rumeli], *Terxhuman-i Shark*, I year, nr.78, 1878, in S. Frashëri, *Kush e prishi paqen në Ballkan* [Who broke the peace in the Balkans], pg.52.

should be set up as in Europe and in accordance with the needs of each region... In one word this country should be considered as it is taken under control right now and should be organized following a new criterion and should be legally run on the same basis. This should be carried out with the aim to have a righteous padishah [Sultan] for the members of the Ottoman community [populations under Ottoman suzerainty], instead of an absolutist one, who with his goodness will dispense freedom and a new constitutional governing to the people in order that they do not fall slaves of tyrannical employees”.⁵⁴

Sami mentioned the Ottoman Empire as his “vatan” [homeland, fatherland] and used the term “our traditions” to indicate the virtues and the deeds of the old Ottomans.⁵⁵ The meaning of the term “Ottoman” was further explored in a series of polemics which Sami exchanged with an anonymous author in late December 1878 and early January 1879 in the newspaper “Terxhuman-i Hakikat” [Messenger of Truth]. The anonymous author accused the Albanian political organization League of Prizren (1878-1881) of striving for the autonomy and independence of the Albanian inhabited lands to the detriment of the Ottoman’s territorial integrity in the Balkans.⁵⁶ The aims of the Albanian political organization were described as betraying the Empire and Moslem Ottoman brotherhood. Sami replied several times denying that Albanians had any harmful intentions towards the Empire. On the contrary, Sami insisted that the Ottoman dominions would be safer if Albanians would be able to keep all their territories in the framework of a single and autonomous province inside the Empire. Here he unveiled his two-faced allegiance toward both “Ottoman” fatherland and “Albanian” birthplace. For him:

“There is no more beloved thing for a man than his homeland and more sacred than his nationality and race [origin]. If one loves his general homeland once, he loves twice his motherland (personal). No matter how much he may love his province, he loves twice the place where he was born and grown up. Therefore, there is no need to describe here how much I am touched by the defamations and lies against my motherland and against my co-nationals, but also for the people of my general homeland, who may be misled by the above defamations and lies”.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ S. Frashëri, “Reforma-Rigjenerim” [Reforms—Regeneration], *Terxhuman-i Shark*, I year, nr.103, 1878, in S. Frashëri, *Kush e prishi paqen në Ballkan* [Who broke the peace in the Balkans], pg.147-48. Sami was careful here not charging the Sultan for the precarious situation of the Empire, but instead he put the blame on the “tyrannical employees”.

⁵⁵ S. Frashëri, “Vërejtjet tona” [Our remarks], *Terxhuman-i Shark*, I year, nr.105, 1878, in S. Frashëri, *Kush e prishi paqen në Ballkan* [Who broke the peace], pg.167.

⁵⁶ S. Frashëri, “Albania”, *Terxhuman-i Hakikat*, V year, nr.144, 1878, in S.Frashëri *Kush e prishi paqen në Ballkan* [Who broke the peace], pg.308-312.

⁵⁷ See the letter that S. Frashëri sent to the newspaper *Terxhuman-i Hakikat*, V year, nr.150, 26.12.1878 in S. Frashëri, *Kush e prishi paqen në Ballkan* [Who broke the peace in the Balkans], pg.315.

In Sami's words, the Ottoman Empire was the "general homeland" and Albanian lands his "motherland", or his "personal homeland". Sami imagined his "personal homeland" as directly and emotionally linked to a person, but, on the other hand, quite naturally incorporated into the broader "general homeland". It is similar to descriptions pertaining to center-periphery relations within the same country.⁵⁸ This is similar to the discourse of the Tanzimat leaders, who by keeping together diverse Ottoman "races" meant to achieve a political unity, the maintaining of a common "fatherland", symbolized in the existence of the Ottoman state.⁵⁹

Ottoman-Albanian sociability is presented in Sami's texts as a long dated union and he used various 'historical facts' to outline this image. First of all, the Albanians had always rendered service to the Empire and they had shed their blood for it.⁶⁰ The Albanians were linked to the Empire also by Moslem faith and in the future they will fight the same enemy on the side of all other Moslem brothers of the Empire. He argued that it was in Albanians' interests to stay within the Empire as the Balkan regional context was adverse to them. The Slavs and Greeks had aspiration to the Albanian inhabited lands, so an independent, weak and small Albania could not resist the hostile Balkan people, which were different from Albanians in terms of religion and origin.⁶¹

Sami thought an eventual domination of the Albanian inhabited regions by the newly founded Balkan Orthodox states would be a twofold disaster: the partition of the Albanian lands among Greeks and Balkan Slavic states which, moreover were of a different religion and culture from the majority of Moslem Albanians. Sami implied an eventual Balkan Christian domination of the Albanian inhabited lands would be a ruthless political regime for the Moslem majority of them, which inside the Empire enjoyed the status of the dominant *millet*. Here Albanians are presented as Moslem people in opposition to the Christian Greeks, therefore naturally linked to the Ottoman Empire.⁶²

In an article about the situation in the Ottoman Balkans, Sami presented himself as an heir of the "famous Ottoman grandfathers", whose might and force was unprecedented for its

⁵⁸ Letter of Sami with the title "Albanian's Hopes", "Terxhuman-i Hakikat", V year, nr.159, 03.01.1879. Here Sami used the term "province" for Albanian inhabited lands.

⁵⁹ A. Vezenkov, "Reconciliation of the spirits and fusion of interests. "Ottomanism" as an identity politics", in D. Mishkova (ed), *We, The People. Politics of National Peculiarity in Southeastern Europe*, (Budapest, New York, 2008), pg.62.

⁶⁰ Ibid, pg.318.

⁶¹ S. Frashëri, "Shpresat e Shqipërisë" [Hopes of Albania], *Terxhuman-i Hakikat*, 03.01.1879, in S.Frashëri *Kush e prishi paqen në Ballkan* [Who broke the peace], pg.328.

⁶² N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg.276.

time, namely the Middle Age, when the Empire was founded. Sami used the time of “Ottoman grandfathers” to contrast the current degrading situation [last quarter of nineteenth century] concerning the Ottoman Empire’s position on the European political scene. Nostalgia for golden ages of heroism and chivalry was expressed through the dichotomy of past and glorious times against the current degrading situation.⁶³ If once upon a time the Ottomans were able to challenge the European states, now the Empire’s destiny rested in the latter’s hands. For Sami, the Ottoman Empire had shown clear signs of weakness, as it was unable to maintain its dominions in the Balkans. The Ottoman presence in the Balkans was threatened by the propagation of ideas of independence among various Balkan nations and people.

The causes lay in the failure to apply the modernizing Tanzimat reforms (1839) and lack of progress in education and civilization. Sami heavily criticized those who held the Islamic faith as responsible for the delay in the progress of the Ottoman people and as a barrier to enter modern civilization. In this case he used terms such as “our national morality” for Ottoman traditions and “vatan” [fatherland] for the Empire.⁶⁴

For Sami, the solution lay with the Sultan’s initiative to “illuminate the fatherland with education and civilization” and, likewise for the Young Ottomans, “to form a United Council” [parliament], through which the Empire could again restore its strength to secure a better future. Sami considered it was the only way to “regain Europe’s sympathy and taking under its protection the independent and autonomous Balkan governments, surely those who have common interests and are connected with us”.⁶⁵ Speaking about the Ottoman elite’s association with the state, Kemal Karpat writes that:

“Throughout Ottoman history, as in that of other Muslim states, the basic identity of the elites was determined by their association with the state, which accorded them superior social and political status and brought them high income...By the end of the 1880s this intelligentsia-a social class- also increasingly adopted modernism, including liberalism and populism, as the ideology to save and rejuvenate “their” state, with which they were so intimately identified. At the same time, the intelligentsia came to view the state as a potential instrument of progress and civilization (and populism) provided that it was controlled, not by an autocratic sultan and his servile aides, but by an idealistic, “illuminated” group dedicated to the good of the vatan [fatherland], as they liked to visualize themselves.”⁶⁶

⁶³ A. D. Smith, “The ‘Golden Age’ and National Renewal”, in G. Hosking/ G. Schöpflin (eds), *Myths & Nationhood*, (London, 1997), pg.41. M. Hroch, “National Romantism”, in B. Trencsényi/M. Kopeček (eds), *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770-1945)*, vol.2, (Budapest, 2007), pg.6.

⁶⁴ S. Frashëri, “Balkan”, *Terxhuman-i Shark*, I year, nr.88, 1878 in S. Frashëri, *Kush e prishi paqen në Ballkan* [Who broke the peace], pg.107.

⁶⁵ Ibid, pg.110.

⁶⁶ K. Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam*, pg.340.

Compared to Vasa, Sami was more attached to the Ottoman “fatherland”. As an Ottoman intellectual of a high profile his personal and emotional involvement with the Empire was many-fold. It was not only the fact of an employee that was serving the state, which pushed him to stand for the protection of the Empire. There were not only the political considerations that mattered, i.e. for the good of the various people of the Empire, or also for the survival of an Albanian ethnic. He was a linguist, devoting researches and time to the study of the Ottoman and Turkish language, he was a scholar of history of religion, namely Islam, and he was also one of the most progressed intellectuals of his time advocating a more secular and scientific outlook in tackling matters of the public life in the Empire in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

If for Sami “Ottoman” was a kind of political attachment,⁶⁷ “Turkish”, instead, sounded as a more personally involved feeling. In his booklet “Lisan” [Language], written in Ottoman-Turkish and published in Istanbul in 1886, it seems that he considered the Turkish language as his own and seemed also to claim membership of the Turkish “We” group.⁶⁸ The booklet was a popular work with scientist pretensions on the phenomenon of language in general and some national languages in particular. It included the birth of language as a unique intellectual faculty of human beings as opposed to animals. Sami’s analysis included the very initial phases of language’s appearance, its irreplaceable function as a means of communication easing human development, and a survey of the state-of-the-art of contemporary linguistics. The latter was seen as a characteristic of Western developed countries. He directly dealt with linguistics in his two small chapters with the titles “Linguistics” and “Linguistics according to us”.⁶⁹ In “Linguistics”, after praising the advancement of sciences during the nineteenth century, Sami wrote:

“Anthropology and linguistics, created after geology, have opened a new page in the history of mankind. This new science, while demolishing the old building of history, laid the foundations of a new one, supported by facts and arguments. Now, the history of mankind is neither created by some supernatural fairy tales made up by untenable words, nor by some conquerors of the world (even though dubious) and invented events of fictitious heroes. It is indispensable to speak about human history, the human being and human race in

⁶⁷ B. Bilmez, “Shemseddin Sami Frashëri (1850-1904): Contributing to the Construction of Albania and Turkish Identities”, pg. 351.

⁶⁸ S. Frashëri, *Gjuha* [Language], (Shkup, 2002). This is the title of the Albanian version of Sami’s book written in Turkish *Lisan* [Language], published in Istanbul in 1886.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, pg.22-26 and 26-28.

general and the natural predicament of the nations and people in particular. And this has to do with anthropology and linguistics that are created following the rules of geology”.⁷⁰

The above paragraph is important in unveiling his materialist and scientific worldview. His Turkish allegiance was further stressed in two texts written in different periods. The first is an article on the Turkish language, written in Ottoman-Turkish, which appeared in the journal “Hafta” in Istanbul, November 1881, and the other is the introduction to his monolingual Turkish dictionary published in Istanbul in 1900. In the article dealing with the Turkish language he wrote:

“We do not think the term ‘Ottoman language’ is quite correct, because this term is used only as the title of the State according to the name of the family of the well known conqueror, first of the Sultans who founded this state. Yet, the language (lisan) and nationality/ethnicity (cinsiyet) are older than the birth of the mentioned person and the formation of this state. The name of the people (kavim) who speak this language is really ‘Turks’ (Türk) and the name of the language they speak is Turkish language (lisan-i Türki). This name which is seen as a derogatory term by ignorant people, and used by some for the peasants of Anatolia, is the name of a great community (ümme) which should be proud to be called so”.⁷¹

In the above article Sami again explained what was “Ottoman”, and what was “Turk”. The former were the subjects of the Ottoman state, called “Osmanlı”, while the latter, the “Turks” were the name of a great community, only a fraction of which belonged to the Ottoman state. According to Sami, only the “Western Turks” were living within the boundaries of the Ottoman state. In the preface of his Turkish dictionary published in 1900, Sami referred once again to the Turkish language made up by two dialects, the Eastern and the Western one. He insisted on his idea that the language of the Turkish people should be called “Turkish” and not “Ottoman”.

Sami acted in a context in which Turkish speaking community in the Ottoman Empire was missing one of the attributes for a full national existence that was a national literary language.⁷² Therefore, Sami’s contribution was mostly related to the first “national attribute” and can be taken as an open appeal in favor of Turkish [cultural] nationalism in that period. On the other hand, it referred to the lack of studies on spoken Turkish in order to elaborate

⁷⁰ Ibid, pg.23.

⁷¹ B. Bilmez, “Shemseddin Sami Frashëri (1850-1904): Contributing to the Construction of Albania and Turkish Identities”, pg. 351.

⁷² M. Hroch, “The Social Interpretation of Linguistic Demands in European National Movements”, EUI Working Paper EUI N0.94/1, (Florence, 1994), pg.4. Hroch ranks the national literary language and culture, political autonomy (or in some cases independence), and a social position equal with the ruling nation in terms of social structure and the division of wealth, as the main ‘missing attributes’ of a full national existence.

and develop it into a literary language. He admitted that while in the West linguistic science was well advanced, it was still unknown among “us”. He continued:

“However, we are in a situation and position to study this science even better than any other nation and people can do, because to learn this language [Ottoman-Turkish] as it is today, it is necessary to learn three other languages, which means also Arabic and Persian besides Turkish. I do not know if one day, due to the achievement of any progress, Turkish will be on its own”.⁷³

Sami’s Turkish allegiance is also evident in his writings on the issue of the Turkish language of that time. He invested much intellectual work focused mostly upon the purification of the Turkish language from foreign words and turning it into a written language based on vernacular and, therefore, into a language easily understood by common people.⁷⁴ He tried to get his contribution in this field recognized, displaying an attachment to the Turkish “We” group through his professional and intellectual endeavors. It would be hazardous to define in clear-cut terms his attachment to the Turkish “We” group as an ethnic one. It intertwined feeling of an Ottoman patriotism of a certain historical period, in which Turkish element had an important place and deep devotion to a lifetime’s professional work in his elaboration of a literary Turkish language. On the other hand, the Ottoman cultural and intellectual environment in general, and the political one in particular, in specific circumstances and periods, were not a hindrance to the simultaneous articulation of Ottoman, Turkish and Albanian allegiances. In an article written in the Turkish newspaper “Servet-i Fünun” in 1897 Sami wrote:

“We have already said and will repeat it: our language [Turkish] is very beautiful if we [Turks] write as we speak it and if we try to carry out reforms within the edges of the spoken language. It is no doubt that through the beauty of the language we would be able to possess a marvelous literature. A lot of words have penetrated from Arabic and Persian languages, they have been Turcised and everybody know them. We even use them as Turkish words. In relation to the scientific terminology, as it happens to any language, it is understood by people of science. In this way the Arabic and Turkish words have entered our language and become accustomed to it, have further enriched our language. After we have met the needs of our language with these words, what is the need then to take from dictionaries strange and rare Arabic and Persian words that even the Arabs and Persians themselves do not understand....?”⁷⁵

⁷³ S. Frashëri, *Gjuha* [Language], (Shkup 2002), pg.26.

⁷⁴ N. Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, pg.279. H. Kaleshi, “Sami Frashëri në letërsinë dhe filologjinë turke” [Sami Frashëri in the Turkish literature and philology] in *Gjurmime Albanologjike*, viti VII (I), (Prishtina, 1968), pg.53-54.

⁷⁵ As referred by H. Kaleshi in his study “Sami Frashëri në letërsinë dhe filologjinë turke” [Sami Frashëri in the Turkish literature and philology], pg.58.

We have mentioned before that one of the most significant effects of Western ideas among Ottoman modernist intellectuals of the late nineteenth century was the secularizing influence, which came through translations from popular French literature. The language by Sami, as of many other Ottoman intellectuals, was more versatile and closer to everyday spoken language. They used this simplified language to reach as large a public as possible. The reform of the Turkish language had become a preferred topic for Sami and in late 1890s he published several articles.⁷⁶ In an article published in August of 1898 in the Turkish newspaper “Sabah” with the title “Again on our language and literature- the way to reforms” he wrote:

“...we must see the issues of our literature and language [Turkish] as connected with each other. If there are a people somewhere in the world, whose spoken language is completely different from literary language, this is us [Turkish people]. Our written language is something else from the spoken one...Can an illiterate Turk get it if we would read to him the work of a good writer of ours and would he trust us and would he give an affirmative answer after we will tell him that this is written in the Turkish language? Is somewhere anybody from us who speak our written, literary and official language, which is full of Arabic and Persian words...? Or, to put it shortly, is it possible to speak this language? In this matter, our first and most important task is to work and coordinate our written and literary language, on the one hand, with the spoken one, on the other. We should unite these two languages, from which one is natural, and the other artificial, or better saying, we should throw out the artificial, as the whole world has done, and start to write in the language we speak and to introduce it and use it in literature”.⁷⁷

Apart from the discourse on the language, Sami dwelt also on Islam and its challenges to become a faith of modernity. It is precisely Sami’s ideas on Islam and its civilization that we are going to deal with in the next section.

4.2. The Islamist discourse. Islam as civilization and identity

The Islamist discourse of Sami is expressed indirectly in his press articles, at least those translated into Albanian. But, Sami wrote also two small popular booklets entirely on Islam. The latter are respectively “The Islamic Civilization” written in Ottoman- Turkish

⁷⁶ Ibid, pg.53-72.

⁷⁷ Ibid., pg.59.

language and published in Istanbul in 1879 and “The endeavors of the heroes in the diffusion of Islam”, which was written in Arabic and was published in Istanbul in 1884.⁷⁸

The leitmotif of these books is the awareness of the delay of Moslem people of the Empire with regard to “civilization”, perceived rather as “high level in sciences and technology”, and “education” embodied in the “European Christian civilization”. The other aspect of it was the need to exculpate Islam from charges of retarding the Ottoman people on the road towards progress and development. On the contrary, Islam is represented as the source of progress *per se*.

Sami’s first book “The Islamic Civilization” is divided into 35 small chapters. The first 7 chapters have the title of the book, while the remaining chapters deal with different fields of human knowledge, such as astronomy, mathematics, geography, medicine, history, philosophy, law, etc. All the chapters converged on one point: Islam has contributed remarkably to the development of all these sciences.

The author firstly proceeds by explaining what was in his view a “civilization”. He divided people on the basis of their level of knowledge, as opposed to ‘racial’ differences as measured in terms of skin color, etc. The latter for Sami bore no value as an indicator of the level of advancement of a people. According to him all human beings are organically unique, but differing from the specific circumstances shaping their culture. He cites here the example of the French people and people of Borneo in Indonesia. The first are civilized and the second are “wild people.”

“ If we take a geographic look, we will see in France civilized people, while in Borneo wild ones, and looking back at history we will understand that two thousand years ago in France there were wild people and now civilized ones, while in the valley of Tigri [Tigris] there were civilized people and now nomad ones. People do not differ from each other in terms of nature and as creatures. This is not a valid differentiation neither from spatial, nor from a temporal point of view. If there was such a differentiation from the spatial view, French people should have been always nomads. We know that two thousand years ago in France there were nomad people, but today France is inhabited by civilized ones, and in the valley of Tigri, which today is inhabited by nomad people, two thousand years ago it was a civilized population... What brought about this difference among people was an entire set of not immutable characteristic circumstances that is called CIVILIZATION”.⁷⁹

For Sami, human beings were not born endowed with civilization. On the contrary, civilization was a condition of humanity that is generated, evolving and changing.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ S. Frashëri, *Qytetërimi Islam* [The Islamic Civilization], (Shkup, 2004); S. Frashëri, *Përpjekjet e Heronjve në Përhapjen e Islamit* [The endeavours of the heroes in the diffusion of Islam], (Shkup, 2004).

⁷⁹ S. Frashëri, *Qytetërimi Islam* [The Islamic Civilization], Logos 2004, pg.20-21.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, pg.21.

According to Sami, it is “a faculty and opportunity given to man by God to create and prepare the conditions for civilization, to improve his own condition and become civilized”.⁸¹ The trajectory of evolution for the human beings, as an antithesis to the animals, is always a continuous upgrading process. But, in terms of civilization, knowledge and culture, it can be different: a certain civilization, while prospering in the past, may lapse into decadence and backwardness in later periods, or the other way round.

Sami’s idea was that civilization, as equal to economic and cultural prosperity and development, was a condition related mostly to specific circumstances rather than to inner attributes of a given culture or religion. His approach was influenced by continuous reference to the binary comparison Christianity-Islam and rejecting accusations of the latter as a barrier to progress. Following Sami’s argumentation, if Christian civilization was in a better position today [nineteenth century], it was so not because it was better than Islam. It was thanks to the contribution of both Roman-Greek classicism and Islamic culture, which a more recent civilization, the Christian European one, has appropriated and elaborated further on. By this assessment Sami wanted to convey the idea that Islam may again restore its splendor and regain its cultural supremacy.

In Sami’s view, if from a spatial prospective civilization may be fragmented, i.e. it moved from one place to another and could blossom here and there, from the temporal point of view civilization can be only an ascending trajectory with an open end. The more recent a civilization is, the more complete it becomes, due also to the contribution of its predecessors. Consequently, if Christian European civilization has reached such a high level it was because it drew upon the achievements of Roman-Greek classicism, but most importantly owing to the Islamic culture that made possible the linkage antiquity-modernity.⁸²

Among the most important characteristics of Islamic civilization stressed by Sami were its universality and its fundamental role in the progress of knowledge and sciences among those people who embraced it. Sami was careful to consider Islamic civilization not as an Arab product, but the sum of all Islamic people’s contribution. For him, Islamic civilization appeared after and was based on Islamic faith. It was the first universal civilization as it did not belong only to one people, as in classical Greece, but to the entirety of the Islamic populations.⁸³ This force was given to this civilization by Islamic faith, which

⁸¹ Ibid, pg.21.

⁸² S. Frashëri, *Qytetërimi Islam* [The Islamic Civilization], pg.24-26.

⁸³ Ibid, pg.31-33.

commanded the faithful to learn and master knowledge, sciences and truth, justice and its application.⁸⁴

Underneath all Sami's assessments regarding Islam, as a religion and civilization, lay the idea that before its advent the world was wrapped in obscurantism and savagery. The fortunate people who joined it became civilized and abandoned once and for all their nomadic life and backwardness.⁸⁵ According to Sami, much of the credit for this radical change in people's life belonged to Islam, which, by the same token, influenced in a positive way the enriching and embellishing of the Arab, Persian and Turkish languages.⁸⁶

"Many tales and novels on moral and ethics have been written in a pure language by Moslems. There are uncountable works with didactic character in Arab and Persian language in this literary genre... Moslem savants collected the popular culture and tales with a didactic character, which contain the morals and the thoughts of the people. In the Arab language there are plenty of collections of didactic tales that are much more known and praised than all the other tales."⁸⁷

Sami believed that European and Christian civilization had its roots in the achievements of Islamic civilization. The latter possessed such a strength that even when it suffered serious blows from the waves of barbaric Asian and European hordes, that swept in from the Eastern and Northern parts of its dominions in the Middle Age, it managed to survive. Its survival was witnessed by the splendor of Islamic sciences and knowledge, which heavily influenced the development of later coming European civilization.

"The Islamic savants of the time set aside the respect and veneration for the ideas of the schools of thought of their predecessors. They abandoned Ptoleme's school and point of views and entirely corrected them. While not accepting that the Earth was the center of the universe they opened the road to Copernicus' major discovery... both civilized and backward people, which rushed into the Islamic world from East and North, after triumphing in battles, they were in fact subdued and overrun by Islamic knowledge, sciences and civilization. Therefore, this is a powerful and sufficient argument indicating the scale and might of Islamic civilization"⁸⁸.

⁸⁴ Ibid, pg.35.

⁸⁵ Ibid, pg.36-37.

⁸⁶ Ibid, pg.38.

⁸⁷ Ibid. pg.96.

⁸⁸ S. Frashëri, *Qytetërimi Islam* [The Islamic Civilization], pg.62;65. In the end of this book Sami informed his readers that he would write two other booklets in the near future, one with the title "The Islamic people, their past, their present and their future", where, as he himself says, he would analyze the causes of their degradation and backwardness. The second book would be "The European civilization". None of these two books were ever completed.

Five years later in his booklet entitled “The endeavors of the heroes in the diffusion of Islam” (1884),⁸⁹ Sami reinvigorated his tones to put forth the idea that Islamic civilization and religion was inherently and historically superior to the European one. The main messages he wanted to deliver were a) the spread of Islam, in direct contrast to Christianity, was carried out on a voluntary basis, through instructing and informing, and on account of its civilizing drive various people were easily won over by it, b) people who adopted it were rewarded handsomely, as they abandoned the savage habits of the pre-Islamic era and were elevated to the level of a civilized people, c) the stark contrast between a civilizing, educational, edifying and enlightening Islam and European- Christian civilization, which reached its supremacy through violence and brutality.

For that reason, the expansion of Islam in the world was described by Sami as “liberation”, while the same notion for the advancement of Christianity, to the detriment of the former Islamic European dominions, was conceptualized as “revenge”.⁹⁰ Sami recognized that European Western countries were ahead in their civilization, understood mostly as technology, but he assigned to Islam the potential to radiate progress and lead again its people towards a new cultural revival.

Sami’s thought on Islam should be placed in the context of the Ottoman materialism of the late nineteenth century, whose main tenet was the belief in science as the main pillar of the rebirth of a new Ottoman society.⁹¹ Like the new Ottoman generation of intellectuals of his time, Sami belonged to those people considered to be “modernists” and “Westernists”. They were influenced by the European Enlightenment and Western ideas such as materialism, evolutionism and Darwinism and these new intellectuals thought of Islam in terms of time and change and no longer in terms of divine, absolute and eternal principles. The evolutionist taint is clear when Sami explained that civilization was a human condition that changed in time and space.

But, in the atmosphere created by the regime of sultan AbdulHamid II that encouraged traditionalism, apologetics, anti-Westernism and pan-Islamism, the clear expression of the admiration for Western achievements was not easy.⁹² According to Berkes:

⁸⁹ S. Frashëri, *Përpyjekjet e Heronjve në Përhapjen e Islamit* [The endeavors of the heroes in the diffusion of Islam], (Shkup, 2004).

⁹⁰ Ibid, pg.29.

⁹¹ Ş. Hanioglu, “Blueprints for a future society. Late Ottoman materialists on science, religion, and art”, in Elisabeth Özdalga (ed), *Late Ottoman Society. The Intellectual Legacy*, (London, 2005), pg.28.

⁹² According to Selim Deringil “to foster the feeling of ‘belonging’ among their people was the basic dilemma of all imperial education systems and nowhere more so than in the cases of Russia and the Ottoman Empire, where the sheer scale of the country and variety of their people meant that ‘the emerging popular conception of

“A characteristic of the Hamidian period was finding roundabout ways to explain continued borrowings from Europe. This was accomplished by replacing the symbol of Western civilization by that of Arab civilization. It had never occurred to the Young Ottomans to claim that the constitutional system they found in the West had been taken over from the Arabs. They simply believed that in the past Islam, too, had had its constitutionalism. The Hamidian period was far bolder. Not only was the whole Western science and technology originally a Muslim (Arab) possession, but Europeans owed their constitutional system also to the Muslims (Arabs).”⁹³

Doubtlessly Sami wanted to somehow accommodate himself within the official trends of thought of the Hamidian period of the late nineteenth century, and tried to convey his scientific and materialist ideas to the public while making ‘concessions’ and praising lavishly Islam and Islamic civilization. However, it was a deeply rooted conviction even among modernists that the masses needed religion. Though many Ottoman materialist intellectuals discarded religion in favor of a scientific and rational civilization, they, nevertheless, tried to give birth to an Islamized version of materialist doctrine in order to make it possible to address the Muslim masses. For them scientific ideas should be spread under an Islamic guise so as to better penetrate the people. But, they cherished also a sincere conviction that Muslim civilization was not exempt from the eternal need of all civilizations for a religious belief system and “that it was vitally important to incorporate liberal Islamic principles into a blueprint for a future society”.⁹⁴ In fact, Sami held different discourses in different periods, depending on the public he was addressing and on the restrictions imposed by the Sultan’s censorship.

In another article Sami adopted a much clearer position as a modernist. He excluded any possibility for reconciliation between religious texts and sciences and stressed the urgent need to save the Muslims from ignorance by borrowing from contemporary science and technology.⁹⁵ The new materialist intelligentsia of the time pushed for “science”, “technology”, “civilization” to be the basis of the modernization process in the Empire, but also regarded them as a scientific necessity of the time. During the previous periods, even among the Ottoman materialist and scientific intellectuals, the prevailing ideas about Western

national identity included only a rudimentary concept of citizenship...’ Nor was there any ‘supra-ethnic concept of nation or empire to which diverse peoples could be attracted with a modicum of voluntarism.’ In this context the gap was filled by a recharged conceptualization of religion and/or direct attachment to the quasi-sacred person of the emperor/sultan. This attachment was to be inculcated through mass schooling”. S. Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains. Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909*, (London, New York 1999), pg.108.

⁹³ Ibid, pg.263.

⁹⁴ Ş. Hanioglu, “Blueprints for a future society. Late Ottoman materialists on science, religion, and art”, (London, 2005), pg.28.

⁹⁵ As cited by Ş. Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, (Oxford, 1995), pg.15.

civilization were divided; the positive view admired Western material and technological advancement, but the negative view considered Western morals and way of living as incompatible with Muslim civilization.⁹⁶ At the end of nineteenth century Sami displayed a more radical shift conceiving Western civilization as a whole and not separable into two components:

“So far those who did not know the language and the culture of the European nations admitted the superiority of the Western nations in their material civilization but were firmly convinced that in culture, especially in literature and in poetry, in history, and in the philological sciences they were far below us. It should be realized that all parts of culture are closely interrelated. A civilization cannot exist with only some branches of knowledge. If the West were deficient in culture it could not develop its material civilization... Those who know European languages and literatures will realize that our own language and literature are deficient and underdeveloped... The literary generation previous to ours put the West in an oriental garb. The present-day generation has approached the West more closely and by doing so has come closer to contemporary civilization.”⁹⁷

Moreover, Islam was used by Sami as an identity marker that favored keeping the Albanians together with all Ottoman people. He rejected any allusion to their supposedly harmful intentions against the Ottoman Empire, as the Albanians could not betray their Moslem brothers with whom they had lived for five centuries.⁹⁸ In this case Sami described Albanians as “two million Moslem people and loyal subjects”.⁹⁹

In the Ottoman newspaper “Terxhuman-i Hakikat” [Messenger of Truth] in December 1878-January 1879, Sami explained why the Sublime Porte should not leave Moslem Albanians fall into the hands of the newly founded Balkan Christian states.¹⁰⁰ Imperial interests and those of the Albanians were seen as complementary, and all the more so, because the majority of the Albanians were Moslem. The Albanian editor of the book of collection of Sami’s article in Ottoman-Turkish language has carefully selected those articles, where Sami appears as a staunch defender of Albania. Even though such a selection aims at obscuring his Ottoman side, it failed to fully erase Sami’s worries for the future fate of the Ottoman Empire. In some of his articles Sami openly displayed his attachment to the imperial state as one of its subjects, but also as a representative of one of the Empire’s most loyal ethnic groups, the Albanians.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, pg.296.

⁹⁷ As cited by Niyazi Berkes in *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, pg.296.

⁹⁸ Ibid, pg.319.

⁹⁹ S.Frashëri *Kush e prishi paqen në Ballkan* [Who broke the peace], pg.328.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pg.315.

¹⁰¹ S. Frashëri, *Kush e prishi paqen në Ballkan* [Who broke the peace], pg.325;333

“If one looks at the Ottoman history it will see that Albanian blood was shed even in the remotest corners of the Empire in Europe, Asia and Africa, Albanian bones can be found in its remotest borders”.¹⁰²

What is noteworthy in the book is Sami’s argument concerning the role of education in bridging the gap between the Islamic people and the civilized West. Here, he assigned primary importance to learning in the respective vernacular as “enjoined by Islam’s commandments”. The Islamic people were for Sami not a unified and homogenous community, but a union of different ethnic elements, including Arabs, Persians, Turkish, Kurds, Albanians, Bosnians, etc.¹⁰³

“In the world there are Moslem people which are not Arabs and speak other non Arabic languages. It is more useful that each people write in its own language, as the mentioned people do [Arabs, Persians]. For Islam it would be better that, besides the five languages mentioned above (Arab, Persian, Turkish, Indian, Malaysian), to comprise also Kurdish, Çerkez and the languages of the negro populations, because the Arab language is the language of the savants that tire themselves out all the time to learn it. That is not a language which can be learnt by anybody. For this reason, many people and nations remain illiterate and this is against Islam. Many of the illiterate people have neglected the truth about Islam and its sublime principles”.¹⁰⁴

Sami’s consideration of distinctive languages for different people fitted the Ottoman cultural model of the time, i.e. a distinctive script and distinct language, was an expression of a distinct people. In the late nineteenth century Ottoman census there is a trend to define various ethnic groups, such as Greeks, Armenians, Bulgarians, Jews, etc, according to their different scripts.¹⁰⁵ From the present day perspective of citizens of nation-states, when a whole state infrastructure impels individuals to interiorize a single national identity, the case of Sami might look abnormal. He appears simultaneously as an “Ottoman”, “Turkish” and “Albanian”. But, the multicultural context of the late nineteenth century Ottoman Empire, the comprehensive concepts of “Ottomanism”, the need for Ottoman society to emancipate and civilize itself and catch up with the modern world, the propagated compliance of Islam with science and the materialist progress, the achievements of Western Turcology and Albanology, his early laic education, all these factors led him to conclude that for the Ottoman people, including the Albanians, to prosper they needed to educate themselves. The best way to accomplish that, for him, was to cultivate the national languages, i.e. the literary

¹⁰² Ibid., pg.317.

¹⁰³ S. Frashëri, *Përpyjekjet e Heronjve në Përhapjen e Islamit*, [The endeavors of the heroes in the propagation of Islam], pg.41.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, pg.46-47. See also N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg.280.

¹⁰⁵ For more see F. Trix, “The Stamboul alphabet of Shemseddin Sami Bey: precursor to Turkish script reform”, pg.262.

languages taken as the closest version to the language of the lay strata. His mastering of languages and his deep interest and life-long work in linguistics made him a modernizer of the Turkish and Albanian languages.¹⁰⁶ But, his Albanian identity had its own dynamic as well, and as we will see in the next section, it would turn into a political one.

5. The political treatise “Albania what it was, what it is and what it will be”

We have already mentioned the letter Sami sent to the Italo-Albanian patriot Jeronim De Rada in February of 1881.¹⁰⁷ He praised his work in compiling a grammar for the Albanian language as well as collecting popular songs of the Albanian colony living in Italy. Then, he stressed the necessity for the Albanian national language to have a single alphabet, as a means for bringing all Albanians together, and that the best suited for that purpose was the one created by the Albanian patriotic Istanbul Society, i.e. the society of which Sami was a leading member. The Albanian dialects, he added, were not an obstacle to unify the language as they were very close to each other and that Albanian men of letters should continue to enrich the Albanian language by finding and preserving the dialects of Albanians abroad and in the Albanian inhabited lands.

In the second part of the letter Sami touched upon political issues. He criticized the federalist project of De Rada for the future Albania intended to better accommodate the three religious Albanian communities, Moslem, Orthodox and Catholic one, built up of three units, one for each religious community. Sami viewed it as not feasible and harmful, as the Albanians should all be united in a single entity, and that all Albanians before being Moslem, Orthodox or Catholic, were Albanians. He argued that a federalist solution was in line with the goals of Turkey, and other Christian neighbors, who wanted to keep Albania divided in order to partition her. He “emphasized that confessions should be left to the church and the mosque and that the Albanians should become brothers as intended by nature and as they had been of old”.¹⁰⁸

Instead, Sami proposed a single autonomous province for all the Albanian inhabited lands, or “depending on the affairs even a complete independence”. In that case he envisaged

¹⁰⁶ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg.281-82, 283.

¹⁰⁷ Arkivi Qëndror Shtetëror, [Albanian National Archives], Fondi 51, D.4, pg.1-2.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, pg.3. S. Skëndi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, pg.167 and *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, [The History of the Albanian People], vol.II, pg.204-213.

the future Albanian state organization not as a principality, neither a Christian or Moslem prince at its head, but as a sort of “democracy”, based on the old Albanian traditions of the “Council of Elders”.

That letter was written in a precise political context, that of the aftermath of the Congress of Berlin (1878), when the League of Prizren (1878-1881) was at the heights of its activity. It was also a moment for disillusion of Albanian patriots towards the Empire, as it turned a deaf ear to their demands to create a single autonomous Albanian province. Parts of these territories were given to Montenegro in 1881. Albanian patriots were increasingly aware of the weakness of the Empire and its inability to defend its territories, including the Albanian inhabited ones. In 1881 the Sublime Porte suppressed the League of Prizren, fearing that the most radical wing of the League has gone too far in its demands for autonomy. Thereafter Albanian nationalist intellectuals opted for the autonomist alternative inside the Empire, so as to prevent the further portioning among the new Christian Balkan states. There was also a deep concern among Albanian intellectuals that Albanians were not yet ripe for an independent life and therefore they should be first culturally prepared through the opening of Albanian schools and elaborating a national language. In fact Sami, until the end of the nineteenth century, and due also to a growing authoritarianism of sultan Abdulhamid in that period, devoted himself to studies, mainly on Turkish language and dictionaries. He also published two short-living cultural periodicals in Albanian, “Drita” [The Light] and “Dituria” [The Knowledge] in 1884-1885 and was the main mentor of the first Albanian school opened in Korça in 1887.

But the political situation inside the Empire continued to deteriorate, because of the “Macedonian problem” of the mid 1890s, the Cretan rebellion of 1896 and its autonomy in 1897. The introduction of reforms in “Macedonia” in 1903, which favored the Christian element, further concerned the Albanian nationalists. As a Moslem Ottoman people, they feared that a final collapse of the Ottoman Empire might mean their expulsion from the Balkans. The Empire’s rule in the Balkans appeared to be rapidly ending, and this required that the Albanians prepare for this eventuality.

It was in this context that Sami wrote his main Albanian contribution, the book titled “Albania what it was, what it is and what it will be”, published in 1899 in Bucharest with the financial help of the Albanian Diaspora in Romania, which was one of the largest and much

distinguished by its patriotic activities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.¹⁰⁹ This booklet was a sign of a further politicization of Sami's discourse with regard to the position of the Albanian nation in the Empire. He was not only concerned about the existence of an Albanian "nation", but he sketched also its future political organization as an independent entity.

The work was divided into three main parts, the first dealing with the history of the Albanian people, the second with the actual situation of Albania under Ottoman rule and the third a kind of forecast of the future Albania, or, rather how Albania should be built up and internally organized once it became an independent political subject. This is quite a new position compared to that of Vasa, who mostly limited himself to draw the European attention to the existence of an Albanian nation. Vasa lived in a period when the Ottoman Empire was giving the impression that it could still stand on its feet and not crumble in a short time.

5.1. An old Albanian nation

The first part of Sami's book is an apotheosis of the past history of Albanian people and covers a period that stretches from antiquity until the late nineteenth century. The Albanian nation is described as the oldest in the Balkans, and even in Europe, as well as being the bravest people in the area:

"Albania is the place where Albanians live. Albanians are the oldest of all the nations in Europe. It seems that they came the first to enter Europe from the Middle Asia; they brought with them the knowledge how to build houses with walls and how to work the soil, to plant and to harvest; before them in Europe there were wild people living in forests and caves, eating fruits and hunting for meat".¹¹⁰

Sami followed the same path as other Balkan nationalist intellectuals of the second half of the nineteenth century, who generated a tradition of fierce competition between Balkan nationalisms as regard their respective antiquity, being 'indigenous' since time

¹⁰⁹ For a detailed story of the publication of this book see B. Bilmez, "New findings on some open questions in the history of the disputed book of Shemseddin Sami Frashëri: *Shqipëria* (1899), in "Seminari Ndërkombëtar për Gjuhën, Letërsinë dhe Kulturën shqiptare" [International seminary for the Albanian Language, Literature and Culture], XVI (Prishtinë, 2004).

¹¹⁰ S. Frashëri, *Shqipëria si ka qenë, si është dhe si do të jetë*, [What it was, what it is and what it will be] (Prishtinë, 1978), pg. 21.

immemorial, contending the ‘virtuousness’ of their respective nations as against the less ‘gifted’ neighbors. As noted also in the case of Vasa, the effort to present the Albanian origin as the oldest possible was not only to show the continuity of the presence in the territory, but also to underline a kind of supremacy in comparison with other Balkan nations claiming the same territories. The other nations had disappeared while the Albanians remained in their place as they were centuries ago. The autochthony was among the most valuable attributes that could enable one Balkan nation to have historical and moral rights on its side in order to support its claims for autonomy, independence and territorial enlargement that very often occurred to the detriment of other neighboring ethnies. Such attributes like old nation, indigenous and brave, were also intended to psychologically influence the people, by stimulating their pride in belonging to a certain ethnic community, giving a sense to their community and making it a symbol of virtues. According to John Coakley:

“In many cases, the national story incorporates a particular episode in which the “nation” was crystallized into its “modern” form. Here there are broadly two types of claim. First, the nation had existed in the same territory “from time immemorial”. The Greeks for example, could make this claim, one that placed the community on the same soil since before the beginning of recorded history, and that therefore gave them a particular entitlement to their land...Second, the ancestors of the nation moved from elsewhere, but at a particular point in time settled permanently in their current location, establishing a decisive presence”.¹¹¹

In his concept about the Albanian nation and its predecessors, Sami might have been influenced by the Austrian consul Johann Goerg von Hahn, who in the “Albanesische Studien” (1854), described the Albanians, and in particular their two main composing tribes, the Northern Gëgs and the Southern Tosks, as descending respectively from the ancient Illyrians and Epirotes.¹¹² The myth of descent here was used by Sami to give the Albanians a sense of pride, compensate the present precarious state of being and calling upon them to act as a ‘nation’. Sami upheld the same legend-like narrative of the nation as Vasa did. It was a Romanticist vision intermingled with the findings of the Western scholars, which the Balkan intellectuals in general, interpreted according to their ‘national’ priorities. In first place they had to do with the ‘redemption’ of their ‘nations’ and contending a territorial supremacy over the same space.

¹¹¹ J. Coakley, “Mobilizing the Past: Nationalist Images of History”, in *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, nr.10, (2004), pg.544.

¹¹² N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg. 170.

5.2. Albanian Moslems as part of Europe

The theme of autochthony is taken by Sami also through another construct, namely the distinction between Albanians and Turks, both being Moslems. Unlike some Albanian studies that hold that Sami discarded religion from his construction of “Albanian identity”,¹¹³ this is an indication that for Sami religion had its own importance, as the Moslem Albanians constituted a majority of the Albanian speaking population. While the distinction between Albanians and Greeks was made somehow easier due to their different religious affiliations, the first being Moslems and the second Orthodox, the distinction Albanian/Turk was very important as it drew on the political context and was to influence the next generations of Albanian patriots. In his work, Sami aimed to detach the Albanian Moslems from the Moslem Turks, as the first, according to him, were of European origin, while the latter were from Asia. Consequently, this dichotomy implied also a distinction between an indigenous people [Albanians] versus late comers [Turks]. Moreover, he characterized the Albanians as “civilized” and the Turks as “backward-barbarian”.¹¹⁴ Sami hinted at a kind of particular Albanian Islam aiming to show the superficiality of this faith among Albanians.

If for Vasa the most usual difference that was highlighted by the Albanian nationalist intellectuals was that between Orthodox Greeks and Moslem Albanians, from that moment on, the distinction between Moslem Albanians and Moslem Turks was, instead, gaining ever greater attention in the discourses of Albanian intellectuals. Here the role of the Frashëri brothers, Sami and the elder one Naim, was really central. An important element in constructing the difference between these two ‘nations’, i.e, Albanians and Turks, became their relations with the common religion, or the type of Islam professed among them.

From 1886, Naim Frashëri published a series of works developing this point. We have already mentioned “The true desire of Albanians”, “History of Skenderbej” (1886), but also “The Booklet of Bektashis” (1896), “History of Albania” (1899), the poem “Albania” (1902).¹¹⁵ These works aimed at stressing further more an “Albanian national identity”, a trans-religious one, including both Moslem and Christians alike. For this purpose, Naim Frashëri emphasized the important role of the Bektashis, heterodox Moslem sect, mostly widespread among southern Moslem Albanians, as a possible binding force of all Albanians,

¹¹³ M. Stavileci, *Iluminizmi shqiptar* [The Albanian Enlightenment], (Tiranë, 2000), pg.156-185.

¹¹⁴ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg.458-460.

¹¹⁵ For more see Rexhep Qosja, *Porosia e madhe*, [The Great Wish] (Prishtina, 1986). Also Naim Frashëri, *Works II*, (Prishtina, 1978).

deemed as a moderate version of Islam in an attempt to induce the Albanians of the Christian faith to look at their Moslem fellow countrymen through a better optic. In the texts of Naim Frashëri, “the religious difference between Moslem Bektashis and Moslem Sunis was turned into a political and cultural difference”.¹¹⁶ The ultimate concern of the Albanian nationalist intellectuals was to legitimize Albanian in the eyes of Europe as a single nation, and to portray the Albanian Moslem population as religiously “tolerant” and “different” from the more “fanatic” Turks as most of them had embraced Bektashism. Speaking about the opinion of European Great powers on Albanians, Sami was concerned that:

“...while looking at our three-fold religious division, and all the more we being mostly Moslems, they do not think we would be able to form a common and united nation, which would be capable of self-governance”.¹¹⁷

Though not focusing too much on Bektashis, as did his elder brother Naim, Sami Frashëri underlined the necessity for the Albanians to be brothers among themselves under the example of the Bektashis. Alongside with the praising of the moral virtues of the Bektashis, the most important being their supposedly tolerance, both Frashëri brothers, but also another new generation of Moslem Albanian nationalist intellectuals at the turn of the nineteenth century, Faik Konica, Shahin Kolonja, Mid’hat Frashëri, Dervish Hima, etc, started to promote the image of Moslem European Albanians, as more tolerant compared to the Moslem Asiatic Turks.¹¹⁸ Sami described Albanians as a warrior people, who did not “pay much attention” to religious matters, and could change their faith provided that the new one would serve them better in keeping their arms, taking profits from them and preserving their status as “equal partners” with the Turks in their conquests. This image was backed by another observation that no religious struggles had ever occurred between Albanians.¹¹⁹ After all, by this work, Sami aimed to legitimize a place in Europe for Moslem Albanians, in the event of a future withdrawal of the Empire from its Balkan possessions.

“What are the Turks?- A wild nation coming from the deserts of the northern Asia... what have we to do with them? Did we come with them? No, never! We are neither Turks, nor comers from Asia’s deserts. We are the oldest nation in Europe; we have the right to stand on European soil more than any other nation.”¹²⁰

This effort was deemed important by these intellectuals as Europe could easily take Moslem Albanians for Moslem Turks and reserve to them the same destiny, as it happened

¹¹⁶ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg.466-467.

¹¹⁷ S. Frashëri, *Shqipëria si ka qenë, si është dhe si do të jetë*, pg.61.

¹¹⁸ For a more detailed story see N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg.433-449; 449-474.

¹¹⁹ S. Frashëri, *Shqipëria si ka qenë, si është dhe si do të jetë*, pg.34; 54.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pg.74-75.

after the independence of Serbia and the occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by Austro-Hungary in 1878, when a large portion of the local Moslem populations migrated to Anatolia. As Maria Todorova has written, European public opinion until the second half of the nineteenth century supposed that all Balkan lands were inhabited by Turks and Greeks, adding to this picture, in a later date, the existence of other ‘nations’ such as the southern Slavs, packed together with Greeks into the same category of the “non-Moslems”.¹²¹

Albanian nationalist intellectuals felt that European public opinion did not perceive the Albanians as a ‘nation’ on its own, but saw them only as Moslems, who in general were identified with the Turks. In his text Sami put the blame on the Turks and the Greeks, who wanted to divide the Albanians:

“First of all, the Turk will divide Moslem Albanians from their Christian brothers, introducing fanaticism and sowing discord among them. In order to split Christians from the Moslems and opening a deep gap between them, the Turkish government does not recognize Christian Albanians as Albanians, but it call them *Rum*, i.e. Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbians, Latins, etc, while it calls the Moslems Islam and it does not want to recognize the name *Albanian*”... [The Greeks] think that if the Christians [Albanians] will become Greeks, Europe will not accept the Moslems in its hearth, and when the day will come, that land, i.e. the whole of southern Albania and Toskëria [part of southern Albanian inhabited lands] will be given to Greece”.¹²²

The ‘confusion’ of Albanian Orthodox Christians with Greeks was the result of a complex picture of overlapping and intertwined collective identities on the ground, not least of a very limited spread of a ‘national’ consciousness among the people. For the Albanian intellectuals the fact that their ‘nation’ was not yet distinguished and recognized as a separate one was a matter of deep concern. To instill that awareness among Albanians the national language had to play a decisive role.

5.3. The Albanian language

For Sami, the most important instrument Albanians had at that moment, to resist cultural assimilations, was their “language”. The treatise laid down demands for the development of Albanian nationality and culture, through Albanian schools, which until that moment were not accepted by the imperial government fearing a greater impetus of

¹²¹ M. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, (Oxford, 1997), pg.98.

¹²² S. Frashëri, *Shqipëria si ka qenë, si është dhe si do të jetë*, pg.56-57.

Albanian nationalism by the end of nineteenth century. Sami thought the strongest and basic elements defining Albanian nationality was language. The antiquity of the Albanian language, the need to print, distribute, write and read the Albanian language is a refrain repeated throughout the book. The subchapter on the Albanian language is very indicative of the importance which Sami gave to language, the title being simply “Albanian nationality”. In speaking about language he followed more or less the same line as with the descent, antiquity and immutability being its characteristics. Sami considered the Albanian language as the oldest in Europe and to prove its superiority and vitality in comparison with the other old languages he wrote that:

“...all languages that we mentioned (Latin, Persian, Teutonic, Indian, etc), which are Albanian’s younger sisters, are all dead languages for thousand years, they are not spoken any more and are found only in the pages of old books. They are called dead languages, while our Albanian, which is the oldest, is a living language and is still spoken today as it was spoken in the time of Pellasgs”.¹²³

Sami showed here influences from the Western scholars, who listed the Albanians, together with Illyrians, Macedonians, and Greeks as heirs of the “Pellazgs”, the most ancient European population. But, Albanians, according to them, due to their isolation among the mountains and living in a semi state of nature, had preserved intact their language, which was a kind of fossil of the pre-historic people, being not elaborated and refined as a written language.¹²⁴ According to this assumption, the Greeks were detached from the pristine “Pellazg” genealogical tree, as they were ‘civilized’ and thus their language diverged from the original idiom. He stressed furthermore the importance that language had as an identity marker:

“Language is the mark of nationality; each nation is held by its language; those people who forget or abandon their language and speak another language, they leave their nationality and with time take the nationality of the language they start to speak. There are many nations that have disappeared, but don’t think they are destroyed or exterminated; no, never, they are mixed with other nations, they speak another language and they cannot be distinguished from other nations”.¹²⁵

Here language took priority over descent as the latter was considered to be somehow a passive factor in determining nationality, a kind of a ground over which language would leave its decisive imprint, i.e. you might be of Albanian descent, but if you don’t speak Albanian you lose your nationality. Therefore, descent became a precondition, but language was a *sine qua non* condition for nationality.

¹²³ S. Frashëri, *Shqipëria si ka qenë, si është dhe si do të jetë*, pg.36.

¹²⁴ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg. 167.

¹²⁵ S. Frashëri, *Shqipëria si ka qenë, si është dhe si do të jetë*, pg.36.

Here Sami hinted at the concrete situation on the ground, where Albanian speaking populations were organized into three millets, Moslem, Rum [Orthodox] and Latin [Catholic]. For that reason, the Albanian language, but not only, was chosen by the Albanian nationalist intellectuals as the most effective means to foster a national consciousness and help create the Albanian ‘imagined community’. The importance Sami ascribed to language as an identifying factor and defender of Albanian nationality can be best summarized with his phrase at the end of the book when he says that “there is no Albania without Albanians and Albanian language; there is no Albanian language without Albanian letters and schools, where language can be taught.”¹²⁶

For Sami, language in itself, in its oral status, could not be a sufficient attribute for a nation. He thought that an unwritten language was only a potential national attribute and people could better prove and stress their nationality by writing and reading their language. Sami saw a real danger in the fact that the Albanian language was not cultivated, not written and not read. Thus, Albanians were running the risk of not being considered a separate nationality.

“One language that is not written and read is not taken as a language. Provençals in France, Catalans in Spain, Gaels in Britain and other nations who speak particular languages, but not writing them, are considered to be French, Spanish and British according to the language they write and read”.¹²⁷

Sami argued that writing the language enabled one’s nation to claim the right to be considered a community apart. In fact for Sami, the Albanian language was both an instrument of education and enlightenment and a strong marker of national identity. In relation to the importance of language as an attribute of a given people to claim the right of being a ‘nation’ during the late nineteenth and early twenty century, Eric Hobsbawm writes that:

“In consequence of this multiplication of potential ‘unhistorical’ nations, ethnicity and language became the central, increasingly the decisive or even the only criteria of potential nationhood.”¹²⁸

The preservation of the Albanian language and nationality, Sami argued, had been made possible by the isolation of Albanian population and its isolation from strangers. He said that Albanians:

¹²⁶ S. Frashëri, *Shqipëria si ka qenë, si është dhe si do të jetë*, pg.79.

¹²⁷ Ibid. pg.63.

¹²⁸ E. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality*, (Cambridge, 2002), pg.102.

“...have preserved their language and nationality neither with letters and nor with knowledge, not with civilization but only with freedom, being always apart and not mixed with others and not allowing foreigners coming to their place. Being away from the world, from knowledge, from civilization, from commerce, so living like wild people in the mountains, this has helped Albanians to save their language and nationality”.¹²⁹

Anthony Smith refers to the importance the geographical location had for nationalist intellectuals:

“...perhaps the most obvious and recurrent factors cited for the survival or dissolution of ethnic are geo-political. Broadly speaking “location” and “sovereignty” constitute for many observers the key to ethnic survival. Freedom from external interference in a compact and defensible territory exceeds all other variables in importance for ensuring the survival of distinct communities”.¹³⁰

The main result due to that geographical isolation was the purity and the cultural compactness of the Albanian people.

5.4. Albanian purity and homogeneity

Besides language, the Albanian leaders of the National Movement professed also blood and descent as pillars of the Albanian nation in order to create internal cohesion among the population but also to present this nation as a distinct one and as compact as possible in the eyes of the Great Powers, which would give the final say on the fate of the Balkan countries after the retreat of the Ottoman Empire from the Balkans at the start of the twentieth century. Sami’s description of the Albanians living apart from the world, in isolation and ‘liberty’, in ‘unity’ with the nature and who knew only their independence, is close to the Rousseau’s concept of “noble savage”. Sami mentioned Rousseau in an article on “European civilization” written and published in the Albanian newspaper “Dituria” [Knowledge]. Here he exalted European civilization as the “the true, universal, and eternal one”, while eulogizing Rousseau, Voltaire, Kant, Descartes as “great philosophers that opened the road to civilization, knowledge and free thinking defeating the clergy once for good.”¹³¹ We have noted in the chapter on Vasa the importance that the symbol of the highlanders had for the Albanian nationalist intellectuals as an indicator of several ethnic qualities, as autochthony,

¹²⁹ Sami Frashëri, *Shqipëria si ka qenë, si është dhe si do të jetë*, pg.37.

¹³⁰ A. D. Smith, *The ethnic origins of nations*, pg.93. See also A. D. Smith, *Chosen People*, (Oxford, 2003), pg.131-166.

¹³¹ S. Frashëri, “Qytetëri e Evropjanëvet” [European Civilization], *Dituria*, nr.8, (Istanbul, 1885) pg.116.

pure Albanian blood, resistance against foreign invaders, etc. Even these constructs are firstly found among the writings of the Italo-Albanian writers, which were later imported and also readjusted to the Ottoman and Albanian contexts by our Albanian authors.¹³² The Italo-Albanians presented the Pellazgs, the presumed Albanians' ancestors, as a "barbarian" people, in the sense of a non-educated people, untouched by civilization, and therefore unchanged in its essence. Instead, they had remained in a pure natural state, namely a still pure "race" and "character". In fact, the Italo-Albanians used this image for the Albanians in general, while our Albanian authors, of a later period, combined it also with the dichotomy Northern Geg highlanders versus lowland urban Southern Tosks. While in the past isolation had preserved the Albanian language and nationality, Sami now considered those conditions as of a bygone age:

"If Albanian language is preserved so far and for thousand years, time has changed and it can't be preserved for much longer. From now on no nation can live apart and separated from the others, neighbors are awakened and are doing well and are trying to swallow us".¹³³

By "time has changed" Sami meant that the late nineteenth century was the time of nationalism in the Balkans and the previous *status quo* situation of a relatively quiet Ottoman dominion in the Balkans was no longer possible. The newly founded Balkan states such as Greece, Serbia, Montenegro and Bulgaria were claiming the Albanian inhabited lands. To realize such a goal they obstructed the opening of Albanian schools, which were seen as a vehicle of national agitation and an obstacle to their plans of culturally assimilating the targeted Albanian population.

Ethnic purity was another argument complementing Sami's reasoning that Albanians were in the actual lands from centuries and deserved their own place in this part of the world. Sami held that:

"Albania has around 2 million people. From these some 100.000 people are Arumanians or Gypsies in the mountains of Pindus; there are as many Greeks in the area around Janina [northwestern Greece]. But, they might be Albanians that have forgotten their language and have learned Greek or Serbian in school or in the church".¹³⁴

In fact this passage bore similar characteristics with the articulation of nations elsewhere in Europe and in the Balkans. Those narratives put the dominant *ethnie* in a

¹³² N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg. 175.

¹³³ S. Frashëri, *Shqipëria si ka qenë, si është dhe si do të jetë*, pg.63.

¹³⁴ S. Frashëri, *Shqipëria si ka qenë, si është dhe si do të jetë*, pg.46.

position of racial superiority derived from the intention to designate a territory as the exclusive homeland of a particular nation. To accept the presence of alien people in the same territory would mean “to share the homeland with strangers” and to create a potential source for the latter’s irredentist activities.¹³⁵ In relation to minorities or people of non-Albanian origin, but living in the same territories as the Albanians, Sami depicted them as intruders, or people of a low social profile, aiming to stress, by so doing, the difference between an autochthonous and numerically dominant Albanian ethnic and the others. Referring to the Greek minority in particular, but also to the Aromanian and Gipsy minorities, Sami wrote:

”Many of these [Greek minority members] do not have even a house of their own, but work as tillers in others’ land. They are brought here from far away to work the land at a time when the Albanians couldn’t leave aside their gun and take up the pickaxe”.¹³⁶

Seemingly, Sami tried to solve two things at once. Thus, he presented the non-Albanian *ethnies* as non-indigenous, brought from far away, and socially inferior, as they served and worked for ‘noble warrior’ Albanians, who were ‘the masters’ of the place. Sami’s concept of the Albanian nation was also that of a socially homogenous community, where solidarity, common sense and love reigned over everything else. He didn’t mention any vertical social division and instead of that we have a community characterized by horizontal fraternity. He says:

“...before being Moslem or Christian, Albanians are Albanians... In spite of religious difference, Albanians are not divided but united by their love between each other”.¹³⁷

He considered the national solidarity between Albanians as a strong link which had survived from generation to generation and had not faded with time.¹³⁸ The only division that Sami vaguely mentioned, and as something not very important, was the internal regional division of Albanians into Northern Gegs and Southern Tosks. As we have indicated, Gegëria in the north and Toskëria in the south were believed to be two main cultural and geographic areas that delineated also two major Albanian dialects, Geg and Tosk dialects. Anyway, he believed that the difference could be overcome by the elaboration of a literary language.

“All the inhabitants of Albania are simply Albanians, divided into Gegs and Tosks. The Shkumbini river splits Albania into Gegëri and Toskëri, but also in the south of this river there are still places where Geg is

¹³⁵ V. Roudometof, “Nationalism and Identity Politics in the Balkans: Greece and the Macedonian Question” in *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, vol.14, (1996), pg. 253.

¹³⁶ S. Frashëri, *Shqipëria si ka qenë, si është dhe si do të jetë*, pg.46.

¹³⁷ S. Frashëri, *Shqipëria si ka qenë, si është dhe si do të jetë*, pg.48-49.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, pg.47.

spoken. There is no radical difference between Gegs and Tosks. All are one nation, speak the same language, with slight nuances, which would be erased by building the language”.¹³⁹

An old nation with an old language had managed to survive through adverse centuries by its glorious deeds, whose memories should be revived to achieve national redemption.

5.5. Glorious past times

In his booklet, Sami characterized Albanians according to three main historical periods. One period was the past, either during the time of the national hero Gjergj Kastrioti Skenderbej (1405-1468), or before the Tanzimat (1839-1876), the present and the future Albanian state. This went more or less in the same line with the division of the book. Albanians of the first period were viewed by Sami as a united ethnic community with a clear sense of national belonging and solidarity, “before being Moslems and Christian, Albanians are Albanians”. It was the ‘Golden Age’ of the Albanians and it clearly contrasted with the present, which witnessed Albanians as a people with a lost ‘national’ feeling:

“...today 90% of Albanians are not Albanian neither with their mind nor with their heart, they don’t love and honor their language and nation; they don’t want to read and write their language and many of them are ashamed to speak Albanian”.¹⁴⁰

The other example was when he touched on religious division. While he described the past ‘Golden Age’ as a time when “Albanians were first Albanians and then Moslems and Christians”, for the present Albanians he argued:

“...in later periods Moslem Albanians have worked for Turks, and Christian Albanians have worked for Greeks, for these two nations which are not grateful to them”.¹⁴¹

Sami saw that something was wrong with the unity among Albanians. Therefore, the last part of the book dealt with the future Albanian state. First, he felt the need to issue a strong call to his co-nationals inviting them not to consider their religion, but to unite with the other Albanians “as they are brothers”.¹⁴² It may seem as a paradox, when a modernist like

¹³⁹ Ibid, pg.47.

¹⁴⁰ Sami Frashëri, *Shqipëria si qenë, si është dhe si do të jetë*, pg.103.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, pg.43.

¹⁴² Ibid, pg.77.

Sami sustained a kind of traditionalist solution when he spoke about how some of the most important institutions of the future Albanian will be built up. He thought that the future Albanian head of state must be neither a Christian prince nor a Moslem one.

“Foreigners and Albanians think very often about a prince or king who would rule the future Albania...A Geg would not be accepted by Tosks; a Tosk would not be accepted by Glegs; a Christian would not be accepted by Moslems and a Moslem would not be accepted by Christians... Why we need a person at the head of government? A king or a prince could harm our traditions, favoring one part and discriminating the other”.¹⁴³

He favored a kind of “Council of Elders”, that he considered an old Albanian tradition. According to Sami, it would be the best solution to avoid religious and regional frictions between Albanians. The Council of Sages, intended as an assembly of representatives of different faiths and regions, would be the sole authority which could be accepted by both Moslem and Christians, southerners and northerners.¹⁴⁴ Here he referred to the traditions of the Albanian highlands. However, in Sami’s case, this construct had to serve also as a means to overcome the religious division of Albanians, as the “Council of Elders” was a kind of an old communal institution with a ‘pan-Albanian’ dimension, which could override religions just because of its inherent authority deriving from its ancientness.

The difference in the way he saw the Albanian nation of the past, as a quasi-cohesive ethnic community, and in present time, as a potential nationality, had a series of motifs. The first part of the book dealing with the past history of the Albanian nation had a clear tone of nationalistic mythology. For Anthony Smith:

“If golden ages can be found among peoples before the era of nationalism, they become a *sine qua non* for modern nationalists. Not only is a golden age a vital component of nationalist mythology; it is indispensable to an understanding of national ‘character’. Without a golden age, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to discover the ‘true self’ of the people”.¹⁴⁵

Sami’s narrative is a didactic history with integrative purposes. Sami was aware of the appeal of history and its role in binding people together through heroes, landscapes, and golden ages. He wanted to create a long-lasting history of the Albanian people, the history of an old Albanian nation, the latter being the sole locus of Albanians’ loyalty through the centuries. He wanted to fascinate Albanians with their common past and to incite them to believe in their national community. It was also the history written by a scholar who has gone

¹⁴³ Ibid, pg.83.

¹⁴⁴ S. Frashëri, *Shqipëria si ka qenë, si është dhe si do të jetë*, pg.84.

¹⁴⁵ A. D. Smith, *Chosen People*, op.cit, pg. 190.

through Romanticism and Enlightenment's influences.¹⁴⁶ We had already seen in the chapter on Vasa the characteristics of the Albanian Romantic writers, which are present in the Sami's texts too, such as the landscape, the national hero, the 'Golden Age', the praise for the noble qualities of the highlanders, etc.

On the other hand, the difference between past and present Albanians had to do also with the respective functions of different historical periods. The past served to forge an Albanian identity and was thus depicted in the best terms in order to have an impact on present Albanians. The past was the time "when Albanians were united between themselves and proud to be a brave nation". The present was considered as a state of stagnancy and decay, when Albanians have lost something from their past dignity. The 'Golden age' must be restored through patriotic activities, through cultivating the language, spreading it among co-nationals. The present situation, in clear contrast of the grandeur of the past, offered him a reason to incite Albanians to think about their existence in national terms.

While, in the past, the Albanian 'nation' had been preserved by its isolation and lack of contacts with others, now, the situation had totally changed. Sami held that Albanians could not enjoy for much longer their status of 'free' highlanders. He expressed serious doubts about chances of survival in the Balkans of an Ottoman Empire giving signs of dissolution. He was afraid the power vacuum would be filled up by the aggressive new Balkan states. In these conditions Albanian people must consider their national allegiance as a militant existence.

Along with the 'Golden Age', Sami exalted the Albanian nation through the figure of the 'national' hero Skënderbej. The myth of Skënderbej as a national hero was widely celebrated during the National Movement. It was a historical construct of the National Movement Albanian intellectuals. The myth was based on this local lord who fought the Turks for 25 years on behalf of Albanians and was considered a national leader. In fact the name of Skënderbej was more known in the Albanian Diaspora, where a patriotic agitation had already started, like the Albanian Diaspora of Italy, Bulgaria, Egypt, Romania, USA, etc. The figure of Skënderbej first reemerged in Italy, where there lived a sizeable Albanian community. As Stavro Skëndi has observed in a rather romantic fashion:

"It was among the Italo-Albanians, who enjoyed freedom in Italy and were far from Ottoman danger, that Scanderbeg became, at the time of the struggles for the liberation of Italy, the inspiration of nationalism and

¹⁴⁶ Peter Sugar, "The Enlightenment in the Balkans, some basic considerations", in *East European Quarterly*, vol.IX, No.4, (1975), pg. 503. See also A. D. Smith, *Chosen People*, pg. 190.

an incentive for the liberation of their brothers across the Adriatic. He served also as an essential link between the two shores".¹⁴⁷

In the words of Sami, "Skënderbej was the king of the Albanians", and he was unique in history "for his bravery, war strategy, for his force and knowledge and he was compassionate and sweet like nobody else".¹⁴⁸ He described the period of Skënderbej as "the most beautiful and blessed time for our country, because only in that time the whole nation was united under a sovereign government and was honored throughout the world".¹⁴⁹ The 'Golden age' of Skënderbej served Sami to underline the importance of the unification of the Albanian land under a central authority as "for the first time Albania was united in one kingdom under a brave king like Skënderbej". The myth of Skënderbej, of this Albanian lord-chieftain of fifteenth century, who managed to keep free his principality and some surrounding areas due to a military alliance with other Albanian lords, was intended to serve as a symbol of national and territorial unity.

It should be noted here that though the 'Golden Age' of the Skenderbej was a contribution of the Italo-Albanians to the building of a 'national' pantheon, Sami and Vasa, but we will see also how Qemali and Konitza added glorious pages to Albanians' history from the pre-Tanzimat period. It was the Ottoman context which had its own part. By referring to that period, these authors wanted to pinpoint a historical period when Albania enjoyed a relative independence, as the Sublime Porte had traditionally negotiated its rule over the Albanian inhabited lands, delegating much power to the local rulers. The Tanzimat reforms, though under modernizing pretenses, aimed to centralize the Ottoman state and directly encroach upon the rights of the Albanians to be governed by their own elite. The hint to the right of Albanians to enjoy autonomy inside the Ottoman Empire by the end of the nineteenth century is clear here, and still the more so, when Ottoman rule in the Balkans was at pains to assert itself before the threat from the European powers and Balkan nationalisms. Quite naturally the Albanian authors praised also some powerful Albanian Moslem rulers, who managed to oblige the Ottoman central government to share rule with them during the pre-Tanzimat times. These powerful Moslem rulers are absent in the texts of the Christian Italo-Albanians who, instead, hailed the deeds of Skenderbej as a Christian Albanian hero.

¹⁴⁷ S. Skëndi, *Balkan Cultural Studies*, (New York, 1980), pg.206.

¹⁴⁸ S. Frashëri, *Shqipëria si ka qenë, si është dhe si do të jetë*, pg..30.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, pg.32-33.

5.6. Religion

We should note that language, blood and descent was a discourse used by the Albanian intellectuals in certain periods of time, e.g. the Eastern Crisis (1878-1881) or the “Macedonian” one (1896-1903) and mainly when addressing external public opinion. These discursive elements were put in evidence just because the Albanian intellectuals were aware of the deep religious attachments of the people and saw them as harmful to ‘national unity’. Sami felt that Albanians were not fully ‘prepared’ and lacked a series of things to be a ‘nation’ and were unable to face the territorial claims of the Balkan Slav and their Greek neighbors. But, this was not the case, as we will see it in latter chapters, when it was about to mobilize Albanians around the ‘national cause’. Instead, they made use of religion in their internal discourse and tried to present national feeling as not incompatible with religious ones.

It was said before that, compared with the integrative function of language as the most important common thing among Albanians, religion was seen as a divisive factor. In the eyes of Sami and other nationalist intellectuals, such a division not only hindered the national unity to be achieved, but it offered good reasons to Balkan nationalisms to consider Moslem Albanians as an Islamic population that deserved to be subdued to the more civilized new Orthodox Balkan states after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. Sami used two arguments to make religion appear as a not very important element of nationality. The first, that Albanians were not a ‘very religious’ people and the second that religion was a ‘more recent’ phenomenon in the life of people than ethnicity, taken instead as perennial. The myth of Albanian ‘non-religiosity’, or rather the pragmatic and not a religious Albanian ‘character’, along with that of national hero Skënderbej and Illyrian descent are among the most lasting myths of the period of National Movement (1878-1912), which had survived until nowadays.

When Sami spoke about the conversion of Albanians to Islam with the arrival of the Ottomans, he says that Albanians embraced the conqueror’s faith because of concrete benefits deriving from that. Sami illustrated ‘Albanian pragmatism’ by using an old Albanian saying “where the sword is, there lies religion”. He wrote:

“Albanians have the quality to be fed up very soon with one religion and they want to change it; after they saw that Turks didn’t offer benefits to those who didn’t change faith, Albanians didn’t laze to embrace the new faith of the conqueror”.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ S. Frashëri, *Shqipëria si është, si ka qenë, dhe si do të jetë*, pg.34.

Sami wanted to say that behind the conversion of the Albanians was determined by pure pragmatism and therefore it was not a profound change in their way of being. Therefore he wrote:

“...even those who remained Christians were not humiliated like the other *raja* [usually the Orthodox people in the Ottoman Empire] nations, but kept their weapons and honor and went to fight on the side of their Moslem brothers against the enemies of Turkey”¹⁵¹.

In Sami’s view Albanians embraced Islam as the Turks allowed them to keep their swords, to keep their freedom as mountain fighters and not being subjugated as other nations did. To confirm the priority of nationality before religion Sami asserted: that:

“...religious division didn’t bring any split among Albanians. Religious wars, not only in eastern countries but also in civilized Europe, very often had caused horrible and numerous killings. In Albania there never occurred a religious struggle between Moslems and Christians, or between Catholics and Orthodox, or between Sunnis and Bektashis. An Albanian is an Albanian before being Moslem or Christian. He is today like he has been when he had his own faith, the faith of Pellazgs, he has been the same when he converted into Christian and he remained the same also when he took the faith of Mohamet. Religion did not change him as he puts nationality before religion”.¹⁵²

It seems that in his Albanian texts Sami saw religion rather as a form of behavior, of adaptation to certain conditions, while nationality was more essential, was the “Albanian being”. According to him the fact that Albanians considered nationality as more important than religion made them superior to other people in the Balkans. The fact that ‘nationality’ presented the ‘essence’, a primordial value against ‘religion’, which in turn was seen as a later and less important accretion to the Albanian ‘character’ was an ‘argument’ extensively used by the Albanian intellectuals in the nineteenth century when they had to deal with the problem of religious division. For Sami, to put more value on ‘nationality’ was turned to be a matter of preserving untouched your character, your moral integrity.

“People in our eastern neighborhood consider first religion and then nationality; if one Greek abandons his faith he abandons also his nationality, and once he becomes Catholic he says: “I am French”, if he becomes Moslem he says “I am Turk”. Only Albanians leave religion in second place after their nationality. One Albanian is always Albanian, be he a Moslem, Catholic or Orthodox”.¹⁵³

In the text Sami saw nationality as a quality acquired by birth and not an external influence like religion. Here, things on the ground were not exactly as he put it. It was

¹⁵¹ Ibid, pg.34.

¹⁵² S. Frashëri, *Shqipëria si është, si ka qenë, dhe si do të jetë*, pg.47.

¹⁵³ S. Frashëri, *Shqipëria si ka qenë, si është dhe si do të jetë*, pg.54.

precisely because the Albanian speaking populations at that time had strong religious identities, that Sami tried to present the latter as something ‘unnatural’ and ‘treacherous’, appealing thus to his co-nationals to convert to the true ‘faith’, to their ‘nationality’:

“There is nothing more valuable for people in this life than nationality. Everyone loves his nation like he loves her mother, his father and his fatherland, where he was born and grew up. Those, who don’t love their nation and fatherland, are traitors and wicked men; such people can not be called human beings”.¹⁵⁴

Practically, he found himself in an ambiguous situation. On the one hand, he wanted to say that religion didn’t play any important role in Albanian history and that Albanians were not so attached to religion and, on the other, he appealed to them to leave aside the religious division and to make common cause on behalf of the Albanian nation. “Don’t look at religion; Moslems, Catholics and Orthodox, you are all brothers. You must all unite under the holy flag of Albania”. Sami urged then for the creation of an Albanian Orthodox Church that would take Orthodox Albanians away from Serbian, Bulgarian and Greek influence.¹⁵⁵

5.7. National virtues and landscape

For Sami moral virtues played an important role too in forging a nation. Among the qualities that Sami considered as sufficient and necessary ingredients for Albanians to be a nation were courage, vigour, industriousness, intelligence. The first national attributes that he mentioned are either male qualities or proficiencies in male professions, like strong soldiers, weapon-producer, land-tiller. The place of women is a complementary one, but no less important. They are a good asset in claiming the right to be a nation as:

“The Albanian women are beautiful, honest, even more than their husbands, and as brave as them. Albanian women mind their own business, without interfering into their husbands’ matters”.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, pg.53.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, pg.77.

¹⁵⁶ S. Frashëri, *Shqipëria si ka qenë, si është dhe si do të jetë*, pg.49.

And here he set in a row all those qualities that were necessary to depict Albanian woman as a perfect housekeeper, sewing, producing clothes, and keeping the house in order. According to Sami, these qualities, combined also with “unity and love that exists among Albanians” make them to have “everything that a nation might have to go ahead and develop”.

He considered these qualities as something inherited and being in the Albanian blood, although in the present situation in a state of hibernation caused by an oppressing Turkish government:

“If Albanians are so strong and brave why they stand with hands tied up when weaker foreigners are splitting and strangling them? They have their hands tied up as there are the Turks who have tied their hands, and the foreigners are splitting them with the help of the Turks. And Turks, are they so strong as to keep the Albanians tied up and with the other hand to help the enemies of Albanians? No, we know that they are strong, but they are foxy; they keep Albanians in this state with betrayal and slyness. Let’s put also in this way: Albanians have their hands tied up, as they are unlearned and blind. Albania is today a strong dragon, encircled by jackals and foxes, which have tied up its feet and are ready to swallow it. It suffices the dragon’s slightest move for the jackals and foxes to disappear.”¹⁵⁷

Another element that Sami used to complete his idea about Albanian nation was the country, the Albanian landscape, or the poetic space where Albanians lived.¹⁵⁸ In his words, Albania was one of the most beautiful countries in Europe, with its magnificent mountains, its large forests and fertile plains.¹⁵⁹ Sami used the description of Albanian landscape to say that Albanian nation was nicely located in a beautiful place and therefore had all the requisites for progress and prosperity. Finally, the Albanians were sufficiently numerous, courageous and proud and they were able to deploy an army able to defend their country. Sami thought that the European Powers would support the future Albanian state, once they will be convinced that Albanians were not “divided into different religious communities”, but were a unified and single nation.

The articulation of the Albanian “nation” of Sami was intertwined with other discourses as well. It pertained to different ideological currents in the late nineteenth century Empire, to its geopolitical evolution and to the various periods of the Albanian National Movement. As we saw the Albanian nation was a part of the much larger “Ottoman nation” and as such it was seen attached to the Ottoman state. The inclusion of the Albanians inside the “Ottoman nation” was in accordance also with the autonomist approach of the Albanian

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., pg.74.

¹⁵⁸ A. D. Smith, *The ethnic origin of nations*, pg.185.

¹⁵⁹ S. Frashëri, *Shqipëria si ka qenë, si është dhe si do të jetë*, pg.45.

intellectuals of the period. His discourse of the Albanians was related also his conception of the future development of the Moslem people of the Empire, and more precisely with his reformist Islam. In that case Sami suggested that the Islamic people of the Empire, and here he enumerated also the Albanians, should regain its “enlightening” and “civilizing” drive and lead people towards progress, but this should be carried out through the cultivation of peoples’ own languages. His articulation of the Albanian nation was related to that period of the Albanian National Movement when the cultural affirmation was deemed of first hand importance. For this reason Sami presented the Albanians as a unitary ‘nation’, where religious differences apparently were not put in evidence. The regional differences as well, as that among the northern Gegs and southern Tosks, including here also their respective dialects, were not fully elaborated. He presented them, perhaps intentionally, as being of a minor importance. Unlike Faik Konica, whose views we analyse in another chapter, Sami was not so interested to describe a ‘fragmented’ Albanian ‘nation’ in the eyes of the foreigners, as the most important task was to affirm the very existence of this nation, and the best way to do it was to see it under the light of an undivided community. As we will see, Konitza lived in another period, when the more visible fragility of the Empire was pressing on invigorating the patriotic actions.

The discourse of Albanian ‘nation’ of Sami became more politicized at the end of the nineteenth century, as it was in the aftermath of the Eastern Crisis (1875-1878). His book “Albania what it was, what it is and what it will be” was in contrast with his previous articles in the Ottoman press. It pertained to two different periods of time the Ottoman Empire was going through. If in the late 1870s and 1880s for the Albanian intellectuals it was important to stress the existence of the Albanian “nation” and to reiterate the demands for the creation of a single Albanian province, or an autonomous status for the Albanian lands inside the Empire, to counter the expansionist policies of the Balkan nationalisms, by the end of the nineteenth century the picture on the ground has changed. The “Macedonian question” in the late 1890s has clearly showed the weakness of the Sublime Porte to contain the Balkan nationalisms from encroaching upon its territorial integrity in the Balkans, and on the other hand it had further opened the doors to an increased European intervention in favor of the Christian Balkan states. In that moment the discourse of the Ottoman Sami would shift to a more Albanianized tenor, which was putting more in evidence the difference between Turks and Albanians, as two ‘nations’ now having much more things dividing them, rather than binding them together, along with the impression that the Empire was becoming a rotten ‘shelter’ that was more risky than safer to stay within.

However, it would be simplistic to consider the periods, from the 1870s throughout the 1880s, when Sami wrote with more ‘benevolence’ on the Ottoman Empire, and the later ones, in the 1890s, when his texts had a more critical vein towards the imperial state, as two separate time spaces, divided between them by a clear-cut watershed as it was the publication of his book “Albania what it was, it is and what it will be” (1899). It true that this book marked a more accentuated attention over Albanian affairs, but it does not forcibly mean that Sami lost his interest on his Turkish studies. In 1900, one year after the publication of “Albania...”, Sami prepared a new edition of a monolingual Turkish dictionary [Kamus-i Turki]. In it Sami considered the Turks as a “race” in its own, among many others under the Ottoman rule.¹⁶⁰ At first sight it would seem paradoxical how an Albanian nationalist intellectual held discourses aiming to build simultaneously new modernizing collective identities, such as the “Albanian” and “Turkish” ones.

But, Sami’s work as a modernizer of collective identities of these two people, “Albanian” and “Turkish”, emerging from the roof of the shaky Ottoman Empire, had in its basis, first of all, his ever more strengthened conviction that the project for the survival of the Empire was doomed to failure. Sami was not alone in this opinion. We have mentioned at the introductory chapter the article of one of the founders of the Turkish nationalism Yusuf Akçura (1876-1935). In his article of 1904 with the title “The three systems” he discarded the “Ottomanist” project as a feasible one for the future of the people of the Empire. Instead, he was calling for the raising of the “Turkish national awareness”. This was a sign that the time was changing fast and the old traditional imperial overarching identities were leaving the place to the smaller national projects. The progressive intellectuals of the time were considering the national states as the most viable and suitable state organization for the prosperity and development of the various people. On the other hand, the Albanian and Turkish national identities constructed by Sami had in their basis his devotion to the study of the vernaculars. He wrote a lot on the standardization of both languages and held in high consideration the role of the language as a means for the advancement of the people. In the end, the simultaneous discourse on Albanian and Turkish nations did not clash with the political projects of Sami. Sami wanted to present Albanians as a people in its own and different from the Asiatic Turks. Moreover that the above projects related to two people

¹⁶⁰ For more see B. Bilmez, “Shemseddin Sami Frashëri (1850-1904): Contributing to the Construction of Albanian and Turkish Identities”, in D. Mishkova (ed.) *We, The People. Politics of National Peculiarity in Southeastern Europe*, CEU Press (2009), pg. 341-373.

which did not have common borders with each other and therefore did not contend territories and hegemonies.

Chapter IV

Ismail bej Qemali (Vlora), imperial employee and national leader

The name of Ismail Qemali (1844-1919) is inextricably linked to the proclamation of Albanian independence on 28 November 1912. On that date, Qemali, at the head of hundreds of Albanian patriots, hoisted the Albanian national flag in his native town of Vlora [south-west Albania]. Symbolically, this act marked the birth of the Albanian independent state, which ended five centuries of Ottoman dominion. As shown above, the event gained international recognition only in July 1913 when, after the withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire from its Balkan territories, the Conference of London ratified the status of Albania as an independent and neutral state under the control of the Great Powers. The figure of Qemali is so familiar to the Albanian public that history text books, movies and literature often refer to him as “the Elder of Vlora”, “the Great Patriot”, “the wise Elder”, recognizing in his figure simultaneously the gift of perspicacity and wisdom. The most famous photo of Ismail Qemali shows his white bearded and slightly smiling tender face, a further confirmation of his image as patriarch or father of the nation. His name is given to streets and public schools in various cities across the country, his face appears on banknotes and postage-stamps, the main square in Vlora bears the name of “Independence Square” and a big statue of him stands there symbolising the link between Ismail Qemali and his native town. His full name, Ismail Qemal bej Vlora, indicates his origin from one of the wealthiest and most powerful Albanian families of the Ottoman era and his attachment to the town. As he himself explained in his memoirs it was an old Albanian tradition for the important families to adopt the name of the locality they ruled.¹

Qemali was a high Ottoman official who, for most of his life, occupied important position in the imperial administration. After completing his elementary studies in his home town and attending the “Zosimea” lycée in Janina, as Sami would do in later years, Qemali in 1859 moved to Istanbul. The imperial capital was a common destination for the offspring of

¹ S. Story (ed.), *The memoirs of Ismail Kemal bey*, (London, 1920), p.3.

important and noble families, who sought a solid education. The education in the capital, combined with familiar ties and through patronage networks, offered the prerequisite conditions for a promising official career. According to Hasan Kayali:

“The imperial capital had long been a cosmopolis where people of various ethnic and religious backgrounds intermingled and assimilated into the Ottoman imperial culture. Its population, educationally more advanced compared with the rest of the empire, was exposed to European political, economic, and cultural influences, and thus provided the human resources needed for an expanding bureaucracy committed to Westernization. Most Tanzimat-men were Istanbul-born, and many were sons of prominent statesmen who started their careers in the Translation Bureau, a creation of Mahmud II and a breeding ground for reformers, where they received their language training and basic experience in government service”.²

In Istanbul, Qemali continued his studies in the Faculty of Law and at the same time, thanks to his knowledge of foreign languages, entered as translator of the French language in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Qemali distinguished himself as a valuable employee, and whilst still very young reached a high rank in the Ottoman administration and was appointed governor to various provinces. In 1868 he was nominated as first secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in 1869 he worked as rapporteur in the Ottoman State Council, in 1870 he became governor in Varna [Bulgaria], in 1876 General Secretary of the Foreign Ministry, in 1884 governor of the Anatolian province of Bolu. From 1890-1892 Qemali was successively governor of Gallipoli [in European Turkey] and Beirut and in 1893 in Tripoli.³ From the mid 1860s on, Qemali became a close collaborator of Midhat Pasha (1822-1884), the distinguished Ottoman reformer and the architect of the first Ottoman constitution of 1876. First he worked with him in the Danube vilayet and then in the State Council. Throughout his life Qemali nourished a great admiration for Midhat Pasha as a statesman and reformer.

In 1900, Qemali left the Empire and went abroad in a sort of self-imposed exile that lasted for eight years. He was dissatisfied with the condition of affairs in the Empire, with the ever growing autocratic rule of the Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909) and of the general disorder in the European provinces of the Empire. His liberal and reformist ideas would cost him the support of the high Ottoman administration including that of the Sultan himself. He settled in various European cities, Geneva, Rome, Paris, London and Brussels, where he had the opportunity to urge European diplomatic circles to compel the Empire to take the road of

² H. Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks, Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire 1908-1918*, (University of California Press, 1997), p.19.

³ K. Naska, *Ismail Qemali në Lëvizjen Kombëtare* [Ismail Qemali in the National Movement], (Tiranë, 1987), p.18.

administrative reforms. During this stay abroad he also established the first important contacts with Albanian intellectuals and exponents of the Albanian National Movement.

With the proclamation of the second constitution in 1908 and with the Young Turks' coming to power, Qemali returned again to Istanbul in November of that year. He became head of *Ahrar* opposition party, which included in its ranks also Arabs, Armenians and representatives from other ethnicities of the Empire. This party opposed the centralizing policies of the new regime. From this period until 1912 Qemali became more and more engaged in the political struggle inside the Ottoman Parliament trying to persuade the regime of the Young Turks to initiate administrative reforms. These reforms aimed to recognize regional autonomies and the ethnic rights of the people of the Empire and were thought to form the basis for safeguarding its future.

The outbreak of the Italian-Ottoman conflict over Libya in November 1911 led to the Italian occupation of the former and made Qemali more and more convinced of the hopeless situation of the Empire. Consequently, he became much more involved in activities in support of Albanian affairs.⁴ During 1911 and 1912, Qemali undertook a series of meetings with European diplomats trying to persuade them to recognize firstly the existence of "the Albanian nation as such". After the Balkan War started in the autumn of 1912, it became clear that Ottoman rule in the region could not last long. In these circumstances most of the Albanian national leaders abandoned the option of autonomy for the Albanian inhabited lands within the Empire, and turned to consider the possibility of the proclamation of an independent Albanian State as the best solution. This happened on 28 November 1912, and Ismail Qemali was elected as the President of the Provisional Albanian Government. Qemali remained in his position until January 1914, when his administration was replaced by the International Commission of the Great Powers as decided by the Conference of London. Qemali left Albania in January 1914 and made a short return some months later. He died in Perugia [Italy] on 24 January 1919 and his body was returned to be buried in his native town two weeks later.

In 1962, he was posthumously awarded the title of "The Hero of the People", the highest honor bestowed by the communist regime, for his patriotic contributions. Albanian historiography has produced many studies on Ismail Qemali especially after the Second World War. They all have contributed to build an image of him as the symbol of Albanian

⁴ A. Puto, *Pavarësia e Shqipërisë dhe diplomacia e Fuqive të Mëdha*, [The Independence of Albania and the diplomacy of the Great Powers], (Tiranë, 1978), p.91.

patriotism, national pride and personal sacrifice for the good of the nation. His figure was seen more as an experienced statesman and diplomat, who knew the subterfuges of politics, rather than an ideologue or intellectual of the Albanian National Movement.⁵ The first important studies appeared on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the proclamation of Albanian Independence in 1962.⁶ The figure of Ismail Qemali holds an important place in the various editions of the “History of Albania”, published either by the University of Tirana or by the Albanian Academy of Sciences.⁷ There have been also two publications of collections of documents which have tried to show the patriotic activities of Ismail Qemali in support of “the Albanian national cause”.⁸

This chapter will be based mainly on the memoirs of Ismail Qemali and some other documents, such as interviews, memoranda, which in our opinion are complementary and help to provide a better understanding of his role, both as an imperial employee and Albanian national leader. The memoirs provide interesting materials that portray the complex personality of Ismail Qemali and the turning points in his activities. However, they sometimes lack a clear connection with contemporary events in the Empire and thus lack historical context. The memoirs of Ismail Qemali were written during 1917-1918. He didn't write them himself, but, as he explained in the preface of the book, they were collected by Sommerville Story, an English friend of his during long talks they had together. These memoirs were published by William Morton Fullerton, who was an English journalist of the *The Times* of London and who worked in Paris in early 1900s.⁹ After Qemali's death the editor of the book added to the memoirs a long article by Qemali on the Albanian question which served as the chapter on Albania and the Albanians.¹⁰ The article was to have formed

⁵ K. Xoxi, *Ismail Qemali*, (Tiranë, 1983); K. Naska *Ismail Qemali në Lëvizjen Kombëtare*, (Tiranë, 1987).

⁶ S. Luarasi, *Ismail Qemali*, (Tiranë, 1962); L. Dilo, *Ismail Qemali dhe pavarësia e Shqipërisë* [Ismail Qemali and the independence of Albania], (Gjirokastër, 1962); S. Pollo, “Shpallja e Pavarësisë së Shqipërisë” [The Proclamation of the Independence of Albania] in *Mbi Lëvizjen Kombëtare Shqiptare* [On the Albanian National Movement], (Tiranë, 1962).

⁷ *Historia e Shqipërisë* [History of Albania], vol.II, (Tiranë, 1965), and *Historia e Shqipërisë*[History of Albania], vol.II-III, (Tirana, 1984), *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar* [History of the Albanian People], vol.II (Tiranë, 2002).

⁸ T. Hoxha, *Ismail Qemali, përmbledhje dokumentash* [Ismail Qemali, collection of documents], (Tiranë, 1982); R. Falaschi, *Ismail Kemal bey Vlora, il pensiero e l'opera attraverso I documenti italiani* [Ismail Kemal bey Vlora, his thought and work through the Italian documents], (Rome, 1985).

⁹ S. Story, (ed.), *The memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, pg.11-12.

¹⁰ Ismail Qemali published in 1917 in the London magazine *Quarterly Review* an article with the title “Albania and the Albanians”. Before being included as the last part of his memoirs, this article was published also by the Albanian diaspora newspaper of Boston “Ylli i Mëngjezit” [The Morning Star], March 1917.

the nucleus of a longer chapter or two on ‘the Albanian cause’, containing more personal details, with which Qemali wanted to provide the edition of his memoirs.

His memoirs were written *a posteriori* of the break with the Ottoman Empire, marked by the proclamation of Albanian independence in 1912. This might have induced him to see the events through a certain optic, which was basically that of a life morally coherent and devoted to his final and prevailing Albanian attachment after having served and done his utmost to save a moribund Ottoman Empire. Had the Empire survived, perhaps his memoirs would have been written in another vein. Qemali’s opinions and ideas have to be seen against the background of the changes inside the Ottoman Empire at the end of nineteenth and in the first decade of the twentieth century.

1. Social and educational background

1.1. Vlora family in its local and imperial framework

The memoirs of Qemali offer some details concerning his childhood. Qemali often referred to his native town and fellow countrymen, and frequently sought time to visit his family. But, we have now at our disposal another book on Vlora family. These are the memoirs of Eqrem bej Vlora (1885-1964), a close relative of Ismail Qemali and an important political figure of the late period of the National Movement (1878-1912) and that of Independence (1912-1939).¹¹ From the first half of the XVI century on, Vlora family became a sort of hotbed which constantly produced officials and Ottoman rulers that served the Empire on an almost hereditary basis.¹² The area of the dominion of Vlora family remained the *sandjak* [Ottoman province] of Vlora with its centre in Berat [Central Albania].

The policies of the Ottoman state allowed the hereditary Albanian aristocracy to rule according to tradition. This was fully in line with the Ottoman methods of conquest. It was in fact a conservative reconciliation of local conditions and classes with Ottoman institutions which aimed at gradual assimilation.¹³ As the Empire expanded, the Ottomans dealt with the

¹¹ Eqrem bej Vlora, *Kujtime* [Memoirs], (Tiranë, 2001). The author, a very cultivated man and a typical progeny of a wealthy and powerful family, has left behind a quite colourful and vivid picture of the way of living and the status that the Vlora family enjoyed in the locality of origin and in a broader imperial framework.

¹² K. Naska, *Ismail Qemali në Lëvizjen Kombëtare*, pg.13.

¹³ H. Inalcik, *Ottoman Methods of Conquest, Studia Islamica*, vol.II, (1954), pg. 103.

new social institutions they encountered by “giving the seal of legitimacy to local usages and by enforcing a system of decentralized accommodation toward ethnic, religious, and regional particularisms”.¹⁴ Their long rule and the image emanating from that position in the eyes of the community allowed this family to create over centuries “the family-power”. They were turned into local hereditary dynasties, whose right to run the country was taken for granted.¹⁵ Vlora family’s legitimacy was acquired in its role as an agent of the center and dependent on the Sultan. As Qemali recalled:

“Albania, divided into Upper and Lower Albania, continued to be administered, always under the sovereignty of the Sultans, by the noble families of the country. Among those who ruled in this sort of semi-sovereignty were, at Scutari, in Northern Albania, the family of Bushati, whose last representative was Mustafa Pasha; for Kosovo there was the family of Prishtina and that of Kalkandelen. In Lower Albania there was first our family for Berat and Valona and that of Pasha Kallo for Janina.”¹⁶

Like other forces of the Ottoman periphery, Vlora family saw the central imperial authority as a hegemony, with which it had many points in common, but also as a rival who tried from time to time to lessen the influence of this Albanian family in the region.¹⁷ In the Albanian territories there was never a sole and absolute pasha who ruled these lands on behalf of the Sultan. The Ottoman rulers played off one against the other, as they did with the chieftains of the highlands.¹⁸ In the nineteenth century and, especially during the Tanzimat reforms (1839-1876), the Ottoman government tried to integrate the foreign elites by the secular Ottomanist patriotism.¹⁹ Local rulers came under direct pressure from the imperial government, while enforcing the centralizing reforms of Tanzimat, but Vlora family survived

¹⁴ S. Mardin, “Center-Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics?”, in *Post-traditional societies*, (New York, 1974), pg.171.

¹⁵ See a reference from the Turkish historian Ahmet Xhevdet pasha in the memoirs of Eqrem bej Vlora, *Kujtime*, pg.39. The local population saw Vlora family as a protector having quasi a paternalistic function due to a) the deep roots of the “grand house” in the locality, b) its old and noble origin, c) an uninterrupted dominion over the territory of its origin and d) its considerable wealth.

¹⁶ Ismail Qemali distinguished between noble, old and powerful families and those who had only “local authority”. According to him the former were like “natural born rulers” of an undisputable and stable authority. While the second were of obscure origin and in order to affirm their supremacy in their area they had to fight with other rivals. S. Story (ed.), *Memoirs*, pg.5.

¹⁷ S. Mardin, “Center-Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics?”, pg.173-74.

¹⁸ S. Skëndi, *The Albanian National Awakening 1878-1912*, pg.21. A. Gould, “Lords or bandits? The derebys of Cilicia”, in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, nr.7, (1976).

¹⁹ A. Kappeler, “Imperial Core and Elites of the Peripheries in the Habsburg, Romanov and Ottoman Empires”, (conference paper) in *Imperial Order, Identification and Loyalties in Contiguous Empires*, course reader, CEU, (winter 2006), pg.2-3.

this period due to the compliance of its descendants with the new order, but also because of the great prestige it enjoyed both in the region and in the imperial administration.²⁰

Qemali explained his family services to the Empire as a chivalrous action, worthy of the noble character of his family, which could not be shaken by the undignified acts of some Turkish governors. Although in his memoirs Qemali expressed the grievances of his family towards intermittent interference from the imperial government, his family was tightly bound to the Empire. The myth of imperial majesty and loyalty to it played its own role as a bond of allegiance. Qemali stressed that his family had faithfully performed two tasks at once, that of the loyal imperial governor and that of preserving its “Albanian original” character. In the following paragraph the attachment of the family to the Empire seemed to be something so familiar that it could not be easily blurred.

“Our family, on account of its ancient origin and the peculiar character geographically of the country where it held sway, exercised at all times a very great influence in the affairs and the destiny of Albania. For more than four centuries our family enjoyed great consideration from the Ottoman Empire, although also from time to time it suffered from the misdeeds and the capricious tyranny of the Ottoman overlords. Sometimes, when I review the vicissitudes of my ancestors, I am astonished at the fact that, despite such continued repetitions of unjust treatment, this family should have remained attached to the Empire. But men support with more or less resignation misfortunes that, by continual repetition, assume the aspect of fatality.”²¹

At the same time, looking back on the history of his family, already from the position of the father of Albanian independence, he tried to reconcile the years serving the Empire with a kind of local ‘national’ morality. Though the Vlora family served the Empire, the state functions it held could in no way alter its inner Albanian ‘patriotism’.

“The truth is that our ancestor Sinan Pasha was a pure Albanian and we are proud to feel that during the Ottoman domination, in spite of much unjust treatment from the Turkish rulers, we served the Empire faithfully, while at the same time preserving pure and undefiled our Albanian patriotism.”²²

The role and the image that the strong families had in the bosom of the community are important elements that help to understand the linkage between Qemali and his Albanian environment. The understanding of Ismail Qemali of the nobility of an important Albanian family was based mainly on the family’s attachment to the locality under its rule, on the

²⁰ Eqrem bej Vlora, *Kujtime*, pg.40. See also H. Inalcik, “Application of the Tanzimat reforms and its social effects”, in *Archivum Ottomanicum*, vol.5, (1973), pg. 110-111.

²¹ S. Story (ed.), *The memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, pg.4.

²² *Ibid*, pg.6.

preservation of the social status through marriage with families of the same rank and on its role as paternal protector for the community.

In his memoirs, Eqrem bej Vlora, the nephew of Ismail Qemal, wrote that strong and noble families had a precise social and political role in the community. The first task was to preserve a kind of social balance, whose embodiment was the patriarchal order. In this environment the place that each social group occupied in the communal hierarchy was quite clear. The grand house, as the noble families used to be called by the locals, was the leader of the community, the smaller notables in a lower stage and the lay people were to be loyal to the grand house, which in turn should guarantee their protection.²³ These families performed also a political task. They were the ablest element to rule the locality on the basis of its traditions as they knew how to speak the ‘people’s language’ and this was in compliance with the “Ottoman traditional political philosophy, whose basic ideas were the social order and security under justice”.²⁴

The grand house was often seen as a ‘public affairs’ office’, where all kind of people came to solve the problems they had with the state bureaucracy. But, it was also a school that taught the youngsters of the house how to deal with the people’s problems, how to rule and to better understand the intricacy of politics.²⁵ Vlora family can be defined as a secular traditional notable family,²⁶ whose established authority over the local population was also favored by the ideology of the Ottoman state class. The doctrine of the latter emphasized the symbiotic relationship between the peasantry and the rulers and the beneficiary nature of this rule. As Çaglar Keyder summarises:

“The famous ‘circle of justice’ that epitomizes the presumed relationship suggests that economic reproduction, i.e. the production of surplus, depends on ideological reproduction, i.e. the judicious dispensation of justice and political order by the authorities. The very nature of this legitimization, where the ruler is cast as the omniscient power who secures the global conditions in the realm for that smooth functioning of the system, gives to the state-class a self-conception of paternalist wisdom”.²⁷

²³ E. Vlora, *Kujtime*, pg.12.

²⁴ See Halil Inalcik, , “The nature of traditional society: Turkey”, in R. Ward and D. Rustow, (eds), *Political modernization in Japan and Turkey*, (Princeton University Press, 1964), pg.43.

²⁵ E. Vlora, *Kujtime*, pg.37.

²⁶ There is a striking similarity between the positions of the Albanian notable families in the Empire with those of Kurdish origin in the Middle Eastern context. See Hakan Ozoglu, “Kurdish notables at the end of the Ottoman Empire”, paper presented at the *Second Mediterranean Social and Political Research Meeting*, organised by Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, (Florence, 2001).

²⁷ Ç. Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey, a Study in Capitalist Development*, (London, 1987), pg. 26.

1.2. The educational background

The education of the young Qemali followed two paths simultaneously. One was to receive a purely local education for which, in his memoirs at the end of his life, Qemali stuck on the label “Albanian”, and the other was to become acquainted with European culture. Both were done under the guidance of his parents. His mother, as Qemali himself recalled, was very anxious to raise him as “a perfect Albanian”. On the other side, his father knew Turkish, Italian, Greek and French, and was well versed in Western literature, which inculcated in him a taste for European culture.²⁸

His ‘Albanian’ education aimed to enlarge his experiences and prepare him to be a future leader, but also to learn as he put it, “the good national habits”. According to Qemali, the most important elements in the education of a young Albanian notable were horse-riding, shooting, and hunting. At each of the four seasons, the young Qemali was sent to make a horseback tour into the interior of the country accompanied by a large retinue. On these occasions he used to visit various villages and was received as a special guest by the local chiefs. He attended all kinds of festivities, especially “the performance of the national dances, which formed a part of youthful education”.²⁹ This was a kind of acculturation process with local traditions, rites and habits permeated by hierarchic symbolism. The young boy from the grand house should be raised to being aware of his future position and tasks in the community and, therefore, he should also learn how to decode the local habits. To all these aspects of a local, in his memoirs of a much later date, Qemali lent a larger ‘national’ connotation, i.e. that of ‘national’ traditions. He manipulated them into a kind of ‘national consciousness’ that made part of his mental outlook since a tender age, in order to construct a narrative to better suit his activities that led to the Albanian independence in November 1912.

With regard to the influences that made him an admirer of western European empires, Qemali wrote that:

“My mind was fed at a very early age by the contemplation of souvenirs of the greatness of France. The lamp which lit up my cradle was fixed upon a statue of Napoleon the Great; almost my first toys were drawings representing the great deeds of Napoleon, and I think the first of the childish questions which I put to my father was the meaning of the globe that the great Emperor wore on his head... On the other hand, the English at that time occupied Corfu, almost opposite the port of Valona. Officers from the garrison there, and other tourists of distinction, who often arrived in yachts, used to come to Valona for the hunting and shooting

²⁸ S. Story (ed.), *The memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, pg.13.

²⁹ *Ibid*, pg.14.

which the country afforded, and astonished every one by the nobility of their bearing and their generosity... It seems to me that all these facts had a great deal to do with laying the foundations in early life of my attachment to France and Great Britain.³⁰

It is interesting to note here the admiration for Napoleon was to be found also in other reformist Ottoman bureaucrats of the Tanzimat period. Sherif Mardin has described it as a kind of a psychological process that associated the desire for reforms with the idealization of Napoleonic achievements and, consequently, “Napoleon was seen as the symbol of a mighty empire and of a solid state”.³¹

In relation to formal education, all the children of the Vlora family received their elementary education at home. They all were taught by foreign tutors, who instructed them in Turkish, Italian, German, French, and other topics such as literature, mathematics, etc. Later on, Qemali was sent to attend the secondary studies in the Greek gymnasium of “Zossimea”, which he considered to be “a brilliant centre of education”. As we have already mentioned in the chapter on Sami, “Zossimea” gymnasium was one of the schools that were opened during the period of the Tanzimat reforms.

Eqrem bej Vlora, who finished his studies there too, considered that school as a very important institution attended by both Orthodox and Moslem Albanians. For Eqrem bej, the Albanians that went through that school used to nourish a kind of sympathy for Greece, but at the same time they matriculated from there as “Albanians with a high national consciousness”.³² According to him, this was due to its laic and universalistic character of education. The “liberal” Qemali was formed, as he said in the latter pages, under the influence of his professors at the “Zossimea” gymnasium who taught him the literature and history of the ancient Greece and “made him live in the atmosphere of liberty of the ancient Greek world”.³³ As noted in the chapter on Sami, Hellenic culture had a big impact on the minds of the young Albanian nationalist intellectuals. They took from the Greek school the methods for producing their own nationalist narratives full of national heroes and of ‘Golden Ages’ transplanted into an Albanian context.³⁴

Vlora family lived in a kind of mixture of Moslem habits and local traditions with borrowed European manners. Qemali’s family observed Moslem rites and the house was

³⁰ S. Story (ed.), *The memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, pg.18.

³¹ S. Mardin, *The Genesis of the Young Ottoman Thought*, pg.13.

³² E. Vlora, *Kujtime*, pg.160.

³³ *Ibid*, pg.19.

³⁴ Anne-Marie Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales*, pg.13.

divided into two main parts, the *selamllëk* [the place of the men] and the *harem* [the place of the women].³⁵ Nevertheless, this ‘oriental’ aspect of the everyday life coexisted with a tendency to initiate the youngsters of the house into European culture. He respected his faith as an element of the private sphere.³⁶ As we will see later, he identified himself as a secular Ottoman employee. A further sign of the relaxed relations of Qemali with the Islamic faith was his marriage to an Orthodox Greek woman in 1867. This marriage much later gave occasion to an Albanian author to underline Qemali’s neglect of religious norms, which was well tuned to the atheistic outlook of the Albanian socialist historiography. This author asserted that through this marriage Qemali had challenged “the Islamic and obscurantist Turkish environment”.³⁷ It was a further ‘confirmation’ of his liberal, modern and open character that showed also his “full commitment to apply reforms in the Empire regardless of religious allegiances”.³⁸

The elites in the Ottoman state were tied to the state above all else, and consequently their relation to Islam was subordinated to and determined by their power interests. Service to the state and not religion was the essential point that determined the elite’s political identity.³⁹ The education received at home and during his studies at the Greek gymnasium, with its European and vernacular aspects, made the figure of Qemali a complex one and imbued with “a liberalism that never faded away”, using the words of a British diplomat that knew him.⁴⁰ The role of his family as an imperial elite member, but also his own long professional career in the Ottoman administration, contributed to render his figure more interesting rather than putting it into the simplistic category of “an Albanian patriot”.

³⁵ As Eqrem Vlora explained in his memoirs, the institution of “harem” in the Albanian “grand houses” was not the same with that oriental concept that had so much excited the fantasy of the Europeans. Vlora wrote that the Albanian lord was not the real master in his house. His authority was very much limited by the “tyranny” of his lady. The “harem” was only that part of the house left for the activities of the women of the house and of their servants. In E. Vlora, *Kujtime*, pg. 32.

³⁶ In his book, S. Mardin explains that the Tanzimat reformers and employees, to whom Qemali ideologically belonged, “were Europeanized to the extent of accepting Islam as a “private” religion”. In S. Mardin, *The Genesis of the Young Ottoman Thought*, pg.118.

³⁷ K. Xoxi, *Ismail Qemali*, pg.101.

³⁸ S. Story (ed.), *The memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, pg.38. K. Xoxi, *Ismail Qemali*, pg. 50.

³⁹ K. Karpat, *An Inquiry Into the Social Foundations of Nationalism in the Ottoman State: From Social Estates to Classes, From Millets to Nations*, (Princeton University, 1973), pg.23.

⁴⁰ S. Story (ed.), *The memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, pg. 40.

2. The nations of the Ottoman employee

2.1. The Ottoman reformer in an Empire in crisis

In his memoirs, Ismail Qemali considered the period of his birth as coinciding with the most momentous epoch which the Ottoman Empire had ever traversed. Qemali referred to the early Tanzimat reforms as inaugurating an era of equality and justice for all the people in the Empire, regardless of ethnicity or religion. He described them like “an event of great and far-reaching importance” which brought the Ottoman Empire “into the rank of civilized Powers” and the first step on this new road was the abolition of the regime of disorder.⁴¹

The Tanzimat reforms were intended to realize a more centralized state administration. At first, the Ottoman government was afraid of the power of the Albanian noble families and they were ousted from their areas of influence. But, the initial centralizing policy of the Ottoman government was soon changed and the old Albanian rulers were reinstated in their former position. The change in imperial policy was due to precautions to calm down the rebellions and to insurmountable difficulties of the application of Tanzimat in its earlier period everywhere in the empire.⁴² In his memoirs, Qemali wrote about this period with a kind of regret that the reforms, had they been applied in an appropriate way, might have brought positive results for the empire.

“It is unfortunate that the then Sultan and his enlightened counselors were forced by past events to establish an excessively centralized system, which, defective and vicious in its nature was in contradiction to the spirit and the traditions of the Empire. I venture to believe that if the Sublime Porte, instead of concentrating all the administrative power at Constantinople, had improved the existing system of self-government, ridding it of its abuses, the empire would have made immense progress in its internal administration. The statesmen who at that time presided over the destinies of the Empire went for their sources of inspiration only to the French system, which strikes the imagination and is easily assimilable owing to its theoretical and logical clearness. Hence it is that in Turkey there exists an administrative legislation which is complete from the theoretical point of view, but absolutely negative in its practical results”.⁴³

⁴¹ Ibid., pg.2

⁴² H. Inalcik, *Application of the Tanzimat and its social effects*, pg.103.

⁴³ Besides serving as a model for state reforms Qemali writes in his memoirs that the lively sympathy with France was in a way “an expression of gratitude towards France for the unforgettable services she had, together with Great Britain, rendered in the Crimean War in defending the integrity of the Empire and upholding its independence against Russia”. S. Story (ed.), *The memoirs of Ismail Qemali*, pg. 2-3; 52. Also, P. Dumont, “Il periodo di Tanzimat (1839-1878)”, in R. Mantran (ed.), *Storia dell'Impero Ottomano*, op.cit., pg.513; 581.

His support for a policy of decentralization derived from his conception of the Ottoman state as a repository of authority over a mosaic of people forming the Ottoman “nation”. Qemali drew a sharp distinction between the fathers of the reforms and latter Ottoman statesmen. According to him, and maybe because of the fact that he became disillusioned with the growing authoritarian rule of sultan Abdulhamid and severed his ties with the imperial state by starting his European exile in 1900, the initial Ottoman statesmen were the real modernizer of the empire giving way to state reforms. By contrast, the latter Ottoman leaders were not able at all to carry out their duties and were responsible for the course of the events that brought the empire to the verge of dissolution and made it a prey of European rivalries. As we will see latter he was very critical of the Sultan’s handling of the empire’s affairs.

He admired the modernizing work of the first grand vezirs [Ottoman prime ministers] of the Tanzimat era, Mustafa Reshid Pasha (1800-1858), Mehmed Emin Ali Pasha (1815-1871) and Mehmed Fuad Pasha (1815-1869). He especially respected Midhat Pasha, who after serving as governor to different provinces of the Empire during the 1860s, had been also Grand Vezir of sultan Abdulhamid in 1876, when he drafted and promulgated the first Ottoman constitution. For Midhat, reform meant making the centre more responsive to the needs of the provinces.⁴⁴

Qemali appreciated Midhat’s policies during his governorship of the Danube vilayet (1864-1868) and his concern to secure legal equality for all Ottoman subjects, regardless of religious allegiance as well as equal access to public offices. He admired Midhat’s introduction into the country of a modern, centralized system of education, common for both Muslim and Christian children, which aimed to achieve social peace by homogenizing Ottoman society in the spirit of Ottomanism, through an education system inspired by universal principles such as equality, religious tolerance, public service, whilst always respecting the cultural specificities of these communities.⁴⁵ As Fikret Adanir writes:

“The Ottoman statesmen of the reform period of Tanzimat grasped the ideological importance of the abstract principle of equality. As they saw it, it was the inferior legal status of Ottoman non-Muslims that served European powers as a moral legitimation for their interventions in the East. Therefore, Western public opinion

⁴⁴ P. Dumont, “Il periodo di Tanzimat (1839-1878)”, pg.500.

⁴⁵ J. Velichkova-Borin, “Ottoman Effort in the he Field of Education: Midhat Pasha Project for the Foundation of an “Ottoman Nation”, paper presented in *Second Mediterranean Social and Political Research Meeting* organized by Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, (Florence, 2001), pg.14. For more see also N. Berkes, *The development of secularism in Turkey*, pg. 230; also M. Todorova “Midhat Pasha’s governorship of the Danube Province”, in Caesar Farah (ed.), *Decision making in the Ottoman Empire*, (Kirksville, 1993), pg.115-128.

was not to be given the occasion to denounce Ottoman rule as discriminatory against its Christian subjects. Such insights led to the formulation of the two major documents of the Ottoman reform period, the imperial rescripts of 1839 and 1856, and an analysis of them reveals that the concern for the survival of the empire remained the determining factor. In short, by fulfilling the basic requirements of a formally emancipated civil society, it was hoped that the wind would be taken out of the sails of separatist tendencies such as the Greek and Serbian independence movements".⁴⁶

Ismail Qemali belonged to the secular imperial bureaucracy and like his other colleagues of the same pedigree he accepted and justified their adhesion to European models and principles in the name of progressive reform.⁴⁷ His idea of modernization was that of dosing carefully the ill body of the empire with "Western reforms" fearing that a too strong therapy would cost it dear. For an effective functioning of the Ottoman state and for the safeguard of the Ottoman 'nation' Qemali thought that the recognition of the rights of peoples, in terms of allowing them to preserve their culture and to establish a rule according to the cultural distinctiveness of each, was the best policy to be followed in the Ottoman Empire. The experience of his family rule must have left in him the conviction that people, while having all the rights to benefit from progress, should be governed with magnanimity based on a knowledge and respect of their customs and habits.

For Qemali the progress in the provinces, as promoted by Midhat Pasha, was the application of organic laws [suited particular provinces and ethnies] that brought order, security and a visible improvement of the local infrastructure, like the building of roads, railways, hospitals, schools of arts and crafts and other similar institutions. Qemali in his memoirs cites the example of the Danube vilayet in the late 1860s, under the administration of Midhat Pasha, where commerce, industry and agriculture progressed remarkably on accounts of the financial support given by the agricultural and industrial banks founded by the government. For Qemali, the civil, financial, and judicial administration were established on solid bases owing to the participation of the local element, which was represented in every branch and by the working of a General Council that had the character and the attributes of a real provincial diet. Ismail Qemali also admired Midhat Pasha's achievements as Grand Vizier:

⁴⁶ F. Adanir, "Religious Communities and Ethnic Groups under Imperial Sway: Ottoman and Habsburg Lands in Comparison", paper presented in *The Second Mediterranean Social and Political Research Meeting*, organised by Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, (Florence, 2001), pg.34.

⁴⁷ Ç. Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey, a Study in Capitalist Development*, pg. 28.

“Midhat Pasha was resolved to carry out in its integrity the program that had been recommended by Europe, but without the interference of Europe. So he prepared the organization of Bulgaria and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and also began to take measures to give satisfaction to the other ethnic elements of the Empire.”⁴⁸

In fact, as some scholars have noted, Midhat Pasha’s rule of the Danube vilayet, was not so successful, particularly in the educational and judiciary systems. His reforms were seen as harmful and encroaching upon the rights of non-Moslem communities to have their own schools as stipulated by the Imperial Decree of 1856. Moreover, Midhat’s attempts to establish mixed courts, composed of Christians and Moslems, was seen as inimical to the conservative Moslem clergy, which considered the judiciary as its traditional domain. Midhat’s reforms achieved little success, but were important for challenging traditional stereotypes. In short, the Tanzimat reformers thought that the best way to respond to the rising nationalism, mostly among Christian populations, was a secularized education system that would strengthen the bonds between the various communities.⁴⁹

Qemali admired the first Ottoman Constitution of 1876 as “it was compatible with the aptitudes and the manners of people”. He nourished strong hopes that the promulgation of the constitution would bring a rapprochement of the different people of the Empire and would increase their confidence in the new order of things. When in 1876 Qemali was a member of the government commission of inquiry into the massacres that Ottoman troops committed in quelling the Bulgarian rebellion of that year, he was relieved by the act promulgating the constitution and saw it as something that was welcomed by both Moslem and Christian populations of the Bulgarian regions. In his memoirs he said that Bulgarians even more than the Moslems “began to feel confidence and to look forward to a new happiness for themselves and the country”.⁵⁰

But, Qemali tended to embellish the situation on the ground as the administrative centralization, modernization of the state apparatus, secularization and westernization of society, legislation and education, encountered many obstacles. Moreover, the Tanzimat reforms failed to put an end to the process of territorial losses and of the dissolution of the Empire. Thus Tanzimat did not mark a period of renovation but was an era that saw considerable losses, as mentioned in the first chapter.

⁴⁸ S. Story (ed), *The memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, pg.145.

⁴⁹ M. Todorova, “Midhat Pasha’s governorship of the Danube Province”, pg.116. See also, F. Adanir, “Imperial Response to Nationalism: The Ottoman case”, in Henry Cavanna (ed.), *Governance, Globalization and the European Union. Which Europe for tomorrow?* (Dublin, 2002), pg. 58.

⁵⁰ S. Story (ed.), *The memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, pg.133.

However, for a long time Qemali remained hopeful that reforms through decentralization could be the solution, although he grew more and more doubtful about the policies of sultan Abdulhamid II. He seemed to believe that the reforms could yet instill a sense of common belonging to the Ottoman state and nation. As governor of the European Ottoman province of Gallipoli in 1890 Qemali wrote that:

“A curious fact about Turkey is that the different countries making up the Empire show such contrasts in the manners and characteristics of their inhabitants. One has to live in the various countries in order to understand these distinctions and get an idea as to the remedies for the ills inherent to the different kinds of inhabitants”.⁵¹

For Qemali these “countries” with their “manners and characteristics” were parts of an overarching political Ottoman ‘nation’. According to his view, the political Ottoman ‘nation’ should not attempt to erase regional identity, but accept and recognize it and create thus the ground for a peaceful and endurable coexistence.

2.2. The Ottoman ‘nation’

Qemali’s political ideas about good governance were based on his conception of “race”, “people” and “nation”. These ideas are best elaborated in the fifteenth chapter of his memoirs when he speaks about the Armenian question in the Empire. By the end of nineteenth century the Armenian question was one of the most unsettling problems for the Empire.

During the second half of the nineteenth century Armenian society changed a lot. That was the period of the ‘national revival’ through the establishment of networks of schools and the multiplication of books and newspapers published in the Armenian language that were made possible by the Tanzimat reforms. This ‘cultural revival’ led to the proclamation of the Organic Constitution for the Armenians in 1863. Their position within the Ottoman state grew more important concomitantly with their consciousness of ‘national’ identity becoming

⁵¹ Ibid., pg.190.

more and more acute. On the other hand, they were attached to an old Diaspora in Europe, which intensively promoted national culture. Thus, the attachment of their elites to the outside world, made Armenian society, and especially that of Eastern Anatolia, differ more and more from the Moslem society that surrounded it. By the mid 1880s the first revolutionary Armenian organizations emerged and started their activities on the ground. In the summer of 1894 Armenian militants pushed the Armenian population of Samsun [Eastern Anatolia] to revolt. The revolt was quickly and brutally suppressed by the Ottoman government, but the unrest and the period of turmoil continued throughout 1895-1896. The clashes that occurred in 1894-1896 left profound traces behind. More than 100.000 Armenians left the country and a deep gap was created between the Christian and Moslem populations in Eastern Anatolia.

The Sultan viewed the Armenian question as another national problem similar to the Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian ones. In other words it represented a threat to the territorial integrity of the Empire by offering the European Powers a good excuse for further interventions. Therefore it had to be strangled at birth. On the other side, every withdrawal from the Balkans, especially after the Congress of Berlin (1878), was seen by the Armenian national leaders as an encouragement to act more openly and by the Sultan and his entourage as another reason to affirm the state's authority in Anatolia.

At the very beginning of the chapter on the Armenian question Ismail Qemali wrote that:

“The East, looked at from the ethnological point of view, contains different races, different peoples, different nations. When I say different nations, I mean such as have or have had political existence and might still be capable of fulfilling their historical rights and duties. These facts and these distinctions have to be borne in mind at a time [the First World War] when millions of human beings are sacrificing themselves for ideas, and those who handle the destinies of humanity should know how to make the distinctions between all these people so as to establish an equitable distribution of justice. In the first place, among all these peoples of the Orient are the Armenians, for whom I have an attachment not merely in the political sense, but from the humanitarian and personal point of view”.⁵²

Apart from his obvious dissent from the violent and authoritarian solution favored by the Sultan, Qemali thought the Armenians had certain qualities that enabled them to be qualified as “a nation” and consequently entitling them to be treated as such. Qemali's idea about the national evolution followed a progression from “race”, “people” and then to reach

⁵² S. Story (ed.), *The memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, pg.252.

the higher stage of “nation”. For a community to be a nation it had to have or to have had a “political existence”. This “political existence”, such as political organization, kingdom, autonomy, or religious institutions, was proof that the community in question was able to organize itself and to live on its own. The “fulfilling of the historical rights” was the preservation and the possession, still in the modern times, of a set of fundamental national capacities, which could motivate a certain community to claim the restoration of the rights it had enjoyed in the past. Among these qualities Qemali singled out “courage” and “the spirit of industriousness”. Qemali argued that “the Armenian nation” had given to the Empire many politicians and statesmen of indisputable merits, and all the more that some of the closest collaborators of the great Ottoman reformer Midhat Pasha were from this community. Qemali alluded to a certain innate spirit of liberalism and political skill of the men of this ethnies, together with being the most faithful Christian subjects of the Empire. This was the result of history and also of their specific characteristics. Qemali wrote that from the beginning of the Ottoman Empire until the time of Sultan Abdulhamid II, the Armenians had lived in peace and safety in all parts of the Empire, side by side with the Turks and other Moslem inhabitants.⁵³ For him this mutual confidence was based not only on affinity, but because “the Armenians were in the eyes of the Turks a useful element in the economic life of the country, and, being already in possession of their national existence, they constituted no menace to the dominant race”.⁵⁴ It is interesting to note here the judgment of Qemali about the importance to have the national rights guaranteed as in turn the “nations” would not be “a menace to the dominant race”, which was a clear hint at the stability of the Empire and a further stress on the need for adopting a decentralized administration in the Ottoman state.

For Qemali, the Armenians were also well versed in commerce, which showed their activism as a nation and distinguished them from the other inhabitants of Asia Minor. These skills fostered their close relations with Europe, which consequently had its own effect on their education and to be the “only people in the Empire to propagate liberal ideas”. Here Qemali drew a distinction between the Moslem people of the Empire and the Christians, amongst to whom first place was accorded to the Armenians. He wrote that:

“As a matter of fact, the great mass of the Moslem population, Turkish, Arab, Albanian or other, had become stagnant through the regime to which they were subjected, and condemned for their intellectual development to follow the wishes and instructions which he [the Sultan] imposed on them, did not give him much cause for anxiety. But it was a different matter with the Christians, who frequented the foreign educational

⁵³ Ibid., pg.253.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pg.253.

establishments in the country, who traveled and carried on constant relations with Europe and America, and he felt powerless to stay their evolution".⁵⁵

Though accepting the superiority of the Europeans in educational matters in the Empire, better schools, a denser and more widespread network, he expressed no suspicions on the utility for the Empire of the work of these institutions. On the contrary he held them necessary for the advancement of all the Ottoman populations. Here we see the survival of the conviction of the former Tanizmat Ottoman statesman in the superiority of the Western state models and education and the need for the East to follow them in the road of progress. When in 1890 Qemali was appointed as Governor General of Beirut, while appreciating "the civilizing work of European powers such as France", he wrote in this way about the foreign education system in that town:

"Beirut, of all towns in Turkey, possesses the best foreign schools and the largest number of philanthropic institutions. Among others there was a French university and an American college. Unfortunately the superiority of these foreign establishments and the inferiority of the Turkish schools very often excited jealousies, which resulted in irritation and pettiness on the part of the local administration. I could not remain insensible to this galling inferiority of the Turkish schools, but, while seeking to improve them as far as I could with the means allowed me by the Government, at the same time the generosity of the foreigners, who contributed to the intellectual development of all classes of the native population, was extremely gratifying. I had several occasions of expressing my satisfaction with these educational works to the representatives of France and America".⁵⁶

His liberal stance towards the Europeans would in later years draw a separating line between him and a group from the Young Turk movement in favor of centralist policies and of a more defensive/distrustful Ottoman policy towards the European presence in the Empire. With the gradual insertion of the Empire into the European inter-state system and the growth of commerce with the European countries, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century, it was the Christian populations, namely the Greeks and Armenians, who took the greatest advantage of these trends. They acted as the principal intermediaries between European markets and local producers. Foreign merchant agencies engaged in their businesses non-Moslem Ottomans subjects, who knew foreign languages and had relations with Europe. This pattern drove Moslem merchants out of the field. As Çağlar Keyder says:

⁵⁵ S. Story, *The memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, pg.256.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, pg.194.

“It is no wonder that XIX century travelers to the Ottoman Empire expressed their impression that Moslems had no business sense and were fit only to till the soil, while Greeks and Armenians were industrious and forward-looking. By the mid-nineteenth century a good proportion of the non-Moslem population of the Empire had developed as a class of compradors, mediating between peasant producers and foreign capital”.⁵⁷

In Qemali’s view, the Armenians, unlike the Moslems, were an “active nation” and were influenced by liberal ideas that were taken as a sign of modernity or closeness to Europe. In his view the Armenians as a “nation” did not deserve to be suppressed, but, on the contrary, this “active nation” should have its space in the Empire and should have its rights guaranteed.

Although the paragraph quoted from Qemali’s memoirs put the blame on the autocratic policies of Sultan Abdulhamid II, it seems that he discerned the roots of Moslem backwardness back in history and ‘finds’ mostly psychological reasons to explain it. In 1892, Qemali drew up a memorandum, at the request of the Sultan, on the general reforms in the Empire and the policy that ought to be pursued. The distinction that Qemali drew between the Moslem people of the Empire and the Christians might help us to understand the stages of the national evolution as envisaged by him. In the introductory paragraph of the memorandum, Qemali wrote:

“The founders of most great Empires, which, as history shows us, have owed their growth to a series of favorable circumstances, cannot be compared in the matter of merit with those who have foreseen and arrested the decay that inevitably follows the period of an Empire’s glory, by introducing reforms calculated to give it new life and a fresh impulse to its prosperity, for every Empire that has carved a path for itself by the sword has at the same time sown the seed of its decay. In such Empires we find the descendants of the conquerors who hold the rights and privileges acquired by the conquests of their ancestors, and are therefore the privileged class, opposed to those who have to support their domination. The former, sure of themselves and puffed up with wealth and power, easily fall into sloth and ignorance; the others, forced to make a way for themselves in their efforts to overcome the misfortune of their subjection, often achieve a degree of intellectual development which gives them the upper hand and is among the first causes of the loss of Empires born of conquest”.⁵⁸

However, the Empire could well become a developed country, but it had to design an appropriate policy. According to Qemali this policy had to have a double vision, a wise and far-seeing foreign policy and an enlightened and equitable system of administration at home. In foreign policy Qemali advised the Sultan to strengthen relations with England as a

⁵⁷ Ç. Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey, a Study in Capitalist Development*, pg.22.

⁵⁸ S. Story (ed.), *The memoirs of Ismail Qemali*, pg.208-209.

counterbalance to the territorial claims of Russia. With regard to internal policy Qemali thought that a kind of federal Ottoman state, including in its framework the newly created Balkan states, would be the best solution for the economic development of the Empire.

One is surprised to read that Qemali, an experienced politician, really thought it possible, at that time, to create a federal Ottoman state with the emerging Balkan states that had cut their tie with the Empire only a short time ago. This is all the more surprising when, by the end of the nineteenth century, Balkan nationalism was on the rise and, everywhere in the region, local national organizations were being created seeking national rights for the people they claimed to represent. The reason may be found in his belief that at that very moment, when a ferocious rivalry was going on between the European powers to gain predominance in the “Orient”, the only viable political entity was a powerful and big state. By creating a federal Ottoman state on the basis of consensus and compromises between all of its constituting elements, Qemali hoped to see the autocratic powers of Sultan Abdulhamid reduced. On the other hand, he thought that the economic weakness of the Ottoman Empire would be a favorable condition for the Balkan states as the Empire would not be in a position to dominate them and impose upon them imperialistic policies. It would be rather a union among weak states with the hope to join forces and help each other to develop. Thus the sovereignty of the new Balkan states would be guaranteed. On the other hand the Empire would guarantee its old frontiers and a possibility to develop its agriculture, its industry and to start the building of railways network.

“The establishment of a free entente such as I suggest would give the peoples of each state the right to settle in any part of the great Empire, and to be considered as belonging to it, with freedom to undertake any enterprise they wished. Turkey would have the advantage of having re-established her unity as a state within the old frontiers, but instead of having to devote all here resources to preventing the emancipation of the people who have now become independent, her strength would reside in the unity of the people for their mutual defense, and their resources could be devoted to the economic development of the Empire”.⁵⁹

It is difficult to pronounce a clear verdict as to the ‘incapacity’ of Qemali to notice the strength of Balkan nationalisms. It may be a ‘project’ just to contain its driving force in the Balkans, or perhaps he could not forecast a fully fledged development of nationalism in this region. But, these ideas clearly showed that Qemali was influenced by the Ottomanist official nationalism. He thought mainly in terms of Empire-saving policies and the survival of the empire through federal policies. The Tanzimat official propaganda stressed that the small

⁵⁹ S. Story (ed.), *The memoirs of Ismail Qemali*, pg.217.

non-Muslim and non-Turkish peoples of the Empire could reach higher stages of development within a prospered Ottoman state.

In fact, Qemali had borrowed here some of the ideas of the architects of the Tanzimat reforms, Ali Pasha (1815-1871) and Fuad Pasha (1815-1869). Given the continuous perturbed internal situations, such as the rebellions in Crete (1866-1869), the movement among Bulgarians to establish their own Orthodox autocephalous church, emancipated from the Greek one, the reaction of Moslem populations to the centralizing course, like Bosnians, Albanians and Kurds, the Ottomanist course of the Sublime Porte aimed at fostering a general feeling of attachment to the common Ottoman ‘fatherland’. They thought to enroll in the administration not only the Moslem people, but also the Christian populations. One point to this Ottomanist project was the conviction that small states, such as the newly founded Balkan states, could not resist the political games of the Great Powers. According to this Ottomanist view, “the small national states were unviable and dependent on other foreign countries and interests”, while publications in official periodicals “insisted that the unity of all peoples was needed to achieve economic and cultural prosperity”.⁶⁰ Thus, the favored option was a large Ottoman state, where the equality of races and religion would be guaranteed.⁶¹ The names of Albania and Macedonia were not mentioned by Qemali in this project. It seems that he considered them as part of the Empire and their needs for more political autonomy would be accommodated by the federal form of the future Ottoman state.⁶²

Qemali’s conviction was that the Empire could survive if its internal policies and legislation would be compatible with the ‘national’ evolution of the ethnies. For him national evolution was something pertaining to the future of an ethnies, it was a trajectory of growth, maturation, progress and development. ‘National’ evolution was conversely linked to his concept on the ‘civilizing’ role of the state employee. The ‘national’ evolution of the ethnies had to be sustained by the imperial state, which in turn would serve as a political body representing all its constituent members. In his judgment, Qemali distinguished between “nations”, as in the case of the Armenians, and “races”, the latter being tribes living in Anatolia. For Qemali, while “nations” had all the rights to enjoy their “political existence”

⁶⁰ A. Vezenkov, “Reconciliation of the spirits and fusion of interests: “Ottomanism” as an identity politics”, in Diana Mishkova (ed), *We, the People. Politics of National Peculiarity in Southeastern Europe*, pg. 62.

⁶¹ F. Adanir, “The Socio-political Environment of Balkan Nationalism: the Case of Ottoman Macedonia 1856-1912”, in H. G. Haupt/M. G. Müller/S. Woolf (eds), *Regional and National Identities in Europe in the XIXth and XXth centuries*, (Florence, 1998), pg. 237-238.

⁶² S. Skëndi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, pg. 313-314.

and therefore had reached a higher stage of evolution, “races” were not able to live their own life without imperial patronage. Imperial patronage was seen as a medium of emancipation through careful policies and not assimilation processes.⁶³ Qemali was well informed of the ‘civilizing’ policies of the late Ottoman statesmen to nomadic populations of the periphery of the Empire, or in general towards populations living in conditions of primitivism in the territories of the imperial state. As Selim Deringil has indicated these civilizing policies could “range from out and out enmity to a relatively mild paternalism” aiming to win over the hearts of the tribes and ‘subdue’ them to modernity. In general, as in the reports of the Ottoman governors of the peripheries, Qemali described the tribes of Anatolian province he had to govern as “noble savages”, honest and simple, who greatly appreciated chivalrous behaviors.⁶⁴ As an Ottoman governor, Qemali saw himself as the bearer of novelties and civilizing policies. For him, the good ruler was that one who understood the spirit of the ethnies and acted accordingly to instill respect for law and led it on the road of progress. There is also a striking resemblance between Ismail Qemal and the father of the Tanzimat reforms the Grand Vizier Reshid Pasha (1800-1858), who by “innovations” and “way of civilization” meant “education” and “the observance of laws”, the latter intended as organic statute law and not the law of Koran.⁶⁵

In the late 1880s, when Qemali was governor at the Anatolian province of Bollu, close to Istanbul, he had to deal with the brigandage of the Circassians, a tribal population of the place. In his efforts to root out this phenomenon which had made life impossible to the rural population and to merchants as well, Qemali wrote about the Circassians in terms of an “impressionable and intelligent race” and saw brigandage as a consequence of the bad government that had led them into lawlessness. For Qemali, this tribe of “noble savages” was not a bunch of brigands, but people who deserve much more attention and be treated fairly through a policy according to their “particular mentality”. In flattering terms for his mastery to understanding the ‘spirit’ of “noble savage’ populations he wrote that:

“I must say, to the credit of the Circassian race, that during the six years of my administration not only did they cease their robberies and all other misdeeds to the prejudice of the native population, but, recognizing the benefits conferred on them by a fair and just treatment, which was especially suited to their particular

⁶³ For a fuller discussion on the civilizing role of the Ottoman Empire towards nomadic and tribal populations see S. Deringil “They live in a state of nomadism and savagery”: The late Ottoman Empire and the post-colonial debate”, in *Society for Comparative Study of Society and History*, (2003), pg.311-342.

⁶⁴ S. Deringil, “They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery”: The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate”, pg. 317; 319.

⁶⁵ S. Mardin, *The Genesis of the Young Ottoman Thought*, pg.175.

mentality, they became an element of order and real aid to the authorities. I attribute my own success in the treatment of the Circassians to this frank recognition of their racial characteristics. They like to be treated chivalrously rather than by sternness, and one can demand sacrifices from them if one has consideration for them”.⁶⁶

For Qemali, it was very important that laws and legislation be drafted and applied according to the ethnic peculiarities of the population. On the eve of the proclamation of the First Ottoman Constitution (1876), Qemali took part in several meetings of the constitution commission headed by Midhat Pasha. On the matter of the introduction of the trial by jury in the new Ottoman judicial system, he remarked as follow:

“As regarded the principle of the jury, I maintained that it was totally unsuited to the people of Turkey, where it was necessary, first of all, to make the law felt and accustom the population to respect it. The jury system was suited to a country whose population were lovers of order, and who lived in awe and respect of the law. To establish the jury system in Turkey, where the mere idea of law had not yet taken root, would mean that crime would go unpunished... In Albania for instance, one would never have found a jury to condemn for murder in the case of a vendetta. Similarly, an Arab jury would never condemn a person accused of the “Razzia” or raids upon neighbors’ belongings, just as Turkish juries would look with indulgence on abduction of young women and girls”.⁶⁷

Apart from practical and pragmatic considerations, Qemali in his discourse on the Ottoman populations used to call them “Oriental populations”. Although he recognized in them the quality of being a kind of “noble savage”, Qemali sometimes imputed to these people a tendency for despotism, an imprecise and ‘irrational’ way of thinking and opposition to progress.⁶⁸ Qemali viewed Midhat Pasha as possessing extraordinary qualities as a governor of an “Oriental Empire”, being an “unusually active and hard-worker”, while he described the Sultan as inheriting “from his forebears a spirit of Oriental absolutism.”⁶⁹

Qemali’s vision of “Orient” may derive from his social position in the Ottoman secular bureaucracy of the Tanzimat period. These employees had striven to reform the Empire on the basis of European models, and in their eyes Europe was the ideal of the progressive world. Qemali’s cosmopolitan education gave him a lifelong admiration of European civilization. He was part of the new westernizing Ottoman elite that according to Sherif Mardin:

⁶⁶ S. Story, *The memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, pg.179.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, pg.137.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, pg.184.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, pg.174.

“It [state bureaucracy] was quite blunt and merciless in enforcing the political, social and intellectual Westernization of Turkey. In this respect they were continuing a trend begun by Reshid Pasha. Reshid Pasha himself had been so far inclined to Westernization that he had considered the salvation of Turkey to lie in what he called “the way of civilization”. The new elite took over this Western-mindedness of Reshid Pasha and carried it even further”.⁷⁰

The state propaganda cultivated the image of the state administration as an agency securing peace and order. It tried to inculcate in the Ottoman subjects the feeling of fidelity and allegiance to the Sultan, which was almost identical with that to the Ottoman state. As we have seen also in Sami’s case, “the changing meaning of the word “vatan” [fatherland] and the portraying of the whole Empire as a “native place,” was related to the idea that the territory of the state was an indivisible whole. The unity and indivisibility of the Ottoman state were proclaimed in the opening article of the 1876 Constitution”.⁷¹ According to Kemal Karpat:

“By the second half of the XIX century and concomitant with the emergence of press in “national languages”, such as Turkish, Arabic, Armenian, Bulgarian, “the concept of a territorial state, of the love of seeing the motherland as synonymous with the state made their appearances, notably in literature. Once more the meanings of the term “fatherland” varied. The intelligentsia that originated in the lower classes and among the notables in the countryside and in far-away provinces developed a concept of the motherland that corresponded more or less to their respective provinces, their history and culture. The imperial bureaucracy, on the other hand, showed some interest in a “national” language and regarded the motherland as being determined by the territorial limits of the state”.⁷²

For Qemali, a member of the imperial bureaucracy, the “fatherland” was determined by the territorial limits of the imperial state. In his memoirs, Qemali frequently depicts himself as a “patriot” meaning being faithful to the Ottoman Empire. He lived in an ideological environment that favored the image of the Ottoman ‘nation’ as a political identity, implying at the same time the existence of peoples and ‘nations’ composing it. The Ottomanist prospective made possible for the subjects to feel themselves faithful to the state, but also faithful to their own community. In this case, and especially by the late nineteenth century, the community was perceived by various representatives of the various peoples living in the Empire as their ‘nation’. In general, the non-Turkish, and especially the

⁷⁰ S. Mardin, *The Genesis of the Young Ottoman Thought*, pg.116.

⁷¹ A. Vezenkov, “Reconciliation of the spirits and fusion of interests. “Ottomansim” as an identity politics”, pg. 58-61.

⁷² K. Karpat, *An Inquiry of the Social Foundations of Nationalism in the Ottoman State*, pg. 104.

Christian element inside the Empire, saw Ottoman unity as a supranational union, as a compromise serving their own nation and communities. By the end of the nineteenth century the Ottomanist concept had become very porous, so that even for the Turkish element of the Empire it implied a two level allegiance, the narrower to the “purest Moslem Ottomans” and the broader one to all subjects of the Empire.

Another relevant aspect of the influence of the Ottomanism over Qemali is the idea that civilization was universal and that all the Ottomans could take part and enjoy the benefits of that civilization. Even though the Ottoman lands were in a precarious condition, “they could easily be reverted to their once spectacular level of civilization if all Ottomans united behind a single plan of comprehensive development”.⁷³ In fact, the final concern of Qemali in dealing with the Ottoman “races” was the finding of a convenient formula for persuading these people to abandon their condition of backwardness and to gain benefit from “being civilized”.

3. From imperial official to nationalist leader

3.1. The end of Ottoman patriotism

As mentioned above, until the end of nineteenth century, when Qemali went into exile, he often referred to himself as a patriot of his country, i.e. the Ottoman Empire. Many events occurred over these thirty years that shook Qemali’s imperial loyalty and conditioned his latter political allegiances. Four factors had a greater influence on him and led to his loss of hope in the salvation of the empire and his switching from an imperial employee to an Albanian national leader: a) the death of Midhat Pasha, which witnessed also the failure of his reforms, b) the increasing autocracy of Sultan Abdulhamid II by the end of nineteenth century, c) the more and more precarious internal and external situation of the Empire at the turn of nineteenth and early twentieth century and d) the coming to power of the Young Turks in 1908.

⁷³ F. Adanir, “Imperial Response to Nationalism: The Ottoman case”, pg. 57.

Midhat Pasha died in 1884 while he was exiled by the sultan who feared his constitutional ideas and saw them as a threat to his autocratic rule. On that occasion, Qemali wrote in his memoirs:

“The disappearance of this statesman, after so much suffering, was a terrible blow for me. I lost all taste for work and all hope for the future of the Empire of which he had been the real reformer. For weeks I remained a prey to the deepest melancholy. I despaired of everything- the future, life and humanity. If a man of such eminence, of such unselfish and disinterested life, who had done so much for his country and humanity, could meet with such treatment at the hands of those who owed him honor and gratitude, and finally reach such a tragic and miserable fate- what, I asked myself, could other mortals hope for or expect?”⁷⁴

Qemali spent seven years in exile, for opposing the state policies regarding the Russo-Turkish war of 1877 because he was considered a close collaborator of the deposed Grand Vizier Midhat Pasha. In 1884, however, he was nominated governor of the small province of Bollu. He described the province as being in a depressing and morally degraded state, “where abuse, corruption, and disorganization of all kinds were reigning” and where “functionaries and state employees of all classes and all grades were free to do what they pleased on condition only that they gave proofs of fidelity and devotion to the Sovereign”.⁷⁵

Sultan Abdulhamid II installed a political system that was increasingly centralized and tainted by a Pan-Islamic inspiration. His policy was a reaction against the weakening of the authority of the sultan and against the liberalism and constitutionalism of Midhat Pasha. In his eyes the Ottoman population was not mature enough to have a parliament, and he considered the parliamentary system as harmful and dangerous in the multi-ethnic context of the Ottoman Empire. The Sultan thought that only a powerful and centralized government could curb the nationalistic tendencies of the people of the empire and repulse the interference of the European Powers. In this context, as Selim Deringil has written “the gap was filled by a recharge of conceptualization of religion and/or direct attachment to the quasi-sacred person of the emperor/sultan.”⁷⁶ In the course of a few years Sultan Abdulhamid II concentrated in his hands a degree of absolute power that none of his predecessors had enjoyed, while the Grand Viziers were thus stripped of all their authority that they had enjoyed during the reform period of Tanzimat and were turned into simple executors of the imperial will.

⁷⁴ Ibid, op.cit., pg.172.

⁷⁵ S. Story (ed.), *The memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, pg.174-175.

⁷⁶ S. Deringil, *The well-protected domains*, (London-New York, 1998), pg. 108.

In 1897, Ismail Qemali wrote a memorandum to the Sultan on the state of affairs in the Empire. The document can be considered as a last call to the Sultan to undertake reforms in the country and to improve relations with those European Powers that were interested in preserving the empire, namely Great Britain. Although he used an indirect language and very often praised His Majesty the Sultan, Qemali stated that the internal situation in the Empire was deplorable. The loss of Egypt was a heavy blow to the Sultan as from that country sprang his sacred rights of the Caliph of Islam, his spiritual authority over the Moslem people and “the prestige and moral position with the nations interested in Oriental affairs”.⁷⁷ The other failures in internal policy were the Armenian problem and the Cretan affair. According to Qemali the Sublime Porte had failed to introduce reforms in the provinces where the Armenians formed a certain proportion of the population and the same logic was extended also over the Cretan case the cause of the Ottoman-Greek war of 1897.

The other important element of the context was the Rumelian or Macedonian problem in late nineteenth and early twentieth century that we have mentioned in the introductory chapter. This state of affairs had tarnished the glory of the empire and according to Qemali’s analysis it had made the Ottoman Empire in the eyes of the world a model of oppression and disorder. The remedy to end this miserable situation was the promulgation of a constitution. The constitution was to revive the glory and splendor of the Empire, to assure the well-being of the subjects and the prosperity of the country. Qemali believed that this would also resolve the problem of the Ottoman Empire’s relations with the European Powers as the latter would recognize “the new regime and undertake to respect it in an abiding manner, so that the Sovereign rights of Your Majesty and the integrity and independence of the Ottoman Empire may be confirmed and assured.”⁷⁸

In this document, Qemali conveyed some of the traditional ideas of the Ottoman ruling elite on the state, but also presented ideas that were circulating among the young generation of the Ottoman bureaucracy after the Tanzimat period and ideas that were articulated by the Ottoman thinkers and intellectuals of the time. He considered the state of affairs in the empire as a kind of deviation from the good old state traditions and a display of a lack of will and perspicacity in not undertaking reforms. Unlike the past sultans, who had entrusted the high posts of the Empire to the most capable men of their time in order to arrive at the best policy, now the ruler was surrounded by corrupt people. Qemali recognized to the

⁷⁷ S. Story (ed.), *The memoirs of Ismail Qemali*, pg.387.

⁷⁸ S. Story (ed.) *The memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, pg.397.

Sovereign a central role in enforcing changes in the political system of the empire, which somehow derived from the Ottoman doctrine on the relations between the rulers and the community, where the ruler was cast as the omniscient power who secured the overall conditions for a judicious functioning of the system. Yet, he considered it very important to limit his power by the constitution and by a government that should run the country. As a member of the ruling Ottoman elites, Qemali thought only in terms of political reforms to ensure the survival of the state. In this sense he was not so preoccupied by the need of social reforms and class interests, but his judgment was the opinion of the ruling elites on “whether or not demands coincided with what they considered to be the interest of the state”. As Kemal Karpat says:

“These elites tried to modernize the state not in accordance with the spirit of the social transformation which had forced upon them the very need for “reform”, but primarily in accordance with their own historical-political heritage”.⁷⁹

Although he was fully aware of the multiethnic character of the empire, in the last instance he still thought people of the empire would cleave to the imperial state provided a more liberal system was put in place. Their rights were taken as a possibility to progress within the imperial state framework and not as a chance for separation. And if territories had been lost in the past, this had been due only to the neglect of reforms and, therefore, Qemali was convinced that there was still room to remedy the mistakes.

“Your Majesty does not need to be reminded that there are two kinds of revolutions-one which is an armed rising against their government by people who do not consider the disasters which may result from their acts; the other arises out of a passion that blinds the people and makes them resist the progress being followed by the government which they wish to see changed. The causes of the first of this class of revolution are to be seen in the present state of affairs in Anatolia, in Crete and in Roumelia; the causes of the second are in those who are now controlling the country’s administration. A popular revolution may take place at any moment in any part of the Empire, and its motive and causes would not be hard to recognize. Instead of acting in time with justice and wisdom and taking into consideration the legitimate demands of the people in conformity with the requirements of the age, thus consolidation the authority of the throne by giving satisfaction to legitimate aspirations, the people’s prayers have remained unanswered and the functionaries of the Empire, by their arrogant and insolent practices, only provoke discontent, which give rise to recriminations”.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ K. Karpat, *An Inquiry of the Social Foundations of Nationalism in the Ottoman State*, pg.100.

⁸⁰ S. Story (ed.), *The memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, pg.391-392.

The demand for the promulgation of a new constitution and the need to decentralize the political system was veiled under the phrase “taking into consideration the legitimate demands of the people in conformity with the requirements of the age”. For Qemali, that “age” meant that some populations should be recognized as “nationalities”, and therefore to impel the Imperial state to decentralize its authority over them.

Qemali’s memorandum led to his being persecuted by the high Ottoman authorities and to the loss of support from the Sultan himself. He was considered a liberal politician and a close friend of Great Britain whose policies were deemed to be a threat to the Sultan. Due to the ever growing restrictions on his political activities in the empire and to the crumbling of his ideal of a constitutional empire he left Istanbul on May 1st 1900 on board of a British vessel. In leaving the imperial capital and the city, where he had spent so much of his political life, Qemali wrote in his memoirs that the situation in the country and his personal sufferings from police harassments:

“...convinced me that my best course was to finish it all once and for all and go and live abroad, where I could in the first place enjoy some measure of personal liberty, and secondly, I could follow the course of events in order to do something useful for my native country of Albania”.⁸¹

In his memoirs, it was at this point that Qemali mentioned for the first time his Albanian allegiance. His Ottoman involvement prior to this had far outweighing any other political activity. While being praised as the father of the nation, ironically enough, his memoirs were only translated into Albanian in recent years. The reason is to be found precisely in the discrepancy between a primarily and much more Ottoman self-identification and a later image of an Albanian nationalist activist.

His departure from Istanbul did not mark the real end of his Ottoman patriotism. During this period his political activities were motivated by overlapping feelings of attachment to the Empire and concerns for the future of Albania as his place of origin. This transformation led to the slow vanishing of his former loyalties and to an ever accentuating of the latter. It was around this time that Qemali presented himself as an “Albanian patriot” in an interview with an Italian journal in August 1903.⁸² Nevertheless, he remained involved in the political affairs of the Empire, and when he departed from Istanbul he spoke about leaving the “country”, i.e. the Empire.

⁸¹ S. Story (ed.), *The memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, pg.292.

⁸² N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg. 381.

The first stop of Ismail Qemali after he left Istanbul was Athens. His emotional inclinations made him now more attentive and sensible to what he defined as “the call of old associations”. These “old associations” were the meetings he had with Greek politicians of Albanian origin and the great pleasure he found when he listened to his maternal language spoken in the streets of Athens by his compatriots. In his memoirs he said that “everything seemed to remind him that he was also an Albanian.”⁸³ During his stay of six weeks in the Greek capital Qemali once again revived his attachment to the Empire “whose maintenance and glory we all wished to see continued”. Anyway, it should be noted here that Qemali was inclined also to seek a Greek-Albanian alliance to prevent the Slav advancement in the Balkans.⁸⁴ Then, he sketched a political program to be followed in order to preserve “Albania from national catastrophe”.⁸⁵

The political program of Ismail Qemali took the form of an appeal to his Albanian compatriots that was published in Brussels on 15 October 1900 in “Albania e Vogël” [Little Albania], the literary supplement of the newspaper “Albania” of Faik Konitza, on whom we will speak in the next chapter. Qemali tried to justify his act of abandoning the Empire and going to exile. He presented himself as both an Ottoman patriot and a devoted Albanian, which for him were complementary attributes. He explained that his life was a forty years service for the public welfare and he considered the Ottoman kingdom as the “great motherland of all nations living there”.⁸⁶ Qemali said that he was pushed in his act by the fact that “the motherland, the religion and the state were falling down in matter of politics and the kingdom was falling apart”. He judged that the best thing to do for the Empire, instead of wasting time in Istanbul, was to come to an agreement with his Albanian compatriots and through the salvation of the Albanian inhabited lands to contribute also to the strengthening of the Ottoman government. He perceived the Ottoman-Albanian relations as a reciprocal necessity:

“I wanted to show that, in this general downfall of the Turkish Kingdom, Albania would be the first to be torn apart and if Albania is lost no other force or power could make possible the salvation of the Turkish

⁸³ One of the most touching moments for Qemali, as he described it, in the Greek capital was his meeting with one of Albanian aide-de-camp of the Greek King, who urged Qemali to do his best “to make a free Albania for us, so that we can all reunite there. S. Story (ed.), *The memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, pg.296.

⁸⁴ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg.385.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, pg.296.

⁸⁶ Ismail Qemali, in *Albania e Vogël* [Little Albania], (Brussels, 1900), nr.19, pg.1.

Kingdom...The Albanians must further strengthen their friendship and their loyalty to the Turkish government. They should strengthen Turkish government in Albania to keep away the foreign danger".⁸⁷

Qemali believed that the improvement of the situation in the Albanian lands could save the empire as it would be beneficial for both parties and if the Ottoman government would become "more civilized and more just" that would bring about a closer union between Albanians and the Empire. In the conditions when the Balkan states had made clear their territorial claims over the Albanian lands, this union for Qemali would be a guarantee to hinder the partition of these lands and to secure Ottoman rule in the Balkans. On the other hand, the appeal to his co-nationals sounded also like a move to win the confidence of the Albanian patriotic circles abroad and make his act appear as highly motivated by such an important cause as the salvation of the Empire and the Albanian lands. Anyway, in this appeal there are some political considerations that would become the core of the political strategy of the Albanian National Movement at the beginning of twentieth century. That was the autonomist program. I will dwell on it in the next section.

Qemali's attachment to the political affairs of the Empire remained an important motive in his life. He received an offer from the Young Turks to attend their congress to be held in Paris in February 1902. The Young Turks movement was born in 1889, on the centenary anniversary of the French Revolution and was created by a group of young officials and intellectuals who were concerned with the course of events in the Empire. Among the first adherents to this movement were Arab, Albanian, Kurd and Turkish elements. Their goals were to guarantee the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire, the equality of all citizens of the Empire by restoring the constitution of 1876 and limiting the despotism of Sultan Abdulhamid II. We have already written in the introductory chapter about the two main factions of the Young Turk movement. One group was for restructuring the Ottoman Empire on the basis on a decentralized system, while the other favored authoritarian centralism. The latter group, who became stronger in latter periods, held that a decentralized system would be the prelude to the dismemberment of the empire. For the members of this group to grant the autonomy to different nationalities of the empire was synonymous with treachery.⁸⁸

The Young Turk movement was not a unified party group. It included factions that differed in their views as well as in their practices in relation to the policies to reform the

⁸⁷ S. Skëndi, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912*, pg.2.

⁸⁸ S. Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, (Oxford, 1995), pg. 173-199.

Ottoman Empire. One of them was the group of Ahmed Riza (1859-1930), which tried to enforce the establishment of the constitution of 1876, abolished by Sultan Abdulhamid II, to introduce radical reforms in the educational system of the Empire, based upon positive sciences, and reorganizing the Empire through centralist policies, where the Ottoman Turkish element should occupy the leading role. On the other side was the group around the figure of Prince Sabahadin (1877-1948), the son of the Sultan's sister, who had fled to Europe. The latter group was for structural reforms in the Empire, the first being the establishment of a constitutional regime, but it should be followed also by decentralized policies and turning the Ottoman Empire into a sort of confederation of nationalities. This second group saw European support as the necessary guarantee for pushing ahead with the reforms.

Qemali advanced two conditions before taking part in the congress. The first was that the Young Turks had to show that they were acting only in view to create a national government that should be equally impartial and beneficent to all the peoples of the Empire. For Qemali, a "national government" meant representing all the ethnic elements of the Empire. Therefore he was willing to take part in the congress if such a government was put in place, "so that the desiderata of all the people in the Empire might be formulated".⁸⁹ Secondly, he urged the Young Turks to invoke the aid of Europe to push ahead with reforms in the empire.

Qemali differed from that group of Young Turks who saw in Europe's insistence to introduce reforms in the empire a foreign interference aiming at infringing its sovereignty and territorial integrity. For him, the European Powers had to remain always the allies of the Empire by approving the latter's reforms. Although he recognized their political interests, he thought their interference could be prevented and turned instead into an alliance by enforcing the decentralizing reforms. He conceived the Powers also as a kind of higher authority to which the Ottoman Empire should give repeated proofs of its maturity and political reliability. Here, he had in mind in first place Great Britain. His conditions were accepted and Qemali attended the sessions of the meeting.

Qemali took part in the Young Turk congress as an experienced ex Ottoman high rank employee, but also as an Albanian Moslem. After a long career in the imperial administration, and being that his Ottoman attachment was not extinguished, he defended the maintenance of the Empire. As an Albanian he advocated a decentralized Ottoman Empire,

⁸⁹ S. Story (ed.), *The memoirs of Ismail Qemali*, pg.306. See also S. Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, pg. 180-181.

which could make possible the granting of autonomy for the Albanian nation. This option was deemed beneficiary also for the Ottoman presence in the Balkans by increasing the attachment of the Albanians to the Empire.

Referring to the position of Ismail Qemali with regard to the Young Turk factions, though unduly emphasizing their ‘Turkish’ proclivities, Stavro Skëndi has written that:

“In the group of Ahmed Riza he saw not only a tendency for a centralized government, but also an urge for predominance of the Turkish element in the Empire. It was thus natural for him to join Prince Sabaheddin’s group. The greater the liberties insured to the Christian minorities in the Turkish Empire, the more the chances for the non-Turkish Albanians to win rights as an ethnic group. At this time also Ismail Qemali’s political activity oscillated between the overthrow of the regime of Sultan Abdulhamid II and the national Albanian movement, which was gradually gaining ground”.⁹⁰

The Congress agreed upon a constitutional regime guaranteeing justice, recognizing the rights of all components of the Ottoman ‘nation’, to maintain the territorial integrity of the Empire, while calling for benevolent support from the European Powers. At the end, the Young Turks were divided into two main blocks: those aligned with Sabahedin, Ismail Qemali included, and the group of Ahmed Riza, who opposed the intervention of the European Powers into the domestic affairs of the Empire. If the first group was called the “majority”, it was, however, a majority composed of different components, such as Armenians, Greeks, and Albanians. The minority, instead, though not being able to reverse the situation in its favor, by adopting a more centralistic approach to the reforms, and somehow keeping at bay the European interference, came out as a more compact group. The Turkish element was predominant, a factor that would play a significant role in the Young Turks future policies.

Throughout the congress Qemali played an important role, trying to moderate between parties, representatives of ethnic groups, in the first place the Armenians, asking for more rights for their six provinces under European auspices. Though Qemali was a staunch partisan of the decentralization of the Empire, he declared himself as an Ottoman, whose duty was the preservation of the Ottoman state. At this point, Qemali could not accept the stance of the Armenians who sought to create a local government independent of the central administration and based solely upon foreign protection in accordance with article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin, according to which the Ottoman government had to protect the Armenians against the Moslem Kurds and Circassians.

⁹⁰ S. Skëndi, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912*, pg.337.

After the Young Turks Congress in Paris, Qemali tried to organize concrete actions against the central government by using his personal connections in the Ottoman army. But, the program failed due to lack of agreement among Turkish opposition groups. As a prey of growing disappointment Qemali wrote in his memoirs:

“The lack of agreement among the Turkish reformers which had become manifest during the Paris Congress prevented any possibility of united political action likely to give reason to hope for a change in Turkish affairs. On the other hand, the troubles in Macedonia increased, and the directors of Turkish policy at Constantinople, instead of arriving at an understanding with the Powers which would have been interested in maintaining Turkish integrity, adopted a mischievous policy which drove the people to acts of desperation. Having lost all hope of doing anything salutary for Turkey, all my efforts were devoted to the task of trying to save Albania from the disaster which we now realized was inevitable. From this period until 1908 I spent most of my time in Brussels, though I made several journeys to Greece, Italy and England on missions connected with the service of my country”.⁹¹

This was a further blow to his Ottoman sentiments and from now on his Albanian ‘awareness’ advanced slowly to the surface. This involved a gradual shift from an emotional attachment to his place of origin to a political allegiance, which more and more motivated Qemali’s political life. From now on even his narrative of the memoirs is adjusted to a more national Albanian vein. He described in this way the meeting with the Albanians of Italy during that period:

“Every time I went to Rome and Naples, the Albanians of Calabria and other parts round Naples, who had been settled there since the death of Scanderbeg, retaining both their language and their national habits, and who now formed a colony of some 200.000 souls, used to come and see me and discuss the interests of the country which they still had so much at heart, feeling sure as they did of the sympathetic support in these sentiments of their adopted country... The most important centre of the Albanians in Sicily is Piana dei Greci, on a height some twenty miles from Palermo. I was invited there, and was received just as if I had been in my own country, most of the notables of the other Albanian centers being assembled to meet me. It was a touching scene when almost the entire population of women and children, attired in Albanian national costumes, and accompanied by bands, ran towards us to touch our clothes as if we were a portion of the beloved native soil”.⁹²

Ismail Qemali returned to Istanbul in September of 1908 when he was elected deputy to the Ottoman parliament that was proclaimed by Sultan Abdulhamid II in July of that year. His experience in the Ottoman parliament was of a continual clash between his decentralist ideas and the centralist ones of the Young Turk government. The Young Turks centralism aimed to extend the authority of central government to the widest possible extent and to

⁹¹ S. Story (ed.), *The memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, pg.315.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pg.313.

promote the standardization of administrative and financial practices in the provinces. They argued that the parliamentary regime would enable fair regional representation in government and thus protect regional interests within the framework of a unified government whose primary aim was to preserve a united Ottoman state. Centralization was viewed as being well suited to facilitate development in the periphery of the empire, while autonomous administration was deemed to lead to lawlessness.⁹³ Influenced by the Jacobinism of the French Revolution and the idea of “one and indivisible state”, the Young Turks wanted to centralize, equalize, rationalize and bring uniformity. Their intention was also to proceed towards the unification of the education system by trying to impose the Turkish language in schools and tribunals. On the other hand the decentralist views were based upon recognizing the system of cultural autonomies and both Moslem and non-Moslem elements of the empire saw in the Young Turk revolution the beginning of the reforms intended to further strengthen autonomy. Hasan Kayali writes:

“In general, the decentralist program had wider appeal in the incompletely integrated outlying provinces, in ethnically homogenous regions (where increasingly articulate elites held that decentralization would better preserve a distinctive cultural ethos), and among non-Muslims constituting majority communities in their regions (whom decentralization would bring closer to self-determination).”⁹⁴

In the course of four years Ismail Qemali came to see himself as head of the Ottoman opposition urging decentralist policies and finally as head of the Albanian deputies in the parliament. The so-called liberals in the Ottoman Parliament, favouring decentralization and autonomous rights for the ethnies of the empire created the Ahrar Party under the leadership of Ismail Qemali which was an opposition party. The interview which he gave to the *Pall Mall Gazette* of London in January 1909 is indicative of the thinking of Ahrar Party. He declared that the only salvation for Turkey was to grant broad and complete freedom and that Turks, Greeks, Slavs, Armenians, Albanians, Arabs and the other peoples of the Empire should be placed on a footing of equality. He further stressed that the army, the navy, the civil administration should be open to all the nationalities and creeds and promotion should be on merit.⁹⁵

Until 1912 Qemali remained a firm supporter of the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, while considering the problem of nationalities as the main one for the Ottoman government.

⁹³ Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks, Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire 1908-1918*, pg.78.

⁹⁴ H. Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks, Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire 1908-1918*, pg.119.

⁹⁵ *Albania*, XII, (Brussels 1909), pg.33-34.

In an interview with the Italian newspaper *Il Giornale d'Italia* (25.08.1909) Qemali maintained that the only possibility for the Empire to survive was to keep a just equilibrium among the ethnies of the Empire and that its unity “would be preserved only if the government would respect the particular physiognomy of each race”.⁹⁶ He explained that the ethnies of the Empire nourished great hopes and warmly supported the Constitution as they saw in it the fulfillment of their “national sentiments”. For “national sentiments” he intended the improvement of local administration, public works in the provinces and schools in local languages. He viewed “national sentiments” as closely connected with state reforms and not yet with separatism. While heavily criticizing the Young Turk regime for suppressing freedom and equality by establishing “the predominance of one race over the others”, Qemali declared himself as “a staunch defender of the integrity of the Empire”.⁹⁷ In this sense he believed that a constitutional and liberal empire would serve also the Albanian interests. In another interview with the Istanbul newspaper *Prodos* (18.01.1912) he stated that the Albanians were faithful subjects of the Empire and that:

“The national interest of the Albanians is to cohabit and collaborate with the other nationalities and to render the Empire strong and great on the indispensable basis of justice and equality. But they are not ingenuous to be allured by the actual governors, whose policy has been disastrous for all”.⁹⁸

The general disorder in the Empire continued and the conflict between Albanian and Young Turk government became further more embittered over the next three years. With the further strengthening of the opposition in the parliament the Young Turks decided to dissolve the Chamber. In a letter sent to the Albanian notables of Vlora in February, 1912 Qemali changed his tone and clearly set forth his opinion that the Albanians should be prepared to consider the option of independence as the end of the Empire was near.

“I would like to say to you that Turkey cannot be saved and if the Parliament is not reconstituted these will be its last days. We either will save Turkey by re-establishing the Constitution, or we will lose any hope: and then we will walk another way for the safeguard of our nationality”.⁹⁹

In the elections for the new parliament in 1912 the Young Turks succeeded in barring the re-election of deputies like Ismail Qemali and other Albanian exponents. The end of Qemali’s Ottoman parliamentary career coincided also with his increasing transformation from an imperial employee to an Albanian national leader. In the past his Ottoman patriotism

⁹⁶ R. Falaschi, *Ismail Kemal bej Vlora, il pensiero e l'opera attraverso i documenti italiani*, pg.91.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pg.95.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pg.97.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pg.101.

stemmed from an active membership of the central imperial bureaucracy. After that he was excluded from it and he went into exile, and thereafter seeing the failure of reforms and of the model of the constitutional state, his Ottoman patriotism lost its fervor. He became convinced that the model of the imperial nation, like a guarantee and safeguard of its nationalities, was no longer possible. His Albanian patriotism was superseding in importance his former imperial identity, but never completely extinguishing it. Now, Qemali was thinking of the Ottoman Empire in terms of an opportunity to save also Albania. If before the Albanian 'nation' was for him a piece in the mosaic of the Ottoman 'nation', in latter periods the Ottoman state was seen as a means to protect Albania from the Balkan neighboring states. Qemali was not an ideologue, neither an intellectual. He was a politician and statesman who saw his state fading away. He had to find other focus for his political career. But, he was also a man influenced by European political ideas of liberty, justice, constitutionalism, equality and he was also member of a leading family in his native country. All these factors made possible his turning into an Albanian activist leader, but never denying his Ottoman devotion till the last moments. What remained was only a feeling of regret for having failed to build up a reformed Ottoman state like a house for all people. Serving the Ottoman Empire was also related to feelings of honor of the Albanian notability for the highest posts in the imperial administrations and attachment to it during its five centuries long Ottoman dominion, but also to that of responsibility undertaking those tasks, both in the name of the centre and the local community. It was not easy to completely extinguish that feeling even after the creation of the Albanian state.¹⁰⁰ Even two months before the proclamation of the Albanian independence in November 28th, 1912, in an interview with the Austrian newspaper *Neue Freie Presse* (27.08.1912), Qemali considered himself an Ottoman and the Albanian movement as not a separatist one. Moreover, an abrupt rupture with the Ottoman Empire would not be welcomed by the majority of the Moslem Albanians, and Qemali knew it well.¹⁰¹ He still considered the survival of the Empire the best option for the Albanians, provided the centralist regime of the Young Turks would be replaced by a more decentralized one, as the Albanians were still unprepared for self-government and would run the risk to fall under the dominion of foreign inimical Powers.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ E. Vlora, *Kujtime*, vol.1, pg.318.

¹⁰¹ O. Jazexhi, "Turk, Elhamdulillah", *Përpyekja*, v.XIII, nr. 25, (2008), pg.249.

¹⁰² As cited by *Shekulli* newspaper (28.11.2008), in the article written by Syle Ukshini with the title "Ismail Qemali in an article of August 1912".

3.2. The political ideas of Qemali in the Ottoman context

As already said in the first chapter, the Young Ottomans (1865-1878) were the first thinkers to make the ideas of the Enlightenment part of the intellectual equipment of the Turkish reading public and the first to try to work out a synthesis between these ideas and Islam and voicing extremely articulate criticism of the imperial government.¹⁰³

Qemali differed from the Young Ottomans as he was not a political thinker. His criticism remained in the field of his concerns as an imperial employee and in his firm conviction that a constitutionalist system would be the salvation of the Empire. Unlike the state reformers, the Young Ottomans had an ideology to offer and they also elaborated a theoretical framework for changes in the empire.¹⁰⁴ However, there are some points in common with the Young Ottomans that are worth mentioning here.

Qemali and the Young Ottomans shared a common knowledge of European civilization and an equal concern at the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. Like the Young Ottomans, Qemali believed, until a certain period of time, that the decline of the Ottoman Empire was not an inevitable process, but a state of affairs that could be reversed by structural changes. Although he did not elaborate an opinion on the constitutional regime, it seemed that for him the reinstatement of the constitution and a decentralized state administration would save the Empire from collapse. It simply derived from his conviction that the Empire would not survive unless it would guarantee the development of the ethnies.

Qemali also shared with a part of the Young Ottomans the idea which saw work and industriousness as fundamental to Western civilization and that the well-being of the empire was identical with the process of Europeanization which had set in since the Tanzimat. Qemali greatly praised the work of Reshid Pasha the Grand Vizier who proclaimed the

¹⁰³ S. Mardin, *The Genesis of the Young Ottoman Thought*, pg.4.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pg.256.

Tanzimat reforms in 1839. In this aspect his ideas were closer to Ibrahim Sinasi (1826-1910), one of the most “Europeanized” members of the Young Ottoman.¹⁰⁵

With regard to the nation, Qemali as a secular Ottoman employee thought of it in terms of it as a political entity. His Ottoman nation was equal to the Ottoman state.¹⁰⁶ Similar to another exponent of the Young Ottoman, namely the poet Namik Kemal (1840-1888), Qemali seems to have conceived the ethnies as bearers of particular types of culture. The “imperial state had no reason to claim a personality for itself since it was a means to provide for the well-being of the communities”.¹⁰⁷ The Young Ottomans discourse on “personality communities” was more articulated, while Qemali spoke in terms of “mentality of the races of Empire”. But, unlike Kemal, who based his nationalism on an appeal to feeling and emotion, Qemali held an Ottoman nationalism based on political realism and rationalism, intended as policies informed by an acquaintance with cultural peculiarities of the various people of the Empire.

The idea of loyalty to the state was one which permeated all classes in the Ottoman Empire and in this sense both Qemali and the Young Ottomans shared common views. They were striving to save the Ottoman Empire. In fact neither the idea of the preservation of the Ottoman state nor that of an ethnically diversified empire was entirely new. The first one was a traditional Ottoman ideal, while the second was the very basis on which the empire was built.¹⁰⁸ Thus Qemali, and the Young Ottomans, found the ground already prepared to envisage an empire where people could live side by side with one other. What seems to be a novelty of the Young Ottomans, which coincides also with the views of Qemali, was the union of the populations of the Empire as an integrated citizenry. We still do not know with exactitude whether Qemali borrowed this idea from the Young Ottomans or he simply believed it to be the ideal and goal of the Tanzimat statesmen, on whom he heaped praises throughout his book. The union of the Ottoman citizens in the Ottoman nation in fact replaced the previous conception of people living side by side in harmony but still separated by religious barriers in the absence of a feeling of nationality.¹⁰⁹ To achieve such a goal

¹⁰⁵ S. Mardin, *The Genesis of the Young Ottoman Thought*, pg.275.

¹⁰⁶ H. Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks, Ottomanism, Arabism and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire (1908-1918)*, pg.31. Kayali defines “Ottomanism” as an ideology that stressed the notion of a “fatherland”, the geographic expression of which was the territories under the sultan’s jurisdiction.

¹⁰⁷ Serif Mardin says in his study that “the talk of “sentiments” inherent in a people was the hallmark of romantic European thought and the far echo of the idea of the soul of a nation which through the German historian Herder had come to be associated with liberal nationalism”. S. Mardin, *The Genesis of the Young Ottoman Thought*, pg.282;pg.308.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pg.330.

¹⁰⁹ S. Mardin, *The Genesis of the Young Ottoman Thought*, pg.330.

Qemali, and many of Young Ottomans, relied on the conception of equal guarantee of the political rights of the entire Ottoman population and on a system of education accessible to everyone.

What distinguished Qemali from the Young Ottomans was his belief in the secular Ottoman and multi-ethnic nation. Some members of the Young Ottomans, faced with an increasingly strong stream of Pan-Slavism in the Balkans by the end of nineteenth century, gave up the idea of an Ottoman nation made up of various national and religious groups and seemed resigned to the loss of the greater part of the European holdings of the empire and therefore turned toward an “Islamic people”. On the other hand the essence of the Young Ottoman political agenda was a constitutional government based on some form of popular representation, but justified on Muslim religious grounds.¹¹⁰ If the Young Ottomans were a kind of synthesis of patriotism and religion, Qemali remained a secular Ottoman patriot and here a great influence was exerted by his membership to the high Ottoman bureaucracy, with a long tradition of loyalty to the state and the Sovereign, and by his personal background of education.

For this bureaucracy ethnic and religious affiliations were not important in exercising state functions. Qemali did not mention Islam when he spoke about the Ottoman nation for he conceived the latter as the political representation of various Moslem and non-Moslem ethnies. Speaking about the tradition of tolerance among members of the ruling Ottoman bureaucracy, Kemal Karpat explains that historically the government elites in the Ottoman Empire were not identified with any of the ethnic, linguistic, or economic groups, but with the state or the dynasty-throne and therefore they were representative of the state and not of an ethnic group.

“This attitude must be attributed not only to the Ottoman largesse d’esprit, but also to the need of the ruling bureaucratic order to allow capable elements to join its ranks. It is also interesting to note how easily the state bureaucracy accepted the principle of religious equality in the nineteenth century, while part of intelligentsia, developing a new concept of Muslim identity, rejected it”.¹¹¹

A comparison between Qemali’s ideas and those of Young Turks offers further insights. As noted Qemali differed from them with regard to the vision of the future structure

¹¹⁰ H. Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks, Ottomanism, Arabism and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire (1908-1918)*, pg.30.

¹¹¹ K. Karpat, *An Inquiry of the Social Foundations of Nationalism in the Ottoman State*, pg.24.

of the Empire, as the latter favoured a more united and integrated Empire. Nevertheless, there are some points in common between their views. Both were committed to the modernization and westernization of the Empire, and both shared the view that the Muslim masses of the Empire were backward and should be “civilized”.¹¹² Like the Young Turks, Qemali heavily criticized the absolutist regime of the Sultan. They both shared an elitist perception of the masses and rejected revolution, at least for the Young Turks until the eve of their revolution of 1908. So, the common view was that the masses should be educated and led onto the road of progress, which was incompatible with the policies of the autocratic Sultan Abdulhamid.¹¹³ The Young Turks developed a materialist and positivist conception of life and society, but Qemali was not a theoretician. We do not find traces of any political doctrine or a particular scientific approach when he analyzed the Ottoman society. He grew more and more suspicious of the increasing Turkish nationalism of the Young Turks, especially on the eve and after the Young Turks revolution in 1908, which made possible his leaning towards the Albanian cause.

If we speak about the identity of Qemali we may say that whilst he was an active Ottoman employee his identity was firstly molded by his political allegiance to the Ottoman Empire. Even in his memoirs, published after Albanian independence, he saw himself as an Ottoman bureaucrat, who did his best for the good and salvation of his country, the Ottoman Empire. In this context the Albanian identity for Qemali was but a sort of regional identity to which he was attached by way of emotions and old remembrances. The “Albanian nation” was but a small piece of that gigantic mosaic of Ottoman ethnies. While he was performing his functions as an Ottoman employee his “regional Albanian” identity was dormant and not important and overwhelmed by his Ottoman identity, which in turn was solidified by his everyday political activities. But, things had to change along with the vicissitudes of his life and political career, which ended up with him in the balcony of his house in Vlora, hoisting the Albanian ‘national’ flag at proclaiming the Albanian independence from the Ottoman Empire on 28 November 1912.

¹¹² S. Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, pg.201-202.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, pg.206.

4. Ismail Qemali in the new context of the Albanian question

As mentioned earlier, the proclamation of the Constitution of 1908 and the coming to power of the Young Turks stimulated hopes for better possibilities to freely cultivate Albanian culture and in other Albanian provinces to preserve the old privileges of tax exemptions and drafting into the army. It was a period when Albanian nationalism was further invigorated in its demands and modes of expression. The period between late 1890s and first years of twentieth century were crucial in making Albanian nationalism more politicized. The continuing of the centralist policies of the Young Turks, the loss of territories, such as Bosnia's annexation of 1908 by Austro-Hungary and the Libyan war of 1911, which ended with the Italian occupation, pushed many leaders of the non-Turkish elements of the Empire to consider that independence might spare them the death agonies of the Empire. The Albanian uprisings of 1911-1912 had their importance in the Ottoman context. Hasan Kayali writes that:

“More significantly for the empire (and not least because of its implications for intra-Moslem, and hence Arab-Turkish relations) the government confronted in Albania for the first time a nationalist movement in which its Moslem subjects were involved. In 1910 and 1911 major army units had to be dispatched to suppress a series of uprisings and disarm the people. Despite religious, regional, and socio-economic differences, the people of Albania, in the midst of Balkan nation-states that had recently separated from the empire, had developed a national consciousness nourished by a literary revival and fostered by the Albanian intelligentsia”¹¹⁴

The rise of the Albanian National Movement took place in the context of a dying Empire and the threat coming from Balkan nationalisms. This had happened to other Moslem populations of the Empire as well. As in the case of the Arab national movement, a strong factor in the growth of the national movement among the Moslem people of the Empire was its approaching collapse.¹¹⁵ During 1910-1911 northern Albanians resorted to repeated uprisings to reject the Young Turk's attempts to impose on them taxes, obligatory military service and disarmament. In June 1911 Qemali joined the Albanian insurgents sheltered in Montenegro and used their movement to set out his political demands. A memorandum was

¹¹⁴ H. Kajali, *Arabs and Young Turks, Ottomanism, Arabism and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire (1908-1918)*, pg.111.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, pg.172.

drawn up at the instigation of Qemali, signed by all delegates of the insurgents. In addition to the usual demands for the opening of Albanian schools and the use of the Albanian language, the memorandum asked for: a guarantee against anti-constitutional actions and abuses, respect of customs and traditions, recognition of the national existence of Albania, the organization of vilayets inhabited by Albanians along lines of decentralization. The memorandum demanded the autonomy of the Albanian inhabited lands within the framework of the empire, but organized into a single administrative unit.¹¹⁶

As the rebellions in the Albanian lands grew stronger and the Young Turks proved hesitant to fulfill all the Albanian demands and were unable to stop the decline of the Empire in general, in December, 1911 a group of Albanian personalities in Istanbul, headed by Qemali, decided on the organization of a general insurrection in Albania. Qemali was already convinced that the policies of the Young Turks were bringing the country to collapse and he thought that Albanians must be prepared and nationally organized for the eventuality of the empire's dissolution. Qemali said later that the policy of the Young Turks was the "leaven that caused the Albanians national sentiment to revive and flourish again".¹¹⁷ After the Balkan states declared war on the Ottoman Empire in 1912, it became clear for Qemali that Ottoman rule would soon come to an end also in the Albanian lands. In his memoirs he wrote that:

"When the Balkan Allies declared war on Turkey, and the Bulgarian armies were in occupation of Kirk-Kilise, while the Serbs had seized Skopje, I realized that the time had arrived for us Albanians to take vigorous measures for our salvation".¹¹⁸

Qemali was also aware that the preservation of Albania was dependent not only upon the efforts of the Albanians, and perhaps even more upon taking advantage of the support or rivalry amongst the great powers. The powers most interested in Albanian affairs were Austro-Hungary and Italy. Both powers favored an autonomous Albania which in the eventuality of the Ottoman Empire's withdrawal from the Balkans would act as a barrier to the advancement of the Slav Balkan states supported by Russia. After firstly approaching the Austrian authorities, Qemali turned towards Italy and established close relations with the

¹¹⁶ S. Skëndi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, pg.427; *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar* [History of the Albanian People], (Tiranë, 2002), pg.450.

¹¹⁷ S. Story (ed.), *The memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, pg.367.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, pg.369.

Italo-Albanians in the framework of a joint action in support of the Italian policy aimed at achieving an autonomous status for the Albanian inhabited lands, if the status quo in the Ottoman Balkans would not be possible. In the early years of his exile, Qemali had also been in contact with Greek circles close to the government. The major aim of this entente with Athens was to establish an alliance between Greeks and Albanians as a counterbalance to the Serbian and Bulgarian territorial aims in the framework of the Macedonian question of the early twentieth century and in view of an eventual dissolution of the Ottoman Empire.¹¹⁹ These positions of Qemali, stood in sharp contrast to pro-Austrian and anti-Greek position adopted by Faik Konitza, who would launch a series of attacks on Qemali political preferences.

In his first diplomatic steps, after the Balkan Wars broke out, Qemali tried to convince the European diplomats to recognize the existence of an Albanian people and its inhabited territories, comprising the Ottoman provinces where the Albanians were the majority. In the meantime, the penetration by the Balkan allies' armies into the Albanian lands in November 1912 expelled the Ottoman army and cut off Albania's territorial link with the Empire. Albanian independence, instead of autonomy within the Empire, was thus the only option left to the Albanian patriots. Albanian independence was proclaimed on 28 November 1912, by Ismail Qemali and hundreds of Albanian patriots gathered in Vlora. Qemali recalled in this way that moment:

“The Congress was at once opened. At its first sitting-November 28, 1912- it voted unanimously the proclamation of independence. The sitting was then suspended and the members left the hall to hoist upon my house- the house where I was born and where my ancestors had lived- amid the acclamations of thousands of people, the glorious flag of Scanderbeg , who had slept wrapped in its folds for the last 445 years. It was an unforgettable moment for me, and my hands shook with hope and pride as I fixed to the balcony of the old dwelling the standard of the last national Sovereign of Albania. It seemed as if the spirit of the immortal hero passed at that moment like sacred fire over the heads of the people”.¹²⁰

The National Assembly that was convened in Vlora on the same day declared Albania to be independent and elected a Provisional Government with Ismail Qemali at his head. In his speech in the Assembly Qemali said:

“The Albanians, though always loyal to the Ottoman Kingdom, did not forget their language and nationality, and the best proofs are the upheavals of the last four years to preserve their rights and habits. The Ottoman Government never understood its interest and never rewarded Albanian for its services to it. Although in the last times it had showed a minimal desire to come to terms with our nation, it nevertheless did not show

¹¹⁹ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg.497-498.

¹²⁰ S. Story (ed.), *The memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, pg.372.

good will and take all measures to pacify and fulfill the Albanian demands. In this time the war with four Balkan kingdoms broke out. They claimed improvements and rights for their co-nationals and co-religionists. But, they forgot their initial aims and as the war was going well for them they agreed upon partitioning the Ottoman Kingdom and Albania too. The Albanians, who had fought this war more as soldiers and as masters of their country, when they saw that the Turkish army was beaten and the Kingdom could not stand on its feet, took all the measures that time needed”.¹²¹

In his speech Qemali considered the act of Albanian independence as a patriotic, defensive act and one dictated by circumstances. He treated it as a kind of breach of contract on the side of the Ottoman Government, to which the Albanians had remained faithful until the very end. After that the Albanians had lost hope they were obliged to defend their country by themselves. It seemed that Qemali was still careful to present this not as a revolutionary or radical act but as a defensive measure that was intended to protect the legitimate rights of the Albanian nation. By doing so Qemali hoped to gain the understating of the European Powers which were not yet determined to accept the end of Ottoman rule in the Balkans. He wanted also to appease the Moslem majority of Albanians that still felt attached to the Empire. Even the name of “shqiptar” [Albanian] had quite a limited diffusion among people, mostly among literate people and was confined to intellectual strata, while the majority of the population still perceived itself as Moslem, Orthodox and Catholic.¹²²

The first actions of the Albanian Provisional Government of Ismail Qemali were directed towards preserving the territorial integrity of the Albanian lands and preventing the advancement of the Balkan armies that were fighting the Ottoman army in retreat, the extension of the authority of his government over much of the Albanian lands, and building up an Albanian administration that would secure a better union among the Albanian regions. In foreign policy Qemali’s government adopted the position of neutrality in the conflict between the Balkan States and the Ottoman Empire with the hope not to give ground to Balkan pretensions over the Albanian lands. However, due to the unfavorable international events and internal rifts among the Albanian leadership, the authority of Qemali’s government remained limited to a small portion of the Albanian lands including Vlora and the south-western part of the present day Albania.

¹²¹ *Qeveria e Përkohshme e Vlorës dhe veprimtaria saj* [The Provisional Government of Vlora and its activity], (Tiranë, 1963), pg.33.

¹²² M. Kruja, “Shqiptari i 1912-s e shqiptarizma ne qarkun e Durrsit” [The Albanian of 1912 and the Albanianism in the district of Durres], in *Hylli i Drites*, (1938), pg. 469-72; 609-616.

The European Powers convened the London conference 1912-1913 to settle the conflicts in the Balkans and shape the new map of the region. It recognized Albanian independence on 29 July 1913 and decided to create the International Commission of Control composed of delegates of the six powers (Great Britain, Germany, Austro-Hungary, Russia, France and Italy). The International Commission, charged with the organization of the Albanian state, did not recognize the Albanian Provisional Government as a national body, but only as a local authority. On 22 January 1914, Ismail Qemali resigned and the Albanian Government passed its authority to the International Commission of Control with the hope of ending the chaos and anarchy reigning in the country and to secure the creation of a national government for the whole of Albania. The International Commission, in its turn, handed over its power on 7 March, 1914 to the German Prince Wilhelm von Wied, appointed by the Great Powers as the sovereign of the new Albanian state.¹²³ The German Prince, habituated to a life in the European royal courts, was a complete stranger and incapable to understanding the intricate and puzzling world of Albanian affairs. He ruled only for 6 months until he left his 'kingdom' at the mercy of the turmoil of the First World War and departed on board an Italian yacht.

4.1. The Albanian nation of Qemali

The final part Ismail Qemali's memoirs are about Albania and the Albanians. But, also in the first part of his memoirs the author mentioned his country of origin as he recalled moments of his childhood passed in his native town Vlora. When in late 1840s his family was exiled from Vlora to Thessaloniki, due to the centralizing policies of the Sublime Porte, Ismail Qemali described the journey as going to a place that was foreign to him.

“As we went farther and farther in a non-Albanian country, where the country itself, the costumes, language, and everything else contrasted so sharply with what we had been accustomed to in Albania, our childish spirits tended to evaporate and a certain sadness and longing took possession of us...At Salonica M. Grasset, the French consul, who knew our family when he was consul at Janina, and was a great friend of my father, on learning of our approaching arrival, met us with a coach and took us to the house he had prepared for us. The honours and kindness showered on us by this excellent man caused much curiosity and astonishment among the Turkish population of the town, as they could not understand that a family could be Moslem and yet not speak Turkish, while they equally failed to comprehend how a Moslem family could be related to the

¹²³ *Qeveria e Përkohshme e Vlorës dhe veprimtaria saj* [The Provisional Government of Vlora and its activity], pg.23.

Christian consul, and to them the bestowal of kindness of this sort was only conceivable on the assumption of there being some relationship between us".¹²⁴

In the above paragraph there some elements that Qemali will use to define the Albanian nation. He distinguished his place of origin from the landscape, the habits and the language. In the latter pages of his memoirs he explained that Albanian language has nothing to do with Turkish and that the language was not all known among the Albanians. He added that he learnt this language at school, as a foreign language. This explanation was done on purpose to show that the Albanians were not assimilated, but retained their native language throughout the period of Ottoman rule. On the other hand in the paragraph there is a stress on the distinction between an Albanian Moslem family and the Turkish Moslem population. An Albanian family could be Moslem even if it didn't speak a word in Turkish and while keeping warm relations with Christian European diplomats. Qemali intended to tell the reader that an Albanian Moslem had his own particular way to live his religiosity and this is an argument that he will use in characterizing the Albanian nation.

His description of the Albanian nation begins with an account of its location and it seems that the "Pelage" thesis was a dear argument for any literate Albanian of that time, whenever it was about the origins of the Albanian people:

"Between the Adriatic, the Pindus, the range of the Balkans and the Dinaric Alps, on the dividing line between East and West, where history has witnessed the meeting of so many wandering peoples and so many nascent civilizations, Albania stands like a formidable rampart. Protected from foreign invasion on three sides by its circle of mountain peaks, and on the forth by the sea, Albania was formerly inhabited by a race whose origin dates from Pelasgic times. Though not strangers to the civilization of the Greeks, this race nevertheless preserved its own character and the pride of its pre-Hellenic origin... Such is the country where for centuries have lived the "Shkipëtar" (the Men of the Eagle). Dwelling in a sort of isolation, they were variously grouped under the generic name of Macedonians or Illyrians, according to the caprice of different conquerors. But they themselves profoundly indifferent to these arbitrary arrangements, which did not interfere with their race, their language or their national character, seemed hardly to be aware of the fall of Empires or the changes of frontiers".¹²⁵

To explain the antiquity of the Albanian 'race', its resilience over centuries, its perseverance to resist foreign invasions, Qemali used the same arguments and the same Romantic approach to the history as used also by Vasa and Sami. Like them, he believed that

¹²⁴ S. Story (ed.), *The memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, pg.11.

¹²⁵ S. Story (ed.), *The memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, pg.356-357.

it was the special character of the territory where the Albanians lived was a kind of defender of their nationality. The value of this habitat for the preservation of the Albanian nationality becomes more evident in the case of a region that Qemali described as the frontier-line of West and East, and as a cross-road of many “wandering people”, “nascent civilizations” and “foreign invaders”. This geographic shell and the people’s tenacious character had produced an undefiled Albanian nationality. The Albanian nationality in this case is seen as the blend of ‘race-blood’, language and ‘national character’. What is interesting to note here, as also in the case of Sami, it is the way the terms are used in their discourse that reveals their position vis-à-vis “Ottoman” and “Turkish”. In history, the “Ottomans” are portrayed under a more positive light, than the “Turks”, which in the text are ranked among other invaders of the Albanian lands, such as Romans, Byzantines, Normans, Bulgarians, Serbs, Italians, etc. It was the failure of the “Ottoman” project for the Empire, and the turn towards its “Turkish” core, i.e. mostly the Young Turks nationalistic policies, that were viewed by the author as being inimical to his concept of a decentralized Empire, where all people and “races” could peacefully cohabit. Therefore the term “Turk” in Qemali’s text is somehow loaded with negative connotations. It had to do mainly with the regime of the Young Turks that the partisans of the decentralization policies viewed more as a “Turkish” centralist one, in contrast to the more inclusive “Ottoman”.¹²⁶

Qemali was enchanted by the beauty of the Albanian country and he attributed to it the quality of being beautiful and protective to the Albanians. In his texts too, the ethnic territory is invested with a special ethnic poetry symbolizing the unattainable purity and the redemption to which the nation aspires. In fact it is easy to identify Albanian pride and spiritual nobility with the following description of the Albanian landscape:

“Behind that curtain of rocky peaks and steep acclivities here stretch wide expanses of field and forest covered with green and gold, according to the season. At the very threshold of gloomy gorges or narrow defiles in the mountains, one comes suddenly upon delicious oases covered with rich vegetation. Thundering torrents pouring down the mountain side are replaced a little further on by limpid brooks noiselessly meandering through aromatic valleys, while great clumps of evergreen trees and bushes are scattered on the emerald hill-side. Along the sea-cost, bays of limpid blue and serene, bottomless gulfs lie at the foot of mountains whose peaks are bathed eternally in the drifting clouds”.¹²⁷

As we have already explained in the chapter on Vasa, the Romantic tones in describing history survived well beyond his time and Qemali’s text is an indication to that. The Albanian ancestry and ethnic particularity, he argued, were reinforced by resilient tribal

¹²⁶ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg. 641.

¹²⁷ S. Story (ed.), *The memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, pg.356.

social organization, which imparted additional weight to their ethnic identity. When he speaks about the characteristics of the Albanians Qemali writes that:

“In spite of the religious and other consequences of the Turkish domination, the Albanians have remained faithful to the customs and habits of their ancestors. The three principal objects of an Albanian’s devotion are his honour, his family and his country. The notion of honor is inculcated in him from the earliest age. He prefers death to an unexpunged insult. No consideration of interest stands higher in his estimation than the “bessa” (or word of honor).¹²⁸

Albanian society as presented here is a kind of heritage from ancient times that has not changed as the Albanians have remained loyal to their customs. There are the national customs which also regulates social relations among them. More than social divisions, which implied superiority-inferiority statuses, Qemali thought of the Albanians as a community based on old and chivalrous norms. The sense of personal dignity is taken as a national quality which preserved egalitarianism. Obedience to the chief is considered to be a sign of respect and as something inherited from ancient times. His vision of the Albanian ‘nation’ was of an entity which has remained unaltered in its old essence. It is a community whose members are closely linked to each other and therefore feudalism did not have any sense for them as they were all equals. This counted also for presenting the Albanians as a community with a conspicuous internal cohesion. This was particularly important in a period when Qemali strove to convince the European Powers of the existence of an Albanian nation in its own right, with its own cultural traits and not divided along religious faiths.

In backing this thesis Qemali explained that family ties were still very strong in Albania. This was to say that the Albanian nation was built up on blood ties that were stronger than anything else. The symbol here is the patriarchal family.¹²⁹ Although not in tune with modernity, the Albanian nation is the bearer of noble values. This kind of communitarian organization is intended also as something unique that can be found only among Albanians. The ‘uniqueness’ of the Albanian case is connected also with the role of the woman in the community.

“Nowhere does woman enjoy more consideration or influence than in my country. As wife, her individuality is completely subordinated to the authority of her husband, but this is not the case as regards her acts in common or public life, for she is always consulted on questions relating to family or country. She is less proud of her beauty, her birth, or her wealth than of the number of her sons and their merit, which she considers redounds to herself. The mother of a number of children is an object of veneration. In spite of these privileges,

¹²⁸ Ibid., pg.357.

¹²⁹ G. Schopflin, “The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths”, pg.34.

the Albanian woman is never seen in public with her husband. She carries her stoic qualities so far that she is never present at the departure of her husband on warlike expeditions. But should the country be in danger, either through invasion or by an arbitrary act of the government, it is the women who first raise the alarm and urge their menfolk to defence or revolt".¹³⁰

Qemali presumed that the Albanian woman was unique and antique in her style, but these morally valuable things are something rare in the modern age. The uniqueness of the Albanian nation is shown also in its customs. Qemali wrote that:

"Every young Albanian has a foster-brother (called "vëllam"), either of the same religion as himself or a different one, who is considered as an actual member of the family, and takes part in its joys and grieves and its vendettas. There is no instance of such a tie having been broken through animosity or treason; and in many parts these engagements are considered so sacred that the children of the two families do not intermarry. The ceremony of contracting this relationship of the "vëllam" differs in different parts of the country; but usually the two foster-brothers, after taking vows of fidelity before relatives and witnesses, cut each other slightly in the finger and then suck each other's blood".¹³¹

Qemali wanted to demonstrate how strong are the ties and traditional customs among the Albanians and above all how insignificant are the religious divisions. The community depicted by him is a socially uniform one, based on honor and fidelity, so in an almost pure natural status. The Albanian community thus described is similar, except to its social differentiation and labor division, to the agrarian society of Ernest Gellner. In these societies, which look like stable and unchanged, the ancestors and the old institutional forms are presented in an idealized version as moral norms and like an ideal imposed to each member of the community.¹³² But, it is if course a romanticized way of describing a patriarchal society, which is far too different from this fraternal communion as depicted by Qemali. We have explained in the above paragraphs the 'division of labor' in the Albanian society of the nineteenth with regard to the social position of the grand families.

In history, the image of the "Albanian nation" is that of valiant warriors, whose fidelity and patriotism are praised by foreign sovereigns and empires, which preferred to come to terms with the Albanians. Unlike in the other parts of the Balkans, which were easily conquered by the Ottoman armies, in Albania the Ottoman sultan came across stubborn and unexpected resistance. For the Ottomans it was more convenient to deal with these heroic

¹³⁰ S. Story (ed.), *The memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, pg.359.

¹³¹ Ibid, pg.359-360.

¹³² E. Gellner, *Plough, Sword and Book*, (London, 1988), pg.15.

warriors than to subdue them. Like the other Albanian leaders of the National Movement, Qemali used here the myth of Albanian military valor to explain the particular course of events in the Albanian history. Speaking on the myths of military valor George Schopflin says that:

“These myths give saliency to the special regard in which a collectivity holds itself because it has performed deeds of military valour. This valour can be attributed either to an aristocracy or to the people. In some instances, the myth is tied closely to the idea of insurrection or revolution: the group finds the truest expression of its essence by rising against intolerable tyranny. This is potentially a homogenizing myth in which taking part in the collective diminishes the role of the individual but enhances the group because of the very particular demands and qualities of group violence”.¹³³

In Qemali’s narrative, once the Albanians accepted the deal they remained fully loyal to their commitments. For him the attachment of the Albanians to the Empire can be explained only by the national interest. It had nothing to do with the fact that the majority of the Albanians were Moslem, as the Albanians do not make distinctions among themselves on account of their faith.

“Although in a general way the influence of religion on the minds of the people cannot be denied, nor the power that Islam had had in the assimilation of races, Albania is an exception to the rule, so general in the East, that religion constitutes nationality”.¹³⁴

The Albanians appreciated the advantages which the Empire provided in guaranteeing them against all possible aggression on the part of the others. This mutual solidarity continued as the Empire valued the services rendered by this virile people and established a mutual and sincere confidence which increased during the time when the politics of the Sublime Porte were inspired by the enlightened principles of the last true statesmen of the Empire. Here Qemali portrayed his individual fate as that of the whole nation. The most positive period of the Ottoman-Albanian symbiosis was precisely the period of the first Ottoman reformers of the Tanzimat period, for whom he nourished a great respect. On the other hand Albanians were always ready to break the contract if the partner was damaging their interests. It was so because the Albanians were not assimilated by the Ottoman and had precise national goals to follow. These passages wanted to literary represent somehow the political career of Ismail Qemali in the Empire. He faithfully served it until the very end and when he saw its unavoidable end he resolved to sustain the Albanian cause.

¹³³ G. Schopflin, “The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths”, pg.32.

¹³⁴ S. Story (ed.), *The memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, pg.362.

“Although the Albanians never gave up their passionate desire for independence, they have been the only Balkan people really attached to the Ottoman Empire, always ready to support it, always happy to help strengthen it and to profit by its strength. But whenever the Albanians have become aware that, instead of growing stronger, Turkey had weakened herself, and hurried to her ruin, they have risen in an effort of self-preservation with the unanimous cry, “Let her commit suicide if she wishes; we intend to survive”.¹³⁵

Here again we have the ‘positive’ example of the Ottoman Empire, to which the Albanian people are attached, and the ‘negative’ one of Turkey, on the brink of her ruin. The whole story of the Ottoman-Albanian relations is that of unfaithfulness versus fidelity in fulfilling the obligations of this ‘marriage of convenience’. Of course the intention of Qemali was put in evidence that the breach of the contract was to be blamed on the Turks as they didn’t keep their promises. The first of the series of events that showed to the Albanians that they could not face the future for their country with the same sense of security as it had happened in the past was the Russo-Turkish war of 1877 and the Congress of Berlin that followed. This course of events would have its culmination with the centralizing policies of Young Turks which marked also the end of the patience of the Albanians and their walking away from the Empire.

It is interesting to note here that the Albanian nation of Qemali has two main aspects: one is its ‘political life’ and the other its ‘ethnic substratum’. The first is an historical element as it goes from the time of independence before Ottoman rule, to that of Ottoman rule and then again towards the independence with the Young Turks coming to power in 1908. By contrast, the ‘Albanian ethnic substratum’ is something a-historical, it has no date and it has come unchanged to the present from immemorial times. In the appeal that Qemali wrote to his co-nationals in 1900 he said that “our dear nationality has been given to us 4000 years go”. The ‘Albanian ethnic substratum’ is based on the antiquity of the ethnies, on its moral qualities such as fidelity and patriotism, on specific forms of social organization, on language and customs, and on the priority of national over religious spirit.

The Albanian nation of Qemali is a collectivity without social divisions, but a fraternity based on blood links, antiquity and language and not on religion. With regard to the other people, the Albanian nation for him is part of the Eastern nations, but whose natural road goes toward Europe. This was so as he imagined it to be the road from stagnancy to progress. Apart from his belief in the superiority of European civilization, such a perception

¹³⁵ S. Story (ed.), *The memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, pg.362.

of the Albanian nation was conditioned also by political goals. In the early twentieth century Qemali deemed it important to make known the existence of an Albanian nation to the European Powers, with all its cultural particularities. In order to protect the rights of an Albanian nationality in the eventuality of the fall of the Ottoman Empire, it had to be presented as a solid and cohesive ethnic entity. On the other hand Qemali thought of Europe as a repository and dispenser of justice, whose role in resolving the Balkan national affairs was crucial. Therefore, while he was head of the Albanian Provisional Government, Qemali favored the appointment of a Christian and European sovereign to rule an independent Albania securing for her a national government that would defend its territorial integrity.

In the end, Qemali's vision of the Albanian nation had also his own specificity. In a speech delivered in Vlora on 21 October, 1913, as head of the Albanian Provisional Government, he proposed for the Albanian local administration a cantonal regime. His idea was that each Albanian province should be ruled according to its customs, and each inhabitant was to feel part of his region and then of a higher Albanian identity.¹³⁶ So, the Albanian identity here was perceived as a kind of sum of Albanian regional identities, more as a kind of overarching political identity. Maybe the influences of his long Ottoman career had left strong traces in his way of doing politics and for him the national identity was to be considered also from the point of view of good governance. The Ottoman influences of government were seen also in other Balkan countries in the first years of their political independent existence. The autonomous status of the country under an imperial and more general suzerainty was one of the features of the autonomous Serbia during the first half of the nineteenth century.¹³⁷ If before independence he spoke of the Albanian nation as one and indivisible, now at the position of Albanian Prime Minister he resembled the Ottoman reformer that was so sensitive to regional identities.

¹³⁶ *Qeveria e Përkohshme e Vlorës dhe veprimtaria saj* [The Provisional Government of Vlora and its activity], pg.238-239.

¹³⁷ Č. Antić, "The Formative Years of the Principality of Serbia (1804-56): Ottoman influences", in Antonis Anastasopoulos and Elias Kolovos, (eds), *Ottoman Rule and the Balkans, 1760-1850. Conflict, Transformation, Adaptation*, (Rethymno, 2007), pg. 243-248.

Chapter V

Faik Konitza, the cosmopolitan Albanian intellectual

Faik bej Konitza (1876-1942) was a figure of the Albanian National Movement, who has remained unstudied until recently. The communist regime labeled him a “reactionary” and no studies could be undertaken on him. He died in Washington in 1942 after serving King Zog I as his ambassador to the USA for thirteen years from 1928 onwards until the Italian occupation of Albania in 1939. His body was returned to Albania in 1995. After the end of isolationism and the fall of the communist regime in 1990, the road was opened for thousands of Albanians to migrate in search of a better life abroad, and for Konitza to be brought back home once and for all. His simple tomb in the park of the capital Tirana has thus fulfilled his life’s last desire “to be interred in the fatherland’s soil” after more than half a century.

Faik Konitza was born in March 15, 1876, in Konitza. The town was then situated in one of the Balkan provinces of the Ottoman Empire, the vilayet of Janina. It became part of Greece after the Balkan War of 1912, and remains part of present day Greece. His parents were both from important Moslem families, with many holding important positions in the Ottoman administration. Konitza family was very much respected in his native town both by Moslems and Christians.¹ In his early childhood he was taught Arabic by private tutors. At the age of nine, he studied for one year at a Jesuit school in Shkodër [North Albania], living with his sister, whose husband was an officer in the Ottoman army in the town. He then returned to his native town, where he attended a local Greek school (1885-1886). The following year he became a student at the Imperial Lyceum in Istanbul, one of the best secondary institutions in the Empire studying under French instructors.

In 1890, at the age of fourteen, he was sent to France to pursue his higher education. This was an unusual course as most well-to-do Albanian Moslem families sent their children

¹ N. Jorgaqi (ed.), *Faik Konitza –Vepra* [Faik Konica-Works], vol.1, (Tiranë, 2001), pg. 55.

to Istanbul, the capital of the Empire, where the possibilities for a career in the state administration were more numerous. For the next two years, the young Konitza attended the government College de Lissieux (Normandy, France), where he distinguished himself in classical letters. In 1892, he entered the Lycée de Carcassonne (South of France) to study letters and philosophy. Three years later, he successfully passed the examination for the degree of *Bachelier ès Lettres-Philosophie* at the State University of Dijon. From Dijon, he went to Paris, where he lived for about two years, attending courses in Medieval French Literature, Latin and Greek in the College de France. His education was completed at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, when in 1912 he received his *Master of Arts Degree in Literature*.

In 1897, when he was twenty-one years old, Konitza began publishing in Brussels, a monthly review called *Albania*, written partly in Albanian and partly in French. That review continued until 1909 and has been considered one of the most important of its time in promoting Albanian language and culture. In particular, it published documents on Albanian history, local customs and literature by Albanian and foreign authors, and became a periodical that devoted much more attention than any other to linguistic issues. Its ultimate aim was to forge a literary national language.

After five years in Belgium, Konitza moved to London in 1902, where he continued the publication of his review. In the autumn of 1909, Konitza arrived in Boston, Massachusetts and took over the editorship of the Albanian weekly *Dielli* [The Sun], the newspaper of the local Albanian migrants. In 1912, together with Bishop Fan S. Noli, the founder of the Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (1908), and other leaders, he founded the most long-lasting Albanian patriotic organization, *Vatra* [The Hearth], which still exists today. The Pan-Albanian Federation of America *Vatra* played an important role in defending the independence and the territorial integrity of the newly created Albanian state in the late 1910s and early 1920s.

After the proclamation of independence on November 28, 1912, Konitza returned to Europe to plead the cause of Albania in various West European capitals, including London, where the Conference of Ambassadors decided in favor of the independence of Albania in July 1913. During the First World War, he lived partly in Vienna and then in Rome. He returned to the USA again in 1921 and till 1925 he edited “Dielli”, the newspaper of the “Vatra” Federation. From 1926-1939, Konitza became ambassador of King Zog I to Washington. Previously, he has been one of the harshest critics of the Albanian self proclaimed king Ahmed Zogu (1928-1939) but he changed his course arguing that “it was

senseless to continue to fight with him as it was not in the best interests of the country”. For Konitza, in the conditions of a new and yet fragile Albanian state, it was a primary task to reach an internal and enduring stability.²

1. The construction of the nation in the writings of Faik Konitza

In this chapter we analyse Konitza’s articulation of Albanian nation in his writings from late twentieth century until 1909, the last year of the publishing of his review and few years before the declaration of Albanian independence in 1912. We focus upon each of the elements that according to Faik Konitza composed the “Albanian nation”. In order to have as complete a picture as possible, this section will include an essay published in a French magazine and various articles by him that appeared in “Albania” review during the same period. This allows us to map a hierarchical ordering of Konitza’s priorities related to his conceptualizing of the “Albanian nation”.

1.1. The Albanian Language

Faik Konitza devoted great attention to the problems of the Albanian alphabet and the written language, or the “literary language” as he called it. Here we examine the meaning which Konitza lent to the Albanian language and the place he designated for it in the repository of national assets. This requires an examination of his opinion on the importance of national languages as a national characteristic.

Konitza published “Essai sur les langues naturelles et les langues artificielles” in 1909 in the French review “*Pan*”, through the intermediary of his friend, the French poet Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918).³ The essay was a reaction to the spread of the so-called

² Faik Konitza, *Albania: The Rock Garden of Southeastern Europe*, (Boston, 1957), pg. xxxiv.

³ This essay came out as a brochure written by Pyrrhus Bardyli, “Essai sur les langues naturelles et les langues artificielles”, Brussels, Kiessling, 1904. Pyrrhus Bardyli was the nickname of Faik Konitza. Apparently he borrowed the names of the Epirot king of antiquity Pirro and the Illyrian king Bardyli, indicating his passion for the history of the ancient times and his desire to see in the ancient people of the Balkans the predecessors of Albanians. He liked the idea of being hidden under nicknames and in this he was following the example of Henry Beyle, alias Stendhal, one of his dearest idols together with the French linguist Remy de Gourmont. As cited in the book of Luan Starova, *Faik Konitza dhe Guillaume Apollinaire, një miqësi europiane*, [Faik Konitza and Guillaume Apollinaire, an European friendship], (Tiranë, 2001), pg.20-21.

universal languages, such as “Esperanto”, “Blue language” and “Volapuk”, and was intended as a defense of national languages. For Konitza, the first were “the artificial languages”, while the second ones “the natural languages”.

Konitza presented his essay as a treatise on language philosophy, aiming to explain the inner rules governing natural languages. The essay is provided with footnotes, through which we can examine the literature which he used in completing his essay. Most of the books he used were works dealing with language philosophy, or pure linguistics. From philosophy, Konitza referred to the evolutionist school, including Herbert Spencer’s book “Philosophy of style”, in “Essays: Scientific, political and speculative”, London 1883, Edward Claude’s “Pioneers of Evolution”, London 1902, and lastly Alfred Russell Wallace “Contributions to the theory of natural selection”, London 1871. He referred also to John Locke “An essay concerning human understanding” (no date). From linguistics Konitza cited the French linguist Arsen Darmesteter “La vie des mots” (no date), Remy de Gourmont, “La culture des idées” (no date), Henry Sweet “The practical study of languages”, London 1899, Henry Estienne “Thesaurus Graecae Lingae”, Paris 1842, Thomas de Quincey “Oeuvres complètes” (no dates), George Borrow “English gypsy language”, London 1888. According to Luan Starova, Konitza held in high esteem Pierre Bayle’s (1647-1706) dictionary of 1697. One of his admired authors was the French linguist Remy de Gourmont, whom works like “Esthétique de la langue française” and “La culture des idées” were among Konitza’s highly praised oeuvres.

The essay has a brief introduction and is composed of three parts. In the introduction Konitza made a short presentation of artificial languages. The first part is a kind of inquiry into the structural make-up of artificial languages. He advanced his argument concerning their inner shortcomings, their inefficiency and, at the same time, their impossibility to become pan-human languages. The second part deals with the serious limits of artificial languages in becoming literary languages, as compared to the natural languages. The third part is a kind of conclusion, stressing the importance of natural languages, against the static and frozen artificial languages.

Konitza saw the natural languages as the mirror reflecting certain aspects of the people. The natural language was the reflection translated into sounds of the ‘national genius’ of a given people. Language was seen as ‘race’s spirit and people’s outward look’. Konitza argued that a particular nation had its own model of thinking and doing, which comes out through the language it uses.

Speaking about the influence of Romanticism and the development of nationalist movements in phase B, dominated by linguistic and cultural demands of the national movements of nineteenth century, Miroslav Hroch writes that:

“A new concept of the nation as a personalized body emerged, based on this very coexistence and interconnection, and this metaphor was soon transformed into a basic conception, whereby the ethnic group was internally defined as “us”. When seen as a personality, the nation could therefore naturally only use one literary language, just as it could only incorporate one common past into its “memory”. The life of this personality-nation and its dissimilarity and differentiation from other nations, logically depended on the successful spread of national languages; if that failed, the personality-nation would “die”.⁴

Konitza’s position should be placed also in the framework of the rise of ethnic nationalism in Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was a time when ethnic nationalism gained more momentum through the transformation of the concept of ‘race’ under the influence of social Darwinian evolutionism, and when ‘race’ and language were seen as two concepts closely linked to each other.⁵ According to Eric Hobsbawm:

“The links between racism and nationalism are obvious. “Race” and language were easily confused as in the case of “Aryans” and “Semites”, to the indignation of scrupulous scholars like Max Müller who pointed out that “race”, a genetic concept, could not be inferred from language, which was not inherited....However, what brought “race” and “nation” even closer was the practice of using both as virtual synonyms, generalizing equally wildly about “racial/national” character, as was then in fashion...Linguistic and ethnic nationalism thus reinforced each other”.⁶

Konitza asserted that natural languages were an indicator of the level of civilization of a people. Here he used the following observation: the more the people or “the race is civilized, the fewer exclamation marks its natural language possesses”. Obviously, the opposite was true: the languages of the less civilized people “had more exclamation marks”.⁷ This was so because Konitza thought the exclamation marks were closer to the language

⁴ M. Hroch, “The Social Interpretation of Linguistic Demands in European National Movements”, in H.G. Haupt/M. G. Müller/S. Woolf (eds.), *Regional and National Identities in Europe in the XIXth and XXth Centuries*”, (Florence, 1998), pg. 86.

⁵ E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780, programme, myth, reality*, (Cambridge University Press 2002), pg.108. See also R. G. Suny and M. D. Kennedy, *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation*, (The University of Michigan Press, 2001), pg.28.

⁶ E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780, programme, myth, reality*, pg.108-109. See also B. Anderson, *Imagined communities*, (Verso, London, 2003), pg. 67- 83; J. Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, (The University of Chicago Press, 1994), pg. 54-69.

⁷ Faik Konica, “Ese mbi gjuhët natyrore dhe gjuhët artificiale” [Essay on natural and artificial languages], in Luan Starova, *Faik Konica dhe Guillaume Apollinaire, një miqësi europiane*, [Faik Konitza and Guillaume Apollinaire, an European friendship], pg.116.

spoken by the human primates and were numerous among African idioms, which he described as “wild” or “the blacks”. By contrast, as he put it, for the northern European writers the exclamation marks were a somehow farcical souvenir. Konitza maintained they were incompatible with their “austere” and “introvert character” and, at the same time, with their “higher civilization scale”.

In Konitza’s view, natural languages had another important advantage, as they subscribed to the laws of evolution. They changed as nations changed and this happened in conformity with the “spirit of the race”.⁸ Konitza took the ‘awakening’ of the national languages as part of an evolutionary process in the history of humankind. They followed the same life cycle trajectory as “the personality-nation”:

“One of the most interesting phenomena of nowadays is of course the amazing awakening of a cluster of nations and languages deemed as swallowed once for all by their stronger neighbors. But, it is extremely strange to note the parallel, co-temporal and opposite tendency, to this individualistic movement, of socialism and universal languages. The first [awakening of national languages] is the diversity, irregularity, and most of all the exerting of this vital function which is the propensity to survive and prevail over others. The second is the uniformity and the wild mania of a panhuman erasing. Universal languages, born of the same fake needs and similar thrust as socialism, take little into account of the very complex and multifarious nature of human beings”.⁹

Probably, as a former young socialist, in his early years in Paris, as he recalled in his short autobiography, he knew of the appeal which “Esperanto” had among European leftist and syndicalist movements in the late nineteenth century, hoping to use it as a means “for a peaceful inter-comprehension among people”.¹⁰ In his essay, Konitza’s basic concern was the fear that artificial languages might impede the natural growth of national languages. Therefore, the artificial languages were taken as part of a strategy aiming to raze to the ground natural diversity as embodied in the development of nationalities and their natural languages. Konitza might have seen them as a threat to his intellectual mission as constructor of the Albanian literary language.

One year before starting the publication of his “Albania” review, in a letter sent to a friend, in March 1896, Konitza said that Albanians were never conceived as a nation by Europe, as they lacked 1) a literature of their own, 2) a clear program, “an idea”, as he put it, and finally 3) the way to reach it (nationhood). Konitza was worried as, apart from some

⁸ Ibid, pg.165.

⁹ F. Konica, “Ese mbi gjuhët natyrore dhe gjuhët artificiale” [Essay on natural and artificial languages], pg.175.

¹⁰ A. M. Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales. Europe XVIIIe-XX siècle*, pg. 80.

grammar text books, songs and tales, Albanians did not have a real literature, by which he meant “verses, novels, history, etc”. As a further indication of this poor state he added that “there is not even a long or short poem on Skënderbej”, the Albanian national hero. Then, he continued by explaining that the second element was the idea how to revive the old splendor of Albania, which “does not merely mean Albania of the Middle Age [the ‘Golden Age’ of Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbej], but also the Pellazgs”. He foresaw a bright future for this nation as he envisaged a huge political entity going from Greek Macedonia, Epirus and including even Sicily and Calabria in Italy. For Konitza, the Albanian element was prevailing there. There is a hand-made drawing in the letter of this ancient and very large entity under the name “Pellazgia”.¹¹

This idea was, probably, a short-lived and very romantic one, which had temporarily caught the mind of the twenty years old Konitza. In fact, here he combined the findings of the Western Albanologie on the Pellazgs, and the ideas of the Italo-Albanians on the old origin of their ‘nation’. Some Italo-Albanian authors of the early nineteenth century had expressed such grandiose theories considering Albanians as an old population inhabiting a very large territory extending from the Greece to Southern Italy. The Greek historian of Antiquity, Herodotus, was another reference to ancient authors writing on the Albanians’ origins that Konitza shared with the Italo-Albanians. Here, Konitza displayed influences of the theories of the Austrian consul Johann Georg von Hahn, who, in his already mentioned “Albanesische Studien” (1854) and through his ‘linguistic analysis’ imagined Albanians as heirs of ancient populations of the region, among which he ranked Epirotes, Macedonians, Illyrians, all stemming from an archaic population inhabiting the Southern parts of the Balkans and of the Italian peninsula. But, the above letter is an outline of the future directions and priorities of his review. They were the developing of an Albanian national literature and hailing the antiquity of the Albanian nation as a source of pride and a strong motive to lay future political claims for an independent political life. In short, it became a channel propagating the idea of a preliminary cultural development of Albanians in view of their future political independent life.

In the review “Albania”, which he started in 1897 and continued to issue up to 1909, he outlined his aims. In the forefront of the first number, and below the title “Albania”, was written “literature, linguistic, history and sociology”. The motto of the review, as written on

¹¹ Arkivi Qendror i Shtetit, [Albanian State Archives], Fond.13, File.13, pg.3. N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*”, op.cit, pg. 167.

the front page of the first issue, was “It defends the rights of the Albanian Nation”.¹² The program of the review may be summarized by this paragraph written by Konitza in the first page of the review:

“The aim of the magazine is to preserve and to help the Albanian nationality to grow. To exercise and embellish the language, as the language is the marker of the nationality. To improve the situation of the people, for the nationality is stronger, free and integral when people are not poor”.¹³

Then he announced that the content of his review would include poetry, folk songs, linguistics, history, science and news. The review had its historical column, where its editor published different studies on Albanian history by foreign authors and unpublished documents, found in archives or libraries, on Albanian history, archaeology, traditions and customs. Konitza was particularly supportive of Albanian popular literary production and thought of it as an indicator of the ‘artistic genius’ of the Albanian people. Unlike Pashko Vasa, Shemseddin Sami Frashëri and Qemali, Konitza had an interest in folklore and popular culture. In this he followed the example of the Italo-Albanians, who distinguished themselves, in the whole Albanian Diaspora of the nineteenth century, in the publishing and collecting of folklore.

While Konitza firstly appreciated the particular role played by the Italo-Albanians in literature, linguistics, and “rediscovering” the Albanian ancient culture, nevertheless he was more suspicious of their political activities and their efforts to take over the leadership of the Albanian National Movement. He attacked them, by the late nineteenth century on, for being tools in the hands of the Italian government and its policy towards the Albanian inhabited lands. For Konitza, they were more “Italian citizens” than “true Albanians” and they could continue to give their contribution in the cultural field, but they should not pretend to guide the Albanian National Movement. Konitza had already sided with Austro-Hungary, whose financial support made possible the survival of his “Albania”. Therefore, he could not work together with a part of the Albanian Diaspora which was close to Italian policy in the Balkans, in fierce rivalry with the Austrian interests. But, there was also another reason. The Catholic Italo-Albanians could not aspire to lead a National Movement, such as the Albanian one, in which there were involved Moslem and Orthodox Albanians.¹⁴

¹² *Albania*, nr.1 (Brussels, 1897), pg.1.

¹³ *Idem*, pg.1.

¹⁴ S. Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, pg.234.

His first article “The enemies of Albania”, Konitza explained the degrading situation with regard to their “national awareness” by the fact that “there are fewer literate Albanians than true words in the priest’s mouth”, that “the Albania’s enemies are the Albanians themselves, as they have shed their blood for others, thus selling themselves”, that “Albanians do not love freedom”, that “some do not speak Albanian and in this way they believe they are not Albanians”, and “some are circumcised and others baptized”.¹⁵

Konitza conceived of his review as a medium through which all Albanians could come together and talk “like civilized people who fight with their words for their ideals”. According to him, these ideals were “the love for truth and for Albania”.¹⁶ He described the actual stage of Albanians as “the life of the body” [only being physically alive], and called for “entering into the intellectual life or life of the mind”. The future should be different. They should cultivate themselves through learning. Some months later, in another article, Konitza stressed the need for union, as one of the preconditions for being perceived as a nation by others.¹⁷ The common thread of his writings was the importance given to learning in order to prosper and regenerate a community, which in the eyes of Konitza had lost the consciousness of being one and the same.

Konitza’s stance should be placed in its proper political context. In the conditions of an ever growing Balkan nationalism and an increasingly weak Ottoman Empire Konitza supported the idea of a “gradual cultural preparation of the Albanian people”, as a first priority, aiming at administrative autonomy within the Ottoman Empire. We have already said that the prevailing opinion among Albanian nationalist intellectuals was that in the conditions of a rising Balkan nationalism the best solution would be the administrative autonomy inside the Empire. In the meantime, Albanians had to make all efforts to cultivate the sense of nationality, as otherwise “in a quarter of century we will pass, like miserable slaves, from the Sultan’s hands to Slavs’, Greeks’ and Italians’ ones”.¹⁸ The option for Konitza was to be prepared as an already distinct and compact national community to face the future crumbling of the Ottoman Empire”. And this national community would be forged through cultural development, and, most of all, by the opening of Albanian schools in the Albanian lands.

¹⁵ *Albania*, nr.1, (Brussels, 1897), pg.1-2.

¹⁶ Faik Konitza, “What is freedom”, in *Albania*, nr.2, (Brussels, 1897), pg.32.

¹⁷ *Albania*, nr.8, Brussels 1897, pg.121.

¹⁸ N. Jorgaqi (ed.), *Faik Konitza-Veptra*, vol.4, pg.8. Letter sent by Faik Konitza from Paris on April 18th 1896 to an Albanian friend of him (no name).

In the chapter on Vasa, we have mentioned that the Ottoman state did not officially recognize Albanian as a teaching language for Moslem Albanians, firstly because there was no such written language, and then, due to the traditionalist conception about classifying the populations along religious lines, the Sublime Porte allowed the Moslems to study in Ottoman-Turkish, and the Orthodox in Greek. At a later date, as we have already explained, when the Albanian nationalist intellectuals started to formulate linguistic ‘national’ demands, asking for the Albanian to be used also in the schools, Istanbul tried firstly to use this question for its own ends, and in specific periods of time, it tried to prevent the growth of nationalist feelings among the Albanian Moslems. It became a more acute question when the Albanian alphabet with Latin letters was looming as a possible option, and the Ottoman government would not permit its use among its Moslem subjects. In its turn, the Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul opposed the efforts of Albanian activists to introduce the Albanian language in the schools for the Orthodox, as it could menace its influence over the Albanian Orthodox community. As a result, the teaching language for the Moslems remained Ottoman-Turkish, while the Orthodox used Greek.

To create Albanian ‘national’ unity and to protect the Albanian inhabited lands from being partitioned by the newly founded Balkan states, Konitza considered the assistance from Austro-Hungary to be of vital importance. We have already mentioned the Austrian interests in promoting the Albanian nationalist movement as a barrier to the Slav advancement in the Balkans. In his article entitled “Without support Albania is lost”, Konitza wrote:

“The affairs of the Orient may last yet, and who knows for how long. But, one thing is clear; the affairs of the Orient, like all the others, will end one day. Then, what will happen with Albania? The Albanians will ask this question, the Albanians’ friends will ask...Albania needs to strive to have the support of a big and healthy state, which does not have bad intentions, but instead to open ways for a sufficient autonomy and for the progress of the nation,- FOR SALVATION”.¹⁹

Konitza thought one of the best ways to guarantee the cultural development of Albanians was to forge a literary language. Here his role proved to be really important. His intentions were clearly stated in another letter, dated 18 August 1897, sent from Brussels to Theodor A. Ippen, the Austro-Hungarian consul in Shkodër [Northern Albania]. Having in mind the Austrian policy of supporting the preservation of Ottoman rule in the Balkans and not favoring any radical and violent change of the *status quo*, Konitza tried to present his involvement as merely cultural, and described in this way the target of his review:

¹⁹ *Albania*, nr.2, (Brussels, 1897), pg.1.

“From a literary point of view our effort has a limited goal: to inspire in the majority of Albanians the desire to lean towards the unification of their language, in fusing in a rational way the dialectal differences in Albania.”²⁰

As we have already said, for the Albanian nationalist intellectuals, the problem of the Albanian language encompassed two main issues, that of a common alphabet and that of the creation of an Albanian standardized literary language. What Konitza wanted to achieve with his review was to use his own alphabet, which, as we will see below, was close to a Latin one produced by the Catholic clergy of Shkodër, and make it the basis for the unification of the others.²¹ It was intended to help the two Albanian major written dialects, the Northern Geg and the Southern Tosk, to fuse into each other and then to give birth to a common Albanian literary language.²² How did Konitza perceive the Albanian language at that time, and how did he justify his undertaking?

Konitza frequently expressed in his writings the idea that the Albanian language was an old, but not a cultivated language. This language, as it was inherited from Albanians’ ancestors, was archaic and lacking a lot of words expressing ideas.²³ He thought that the Albanian was more a “folklore and wedding language” and remained at the status of the spoken vernacular.²⁴ It was poor in philosophical and general terms, which made “it difficult to express with the appropriate clarity for major topics”. Konitza admitted his own difficulties in writing in Albanian, when he wanted to deal with philosophy or sciences in general, or to express abstract thoughts, and, due to that, he preferred to write in French.²⁵ One of the methods he used to make more visible this deplorable predicament was to confront the Albanians with the progress made by other people in the region. The latter were far ahead. They had a literary language with which they wrote books and “make possible the communication between people not born in the same place”. Here he referred to the Greeks.²⁶

“Only the Albanians do not have such a language and therefore they have remained divided amongst themselves. It is important to create a literary language as a means for unification”.²⁷

²⁰ N. Jorgaqi, *Faik Konica-Veptra*, vol.4, pg.20.

²¹ S. Skëndi, “The History of the Albanian Alphabet: A Case of Complex Cultural and Political Development”, in S. Skëndi, *Balkan Cultural Studies*, pg.220.

²² Janet Byron, “Faik Konica dhe gjuha letrare shqipe” [Faik Konitza and the Albanian Literary Language], in N. Jorgaqi, *Faik Konica- Veptra*, vol.5, pg. 297-300.

²³ *Albania*, nr.7, (Brussels, 1897), pg.111; *Albania*, nr.6, (London, 1906), pg.119.

²⁴ *Albania*, nr.11, (Brussels, 1898), pg.201.

²⁵ N. Jorgaqi (ed), *Faik Konica-Veptra*, vol.4, pg.5.

²⁶ *Albania*, nr.1, (Brussels, 1897), pg.4.

²⁷ *Ibid*, pg.5.

Consequently, the literary language was deemed to be a tool for uniting Albanians. For Konitza, the problem of the creation of the Albanian literary language pertained more to the political and national order [the unification of Albanians], rather than to the philological one [linguistic elaborations].

1.2. The Albanian alphabet

With regard to the writing of an Albanian literary language, Konitza's favored the Latin alphabet. This would emphasize the European identity of the Albanian people and it would stress also their autochthony, as one of the oldest in the continent. Moreover, the Latin letters were also more practical and easier to be used for printing. Konitza also thought that the Latin alphabet, used in his review, was the continuation of an alphabet created by some Albanian Catholic priests in seventeenth century, as mentioned in the chapter on Sami, like Pjetër Budi (1621), Frano Bardhi (1635), who published their religious works in the vernacular. Konitza's belief was that every field of human activity, such as sciences, politics, and civilization as a whole, were based on "la loi de continuité". Thus, in the matter of alphabet, he saw himself drawing on a more ancient experience.²⁸

As already noted, the Albanian patriotic society of Istanbul the "Istanbul Society", led by the Frashëri brothers, had devised a particular alphabet for writing the Albanian language. The "Istanbul" alphabet was a mixture of Latin, Greek, Cyrillic and specific letters [diacritic and modified Latin and Cyrillic]. Other patriotic associations among the Catholics in the north, mainly in the town of Shkodër, had created their own alphabets based upon Latin letters. Both "Bashkimi"[Union] and "Agimi"[Dawn] alphabets, founded in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were among the first promoters of a debate to device a single alphabet for the Albanian written language that could unite the Albanians. As indicated above the problem of the Albanian alphabet stemmed from the rivalry between Vienna and Rome, each supporting their own groups amongst the Albanian activists. The Austrians backed "Agimi" [Dawn] association, which offered better chances for a union with the Istanbul based Albanian Diaspora than the "Bashkimi" [Union] with its Italian leanings.

²⁸ *Albania*, nr.6, (London, 1906), pg.120-121.

The victory of the Young Turks revolution in July 1908, and the proclamation of the Constitution, encouraged Albanian patriots to press for the introduction of the Albanian written language in the schools in the Albanian lands. Though the constitutional rights allowed to Albanian nationalist intellectuals to gather to debate the question of the unification of the Albanian alphabets, the Albanian written language would find its standardized alphabet only much later, when in 1972 the communist regime officially endorsed an alphabet, based mainly on the Southern Tosk dialect.

Even if Konitza's magazine followed the Austrian policy priorities regarding the Albanian patriotic activities, in the matter of the alphabet he adopted a more independent stance, although both were for a Latin alphabet for the written Albanian. He argued his choice by asserting that:

“Given that our predecessors did not leave to us [a written language] it is our task to determine how to write the language. In solving this literary and national question every Albanian should never forget three points: 1) our aim is to create letters that make possible the printing of books for which we are so much in need, 2) as [our] country is located in Europe, [our] people are linked to other European peoples and we are obliged to use Latin letters as in all Europe, 3) as a poor people, surrounded by dangers and backwardness, we need letters that can be found everywhere, that are cheap and easily printed.”²⁹

Konitza criticized Sami's alphabet as, according to his view, with its mixed and “strange” characters, difficult to be found in the printing market, it poorly matched the needs of Albanians. For him, the Istanbul alphabet would make more complicated and more difficult the printing of Albanian books in Europe. On the other hand, as a more radical westernizer, Konitza was for a wholly Latin alphabet, without Greek and Cyrillic letters. A wholly Latin alphabet would give a more “European look” to the Albanian alphabet.³⁰ Konitza thought that the Latin alphabet would create a better image for Albanians, as a largely Moslem people emerging from the Ottoman Empire, but aspiring to become a member of the European family of nations. He saw the Latin alphabet as a more convenient tool for the “reawakening of the people”, in its advance towards “civilization and progress”.³¹ By contrast, for Konitza the “Istanbul” alphabet had an “Asiatic” look and he hinted at the

²⁹ *Albania*, nr.12, (London, 1904), pg.223.

³⁰ *Albania*, nr.1, (London, 1902), pg.19-22. In another article published in *Albania*, the Albanian poet Asdreni (Aleks Stavre Drenova), wrote that “Bashkimi” Latin alphabet of the Catholic clergy of Shkodër was not only more practical, “but it resembles more to the West rather than to the East, both in its appearance and in its content”. *Albania*, nr.4, (London, 1905), pg.79.

³¹ *Albania*, nr.6, (London, 1906), pg. 120.

“oriental” influences of its authors, namely Sami and his colleagues.³² This was a long debate among Albanian intellectuals. In late 1860s and 1870s, the Catholic Pashko Vasa had opted for an Albanian alphabet fully based upon Latin letters, as they would help to print books in Europe and all the more it would witness to the European origin of the Albanian ‘nation’. Others, such as the Orthodox Jani Vreto and Konstantin Kristoforidhi, defending the principle of one letter for one sound, had suggested the borrowing of special letters from other alphabets, such as the Greek one, for special sounds in Albanian language.³³

These dissimilar positions reflected simultaneously different cultural and political settings in which the question of the Albanian alphabet evolved, but also the distinction between two generations of Albanian patriots acting in different periods of the Albanian National Movement. Thus, it accounts for the generational competition in claiming the lead of the national movement and for dissent among Albanian intellectuals with regard to particular questions of “national” importance, one of them being the problem of the writing of the Albanian language.

The “Istanbul” alphabet was created in the aftermath of the Congress of Berlin (1878), when the Albanian inhabited lands were threatened with partition between the Balkan neighboring countries. A distinct alphabet would mean also a distinct Albanian “nation” in the multi-ethnic setting of the Ottoman Empire, which could not be confused either with Greeks, or with Slavs. The “Society for the Printing of Albanian Letters” (1879), headed by Sami, created a distinct Albanian alphabet to hasten the publications in the Albanian language, which up to that time had not its own and unique alphabet. A unique alphabet for all Albanians, despite their religious divisions, was deemed by Albanian patriots of that time as a means to promote the education of Albanians and cultivating a national consciousness among them in confronting the danger to see lands coming from the Slavs and the Greeks. As Frances Trix has summarized it:

“The Greek alphabet was closely associated with Greek nationalists, who in 1879 laid claim to Albanian lands known to them as northern Epirus, and the Arabic alphabet was closely associated with Islam and Ottoman policy that tried to keep Muslim and Christian Albanians separate, and thereby vulnerable to their neighbours. Only the Latin alphabet was not associated with any immediate danger to Albanian lands.”³⁴

³² *Albania*, nr.1, (London, 1902), pg.21.

³³ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg. 227.

³⁴ F. Trix, “The Stamboul alphabet of Shemseddin Sami bey: Precursor to Turkish Script reform”, in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 31 (1999), pg.259. For a more detailed history of the question of the Albanian alphabet see also *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar* [History of the Albanian People], pg. 298-302; pg. 391-396.

Sami and the “Istanbul” Society took the first step towards the standardization of the Albanian language, as their alphabet, though using mixed letters, was used by the end of nineteenth and early twentieth century to print school books, patriotic booklets and newspapers. Its mixture reflected the diverse cultural influences of its authors and the political background into which it came into being. Sami and his elder brother Naim had studied in the famous Greek gymnasium “Zosimea” in Janina. The influence of Greek culture and the mastering of the Greek language by the Frashëri brothers no doubt played its own role in their favoring some Greek characters for the Albanian alphabet. On the other hand, the “Istanbul Society” included in its ranks Moslems, but also Catholics and Orthodox. Consequently, the “Istanbul” alphabet might be seen as a kind of compromise between different cultural influences amongst Albanian intellectuals, which reflected various cultural environments in the Albanian inhabited lands proper. One of the contributors of Konitza’s “Albania” offered a revealing comparison between the “Istanbul” alphabet and the later alphabet of the “Bashkimi” society of Shkodër:

“[For the Istanbul alphabet] it was decided a mixture of characters, as it was well known that Albanians were divided among some groups, some were learning Greek, some Slavic and others the Western languages- as it is known Turkish was the state language. Taking into account these reasons, [the Istanbul based intellectuals] were obliged to start with an alphabet including all these characters [mixed alphabet with Greek and Cyrillic letters] to please all Albanians”.³⁵

For the author, the importance of Sami’s alphabet was distinguished by the fact that his Society acted with the permission of the Ottoman government as, in early 1880s, the Albanian patriots nourished some hopes that the Sublime Porte would grant permission to open Albanian schools, as a measure aiming at a temporary promotion of Albanian nationalism to counter Slav and Greek influences in the region. We have already said that when this hope was dashed in the critical years of the Eastern Crisis (1878-1881) the Sublime Porte lost interest in furthering Albanian nationalism and took the wind out of its sails, it became important to print newspapers and books in Europe, where it was difficult to find the mixed letters of the “Istanbul” alphabet.³⁶

The rift between Konitza and the Frashëri brothers on the question of Albanian alphabet was a sign of new developments taking place in the Albanian national movement at

³⁵ *Albania*, nr.4, (London, 1905), pg. 78. This article with the title “The alphabet question” was written by Asdreni (Aleks Stavre Drenova).

³⁶ *Ibid*, pg.80.

the end of nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Its geography was changing and Istanbul was no more the most powerful patriotic centre. Other centers emerged, either collaborating with, or competing with it, such as Bucharest, Sofia, Brussels, London, and the Albanian Diaspora in the US. Another reason made possible, in early twentieth century, the shift of the Albanian patriotic activities from Istanbul towards the western part of the Balkans. It was mainly due to the “Macedonian” question and the ensuing clashes between Balkan Slav, Greek and Albanian nationalisms to enlarge their area of dominance in the Balkans.

A new phenomenon was also the emergence of patriotic circles operating in the Albanian lands proper. The most important of these were the Catholic clerics of north Albania, notably in the town of Shkodër, who enjoyed Austrian support in the framework of its *Kultusprotektorat* over the Catholics in the Ottoman Empire. Konitza’s “Albania” largely benefited from the Austrian subventions. It was not by chance that Konitza, a southern Moslem intellectual, in relation to the question of alphabet, but also in publishing his magazine, collaborated closely with the northern Catholic clergy and writers, a major section of which was sustained by Vienna. Many pages of his “Albania” was written in the northern Albanian dialect, while Konitza himself concomitantly used both dialects, the Northern Geg and the Southern Tosk one, just to give the impression of a magazine addressing the largest possible Albanian audience, preaching union among Albanians and not favoring any particular region or dialect.

Konitza’s endeavor to create a unique alphabet for Albanian, together with his efforts to establish an Albanian standardized literary language, were in line with Austrian policy, which encouraged the fostering of an Albanian “national consciousness” through schools and books using an Albanian language understandable by all Albanian speaking populations. The stimulation of pan-Albanian collaboration among intellectuals, from different religious and regional background, was a high priority of the Dual Monarchy with regard to its Albanian policy. Beyond political considerations, Konitza’s collaboration with the Albanian Catholic clergy, the last being culturally associated with European powers, such as Austro-Hungary and Italy, was somehow a ‘natural’ corollary, due to his long period of studying, living and working in Western Europe and his consequent ‘occidental’ outlook. He saw himself and his followers, as the most authentic representatives of the European aspirations of the Albanian “nation”.³⁷

³⁷ *Albania*, nr.2, (London, 1905), pg.48.

In one of his articles on the Latin alphabet, Konitza denied a “national” dimension to the “Istanbul alphabet”, as according to him, it was very limited in its use, but, all the more, he attacked also the monopoly of the Istanbul based Albanian intellectuals in “national” affairs.³⁸ Already in a memorandum in 1899 to the Austrian Foreign Ministry on the Albanian National Movement, Konitza had assigned a low patriotic profile for Sami, while briefly mentioning his Albanian grammar.³⁹ In their turn, Sami and Naim Frashëri were critical of Konitza’s activities in Brussels. In a letter sent in 1899 to a relative, who was an early collaborator of Konitza in his “Albania”, the Frashëri brothers expressed their displeasure and concern in seeing how the emerging young Faik was trying to consolidate his influence in Brussels and becoming a potential pole of attraction for young Albanian intellectual patriots. They paternally advised their relative to keep away from Konitza, as he was a “traitor” aiming at destroying the 25 years long patriotic work of the Istanbul society and, most of all, the alphabet they had created for writing the Albanian language.

In promoting their own alphabets, both sides tried to present their respective work as “truly national”, either in the extension of the area of usage, or in its content. Moreover, Sami and Naim were arguing that Istanbul should remain the main centre of Albanian patriotic activities, as according to them, important decisions were about to be taken by the Sublime Porte, with the support of the Great Powers, in granting autonomy for Albania and Macedonia.⁴⁰

1.3.The Albanian dialects

The overcoming of what the Albanian nationalist intellectuals perceived as the ‘divisive’ factors that impeded the union of the Albanian people was among the main goals of that time. In this respect the regional differences, as reflected in the dialects, were to be tackled through shaping an Albanian literary language. In one of his most frequently cited articles published in “Albania”, written in French with the title “Les dialectes albanais et la nécessité de leur fusion”, Konitza presented the linguistic situation in the Albanian inhabited lands as dominated by the existence of two main dialects, the Geg and the Tosk, and their

³⁸ *Albania*, nr.12, (London, 1904), pg. 223.

³⁹ F. Konica, “Memorandum on Albanian National Movement”, in N. Jorgaqi (ed), *Faik Konica-Veptra*, vol.3, pg.18-59.

⁴⁰ N. Jorgaqi (ed.) *Faik Konica-Veptra*, vol.5, pg. 72-79.

minor subdivisions. His thesis was that their difference, as everyday spoken languages, was based on phonetic nuances, but which could become more accentuated in the written forms. He warned that the written forms could become ever more divergent from each other as there were no Albanian schools, which could smooth out these distinctions through the propagating of a standardized written language. All the more, phonetic nuances were taken to impart character differences too, implying distinct “identities”:

“The visionary Albanians in this field are aware of the risk deriving from the coexistence of these two dialects, as well as for the related difficulties to fuse them together. The question here is not to erase Tosk or Geg, nor to convince Albanians to improve their everyday spoken language, Tosk or Geg, in view of the unification of the dialects. Such a thing would be impossible and not convenient either. For changing the language of people would amount to changing its character and spoil its personality. The Tosk dialect, which is vivid, light and in an ever going evolution, reflects very well the Tosk character, with its constrained austerity, humorousness, bent on intrigues and skillfulness. On the contrary, the Geg dialect, massive, immobile, without ambiguous expressions, shows very well the Geg character which is serious, sincere, more often without bad intentions and resilient to novelties. The question is to create beyond the parallel existence of the two dialects, a written literary language that is the same for all Albania”.⁴¹

Therefore, the solution for Konitza seemed to be the preservation of both dialects, as it would encourage linguistic richness, while not destroying the character of the people speaking them. Konitza thought that it would be better to temporarily use both dialects for different purposes. The dialect of the ‘cunning’, more urban and ‘pragmatic’ people of the south, was more “suitable for prose”. While the dialect of the ‘epic’, ‘unruly’ and ‘stubborn’ people of the North, was deemed by Konitza to be more suited for poetry. The technique here was to ‘tame’ the regional characters, to tune them towards a wider ‘national’ one, and not to entirely repress them. The final aim was to make both dialects a kind of a common written language for all Albanians. Here it should be added the difference between Konitza and Vasa and Sami in the way they perceive the regional difference between northern Gegs and southern Tosks. Vasa and Sami wanted to present a unitary Albanian ‘nation’ and mentioned these differences as not relevant. Konitza’s work had another major priority. He wanted to construct a literary language and was somehow obliged to highlight the barriers to that undertaking, i.e. the overcoming of the dialects, and the more so, as they were deeply entrenched cultural markers in the populations of two major Albanian geo-cultural spaces, the

⁴¹ *Albania*, nr.10, (Brussels, 1898), pg.173.

Northern Gegeria and the Southern Toskeria. Konitza's 'nation' was more fragmented along regional lines.

According to Konitza, the problem would require a unique grammar, drawn up by foreign scholars of Albanian studies and learned Albanians, which would bring together dialect elements in a rational way. This would be the way to advance towards creating a common language for all Albanians. Konitza referred here to the Greek "Koine Glossa".⁴² The problem of creating a literary language out of spoken dialects was not a particular Albanian phenomenon.⁴³ But, unlike most Balkan people, who based their latter 'national' idiom on elaborations of earlier, older version of languages - ancient Greek for the Greeks, the old ecclesiastical Slavonic language for the Serbs - the Albanian intellectual had to carve a national language out of the spoken dialects, the northern and the southern. The Albanian case is closer to the Bulgarian 'national' language, which was created from the melting of the Eastern and Western dialects.⁴⁴

Some years later, Konitza wrote another article entitled "For the foundation of a Literary Language"⁴⁵ which further elaborated his ideas about Albanian linguistic issues. In his view, the "Albania" review had acted as a link bringing together two separate populations, the Gëgs and the Tosks, compared to two un-bridged peninsulas. In the words of its editor-in-chief, "Albania" had paved the way for the foundation of that language without which "our people can never be considered as a true nation".⁴⁶

"So far, the Albanians didn't know a common life, but only that of the village or town; therefore everybody was happy with the dialect of the area where he lived. Today Albanians have entered a new wider life, the national life. This huge widening in their life obliges us to widen also our language. This new body, the Nation, needs a new organ. How can an Albanian from Peja [present day Kosovo] feel he is from the same nation as he from Filat [present day Greece]? Everybody who is able to understand will see the most important need for the moment is to have a common language, a literary language".⁴⁷

Faik Konitza thought of the "national life" as a new, more qualitative and more inclusive life experience compared to the regional one. It required also a fundamental

⁴² Ibid, pg.174.

⁴³ M. Todorova, "Language as a cultural Unifier in a Multilingual Setting: The Bulgarian Case During the Nineteenth Century", in *East European Politics and Societies*, vol.4, no.3, (1990), pg.442.

⁴⁴ S. Skëndi "The emergence of the Modern Balkan Literary Languages- A comparative approach", in S. Skëndi, *Balkan Cultural Studies*, pg. 3-22.

⁴⁵ *Albania*, nr.6, (London, 1905), pg.123-125.

⁴⁶ Ibid, pg.123.

⁴⁷ Ibid, pg.123.

prerequisite, which was “a national language”, or an Albanian literary language. He thought that dialects reflected the regional level of the community’s life, but ‘nation’ as a new ‘body’ needed new ‘organs’ through which to cultivate among Albanians the sense of belonging to the same community.

As noted above, the idea of the nation as a collective body with a unique physiognomy and possessing an essential ‘character’ became widespread in the nineteenth century. Such a concept was further supported by the influence of the new deterministic theories of racial and cultural evolution that perceived the nation in biological terms as a living organism.⁴⁸ In this sense the process by which individuals or groups embrace the concept of the nation as the most “meaningful context for self-definition necessarily involved temporarily marginalizing other categories that could also provide a sense of identity”.⁴⁹ “Englishness”, “Frenchness”, or “Greekness” were all identity-building processes closely “bound up with the celebration of local and regional identities”, and the process of their national acculturation.⁵⁰

In the Albanian case, the dialects and their respective regional allegiances are treated as composing elements of an overarching Albanian ‘national identity’. When Konitza wrote of an Albanian literary language, as one of the main features of the national identity, he conceived the latter as an overarching one. The growth of a literary language and the fostering of national identity went in parallel. In Konitza’s texts, they were constructed upon the fusion of the two main regional identities reflected into the respective dialects, the Northern Geg and the Southern Tosk. The national identity as a new self-identification form was on its way to construction and it should be built upon by educated Albanians.

In a way, Faik Konitza was anticipating the cultural nationalizing processes of the future Albanian nation-state. He knew the importance of the national state in finally resolving the issue of a national literary language.⁵¹ He was aware of the fact that a transitory period of time was needed to reach that stage. This transitory period meant bringing the two main dialectic forms of the written Albanian into the closest possible contact without extinguishing them.⁵²

⁴⁸ R. Shannan Peckham, “Internal Colonialism, nation and region in nineteenth-century Greece”, in Maria Todorova, (ed.), *Balkan Identities, Nation and Memory*, (London, 2004), pg.43-44.

⁴⁹ M. Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830-1864*, (Chicago, 1995), as cited by R. Shannan Peckham in “Internal Colonialism, nation and region in nineteenth century Greece”, pg.44.

⁵⁰ R. Shannan Peckham, “Internal Colonialism, nation and region in nineteenth-century Greece”, pg. 44-45.

⁵¹ *Albania*, nr.7, (Brussels, 1897), pg.113.

⁵² *Albania*, nr.1, (Brussels, 1897), pg.5.

The ideal conditions for Konitza would be to let to the evolutionary process to shape and mould the common literary language for all Albanians. He explained his idea drawing a parallel with other countries. For him, in other countries, and here he hinted at Western Europe, the literary language had been sanctioned due to the imposing of the dialect spoken either in the kings' courts, or as a result of the literary activities of major writers, who made possible through their work the prevailing of their own dialect. According to his analysis, Albanians lacked many things in this respect. The first one, no royal court existed. Albanians were living among hostile neighbors, which constituted a real danger for the future of Albanian nationality.⁵³ Therefore, there was no time to lose. Moreover, Albanians were not civilized enough to tackle sophisticated problems such as the creation of an Albanian literary language. Albanians could not wait for their language to be created with time, or through established state institutions. With a sense of urgency, he called upon Albanian patriots to handle this question. He suggested for both dialects to come closer around the Elbasan dialect, an Albanian town centered in the middle of present day Albania and, therefore, on the very spatial border dividing the two main dialects and, for that reason, containing elements from both.

It was Konitza's conviction that the primary and the most entrenched loyalties of the Albanians were regional ones. However, the dialectal-regional loyalties in his text sounded like different branches of a common tree. But, if left uncultivated, their difference could only deepen further. The most common perception, which we will examine in the next section, was that Northern Moslem Gëgs were more backward compared to their more advanced 'co-national' Southern Tosks. This was because they were deemed to be a refractory mountainous population, which needed to be brought closer to the Southern brethren through schooling and national propaganda.⁵⁴ The matter of the Albanian literary language bore some similarities to what Maria Todorova has written about the language problem in Bulgaria of nineteenth century, and what she calls "the existence of multi-graphia and multi-lingualism".

"The Bulgarian press of the 1850s and 1860s is extremely interesting on account of, among other matters, the lively discussion on how dialectal differences could and should be overcome. Roughly speaking, two major viewpoints emerged: one, for the creation of the Bulgarian literary language on a poly-dialectal basis, i.e., the formation of a common language which would include some characteristics of all possible dialects; and

⁵³ *Albania*, nr.6, (London, 1905), pg.124.

⁵⁴ *Albania*, nr.4, (Brussels, 1901), pg.15.

the second, shared by the greater number of contemporary literary figures, for the creation of the Bulgarian literary language on a mono-dialectal basis”.⁵⁵

It resembles also the tension between regional allegiances and nation-building policies in Greece during the first half of nineteenth century.

“Regions were characterized by distinct languages, a situation that was satirized by the play-writer Dimitrio Vyzandios in his play *Babel, or the Regional Corruption of the Greek Language* (1836) where different characters, speaking mutually incomprehensible dialects, meet up with comic consequences in a tavern in Napflion”.⁵⁶

The dichotomy dialect- national literary language in Konitza’s texts accounts for the inherent conflict within nationalist ideologies between authenticity and modernization. The dialect was held to be an authentic and a more direct set of values for the inhabitants. Through the agency of press, text books, linguistic standardizing intervention, the dialects should be gradually transformed to fit the modernized version of the literary language. This new kind of language entails the acquiring of a new self-identification, the national one.

Konitza delineated different profiles of the Albanian ‘nation’. It was not always homogenous and unitary. We will see that depending on the context he used different languages to express his own vision of the Albanian ‘nation’. His stress on language was not always constant either. On the other hand, in an article of his, dated February 1898, with the title “The Albanian Nation”, through an invented dialogue between an Albanian and a foreigner, he ridiculed the way his compatriot identified himself:

“Foreigner- What are you?
 Albanian- I am Moslem (or Christian, depending on the case).
 F- I am not asking what is your religion, but please be kind enough and tell me what are you?
 A- You do not understand; I just told you I am Moslem.
 F- I am afraid you understand nothing; I am asking what nation are you from. Do you know what nation is about?
 A- I do not know it so well.
 F- Nation is a gathering of people, who have one origin, one language and one way of living. Now, tell me what are you?
 A- I am Turk.
 F- Ok, do you know Turkish?
 A- I don’t know, may be that little that I learnt at school.
 F- And your customs are the same as Anatolians?
 A- Not at all.....
 F- So, you are not a Turk then, may be you are Greek or Latin. Do you know those languages?
 A- My language is neither Greek, nor Latin, the language taught by my mother, the language I have heard at home is Albanian.

⁵⁵ M. Todorova, “Language as a cultural Unifier in a Multilingual Setting: The Bulgarian Case During the Nineteenth Century”, in *East European Politics and Societies*, vol.4, nr.3, (1990), pg.442.

⁵⁶ R. Shannan Peckham, “Internal Colonialism, nation and region in nineteenth-century Greece”, in M. Todorova, (ed.) *Balkan Identities, Nation and Memory*, (London, 2004), pg. 49.

F- Albanian is an old and nice language. So, you are Albanian.

A- I am Albanian, but also Turk.

F- One cannot have both things at once, if you are Albanian you are nothing else. May be you are Moslem Albanian, but you are not a Turk.

A- I tell you I am Turk.

F- Religion is religion, nation is nation. As you speak Albanian and you live in Albania, you are not a Turk and nor a Greek, nothing else but an Albanian”...⁵⁷

The patriotic vision of the Albanian nationalist intellectuals on their nation wished for a single identity for the whole Albanian speaking populations, which should not allow differences, be they regional, dialectal or religious, or, if not possible to erase, at least turning them into second hand allegiances, the national one being the main locus of people’s attachment. Konitza perceived regionalisms, and the following fragmentation, as a barrier that could lessen the pace of a people to progress and to being considered civilized. By contrast, a single national identity, shaped through a common national language, was deemed as a more appropriate condition favoring such a course.

In the above paragraph, the nation and religion were clearly divided from each other. Besides regional and dialect cleavages, there were the religious ones which, from time to time, came to the fore in the pages of “Albania”. National identity versus religion was another way to construct the “Albanian nation”.

2. Religion

In some of his articles, Konitza used two levels to construct the “Albanian nation” in opposition to religion. The first was the historical and the second the actual one. The first one was related to presenting the nation as older than religion, as a set of values which was higher and nobler. It was a heritage bequeathed by ancient predecessors. At this point his stance was relatively identical with that of Vasa’s, Sami’s and Qemali’s. In Konitza’s view, but also in other articles of “Albania” written by various authors, religious allegiances were perceived as a more recent phenomenon, which have superseded the older ‘national’ ones. The following implications were that of a glorious past when Albanians were not divided by religion, and in contrast a present, when Albanians have lost the feeling of a common community. This is how Konitza explained nation-religion dynamics among the Albanians:

⁵⁷ *Albania*, nr.10, (Brussels, 1898), pg.181.

“Nation means all people who live in the same land, speak the same language and have the same origin. We Albanians, we live in the same land, speak Albanian and have the same origin, and therefore we are one nation, we are the Albanian nation. Some nations are Moslem, some are Christian, or some are both mixed Moslem and Christian. But all nations have been without religion two thousand years before. Today, the Albanian nation is Moslem, Catholic, Orthodox and Bektashi, mixed altogether... The Ottomans came to Albania in the XV century, and after thirty years of fighting, the Albanian nation was constrained to become Moslem; some fifty years later some Albanians returned to the old Christian religion, while the rest remained Moslem, either because they found it better or because it served them more. Albanians have always been brave and strong but, after being divided by religions, they have lost their strength”.⁵⁸

As it stands in the text, religion has an ambiguous dimension in relation to the national one. It came later and changed over time, while the Albanian nation remained one and the same through the centuries. This a-historic and essentialist perception of the Albanian nation served to highlight the past golden age as a contrast to the gloomy present. However, religion has exerted its ‘noxious’ long-term effects on the nation, and the latter has lost its former strength and, thus, obliged Konitza to urge his co-nationals to see each other as member of the same community, despite their religious fragmentation.

In this sense, Konitza, as the previous figures studied here, read the works of the Western albanologists and appropriated their theories. One of them was the myth of the religious indifference, or to put it differently ‘the non-religious Albanian spirit’. The ‘theory’ on the Albanians’ indifference towards religion matters included various imageries, such as those of “the syncretism of folk-religious practices, the tolerance (and doctrinal syncretism) of the Bektashi, the much rarer phenomenon of crypto-Christianity (both Catholic and Orthodoxy), the social system of the northern Albanian clansmen (for whom loyalty to their fis [tribe] took priority over any division of that fis into Catholic and Muslim branches), and the perfectly normal practice of Muslim men taking Christian wives without requiring their conversion to Islam”.⁵⁹ Other Western scholars of the nineteenth century had represented Albanians as a non-religious people, mostly stressing their superficial Islam, which was embraced by Albanians after the arrival of the Ottomans in their lands for pure ‘pragmatic’ reasons. The implication was that this people never considered religion as a first hand value, but, instead, cared much more about their ‘nationality’ and preserving their freedom. In other

⁵⁸ *Albania*, nr.9, (Brussels, 1898), pg.146.

⁵⁹ N. Malcolm, “Myth of Albanian National Identity: Some Key Elements, as Expressed in the Works of Albanian Writers in America in the Early Twentieth Century”, in S. Schwandner-Sievers, Bernd Fischer (eds), *Albanian Identities. Myth and History*, (London, 2002), pg.84.

words, it was a response to the external image of Albanians as a religiously divided people into Moslems, Orthodox and Catholics, to the fact that their Moslem majority was not identical to the fanatic Asiatic Moslem Turks and it was a people that deserved freedom, intended as their recognition as a ‘national’ entity on its own. The Albanians’ ‘faint’ Islamism was judged as a way to bring them closer to European people, viewed as ‘civilized’ and thus ‘tolerant’ in religious matter. But, most of all as not ‘real’ Moslems, as Moslems were equated with Asiatic and backward.

Sometimes, Konitza employed satire to ridicule religious practices and make them appear less important as compared to national origins. Here it is a paragraph from one of his articles, where he sarcastically described circumcising and baptizing practices respectively among Moslem and Christian Orthodox ones:

“Another cause [of religious division] is that some of the Albanians are circumcised and some are baptized. These two affairs are pretty ridiculous and if any reader does not know them, here it is in brief how they happen. When a child grows up and reaches seven or eight years of age, his father invites guests and they eat, drink and sing; then, playing the violin, a scoundrel approaches the helpless infant, who shrieks and squirms, and with a pair of scissors cuts off from him a slice of flesh, from a part of the body that I feel ashamed to name. There are Albanians who do not practice such business, but when a child is born, they bring him to a priest with a filthy beard, who grabs and dumps him stark naked into a washtub full of water. Do not take my opinion in the wrong way, please; I am not arguing against these things; be they good or evil, every person is free to believe and observe them. I shall only ask you a question, praying your honesty: can you understand the way a man’s origin can turn, for when he was a child they severed from him a bit of flesh, or put him inside a washtub? I do not grasp it”.⁶⁰

Apart from his versatile and satirical style, the new thing in Konitza’s texts is the description he provided on Albanians. It was not an idyllic picture, Albanians living all together, Moslems and Christians alike. At this point he departed from the Romanticized version of the story told by Vasa, Qemali and to some extent Sami. It is true that they, too, drew a demarcation line between the glorious past and the miserable present, but for the religious divisions among Albanians Vasa and Sami usually blamed the foreigners. Traces of such an approach are present also in some of Konitza’s texts, but it is not the prevailing position. Konitza went deeper into scrutinizing the Albanians’ domestic affairs. His texts are more articulated and more critical towards his countrymen. His own version of the Albanian went more down to ‘the reality’. For him Albanians were very loyal to their religious faiths too, as they still did not understand the benefits of civilization. It offered him good grounds to

⁶⁰ *Albania*, nr.1, (Brussels, 1897), pg.2.

justify his own work. He was working to overcome a situation, in a way to achieve irreversible and long-lasting results, such as the ‘cultural awakening’ of his own people through the creation of a literary language. For him it was much more important than scheduling plans for an independent political existence of the Albanian nation. In fact, in his texts, one comes always across a feeling of being misunderstood, of a profound gap between him, a polyglot and deeply cultured man, who was immersed in European civilization, classical music, museums, classical and modern literature, dandy life, and the flock of Albanians, half tired warriors and half impoverished farmers, watching him with astonished eyes, a man telling them the good from bad. This distance between the author and the ‘nation’ he claimed to represent is not found in the texts of Vasa, Sami and Qemali. Konitza had severed his relations with the ‘Oriental’ Albanian environment from his early youth when he went to study and live in the West. However, he wanted to make his Western cultural standard the point of reference for the new ‘national’ culture, especially for the newly born Albanian literature.

If the theme of religious allegiances was from time to time present in the pages of “Albania” review, it meant that religion was a matter of concern for Konitza and other authors writing in his review. The articles related to this topic gravitated between two different poles, the Albanian religious ‘indifference’ and ‘tolerance’, and an Albanian ‘nationality’ torn apart by different religious affiliations.

Konitza idealized the situation on the ground, when it came to react to what foreigners thought about Albanians. He rejected foreign allegations on Albanian religious fanaticism and the picture he presented was not as problematic as that which he drew for internal consumption, when he addressed the Albanian readers. His main counterargument to foreign patterns of perceiving Albanians as religiously divided was that Albanians were the least religious people in the Balkans.

One of the clearest examples of his defence of the Albanians’ ‘virtues’ was when he commented on Henry N. Brailsford’s book on Macedonia and its populations.⁶¹ The long article was a kind of commentary of the book, and it concentrated on selected parts when Brailsford spoke about the Albanians. Konitza held the book to be a contribution of permanent academic value in it dealing with the Balkan region. One of the strongest reasons was that in many cases the author showed his sympathy to the Albanians and wrote in a way

⁶¹ *Albania*, nr.4, (London, 1906), pg.71-80. The book Konitza refers to is H-N Brailsford, *Macedonia, its races and their future*”, (London, 1906).

that pleased Konitza. He became more critical when Brailsford did not spare some unfavorable notes on Albanians, or when he showed himself to be too much on the side of Albanians' 'enemies'.

The paragraphs that Konitza brought in to illustrate the book reveal also the way he explained the religious situation among Albanians. There are two main points here to be underlined. It seems that these paragraphs were chosen and selected on purpose by Konitza as they depicted a kind of Albanian particularity with regard to religion. The first related to the preservation of the feudal order among Albanians despite their conversion to Islam. This was something unique as Islam had acted as a kind of social leveler among other people who had embraced it. The propagation of Islam among Albanians, and here Konitza added to the paragraph of the book his own explanation, was due to their social hierarchy. If other people in the Balkans, and Konitza here referred to Bulgarians, had converted individually, this phenomenon in Albania assumed a wider scale because it was imposed by the local feudal lords. The latter's conversion was mainly a strategy to keep their old privileges, but it brought about also the mass conversion of the peasantry under their control. In this way, the difference, and the comparison here is made between "Bulgarian individuals" and Albanian ones, consisted in the fact that the latter adopted Islam not as a free personal choice, as some Bulgarians did, but as something imposed over them by the local feudal leadership. While considering Christianity as the ancient religion of all Albanians, Konitza very often took Islam as something 'unnatural', belated and, most of all, imposed upon Albanians. Consequently, another feature of Albanians' conversion to Islam was its 'superficial' influence over the Albanian speaking populations which did not affect their way of life, one of the indicators being, e.g. the preservation of the pre-Ottoman feudal order. Anyway, as we will see below, Konitza did not view Albanian Moslems as a monolithic group with the same characteristics, as some were less Moslem than the others. Vasa, Sami and Qemali did not use slanderous tones on Islam, as Konitza often did.

The 'peculiar' religious situation among Albanians, in this case the 'superficial' penetration of Islam amongst the local populations, permitted Konitza to point to the strong regionalism and particularism of Albanians, but also the "free development of the individual". He viewed the Albanian mountainous northern populations as people obeying only their local customs and disregarding any central authority. This feature matched with the wild, remote and un-accessible image of the mountains where they lived. This converged also

with Brailsford's conclusion that "these primitive Albanians are Nietzsche's supermen—something between kings and tigers".⁶²

To strengthen his arguments that Islam had not taken firm roots among Albanian speaking populations, Konitza asserted that the Albanians lacked vernacular religious literature.⁶³ On the other hand, referring to Brailsford's book, Islamism and Christianity were introduced to the Albanian inhabited lands by foreign missionaries. Unlike Bulgarians, for example, Albanians did not have their own apostles, and therefore "religion remained associated to a foreign culture and spirit". According to Konitza, Albanians usually looked upon churches and mosques as "tools of foreign domination".⁶⁴ As a final conclusion to this section came the definition of Albanian nationalist movement specifically as a laic one.⁶⁵

Albanian pragmatism, religious 'tolerance', or religious 'indifference', sometimes clashed with his argument concerning the 'fanaticism' of Albanians, which are highlighted in other texts. These allegations might sound contradictory, but we should take into account that they were constructed myths of a nationalist intellectual and they varied according to the context and the target they were aimed at. The author used them either to make religion appear in the life of the Albanians as something of secondary importance, when it was to refute the 'biased theories' of the foreigners on Albanians' internal animosities due to religious fragmentation, or to underscore religious issues as the main factor behind the internal division of Albanians, when it was to motivate his role as a 'national awakener', whose primary task was to supersede religious affiliations by 'reviving' national feelings. Another 'valid' argument, for emphasizing the Albanian supposed religious 'indifference', became their character and the image of the free highlanders, their 'unyielding' character, putting up stiff resistance to any foreign invasion and the "free development of the individual". When it was for conceptualizing a sound basis upon which to construct a new Albanian identity, religious 'tolerance' and 'indifference' were underlined and put forth as potential national capacities.

This was mainly the discourse Faik Konitza used to address foreign audiences, or for presenting Albanians to an outsider and trying to explain and reject the outsiders' 'mistaken' image on Albanians as a divided people. When Konitza spoke to foreigners he presented a more idealized picture in which Albanians were not so religiously divided. The ultimate

⁶² *Albania*, nr.4, (London, 1904), pg.73.

⁶³ *Ibid*, pg.74.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, pg.74.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, pg.75.

concern was to present Albanians in the eyes of the Europeans as a single nation not internally beleaguered by religious fanaticism and factionalism, needing only time to be ‘reawakened’ as a nation. But, as we will see some paragraphs below it also pertained to deep concerns of another order.

Konitza adopted a more critical stance when he spoke to his co-nationals. In this case, he pointed out the ‘weaknesses’ of his community that needed to be overcome. If religious splits were put into focus then it was for identifying the nation’s ‘malaise’ to be cured in line with what he envisaged his image of a civilized and western-like Albanian nation.

How did Konitza envisage the overcoming of religious divisions and rendering them less harmful to national identity? The solutions presented by Konitza were closely linked to how he formulated his ideal Albania and further distinguish him from the previous intellectuals presented here. In his view, this future Albania should be “passionate nationalist and aware of its leanings to the Occidental world”.⁶⁶ Therefore, the way religion was practiced should be tuned to the primary importance of national feelings. This was to say that the solution was “to albanise” religious practices. The stress was put here on the fact that religions in Albanian inhabited lands were professed and controlled by foreign clergy, who did not use the vernacular in their practices. The basic idea of these texts was that the language used for religious services should be Albanian. Apart from the importance given to language as a transmitter of national feelings, Konitza’s texts revealed also the concern of their author to handle with care the religious issue and not to offend the spiritual attachments of Albanians.⁶⁷

In other cases, Konitza favored more radical solutions. His “occidental Albania” meant a clear and definitive rupture with the “backward Orient”.⁶⁸ According to him, the links with the more backward Orient were kept alive by Moslem Albanians. Consequently, Moslem Albanians needed to undergo major changes in order to join the “civilized Albanian nation” through conversion. But, another important element in Konitza’s opinion, which could help also the conversion of Moslems into Christians, was the albanisation of the Orthodox Albanians. This meant to protect the Albanian Orthodox community from Greek

⁶⁶ *Albania*, nr.5, (London, 1907), pg.121.

⁶⁷ *Albania*, nr.2, (Brussels, 1897), pg.21; *Albania*, nr.8, (Brussels, 1897), pg.121.

⁶⁸ For the orientalist discourse in the texts of some of the most important Albanian national leaders during the National Movement period see E. Sulstarova, *Ligjerimi nacionalist ne Shqiperi*, [Nationalist discourse in Albania], (Tiranë, 2003).

influence.⁶⁹ When this community gained religious independence, and become more “Albanian”, then, as Konitza imagined it, it would turn into a pole of attraction for the Moslem Albanians too, who could join the Christian Albanians and return to their ancestors’ faith.

He saw this project as feasible, as he held that the islamization process in the Albanian inhabited lands was uneven, though forcefully carried out, leaving on the ground a non homogenous community. As a result the Northern Gëgs were for Konitza more fanaticized than the Southern Tosks, who were only ‘superficial’ Moslems. For Konitza, as we will see below, the Tosks had a kind of ‘innate’ feelings against Islamism as they found themselves more under pressure to change their ancient Christian faith, but they were also a population more open to changes than the Northern Gëgs.⁷⁰ So, in Konitza’s vision, the Southern Tosks, who lived in more urban locations, were the section of the Albanian Moslem population most prone to abandon their religion and to join the Orthodox Albanians. Women could also give a hand in this undertaking.

“Since ancient times, Albanian woman felt through an unmistakable instinct that Islamism- with its polygamy, with easy divorce and the reduction of the woman into a servant- was dangerous for women’s rights and for the sanctity of the family”.⁷¹

Konitza’s concept of Gëgs varied also depending on the context his discourse was placed. When it was for hailing the ‘unyieldingness’ of the Albanians in front of the Turkish invasion, they were ‘free’ highlanders; when it was for the spreading of the national feelings among the local populations, they were less ‘progressive’ as they were isolated, but also because they were more ‘fanatical’ in religious affairs. In some of his texts, the heterodox Moslem sect of Bektashism was related to the Southern Tosks, who were seen as more open and more patriotic than the Gëgs. This division of the Albanian speaking populations along their regional characters was a topic often used by western scholars when they characterized the Albanians according to two main geo-cultural areas, the Northern Gegeria and the Southern Toskeria.⁷²

At the turn of nineteenth-twentieth centuries, the Geg-Tosk discourse was mentioned also by Sami, but Konitza dwelt more on it, and this regional cleavage was more present in

⁶⁹ *Albania*, nr.7, (London, 1906), pg. 144-146.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, pg.145.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, pg.145.

⁷² N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg.169-170. *Albania*, nr.1, (Brussels, 1901), pg.15.

his texts. It might be explained by the fact that Konitza wrote more extensively on the necessity to create a national language, and finally a single national identity, out of these two major spoken dialects/regional identities, which for him, as explained above, implied also character differences among their speakers. In the article “The progress of the nation”, Konitza published an invented dialogue between a Southern Moslem Tosk and a Northern Moslem Geg. Contrary to the more ‘open-minded’ Tosk, the Geg seemed not able to understand the importance of learning the Albanian language and confused it with Christian propaganda.

“Tosk- Brother, do you want me to teach you Albanian,

Geg- Tosk, what are you talking about?

T- Look at this book. It is Albanian. Listen a bit...

G- You are trying to make me “kaur” [in Ottoman-Turkish language “kaur” meant “unbeliever”, mostly used to indicate “the Christians”]

T-What is this stupidity. Learn your language, it’s nothing wrong,

G- What are this kaur writings? Get out of here, kaur...

This is the way most of Moslem Gecs are used to think. They are the biggest obstacle to the progress of the nation. There is a great need to make national propaganda in Gegëria because otherwise it will be in vain⁷³

The superiority of the more ‘emancipated’ Tosk comes out through the terms he used in the dialogue. When addressing the Geg, the Southern Tosk called him “brother”, but, all the more, he showed an eagerness to teach the Albanian language to the former. On his part, the Geg was ‘backward’ as he did not understand the benefits of learning Albanian and he declined the Tosk’s offer for brotherhood. The combination Moslem/Geg was seen as fatal to progress, and for Konitza it was tantamount to regress.⁷⁴

Here it is another example where Konitza saw the religious factionalism as an Albanian malaise compounded by the ignorance of the Northern Gecs.

“The bad thing is that our Geg brothers do not have the same love for their language as the Tosks do; because in all towns and villages of Toskëria there are Albanians who write and read their language, and are glad when they receive Albanian journals. But in Gegëria people who love their language and their country are rarer. Unlike many areas in Toskëria, people in Gegëria haven’t understood yet that religion is religion and Albanianism is Albanianism. In Gegëria, Moslem Albanians call the Christians “kaur”, and Christian Albanians call the Moslems “Turks”: why “kaur” and why “Turks”? “Kaur” means “infidel”, aren’t the Christian Albanians brave and people of honor? “Turks” means a people that has its origin in Asia, a remote and foreign people, aren’t Moslem Albanians also Albanians? Haven’t they the same blood and origin as the Christians,

⁷³ *Albania*, nr.4, (Brussels, 1901), pg.15.

⁷⁴ In a memorandum that Konica handed over to the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1899, he wrote the national movement was less developed in Northern Albania and “this mostly among Moslems, who do not even know their language can be written”. N. Jorgaqi (ed.), *Faik Konica-Vepra*, vol.3, pg.48.

aren't they bound to Albanian customs, to Albanian language, to the blood, to the canon of Lekë Dukagjini, etc? It is crazy for Albanians to call each other "Turk" or "Kaur"- and "Albania" will do the utmost to fight this".⁷⁵

Konitza believed that the Geg pattern of backwardness and ignorance was deeply-entrenched. In an unfinished popular version of the history of Albania, written in 1935, Konitza wrote that the people of the mountainous north, called Gegs, lived in complete isolation and consequently they had "greater patriarchal simplicity than the rest of their countrymen, and their whole mental outlook was decidedly medieval".⁷⁶

In the texts of Vasa, Sami and Qemali, the division of Albanians into Gegs and Tosks was not so well articulated. Sami vaguely mentioned the regional division of Albanians into Gegs and Tosks.⁷⁷ A difference between Sami and Konitza lay in the fact that they lived and worked in specific political-cultural contexts. The way they approached the articulation of the Albanian nation was clearly influenced by those contexts. Sami worked as an intellectual during the last quarter of the nineteenth century in a multicultural Ottoman Empire that was undergoing important changes due to modernization and Westernization of its state apparatus and the forming of ethnic nationalisms of its populations. His Albanianism was intertwined also with other discourses, such as Ottomanism, Islamism and Turkism.⁷⁸

During the Eastern Crisis of late 1870s, Sami advanced the Moslem identity of Albanian to argue against Greek territorial claims over Albanian-inhabited lands in the European part of the Ottoman Empire.⁷⁹ He also played a major role in the consolidation of the modern Turkish language recognizing the importance of the vernacular for the spiritual revival of the nationalities. His Turkism and his Albanianism were not two rival modernizing projects, given that the respective lands did not border each other.⁸⁰ On the other hand, if for Sami, Islam could be a channel for transmitting science and progress,⁸¹ Konitza was too westernized and could not accept it. For Konitza, Western Christian civilization was without doubt far higher than any other.

⁷⁵ *Albania*, nr.11, (London, 1898), pg.203. See also *Albania*, nr.2 (Brussels, 1897), pg.36.

⁷⁶ F. Konitza, "Albania: the Rock Garden of Southeastern Europe", Vatra, Boston 1957, pg.112.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁷⁸ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg. 273.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 280.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pg. 283; K. Karpat, *The Politicisation of Islam. Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the late Ottoman State*, (Oxford, 2001), pg. 339.

⁸¹ S. Frashëri, *Përpekjet e heronjve në përhapjen e Islamit*, pp. 20–21; S. Frashëri, *Qytetërimi islam*.

It is worth here to dwell upon some of his arguments formulated in the article “A short announcement to the Moslems” under the heading “The imminent danger to Moslem Albanians”, published in 1909.⁸² His article can be summarized in five points. Konitza held that: 1) in a few years the Ottomans would be expelled from Europe, 2) Albania, as it is, divided and uncivilized, has remained, due to its fault, without strong foreign friends and, thus, seriously runs the risk to be partitioned among the Balkan Christian states, such as Greece, 3) after the retreat of the rule of the Sublime Porte from the Balkans, Moslem Albanians would be expelled from their lands, thus losing their property and wealth, 4) if the Ottomans withdraw from the Balkans, they would not welcome the expelled Moslem Albanians in Anatolia any more, as they did in the case of Moslem populations fleeing Serbia after its independence in 1878. In the actual case, as Konitza saw it, the Ottoman government would not have any link with the Balkans and no more interests in the local Balkan populations, such as the Albanians, and 5) in order to avoid such a threat the Albanians should convert to the faith of their ancestors, i.e. Christianity, or to remain Moslems, but truly united with the Christian part of the population, by their common blood, “such as to give an almost Christian character to the nation”.

This article is important as it displays both a similar, but also a different vision in relation to the way Sami, in his political treatise “Albania, what it was...,” tackled the problem of the future fate of Albanians in view of the eventual dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans. This topic, instead, is not present in Vasa’s and Qemali’s texts. As we have seen also in the chapter on Sami, events by the end of the nineteenth century revealed a steady tendency towards the dissolution of Ottoman rule in the Balkans, and an ever growing weakness of the Sublime Porte to contain the nationalistic activities of various populations in its “Macedonian” provinces, such as the Bulgarians, Albanians, Greeks. These events showed the Empire’s inability to resist the European interferences, from Austro-Hungary, Russia, England, and Italy, in backing this or that local “nation”, with the aim of securing a better position for themselves in the future geo-political rearrangements of the Peninsula.

Both authors conceived the Albanians as being in the worst possible position. For them, the Albanians were religiously divided, underdeveloped and uncivilized, posing a serious threat to their survival after the disappearance of the Empire. They implied that Albanians were not yet culturally prepared for complete political independence. For that reason, both authors were for a temporary recognition of the Sultan’s sovereignty over

⁸² *Albania*, vol.XII, (London, 1909), pg.22-23.

Albanians, as this transitional time would serve to civilize the nation through schools and culture. In the end, in the context of an ever fragile Ottoman rule in the Balkans, Faik Konitza and Sami were warning that the Albanians had no time to waste in face of the future crumbling of the Empire. In view of the future territorial rearrangement of the Peninsula after the Ottoman retreat, Albanians should be able to prove that they were a European nation and not identical with the Turks, ‘barbarians’ and ‘Asiatic’. Otherwise, after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the Moslem Albanians would be expelled from Europe.

In the article, Faik Konitza referred to the fate of the Moslems in Serbia, namely Vranja and Leskovac. He said that when Serbia took possession of these lands it expelled the Moslem populations.⁸³ This concern was further justified in terms of a negative outside image of the Albanians in the eyes of the Europeans. For Konitza, their image was that of an “un-unified nation”, “lazy”, “plunderer” and a “fanatic” in religious affairs, but most of all, as a “petted” people, having always enjoyed the favors of the Ottoman Sultans, who left them much freedom to act as they pleased, having in their hands the reigns of the Empire. Konitza thought that these shadows would be dissipated if Albanians would work for the good of each other and change from a “cold” nation, where each pursued his own interests, into a more “nationally minded” people.⁸⁴

Konitza’s various solutions either 1) the conversion of Albanians to their “old Christian religion”, or, 2) to remain Moslem and join with Orthodox Albanians in order to give to the “Albanian nation an almost Christian character” deserve further attention. Sometimes, Konitza seemed more in favor of the second option, a kind of “brotherly and conscious union between Moslems and Orthodox”. For the Moslems, Konitza’s solution meant also detaching Albania from Istanbul and creating a centre in the Albanian inhabited areas and making it comply with local traditions. Konitza put much more stress on the Moslem people as they were the majority of the Albanian speaking populations, but also because he saw them as the ‘weakest’ point of the nation, which could be identified with a “Turkish” identity. Furthermore, as mentioned in the chapter on Sami, Konitza stressed the particularity of the Albanians’ conversion to Islam, after the Ottoman conquest, trying to present it as something pragmatic, not deeply felt and rooted in the people. He drew also it seems on the works of Naim Frashëri, Sami’s brother, who, by his patriotic poems published

⁸³ *Albania*, vol.XII, (London, 1909), pg.22-23.

⁸⁴ N. Jorgaqi (ed), *Faik Konitza-Vepra*, vol. III, pg.98-100; 101-103.

in the late 1880s and 1890s and mentioned above, was constructing an image of Albanians as more European as against the Asiatic Turks. In a letter sent in late 1890s to Baron Goluchovski, the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, Konitza presented as one the main goal pursued by his review the “developing the national feeling among Albanians and the awareness for their radical differences with the Turks”.⁸⁵ Konitza published in his review a commentary of Naim Frashëri’s booklet on the Bektashis and some of his verse on the ancient origin of Albanians as we will see below. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Frashëri brothers, more than any others, contributed to the diffusion of this “European” image of Albanians, in opposition to the Asiatic Turks, among Albanian nationalist intellectuals.

This dualism between ‘European’ Albanians and ‘Asiatic’ Turks was not an original finding of Albanian intellectuals. Many Western scholars had pointed to the ‘superficial’ religious spirit of Albanians, which made them less fanatical Moslems than the Turks.⁸⁶ But, it was a reflection of the orientalist imagining of the world, between a progressed and civilized Europe and a barbaric and backward Orient. Under the example also of the other Balkan nationalist intellectuals, Albanian intellectuals traced Europe’s borders to include the Albanian inhabited lands and allowing the Albanians to be included in the European sphere of civilization, closing behind them the door to the barbarian and Asiatic Turks.⁸⁷

Albanian intellectuals had understood that, apart from the political interests of different European Powers to back the Christian Balkan states, the prevailing opinion among diplomatic circles was that the vacuum left in the Balkans by the retreat of the Moslem Ottoman Empire had to be filled by the Christian Balkan states, as countries naturally belonging to Europe, mostly conceived as a Christian continent. Therefore, the creation of an Albanian state in the Balkans would be easily taken as the creation of a Moslem state, or, due to that association often made between “being Moslem” and “being Turks”, as the emergence of a small “Turkey” on European soil. The Frashëri brothers, Konitza, but also others, tried by their writings to present Albanians as an old European nation, Albanians as brothers between them, despite their different religious affiliations.

Living almost always in Western Europe, Faik Konitza was influenced by the image the Europeans had of the Turks. One interesting example was a short compilation of French proverbs published in Konitza’s review, not by chance selecting those regarding the

⁸⁵ N. Jorgaqi (ed), *Faik Konitza-Vepra*, vol. IV, pg.26-27.

⁸⁶ N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg. 168.

⁸⁷ E. Sulstarova, *Arratisje nga Lindja* [Fleeing the East], (Tiranë, 2006), pg.38-44.

‘traditional’ enemies of Albanians, such as the Greeks, Russians and the Turks. For the latter, he had selected “*Fidel couma un Turc à l’Alcouran*”, taken from Languedoc dialect and meaning “being loyal to Koran” [religious fanatic]; “*Jura coumo un Turc*”, from Languedoc, meaning “cursing like a Turk” [being impolite]; “*c’est un Turc, c’est un vrai Turc*”, the meaning Konitza himself gave was “being a wild man, merciless”; “*traiter quelque’un à la turque*”, the meaning being “treating somebody mercilessly”; “*tête de turc*”, meaning “being dull”. In his review, Konitza was displaying a kind of belief taking shape by the end of the nineteenth century in European intellectual circles holding “the Ottoman Empire as a basic hindrance to progress”, which in turn had had its roots a Euro-centrist conception of the human civilization.⁸⁸ In the words of Maria Todorova:

“These patterns of perception were also shaped by what was increasingly becoming a common outlook of the educated European, sharing in the beliefs and prejudices of the intellectual currents and fashions dominant at different periods: renaissance values, humanism, empiricism, enlightenment ideas, classicism, romanticism, occasionally even socialism, but almost inevitably tainted with what Aijaz Ahmad has called “the usual banalities of nineteenth-century Euro-centrism”. They were transmitted throughout the following periods and perpetuated, sometimes literally, sometimes in a modified form, often intertwined, by consecutive generations.”⁸⁹

Unlike Sami, who held different discourses with regard to Islam, as civilization, as identity, but also as a different way of being between Albanians and Turks, Konitza continuously devalued Islam as inherently and culturally inferior to European civilization, understood as a Christian one. In his articles, Konitza introduced a kind of hierarchical scale serving to indicate the place of each Albanian religious community with regard to civilization and progress. In this scale, Islam and Moslems occupied the lowest echelons. His difference with Sami, and his brother Naim, with regard to Bektashism and the Moslem faith in general, stands also in the fact that in publishing his review Konitza closely collaborated with the Albanian Catholic clergy of the North, for which Bektashism was not so relevant.⁹⁰

If he spoke about albanisation of religion, through creating local religious centres and introducing the Albanian language in the practices of Moslems and Orthodox, he seemed to exclude the Albanian Catholic from this question. From a ‘national’ point of view, Konitza considered the Albanian Catholic community already in a positive way. Firstly, because this

⁸⁸ *Albania*, nr.10, (London, 1903), pg.148-149.

⁸⁹ M. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, pg.111.

⁹⁰ I thank Nathalie Clayer to have drawn my attention to this aspect.

community already organised Albanian schools, and, secondly, it was under Austro-Hungarian protectorate, which tried to promote the Albanian vernacular for the reasons mentioned above.⁹¹

However variegated the discourses Konitza held on the religious problem, it is clear that this question was considered of primary importance by Albanian nationalist intellectuals. Konitza suggested that a religious union would immediately bring about “the union of the nation”.⁹² The religious division among Albanians was a frustrating issue for Albanian intellectuals of that time, as despite their patriotic rhetoric on Albanians’ religious ‘indifference’, they considered it a real factor on the ground, albeit a harmful one, for their nationalistic and culturally homogenous project for the future Albania. If they spoke on religious tolerance they didn’t describe the picture on the ground. They were formulating a strategy for constructing a national community of Albanians.⁹³

As was seen above, religion was not discarded from the set of tools that could be used in molding an Albanian nation. It was a problematic one, as in the view of Albanian national intellectuals it implied a powerful mode of self-identification, which competed and ran counter to the ‘national’ loyalties they wanted to construct. It is interesting to see how in “Albania”’s pages a journalist explained to the common people the idea of “nation” through the verses of the Koran in Arabic. It is a strategy of speaking to the people in a way that was comprehensible to them, i.e. the language of religion. It was also an attempt to convince people that believing in an “Albanian nation” was not a sin, but allowed for and sanctioned by their religion.⁹⁴ But, while national loyalties had to be constructed, remaining a virtual reality yet, religious values were deeply entrenched in the beliefs and customs of the people. Therefore they could not be avoided, but they should be transformed. Konitza’s national project foresaw the Albanisation of religion, through vernacularizing policies, as a means to compensate for the existence of three religious communities among the Albanians.

⁹¹ S. Skëndi, “The history of the Albanian alphabet: a case of complex cultural and political development”, in S. Skëndi, *Balkan Cultural Studies*, pg.218. See also S. Skëndi, *The Albanian National Awakening 1878-1912*, pg.129.

⁹² *Ibid*, pg.23.

⁹³ This is clearly stated in the article written by Fan. S. Noli in “Albania” review with the title “The Albanian Orthodox Church”, in *Albania*, nr.5, (London, 1907), pg.35-37. The author would become in 1908 the head of the Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church in Boston. Noli underlines the great importance the religious factor plays in the unification of the people. Noli dismisses the option of conversion among Albanians and suggests instead that the religious leadership should be a national one. It must carry out his religious practices in Albanian. His main concern here goes to Moslems and Orthodox Albanians, as the Catholics enjoyed religious institutions where Albanian language was taught. For this see S. Skëndi, “The history of the Albanian alphabet: a case of complex cultural and political development”, pg.218.

⁹⁴ *Albania*, nr.2 (Brussels, 1897), pg.36.

3. Ancient origins

In the article “The enemies of Albania” the most important factor for uniting Albanians came to be their shared roots, or their common origin. Konitza said that there were Albanians who did not speak the Albanian language, but nevertheless it was their origin which bound them together:

“Those between us who do not speak Albanian easily say they are not Albanian. What have language to do with this matter? Swiss people, for example, speak either French, or German, but they are one nation. Why? Because they have one origin and nation is a matter of origin and not language”.⁹⁵

The Albanian “nation” of Faik Konitza was a community of people based on common language and common descent, blood and traditions. If he devoted much more attention to the creation of an Albanian literary language, it did not mean that common descent was of lesser importance. It would be better to see them as complementary and interchangeable elements in the hierarchy of national values constructed by Konitza. As we saw in the above section, Konitza adopted various viewpoints according to the message he wanted to convey.

In “Albania”, Konitza explored the ancient roots of the “Albanian nation”, which were considered as another relevant constitutive element. Generally, the part of the review dealing with history had two kinds of writings, a) popular history of the Albanians and b) unpublished documents or studies on Albanian history, archaeology, folklore and ethnography.⁹⁶ Konitza was more attracted by the history of Antiquity, the history of Albanian national hero Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbej (1403-1468), and the Albanian Diaspora. According to Albanian studies, all Konitza’s “scientific activity” was carried out in relation to the Albanian question, national liberation and in shedding light on “positive Albanian traditions and the brilliant past”.⁹⁷

I will mention here only what Konitza published in his review about the ancient origin of the Albanians and, in his case too, there are indications that he was familiar with the findings of western scholars. As in the case of Sami and Vasa, the Pellazg theory as the

⁹⁵ *Albania*, nr.1, (Brussels, 1897), pg.2.

⁹⁶ J. Kastrati, *Faik Konitza*, pg.106.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, pg.280.

predecessors of the Albanians, was taken up by western scholars who took an interest in the Balkan people during nineteenth century and also by the Italo-Albanians.

From the first numbers of his review Konitza began to publish documents on the Pellazgs, who were held to be the most ancient populations living in the Balkan area. They are mainly pieces taken from Homer and Herodotus, where the name of Pellazgs was mentioned. They were mentioned in the sense of being older than the Greeks and their language being different from Greek. From the title of the column, “Written proofs from Antiquity on the origin of the Albanian nation”, it became clear that Konitza established a direct connection between the Pellazgs and the Albanians.⁹⁸ He said that from these pieces the reader will draw the conclusion that a) the ancient writers believed that the Pellazgs lived in the same territories where the Albanians live in the present and b) the names of the deities and all the beautiful verses of the Greeks were taken from the Pellazgs.⁹⁹ A more direct statement on the continuity between Pellazgs and Albanians came from the verse of Naim Frashëri, as already mentioned, that Faik Konitza published in two successive numbers. The first bore the title “Albania” and the second “The Pellazgs-the Albanians”.¹⁰⁰

The author wanted to construct the image of the Albanians as the most ancient people in the region. This derived from the fact that the language of the Pellazgs was that of the Albanians and that all the other languages, both Latin and Greek, were branches of the latter.¹⁰¹ The other messages implied in the above mentioned verses were those of the Albanian’s old splendor, or the Golden Age of Albanian nation, as opposed to the present miserable predicament in which they found themselves. All the more, that Albanians throughout their past history had worked only for the good of the others, gaining nothing for themselves.¹⁰²

Konitza used these myths as instruments of self-definition and identity building. They created an Albanian distinctiveness vis-à-vis the other people. They were different from the Greeks and other people surrounding them. On the other hand, these myths aimed to provide the targeted community with a new identity, a homogeneous national one that transcended all the other modes of self-definition, either religious or regional ones.¹⁰³ The Albanians as direct

⁹⁸ *Albania*, nr.1, (Brussels, 1897), pg.5.

⁹⁹ *Albania*, nr.2, (Brussels, 1897), pg.23.

¹⁰⁰ The poetry “Albania” is published in *Albania* nr.3, (Brussels, 1897), pg.40 and the second “The Pellazgs-the Albanians”, is published in *Albania*, nr.4, (Brussels, 1897), pg.50.

¹⁰¹ *Albania*, nr.3, (Brussels, 1897), pg.34.

¹⁰² *Albania*, nr.4, (Brussels, 1897), pg.72.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, pg.22.

heirs of the old Pellazg populations were described as a whole and not a fragmented community. At the same time this practice stressed what Anthony Smith calls “the Janus-nature of the nation, at once visionary and nostalgic, backward-looking, yet oriented to the future” and the reference to a Golden Age.

“But perhaps the most important spur to the proliferation of ‘Golden Ages’ was the nationalist intellectuals’ drive to rediscover the past of every ethnic community for which they wished to secure political recognition. For nationalists, ‘antiquity’ became almost synonymous with ethnic liberation and efflorescence”.¹⁰⁴

In the review “Albania” we see other examples of the influence of western scholars. In one article the French scholar Léon Cahun, with the title “Un plaidoyer en faveur des albanais” underlined the superficiality of the religious feelings among the Albanians and their powerful love for their country. He depicted Albanians as a nation of freeborn, proud mountainous people.¹⁰⁵ The Pellazgian theory, which was propagated by the Albanians of Italy too, in an effort to create a national pantheon with Scanderbeg, Philip of Macedonia, Alexander the Great and Pirro of Epirus, whose main goal was to differentiate Albanians from Greeks, was reproduced in several issues of “Albania”. As noted, throughout the nineteenth century the Albanian-Greek contrast was present in the nationalist discourses of Albanian intellectuals.

It was not by chance then that Konitza saw Hellenizing policies as a real threat for the would-be Albanian nation, but also as an incentive to constructing an Albanian national identity and to detach it from the Greek religious-cultural sphere of influence, as was the case with the Orthodox Albanians. Konitza’s nation was in part a product of external cultural influences, European literature of Classicism, Romanticism, and his perceived role as national activist in the sense of receiving, selecting and appropriating knowledge in the service of the ‘national cause’. More than anything else it pertained to the problem of forging an Albanian literary language.

¹⁰⁴ A. Smith, “The ‘Golden Age’ and National Renewal” in G. Hosking and G. Schöpflin (eds), *Myths and Nationhood*, pg.36; 41.

¹⁰⁵ *Albania*, nr.7, (Brussels, 1897), pg.116-119. See also the introduction to *Bleta shqypëtare e Thimi Mitkos* [Albanian Bee of Thimi Mitko] by Gergj Pekmezi, Vienna, 1924. Thimi Mitko was an Orthodox Albanian who lived in Egypt and in 1878 published popular songs and tales with the intention to save the Albanian language as a means to civilize his co-nationals. He stresses the fact that Albanians have always given the priority to the motherland as against their religious belonging.

In relation to the theme of the ancientness of the Albanians, unlike Pashko Vasa, Sami Frasheri and Ismail Qemali, Konitza used also anthropological data to prove the uniqueness of the Albanian 'race'. In 1902, in the spring number of "Albania", Konitza reported on a conference organized by the Anthropological Society of Berlin in 1900. Konitza referred on purpose to Dr. Paul Träger as he had given proofs of being pro-Albanian. In that conference, the German scientist 'deconstructed' some entrenched stereotypes on Albanians, which were widely used by foreign travelers who crossed the country. Due to his personal experience in Albania, Dr. Träger rejected allegations that made Albania "more African than Africa itself", that "Albanians live their life inseparably from their ever ready and loaded pistol guns", that "it is true they kill each other because of the vendetta, but, in turn, this is a safety guarantee for the foreigners, as the old canons put them under the strict protection of the locals". Dr. Träger considered himself as an unconventional expert in the matter, aiming at deconstructing certain patterns of biased representation of Albanians, which impeded the scientific exploration of the country.¹⁰⁶ The Albanian version of the "noble savage" of Dr. Träger pleased Konitza and some months later he published a letter from the German anthropologist. The latter wrote of his time spent in Albania, during four trips, in measuring skulls and bodies of the local people and from where "it was blatantly evident that the "Albanian race is unitarian".¹⁰⁷ In the same number Konitza published an article about the Albanian intrigues in the Balkans, which he explained in terms of 'racial' characteristics. He said that Bulgarians derived from a mixed Asiatic 'race' Turkish-Tartar. Konitza held that in the best version Bulgarians "could be half Slavs".¹⁰⁸

This article was written in the conditions of the "Macedonian" crisis, when, as noted, Bulgarian, Greek, Serbian and Albanian nationalisms were clashing to gain the most territorial benefits from the Ottoman Rumelia [Macedonia]. In this case Konitza used 'racial' arguments to discredit the Bulgarians. The assumption is twofold: a) from a mongrel 'race' the expectations could not but be low, i.e., to plot 'unjustly' against Albanians, b) moreover, that Bulgarians were of Asiatic origins, so not entitled to any compensation from European Ottoman territories.

Here we have a qualitative change in the use of 'race' as an argument. Before Konitza, Albanian intellectuals in articulating the idea of an Albanian nation used the term 'race' interchangeably with people and nation. And in this there were similarities with other

¹⁰⁶ *Albania*, nr.4, (London, 1902), pg. 115-117.

¹⁰⁷ *Albania*, nr.8, (London, 1902), pg.202.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, pg. 201.

Balkan nationalisms, which took the ‘racial’ ideas from Europe in a later date, and started to make use of them as a ‘scientific’ argument in the early twentieth century.¹⁰⁹ Living in the West, Konitza was easily influenced by these ideas. By the end of nineteenth century Europe was marked by a growing anti-liberal tendencies and growing militarism. After the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71), history was viewed more and more in ‘racial’ terms and the Aryan myth and racial hierarchy became arguments to legitimize political dominion. The articulation of nationalist ideas sought to gain more strength and legitimacy by adopting a ‘racial’ discourse. ‘Race’ was held to be a scientific approach in explaining the national peculiarities, as it was also intertwined with social and evolutionary Darwinism which lent an aura of ‘scientific’ authority to reasoning in terms of ‘racial purity’ of different nations. His essay on natural and artificial languages is an example of the adoption by Konitza of evolutionary and ‘racial’ ideas. In his discourse Konitza used ‘race’ as a classifying category, in presenting Albanians as one of the oldest and purest ‘races’. The, ‘racial’ arguments became much more prevalent in the interwar period, when publications about ‘race’ would make their appearance in Albania too, linking Albanians to the Aryan ‘race’ as the ‘truest’ European one.

4. An “aristocrat” against violent methods

As noted, by the end of nineteenth and early twentieth century, due to the growth and expansion of the Ottoman state administration, and a much larger spread of education institutions in the Empire, a new class of intelligentsia made its appearance. This was of a more diversified social background, including not only members of grand landowning *bej* families, but also of humbler origins, such as from landowning families of lesser importance, state functionaries, local clerics, etc. The possessing of modern knowledge became “a social and political capital”, which started to compete with social origins.¹¹⁰ The widening of this educated “middle class” had its influence in making more populous the scene of Albanian nationalism with new actors. It would also generate a rivalry, not less a generational competition, with the traditional educated elites. Members of this educated middle class would also seek their own space in the Albanian national movement.

¹⁰⁹ S. Detchev, “Who are the Bulgarians? “Race”, science and politics in fin-de-siècle Bulgaria”, in Diana Mishkova (ed), *We, The People. Politics of National Peculiarity in Southeastern Europe*, pg. 237-262.

¹¹⁰ N. Clay, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg.359-366.

These changes in the social structure in the Albanian national movement, which previously had been dominated by the descendants of grand bej families or of imperial high ranked officials, who had the possibilities to get educated and influenced by European culture and national ideas, was reflected in a series of articles in the pages of “Albania” in early twentieth century. A first article was written in 1902 by Nuri bej Villa-Frashëri, a descendant of a big landowning family. His article was a response to a previous one, published in the Albanian patriotic journal “Drita” in Sofia, which criticized the Albanian nobility for making common cause with the Ottoman government, while increasing their benefits by exploiting the Albanian humble classes.¹¹¹

The author considered the “Albanian old nobility”, taken here for the traditional big landowning Moslem Albanian families, as being the natural leader of the people, because it was the only one which “knew people’s psychology”. The historical symbiosis between the old nobility and the people, the first compared in the text with “the driver” and the second with “a machine”, had broken down under the Tanzimat reforms. The pre-Tanzimat period (1839-1876) was described by the author as the period when calm and order reigned. The old Albanian nobility enjoyed such authority and strength that it obliged the central government to negotiate and leave in their hands the ruling of their localities. In the words of the author, the ruling of the traditional Albanian nobility couldn’t be, but magnanimous and paternalistic towards its own people. They had, it argued, spared the Albanian people from being brutally exploited by foreign governors, whose rule would be tougher because “racially” different.

The period of the Tanzimat reforms, that ensued after the ‘good old times’ of the author, was marked by centralization and the concentration of power in the hands of the Sublime Porte, which almost expelled the old Albanian nobility from its traditional position of local ruler. The author displayed a patrician outlook in considering the Albanian old nobility as the pillar of the nation and the natural guide of the people. According to the narrative of the author, when this state of things was reversed by the Tanzimat reforms, the Albanian people found themselves under the double tyranny of the Ottoman central government and the new emerging local ally, the plebeian nobility, or the “new/fake” nobility, which usurped the position of the traditional nobility and was devoid of any moral integrity.

In the following issue of “Albania”, one of Konitza’s collaborators from Bucharest delivered a response. He argued that the future independent Albania should be a country

¹¹¹ *Albania*, nr.1, (London, 1902), pg.8-10.

guaranteeing the full equality of all citizens before the law. His example of democracy was the “popular France”, as he put it, and the “great idea” of “Egalité, Fraternité, Liberté”. Unlike the first writer, the author of this article considered the “humble classes” as the pillar of the nation, displaying instead a plebeian conception of the nation. For him the nobility should be the one that people desired, the one that sprung out from the people.¹¹²

Faik Konitza replied two times to the last article. In the first, Konitza made it clear that the old nobility, to whom his family belonged, was the true defender of the people. By contrast, the “new/fake” nobility, just because it was allied with the Turkish government, was a harsher exploiter of the peasantry. He hinted at the Istanbul based Albanian activists, and Sami in particular, who had made their career in the capital of the Empire, and who had benefited from some privileges because they worked on the Turkish language. For Konitza, the Albanian nation was not only regionally divided, into Northern Gegs and Southern Tosks, but also from a social point of view, according to which the patriotic old nobility, though somehow surpassed by the time, has been far more useful to the country and to the humbler classes and stood in stark contrast to a corrupted “new/fake” nobility.¹¹³

In the following issue of the magazine, Konitza returned to this theme. He presented the Albanian old nobility as the protector of the Albanian people, especially of its Christian part. He associated this social division of the nation with the religious affiliations. The old nobility were the big Moslem families, while Christians stood in the position of *protégés*. Thus, Konitza divided the Albanian nation in local rulers, the big Albanian Moslem landowning families, and the ruled, in the most part the Christian part of the population. He explained that the “new/fake” nobility was emerging from the Moslem middle class. He argued that during the pre-Tanzimat reforms the Albanian inhabited lands were ruled by the big Albanian Moslem families, which shared power with the Sultan: they were co-rulers and not subdued by the Sublime Porte. Konitza thought that Albanian Christian populations made the most from this fact, as unlike their co-religionists in the Balkans, they did not suffer from the direct rule of a Moslem Sultan. The former spared the Christian Albanians the sufferings endured by other Balkan Christian populations. His conclusion was that the Albanian old nobility had guaranteed a general freedom for the Albanian populations until the Tanzimat reforms.

The situation changed for the worse after the centralizing Tanzimat reforms, both the power of the Albanian old nobility and the freedom and protection of the people were

¹¹² *Albania*, nr.3, (London, 1902), pg.54-56.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, pg.56-57.

destroyed. The vacuum left by the old nobility was promptly filled by the “new/fake” nobility, which in the words of Konitza was a kind of enriched Moslem middle class that usurped the highest places in the social hierarchy, after the disgrace of the Moslem “old and true” nobility. This Moslem middle class was a mere tool in the hands of the Ottoman central government and, it had neither the dignity nor the traditional authority of the old nobility.¹¹⁴

The above replies of Konitza call forth two remarks. One has to do with the image of the Albanian nation during pre and post Tanzimat periods and the other pertains to his social identification. In the treatise of Sami “Albania, what it was, what it is...” the distinction between the two periods stood in the fact that the Albanian nation as a whole had lost the prestige it had enjoyed in the pre-reforms periods. From a partner of the Turks in ruling the Empire, the Albanians were put at an inferior and undignified position when the Sublime Porte enforced the centralizing Tanzimat reforms. By contrast, Konitza presented a more nuanced account of the changes that occurred during the transition between the two periods of the Ottoman centralizing reforms. The only point in common was in admitting that the Tanzimat reforms brought with them the suppression of the traditional Albanian local rule in the framework of a decentralized Ottoman Empire. But, Konitza added more colors to the changed panorama.

In the article “Albania in 1801 and in 1901”, referring to the pre-Tanzimat times, Konitza wrote that “100 years ago Albanians were the most vivid and strongest nation in the Balkans but today we are the sickest and the weakest”.¹¹⁵ According to him, in the post-Tanzimat period, the country lost its prosperity and fell into a deplorable condition for another reason, the true protectors of the Albanian people, the old grand families had seen their authority and power diminished, while the growth of a Turcized Albanian Moslem middle class, which has replaced the traditional elite and was a mere tool of the Ottoman central government, had deepened the exploitation of the country and kept it in backwardness.

“In 1801 Albania had around fifty bej old houses [grand families] and some Christian important families, which truly loved the country, lived in Albania and kept the country as a hearth, around which common and poor people were united and got warm. Now, the nobility has been disrupted. A few old houses have remained. The burglars and the robbers [the “new/fake” nobility] had dispelled the bej [the “old” nobility] to Istanbul”.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ *Albania*, nr.4, (London, 1902), pg.78.

¹¹⁵ N. Jorgaqi (ed), *Faik Konica-Veptra*, vol.III, pg.69.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pg.71.

Therefore, if Sami looked at these periods of the history of Albania from the point of view of the destiny of the Albanian nation taken as a whole, Konitza characterized them also according to the particular role and the destiny of different social strata. Konitza described in a positive light the pre-Tanzimat period not only because Albanians were “partners” of the Turks and co-ruling the country, but because that order of things was protected and preserved by the old Albanian nobility. The argument of the important role played by the old noble Moslem Albanian families was used also by Ismail Qemali. The reason may be that both, Qemali and Konitza were descendents of the big landowning families. In fact, Konitza’s division of the history of Albania into two clear-cut periods, pre-Tanzimat and post-Tanzimat, when the “old” nobility was the master of the country, and its subsequently fall into disgrace, was both a romantic vision and a speculative description constructed on purpose. The centralizing reforms that the Sublime Porte undertook in the middle of the nineteenth century did not follow that linear and straight course described by Konitza. The social effects that followed were much more complex and it would take decades for the old nobility to lose its traditional authority. If for Sami recalling the pre-Tanzimat period principally served to incite the pride of Albanians to a glorious past, for Konitza it served also as a social stigma to lessen the role of other rival Albanian patriotic groups who were claiming a leading role in the Albanian national movement.

The entry of an increasing number of people of a much more variegated social origin into the Albanian national movement in the early twentieth century, and the growth in the number of centers of Albanian patriotism in the Balkans and Europe, entailed also a kind of competition among different actors. In this sense the way the Albanian nation was formulated and described pertained not only to ideological and cultural priorities, but also served pragmatic goals. Konitza saw his rivals of the Istanbul society, and its collaborators, as descendants of that newly emerged middle class, which nourished hate and revenge against the old nobility to whom he belonged, assigning to the former a tradition of opportunism and compromise harming the interests of the country and, in contrast, to the latter’s traditionally “patriotic” role.¹¹⁷

Konitza’s identification with the old nobility was also a device to present his own involvement in Albanian patriotic activities as a familiar tradition and thus a means to legitimize his leading position in the Albanian movement. On the other hand, Konitza was a young Albanian intellectual, a man of letters, who was detached in a tender age from the

¹¹⁷ Ibid., pg.84.

Ottoman and local environment of his native region and worked and lived for a long time in Western Europe. His intellectual activities in Brussels and London, mostly through his journal “Albania”, were very different from the career that the local patrimonial networks or family ties would have secured him in the Ottoman administration, should he have decided to remain inside the Empire. Therefore, he had the necessary distance to look at the old Albanian nobility not only as its descendant, but also as an outside observer. He did not spare his attacks on the old nobility who looked after their own interests, but, as a whole, this social stratum, according to Konitza, had performed good services to the country. In his second article on the old nobility, he presented himself as defender of the common people and wrote that he supported the idea of a future civilized Albanian state, where all people would be equal, regardless of their social origin. To the old nobility the future state should recognize only an honorific position, as a sign of gratitude for its past patriotic deeds.¹¹⁸ Konitza was among those young Albanian intellectuals of the early twentieth century, whose main social and political capital were not the family ties, but their modern knowledge.

Konitza assigned to himself the role of the “educator of the nation” and one who stood in the vanguard of the Albanian nationalist movement. With this regard Konitza wrote of himself:

“It was in 1895, when I was in Paris, that I firstly became acquainted with the existence of an Albanian propaganda and the publication of Albanian books in Bucharest. Since 1890, I was dealing with the elaboration of my language and I had created a library containing all books written by foreign albanologues. I had started to write some articles on Albanian nationality in a Paris based newspaper. This shows that Albanian propaganda was null. Because I was one of the very few tackling this issue pushed by my own initiative”.¹¹⁹

His role was conceived in opposition to those favoring violent methods to reach Albanian national affirmation.

“Il y a une douzaine d’années, on pouvait compter sur les doigts le nombre des nationaliste shkipëtar [Albanians]. Sans doute il ne manquait pas de gens dont une vague curiosité pour la langue nationale secouait quelque peu l’indifférence; mais les nationalistes sincères, avec des opinions fixées et un but précis, étaient fort rares et passaient pour des excentriques. Cependant, avec le temps, l’idée faisait du progress et l’attrait de tout ce qui est neuf et hardi nous amenait de jour en jour des adhérents, généralement des jeunes... Educateurs de la nation, c’est-à-dire l’opposé de demagogues, nous n’avions nulle envie d’entrer en concurrence avec des charlatants frénétiques. Avec une continuité ininterrompue de methode, nous nous sommes toujours appliqué à

¹¹⁸ *Albania*, nr.4, (London, 1902), pg.81.

¹¹⁹ N. Jorgaqi, *Faik Konica-Vepra*, vol.3, pg.18-60.

eviter de flatter les passions populaires et n'avons recherché d'autre succès que la conquête permanente d'intelligences libres.”¹²⁰

This article was written in a time, 1901, when the conflict in the “Macedonian” territories deepened further more and sharpened the clashes between various Balkan nationalisms, each contending for territorial supremacy in this multi-ethnic European part of the Empire. The clashes in the “Macedonian” territories coincided, as mentioned above, with the emergence of a new generation of Albanian activists. This generation was made up by new intellectuals with radical ideas, journalists or editors of patriotic newspapers, teachers in the state schools, or employees in the local administration, coming from the middle classes, petty bourgeoisie of the towns. Members of this generation of patriots created in November 1905 in the town of Monastir [present day Macedonia] an Albanian Committee called “For the Freedom of Albania”, headed by Bajo Topulli, vice director of the Turkish gymnasium of the town.¹²¹ Its major aim was the recognition of the Albanians as a nation in its own, the recognition of the Albanian language as a national language and its introduction in the state schools. For the achievement of these goals the Committee decided that, besides national propaganda, it was necessary to create armed bands, under the example of the neighbors. From the period from 1906 till the proclamation of the Ottoman Constitution in 1908 after the Young Turks Revolution, various Albanian armed bands operated in the “Macedonian” territories and in southern Albania, trying to counter the Slav and Greek propaganda and save the Albanian inhabited territories from annexation. The major events related to the armed activities of the Albanian bands were the killing in September 1906 of the Greek Bishop of the town of Korça [south-western Albania], held to have supported Greeks efforts to suppress the Albanian patriotic activities in the region, and the killing in March 1908 of the commander of the Turkish garrison in Gjirokastra [southern Albania].¹²²

“Albania” of Konitza expressed its concern about the escalation of the armed activities and condemned the killings by the Albanian armed bands. In line also with the Austrian policy of the preservation of the *status quo* in the Balkan Ottoman territories, Konitza thought that the best way for the Albanian national movement to achieve its goals

¹²⁰ *Albania*, nr.5, (London, 1907), pg.118-119. Konitza was not very regular in publishing his review, and some numbers were prepared with much delay. This number of his review was prepared in 1908, but on the cover page of the review was written 1907.

¹²¹ *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, [History of the Albanian People], vol.II, pg.315-318.

¹²² N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pg. 564; 568. *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, [History of the Albanian People], vol.II, pg. 315-318.

were to be confined within the limits of a cultural movement, “the spread of Albanian language and knowledge among the people”, which would best serve the preparation of the Albanian people for future political independence.

For Konitza, the aim of “national propaganda” was the efforts to “awaken and bring together the Albanian nation”.¹²³ He thought that the armed upheaval could only temporarily bring a union among Albanians, but only the “literary propaganda” [national education through language] could eradicate the causes of division and cultivate lasting “national feelings”. His opinion was based on the assumption that an upheaval was senseless when the majority of the nation did not know what was the meaning of a “nation”, and when not only Moslems did not want to unite with Christians, but they were not united even among themselves.

In 1907, in an article called “The two schools”, Konitza wrote that there were two alternatives to solve the Albanian question.¹²⁴ One was armed rebellion, or the way of “today spontaneous killings” preparing the ground for a “future general massacre”. For Konitza, this option was harmful and senseless, as the Albanian people were not yet politically mature and that some European Powers were still decided to preserve the *status quo* in the “Macedonian” territories. Therefore, Albania and Macedonia were to remain for some time in the Ottoman Empire preventing eventual territorial divisions. The second option, supported by Konitza, was that of the “éducation politique”. Europe, he believed, was not ready to recognize the national rights of Albania, when its people was considered as politically immature and, consequently, unfit for self-rule. For him, the only valid program to the Albanian national cause was “political education”, or the cultural development of the Albanians, which would strengthen their feelings of belonging to the same “nation”.

In the end, his role should be taken as that of a “European cultured” man conscious of the big gap dividing him from his own people, but at the same time feeling a moral duty to tell these poor people the way to shake off from their shoulders the burden of backwardness. In 1921, almost a decade after Albanian independence in 1912, Konitza wrote that for a while he had thought that the problem of Albanians was a “national” one, that with the proclamation of the independence this people would fast embark on the road of progress and development. But, independence had shown that the Albanian problem was even deeper, it

¹²³ *Albania*, nr.11, (London, 1902), pg.241.

¹²⁴ *Albania*, nr.3, (London, 1907), pg.59.

was, as he called it, a problem of “moral and social training of the people”, i.e. it was a matter to learning how to live a civic life.¹²⁵

5. Albanian studies on Faik Konitza and his “Albania” review

The Albanian official historiography of the communist period considered Faik Konitza a “reactionary figure”, due to “his negative role in hindering the efforts of the Albanian people to create its own national and independent state and to progress on the road of democracy, social and spiritual emancipation”.¹²⁶ He was mainly blamed for being “the representative of the landowning feudal class, for defending feudal class’ interests and having no trust in the Albanian people’s capacities to build up its own independent state”.¹²⁷ He was also accused “to have favoured an Austrian protectorate for Albania in the early XX century and after the First World War an Italian protectorate”.¹²⁸ Finally, his biggest “sin” was the fact that “he accepted to be the diplomatic envoy of the former King Zog I to Washington”.¹²⁹

After the fall of the communist regime in 1990, his name was quickly rehabilitated. We have now a series of publications on him, including articles in the periodical press, books and collection of his literary work. Here we mention only the most important. In 1993 was published the first book on Faik Konitza, a collection of his writings, including articles and prose.¹³⁰ In 1994, Sabri Hamiti, published “Faik Konitza: this is me”, which was a first attempt at a literary critique on his prose and poetry.¹³¹ One year later, Jup Kastrati published in New York a study on the work of Faik Konitza.¹³² In 1998, Luan Starova wrote a book in French with the title “Faik Konitza et Guillaume Apollinaire, une amitié européenne”.¹³³ This

¹²⁵ N. Jorgaqi (ed), *Faik Konica-Vepra*, vol. III, pg.168-173.

¹²⁶ *Drita* [The Light], (Tirana, 1990), pg.4.

¹²⁷ K. Frashëri, “Kush ishte Faik Konitza” [Who was Faik Konitza], *Nëntori*, nr.1, (Tirana, 1991), pg.78. This was one of the first articles appearing in the Albanian press on Faik Konitza after the fall of the communist regime in Albania in 1990. The author explained some of the reasons why the Albanian historiography after the Second World War had discarded Faik Konitza from the Albanian patriotic elite of the National Movement and tried to rehabilitate his figure.

¹²⁸ *Idem*, pg.78.

¹²⁹ *Idem*, pg.79. Robert Elsie writes that “Konitza’s ties with the Zogu’s regime in later years created consternation among many Albanian intellectuals and it is this more than anything which caused his influence on Albanian literature and culture to be underestimated and ignored by post-war critics in Tirana”. R. Elsi, “Introduction”, in B. Destani (ed.) *Faik Konitza, selected correspondence*, (London, 2000), pg.x.

¹³⁰ N. Jorgaqi/Xh. Lloshi (eds.), *Faik Konica-Vepra*, [Faik Konitza-Works](Tirana, 1993).

¹³¹ S. Hamiti, *Faik Konica: jam unë*, [Faik Konitza: it is me], (Tirana, 1994).

¹³² J. Kastrati, *Faik Konica*, (New York, 1995).

¹³³ L. Starova, *Faik Konitza et Guillaume Apollinaire, une amitié européenne*, (Paris, 1998). I have used here the Albanian version, L.Starova, *Faik Konica dhe Guillaume Apollinaire, një miqësi evropiane*, (Tirana, 2001).

book is a collection of articles that Konitza wrote in French and also texts by his friend and poet Guillaume Apollinaire on Konitza. In 2001, Nasho Jorgaqi published a five volume collection, which includes his poetry, translation from foreign literature, novels, essays on language and literature, epistolary with foreign and Albanian colleagues, articles appearing in the Albanian press of the time and studies on his work.¹³⁴ This is a first step in collecting the dispersed literary work of Konitza. Nevertheless, it lacks a sound informative apparatus and materials are published without a clear criterion.

Many of the authors concur that the publication of *Albania* review (1897-1909) was his greatest contribution to the Albanian National Movement and creating a literary language out of the Albanian dialects.¹³⁵ They praise his role in setting the first rules of modern Albanian syntax.¹³⁶ Konitza is considered to be the forerunner of a long transformation process of the Albanian language into a standardized one.¹³⁷ All studies underline his deep linguistic knowledge, his talent as a writer and his mastering of various languages, dead and living, from East and from West. They praise Faik Konitza's importance for Albanian culture and view him as the founder of Albanian literary critique. For Kristaq Jorgo he systematized the criteria of literary critique. He was perhaps the first to follow the Albanian literary production of that time and to try to set some parameters for its evaluation.¹³⁸ Konitza perceived criticism as a literary genre *per se* and tried to compile a history of Albanian literature from the seventeenth to the twentieth century.

Konitza was the writer who opened new dimensions for Albanian literature in the early twentieth century. The satiric and sarcastic tones in his writings and essays contrasted with the Albanian romantic literature of the nineteenth century, which mostly hailed "Albanian traditions and virtues". According to these studies, influenced by the French literature of the nineteenth century, for Konitza it was easy to discard many works of Albanian patriots as poor from a literary point of view.¹³⁹ For Robert Elsie, Konitza was too

¹³⁴ N. Jorgaqi (ed), *Faik Konica-Vepra*, (Tirana, 2001).

¹³⁵ E. Koliqi "Konica, mjeshtër i gjuhës shqipe" [Konitza, a master of the Albanian language], in N. Jorgaqi (ed), *Faik Konica-Vepra*, vol.5, pg.83.

¹³⁶ M. Camaj, "Mbi funksionin e gjuhës së Nolit dhe Konicës" (On the function of the language of Noli and Konitza), in N. Jorgaqi (ed), *Faik Konica-Vepra*, vol.5, pg.109. Also S. Skëndi, *Balkan Cultural Studies*, pg.220.

¹³⁷ Xh. Lloshi, "Stili i Faik Konicës", [The style of Faik Konitza], in N. Jorgaqi (ed), *Faik Konica-Vepra*, vol.5, pg.287. See also Robert Elsie, *History of Albanian Literature*, (New York, 1995), pg.271.

¹³⁸ K. Jorgo, "Faik Konica dhe sistemi letrar shqiptar" [Faik Konitza and the Albanian literary system], *Studime Filologjike*, nr. 1-4, (Tirana, 1993), pg.199-129. This article is a rare exception of a thoroughly study of the ideas of Faik Konitza on Albanian literature and its critique.

¹³⁹ L. Starova, "Ese për gjuhët natyrore dhe artificiale" [Essay on natural and artificial languages], in N. Jorgaqi, *Faik Konica-Vepra*, vol.5, (Tiranë, 2001), pg.348.

sophisticated to appreciate the “nationalist outpourings on the lofty virtues of the Albanian people”.¹⁴⁰ With Konitza, Albanian prose entered the transition from romanticism to realism.¹⁴¹ Through his translations, he offered to the Albanian readers the masterpieces of the world literature. He translated from Arabic “The thousand and one nights”, which appeared in Albanian with the title “Under the shade of the Date Palms”, Shakespeare, Miguel Cervantes, Henrik Ibsen, Edgar Allan Poe, etc. He was of the opinion that the translation of the world literature into Albanian would help its further elaboration and refinement.¹⁴²

All these studies have the merit to collect and systematize for the first time the otherwise dispersed literary production of Faik Konitza in various newspapers and archives. They have raised interest in him and have made easier the task of scholars who want to study him. One common characteristic of these studies is the delineation of Konitza as somebody who was different from the first generation of the Albanian nationalist leaders of the period from the Congress of Berlin till the end of nineteenth century. Due to his wide knowledge in various fields, such as history, languages, music, ethnography, etc, these studies consider him as the most advanced intellectual of his time, the father of Albanian *belles lettres* and a consummate stylist of Albanian language and one of the first representatives of “realism” in the Albanian literature.¹⁴³ Konitza is held to belong to an intermediary period of time that stands between the National Movement (1878-1912) and that of Independence (1912-1939).

However, according to Rexhep Qosja, at the close of the nineteenth century “romantic” elements in Albanian literature coexisted with “realism” and we cannot draw a clear cut line between these two literary streams. They intermingled with each other and continued in their symbiosis even in the first decades of the twentieth century. Therefore, it would be more correct to define Konitza’s literary production as a kind of blend of “romanticism” with new elements of “realism”.¹⁴⁴ In fact, his literary legacy bore the stamp of the two historical periods in which he lived. Faik Konitza is depicted as somebody

¹⁴⁰ R. Elsie, Introduction to B. Destani (ed), *Faik Konitza, selected correspondence*, (London, 2000), pg.x.

¹⁴¹ Dh. Fullani, “Proza e Faik Konicës” [The prose of Faik Konitza], in N. Jorgaqi (ed), *Faik Konica-Veptra*, vol.5, pg.235.

¹⁴² M. Camaj, “Mbi funksionin e gjuhës së Nolit dhe Konicës” (On the function of the language of Noli and Konitza), in N. Jorgaqi (ed), *Faik Konica-Veptra*, vol.5, pg.121.

¹⁴³ J. Kastrati, *Faik Konica*, pg.532. N. Jorgaqi, “Faik Konica, shkrimtari” [Faik Konitza, the writer], in N. Jorgaqi (ed), *Faik Konica-Veptra*, vol.1, pg.16.

¹⁴⁴ R. Qosja, “Faik Konica, ngadhnjimtari i vonuar” [Faik Konitza, the belated winner], in N. Jorgaqi (ed), *Faik Konica-Veptra*, vol.5, pg. 133.

influenced by both Oriental and Occidental cultures, but the latter triumphing over the former.¹⁴⁵ He is seen as a symbolic representation of the European leanings of the Albanian people.¹⁴⁶

With few exceptions, these studies on Konitza are a kind of romanticized narrative of his figure, rather than textual critique. Almost all that has been written on him exudes a kind of enthusiasm in “discovering”, after a long period of silence, such an interesting figure. However, these studies fail to explore his ideological and cultural backgrounds. There are not analysis on how and by which European authors and ideas was he influenced. Instead, he is simply seen as an erudite and patriotic Albanian intellectual, who, due to his exceptional talent as a writer and his fully Western education, played a major role in the national culture of the time of the National Movement.

Some authors mention the influence of Montaigne, Voltaire, Diderot on Konitza, when he initiated the essay as a new literary genre in Albanian literature at the end of XIX century. But, they do not explain in what sense their influence can be grasped in his works.¹⁴⁷ Others claim that he was influenced by the French school of impressionist criticism, whose leaders were Charles Baudelaire, Jules Le Maitre, Paul Valery and Remy de Gourmont.¹⁴⁸

To thoroughly scrutinize them would require a separate study. We can quickly touch upon the influence of symbolism and evolutionary ideas. This is possible as Konitza has left clear references to them. As we have already seen, in his essay on artificial languages Konitza referred quite often to the French symbolist writer Remy de Gourmont (1858-1915) and the English philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820-1903). Konitza mentions two books of Remy de Gourmont “L’esthétique de la langue française” (1899) and “La culture des idées” (1900). The main message of de Gourmont’s conception of symbolism was the liberty that every individual has in interpreting and judging art and that the latter’s representation is the way how we perceive it. The stress was put on individual aesthetic as a fundamental precondition in creating art. For de Gourmont, words were the substratum of thought, its form and essence, they have unique aesthetic values.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, pg.534. See also N. Jorgaqi, “Faik Konica, shkrimtari”, pg.13.

¹⁴⁶ L Starova, *Faik Konica dhe Guillaume Apollinaire, një miqësi evropiane*, pg.6. See also R. Qosja, “Introduction” to J. Kastrati, *Faik Konica*, pg.25.

¹⁴⁷ N. Jorgaqi, “Faik Konica, shkrimtari”, in N. Jorgaqi (ed), *Faik Konica-Veptra*, vol.1, pg.28.

¹⁴⁸ R. Qosja, “Faik Konica, ngadhënjimtari i vonuar”, pg. 138.

¹⁴⁹ See also three texts of Remy de Gourmont “Le symbolisme”, “L’art libre et l’esthétique individuelle” and “L’ivresse verbale”. In <http://www.remydegourmont.org> as accessed in June 2008.

Konitza seemed to have appropriated the above ideas and applied them in some of his writings. When in 1906 he promised to publish in his review a regular literary critique of Albanian literature, intended as a literary genre *per se*, he wrote that the methodology of literary critique should be different from that of the sciences. According to Konitza, literary criticism was subjective as it was only a personal impression.¹⁵⁰ Here he drew a clear division between “patriotism” and “aesthetics”, the latter only being the right judgment on literary production. This was an obvious break with the romantic verse and prose of other Albanian writers of his time. Like de Gourmont, Faik Konitza was particularly concerned with the style of writing and devoted particular attention to correctly and clearly writing the Albanian language.¹⁵¹

The other characteristic of Konitza’s writings was the constant references to the idea of evolution in relation to the literary language. It had to do in general with the Albanian speaking people, as a community going towards a higher stage of its development, which is the Albanian nation. In particular it refers to the Albanian literary language, taken as the evolution of the spoken popular language, the dialects, into an Albanian literary language.

As it was mentioned before, Konitza saw the language as strictly connected with the people speaking it and he ascribed to the natives a predestined genetic capacity to speak their own language.¹⁵² Here he referred to the definition of the style of writing formulated by Herbert Spencer as pertaining “to economize the attention of readers”.¹⁵³ Konitza wrote that only a writer of the same “race” as his readers had full chances to succeed in his literary performance. His perception of the writer’s style in a natural language was that it created that unique atmosphere through which his work can be assimilated by his audience of native speakers. This atmosphere, as understood by Konitza, as a kind of climate created by cognitive signals expressed through the mother tongue, which could induce people to understand a message and to contextualize it easier and with less mental effort, or “attention”, than a foreigner could do. According to him, this was possible in natural languages only.

¹⁵⁰ F. Konica, “Periudhizimi i letrave shqipe” [Periodization of Albanian letters], in N. Jorgaqi (ed), *Faik Konica-Vepra*, vol.5, pg.244.

¹⁵¹ F. Konica, “Disa këshilla për artin e shkrimit” [Some advises on the art of writing], in N. Jorgaqi (ed), *Faik Konica-Vepra*, vol.5, pg.224. For more see also, K. Jorgo, “Faik Konica dhe sistemi letrar shqiptar”, pg.199-129.

¹⁵² L. Starova, *Faik Konica dhe Guillaume Apollinaire, një miqësi evropiane*, pg.126.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, op.cit, pg.125. Here Konitza refers to Herbert Spencer book “Philosophy of the style”, in “Essays: scientific, political and speculative”, London 1883, vol.II, pg.11. Spencer held that along with the human evolution people have acquired through biological heritage certain capacities that are developed independently from individual experiences.

Their evolution was based on long living experiences of a given people, but also on the born instincts to appropriate the native language.

On the other hand, Spencer's influence on Konitza, and his positivist ideas in a wider sense, can be seen in his claim to explore linguistic phenomena only in a scientific way. This was reinforced by a strong belief in progress, in a laic stand with regard to politics and agnosticism with regard to religious matters. This matched well with the intention of Konitza to create an Albanian identity out of linguistic and common descent, as primary national attributes, rather than on any religious basis. As for the Albanian nationalist movement, which was seen as opposed to the other more religiously influenced Balkan movements, he wrote that:

“Le seul élément de progrès dans l'Empire ottoman c'est le parti national albanais. En effet, nous autres Albanais, nous ne nous plaçons jamais au point de vue religieux. Nous respectons toutes les convictions sincères, mais nous considérons qu'elles sont affaire de conscience... Unis dans un même désir de progrès intellectuel, d'amélioration politique et économique, tous ces Albanais ne se réclament que de leurs droits en tant qu'hommes... Le mouvement albanais est donc un parti *moderne* de progrès *vrai*. Les autres mouvements, quelle que soit leur étiquette, ne sont que des *confréries religieuses*”.¹⁵⁴

Some authors have rightly stressed the importance of Konitza's knowledge of various foreign languages in his undertaking to forge an Albanian literary language.¹⁵⁵ The influence of French is evident in the way he writes Albanian.¹⁵⁶ Others refer to his classical education (Ancient Rome, European Renaissance) when they praise the clarity, the beautiful expression of his thoughts and the way Konitza constructed his phrases.¹⁵⁷ While writing on Konitza, Albanian scholars have delineated for him the profile of an “erudite awakener” and “enlightener” of the nation.¹⁵⁸ He is seen as a patriot intellectual, who elaborated the Albanian language and enhanced it at the level of literary language. His linguistic contribution is conceived as reviving and improving a national attribute such as the national

¹⁵⁴ *Albania*, nr.4, (London, 1903), pg.63.

¹⁵⁵ In various articles with the title “New Words”, while trying to create new words in Albanian, Konitza brings in examples from French, Greek and Turkish. See for example “New Words”, in *Albania*, nr.6, (Brussels, 1897), pg.97.

¹⁵⁶ L. Starova, “Faik Konitza dhe Guillaume Apollinaire”, op.cit, pg.10. Konitza used to write in French when he wanted to explain problems related to the writing of a language. F. Konica, “La question de l'écriture albanaise”, *Albania*, nr.7, (Brussels, 1897), pg.111. The second part of this article is published again in French in the successive issue of *Albania*, nr.8, (Brussels, 1897), pg.133. Another important article regarding the Albanian literary language is written in French as well. F. Konitza, “Les dialectes albanais et la nécessité de leur fusion”, in *Albania*, nr.10, (Brussels, 1898), pg.173.

¹⁵⁷ R. Qosja, “Introduction” to J. Kastrati, *Faik Konica*, pg.20.

¹⁵⁸ J. Kastrati, *Faik Konica*, pg.527. Also S. Hamiti, *Faik Konica: jam unë*, pg.36; L. Starova, *Faik Konica dhe Guillaume Apollinaire, një miqësi evropiane*, pg.11.

language. But, the way of explaining his role is strongly linked to some deeply entrenched ideological dogmas in Albanians studies.

First of all, it was always held that Albanians represent a specific case in the Balkan context with regard to religion. Albanians had never forgotten their nationality though divided into three religious communities. It was due to their superficial religious affiliations. Secondly, and unlike other Balkan people who identified religion with nationality, Albanians had to cope with a far more difficult situation. Religious affiliations are considered as an obstacle to national unity, national awakening and political emancipation.¹⁵⁹ Consequently, the choice on language as the “strongest link” by Albanian intellectuals of the National Movement is considered by Albanian historiography as more rational and more scientific as compared to religion.¹⁶⁰

Many studies on Balkan nationalisms emphasize the importance of “national” languages as a marker of nationality. It was not an Albanian specificity. The use of language to define nations was instead an important part of national projects all over the peninsula, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century. As Paschalis Kitromilides has shown in the case of the rise of Greek nationalism in the early XIX century, the linguistically-based Greek community, as part of parochial secular ideals of nationalism, ran counter to ecumenical and theocratic values of Orthodoxy.¹⁶¹

In general Balkan nationalist intellectuals of the nineteenth century used language both as a means of enlightenment and unification, but also as a factor of national identity.¹⁶² Faik Konitza was a modernizer and nationalist intellectual with the intention to realize the project of a cultural homogenous entity in a particular context, such as the “Albanian nation”, then the “Albanian literary language” was the most convenient tool to bring it into being. The Albanian literary language, in this case, was not merely the improvement of a “national attribute”, such as the spoken vernacular. It was the outcome of a selective process of nationalist intellectuals, who took certain elements from the traditional culture to incorporate into the new culture, the “national” one. The literary language was also an ideological construct with a highly symbolic significance. It secured continuity between old populations and Albanians, it was a strong identity-maker, and at the same time, it could legitimize the

¹⁵⁹ *Historia e popullit shqiptar* (History of Albanian people), vol.II, pg.27.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, pg.80

¹⁶¹ P. M. Kitromilides, *Enlightenment, Nationalism, Orthodoxy, Studies in the culture and political thought of south-eastern Europe*, (London, 1994), pg.56-57.

¹⁶² S. Skëndi, “Language as a Factor of National Identity in the Balkans of the Nineteenth Century”, in S. Skëndi, *Balkan Cultural Studies*, pg.33.

Albanian nation in the eyes of Europe and give it the license to enter civilization as a predestined target.

CONCLUSIONS

In the Albanian language the word “nation” is “komb”. An etymologic analysis of this term reveals an Ottoman linguistic influence over the Albanian lexis. The Albanian word “komb” stems from the Ottoman ones “kaum, kavim”, which implies a community bound by blood ties, in contrast to a religious community, or an “umma, millet”. Albanian nationalist intellectuals, firstly Shemseddin Sami Frashëri, as noted in chapter two, introduced this term into the Albanian language with a certain goal. In an effort to imagine a unitary Albanian “nation”, given that Albanian speaking populations were “divided” into different religious communities, Moslem, Orthodox and Catholic, Sami chose from the Ottoman language the word that excluded religious connotations. “Komb” was to become the appropriate term to denote the blood based community that was otherwise religiously “divided”. The case of the use of the term “komb” in the Albanian language reflects the perception and articulation of the concept of an extended pan-Albanian community seen as an Albanian national “imagined community”. The gradual evolution of the term “komb”, from the concept of a family, tribe, to that of the common people and culture, indicates the way nationalist intellectuals selected and changed the lexis in accordance with their programs and concepts. The final product was to be an Albanian “nation” that stood above religions divisions. This accords with the dominant discourse of Albanian nationalist intellectuals over the Albanian nation, which placed the stress on non-religious ties keeping together the Albanian “nation”, mostly the common origin and the language. This last one with further ‘adjustments’ was intended to make the Albanians feel closer to each other.¹

This linguistic fact indicates a close relationship between Albanian nationalism and the Ottoman Empire. Albanian nationalism found the necessary space inside the empire and its main objective initially was not to separate from the Sublime Porte. The conventional view of Albanian historiography looks at the multi-national empires and the nation-states as two irreconcilable realities. From the perspective of today we perceive the empires as predestined to die before the onslaught of the more vigorous and more modern paradigm of the nation-state. The latter are usually taken as the highest and most developed stage in the

¹ For more A. Puto, “Evoluimi semantik dhe perftesa ideologjike e fjalës “komb” [The semantic evolution and the ideological connotation of the term “komb”], in *Përpykja*, nr.21, (Tirana, 2005).

political organization of human societies to date. The narrative of the national historiographies recognizes the actors of the national movements as deeply aware patriots, whom final aim was to endow their nation with political sovereignty, which results from a separatist movement, or stemming from the will of the majority of the population to have its own national state. Consequently, these actors are described as embodying a national single-dimensional identity that is ascribed to them as a quasi biological quality. The Albanian case does not fit well with this imagery of empires and nation-states.

In first place, three of the four case studies, Pashko Vasa, Shemseddin Sami Frashëri, Ismail Qemali, were actively involved at the highest level in Ottoman political and cultural life, combining “being Ottoman” with “being Albanian”. Such an overlapping was possible not only due to the multi-cultural Ottoman Empire, but also due to the “Ottomanist” ideology of the modernizing policies of Tanzimat (1839-1876). “Ottomanism” was an ideology which aimed, first of all, to nurture a political loyalty to the Ottoman state, including elites with different ethnic backgrounds. These elites were politically attached to the center, which did not intend to erase the pre-modern peripheral identities, but to accommodate them into a form of a modern citizenry within the framework of the imperial state. This was a propitious ground for the growth of multi-identity elites. Adapting the traditional structure of the Ottoman power, i.e. the continuous negotiation between center and periphery, to the constitution of a Western type centralized state, would be one of toughest challenges and one of the most constant sources of tensions between the “old” and “new” in the Ottoman Empire of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. These processes would affect the multi-identity elites prompting them either to participate or to react against them. This would determine to a great extent the capacity of the Ottoman Empire to survive. The survival of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans posed a geo-political problem of European importance following the Russian-Ottoman war (1876), which led to the San Stefano Treaty and the Congress of Berlin (1878). A new stage in the crisis of the Ottoman rule in the Balkans was created by the Macedonian crisis of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The international conferences of the Great Powers (Great Britain, Russia, Germany, Austro-Hungary, France, Italy), convened to ‘solve’ the problems of the Ottoman Empire would lead towards the granting of political sovereignty to Romania, Serbia, Montenegro and Bulgaria. On the other hand, the decisions of the Great Powers, from the last quarter of the nineteenth and to early twentieth century, marked new stages in the withdrawal of the Sublime Porte from the Balkans. The direct consequence of the Ottoman withdrawal would be that territories inhabited by Moslem Albanian speaking populations would be left unprotected.

These territories became target of the newly founded Balkan Orthodox states, which sought territorial enlargement through splitting up the Ottoman heritage in the Balkan Peninsula. This situation in the Balkans attracted the interest of European Powers, whose mutual rivalry for expansion would preserve the status quo in the Balkans and lessened the pace of the Ottoman evacuation.

In these conditions, an Albanian question emerged in the region. As a predominantly Moslem population its reaction was directed primarily to preserve the rule of the Sultan and resisting the division of the territories by the new Balkan orthodox states. On the other hand, Albanian nationalism would seek its own part in the division of the multi-ethnic Macedonia, entering into a fierce competition with the other Balkan projects, such as Bulgarian, Greek, Serbian, for territorial expansion in the conditions of a weakened Sublime Porte. The League of Prizren was born (1878-1881) as a reaction of the Moslem Albanian speaking populations against the threat from the Balkan states and it received support from Istanbul both direct and indirect. At this point these populations react against the dissolution of the Ottoman rule.

This marks also, what we might call as the politicization of Miroslav Hroch's phase A of the national movements, which is the period of the scholarly interest on the nation. If during the first half of the nineteenth century the Albanians of Italy started to undertake researches on the existence of the Albanian nation, establishing its cultural peculiarities, its origin, language and its character, now, in the conditions of a Balkan region standing between the withdrawal of the Sublime Porte and the advancement of the new Balkan Orthodox states, these scientific findings were turned into ideological tools to back a political discourse. Albanian nationalist intellectuals strove to turn the territories inhabited by Albanian speaking populations, and beyond these confines, into the natural space of the Albanian nation.

For Pashko Vasa, a high ranked Ottoman employee, Catholic Albanian, the autonomy for Albanians within the Empire was a better guarantee as they were an under-developed people and were not capable of self-government. On the other hand, he presented the Ottoman dominion as something which Albanians were used to, because it guaranteed their existence and preserved Albanian traditions and character, based upon the traditional decentralized Ottoman system. Autonomy for Albanians was seen also as a condition for the strengthening of the rule of the Empire in the Balkans. Vasa wrote his works on Albanians after he had published writings on the modernization of the Empire and on its new legislation. His concept of the paternalist Ottoman state as a shelter for Albanians, his thoughts that the government was the most illuminated part of the society and that for the under-developed populations the best option was to gradually evolve in order not to spoil their character, were

some of the meeting-points between his thoughts as a Ottoman statesman and his role as a nationalist Albanian leader.

Shemseddin Sami Frashëri considered the relations between Albanians and the Empire from another perspective. Viewing Albanians as part of the Ottoman Moslem people, Sami added Moslem religion among the common interests linking Albanians to the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, another foreign rule over Albanians, implying in first place the Orthodox states of the region, would worsen their situation. His Albanian writings were intertwined with his other activities as an Ottoman intellectual. In the case of Sami, the overlapping of various identities in one person was also the way he understood his “being an Ottoman”. For him the Ottoman Empire was the “general fatherland”, while Albania was the “particular” one. Furthermore, being influenced by materialism and Moslem reformism he perceived the Islamic community as composed of various ethnies. Their advancement stood in the use of the vernaculars, according to Sami. Unlike Pashko Vasa, Sami was an Ottoman intellectual, with a richer profile, as a linguist and journalist. If Vasa conveyed the feeling of political Ottoman loyalty, Sami had also a professional devotion for the Turkish language. He published various dictionaries in this language and wrote a series of article for the standardization of vernacular Turkish. In this sense, Sami possessed a threefold identity, i.e. Ottoman, Turkish and Albanian. Sami was an Ottoman scholar who has written on Islamic civilization and modernity, but at the same time being involved in the standardization process of the vernacular Turkish and Albanian as well. He was an Ottoman journalist, a Turkish linguist, but also an Albanian nationalist intellectual that together with his brothers helped to promote Albanian nationalism. In the last years of his life Sami wrote one of the most important treatises for Albanian nationalism. His book “Albania what it was, what it is and what it will be” was published in 1899. He wrote this book in the years of the Macedonian question, when the European Powers were trying to divide Macedonia, or most of the European Ottoman territories, according to the ethnies inhabiting it. Such a divisions was expected to favor the Balkan Christian populations, while the Moslem populations of the region, Albanians in first place, were in danger of being categorised as “Moslem Turks”, and, as such, to be deported from the Balkans. The Empire was losing its ability to keep its possessions in the Balkans and, therefore, it could no longer be a safe shelter for the Albanians. At this moment, and considering an eventual dissolution of the Empire, Sami’s stance became more politicized and took into account even the idea of a new Albanian state. Another indication of Sami’s more radicalized position was his effort to construct another image for Albanian Moslems. Sami wanted to justify the future separation from the Empire,

in case of an eventual crumbling of the Ottoman rule, also from the religious point of view. Years earlier he had seen in Islam a strong bond between Albanians and the Empire. Now, in the new conditions of the late nineteenth century, during the Macedonian crisis, it became necessary to draw a dividing line between European Moslem Albanians and Asian Moslem Turks. Such a distinction was used to justify the autochthony of Albanians in the Balkans and thus to avoid the destiny visited on the Moslem populations in Serbia and Bosnia, which were expelled to Anatolia after Serbia became independent and Bosnia fell under the Austrian protectorate in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. He aimed to create a place for a predominant Balkan Moslem population, like the Albanian speaking ones, when the Peninsula was succumbing to the rule of the newly founded Balkan Christian states. The imagining of Moslem people as “Turks” and, on the other hand, “Turks” as something extraneous to the civilized Europe was a cliché that went parallel with the interests of the European Powers to dominate the post-Ottoman Balkans. In this sense, the survival or death of the old imperial Ottoman state became the turning point that determined the prevalence of a new national identity over the imperial one and/or the gradual fading away of the co-existence of the Ottoman identity with the Albanian one.

The feeling of powerlessness to stop the destruction of the Ottoman Empire as a result of the failure of the Tanzimat modernizing reforms, the absolutism of Sultan Abdulhamid II and the centralizing policies of the Young Turks in late nineteenth and early twentieth century, prompted the other Ottoman dignitary, Ismail Qemali, to engage more in the Albanian question. His Ottoman-Albanian multi-identity was shaped by his being an heir of a powerful Albanian family, which had faithfully served the Ottoman Empire in past centuries in consolidating its power in the Albanian inhabiting territories, but also into a wider context. Imperial loyalty and a close connection with the local reality was the fundamental characteristic of these families. Qemali praised the Tanzimat reforms as important for the Empire, but he underlined the necessity for them to be undertaken in conformity with the character of the people living in the Ottoman state. This explains also his attitude in favor of a decentralized system, where various people would be treated according to their level of development. Being a politician who, during his career, was also part of the Ottoman provincial administration in different parts of the Empire, Qemali elaborated the concept of the nation from the perspective of “political maturity” of a given people. Unlike Vasa and Sami, Qemali distinguished “races”, “people” and “nations”. In this last category he included people which had displayed a capacity to politically organize themselves, to create their own religious institutions, which he defined as “the fulfilling of historical rights”, or as a progress

towards an independent political life. These prerogatives could not be assigned to ethnic groups in the early stages of their development, such as “races” and “people”. The Albanian “nation” in Qemali’s memoirs, which in fact occupies much less space than his devotion to the Ottoman Empire, it is a “noble savage” community and close to his concept of “race”. In this way, Qemali saw as important the link between Albanians and the Ottoman Empire both for the strengthening of the Ottoman rule in the Balkans and for the preservation of Albanians as a separate people. He didn’t give up his hopes for the salvation of the Empire till the very end. Qemali would argue the symbolical proclamation of the Albanian independence in 1912 more dictated by circumstances, which rendered impossible the continued connection of Albanians with the Empire, when the Ottoman armies withdrew from the Balkans after the Balkan wars of 1912-1913, rather than an expression of the desire and will of the majority of the Albanian speaking populations. Albanian nationalist intellectuals were convinced that the Albanian “nation” was not politically mature and it still had the need for the protection of the Empire, mainly against the Balkan Orthodox neighbors.

Faik Konitza, the other Albanian nationalist intellectual, who passed his life in the West, was of the same opinion. He thought that Albanians were not prepared for an independent life and were a culturally backward people. For this reason he advocated for Albanians autonomy inside the Empire as a transitory phase, during which Albanians should cultivate their culture. This implied firstly the development of culture through a written, standardized language. At this point he was also in line with the aims of the Austro-Hungarian policy, from which he was sponsored and which backed the status quo in the Balkans. For Konitza too it was important to stress the distinction between Moslem Albanians and the Turkish ones in the conditions of a weak Empire. His position was close to Sami’s one. But, unlike Sami, Faik Konitza lived in the West, and he considered Islam as an inferior religion compared to the more emancipated Christianity. So, Konitza tackled the problem of the distinction between Moslem Albanians and Moslem Turks not only from a geo-political point of view, in the eventual case of the dissolution of the Empire, but also under his Euro-centric visions that identified Islam with backwardness. In his turn Sami praised Islam as a religion which stimulated civilization and sciences. Such a discourse is present in the texts of Vasa and Qemali, as the first died too early to see the further decline of the Ottoman rule in the Balkans, while Qemali remained politically involved in the Empire till the symbolic proclamation of Albanian independence in November 1912.

The Ottoman political atmosphere exerted its influence on the way Albanian authors viewed historical periods and their neighbors. A meaningful example is the Tanzimat period

(1839-1876). In the texts of Vasa on the Ottoman legislation and the centralizing reforms in Bosnia, the author judged them as necessary for the progress of the country. These writings were published in the 1860s, during the time of the implementation of the reforms and they express his enthusiasm and hopes for the rejuvenation of the Empire. The coming to power of sultan Abdylhamit II (1876-1909) marked the starting of the period of reaction against the Tanzimat reforms which ended with the abrogation of the first Ottoman Constitution of 1876. This is reflected in Vasa's texts on the Albanians, which describe the Tanzimat reforms under a new register. He created a pre-Tanzimat 'Golden Age', during which Albanians were equal to Ottomans due to the decentralized nature of the Ottoman system of government. This had made possible the preservation of the character of the populations, while the centralizing Tanzimat reforms, according to the new position of Vasa, had alienated the Ottoman power turning it into a "foreign rule" for Albanians, which now found themselves in the condition of a subjugated population. This was seen as something un-natural after a long tradition of 'effective' Ottoman-Albanian relations and co-existence. It was precisely at this time that the Sultan deemed it of state interest to promote Albanian nationalism, as in the case of the League of Prizren (1878-1881). The Sublime Porte propagated the idea that the Empire was a real protection for Albanians against the expansionism of the Orthodox Balkan countries. It was not by chance that Vasa's booklet was published in various languages with the support of the Ottoman authorities, which were interested to foment Albanian reaction against Greek's territorial enlargement into the Ottoman dominions in the Southern Balkans, inhabited also by Albanian speaking populations. Sami was of the same opinion. He described the pre-Tanzimat period as the time when the Sultan shared power with Albanians. Such a presentation of historical periods indirectly conveyed the message that the union of the Albanians with the Empire would be more fruitful if Albanians enjoyed the right of self-rule, presenting it as a traditional pattern of Ottoman rule. The more so, when during the Eastern Crisis (1875-1878), Albanian nationalist intellectuals thought that the autonomy and the unification of the Albanian lands into a single Ottoman administrative unit would be the best option to counter the goals of the Balkan countries to split the Ottoman possessions. Qemali relatively followed the same line. He drew a distinction between the first Ottoman reformers of the Tanzimat time and its late phase, which he criticized as the time for its excessive centralizing policies that deviated from the decentralized traditional Ottoman system. In the first period he included Mithat Pasha (1822-1884), the father of the first Ottoman Constitution (1876), with whom Qemali had collaborated in the administration of the Danube vilayet (1864-1868). On the other hand, at the beginning of the twentieth century Qemali was

one of the protagonists of the political group opting for a decentralized Ottoman system, opposing the other group amongst the Young Turks, which supported a more centralized orientation. Qemali considered decentralization, the right for the ethnies to enjoy autonomy inside the Empire, as the only hope for the survival of the Empire. As an Albanian nationalist intellectual of a later date, Faik Konitza perceived the distinction between pre-Tanzimat and Tanzimat time through a different optic. He would add to this contrast a social component too. According to Konitza, the pre-Tanzimat Albania was in a better condition. The Albanian lands were ruled by the grand local families, whose authority was recognized and respected by the Sublime Porte, because they knew the local habits and were of the same nationality as the local populations. Konitza maintained that the negative aspect of the centralizing Tanzimat reforms was the replacement of these noble families with a lower middle nobility class, which he defines as “fake nobility”. In the words of Konitza, this lower nobility imposed the new Ottoman rule, which did not match local traditions and expectations. In Konitza’s texts the discourse changed according to the target it aimed to reach, which in this case was the legitimation of the old Albanian nobility as a supporter of Albanian nationalism. Konitza’s family was supposed to be of its ranks. This new trend in the discourse on the Albanian nation was due also to the changes of the Albanian movement on the ground. The representatives of the old nobility, or of the traditional grand families, were not the only ones to be affected by national ideas. New intellectuals recruited from lower strata were competing with them and seeking their own place in the movement. Konitza’s discourse was in part a response to the criticism coming from the new middle class nobility on the role that the old nobility had played in the Albanian movement. Therefore, the description of the history of Albania, the place the Albanian nation had in the Empire was closely linked to the changes brought about by the Tanzimat and to a social diversification of the Albanian movement.

Another boost to Albanian nationalism came also from its Balkan neighbors, and in first place those related to Hellenism. Usually the place and the role of Greece in the Albanian studies have been negative, as a nationalism fiercely opposing the Albanian national movement. Surely, the two nationalisms competed to secure supremacy in the Ottoman vilayets in the Balkans. But this was only one aspect of the complex relations of Albanianism with Hellenism. Like Sami and Qemali, many other Moslem and Christian Albanian intellectuals, lately integrated into Albanian movement, had studied in the Greek gymnasium “Zosimea” in Janina, the center of the Ottoman vilayet of Janina. There, they studied Greek and Roman civilization and to be culturally influenced by them, to learn Western languages, in first place the French language. The Albanian alphabet of Istanbul

drafted by Sami in 1879 contained also Greek letters, which mirrored a certain cultural influence. Hellenism served as a model for imitation, first of all to build up a national pantheon, searching for heroic figures in ancient Albanian history, but also as a reference point to distinguish between “being Albanian” and “being Greek”. The Albanian-Greek contrast is present in the writings of all the figures we have studied. Firstly, the technique was to use the “Pellazg” thesis as an indication that Albanians were a much earlier population than Greeks; the Albanians were much more attached to nationality rather than to religion. Sami used the presence of a tiny Greek minority among Albanians hinting at the homogeneity of the Albanian nation, while Konitza urged for the albanization of the Orthodox Church in order to curb Hellenic influences among Orthodox Albanians. In this regard, the expression of anti-Greek feelings was well regarded by the Sublime Porte, which through the Albanians hoped to contain the territorial expansion of the Greek kingdom. Ismail Qemali was an exception, as he did not overtly refer to an Albanian-Greek contrast. Probably, this was due to his idea of an Albanian-Greek alliance aiming to block the Slav advancement into Balkans. Qemali considered this option having in mind the survival of the Ottoman Empire too.

Here it is the place to underline some differences and common features between Albanian nationalism and its Balkan counterparts. First of all, the Albanian movement emerged as a reaction to the dissolution of the Empire, rather than a separatist movement. For a long period of time it developed in the condition of the absence of nation-state of its own. In this sense the Albanian movement could be compared with the Turkish or Macedonian one, which operated much before a nation-state was in place. Therefore, its support to irredentist projects was a minor tenor compared to the other Balkan countries. These countries had already in the second half of the nineteenth century a state apparatus at their disposal to back their irredentist projects. This is not to say that Albanian nationalist intellectuals did not have plans for a “Great Albania”. On the other hand, the formulation of an Albanian ‘nation’ in the discourses of the Albanian intellectuals was more variegated than in their Balkan colleagues. This had to do with the presence of more religious identities on the ground, and Catholic, Orthodox and Moslem identities had to be ‘co-ordinated’ with a single national Albanian one. In the Balkans a common pre-national Orthodox identity rendered the process of national acculturation less divergent and complicated at the level of an intellectual discourse. Here it should be added that, though the standardization of a literary Albanian language followed the same procedures as in the other Balkan movements, i.e. it was the work of nationalist intellectuals that wanted to erase dialects and create through it a single national identity for their ‘nations’, it presented a much more intricate picture as

related to the issue of the alphabet. The Albanian case saw the competition of very different options for the national alphabet and the choice had to fall among Arabic, Cyrillic or Latin alphabets.

However, like in the other Balkan cases, the emergence of an Albanian ‘nation’ was the outcome of a desire to see the Ottoman state reformed and also of an ever stronger belief that the life of the imperial state was doomed, and instead to leave the place to the national states. As in the other Balkan cases, the idea of nation was used by the Albanian nationalist intellectuals for a social and political mobilization of their people. The education in a standardized language was seen as a powerful means to construct a nation and hence the development of a patriotic press which played an important role in diffusing the idea of nation among the people all over the Balkans. The idea of a common blood and grandiose past, along with religion as an important collective bond, were articulated to forge a ‘national’ sense of belonging. The Albanian intellectuals, like the other Ottoman intellectuals, and the Balkan intellectuals, had an elitist conception of the nation, of the state and of the politics. Following this conception the people were backward and were to be guided and educated by them.

Other sources of influence for the Albanian nationalism were the Western ideas. As noted, Sami and Qemali studied French in the Greek Zosimea gymnasium. Sami undertook important translation from French into Ottoman, while his activities for the modernization of the Turkish language and the written Albanian were influenced by his knowledge of French. In his memoirs, Qemali recalled the French influence, which was personified in the admiration of Napoleon, as the embodiment of a solid and powerful state, which attracted so many Ottoman reformers of the second half of the nineteenth century. Pashko Vasa was a polyglot, whom career started at the Translation Office of the Ottoman Foreign Ministry. Vasa wrote his works on the political reforms in the Empire and Albanians in French. In general, the French influence in the Empire had a long tradition, reflected in the modernization of the army, civil legislation, and rationalization of the administration during Tanzimat, secularization, the influence over the emerging press, the spread of materialist ideas, evolution, constitutionalism and ideas on personal freedom. Faik Konitza lived for a long time in Brussels, having studied from a young age in France, and used French when he wrote on sophisticated issues, because Albanian was still an uncultivated language and in its early stages of standardization. A direct western influence was the reference to the “Pellazg” ideas, the character of the Albanian people, but also the regional typology of Albanians. The Western Albanologues created the theories on Albanians’ origin, which through French were

appropriated by the Ottoman-Albanian intellectuals, like Vasa and Sami and by the westernized Albanian intellectual Faik Konitza. The division of Albanians into the Northern Gegs and Southern Tosks was a product of the perceptions that Western scholars had on the internal divisions among Albanians. Here an important role was also played by the Italo-Albanian intellectuals, which echoed and transmitted the findings of the Western Albanologues.

This last point relates also to the malleable imagery of the Albanian nation. The image of the Albanian nation in the texts of the authors studied above was not a static one, as often defined in Albanian historiography. This image changed from generation to generation, depending also on the priorities of the Albanian movement, but also on the contexts in which the authors operated. For Pashko Vasa, who belonged to the first generation of the Albanian national movement, it was more important to present the Albanians nation as as unitary and as homogeneous as possible. This was the time of the Eastern Crisis (1875-1878), when it was important to confirm the existence of an Albanian nation different from the other people in the Peninsula, in order that the Albanian inhabited lands could not be included in the division plans of the Ottoman possessions in the Balkans, that the European Powers had decided to give to the newly founded Balkan states. For Vasa, the Albanian nation had to be a compact one with regard to its character. This compactness was primarily based upon its ancient origins, being a highlander population not touched by civilization and uninfluenced by modernity which alienated the personality, by an archaic language with unusual capacities to resist assimilation by the great cultures such as the Greek and Roman ones. These fundamental and enduring qualities were perceived as factors that neutralized the religious divisions. Sami mentions in his texts the regional divisions, the Northern Gegs and Southern Tosks, but they are seen more as organic part of a single body, of the Albanian nation. Sami viewed Albanians also as Moslem people, which was naturally linked to the Ottoman Empire. In a later time, depending also on the regional geo-politics, Moslem Albanians were distinguished from the Moslem Turks. Qemali was more an Ottoman politician concerned with the destiny of the Empire and did not go into details. The difference here is made by Konitza, who emerged as an important figure by early twentieth century. Konitza focused much more than the other three writers on the elaboration of a standardized Albanian language and the development of an Albanian literature. Beyond the question of the Albanian alphabet, that was one of the major concerns of Shemseddin Sami Frashëri, Konitza saw the Albanian language not only as a national feature, but also as a potential to create a literature that had to reach the levels of the Western one. For Konitza a mature Albanian nation had to

be able to produce intellectual values, which meant first of all to produce a true literature that should not be confused with patriotism. Konitza was inclined to view the Albanian language and literature from an aesthetic point of view. With his "Albania" magazine, he created for the first time the institution of an Albanian literature on poor ground, including here literary critique, translations from world literature, at a time when the Albanian language had still to solve the problem of a unified alphabet. Konitza strived to connect Albanian writers of the time and his journal was the first example of the integration of the Albanian literature, not obligatory as a political action, not only as a national propaganda to forge a national community, but also an effort to create an artistic literature. As a person who considered himself a product of Western refined civilization, he saw a deep gap between him and the people of his backward nation. To convey his civilizing messages he had to tackle the deficiencies. Therefore, Konitza presents in his texts a more fragmented Albanian nation than Vasa, Sami and Qemali, poorer in national qualities and often a target of satirical descriptions of a man that had passed his life in Paris, London and Washington. He stressed much more than the others the religious and regional divisions among Albanians. He also saw these divisions in the Albanian language and elaborated in more detail the way to construct a standardized and literary Albanian language. He envisaged the union of Albanians through the linguistic fusion of the Albanian dialects in a single national language. On the other hand, Konitza's discourse on the nation was not static either. Sometimes he used the Albanian language as the most important national value, but he did not exclude origins, when he wished to stress the commonality of all Albanians regardless of their regional and dialectal differences. When he wished to present Albanians in a positive light for European public opinion Konitza endowed them with the necessary asset of values required to pass the maturity exam, whose certificate was released by the European Powers.

A common point in all the texts studied above is the concern of all these intellectuals that the Albanian speaking populations had to be presented as a nation. In this nationalist ideology shows itself as a very plastic tool, which found its raw materials even in the most prohibitive conditions. But, the finalization of this process did not depend on the internal development of the society. Up to the symbolic proclamation of Albanian independence in November 1912, the Albanian movement remained an intellectual movement. It would be more accurate to talk about the growing attachment of intellectuals to the nationalist ideology, rather than consider it as a mobilizing force that affected the masses. It would reach this stage only after the Second World War, when the communist regime was installed in Albania, and when again the geo-politics of the Great Powers assigned Albania to the

communist sphere. It would be the Albanian communist state that would bring to the end the forging of an Albanian nation with its policies of social mobilization and control. The case of the Albanian nation shows clearly that it was the context, the crumbling of the Ottoman Empire and the geo-politics of the Great Powers that was the determining factor that occupied the vacuum created by the disintegration of Ottoman rule in the Balkans with a new Albanian state. Taking into account the fact that a linguistic congress for the standardization of the Albanian language was held only in 1972, we can imagine that producing of an Albanian nation had in the symbolic proclamation of the Albanian independence in November 1912 by a group of Albanian intellectuals only its starting point.

With reference to the categorization offered by John Breuilly with regard to the functions of nationalist ideology, we might conclude that the Albanian ideology had mostly a legitimacy function, i.e. it strove to present as good an image as possible for the Albanians to the eyes of the foreigners. The principal aim was to distinguish the Albanian nation as a particular one, but also dignified enough to merit some political rights, which at the outset did not go beyond the autonomy in the framework of the Ottoman Empire. This comes in clearer terms in the texts of Faik Konitza. Though he was more realistic and he pointed to the lacunas of the Albanian national awareness, he did not hesitate to present a better picture of the Albanian nation when he addressed a foreign audience. On the other hand, the legitimacy function is revealed by the fact that all the figures studied here referred to the thesis on the ancient Albanian origin, associated with the respective myths of the autochthony, “pure race”, ancient language etc. An old history was conceived as a fundamental argument to support the autochthony of the Albanian nation and, thus, asking the European Powers to grant to Albanians the rights recognized to other Balkan nations. Only by the end of this period, on the eve of the symbolic proclamation of the Albanian independence in 1912, we may say that the legitimacy function of the nationalist ideology was intermingled with efforts to spread the idea of an Albanian nation to wider strata than the intellectual circles.

If we might consider the Albanian movement from another perspective, having in mind here the periodization formulated by Miroslav Hroch for the national movement of small people, it is clear that Albanian entered into the era of the political independence when their movement didn't reach yet the period C, i.e. that of a mass movement. The Albanian movement was somewhere at the early stage of the period B, i.e. of the political agitation of the idea of Albanian nation, after that it had passed a much longer time into the phase A, i.e. the period of the scholarly interest on the Albanian nation and while spending most of its time to construct a standardized language and an acceptable image of a nation in its own.

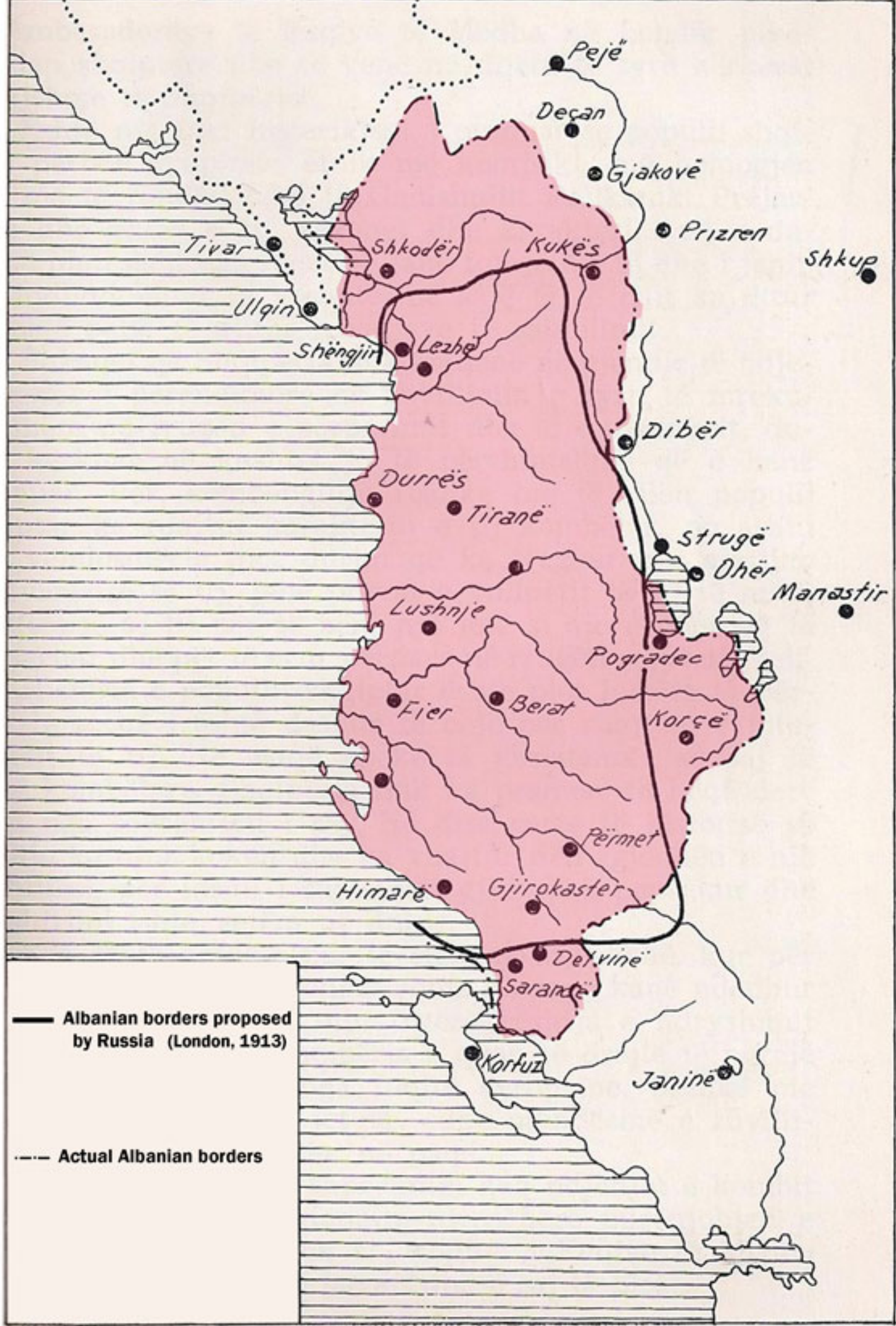
Theories of nationalism would better cover the particular cases of national movements if they would take into consideration, among the decisive factors for the encouraging of the nation-building process not only the trajectory of the internal development of the ethnies that reach the stage of a “nation”, and the economical, social and cultural conditions. As the case of Kosovo shows today, the geo-politics and the decisions of the Great Powers may play an important role in opening, but also blocking, the road of the formation of nations, as other cases across the globe witness today.

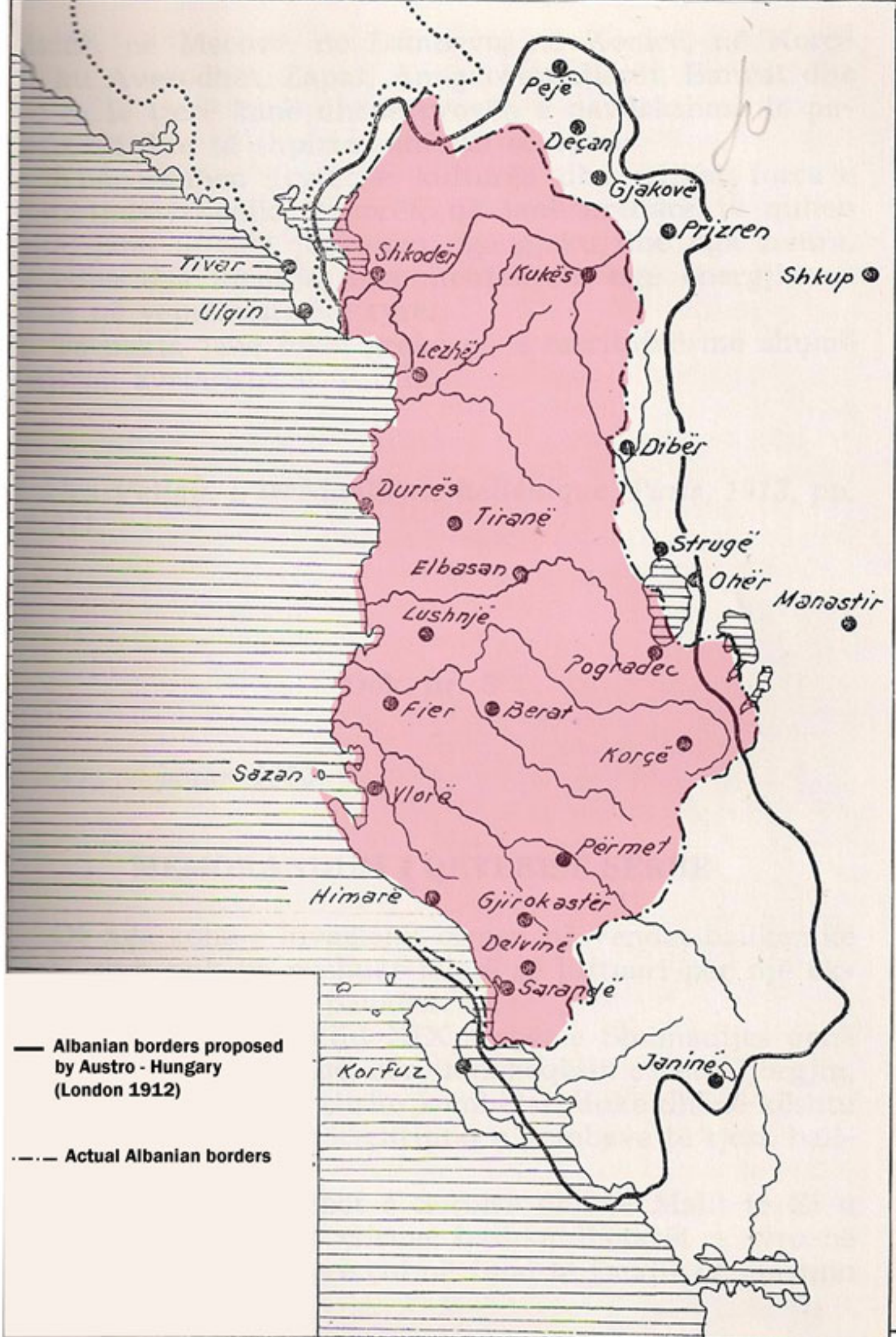


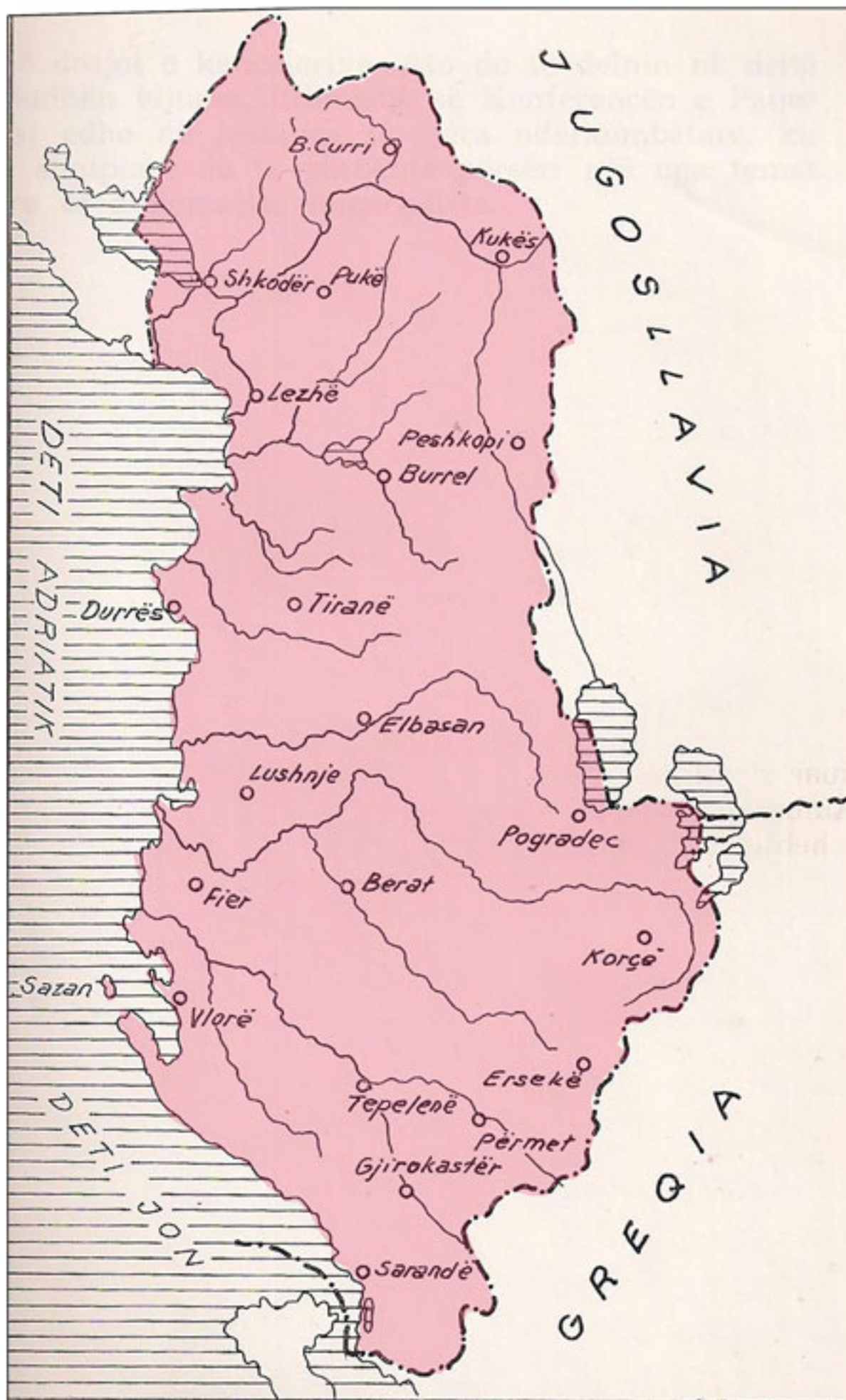
Provinces de la frange occidentale des possessions ottomanes dans les Balkans

- Vilayet of Kosovo**
- Vilayet of Shkodër**
- Vilayet of Monastir**
- Vilayet of Janina**

(source: N.Clayer, " Aux origines du nationalisme albanais" (Paris,2007)







Actual Albanian borders

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