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## THE LINE OF THEODOSIUS REAPPEARS

Which Side Will the Albanians Take?

studiate il passo

Mentre que l'Occidente non s'antera.

(Dante: Purg., XXVII 62-63)

The Red phantasm has been banished from Europe. Or, rather, has died of old age.

His burial in some countries of the East took the form of a carnival; the Poles saw him off banging pots and pans, the Czechs and Slovaks jangling keys and shouting, „It's over! It's over!“ In others of these countries, such as Romania, Bulgaria, or Albania, there were massacres in public squares or along the border cordon, last-minute crimes, or cowardly assassinations; meanwhile, in Serbia, this still unfinished burial is taking the form of a civil war.

When Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary embarked upon post-communism as soon as the leaden Soviet lid was lifted, the world remembered that the regimes in these countries had only been propped up with the help of the Red Army, and that these had been the countries of the three anticommunist revolutions: Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968), and Poland (1980). A different phenomenon was noticed at the same time in the other part of the former communist bloc. In Albania, the painful fact was that even after half a century of iron dictatorship and economic backwardness, two-thirds of the electors polled their votes for the former party „of labour.“ The international public was astonished to see the Albanians, Romanians, and Bulgarians, after so much suffering, finding it so difficult to imagine their countries without Marxist dictatorship. Even today, after the transfer of power to the hands of an opposition party in the elections of 22 March 1992, one can discern the most implicit and explicit forms of nostalgia for „the glorious past.“

Yet the Balkan countries, with the exception of Bulgaria that was once called the sixteenth Soviet republic, had considerable independence from Moscow! Analysts have a variety of explanations for this phenomenon: strong ties to the local power structure, ideological hangovers in people's thinking, conservative reflexes in a population accustomed to bowing to state terror, the weakness of democratic oppositions.... None of these factors individually, but perhaps all of them together, helped produce the paradox that the very peoples who had most suffered from Marxist totalitarianism found the greatest difficulty in throwing it off. Stefan Tafrov, the éminence grise of Bulgarian President Zhelyu Zhelev, formulates the explanation thus: „Here in the Balkans, communism has always had a local mafia structure, which it is difficult to dismantle...“

The so-called Eastern bloc was thereby divided into two: the nations of central Europe entering immediately into post-communism, and the south-eastern nations freeing themselves with difficulty from the Marxist legacy. The two halves were seen moving at different speeds, sometimes even in opposition to one other.

One of the characteristics of the countries in the first group is that ethnic problems within their borders are to a large extent solved, or are at least not acute. Thus, they are able to devote the greater part of their energies to accomplishing the transition. Poland and Hungary

are to some extent homogenous. They do indeed have some minorities, but these do not create any excessive problems, and especially do not threaten the territorial integrity of these countries. There remains the delicate problem of Czechoslovakia, where secessionist tendencies are strong and a solution of some different kind of confederate structure remains to be found. However, no civil war seems to be looming in Czechoslovakia.

The case is different in the Balkans.

Here, as soon as the ice of communism began to melt, ancient ethnic problems that seemed to have been banished became acutely apparent once again.

Regardless of the linguistic subtleties of diplomacy, the Albanians are laying claim to Kosova, populated about 90 percent by Albanians, which the Serbs for their part consider the cradle of their own nationality. The secession of Slovenia and Croatia created a state of civil war in the former Yugoslavia, currently seen in the conflicts between the Serbs and Muslims of Bosnia or between the Muslims and Croats. The Turks of Bulgaria have stood up against the discrimination that they claim to suffer, and are threatening Bulgaria with secession. I had the opportunity to see with my own eyes demonstrations by the Romanian population against the Hungarians of Transylvania and I can assure you that they at times amounted to the kind of pogroms about which we have only read in literature.

Unfortunately, all these unsolved ethnic problems are strong cards in the hands of the communists. People feel them viscerally, and sometimes go so far as to put them before the urgent needs of economic and political change. For instance, the Bulgarian Socialist Party, rallying the former communist nomenclature, was able to maintain a strong position in the recent elections by using the defence of the Bulgarian population against the Turkish minorities as a warhorse of its electoral campaign. Slobodan Milosevic, the neo-communist leader who was triumphantly elected president of Serbia in December 1990, has constructed his entire political career on Serbian nationalism, whose champion he pretends to be. The public listening today to the noisy declarations in parliament by the Albanian „Socialists“ in defence of the cause of Kosova or reading the tub-thumping pathos of „Zeri i Popullit“, traditionally distinguished not only for ignoring the cause of Kosova but stigmatising any attempt to mention it as chauvinist, can make its own comparison.

## II

The case of the former Yugoslavia illustrates more clearly the distinction I wish to point out.

Whereas the western republics of Slovenia and Croatia elected non-communist presidents at the first opportunity, Serbia has preserved its communist framework. One of the causes of this divergence in the former Yugoslavia must be sought in economic problems: With its exceptional maladroitness in the economic field, Serbia was pulling the entire country down into an inevitable crisis. It was no accident that about 60 percent of the 1,662 large Yugoslav enterprises on the verge of bankruptcy before the war were in Serbia. Slovenia and Croatia had long ago developed a sense of being the locomotives of the Yugoslav economy, stalled by the dead weight of the wagons of the east. Statistics showing the specific weight of each republic confirmed this feeling: Slovenia, with 8.1 percent of the population, accounted for 21 percent of federal earnings; Croatia, with 20 percent of the population, brought in 25 percent of earnings; meanwhile, Serbia, with 41.8 percent of the population, brought in a mere 34.8 percent of federal earnings.

Outside observers of the events in the former Yugoslavia did not find it easy to understand the reasons why these peoples were pitted against another; they are ethnically divided by so little and linguistically perhaps by less. However, the south Slavs, these „estranged brothers,“ have experienced different historical destinies, whose distinctiveness is the real key to understanding what is happening in this corner of Europe.

Croatia corresponds more or less to the territory of ancient Roman Dalmatia that was integrated as early as the first century into the Western, Latin, and Catholic ambit. After a short period of independence, Croatia was again under the wing of Hungary in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and under the Habsburgs from 1519 to 1918, i.e. until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Catholic Slovenia, that had never known independence, also has a history that places it firmly in the Western arena. As for Serbia, it was formed within the orbit of Byzantium, and embraced the Orthodox faith. After the destruction of the Balkan army on the Field of Blackbirds (Kosova) in 1389, Serbia was under Ottoman sway until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Strange as it may seem today, it was French policy that in 1919 artificially created a hybrid state containing Serbs, Montenegrins, Albanians, Turks, Croats, and Slovenes, in order to raise a bulwark against „the Germanic race“ in south-east Europe.

Thus, the divergences among the former Yugoslav republics today oblige one to turn back to the fatal consequences of the division in two of the Roman Empire in 393, along the Line of the Emperor Theodosius.

This was a line that first divided two empires, and then separated two worlds, as it apparently continues to do. The northern extension of this line today divides two eastern Europe, one predominantly Catholic and under Latin or Germanic influence, in which the transition to democracy is being accomplished gently, and the other largely Orthodox, if not Ottoman, in which this transition is being performed with difficulty, sometimes even a fortiori.

The western sphere, besides Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland, also includes the three Baltic countries, Christianised at sword-point by Teutonic knights at the behest of Rome. Whereas Lithuania remained loyal to Catholicism, Latvia and Estonia largely converted to Lutheranism, a choice that removed them even further from the sphere of the East. Within the former Soviet Union, the three Baltic republics were without a doubt the most economically developed. Gorbachev, without properly recognising the nature of their national feelings, had intended to make them the laboratory of economic perestroika.

To return to the former Yugoslavia, it should be noticed that the persistence and continuity of the religious factor, although often underestimated by analysts, is one of the main keys to understanding the quarrel among the „south Slavs.“ During his electoral campaign, Slobodan Milosevic trotted round churches, and appeared on the television screen alongside senior party dignitaries, mobilising large numbers of cassocked priests to celebrate the liturgy after rallies. To judge from the official Serbian press, the Catholic Church is the former Yugoslavia's number-one enemy. Some time ago, the Belgrade tabloids made a great deal of commotion over the discovery of a „sensational fact“: The Vatican had allegedly promised Croatia a loan of \$4 billion. Although both sides denied this and called it a rabble-rousing ploy typical of Milosevic's politics, this did not in the least deter the Serbian public, which is apparently still inclined to fantasise about conspiracies hatched against Serbia by the „Romans.“

The problem is compounded by the collaboration of a section of the Orthodox hierarchy, now seasoned on the anti-Western battlefield, with the communist old guard in the countries of south-east Europe. The anti-Milosevic opposition has condemned the Serbian episcopate's

role in encouraging the Belgrade government in the war against Croatia. Similarly, before the coup of August 1991, a secret meeting in Moscow brought together many prelates of the Orthodox churches of Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, and the Soviet Union, together with several conservative Soviet leaders. On the agenda was the „great conspiracy,“ according to which financial circles and Western governments had supposedly decided to sacrifice these countries for the sake of the Catholic and Protestant countries of central Europe. Slightly earlier, the name of Aleksey, patriarch of all the Russias, had appeared alongside that of General Moiseyev, chief of the General Staff of the Red Army, among the 53 signatures to the „Appeal“ sent to Mikhail Gorbachev, calling for a return of order to the Soviet Union and the suppression of „nationalist and reformist disruption.“ This peevishness on the part of Orthodoxy was apparently also fed by the campaign of evangelisation launched by Pope John Paul II in the direction of the countries of the East with an Orthodox tradition. The spread throughout the East of the Message of Fatima, exalting the „conversion of Russia,“ contributed to a revival of hostilities between Rome and the Eastern churches. Was it the moment to launch a missionary offensive, the Orthodox wondered, at a time when the Russian Church had barely begun to lift itself to its feet after seventy years of decline and persecution? The appointment of Catholic bishops, without prior notice to the Orthodox episcopate, to Russian cities that had never before been seats of Roman bishops, such as Moscow, Karaganda, and Novosibirsk, was especially poorly received. Patriarch Aleksey, followed by the patriarchs of the churches of Serbia, Bulgaria, and Romania, refused John Paul's invitation to attend the proceedings of the European Synod last December. In a press conference in London, he chided the Roman Church for engaging in „braconnage religieux“<sup>1</sup>.

After such accumulated misunderstandings, we might use the familiar expression to say that the fuse has been lit. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the parting of the Iron Curtain, Europe is not faced with its future so much as with its past. The danger arises not from hesitation or indecision, but, paradoxically, from the weight of ambitions and problems left unsolved over a long period. Indeed, there is talk about and work towards unification, but it cannot be forgotten that in Europe demons of secession are as ancient as dreams of imperial unity.

The struggle between unification and secession in fact forms the parameter of European history.

### III

I am sure that those who conceived „united Europe,“ as they drew up the program for this unification, dusted off entire library shelves in search of „ways,“ „forms,“ and „means,“ from the articles of the Code of Hammurabi to Deuteronomy or the Book of Job, from Pope Pius II or Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini to Machiavelli and Guicciardini, from Suetonius to Hugo, from Ortega y Gasset to Marcuse. In all probability, somebody's eyes must have fallen on the portrait of an extraordinary man, who was never to arise again in the continent's history: Charlemagne.

This providential figure seems to have been created in order to accomplish a project of unification. Realising that wars waged with the cross and sword, i.e. crusades, had only further embittered the conflicts and deepened the divisions between two worlds, within a few years he peacefully evangelised one territory after another, always further east. When he was crowned emperor in the year 800, Engibert wrote, „Charles, the glory of Europe, is describing

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<sup>1</sup> French: „religious poaching.“

the walls of a new Rome.“ That is how the philosophical chronicler understood the Carolingian strategy of a united Europe.

A plan existed for Charles to marry the Empress Irene of Byzantium. If this plan had come to fruition, the destiny of Europe would no doubt have been different from what it is today. It failed because of a disagreement between the emperor and Pope Leo II, who had placed on his head the imperial crown. In European history, this should be called „the great Carolingian failure.“ It is instructive now to be reminded how anachronistic it would be today, one thousand years later, to hope for unification to start from imperial marriage-beds, i.e. „by order from above.“

#### IV

The division along the Line of Theodosius has been a great pest to the Albanians.

After the Empire's division into East and West, the territories of Albania fell administratively under the Eastern Empire. Their population was thus not only separated from the West, but exposed to the two great dangers of Hellenisation and Slavisation. Byzantium, with its powerful military organisation, its advanced culture, sophisticated laws, and extended administration, could have Hellenised these areas quickly. Besides this danger, there were also the Slavic migrations of Serbs and Bulgars into the Balkans.

As a powerful counterweight to these two dangers, the territories of Albania at this decisive moment remained under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Rome for a further two centuries, and their Christianity in general preserved its Latin character.

Even after these two centuries, the church of Albania wavered in its allegiance between Rome and Constantinople, though the structural unity of the Latin rite remained in general intact. The church of Albania was divided from that of Macedonia at the Council of Dalmatia at Spalato in 877, and preserved its obedience to Rome. As a consequence of this division, Dioclaea was elevated to the rank of a metropolitan seat and subdivided into twelve dioceses in what are today northern Albania and Montenegro. When Tsar Simeon of Bulgaria conquered the city of Dioclaea half a century later, in 927, this organisation was destroyed. Nevertheless, Bulgarian occupation not only failed to separate the Albanians from Rome; church historians note that it had the opposite effect.

Gjon, archbishop of Dioclaea and vicar apostolic, moved to Ragusa together with several bishops, and continued to govern the occupied provinces of Albania from this little republic, populated by an Albanian majority. This form of organisation continued until the foundation of the Archdiocese of Antivari in 1034 under Pope Benedict IX. After much opposition from the archbishop of Ragusa, who sought to put all the northern areas of Albania under his own jurisdiction, Pope Alexander III finally settled the matter in 1178 by appointing Gregory as the first archbishop. Gjon I was to follow in 1199 and Gjon II in about 1248.

Not a single Slavic bishop took part in the Council of Dioclaea, which assembled in 1199 in the province of Antivari, and is considered to be the first council of Albanian bishops. Thus the church of Albania remained loyal to Rome, while the Slavic provinces of Serbia and Montenegro remained under the Patriarchate of Constantinople. If the Albanians had been undergoing Slavisation until that time, one reason for this was the shared religion in many regions inhabited by both Albanians and Serbs, because the Serbs had been obedient to the Roman Church since the seventh century. When they took the side of the Greek Church in

1288, this change enabled the Albanian population to resist further assimilation, as they were to continue to do in almost the same way throughout subsequent centuries.<sup>2</sup>

At this time, history mentions a „Regnum Albaniae,“ proclaimed in 1272 under the crown of Charles d'Anjou, king of Naples, at the very juncture when the territories of Albania became a battlefield not only between two churches, but between the Roman-Western and the Balkan-Byzantine worlds. The Romans, Venetian, Normans, and Angevins sought here a „bridgehead“ in their struggle towards Constantinople. The Byzantine, Goths, Bulgarians, Serbs, and finally the Ottomans yearned for political access to the Adriatic. The Albanian nobility grew up and established themselves in such soil, with such names as Angeli, Topia, Dukagjin, Arianit, Blinishta, Zenevisa, Gropa, Balsha, Shpata, Muzaka, and Comnenus. All these intermingled with each other through many blood ties, besides occasional marriage alliances with the dynasties of Nemanja, Asjen, and Anjou, the despots of Janina, the Lazarovic and Brankovic families, the dukes of Bosnia, and the Croatian aristocracy in the north of the peninsula. The modern reader can acquire an impression of this broad network of great Greek-Albanian-Slavic families by looking at the Muzaka Memorandum, in which the legends of Byzantium, Greece, Albania, Serbia, and Zeta are magically interwoven.<sup>3</sup>

Without ever entirely abandoning Byzantium, the Albanian nobility were inclined toward the West. Specialists in mediaeval Balkan culture have described their courts and chancelleries, which used the continent's three written languages of Greek, Latin, and Slavic, and observe that their cultural life did not in any way fall below that of Western courts.

In the 200-year struggle between two worlds, the Albanian nobility wavered sometimes between the service of the Byzantine emperor and the Papacy, and between the Angevins and the Nemanjas. Between 1318 and 1336, the Arianit and Muzaka families, together with the Catholic Subic family of Croatia, launched with the pope a major uprising „against the faithless emperor of Raska, a thorough schismatic and enemy of the Christian faith“<sup>4</sup>. In edicts sent to the Houses of Muzaka, Matranga, Arianit, Blinishta, and Jonim on the occasion of the uprising in 1319, the pope calls these men „dilecti filii,“ and „viri catholici.“ The Muzaka family, for example, were of Byzantine origin, but in the course of history attached themselves one after another to the Holy See.

Let us take the Topia family.

Pope John XXII gave Tanush Topia the title of „count,“ recognising his suzerainty over areas including Mat and Shkumbin. Tanush took for his wife an illegitimate daughter of Robert, king of Naples. Tanush's son Karl called himself „the first of the house of France“ („primus de domo Franciae“), and his shield carried a lion with fleurs de lys<sup>5</sup>. The Serbs called him „the great zupan,“ while for the Venetians he was „the Catholic prince of Albania,“ and for the pope the „great count.“

Let us take another family, the Blinishtas, who disappeared relatively early.

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<sup>2</sup> This history is described in fine detail in D. Farlati, *Illyricum Sacrum*, Venetia, 1751; Thallòczy, *Acta et diplomata res Albaniae Mediae aetatis illustrantia*, and Thallòczy-Jirecek, *Illyrisch-Albanische Forschungen*; Teodoro Minisci, *Appunti di Storia Ecclesiastica Albanese*, „Le pleiadi,“ Roma, ott.-dic. 1966, etc; more summarily in Gj. Sinishta: *The Fulfilled Promise. A Documentary Account of Religious Persecution in Communist Albania*, Santa Clara, 1976.

<sup>3</sup> *Storia e genealogia della casa Musachia scritta da Giovanni Musachio despoto d'Epiro a suoi figli nel 1510*, in K. Hopf, *Chroniques Greco-Romanes inédites ou peu connues*, Berlin, 1873.

<sup>4</sup> M. Sufflay, *Serbët dhe Shqiptarët*, Tirana, 1926, p. 142.

<sup>5</sup> G. von Hahn, *Albanesische Studien I*, Jena, 1854, p. 120.

Vlad, the great-grandfather of the family, probably from a tribe of Mat, became known in 1274 as a Byzantine stratiot. He allies himself with the Angevins, and then turns to the Serbs, who give him the title of kaznac . The captain of Durres arrests him and takes him, bound, to Brindisi, but after a few years he returns from Naples with the title of count. His son, with the Western name of Gulielm, becomes „marshal of Albania“ and in 1319, as if Western titles were not sufficient for him, he adds to this the Byzantine one of „hypersebast.“

The educated Albanian nobility of the day, perceiving that the greatest danger came to Albania from neighbouring peoples who confused the ideas of religion and nationality, realised that to follow the schismatic faith meant also denying their nationality and becoming Serbs, Greeks, or Bulgars. In this emergency, they sought rescue in the support of the Roman Church. Bogdani in his „Cuneus“ shows that this identification persisted in later years, when he writes in his introduction that the Slavs also used the name „arbanaska vera“ for the Catholic faith. Discussing the benefits accruing to Albania from Catholicism, Fan Noli in his „History of Skenderbeg“ writes: „Catholicism gave Albania the unity it lacked as a state, and moreover linked it to the European Christian world.“<sup>6</sup>

It therefore seems that the history of Albania included a period in which the danger of Slavisation and Hellenisation was thrown back, and Albania attempted to tie its spiritual and political life with the West. A new danger appearing in the Balkans, that of the Ottoman Turks, led the nobility to join together in an alliance. Nobles who could not stand the sight of one another, and who had fought as often against each other as against the Serbian, Greek, and Croatian princes, now assembled under Gjergj Kastrioti in a genuine state, the largest Christian state in the Balkans. They successfully united under the idea of Catholicism and in an alliance with the Western Catholic Church. As we know, the Patriarchate of Constantinople signed an agreement with the Sublime Porte in 1453, the year in which the city fell into the hands of the Ottomans. The Vatican never signed such an agreement, and this fact would be reflected in the anti-Turkish resistance in Albania, in defence of the values of European civilisation and culture.

Until then, in all their battles with the East, West, North, and South, these nobles had never given proof of their Albanian nationality. Their battles were initially part of the history of Byzantium or Rome, as they were later to be part of the histories of Turkey, Serbia, or Greece. These nobles began to write a national history as part of the community of Europe under Gjergj Kastrioti, (Skenderbeg), whom the four popes who reigned during his time honoured with the august title of „athlete of Christ, defender of Christianity.“ A. Ermenji writes in his History:

„After Albania acquired its name, Skenderbeg was the man who showed it was a nation and state in itself, one of the strongest in Europe at that time, in an uninterrupted war of 25 years' duration. He was the knot to which the thread of Albanian history in future eras could be tied.“<sup>7</sup>

Gjergj Kastrioti fulfilled this role because, in Albania's traditional geopolitical position as a gate to the East for the West and to the West for the East, it was he who found the key of success: an equilibrium -- that equilibrium between two worlds which, after three centuries passed, the historian Robertson would call „the great secret of modern European politics.“

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<sup>6</sup> F. Noli, Vepra 4, Tirana, 1989, p. 490.

<sup>7</sup> A. Ermenji, Vendi që zë Skënderbeu në historinë e Shqipërisë, Romë, 1968, p. 507.

After the death of Gjergj Kastrioti in 1468, the Ottomans succeeded in destroying this state structure. First they wiped out the Albanian nobles one by one. Those who were not killed in battle decamped to Italy, Venice, Naples, Ragusa, or elsewhere. As time passed, the Ottomans even interfered in the structure that had given the Albanians their unity in the absence of a state: their religion. If they were no longer of the same religion, and especially a Western religion, the Albanians would no longer possess a national culture sustaining them as a people; nor would they have a political rallying-point, because at this time „religious life“ meant at the same time „cultural life“ and „political life.“

Nevertheless, although it destroyed a great deal, the 500-year-long Ottoman domination could not resolve the Albanian dichotomy. The Albanians' way of life, history, spiritual and mental constitution, and customary usages would be strongly marked by a struggle for self-identification and reidentification, conducted as if in some mist of subconsciousness there in the Balkan peninsula, on the cusp between two worlds.

Now there was this difference: the introduction of a new religion had added to the dimensions of this struggle.

The continent too was to feel this clash between two worlds whenever the Albanians were to strive for national unification and autonomy. Two ideological currents within the League of Prizren, which acted as „two fronts“ within the framework of this movement, were a reflection of this conflict: one front fought to rescue the Albanian nationality and to ensure its free participation in European civilisation, while the other was frankly Turcophile and oriented politically towards the East.

The clash between the two currents was apparent in the ugliest manner at the Congress of Dibër in July 1909. This congress was organised by the Young Turks with the intention of binding prominent Albanian circles to their policies. Representatives of the Catholic population of the north were not invited, and were conspicuous by their absence. The congress was inspired by anti-Albanian propaganda and was devised as a counterweight to the Congress of Manastir in November 1908, at which the Albanians demonstrated their awareness that they could expect salvation from nowhere but the West. At Manastir, Western culture totally conquered the field. „The Albanian language heads westward,“ rejoiced Fishta after the battle he waged as chairman of the alphabet commission at this congress, at which Turkish or Greek script was rejected for the Albanian language. This historic moment seemed to realise the vision of Naim Frashëri, when he declared: „Sun rising from where you set!“

A few months later In October 1909, the Congress of Elbasan attempted to correct the unfavourable impression created at Dibra. Konica, writing from the United States, seems to have understood the danger to the national cause posed by the „second front,“ as far as can be grasped from an article published in „Albania,“ „A short message to the Mohammedans“ (1909). In fact, a large proportion of the Albanian Muslims welcomed the Western solution for the Albanian alphabet, aware that it was not only a question of an ABC, but a vital political settlement for Albania. Regardless of demonstrations organised by extremists in Manastir or Üsküb against Latin characters and for the Arabic alphabet, Hafiz Ali Korça blessed the Latin letters in front of the people, saying a prayer. At a large meeting organised in Gjirokastra by the city's leading figures and the Muslim clergy, it was publicly announced that the Latin ABC did not harm in any way (the Islamic) religion, and must therefore be accepted. The Club of Janina and other towns in Çamëria sent protests to the prime minister

and education minister in Istanbul against the introduction of Arabic script into the Albanian language. The protest of the Club of Filat addressed to the Sublime Porte concluded with the following words: „We will shed what blood we have left for the Latin alphabet.“

It seems that the first period of the work of Ismail Qemali was connected with the „second front,“ whereas, as soon as the Old Man realised that the destiny of the Balkan states was being determined in the chancelleries of Europe, he joined the ranks of the „first front.“ This is how he describes in his Memoirs the submission of the Albanian question to the Conference of London: „Of all the Balkan questions examined at this conference, to my mind, that of Albania is the first, the most urgent, and, above all the most European.“<sup>8</sup>

Wavering between the world of the East and the West, Albania as a state felt one hundred years behind its Balkan neighbours. (Ismail Bey, before travelling to Vienna and talking with the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister, was still unclear whether Albania should emerge as an autonomous or independent state.) However, it was precisely by exploiting East-West oppositions that Albanian independence was to be achieved. The new spirit in the East, with Russia behind it and supported by France, had run up against Western policies represented by Italy and Austria-Hungary, and indirectly supported by Britain. Seeing themselves threatened as never before by the Eastern powers, the Albanians performed an about turn, to find protection in the West.

The start of World War I was to upset this equilibrium of forces. After a war of this kind, it was as clear as day that Albania faced a greater danger from the West than from the East. Ismail Qemali, the Old Man of Vlora, who had once sought help from the West in order to secure rescue from the East, now turned to the East in order to beg for help against the West, first by suggesting to the Russian ambassador in Paris that the throne of Albania might be offered to a prince of the House of Romanov, and then joining the conspiracy for a Turkish prince.

This turnaround would probably have been fatal for the Albanian state.

With the mediation of Major Beqir Grebeneja, the agent of the Young Turks, Ismail Qemali agreed to involve the state under his command in an Albanian-Turkish-Bulgarian military alliance, as a consequence of which Albania was to acquire a „Turkish prince.“ This was the most dangerous kind of behaviour that could be engaged in by the leader of an Albania recognised as a neutral state by the great powers. Official history reassures us that „this co-operation promised the liberation and restitution of the Albanian lands invaded by neighbouring countries“<sup>9</sup> But in whose name was this promise made? „In the name of the Young Turk Committee of Istanbul!“<sup>10</sup>

But what power did this committee possess over Albania compared to the great powers?

None at all!

Enver Hoxha wrote, „With this step, he aimed to split the front of those in the Balkans who were against Albania“<sup>11</sup> A great diplomat, this Enver Hoxha! But also a master in the manipulation of history, especially in order to abuse the Albanians' national feelings. This

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<sup>8</sup> According to S. Luarasi, *Ismail Qemali -- Jeta dhe Vepra*, Tirana, 1962, p. 81.

<sup>9</sup> *Historia e Shqipërisë III*, Tirana, 1984, p. 123.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>11</sup> E. Hoxha, *Vepra* 23, p. 160.

„provisional government“ craved recognition from a world that still did not acknowledge its jurisdiction of the entire country and could not raise an army or a gendarmerie or form an administration within those borders given it by the Conference of London. In short it could not unite the country, which had for some months been under two governments, one with a cabinet in Vlora and one in Durrsi. Because of its „neutrality“ it pretended that it could not interfere in the Kosova uprising. Now this government suddenly decides to „split a front.“ At a time when the Conference of London had decided that „Albania will have no ties of sovereignty with Turkey,“ the head of the Government of Vlora plots for a „Turkish prince“!

And when does he do this?

In January 1914, a treaty of Turkish-Bulgarian understanding was signed, and Ismail Qemali accepted „in principle,“ as the history books write, that Albania would serve as a base for the activities of Turkish and Bulgarian military forces. (In fact, the Turkish military forces and the armaments that were seized during an inspection of the port and city of Vlora in January 1913 show that it was not simply a matter of „principle.“) However, note well: This was in January 1914, when the Old Man was effectively collaborating for the option of a „Turkish prince.“ Europe at that time, at least since November 1913, had finally accepted Wilhelm zu Wied as prince of Albania. Also at this time, the International Control Commission was carrying out its work in Albania on behalf of the great powers. Ismail Qemali himself, as head of a „provisional government,“ had asked the great powers as early as December 1912 for „a prince from the countries of Europe!“<sup>12</sup>

The Western chancelleries were indeed not distinguished for honesty and loyalty, but they were not at the level of some meclis that the old man might have known in the courts of the Ottoman devlet. One of the first reasons of the failure of this government, rather than being sought in the political antagonism between Ismail Bey and Esad Pasha, must be found in its forced surrender of its Westward outlook.

## VI

The idea of a „Turkish prince,“ it is true, was based on national thinking and had a political meaning. Unfortunately, it was later to serve as a pretext for a fanatical religious rebellion. Even before Prince zu Wied disembarked in Albania, this fanaticism had been kindled. Abdi Bey Toptani, a former minister in the Vlora Government, wrote thus from Tirana to Mustafa Kruja in Elbasan:

„Propaganda is now being conducted against the prince (Wied) from several sides. Propagandists for a Muslim prince are particularly active in Shkodra, Mat, and their vicinities. Fadil Pasha (Toptani) and Faik Bey (Konica) will not rest in their propaganda for a Muslim prince.“<sup>13</sup>

When the prince was established in Albania and the Durrës Government formed, two movements broke out that could have been devastating for the Albanian state: that of the Vorio-Epirotes and the Orthodox Hellenophiles in the south, and that of the Muslim fanatics of central Albania, the „rebels,“ as they were called at the time. While the first sought to further truncate Albania by reactivating European diplomacy over the question of the Greek-Albanian border, the second, by fighting for „a Mohammedan prince“ and seeking an „autonomous“ Albania back under the wing of Turkey, were more a symptom of a Turcophile disease than a religious struggle. While the Hellenophiles of Epirus slaughtered the Albanian

<sup>12</sup> Historia e Shqipërisë III, Tirana, 1984, p. 88.

<sup>13</sup> Original in Turkish; Leka, Materiale të Lëvizjes Kombëtare 1908-1914, Tirana, 1942, Doc. nr. 203.

Muslim population, not sparing women and children, the rebels did not bother the Christians, and at the most murdered some intellectuals or Muslim nationalists (Baki Gjebreja, Muharrem Lleshi, Ismail Klosi, Hajredin Fratari, etc.) whom they thought were to blame for the breach with their „Father.“

The main impetus for this movement came from the East, from the Young Turks, who, jealously eyeing the European bias of Wied's policies, exploited the feelings of a section of the Albanians in order to return Albania to the imperial fold. For once, the involvement of foreign agents is no fable. When the British colonel G. Philips, former commander of the international forces in Shkodra, conducted talks with the rebels in order to make them obey the Prince and the Durrës Government, he met five men. The first seemed to him a Turk, the second looked like a Greek priest, but none of them resembled an Albanian.

Prince Sturdza, secretary of the Romanian Legation in Durrës at that time, describes succinctly the baleful influence of foreign agents in Albania at this time.

„Any good and constructive initiative in Albania today is doomed to failure. Whatever way you follow, your neighbours, close or distant, will do their utmost to block your path. Even if you are polite and straightforward, foreign agents will do all they can to upset you until you seize a gun and hurl yourself into an uprising. Weapons and money penetrate the borders from all sides in the service of foreigners' destructive ambitions.“<sup>14</sup>

Prince zu Wied's determination to the end to keep the policy of the Albanian state on a European track is shown by his attitude to the war. When Austria-Hungary entertained ideas of harnessing the Albanian state after its own policies and hurling it into war against Serbia, the chiefs of Kosova such as Hasan Prishtina, Isa Boletini, and Bajram Curri saw in this an opportunity to liberate Kosova, and accepted the offer, without calculating the devastating consequences this might entail for the Albanian state. Wied declined the offer, refusing to declare war on Serbia because Albania was a neutral state. This was not a „denial of the cause of Kosova“ as some have striven to portray it. In his reply to Austria-Hungary, the Prince said that, although he was convinced like all the Albanians that these purely Albanian lands that had been unfairly granted to Serbia must be returned to Albania, he could not enter into war because of domestic difficulties, and also because Albania was a neutral state guaranteed jointly by the great powers.<sup>15</sup>

Any other policy would have seriously compromised the future of the Albanian state if Austria Hungary, as indeed happened, turned out the loser in the war.

The massacres of the Greeks and the Orthodox Hellenophiles in the south, the victories of the rebels in central Albania, and the incursions of the armies of neighbouring countries into its territory were eroding the foundations of the Albanian state. The International Control Commission, before leaving Albania, surrendered its responsibilities to the Commission of Consuls in Shkodra. Some patriots were forced to flee, others gathered in Shkodra itself, which seems to have remained the sole remaining corner of Albania maintaining contact with Europe. In the conflict between the „two fronts,“ one wishing to ally Albania with the West and the other seeking to return it to the East, the Hellenophile and Turcophile „second front“ won, and, through a repulsive kind of alchemy, destroyed the Albanian state. Edith Durham wrote, „Ces misérables albanais qui ont acceptés l'argent de la Serbie, de la Grèce et de l'Italie

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<sup>14</sup> A. Ermenji, op. cit., p. 347-348.

<sup>15</sup> Denkschrift über Albanien von Wilhelm, Fürst von Albanien, Prinz zu Wied, 1917. Als Manuskript gedruckt; nicht für die Öffentlichkeit.

en Juin 1914 pour chasser Wied ont, en verité, ruinés l'Albanie. Seulement je crois qu'elle soit un phénix et se soulever encore...<sup>16</sup>

But could Albania really become a phoenix?

## VII

Albania, which had become a battlefield of Balkan and European armies during the war, would not be evacuated either by the hopes of Miss Durham, the fine words of the Marquis of Lansdowne in the House of Lords, or the statements of Aubrey Herbert, a sincere friend of Albania, in the House of Commons. The Albanians learned that Baron Sonnino, the Italian foreign minister, had submitted to his British counterpart Sir Edward Grey a memorandum including plans for the partition of Albania. The secret archives of the tsar, published by the Bolshevik government, brought to light devastating facts about what was called the Treaty of London.

Could this criminal hypocrisy of the great powers be believed or not?

What was worse, the Line of Theodosius made an obvious reappearance this time, The front between the two warring sides, Italy and France to the south and Austria-Hungary to the north, followed the course of the Vjosa to the north of Vlora, passed through Mallakastër, Skrapar, Tomorrica, Vërça, and Mokra, and emerged at Pogradec. The Albanians' only hope lay in President Wilson's declaration of „Full freedom of self-determination for every people.“ However, the keys to the chancelleries of Europe were in the hands of diplomats such as George Fred Williams, who stated, „Justice and truth are no defence in the halls of diplomacy.“

Moreover, the Line of Theodosius also passed through the Albanians' minds; here is how we find this division described in a document of the time: „One dismal report after another comes from Albania. I have learned from one very reliable and high-level source that almost all the inhabitants of Vlora have signed an appeal for the annexation pure and simple of their country by Italy. The beys of Vlora head the list, and justify their action by reference to the good Italy has done them, and, on the other hand, out of fear of an incompetent anarchic-despotic government (of Esad among others). Thus the Albanian Government has been discredited before the conference by the Albanians themselves. This behaviour in Vlora resembles that of the Orthodox Albanians of Toskëria; do not be surprised if the Greeks keep such a tight hold on Korca and Gjirokastra, because we Orthodox Albanians are more Greek than the Athenians themselves! The Albanians of Kosova are turning to Serbia in the same way and the Muslims would have done the same sort of thing if Turkey were closer!“<sup>17</sup>

This letter went to Paris, no less, where five if not six „Albanian delegations,“ all claiming to represent Albania, but disagreeing with one another and divided among themselves into two or three factions, pro-Italian, pro-British, pro-American, etc., had batted onto the Peace Conference. The one that emerged as the most important, led by Turhan Pashë Përmeti, prime minister of the Provisional Government formed in Durrës, included as its members Mgr Luigj Bumçi, archbishop of Lezhë; Father Gjergj Fishta, Mehmet Konica, Dr. Mihal Turtulli, Mit'hat Frashëri, and Luigj Gurakuqi. After 13 February, we find Mgr. Bumçi at the head of the delegation, while Fr. Fishta has become its secretary. What had happened? Fr. Pal Dodaj, in his own notes, commented on this change: „It was Turhan Pasha and all his friends who

<sup>16</sup> M. E. Durham to Dr. Turtulli (according to Fr. Dr. Gjon Shllaku, *Historia flet kështu...*, Shkodra, 1944, p. 14.)

<sup>17</sup> Z. Adamides to Mgr. Bumçi (according to Fr. Shllaku, *op. cit.* p. 19).

first grasped that they did not present the appearance of a Christian state, and therefore tendered their resignations...<sup>18</sup>

As a seasoned and wise diplomat well aware of Albania's position, Turhan Pasha realised that a Catholic prelate would have a better chance of victory in front of the chancelleries of Europe than a former ambassador of Turkey to St. Petersburg.

This historic telegram that reached the archdiocese of Shkodra on 29 June 1919 from Paris demonstrates that the Albanians were striving to present the Albanian cause to the great powers in the light of Christianity: the Yugoslavs are determinedly redoubling their efforts at the peace conference to annex Shkodra and all the territory on the right bank of the Drin as well as Lezha and Mirdita stop it is therefore highly important for the episcopate and the catholic clergy to attract the conference's attention by means of a vigorous protest against such claims, declaring that the Albanian catholic element is extremely concerned both from the national and religious points of view to preserve Albania united and independent stop this protest to be sent directly to the conference by telegram sending a copy also for ourselves stop copy also to be given to the command of the military council stop Bumçi Fishta Gurakuqi.<sup>19</sup>

On the same day, the following telegram left Shkodra:

the undersigned wish to protest vigorously against the imperialist Yugoslav claims that would seek to annex the provinces of Shkodra and central Albania which are purely Albanian areas and would never accept a hated slavic domination stop the sufferings of catholic Albanians in 1913 under the Serbo-montenegrin yoke show what barbarism and misery these inhabitants confronted with religious fortitude stop to impose the annexation of Shkodra and northern Albania on people who for centuries have fought to rescue their homeland from powerful foreign invaders would be a fatal blow to our language and traditions and religion and would be opposed with all their force by the people who would be ready to sacrifice their lives and everything stop such are the only true feelings of all the patriots of Shkodra and Albania stop Jak Serreqi, archbishop of Shkodra; Gjergj Koleci, bishop of Sapa; dom Zef Gjinali, administrator of the abbacy of Mirditë; dom Pjetër Gjura, parish priest of Shkodra; fr. Vinçenc Prenushi, ofm; fr. Engjëll Serreqi, sj.<sup>20</sup>

For a part of Albania, events no doubt took their course in a quasi-mystical atmosphere. Testimonies to the Albanians' ancient religion were extracted from archives, showing that the Adriatic was Christianised before Italy. The Crusades that crossed over to the Adriatic coast were recalled; inscriptions and names on gravestones, dates on roof-beams, carvings on church-bells, and shapes of crosses with hooks and biblical quotations were marshalled to the task. Mgr. Bumçi held conferences in French at the Catholic University of Paris; Fr. Fishta rose at dawn to present arguments in Italian about „the Albanians and their rights.“ While Europe listened with indifference to the Albanian delegates, the latter recalled the Catholic alliance under Skenderbeg, which had formed a bulwark against the most terrible empire of the time, against the sultans who had sworn to fix the crescent above Hagia Sophia in Constantinople and to feed horses on the altar of St. Peter's in Rome...

From his quarters in the Cathedral Church of Shkodra, the Franciscan poet Fr. Vinçenc Prenushi wrote to one of his brothers-in-Christ: „We celebrated the signing of peace today with a Te Deum in the Great Church. Everything passed in a very chilly atmosphere, and

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<sup>18</sup> P. Dodaj, *At Fishta në Konferencë të Parigjit 1919-1920*, in „*At Gjergj Fishta 1871-940*“, Tirana, 1943, p. 114.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>20</sup> Fr. Shllaku, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

nobody feels in his heart that the peace will last long. May God preserve it!... Fr. Lorenc [Mazreku or Mitroviqi] came today from Bajza and brings the news that the Yugoslavs are gathering forces in the direction of Han i Hotit. Pray God for Albania!<sup>21</sup>

The same means of defending the national cause was employed in December of the same year, when the Albanians learned that, according to the Tittoni-Venizelos agreement, the two provinces of Korça and Gjirokastra would be given to Greece. This is the text of the agreement: „Article Four: As foreseen by the Treaty of London, Italy will retain Vlora and at the same time hold a mandate over Albania. The course of Albania's border will be changed according to the attached map. This line leaves Korça and Gjirokastra to the Greeks.“

This was a detailed implementation of the secret Treaty of London. If this was signed by Tittoni and Venizelos, the secret treaty was also signed by Grey, Cambon, Imperiali, and Benckendorf on behalf of Britain, France, Italy, and Russia. Since diplomatic approaches to the great powers turned out fruitless, only one door was left open to the Albanian delegation: the Vatican.

At an urgent meeting, the Albanian delegation begged Mgr. Bumçi to set off for Rome and to intercede with Pope Benedict XV, presenting to him the critical state of the two Albanian provinces, On 12 December, the monsignor arrived in Rome and after three or four days obtained an audience with the Holy Father. The conversation was short, and here is an account of it: „After I had told him why I had travelled to Rome and why I had appeared in front of His Holiness, I closed the meeting with the following words. 'Now, Holy Father, all the members of the Albanian delegation kneel before Your Holiness and with one voice beg you to use Your moral strength and your great influence throughout the world to give Your valuable help in whatever way you can in order to rescue the Albanian provinces of Korça and Gjirokastra, which are in danger under the Tittoni-Venizelos accord.'“

After I had completed my speech, the Holy Father, who had been silent for some time, turned to me and said, 'But what can I do for you? There is nothing I can do with Italy, and the whole world knows the position we are in. Relations are broken with France; what can I do?‘

I took the courage to reply, 'Will you allow me to speak, Holiness?' 'Speak, speak,' he said, 'Tell me what you have to say!' 'I want to say, Holiness, that the world does not consist only of Italy and France. There is England too, and the United States of America.' He smiled and immediately replied, 'You are right. Tomorrow, then, I will meet the British ambassador, and the day after the United States ambassador, and I promise you that I will talk to both, and ask them about the two provinces that are in danger, and do what I can to help you. God will settle this; do not expect anything from the Conference of Paris, because they have excluded God, and where God is not present there can be no justice.'“

I had prepared a memorandum to leave with him, and took it out of my pocket and held it in my hand. 'Your Holiness,' I said, 'you have business with the whole world, and therefore, with your permission, may I leave you this memorandum so that you will not forget our cause?' 'Yes, yes, leave it here. I will not forget it.'“

I stood up and fell on both knees. I thanked him as far as I could, and, receiving his blessing, left entirely satisfied...<sup>22</sup>

The provinces of Korça and Gjirokastra were indeed saved.

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 113-114.

<sup>22</sup> L. Bumçi, Nji fletë e re në historinë kombëtare, „Hylli i Dritës,“ Nr. 5, vj, X, pp. 219-222.

The same diplomatic argument was used in front of Europe in the case of the state crisis caused by the rebellion of the kapidan of Mirdita in 1921. The kapidan had, after remaining for some time in Prizren where, it is said, he was paid by the Yugoslavs to put himself in the service of their anti-Albanian plans, returned to Mirdita with money and weapons granted by Yugoslavia and launched his rebellion at the beginning of June 1921. The Yugoslav press portrayed the Tirana government as Turcophile, heirs to the Young Turks, and persecutors of the Albanian Catholics. Thus casting himself in the role of protector of the Catholics, Gjon Marka Gjoni proclaimed the creation of the „Republic of Mirdita“ on 17 July. Through Yugoslavia, he appealed to the League of Nations, Greece, Italy, and Yugoslavia itself for recognition of this „republic.“

This was a foul manipulation not only of religious antagonisms in Albania, but of the primordial Albanian problem of the confrontation between two worlds. If it failed, credit for this goes to the spiritual leaders of the Albanian Catholics. „Look at who are trying to palm themselves off as Christians and the shield of Christendom! the heathens of Belgrade!“, mocked one prelate.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile a telegram was sent to the League of Nations in the name of the archbishop, testifying that Catholics and Mohammedans in Albania were brothers and they wished to live together as brothers through good and ill.<sup>24</sup> The telegram was signed by Mgr. Jak Serreqi, the Abbot of Mirdita, and the group of Catholic deputies.

One year later, Fr. Gjergj Fishta was to use the argument of a „Christian nation“ in order to obtain Albania's recognition by the United States. Fishta made a journey to the United States at the invitation of Fr. Gottfried Schilling, a person with authority among official circles in Washington. Fr. Gjergj succeeded where the Albanian Government's efforts with the United States administration had not. He wrote to Fr. Pal Dodaj from Paris on 10 September 1922:

Meanwhile my visit to Washington bore results in the recognition of Albania by the United States of America, All earlier attempts on the part of our government and Vatra had been without success. I managed it. this was thanks to the intervention of Catholic senators, to whom I presented the issue especially from the religious angle, so that the American Government has officially recognised Albania.<sup>25</sup>

As can be seen, we are dealing with a battle for an Albania belonging to the Albanians, and included in Europe, where it also belonged thanks to its ancient civilisation and culture. The achievements of this struggle were substantial. It can probably be said that without it Albania would not have survived even in its truncated form. Gj. Sinishta even writes:

„If an independent territory exists today, recognised by the world under the name of Albania, great credit for this goes to the Albanian Catholic church and its clergy.“<sup>26</sup>

However, there was something Utopian and anachronistic in the efforts of these men of the cloth, something surviving from the stubborn Albanians of ages long past...

## VIII

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<sup>23</sup> Kush janë anmiqtë e Shqipnisë, herausgegeben in Selbstverlag, P.B. Doda, Graz-Bischofshofen (Salzburg) 1960, p. 30.

<sup>24</sup> Revista e Shtypit: „Grindje me klerin,“ „Hylli i Dritës,“ 1934, Nr. 10, p. 497.

<sup>25</sup> P. Dodaj, At Gjergj Fishta deputet, in „At Gjergj Fishta...“ p. 126.

<sup>26</sup> Gj. Sinishta, op cit. p. 7 (of translation).

Emerging from five centuries of Ottoman rule, the Albanians no longer resembled a Christian nation. Moreover, the balance between the different religions was to the detriment of Christianity. If, in the time of Skenderbeg, it had been possible to achieve national unity and to create an Albanian state on the basis of the Catholic state, such a thing was now effectively impossible. However often Dom Nikollë Kaçorri might appear at the side of Ismail Bey in the capitals of Europe, however Mgr. Bumçi might traipse through the chancelleries and Fr. Gjergj Fishta through the circles of diplomacy, however much Mgr. Serreqi and later Fr. Anton Harapi might address memorandums to the great powers, Albanian Catholicism, once called the *arbanska vera*, was now confined to about 10 percent of the population. The Orthodox, about 20 percent of the population, were excessively tied to the coat-tails of the Greek Church, which continued to identify religion with nationality. The remaining majority, about two-thirds of the population, had turned to the new religion.

In the wake of the culture of the East, the new faith had also penetrated the mentality of the Albanian, and his songs and dances; it had left its impressions on his customs and traditions, and had begun even to colour the heroic epic songs. It had left its traces on graves and in the manner of kissing. When the Austrian researcher Pisko conducted anthropological researches on 572 Shkodra schoolchildren at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he thought he found oriental influences even in hair colour and in the irises of the eyes!<sup>27</sup>

This new religion of the Albanians, according to its own principles, considered religion and nationality to be one. If one opens dictionaries of Arabic and Ottoman Turkish, one finds the concepts of *din* (religion), and *millet* (nationality) to be synonyms; they have only begun to separated from each other in contemporary Turkish dictionaries. Notice what Mehdi Frashëri writes: „The participation of the Albanian nation in Turkey's political domination led the Albanians to associate their destiny with the Turkish nation for five centuries. One may understand from this that the Albanians lacked one of the main ingredients that go to make nationality... Because the Turkish nation had based its civilisation on the principles of the Mohammedan faith, Turkish culture was entirely separate and distant from European culture, whose political feelings were based on national thinking. The Albanians, who had to a large extent accepted Mohammedanism, had in the course of things also accepted Turkish-Mohammedan culture, which did not admit of any nationality but Islam.“<sup>28</sup>

In order to illustrate the confusion of these concepts among the Albanians, I quote a letter of 1912: „This, my pasha, is the truth about our current situation, which everybody approves: this is the only way that Albania and Islam many preserve their European continuity.“<sup>29</sup>

That was written by Ismail Bey Qemali, head of the Provisional Government of Vlorë, to Esad Pasha Toptani.

Matters were different at that time in Western Europe. There had been no more „national religions“ at least since the second half of the 19th century.

The spread of the new religion was the most important event in our national history in the last thousand years. J. Milaj takes the view that, „since the 17th century, its proselytisers have been keystones of our nationality and race.“<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> In *Aufnahme der Haar- und Augenfarben bei albanesischen Schulkindern*, „Zeitschrift für Ethnologie,“ Berlin, 1904.

<sup>28</sup> M. Frashëri, *Lidhja e Prizrenit edhe efektet diplomatike të saj*, Tirana, 1938, pp. 8-9.

<sup>29</sup> *Qeveria e përkohshme e Vlorës dhe veprimtaria e saj*, Tirana, 1963, doc. 137.

<sup>30</sup> J. Milaj, *Raca shqiptare*, Tirana, 1944, p. 81.

More recent studies on this process of conversion reach the better-founded conclusion that, instead of being considered a purely religious movement, its external political and economic reasons must be sought. It is therefore natural that this process should bring to the country political consequences, whether positive or negative. Because we are interested here in its consequences for the Albanians' Eastern or Western orientation, I will mention two of its greatest evils: First, the Ottoman administration, both obliquely and directly, exploited this conversion in order to create a major social division among the Albanians. By granting converts the privileges of Ottoman citizenship, it allowed a Muslim of the lowest rank to be treated as the superior of a Christian of the highest rank. Christians in towns were obliged to live in separate neighbourhoods from the Muslims, were forced to wear humiliating clothing, and had to give way to a passing Muslim on the street. The administration further deepened the antagonism with the Baghdad Order: „Infidel subjects of the Porte are not permitted to have the same clothing as Muslims. Their houses must be lower. The sound of their church-bells must not be heard, and none of them should ride on horseback....“<sup>31</sup>

A severe student of Albania was even to make this observation: The laws, customs, and relationships of life were devised in order to make the greatest division not between the conquerors and the conquered, but between the Christians and the Muslims.“<sup>32</sup>

Secondly, as M. Frashëri relates, the Muslimised Albanians, having the same rights as Ottoman citizens and hitching their destiny to the Ottomans, assumed some of the highest political and military posts in the empire. Therefore, when the Christian peoples of the Balkans began to move towards independence at the beginning of the 18th century, Christianity was for them no longer tied to nationality. For this reason, instead of working in order to win freedom, they not only did not give up their quarrels among each other, but, under the sultan's orders, not infrequently fought against their neighbours, who, under the leadership of their clergy, were throwing off their four-hundred-year-old yoke.

When the Albanians, seeing themselves partitioned by the Treaty of San Stefano, came to their senses and organised the League of Prizren at the end of the 19th century, the politicians of Europe would not think of doing anything for them, having considered them to be Turks, and having decided to banish the Turks from Europe. This danger opened the eyes of the Albanians at the start of their movement. Becker writes: „The League did not wish to confuse the Albanian cause with the Muslim one, and therefore stood apart and did not confuse itself with the Bosnians.“<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, when the time came to divide borders at European conferences, these hot-tempered neighbours would stand up and demand the whole of Albania, on the pretext that some of the Albanians had fought against them. Only after prolonged efforts -- remember Turhan Pasha's voluntary resignation from the leadership of the Versailles delegation and his replacement by a Catholic bishop -- was Albania eventually created, that Albania which we have today, bearing on its shoulders the punishing burden of its divided nature.

What were the Albanians to do, those who understood the consequences of the division?

During the events of 1914, when the nationalist party of Kurbin arrived in rebel-held Krujë, an Albanian said to the rebels: „We have had our heels trodden on only because we were born

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<sup>31</sup> A. Pernice, *Origine ed Evoluzione delle Nazioni Balcaniche*, Milano, 1915, p. 32.

<sup>32</sup> Leka, *Numëri i veçantë i 60-vjetorit të Lidhjes së Prizrenit*, Shkodra, 1938, p. 441.

<sup>33</sup> G. Schiró, *Gli albanesi e la Questione balcanica*, p. 48.

Albanians, and there is nothing we can do to change this even if we wanted to. There is nothing forcing us to leave our homes and come to risk our heads here with you. But if you have lost your religion and you want to stand up and find it again, it is not up to us Christians either to help you or oppose you."<sup>34</sup>

There is no question of considering the harm done by apostasy to be absolute. The consequences for Albania were patchy and often transient; not all decrees were enforced in practice. Kaçorri, Bumçi, Fishta, Serreçi, and Harapi knew this, and, as far as one can understand, also knew something more.

It was the English writer Max Müller who first raised the theory that peoples who speak languages with the same roots also have similar beliefs and customs. Despite the controversies that arose, Müller's theory was vindicated by a long list of studies. It was also applied to Albanian history. Neither 20 centuries of Christianity nor three centuries of Islamisation could sever the Albanian's ties with the great Indo-European family. Perhaps it would not be worth dwelling on this point, if we had not been caught up in accusations that Islamisation has left ineradicable traces on the Albanians that have allegedly gone as far as to distort their Indo-European characteristics.

There is no genuine foundation to such a charge, because Islamisation does not mean Turcification, even if, after the conquest of Egypt by the Turks, it was their head of state, the sultan of the Ottomans himself, who was the representative of Mohammed on earth. To believe such a malevolent accusation would mean accepting that the Germans abandoned their Indo-European qualities because they set aside paganism and embraced Christianity, or that the English of today are not what they were long ago because they left the apostolic Roman Church.

Moreover, such an accusation would be justification for the „second front,“ whose activities were to surface again more than once in Albania's modern history. The German newspaper „Augsburger Postzeitung“ (Nr. 134) published a news item according to which a secret Turco-Masonic society à la jeun-turque existed in Albania, and maintained close clandestine contacts with the Young Turks of Turkey. The British periodical „Near East“ (31 July 1924) amplified this news. If we add the fact that Eshref Frashëri, former deputy chairman of the Albanian parliament and head of the Albanian delegation to Ankara, said in his speech in front of the Turkish authorities that „Albania is one body with Turkey,“<sup>35</sup> then it is clear the „second front“ slowed down and obstructed the work of the „Utopian front“ that was working for Albania's entrance into Europe.

## IX

As I write this, I cannot help remembering an episode on the fringe of the activities of the Albanian delegation to the peace conference. On 4 October 1919, French Foreign Minister Pichon and Mgr. Bumçi, head of the Albanian delegation, happened to be opposite one another at a meeting at the Quai d'Orsay. The conversation that took place was more or less as follows:

„Eh bien, Monseigneur, croyez-vous que la Conférence va toucher la carte du monde?“  
„De la carte du monde je m'en fiche, Monsieur le ministre, mais je sais bien qe'elle va toucher la mienne: c'est pourquoi je viens vous demander quelques éclaircissements.“

<sup>34</sup> According to Leka, op. cit., p. 143..

<sup>35</sup> Quoted by Gj. Fishta, Kleri katolik e bashkimi i kombit „Hylli i Dritës,“ 1924, Nr. 9-10, p. 17.

„Vous devez savoir, Monseigneur, que les territoires conquis par le sang ne seront pas restitués et les Serbes ont combatus à côté de nous.“

„Où est-elle la justice, M. le Ministre?“

„Monseigneur, à mon tour, je vous demande, la justice où est-elle ici-bas?“<sup>36</sup>

It was a conversation that there was no point in continuing. Now very late in the day, the Albanians were left to the mercies of the mighty. The minister of the Quai d'Orsay made reference to the secret Treaty of London, which put the very existence of the Albanian state in question, and the Anglo-Franco-Italian plan of 13-14 January, which entirely partitioned Albania among its neighbouring countries. Nobody wanted to listen to the five Albanian delegations at Versailles. To understand what value was placed on Albanian complaints and protests, it is enough to glance at the two volumes published by L. Gurakuqi, „Albania at the Peace Conference.“ The four memorandums probably ended up in the waste-paper basket. The pathetic telegrams coming from the highlands of Albania were sources of hilarity...

X

Then an Albanian miracle occurred!

It was a decisive moment, putting to the test the hidden resources of the national spirit. Hopes in the great powers had been illusory.

„Only those nations that defend themselves survive,“ an Albanian says.<sup>37</sup>

At Lushnje on 21 January 1920, a meeting for national salvation was held in the house of Kaso Muka, which was to go down in Albanian history as the Congress of Lushnje. It tore up the plans of the great powers to divide the Albanian lands into three. In its telegram sent to the Peace Conference and to the great powers, the congress made it known that the Albanians would shed their last drop of blood against any decision jeopardising their homeland's territorial integrity and national independence. Strong protests were sent to the British, French, and Italian governments. In the telegram sent to the parliament and senate of Italy, which had at that time become the most dangerous enemy of Albanian independence, they wrote: „The Albanians are willing to die rather than be passed from hand to hand like a flock of sheep and becoming the chattels of those directing the diplomacy of Europe today.“<sup>38</sup> The Italians, it seemed, turned out to be hard of hearing, or did not know how to interpret the warnings properly.... The Congress at the same time produced a constitutional act declaring the full sovereignty of the Albanian people, creating a national government, and declaring the Durrës government to be illegitimate. The question of the kind of regime could not be decided there and then, because Albania had been declared a principality in 1914, and Prince zu Wied had still not abdicated; the congress therefore elected a Supreme Council, performing an act of fourfold historical importance: It created a council of four members representing each of the four religious communities in Albania: Sunni and Bektashi Muslims, and Orthodox and Catholic Christians, without attaching any importance to the proportions of the numbers of believers. It also elected a 37-member senate with parliamentary responsibilities. Avoiding anachronistic quarrels among supporters of Shkodra, Vlora, Kruja, Korça, Elbasan, and Berat, the Congress decided on Tirana as the capital city and on 9 February installed the national government there. An interior minister, still a young fellow, showed rare skill in succeeding to establish order within a few months in a country that had never known what order was.

<sup>36</sup> According to Fr. Gj. Shllaku, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>37</sup> A. Ermenji, op. cit., p. 372.

<sup>38</sup> According to Historia e Shqipërisë... p. 211.

Europe looked on in surprise at the resurrection of the Albanians. U.S. President Woodrow Wilson took a step in their defence: now that the Albanians were proving that they knew how to organise and even govern themselves, the thinking even at Versailles began to change. Britain joined Albania's side. The international forces withdrew from Albania and the Albanian Government received Shkodra into its jurisdiction, averting the danger of a possible invasion by Montenegro. Then, Korça was united with Albania: the French forces withdrew, and the path of the Greek Army was blocked. On 18 May, Greeks and Albanians signed the Kapshticë Protocol as equals. On 3 June, the secret National Defence Committee sent a historic ultimatum to General Piacentini, the commander of the Italian military forces still holding Vlora. On the following day, on 4 June, after the Italians indeed proved hard of hearing, Labëria demonstrated Albania still had men. At dawn on 12 June, the victory was sealed with blood at Ullishtat. In central Albania, where supporters of Esad Pasha were increasing their acts of violence against the Albanian state, the Tirana government established calm by entrusting the military command to Bajram Curri. Since Esad Pasha Toptani continued to bother the Albanian Government, especially while a delegation elected by the Congress was visiting Paris, Avni Rustemi settled the issue in a Paris street on 13 June in a manner hitherto unknown to the Albanians, by political assassination. On 22 July, the Rome government was obliged to breach the Tittoni-Venizelos agreement and sent Count Manzoni to Tirana to make peace. On 2 August, the two governments signed a protocol under which Italy recognised Albania's total independence. „The Albanian Caporetto,“ Mussolini said, „was much tougher than the other one between the Isonzo and the Piave.“<sup>39</sup> In addition, in order to force Yugoslavia to withdraw to the borders of 1913, the men of Dibër under the command of Elez Isufi liberated Peshkopi at the end of August and compelled Yugoslavia to respect the „strategic zone.“ When Yugoslavia counteracted in an aggressive fashion, volunteers were mobilised at the summons of the Tirana government, and the Yugoslav Army was once again shown where the borders were. Having become mistress of herself, Albania sought admission to the League of Nations as an independent state. Despite hysterical objections by her neighbours, she acquired membership on 17 December.

Just look: within one year, the Albanians did as much as they had ever done in their entire modern history!

Had the emperor's ancient line perhaps disappeared?

XI

If 1920 was to be considered a miracle and left at that, there was a danger that the Albanians, who are not inclined to believe in miracles, would never again expect such a heroic year.... I would ask those who have read Jules Verne's novel „The Mysterious Island“ to recall that this island's miracles in the end have an explanation in the character called Captain Nemo. He works the miracles, but remains anonymous. He helps make everything happen, but never himself appears. He watches over the destiny of a handful of defenceless inhabitants, but never makes himself known.

Did the year 1920 perhaps have its Captain Nemo?

Yes, I know that it did. If the inadequate documentation in my hands does not yet permit me to reveal his name to readers, this does not keep him from having been the man who advised, prepared, nurtured, and guided 1920. He was a typical envoy of Western Europe and a representative of the methods of its secret diplomacy.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 232-233.

When Albania became a battlefield during the Great War, the Albanian state was destroyed and the diplomatic representatives withdrew, but one aged diplomat did not leave. When Albania no longer had a government and there was nobody to whom he might be accredited, he remained in the villa of his embassy, which he had bought from a political fugitive. This was his „Nautilus.“ His notes record that he was fond of hunting, a „woodcock fancier,“ but it was probably not because of the woodcock that he continued to haunt the swamps of Durrës.

Clergy of the four religions, politicians young and old, soothsayers and journalists, ships' captains bringing messages from Mediterranean, Aegean, and Black Sea ports, Jews and White Russians, landowners and merchants entered and left his villa. Circumcised former imperial soldiers and officers in solemn frock coats and with fezes on their heads held elegant balls. However, the man who came and went most frequently must have been a young fellow, tall and handsome, blond with wonderful translucent blue eyes, smiling, and with an extraordinarily sweetness of temperament. He came and went on horseback, as an expert rider, with a troupe of his own horsemen following him. He had begun to take part in military life and to become interested in the political destiny of his homeland from the age of eighteen. Besides Albanian, he spoke Turkish and German. Meeting him, Captain Nemo turned into an éminence grise, perhaps even a Cardinal Richelieu. And there in his living room, while playing bridge and drinking tea -- because the old man had a mania for bridge -- they embarked on political conversations, unrolling maps of Europe and Asia, and even spreading over the table maps of Albania that the Albanians did not even know existed, while constructing congresses first in Shkodra, then in Durrës, and finally in Lushnje. But Nemo-Richelieu must often have gone out to shoot woodcock with the young fellow, because the latter turned out to be an equally enthusiastic „fancier.“

When the congress was held and Albania acquired a government, the young fellow was appointed interior minister. The plans, therefore, were carried out as they had been devised.

Richelieu was now to give advice about the telegrams that had to be sent to Europe and the new delegations that must be despatched to the West. However, Captain Nemo was also to continue his miracles. When the moment came for the international forces to leave Shkodra, he warned that, according to an agreement made in a corridor at Versailles, the city was to be handed over to Yugoslavia. So the minister of internal affairs stood by the gates of the city and took control of it himself, and even, mentioning the need to establish a city government, drew a prepared document from his pocket, which additionally appointed himself prefect of Shkodra. When the French Army too was to leave Albania, Captain Nemo reported that he had received an order from Paris instructing that the province of Korça was to be left to the Greeks who were waiting at Florina under the command of a certain General Trikoupis. The minister of internal affairs took urgent measures. The éminence grise had officially advised the Albanian Government not to declare war on Italy, which had invaded Vlora, because this would have severe international implications and the new state could not win a war of this kind, but he then suggested other more feasible forms of response, such as, let us say, spontaneous popular uprisings. When the conflict with Yugoslavia flared up and the Albanian state did not know where to turn, because it still did not have an army, he showed how to organise an army by mobilising volunteer forces. He showed how to expel from Albania a baron like Aliotti, and how to use up-to-date European methods to get rid of a political opponent effectively, even if he is a pasha...

I will not enlarge on this, because I have taxed the reader's patience. I will only add that the young lad would one day realise the wildest dream of his aged teacher, and would become

king of Albania with the title of Zog I. meanwhile, this mysterious personage was to remain down to the present day a fantastic hybrid of Cardinal Nemo and Captain Richelieu.

Two years later, when there was risk of his protégé being ousted from power, the mysterious old man climbed into his antique automobile in Durrës, from which a large flag of his mighty country waved, and set off for the capital. The confrontation between East and West in Albania would now be an open one, and both sides would struggle to win over every Albanian government for its own. An uprising both in the north and the south had burst out against the minister of internal affairs. A column from the north had entered Tirana. It was under the command of a fairy-tale highlander with the name of Elez Isufi, illiterate, but a great patriot. As far as can be understood, he had some scores to settle with the minister and had taken the trouble to come down to the capital city and solve them at gunpoint. When Richelieu arrived in Tirana, the minister's situation seemed hopeless. The mysterious old man did not hesitate a moment, but waded through the bullets and in the name of his mighty kingdom sought to meet the rebel commander. It was a decisive step. Impressed by the flag, the commander received him. It is not known specifically what the old man explained to the illiterate patriot, but we know that it stopped the rebel in his tracks. The minister was saved. The rebels of the north withdrew, while the minister marched south at the front of his troops, headed off the other column that was advancing toward the capital, overwhelmed it and took charge of the destiny of the country.

It was one of the triumphs of his political career.

He had now become legendary among his compatriots not only in the north, but in the south. Even those who had never seen him had begun to feel his presence, now in one place and now in another, like a phantasm.

## XII

The son of a bey from Mat, Ahmet Zogolli had been an officer in the Imperial Army, but had also served in the Austrian-Hungarian Army. He had grown up in Constantinople as a „hostage in luxury“ following a rebellion against the Porte by his father, and he had not only studied at the „Numunei Terki“ lycée and the Officers' School, but had grown familiar with the political methods of suspicion, intrigue, and conspiracy, typical of an Eastern court. He had also come across the ideas of the Young Turks. Prince Windisch-Graetz, who had known and negotiated with him in 1915, described him as a „cunning Albanian gangster.“<sup>40</sup> In 1916, the Austrians removed him from the military stage. After they had financed him in order to recruit Albanian volunteers to fight against the Italians, they realised that he was ready to betray them if the Bulgarians supported plans for an independent Albania. Therefore, in order to best remove him from play and to keep him under supervision, they offered him Vienna as a gilded cage.<sup>41</sup>

He stayed for two years in the capital of the Habsburg Empire, until the end of the war, enrolled in a military academy and involved in the life of high society. The capital of the Dual Monarchy -- precisely because of its east-West duality -- enchanted him. He completed his

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<sup>40</sup> „Zogu war ein kluger albanischer Gangster,“ according to P. Lendvai, *Das einsame Albanien*, Zürich, 1985, p. 22.

<sup>41</sup> B. J. Fischer, *King Zog and the Struggle for Stability of Albania*, New York, 1984, p. 15; Father Z. Pllumi mentions another version of his „internment“ in Vienna in Fr. Pal Dodaj -- *A Secret Key to the History of Albania* (manuscript).

political education by observing the Western parliamentary system. Later, if we are to believe Bernd Jünger Fischer, his government was to present, at least outwardly, a combination of Western political doctrines and Eastern despotism.<sup>42</sup> Thus, Constantinople and Vienna became the two schools of the up-and-coming politician who was to become the real architect of the Albanian state.

To be more accurate, it should be said that his regime appeared more Western in its structures and aspirations and more Eastern in its essence and style of government. In all probability, Zog sincerely wished to transform Albania into a Western state. This could be one of the reasons for his choice of a monarchy. For the occasion, wishing to be stronger as a king than a sultan, he westernised his name by removing the Arabic-Turkish Ahmet and modifying Zogolli or Zogu to Zog I. Fischer believes that all this infuriated Atatürk, a supporter of republicanism. The Turkish reformer could not endure this arrogant Albanian attempting to challenge him in the modernisation and westernisation of a backward society; the great Turkish dictator could not bear to see this little Albanian dictator cutting off one by one, at least outwardly, the final ties between Albania and the Ottoman and Turkish tradition. After the proclamation of the monarchy, Zog and Atatürk conclusively broke off diplomatic relations.

Nevertheless, immediately afterward, this „westernising king“ married off his sister Sanie to Prince Mehmet Abid, son of Sultan Abdul Hamid II. For political reasons or just nostalgia? Try as he might, the „secular king“ who published propaganda for his own people about breaking with the oriental past, probably could not himself banish the myths of the regime of the father-sultan and his own memories of the court of Constantinople.

Perhaps what such a king lacked was a wife to help him to overcome his background: for example by paving the way into the courts of the European monarchies. He decided that a Christian wife could perform this service. The unfortunate thing was that he had failed to remember that it is easier to reach the end of the rainbow than to forget your roots!

This king, who now set off in search of a „giaour wife“ through the courts of Europe, had once been engaged to the sister of Shevqet Bey Vërlaci, the greatest Muslim Albanian landowner. This meant something to the Eastern portion of the Albanian mentality. Moreover, the king of the Albanians apparently did not enjoy such a good reputation in the Almanac de Gotha. Some of his cavalier adventures in the Habsburg capital had been the subject of rumours in the European boulevard press. One must add here the obscure legend of a Slavic mistress, which is shrouded in mystery and jealousy. He was in the end reduced to hunting round the minor courts. After a failed alliance with the Italian princess Maria Adelaide, the daughter of the Marquess D'Auleta, he succeeded in 1938 in marrying the Hungarian Catholic countess Geraldina Apponyi, who was only partially of noble blood, because her mother was American. Some rumours have sought to imply that Count Ciano, who knew something about beautiful women, had made the match. Indeed, the count's own papers hint at such a thing. However, it is not our purpose here to interfere with the work of the matchmakers... Ciano took part in the wedding of the Albanian king not only as the representative of the king of Italy, but as best man, and what interests us is that immediately after returning from the wedding he recorded in his diary that he had finally become persuaded that the question of Albania must be settled by „full annexation.“<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> B. J. Fischer, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>43</sup> „...torno dall'Albania più che mai radicato nelle convinzioni di soluzione integrale“ in G. Ciano, *Giornale 1937-1943*, Milano, 1980, p. 231.

The Albanians, especially the Catholics and the Orthodox, should have been pleased at having a Christian queen. Particularly those in the north, who were always stirring up politics. It should have been the Muslims whose noses were put out of joint, for they did not care for mixed marriages. However, it was the Catholic community that started objections: the Holy See did not recognise the marriage with Apponyi. The wedding was purely a civil ceremony, and both parties maintained their original religious allegiance. The senior Catholic clergy avoided attending the celebrations. The Vatican promptly informed Miss Apponyi that she was living in a state of concubinage.<sup>44</sup> Although she continued to follow devoutly the rites of her faith in Tirana, even attending mass daily at the Catholic church of the capital, she was not given communion.<sup>45</sup>

As a social step, the marriage did not help the king to cross to the other side of the rainbow.

As a political act, the marriage did not bring to Zog the results he had expected.

His government, although it had officially left behind Ottoman administrative methods and was talking about the westernisation of Albania, operated behind the scenes more like a miniature version of what the Albanian dictator had experienced in his youth in Constantinople than like the government of a Western country. When talking about a regime like that of Zog, one must add to the characteristics of the structure of the regime the individual characteristics of the ruler, in this case a ruler who had known the old Ottoman Empire. Most of his biographers -- with the exception of the occasional courtier like K. Dako -- describe him as a man of strong passions, intolerant towards his political rivals, extremely distrustful of everybody, with an evident inability to coordinate methodically his own work with that of others in the government, with a born talent for intrigue, a skilled operator in extraparliamentary wire-pulling, vain, boastful, and with a limited knowledge of the Balkan world.

Like Ismail Qemali, Esad Toptani, Turhan Përmeti, Sulejman Delvina, and others before him, Ahmet Zogolli may serve as evidence for the fact that Albanian politics at this time, to the extent that it deserved the name, was conducted by pashas and beys. Issuing forth out of the schools of the Ottoman Government, they were of oriental and orientalising tastes, and carried a burden of imperial nostalgia. Whenever one of such people even temporarily performed an about-turn and supported the West, this must be considered a step forward in Albanian policies. The contrast between Western form and Eastern content was therefore comprehensible to them. Father Gjergj Fishta's denunciation of this form of politics, outwardly Western but of a purely Oriental or Asiatic cast of mind resounded like a voice in the wilderness, but nevertheless a voice of magisterial realism: „And look, at that same moment when we showed ourselves to be liberals, Westerners, constitutionalists, republicans, and democrats, with Supreme Councils, sovereign parliaments, provisional governments, caretaker governments, five-day governments, autocephalous churches and mosques, and while the nation was at the same time perishing of starvation and languishing in misery, we sent representatives and ministers to Rome, London, Paris, Athens, Belgrade, and Warsaw -- yes, even to Warsaw and I do not know where else -- in order to inform the civilised world that God had worked a miracle upon us and that we, even though perhaps murderers ready to settle a blood-score by killing a child in its cradle, thieves ready to steal the lining of a man's sandals, fanatics ready to burn a village for the hair of a man's beard or the tassel of a sash, 95 percent illiterate, and out of work, dying of hunger while squatting on our resources, and remaining even beys, tribal headmen, agas, tax-farmers, and the chaff of the heaviest kind of

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<sup>44</sup> According to A proposito di matrimoni misti in „L'Osservato Romano,“ 16 February 1938

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*

despotism and most vicious kind of tyranny, and of the most disgusting sort of individualism, exclusivity, and Asiaticism, have today become Voltaireans, Labourites, socialists, conservatives, populists, and progressivists.... We have stood open-mouthed and utterly amazed to see this unseemly pantomime being played out at the expense of the wretched Albanian people...<sup>46</sup>

This contrast was also to find its reflection in Albanian ideological life, just as this ideological life had its part in giving rise to this contrast. Even within the class surrounding Zog, one could detect a division into two trends, one so-called Orientalist, and the other that might be called Occidentals.<sup>47</sup> The first, also called „the old lot,“ lived according to the spiritual and political traditions of the father-sultan, although they claimed to be the fathers of Albania's national independence. They were mainly beys, tribal headmen, and former Ottoman officials. The westernisers, also called „the new lot,“ were naturally divided into two currents, both interested in opening Albania to Western values. One wing asked from Zog an „enlightened dictatorship“ at a time when this term was also used for the regimes of Mussolini and Hitler. The other wing was of a more liberal aspect, and insisted on the modernisation of the economy and the state apparatus. Mussolini's fascism and especially Nazism, which were for Albanian spectators at that time merely „efficient authoritarian regimes“ and nothing more, constituted a model for this second current among the „new lot“ too.

Abortive efforts to strike a balance between these groups and subgroups characterised virtually the whole of Albanian political life in the thirties. It might even be said that the key shortcoming of Zog's regime lay precisely in the failure of every attempt to create an equilibrium of this kind.

After years of the domination of the „old“ over the „new,“ in the middle of the thirties the hour struck for the second group, who calculated on the support of the Albanian intelligentsia of the time. Between October 1935 and November 1936, the western-minded bey Mehdi Frashëri, a truly talented diplomat, headed a government with a liberal tendency. It aroused great hopes from the beginning, even if it was considered to be a „deutsch-government,“ not only because at least four of its seven ministers had studied in Vienna, but also because it was inspired by the notion that as a government it constituted a specifically Albanian embodiment of German nationalism.

It was a government with whose help Albania yearned to become more Western than the West. Indeed, the West at that time did gain the upper hand. Fascist Italy built in Albania a chain of military fortifications whose keys were never to be given to the Albanians. However, while the „deutsch-government“ strove to imitate the manners of Viennese and Berlin drawing rooms, the Albanians failed to notice that the Pllana-Librazhd-Vlora line of fortifications formed a triangle that excluded not only Kosova but even Dibra in the north and Korça and Gjirokastra in the south.

Della Rocca, from whom I have obtained a detailed description of the Frashëri Government, relates that after this government's collapse a „government of the old“ issued a law forbidding any public official to marry a foreigner, and deprived Albanians with marriages of this kind of the right to hold public office. Members of the royal family were exempted. The law did not at all arise out of a wave of xenophobic nationalism, but was aimed solely against the ministers of the previous government, who had almost all made matches abroad. The episode is significant in showing how far the westernising tendencies of „the new“ could go! Louis

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<sup>46</sup> Gj. Fishta, *Arsim apo luftë kundër katolicizmit në Shqipëri?*, „Hylli i Dritës,“ 1923, Nr. 7, p. 291.

<sup>47</sup> Also described by B. Tönnies in *Sonderfall Albanien*, München, 1980, pp. 88-89.

Mersier, the French ambassador to Albania, informed his Foreign Ministry of this news with some surprise in a telegram in which he was obliged to recall the fact that they were dealing with a country in which a traditional „reserve“ prevailed where ties of marriage were concerned.<sup>48</sup>

It should perhaps be said here that the westernising wing was not very clear about the terms of conflict within Western European countries, and, even while expressing a preference for authoritarian regimes, was in no position to make a firm distinction between the old empires of Central Europe, such as Austria-Hungary, and Hitler's new Reich, now on the verge of the Anschluss. It is unsurprising that at this time fascism was understood in Albania as a form of democracy, a „disciplined democracy.“ Such a muddle of feelings and ideas and such a fantastical clash of Eastern realities and Western aspirations could do nothing but give birth to -- Albanian communism.<sup>49</sup>

Like a fatal coincidence, the River Mat, on whose banks the king had spent his childhood, had been the river denoting the border between the Western Roman Empire and the Eastern, i.e. the very beginning of the line of Theodosius. In short, Zog himself straddled this ancient line of demarcation that is also an equally ancient line of contact between two cultures, two mentalities, and two worlds. If we judge by the terms of conflict and the political contrasts during Zog's reign, we find that Albanian politics were still far from finding an equilibrium.

This Theodora affair, more than his hesitations between his Hungarian wife and Slavic mistress, should have given the king of the Albanians sleepless nights.

### XIII

World War II upset once more the equilibrium between East and West. The course of political and military events again brought Albania to the threshold of the diplomatic salons of Europe. During the years of the war, the contrasts between the two worlds in Albania acquired an ideological edge, contributing to the country's transformation into a theatre of war.

In the middle of the thirties, two major ideological centres strove to draw Albania into their spheres of influence.

Under direct instructions from the Comintern, Albanian communists had, as early as the thirties, created two communist parties, one in the south, formed with the „mediation“ of the Greek Communist Party in 1936, and the other in the North, formed with the „assistance“ of Montenegrin communist activists in 1937. In the same year of 1937, as a response to the Comintern's instructions, Pope Pius XII issued his encyclical, „On Godless Communism,“ one of the most important documents of the Catholic Church in the 20th century.

Explaining the inhuman nature of communist doctrine, the encyclical called on the Catholic hierarchy, religious organisations, the press, and all believers to take a stand against the communist peril, which had become imminent in Europe. A copy of this encyclical was also sent to the Catholic community in Albania, together with a covering document. In this second document, the Pope, among other things, suggested to archbishops that religious organisations should be strengthened in those places where they existed, and created where they did not, in order to direct Catholic resistance against communist infiltration. Several organisations were

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<sup>48</sup> Archives historiques du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Paris, Z Europe 1930-1940, Albanie, vol. 93, doc. of 5 April 1937 (according to R. M. della Rocca, op. cit., p. 110 (159)).

<sup>49</sup> Michael Schmidt Neke according to R. M. della Rocca, op. cit., p. 110 (159).

thus created at different times in the north of Albania, with names that are often confusing for the outside observer, such as „Catholic Action,“ „Demo-Christian Organisation,“ etc.

Following the Soviet Union's entry into the war in 1941, when the „final“ communist party was created in Albania, an armed conflict began; by the middle of 1943 this had become what must without any doubt be called a civil war. The forces taking part in this war were evidently confused among themselves, and there were various mergers and splits; however easy it might seem at first sight, it is difficult to discern an ideological dividing line between them. It must first of all be said in general that the communist ideology in Albania never fought as „pure Marxism“ but as „practical Leninism,“ or, put plainly, as Slavophile communism. Alain Besançon points out this phenomenon in writing about Soviet socialism:

„With its falsification of the past by imposing on it images that never existed, Slavophilism in its most extreme and perfervid forms is the counterpart of Leninism, and what is included in one can very well be included in the other.“<sup>50</sup>

One of the ideologists of „Russian Marxism“ said: „Leninism has more in common with Russian Orthodoxy and Slavophilism than with Marxism.“<sup>51</sup>

The Albanian Communists fell prey to such a doctrine.

Albania, thanks to its geopolitical fatality, once again became the theatre of a struggle between two worlds, now conceived as the Communist East and the Christian West, except that the two warring sides were far from being similar. Communism fought in Albania with regular military units and weapons, while Christianity fought with the cross, the gospel, and the word of God. In 1942, when Monsignor Thaçi, the archbishop of Shkodra, and Father Anton Harapi appeared on behalf of the secular and regular clergy before Monsignor Ngrisi, the apostolic delegate in Albania, in order to pose the question of the participation of the clergy and the faithful in the armed struggle, they explained to him that there were two wings within the nationalist bloc composed of „Balli Kombëtar,“ „Legaliteti,“ and some other organisations. One was moderate and non-violent and the other was in favour of an armed struggle. What must they do? Ngrisi replied that he only had one instruction from the Holy See, which they already knew: the clergy must not take part in either wing of the antifascist and anti-Nazi resistance, because their duty was, in essence, that of religious missionaries. As for the faithful laity, it might be suggested that they support the moderate nationalist wing, while the use of any form of violence was unacceptable *ex natura rei*.

Regardless of the terms it has used and its evasive interpretations, Albanian historiography has never denied the existence in the north of Albania of a region resistant to the so-called national liberation movement led by the communists, which had taken root more strongly in the south and subsequently the central region of the country. The Germans had also grasped this difference between the south and north of Albania. As far as may be judged from some of their documents, they planned to divide the country by creating a new territorial entity in the north that was to include Kosova, besides the part of the previous Albanian state north of Tirana.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> According to P. Ostellino, *In cosa credono i russi*, Milano, 1990, p. 97.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>52</sup> Telegram from Schliep in Akten des Auswärtigen Amtes, Politisches Archiv, Bonn, Büro des Staatssekretärs, Albanien, doc. of 14 December 1943.

However, as far as I am aware, no official historian has examined the reason why the political orientation of the north of Albania was different from that of the south and centre of the country. It would be an insulting, propaganda-style generalisation to consider this difference to be the result of a „conspiracy of reactionary elements,“ or, still worse, „the manipulation of the popular masses by the reactionary clergy.“ Strangely, the theorists of „free-flowing sociology“ have refused to see this reality as the fruit of a specific situation combined with an ancient, indeed centuries-old mental outlook. What I call northern anticommunism was too multiform to enable one to lump together, for instance, the stand taken by the archbishop of Shkodra with that of the banners of Mirditë, or that of the Catholic priest Father Anton Harapi with that of a Gjon Marka Gjoni or a Muharrem Bajraktari.

Yet one thing can be said with certainty. If I mentioned at the start of this paper that Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, as East European countries traditionally within the Western Catholic orbit, became the countries of the anticommunist revolutions, then the uprisings of northern Albania testify to inclusion in this orbit too. If the Hungarians rose against the communist regime in 1956, the Czechs and Slovaks in 1968, and the Poles in 1980, the Albanians of Postribë and Koplik rose in 1945 and 1946.

The communist regime was in all probability aware where the greatest number of its natural enemies were gathered. Thus, the blow suffered by the intellectuals of this area was incomparably more severe than in any other area of the country. I would cite as an example the persecution of the Albanian Catholics, a genuine genocide that bears no comparison with any assault on any other compact section of the population in Albania. Historically, the patriotism of the Albanian Catholics and their contribution to culture and politics were unquestioned until the day the communists took power and started to persecute them in their maniacal fashion. The reasons for this are clear today. Prof. Zef Valentini, writing from exile, points out that their natural outlook was toward the West and that their philosophical, theological, and legal cast of mind was entirely opposite to that of the communists. He continues: „Being cultured and with a very high level of education, the Albanian Catholics had always aroused some people's jealousy.“<sup>53</sup>

The wielders of communist power were faced with a world-view that was entirely alien not only to their materialist ideas, but also to the alliance they had forged with the world of the orient, with the South Slavs, and were to forge subsequently with the Russians, not to mention the Chinese.<sup>54</sup> Thus, the communist regime exterminated from the ranks of the Catholic intelligentsia not only those it considered active enemies, but also those who were reckoned simply to be „potential enemies.“

In the historical sense, it might be said that their extermination finally obliterated Albania's chances of turning its eyes towards Europe, to the west of that fatal line. The destiny of the nation rested in the hands of a former tinsmith who had emerged from the filthy shanty towns of the most Hellenophile section of the Orthodox population; an initiate of the left-wing freemasonry of France; and a sabre-rattling criminal, the spawn of dervish sheikhs.

Moreover, this was also a sign, however strange this may appear, that Hoxha's inheritance was not exclusively that of Stalinism. He was not only to infect the national political culture with Stalinism but was to perfect the tradition of backstairs intrigue and political wheeler-dealing, for which the most accurate term would be debased Byzantinism. Hoxha's specific form of Stalinism was to be a filthy, cynical, hypocritical kind, devious, opportunistic, and

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<sup>53</sup> According to Gj. Sinishta, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*

ready for the most sordid kinds of compromise -- in short, a Stalinism of the „Gateway of the East.“

#### XIV

After the fall of Rome in 476, the West was left with nothing but its universal Christianity to structure a society that had fallen into the hands of barbaric invaders. Under these circumstances, a great economic and cultural gulf opened up between the prosperous and refined Byzantine Empire and a ruined and devastated Western Europe. The divorce between the Latin and Byzantine worlds seemed almost irreparable. Nevertheless, with the rise of the Carolingian dynasty and especially around the year 1000, a reversal of this tendency became clearly evident. The decline of Helleno-Slavic Orthodox Europe and the revival of Roman-German Catholic Europe was to become one of the decisive transformations of European history.

Now, almost a thousand years later, this rapport seems to have stabilised and appears finally irreversible.

However, alongside the sense of western superiority, one cannot deny the existence of a sense of Eastern superiority, expressed for instance in a new and very powerful Slavophile movement in the last century. According to the ideas of this movement, the Latin, German, and Anglo-Saxon West has been incurably infected by materialism, and its salvation can come only from the Slavic world and the spirit of Orthodoxy. A renewal of the Slavophile movement with all its anti-Western baggage cannot be excluded today. The Serbo-Slovene and Serbo-Croat conflicts show that the continent is at a crossroads, at which the people must take care not to allow the two halves of Europe, the two half-civilisations, to pit themselves against each other.

If we add to this phenomenon the conflict between the Serbs and Muslims of Bosnia and most recently between the Croats and Muslims of Bosnia, there is no doubt that the strife between the two halves is assuming the shape of a religious-political struggle. There are observers who include Kosova in this struggle, to the point of asserting that „Albanian“ in the former Yugoslavia means „Muslim“ and vice versa.<sup>55</sup>

Where do matters stand regarding Kosova?

Seen in this light, the issue of Kosova is not related to the Line of Theodosius. It is part of the Albanian national question, while this latter, for its part, may be part of the conflict between the two halves of Europe, the contrast between the two half-civilisations. If the fate of the Albanian nation has meant something different for the two halves, as far as East-West relations have been concerned, Kosova has not in general been included within the sphere of the West's aspirations. Thus, in Kosova, there was no balance of forces or any foreign influence to set against the East. It might in theory be imagined that Kosova, for the West, would represent a second or third step in the West's interests. One of the many reasons impelling the Albanians to turn toward the West without the slightest doubt has been the fact that Kosova suffers under Slavic occupation. In order that the clash between the blocs should not be over a part of Albania, but over Albania as a whole, it has been the task of Albanian diplomacy to find ways to include Kosova too within the range of Western European aspirations.

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<sup>55</sup> R.M. della Rocca, op. cit., p. 7.

However, instead of realising the national idea and restoring health to the whole of Albania in order to finally enable all its parts to function, if anybody is perversely calculating that unification with Kosova means making the Albanians appear a 90 percent Muslim nation, or, worse, is concocting plans for Islamic republics from Arta to the banks of the Danube, then we are talking in vain, because this is neither patriotism nor nationalism but simply antipatriotic and antinational fanaticism. Kadare rightly calls this tendency to speculate with the Albanian religious question, „and especially with Albanian Islam,“ the preparation of a new isolation for Albania.<sup>56</sup>

This is not a question of Arab civilisation, of the wonderful gardens of Granada that the Arabs left in Spain, their enchanting architecture and fountains, the ancient manuscripts that paved the way for the European Renaissance, and neither of the Blue Mosque or the Suleyman Mosque, but of something else as tangible as the communist regime. If a tendency to shun Islam is evident in Europe today, this tendency no doubt bodes ill for the united future of the continent. However, instead of being moaned and groaned about in and out of season, this tendency must first be understood and explained.

## XV

After the failure of Charlemagne, Europe suffered a new wave of invasions: The Vikings, Magyars, and Saracens swept over the continent shortly after the Treaty of Verdun that divided the Carolingian Empire into three. Nevertheless, the Viking invasion turned out to be just as fortunate for Europe as that of the Franks. Settled in Normandy, the Norwegian Vikings became rich, invaded England, and gave this country a strong state and institutions that were auguries of future democracy (as with the Magna Carta). As for the Swedish Vikings, they helped to create the Russian state, starting from the city of Kiev.

Europe's relations with Islam were different. After expelling the Muslims from the Iberian peninsula during the Reconquista, the Europeans strove to affirm their identity and their unity in Christianity through seven crusades, of which only the first triumphed. The crusades in themselves had a fatal effect, because they made final the divorce and deepened the hate between Catholicism and Orthodoxy. It should be remembered that the Christians fought more among themselves than against Muslims. This divorce was fatal for Byzantium, which finally fell into the hands of the Turks in 1453, after the Ottomans had meanwhile seized Serbia, Greece, and Bulgaria and were pressing their struggle against the Albanian nobles, who had changed their coats-of-arms, standards, and banners, but had still not surrendered their lands.

It was precisely when faced with the Turkish peril that the adjective European and the noun Europe began to appear with increasing frequency in the documents of the chancelleries of the continent. One can notice the same phenomenon at the time of Charles Martel, the grandfather of Charlemagne, in the course of his victory over the Arabs in 732. Commenting on this event, the Spanish chronicler Isidore of Seville called Charles' forces „the army of the Europeans.“ Historians believe this to be the first appearance of the adjective, and that it defined Europe as the exclusion of Islam. It is an equation of the continent with Christianity and, in this sense, we cannot deny historians the right to say that the very concept of European was born out of the confrontation with Islam.

Islam has brought and continues to bring great benefits to mankind, especially in its enrichment of the world of the spirit, the recognition of transcendence and a single God, its

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<sup>56</sup> I. Kadare, Një sqarim i domosdoshëm, in „Zëri i Rinisë,“ 18 April 1992.

sense of brotherhood and solidarity among people, and the meaning it gives to life. Even without being a believer, one cannot fail to be enchanted by Islamic sacred architecture and the immortal works of Islamic sacred art. Europe must take seriously the Islamic question, not out of „pity“ or „tolerance,“ but because Europe today has need of Islam, as of the other great religions. However, this is the sort of need that Islam will meet naturally and peacefully; if it appears as an imposition, Islam will only meet with renewed rejection. Europe can no longer accept aggressive challenges to its civilisation such as that attempted by the well-known student of Islam Muhamed Arkun, who announced that human rights are a construct of Western culture and have no universal validity!<sup>57</sup>

It seems that for this category of Muslims the war between Islam and the „infidel West“ is still not over!

An observer of history is not allowed to interfere with an individual's personal beliefs, urging upon him a religious life, or still worse, attempting to change its course. As Bernard Dupire rightly points out, these things constitute an internal, invisible, and inscrutable reality, whose mechanism it would be vain to investigate from the historical viewpoint. However, symptoms of this internal reality rise to the surface. Because of the Albanians' specific geopolitical position, the religions in Albania have sometimes become value systems involving ideological confrontation.

I mentioned at the beginning of this work the confrontation evident on the continent between the two churches, the Eastern and the Western. Sparks have flown between them. I also mentioned the „braconnage religieux“ of which one accuses the other. To this confrontation one must add yet another: the confrontation with Islam. In recent years, this confrontation has given rise to two shocking cases before the eyes of Europe, which has this time become familiar with Islam in two negative aspects of militancy and vengefulness.

The „Rushdie affair“ broke out in 1988. The British writer of Muslim origin was accused, in his novel „The Satanic Verses,“ of insulting the prophet and committing „blasphemy“ and even „apostasy“ by attacking the Islamic Revolution, a process by then under way. The Ayatollah Khomeini, by raising a storm of protests, curses, and threats, and by ordering the death penalty for a British writer, subjected the „Rushdie affair“ to the logic of the revolution of which he himself had been the leader for the past decade. An objective observer cannot fail to note that his attitude was impelled by the specific imperatives of Iranian policy at a time when Tehran was attempting to regain the ideological leadership of the Muslim world and to overcome its defeat in the war against Iraq.

The same logic was to lead to the „headscarf issue“ that broke out in France in the autumn of 1989, immediately after the „Rushdie affair“ in England. The Islamisers insistently demanded „positive discrimination“ for Muslim students at French schools, allowing them to wear headscarves during classes, and exempting them from physical education and music. This was a threat in an area very sensitive for the French state, that of secularism. Fanatical Muslims demonstrating in the Place de la République openly challenged French legislation, especially under a government of the ultrasecular left.

What is the essence of this „Islamic revolution?“

The most accurate term for it used by modern political analysts is that of „new Islamisation.“ Its main theories, which have been spread very widely recently, were advanced by Sayyid

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<sup>57</sup> J.-C. Barreau, Plus de ferveur, mais une ferveur ouverte, in „Référence,“ Nr. 3, 1992, p. 59.

Qutb in his books, „Under the Aegis of the Ku'ran,“ a voluminous commentary on the Islamic sacred scripture, and „Following the Precepts,“ a manifesto that might be called the „What Is To Be Done?“ of the Islamising movement.<sup>58</sup> What is original about Qutb's theory is that, from the outset, he poses a great gulf between Islam and all other societies of his time, including those that call themselves „Islamic.“ According to Qutb, no Islamic society at present exists: it would be vain to look for examples of Islam in a world that has excluded Islam. According to him, the universe is a mere jahili, a word that in the Islamic vocabulary signifies the „ignorance,“ or „barbarism.“ that prevailed before Mohamed's preaching in Arabia. Qutb and his followers use jahili to describe societies which, according to them, are against the essence of Islam.

Every good Muslim must separate himself from the jahili, strive for its destruction, and work to build an Islamic state on its ruins. In the case of the theory of Qutb, therefore, we are not dealing with an internal, invisible, and inscrutable reality, but a genuine political doctrine with clearly defined aims. Of course, the possibility cannot be excluded that such a doctrine might turn out useful for the countries that have produced it, but its import into Europe appears redundant.

After the fall of communism in this half of the continent where we live, it is natural that what is called a „power vacuum“ should arise in the political lives of the countries that have emerged from the thaw. The peoples feel the powerful suction of this vacuum, even if they may not be able to describe it. It is precisely under such circumstances that a political reconquest on the part of religion (whether Christian or Muslim) is unlikely to help to solve outstanding ancient problems. One might even assert the opposite. Anybody imagining that the church or mosque might be candidates for the throne left vacant by communism would be making an error with serious consequences, like that of procommunist intellectuals.

The Red phantasm has been banished from Europe, but people know from legends that a host of spirits are ready to invade any house from which a spirit has been evicted!

Intellectuals have raised their voices against such attempts in Europe today. They include the voice of the Albanian writer Ismail Kadare, who, in an interview with the Paris paper „Le Figaro,“ has called the journey of the Albanians first through Islam and subsequently through communism a national disaster. This idea is open to discussion, but cannot be rejected a priori.

This is what the well-known writer on Europe Pierre Ceyrak says in his study, „Europe in the 21st Century Will Be Fraternal and Generous or Nothing:“

„The tragedy of mediaeval Europe was the schism that divided Western and Eastern Christianity and which led to many European peoples falling under the Muslim yoke; a tragedy closer to us has been the imposition of atheist communist dictatorship on one-half of the continent.“<sup>59</sup>

What can we do to M. Ceyrak for this idea? Excommunicate him?

After all, even official Albanian history, extremely reticent over this issue, did not deny some of the negative aspects of the Albanians' Islamisation:

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<sup>58</sup> Treated at length by O. Carré, *Mystique et Politique. Lecture révolutionnaire du Coran par Sayyid Qutb, frère musulman radical*, Paris, 1984, and G. Kepel, *Le Prophète et Pharaon*, Paris, 1984.

<sup>59</sup> P. Ceyrak, *L'Europe du XXI siècle sera fraternelle et généreuse ou ne sera pas*, in „Référence...“ p. 8.

„Mass Islamisation, involving almost two-thirds of the Albanian people, created another factor of differentiation that had unfortunate consequences for the Balkans and especially for Albania, because it created a series of causes for discord within the family of the Balkan peoples and within the Albanian people.“<sup>60</sup>

Of course, Tajar Zavalani's conclusion seems pithier: „If the Albanians had been entirely Christian, the fate of Albania would have been different.“<sup>61</sup>

However, even Zavalani's idea aroused not discussion but accusations of being a „partisan of the West,“ „agent of the religion of the Westerners,“ „toady of the Vatican authorities,“ „champion of the Vatican,“ etc.<sup>62</sup>

The charges themselves, alas, reveal their authors' desire to keep Albania perpetually on one side, and perhaps even to involve her in a miniature Qutb- or Khomeini-style revolution. If the statement that the Albanians as a nation are 90 percent Muslim is designed to assist such a wish, and I hope I am mistaken, then we are dealing with a policy without national principle, a policy under the sway of religious fanaticism.

When Dom Nikollë Kaçorri stood by the side of Ismail Bey to demand the independence of the homeland, he did not calculate the percentages of the religions in Albania! When Father Anton Harapi drafted the famous memorandum addressed to the great powers in 1918, he did not calculate that among the 44 signatures of the chiefs of Hoti and Gruda there were 40 Muslims and four Christians! When Monsignor Bumçi fought for the borders of Albania at Versailles, he did not have percentages on his mind! When he fell on his knees in front of the Pope to rescue the provinces of Korça and Gjirokastra, he did not consider that there was not a single Catholic soul in these districts! When Faik Konica, Fan Noli, or Gjergj Fishta strove for their country's recognition by the United States, I do not believe that they boasted to the American senators about the balance among the religions in Albania! When Monsignor Serreqi wrote to the League of Nations that in Albania, which was in danger of being obliterated, Christians and Muslims are brothers and want to live in the same state, he did not base his argument on percentages!

Today, indeed, Europe stands not so much before its future as before its past. Before such a quandary, it is not such a surprising thing that history should repeat itself. When we speak and write, calculate percentages, and reconstruct the history of „Albanian Islamisation,“ let us therefore anticipate that our neighbours may use these things as arguments against the Albanian nation, as they have done more than once, at Versailles and elsewhere. Then we can light as many candles as we like, on this side of the border or beyond, and put prelates at the head of our delegations, but we will not be able to throw dust in the eyes of Europe, and Europe will have reasons not to trust us. It seems that Della Rocca is right when he says that in Albanian history the history of religious beliefs is not of secondary importance.<sup>63</sup>

## XVI

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<sup>60</sup> A. Buda, Mbi disa aspekte të njësisë dhe ndryshueshmërisë në historinë e popullit shqiptar dhe të popujve të tjerë ballkanike, in „Actes du Colloque International des Civilisations Balkaniques,“ Sinaia, 1962, p. 62.

<sup>61</sup> T. Zavalani, Histori e Shqipërisë II, Londër, 1968, p. 148.

<sup>62</sup> In Kush janë anmiqtë..., p. 81.

<sup>63</sup> R. M. della Rocca, op. cit., p. 10.

The Albanians, who are inclined to boast of the extravagance of their history, have more than once attempted to tie the thread of this history to early Christianity. The Emperor Constantine, for example has proved particularly handy for this purpose. Together with Decinus, Claudius II, Aurelian, Probinus, Maximian, Diocletian, Constantine Chlorus, and, later, Justinian I and company, they are the galaxy of men of Illyria who carried out the perestroyka of the Roman Empire. W. Weber writes: „The Illyrian emperors were men of great energy, sons of the wild mountains and fertile valleys of the Balkans. They were of the fire of the Balkans, and introduced new blood, new principles, and new action. With their keen eyes, they stared passionately at the unbounded. They tried to establish order with their coarse hands. They were still rough-hewn in many ways, but were military men, no slaves to tradition, and full of the vitality that has several times burst out of Illyria into the world at large. They were not classical men. They viewed everything from the military angle and organised matters as the uncouthness of the times demanded, because only coercion and strictness could unite the sundered components of freedom and civilisation. They understood something about war. They generally came to power from positions close to the previous rulers. If they did not want to know about the earlier subtleties of the Senate and if they rarely interested themselves in the beauties of ancient cultures, the reason was that that they did not have enough time and that this civilisation had withered.“<sup>64</sup>

If Constantine the Great reformed the empire, united the western and the eastern provinces, fought against schisms and heresies and turned Christianity into the official religion, the ancients thought that he did all this under the inspiration of a mysterious sign. During the Battle of the Bridge of Milva in front of Rome in the year 312, there appeared to him impressed on his weapons the sign of Christ. Contemporaries describe it as resembling the initials IHSV, which the Italian officers deciphered as „In Hoc Signo Vinces“ („In this sign you will conquer.“). It looks like dog Latin, with at least a superfluous „In.“ But look how Albanian enthusiasm can interpret this sign, among the mass of mainly Illyrian soldiers. Coming from an area where East met with West, they generally used a mixed, unlitery Greek-Latin alphabet, a sort of predecessor of the Glagolitic alphabet. These soldiers supposedly wrote the name of Jesus with a Latin I, followed by a Greek H (which was still not palatized as in modern Greek but was read „e“), followed by a Latin S and a U written as V.

With the passage of time, the two branches of the V assumed the form of a cross and were imposed upon the H. This sign was inscribed, and is still inscribed, on hosts, chalices, altar cloths, etc., as a symbol of belief and its triumph throughout the Christian world. The Albanians can hold their heads high, and why not, for it is an Albanian symbol!

## XVII

This golden age has come to an end for the Albanians, if it ever existed, when the traveller Ibrahim-Manzur Efendi wrote in his diary that they held themselves to be the foremost nation in the world and looked down contemptuously on both the Orientals and the Europeans.

The Albanians are not the foremost nation on earth, nor the eighth miracle of the world. They are not the most civilised people on the continent, or the most ancient on the peninsula. They are not the bravest, the most honest, or the most loyal. When we learn to set aside national bombast, we must admit that the Albanians are simply Albanians, a clever and vigorous people, with virtues and faults. They are a people with shaping characteristics similar to those of other peoples on this continent. They have lived through an exceptionally difficult

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<sup>64</sup> W. Weber, *Das Kaiserreich und der Eintritt der Germanen in die Weltgeschichte*, in „Knaurs Weltgeschichte...“ pp. 250-251.

experience of history. They were able wholly to preserve their language and customs, and partially their territory and their Christianity. They emerged from this experience with their culture and civilisation both enriched and maimed. This probably influenced the fact that they were the last of the Balkan peoples who threw off Ottoman rule to form an independent state.

Albania is not the only country in modern Europe in this kind of position: there are small European countries that offer surprising parallels, such as Ireland or Lithuania, which achieved independence in the same decade as Albania.

This delay is one of the reasons why the Albanians have a history with many unsolved problems. It is precisely these problems that face them now, when the ancient Line seems to be appearing again. One thing must be made clear: the Albanians' greatest problems, the real problems that are basic to their existence, are internal, not external. In the hierarchy of these problems, national economic and social difficulties, not foreign problems, take the first place. Any foreign policy beyond the preservation of the country's independence and territorial integrity is a luxury that mature and internally consolidated nations might allow themselves. Such nations must be capable of supporting their demands with the solid force of a nation coterminous with all its provinces, with tested institutions, an army and navy of the standards of other countries, schools, judicial institutions, defined social classes, and a clear material and spiritual heritage.

If I have said that the fatal Line, for the Albanians, has not been and is not geographical, historical, or political, but a line dividing the two mentalities of the West and the East, I must cite an example of this. Meet young intellectuals in Tirana and talk with them. They will talk to you about economic and political reforms, national programs, subtle alchemy in diplomacy, parties, ideologies, democratic and social-democratic alliances, shock therapy and economic homeopathy, democracy and dictatorial tendencies, parliamentary motionists and lobbyists, the rule of the law and the position of the individual in relation to the state, human rights, accountability and corruption, systems, and institutions and their creation.

All clever things, no doubt.

Go further and talk to the peasants, who are not a negligible proportion of the Albanian population. „What do you want?“ an Austrian journalist asked them shortly after the last elections. They replied with more or less the same demands: „We want an improvement in the bread, because we can't swallow this maize stuff. We want the aid that comes to us from Italy not to be stolen. We want a good look at the Land Law, so that we will not be forced into quarrels with one another. We want someone to think of some tools to work the land, because those oxen we have are skin and bone. We want some sort of loan so we can build a house each to call our own...“

None of them expressed the urgent need for the formation of a new party with such-and-such a name, never heard of anywhere in the world, or for a better separation of the three powers within the state. None of them talked about human rights or the freedom of the press or dissidence or persecution and rehabilitation. The shocking fact is that these peasants raised precisely the same demands half a century ago to an Italian analyst such as Indro Montanelli.<sup>65</sup>

Unfortunately, a similarly divided mentality is also evident in another sphere: between the Albanians of the west and those of the east. (Anyone who wishes is free to pretend not to

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<sup>65</sup> I. Montanelli, *Albania una e mille*, Paravia & C., 1939, p. 104.

notice it.) This makes spiritual ties between all Albanians even more difficult. Many stones have indeed been laid to construct such ties, but many of them turned out to be theatrical props, such as the determination to embrace a „unified linguistic standard“ for the sake of an abstract „national unity,“ or the pretentious fumbling after „national conciliation“ à la Ramiz.

Threads between the Albanians of the West and the East still remain to be tied. These ties cannot be made a reality if one person thinks one way and someone else another, when people aspire for different things, solve problems in different ways, and when one person with money takes himself for an locomotive, and thinks of those without a penny in their pockets as mere trucks. Without these ties, and with the Line of Theodosius running through their heads, there is a danger of the Albanians in the Balkans remaining like the armies of a single power that act independently of one another. „Either saved together, or sunk together,“ Father Anton Harapi warned in July 1944. Unfortunately, nobody paid heed to him and men like him.

A division between two mental realities, regardless of which dominates over the other, represents a potential danger for the disintegration of any people. The special envoys of diplomacy in Kuwait or Paris do not deny this. Philosophical treatises, however optimistic, cannot paper over this fact. „Albania Past, Present, and Future“ proved to be just as much a literary utopia as Plato's „Republic.“ This cannot be avoided either by manipulating historical memories, or by writing new „memoirs of civil servants and exiles“! In the histories of peoples, irresistible forces work secretly, like seismic faults on the sea-bed. A solution offered to a given historical problem ceases to be valid at the moment when historians change their methods and their responsibilities become different. Because of these continual changes, however insignificant they may appear to the superficial eye, every new generation must reread and rewrite history in its own way, without fear of, and even with a taste for, demythologisation; the more we know our country's history, the more we love it! We must not rest content with looking for new answers for old questions, but must review the questions themselves. This is not an argument in favour of historical scepticism. It is a question merely of discovering a „second dimension“ to historical thought, possibly that which Collingwood called „the history of history.“ Or that which, according to Emile Durkheim, by helping us to research carefully the past, enables us not only to understand the present, but to anticipate the future.

Which side, then, will the Albanians take?

Equipped not with the twaddle of party historians but with „the history of history“ itself, the Albanians would long ago have entered the gates of a united Europe, as long-standing founders of the community and fellow participants in it, with equal rights. They would have done this by doing their utmost to explain to their fellow Europeans that Albanian specifics, what they have called „the Albanian unicum,“ do not make this country impossible to deal with, that there is a key to the forces that subject the country to internal tensions, and that the nationalism that lives still among this people is not an incomprehensible anachronism.

I said, long ago!

Otherwise, it is probable that one day another foreign minister, maybe of France, but of the European Community, will drum his fingers on another round table at another conference, and reply to the belated Albanians as follows: -- Eh bien, Messieurs, croyiez-vous que la Conférence va changer la carte de l'Europe à cause des Albanais?

By then we will be in the 21st century and, although one cannot predict what will happen then, there remains the nagging doubt that the result might be the same as in 1919 and the Albanians will be required to perform a new 1920. If this is the case, it will again be a beginning, not an end, for the Albanians. Then, after another 70 years, someone will again set to writing about the re-emerging Line of Theodosius, and will again ask which side the Albanians will take.

September 1992

Although the course of events since September 1992 has necessitated a review of some issues in this essay, the author prefers to leave it as it stands.