

The Extent of Italy's Military Control in Northern Albania and the Crystallization of Contradictions with France (1917-1918)

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Abstract

The paper reflects the moment with the interests of the history of the first world war in the Albanian territory, it is about the military movement of Italy to the north of Albania, to put it under its administrative and political control. This moment intertwines and crystallizes at the same time the withdrawal of Serbia from Middle Albania and its control by Italy and the emergence of Esat Toptani, who seems to withdraw from his political activity at the request of French politics in Albania, to be reactivated by France at the Peace Conference which would take place a year later in Paris. France, on the other hand, was interested in Esati making political divorce with Italy so that he would be politically used by Ke D'Orseja (French Foreign Ministry). This political movement essentially had strategic implications through the resurrection of the Secret Traktate of London, in the service of its own interests France.

Keywords: treaty, military control, politics, diplomacy, contradictions, influence

Introduction

The Italian invaders largely maintained the part of southern Albania that they had conquered in 1916-17. They even temporarily preserved (until the end of 1919) the occupation of a part of Greek land, that of the triangle Kakavi-Kalibaq-Perat, to secure the Saranda-Korça road. With the designation of the Middle East as an operation area for the Italian troops, and with the withdrawal of the French from Elbasan, the Italian-French contradictions, which were born in October 1918 on this issue, were flattened. The invasion of Middle Albania by Italian troops was completed by October 20, 1918¹. Another controversy was born between the two signatory powers of the secret treaty of London, between Italy and France. Would Italian invasion be extended only to Middle East, as the French side thought, or would it include North Albania as the Italians demanded? For Italy's strategy, it seemed important to master the important roads along the east "along with the Roman road Egnatia, which extended to the lake of Macedonia. This was of great importance, almost capital for us, while from our Adriatic we had only the west coast of the sea². " So it seems very obvious that Italy's greed to securely master the main arteries in Middle Albania, with a look to the north.

With the instructions given by the Allied High Council on 7 October, it seemed that this contradiction was solved for the benefit of the Italians. In these guidelines, by requiring French troops not to continue their progress in the north of Albania, and specifically in the direction of Lezha and Shkodra, underlined: "Italian troops can continue their progress in these directions" (implied, towards Lezha and Shkodra).

These instructions were referred to by the Italians as diplomatic success. But they did not match the intentions of the French diplomacy, which reacted immediately. That is why Ke D'Orseja (French Foreign Ministry³) soon approached the clauses of the treaty of 26 April 1915 and urged Rome to extend the forces of Serbia and not Italians in Northern Albania. The northernmost border of Middle Albania, to which the Italians had the right to advance, was the Massi River because, according to French diplomats, there should be the border of the "Muslim" Albanian state envisaged in the bargaining of April 1915. "In the north of this river, the entire Catholic part of the Albanian state stretching to the borders of Montenegro

¹- Archives of the History Institute, Vienna Archives Fund, 1918, file no. 28/5, p. 87

²-The Work of Italian Soldiers in Albania during the War. Ten. General Giacinto Ferrero, Publications of the Institute for Eastern Europe in Rome, Second Series: Politics. History. Economy, Naples, Ricardo Ricardo Publisher, -MCMXXIII, f. 8 (Italian).

³- Muin Chami, Historical Studies No.4, 1986, p. 54.art "Albania in international relations".

on the one hand, and Serbia on the other, should be considered outside the Italian area of action. There is therefore no obstacle for the Serbs to be allowed to enter this part, "said the elaborate material at Ke D'Orse on October 8, 1917.

This is also reflected through the observations made by the Austrian military, who, seeing the rival power movements at the end of World War I in the Albanian lands, noted that there were disagreements between the France and Italy regarding the areas of influence. "Between Italy and France there are strong disagreements over Albania. The French want to divide Albania between Greece and Serbia. While Italy will create an independent Albania under its protectorate¹". But Italy had a greater advantage than France for the fact that these protectoral interests were also supported by the power politics which had an influence that was to be admired at the end of the Great War, "this is the opinion of both England and America²".

But on the other hand, the rulers of Rome based their plans in Albania on the terms of the Treaty of London of 1915. It is well known that it was the leader of Italian diplomacy, S. Sonino, who sought to preserve it as the most expensive thing he had achieved during the war for post-war purposes. It was only his implementation that every party wanted to do now according to their own interests, by interpreting it in different ways. It was in October 1918 that Austrian diplomacy did not spare charges against Italy's foreign policy, considering it as treacherous and charlatan, led by Sonino. To vindicate the unfaithfulness of the Italian government's "sneaky way of thinking behind the front³" of the Central Powers, this foreign minister had managed to build the phrase "sacred selfishness"⁴. This, according to Austro-Hungarian diplomacy, was the desire of the charlatan man to strike for the war, and the covetous "for the sake of others, is sacred selfishness⁵". The irony of Austro-Hungarian politics went even further. She compared the politics of the Italian state's war with that of a man who was conquered by love and "kidnapping another's wife whom he likes⁶".

Representatives of France demanded that the invasion of northern Albania by the Serbs (as a first annexation measure) be implemented now, without waiting for the opening of the Peace Conference and consideration of the issue at this conference. And the representatives of Italy felt differently. According to them, the right to partition of Albania under this treaty belonged only to the conference. In addition, the very application of specific treaty clauses is, as we have seen, with certain conditions.

Such is the point VII. According to this point, Italy was obliged to accept the wish of the other signatories of this treaty to divide Albania with the Balkan neighbors only when it first provided for those territories in the northern and eastern Adriatic that the treaty in question gave to Italy. This was a condition that helped Italian diplomats to maneuver for the separation of Albania with two Balkan neighbors. Therefore, the governors of Rome sought to extend the invasion of Italian forces throughout Northern Albania in order to have them, in the peace treaties, in their hands.

The decision of the High Council of War on October 7 came to them more or less to help. At a conference held in Ke d'Orse, after a discussion between Klemansos, Llojd George and Soninos, the French president agreed to send orders to General Franse d'Esperay that two French divisions who were invading Albania to retreat without replacement and that the troops Italians to continue their advancement to Albania. "This decision was interpreted by Sonino as a reservation for the invasion by Italy of all Albania and for a year and a half, so next year Italy justified the right to invade Albania with this decision⁷." The French disagreed with this view, and this seemed even more apparent when Italian General Ferrero refused to allow Serbian troops to operate in northern Albania because of his claim that the region was reserved for Italy. General Franse d'Esperay complained to Paris that Italian claims and lack of co-operation were hampering military operations.

French Foreign Minister Pesson in talks with Bonin Longere, Italian ambassador to Paris, insisted that although Italian troops were allowed to invade Albania, "this had not prevented Serb forces to conquer Northern Albania. Italy should be

¹ - A I, *Vienna Archives Fund*, D. 28/6/619. N.16.206, *Telegram 7 October 1918: Reporting. 1-A Kral. ddt of Shkodra October 9, 1918, p. 30, nr. 111, given 5.50 pm afternoon, arrived at 1am the next day.*

² -the same

³ - A H. *Vienna Archives Fund*, Viti 1918, D.No.28 / 6, "Here are the strange policies of your government, Italy," October 1918, the transcribed page, 144.

⁴ -there pg.145

⁵ -there pg.146

⁶ - A I H. *Vienna Archives Fund*. Year 1918, D. no.25 / 6, f. 130.

⁷ - Woodall, Robert Larry, "The Albanian Problem During The Peacemaking 1919-1920", *Memfis State University, PH.D. 1978, F. 25 (7909423).*

allowed to operate in central Albania, "but when General Ferrero, the Italian commander, would cross the Mat River, he would be put under the command of General Franse d'Esperrey. The Italian ambassador rejected the request that all operations in Albania be reserved for the Italians, as agreed during the October 7th conference. He insisted that Shkodra and Lezha were also reserved for the Italian invasion, but agreed "to refuse Serbian troops"¹.

However, two commands of the powers of the Antant powers operating in the Balkans were sent two different guidelines. The command of Italian troops in Albania was forwarded on October 8 to the instruction of the 7 October War Council, according to which the Italian troops would operate in the north of Albania, and on October 10, Parisi conveyed to the command of the East Army its instruction that was based on the elaborate platform at Ke D'Orse on October 8, according to which the northern boundary of Italian troops would be the river of Mat, north of which Serb troops would operate.

However, with the withdrawal of French troops from central Albania, the initiative of military action would take the Italians not only in this part of our country but also in the north. The French authorities did not come to the aid of Serbian troops, a contingent of which broke into Middle Albania sooner (to cross Mat to the north), and occupied Tirana on 10 October before the Italian forces arrived. Paris could not demand that Serbian forces stay in Middle Albania, which had been recognized by Italian forces, but demanded that the advanced army column of the Serbian army that had entered Tirana be allowed to cross north to the Mat River in the direction of Lezha to drive from there Austro-Hungarian forces.

Despite the repeated interventions of French diplomacy with the Italian side on this issue, there was no result. The Serbs were not allowed to cross to the north and were forced to retreat from middle Albania towards Dibra. However, the French government and the command of the Eastern Army tried to find other political and military ways to prevent the spread of Italian forces in northern Albania and to help Serbian forces. The Italians rejected again.

At the end of the tenth second of October (when Italian troops crossed the north of the Mat River), the French came up with two proposals:

First, they demanded that the invasion of Albania in the north of Mat be made with common Italian forces and other allies. This mixed invasion was dictated, according to the French, by military factors, by the successful and rapid development of the struggle against numerous Austro-Hungarian forces. Upon completion of this joint operation, Italian forces would no longer stay in northern Albania but should retreat back south of the Mat River. "We will not hinder the progress of Italian troops in the north of Mat," - the telegraph on October 19th, the head of French diplomacy, S. Pishon, his ambassador to Rome. "But it should be made clear to the Italian government," he further underlined, "that immediately after military operations will no longer justify this advance, these troops should be drawn back to the south of Mat in order to leave it inexpensive those parts of the Albanian territory and coastline, which, according to the London treaty, are expressly reserved for both Serbia and Montenegro²."

This proposal, which was presented to Rome on 21 October, was not approved by Italian governors. For the Italian foreign minister, the question of return could not be extended either. On the contrary, according to the instructions of October 7, the Allied High Council, the invasion of all northern Albania was reserved only to the Italians and, therefore, were the Serbs, he thought, those who should not enter or stay in northern Albania; not Italians.

Second, in this case, according to him, the Treaty of 26 April 1915 did not even come in the middle, after the treaty concerned "related matters to be settled upon the end of the war in the peace treaty".

After rejecting the first proposal, Paris came out with the second, according to which the contingents of Italian troops crossing north of Mat should not operate independently but should be under the command of the Eastern Army³. So they would be disconnected from the Italian army's supreme command, from which the Italian troops depended on Albania. If he did not do so, then: "No one can stop the progress of General Ferrero when he has no enemies in front of him. Its

¹ - Woodall, Robert Larry, "The Albanian Problem During The Peacemaking 1919-1920", *Memfis State University, PH.D.* 1978, F. 26 (7909423)

² - *Boston's "Sun" newspaper, Boston, May 1918, no. 67, f.38.art "Italy and Austria "*

³ - A I H. *Vienna Archives Fund, D 28/5/610, No 26.206, Telegram 7 October 1918. Reporting 1-A. Kral ddt. Shkodër, October 9, 1918, no. 111, f. 39.*

immediate achievement with Shkodra has to be predicted, as the Austrians are retreating before the threats I am exercising on their left wing¹. " Thus telegraphed the commander of the East Army, General F. d'Esperey, Paris, October 22, 1918.

The deployment of all allied troops operating in the north of Albania under its subordination, the French Armed Forces Command, who made this proposal, and then the French Foreign Ministry, which approved it, introduced it as a necessary condition for co-ordination of combat actions and for the avoidance of possible conflicts between the two rivals: Italians and Serbs. But the real purpose of this proposal could not be concealed. He intended to curb the actions of the Italian army in this part of Albania and to limit as far as possible their extension. So even this proposal the representatives of Rome rejected it.

Even the Italian government was preparing to extend its conquests to other parts of the Balkans which would soon be released from central power troops, especially in areas where its intentions and interests were extending. For this reason, Rome also raised a special command, the supreme command of Italian troops in the Balkans, which depended on the Italian troops in Albania. At the top of this command, which settled in Vlora, General Seres² was arrested.

Thus, the diplomatic struggle between Paris and Rome did not stop the progress of the Italian army to the north of Albania. She passed Mat and, on October 27, entered Lezha, where she replaced the Austro-Hungarians who had just retired³. Now when Italian forces were at the door of Shkodra, Paris diplomacy came up with a new proposal.

Thirdly, it set another, more advanced, boundary to where the Italian forces could stretch; this border was the Drin River. This river could only be crossed by the Italians in a place along the coast to go to Shkodra and allowed to pass only a small unit, which would be part of Shkodra's garrison⁴.

This third proposal was made by the French government on 26 October, apparently in order to push the Italian government to accept another proposal. The proposal, which we will talk about below, was aimed at putting Shkodra under an ally garrison.

In these political circumstances, the invasion of central Albania and of a part of northern Albania was carried out by the Italian army, which on 1 November 1918 also entered Shkodra. In addition, it also captured some other territories north of the Drin River. With the expansion even in these parts of the country, the Italians occupy most of the Albanian territory.

The withdrawal of French and Serbian troops from Middle Albania and its invasion by Italian armies made another contradiction between Rome and Paris a solution. It is about the support that French diplomacy has given and continued to give Esad Pasha Toptani since August 1916, contrary to the will of Italian diplomacy. Italian invaders looked at pashai toptana as a tool of France and their two Balkan rivals fighting for the partition of Albania. Therefore, Paris tried to hide the political side of the case⁵ and tried to cling to the "military" benefits that supposedly would have from the followers of this Jewish warrior who would fight against the forces of central powers, Austro-Hungarians and Bulgarians. This "benefit", according to French representatives, would increase when Allied troops would enter Middle East where "France had attempted to restore the relationship between Esad Toptani and Italy, by which Esad would run a small state in central Albania, which would be under an Italian⁶ protectorate. " But the Consultation had refused this approach.

At the time of the Balkan penetration, Esad traveled to Paris in the hope of receiving French support for his Albanian government in emigration. His mission failed. Rather, the French, trying to show their indifference to Albania, withdrew their de facto recognition and support for Esad. Both French actions, in the abandonment of Esad and in allowing the invasion of all Albania, encouraged Sonin to come to terms with his plans for a "wide-controlled independence from Italy".

¹ -there pg.15

² - A I H. *Fund of the Rome Archives*. D. nr.28 / 5, 1918, f. 65.

³ - *The newspaper "The Sun" Boston, May 1918, no. 34, f. 5.*

⁴ - *US, FP Dodaj: Ditar i tij, 1918, f. 34.*

⁵ - *In view of the fact that the secret treaty of London knew Italy as an advantage in the Albanian problem, yet in the coming months it would have become clear that the treaty foundations were dim and they served only as a starting point for further mediation. During these mediations, the current territorial ownership was important. Italy was allowed to conquer all of Albania until Drin, and soon it would extend its invasion beyond this line.*

⁶ - *The Albanian Problem During The Peacemaking, 1919-1920, vep e përmd, PH.D. 1978, f. 67.*

After the establishment of Italian invaders in central Albania, the problem of the official attitude they had to hold to the mercenaries of Esad Pasha was the problem for the French, because the Pasha forces could no longer serve the French. They had had these forces as a guide and as a vanguard to Middle Albania, as they withdrew from there.

In these circumstances, the Eastern Armed Forces command in October ordered the deployment of Esad Pasha's armed forces. They were ordered to go to their villages with "leave" indefinitely. Under these circumstances, France's position on Esad Pasha's "government" had to be revisited, with which she continued to hold a plenipotentiary minister, recently Leon Kraevski.

The one who put the problem first was the French Ambassador to Rome, K. Barer, who was under the constant pressure of Italian diplomacy and, in addition, at first did not agree with this political action of the center. By mid-October he noted Paris that: "The Italian government does not want Esad Pasha to go to Albania and not authorize him to pass through Italy¹ ...".

And K. Barer was reluctant to give Esad Toptani no support. He gave Ke D'Orses the question: "The Italian government has told us in a very clear way that she keeps Esad for her opponent and she will not see it in any way in Albania. The point here is not whether she is right or not. The London Treaty of 26 April 1915 foresees the establishment in the middle Albania of a Balkan state, whose diplomatic representation will be provided by the Italians. This is a privilege that constitutes the main protectorate node. We have therefore recognized Italy in a medium-sized Albania implicitly as a privileged situation, equivalent to that of the protective power. Therefore, "said K. Barer further," the circumstances advise us and our commitments impose on us ... to put an end to the patronage of whose harm I have pointed out since this patronage was accorded to us and the evolution of events proved his futility. "

The withdrawal of its diplomatic representative to the government of E. Toptani and his call to Paris, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided at the end of October, while the actions took place during November. How did Ke D'Ors's argument in this telegram to L. Kraevski argued: "Because of the provisions that include all of the middle Albania in the Italian area of operations and deriving from our commitments to Italy, there is fears that the Italian government will again raise difficulties in your presence at Esad and his government. On the other hand, since we have no interest in giving the Consultation a pretext to violate the commitments it has made to us, please inform Esad Pasha that I have called you back to France². "

It is quite clear that Italy's commitments to France and its other allies, spoken by S. Pishon, were nothing but the ones related to the secret treaty of London. That is why S. Powon was told to tell the Pope toptana to give up attempts to return to Albania until the fighting had ended and the conditions of peace had not been determined, at least in their general lines.

Thus, at the time of the ceasefire, the French government was forced to distance itself from Esad Pasha formally, for in fact, she did not even spare her moral and material support (by granting any subsidy in hand). At this time there was another contradiction to the invasion of Shkodra. This issue was resolved by placing there an interracial garrison, which would be temporary, until it settled for its political future.

¹ - Magazine "The Adriatic", Boston, 1918, no. 2, f. 12. art "Unemployment of Bulgaria"

² - *The Albanian Problem During The peacemaking, 1919- 1920, vep e përmd, Woodall, 1979 (phd).*