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AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN AND ALBANIAN RELATIONS DURING THE WORLD WAR I

Abstract: This article focused on the policy pursued by Austro-Hungary towards Albanians during 1916-1918. It observes carefully the disputes between “civil” and “military” authorities about the political status of Albania throughout the war. The author analyzes special attention of Austro-Hungaria to the cultural and administrative development of the Albanian population as well as their opposition to any national political movement of Albanian nationalists disagreeing with Vienna political platform.

Keywords: *Austro-Hungaria, Albania, relations, August von Kral, cultural and administrative development, Albanian nationalists.*

Introduction

The period of Austria-Hungarian occupation in Albania has attracted the attention of Albanian scholars for a long time. Generally, in these studies, scientific research has been mainly focused on the negative consequences of this occupation. Austro-Hungarian politics has been often seen simply as “invasive” or as a penetration of a protector-state toward the Catholic population in Albania. This research paper will treat whether the period of Austro-Hungarian occupation had a negative or even positive impact on the development of the political and socio-cultural rights of Albanians. It deals with the question whether building a public administration under the control of the Austro-Hungarian authorities helped the Albanians in building nation-state during later years. The paper tends to deter-

mine the factors affecting the interests and bilateral relations. Also, it addresses the attitude of the Austro-Hungarian authorities to any national political movement of Albanians disagreeing with their political platform.

A Prelude to the Austro-Hungarian and Albanian Relations until 1916

The Austro-Hungarian interest about Albania and Albanians began at the Berlin Congress in 1878 and it became more active from the end of 19th century.¹ Austro-Hungary was directly involved into the Albanian affair when the Serbian government demonstrated its hegemonic ambitions to Albanian Adriatic coast during the Balkan War I. These circumstances led the Austro-Hungarian government to protect Albanians and their territory. In effect, by protecting Albanian interests they were protecting their own interests too. However, after the Ottoman defeat in late October-November 1912, Albanians relied on Austro-Hungary as remaining great power on their path towards national independence and sovereignty. The efforts made by Albanian nationalists and the support of Austro-Hungarian diplomats led to the Albanian declaration of Independence. During the proceedings of the Ambassadorial Conference in London (1912-1913), Austria-Hungary as the power had strengthened its support for the national interests of the Albanians. At this conference, it presented a draft proposal for the Albanian state borders, which included most of the ethnic areas inhabited by Albanians.²

Austria-Hungary supported Prince Wilhelm von Wied during his six month period on the throne of Albania. At the beginning of August 1914, the Austro-Hungarian government asked Prince to declare war on Serbia in return to the loan funds and the support to Albania. Since Prince of Albania rejected this offer, the Austro-Hungarian government decided to withdraw the support to the Prince. Thus, left without the support in Albania and from the main international allies, on September 3, 1914, Prince Wilhelm von Wied decided to leave Albania. Consequently, from September 1914 to December 1915 the internal riots in Albania spread like a wild fire and as such were strategically exploited by the neighbouring states.

At the beginning of World War I, about two years after Albania's Independence Declaration, Albania encountered numerous political, economic and social

¹ Prela Z. 1965. 147, 152.

² HHStA. PA. A. at AQSH. F. 591. D. 2/1. Telegram of Foreign Affairs Minister Berchtold to the Austro-Hungarian representative in London, Vienna, December 19th, 1912.

challenges. Emerging turmoil resulted in the change of political and diplomatic attitude of the Great Powers of the two combatant blocs, which hesitated to grant the independence and territorial integrity to the Albanian state in accordance with the decisions of the Ambassadors Conference in London in 1913. During the negotiations between Italy and Austria-Hungary on April 8, 1915, Rome demanded from Vienna the transfer of full Italian sovereignty over Vlora and its surroundings. Meanwhile, Italy continued negotiations with the Entente's governments. The readiness of the Entente's states to satisfy Italian imperial hegemony led to the signing of a secret agreement in London on April 26, 1915, which violated the independence and territorial integrity of Albania. With this document, the Great Britain, France and Russia managed to persuade Italy to abandon its neutrality to become part of this bloc³.

On October 14, 1915, Bulgaria declared the war on Serbia, fading alongside the Powers of the Austro-German Bloc. Located between the two armies, in front of the Austro-Hungarian army and behind the Bulgarian one, the Serbian army broke down within a short period of time. After this, the Montenegrin army was also defeated and eventually capitulated.⁴ During the cold winter of 1915/1916, the Serbian army of about 220,000 soldiers, along with members of the government and the royal court, accompanied by tens of thousands of civilians, withdrew toward the Albanian Adriatic coast⁵. During their withdrawal, through the Albanian territories, Serb soldiers and civilians were not attacked by the Albanians.

The Meeting of the Council of Ministers

On January 7, 1916 at the meeting of the Council of Ministers the Austro-Hungarian government discussed the issue of Albania. Should the Albanian state still exist was one of the major topics at the meeting. Based on the strategic interests, the Austro-Hungarian government attempted to create a land corridor along the Adriatic and Sanjak of the Pazari i Ri (Novi Pazar), which would continue all the way through the Albanian territory. Furthermore, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Istvan Burian von Rajecz, expressed the view that Austro-Hungary should turn the Albanian state into an effective protectorate, especially with regards to political, economic and administrative oversight as to ensure state's stability, growth

³ History of the Albanian People, vol. III, edition of the Academy of Sciences of Albania], Tiranë: Toena, 2007, p. 79.

⁴ Çami M. 1987. 211.

⁵ Božić I, Čirković S, Ekmečić M, Dedijer V. 1973. 390-391.

and development. Such model was supposed to be similar to the Russian protectorate on Bulgaria after the victory for autonomy in 1878.⁶ Burian argued that Albania as an autonomous state under the Austro-Hungarian protectorate would embark on the path of viable development. On the contrary, the failure of establishing an effective protectorate in Albania could easily result in the partition of Albania between Austro-Hungary and Greece⁷.

The military wing and the Austro-Hungarian generals were more prone towards the full invasion of Albania and they categorically opposed the creation of an independent or autonomous Albanian state in the form of the protectorate. According to them, the Italians, the Greeks and especially the Bulgarians, states that had pretensions on the Albanian Adriatic coast, rejected to give up voluntarily Albanian occupied territories. They were persistent not to allow the creation of an independent Albanian state even at the expense of the war⁸. These reasons influenced the Austrian-Hungarian Staff Army Chief, Conrad von Hötzendorf to object openly the creation of an independent Albanian state. He was arguing for entire removal of Albania from the Balkan political map. He argued that “for Albania we cannot even break out a war, nor we will break it”. According to him, Albanians did not have homogeneity regarding their language, origin, and religious beliefs. The country was divided and the separation of Albanians in Tosk and Gegë was an important argument that it is almost impossible to create an independent and united state of Albania⁹. He thought that the northern part of the Albanian state had to be annexed by Austro-Hungary, the southern by Greece of King Constantine and a part of Albania should be given to Bulgaria¹⁰. Most of the participants in this meeting supported the idea of preserving the Albanian state, but with a condition of placing the state under the Austro-Hungarian protectorate.

The meeting of the Council of Ministers also addressed the issue of Albanian borders, especially in the form of the Austro-Hungarian supervision. Thus, Albanian eastern border was defined by the agreement with Bulgaria. Although Burian supported the preservation of the Albanian state, he argued that the southern parts of Albania should belong to Greece. Consequently, on May 23, 1915, the Austro-Hungarian government had promised the Greek government that in the case of war neutrality Greeks will be permitted to take the territories of their sphere of

⁶ ÖUA. 358-360, 372.

⁷ Ibidem, 359.

⁸ HHStA. PA. A. at AIH. Vj. 26-17-1727. Secret instruction of the Austro-Hungarian Army Command Chief to the Command of 19th military Corps, Teschen, April 18th, 1916.

⁹ ÖUA. 372, 380.

¹⁰ Ibidem, 371-372, 376-381.

interest in Albania. As an exchange of this concession, Burian proposed that the Albanian state should be compensated with the northern areas inhabited by ethnic Albanians, territories previously annexed by Serbia and Montenegro in 1913. With this step, he intended to attract the sympathy of the majority of Albanians, to weaken Serbian and Montenegrin position and to keep Greece as the key ally of the Austro-German bloc¹¹. However, Burian's proposal did not find support from the attendees at the meeting. Under these circumstances, the Austro-Hungarian government accepted and maintained the borders of the Albanian autonomous state of 1913, but under the protectorate. The Austro-Hungarian government's position on the Albanian issue remained unchanged until the end of the war. For this reason, Austro-Hungarian authorities opposed any national political movement of Albanians disagreeing with their political platform¹².

Austro-Hungarian and Albanian Relations (1916–1918)

On January 23, 1916, Austro-Hungarian armies entered the outskirts of Shkodra by taking control of fortified places¹³. Prior to entering Albania, the Austro-Hungarians issued an announcement stating that they came to Albania as friends of Albanians to expel Serbs and Italians. Therefore, they called on all Albanians to support their presence and role in Albania. On January 28, 1916, an Albanian political group consisting of influential personalities in the country, such as Preng Bibë Doda, Seit Pasha, Fejzi Alizoti, Luigj Gurakuqi and Aqif Pasha Elbasani, made an announcement, asking the Albanians to welcome Austrian forces as liberators. They articulated an idea that Austro-Hungary defended the Albanian question at the London Ambassadors Conference and its forces liberated Albanians from their Serbian-Montenegrin occupation.

Senior Austro-Hungarian military leaders were concerned about the advancement of Bulgarian forces in the eastern part of Albanian-inhabited areas as well as their efforts to experiment with the formation of an Albanian government with no influential Albanian political elites. The Austro-Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs urged its representative in Sofia to forward the clear message to the Bulgarian government that Austro-Hungary "the same as before, was adhered to the viewpoint to create an autonomous Albania, preferably based on its ethnic

¹¹ Ibid. 362-363, 367, 370-371.

¹² Çami M. 1987. 256.

¹³ "Austrija n' Shkodër", [Austria in Shkodër], at *Besa Shqyptare* ["Albanian sworn oath" newspaper], No. 7, Shkodër, January 1916, p. 1; Nikaj P. Ndoc. 1917. 212.

borders”¹⁴. Due to Bulgarian pressure, the Austro-Hungarian troops managed to occupy Albania from Shkodra to the Vjosa River in Central Southern Albania within a short time.

Well-known Austro-Hungarian diplomat D. Thurn recommended the Foreign Affairs Minister to send General Counsel August Ritter von Kral to Albania, arguing that he was one of the best experts in the Albanian affairs¹⁵. After taking over the administrative position in Albania, A. Kral requested the Austro-Hungarian government to implement a project he had devised for Albania. The essence of this project was based on modern and a “common administrative” system of governance. He also proposed the establishment of a “Second instance” Albanian Administrative Council in Shkodra. The central Albanian administration in Shkodra under the control of the Austro-Hungarian Superior Command in Albania was based on three main directorates: the General Directorate of Finance, the General Directorate of Education and the General Directorate of Justice¹⁶. He argued that the country had to be administratively divided into three *bezirke* (Districts) and an appeal court.

The Austro-Hungarian authorities gave Albanians political and socio-cultural rights, including the Albanian national flag, the use of Albanian language in administration and the appointment of Albanian officials. However, the most remarkable achievement was the establishment of a centralized administration system in Albania. The administration in all the ethnic Albanian regions under the Austro-Hungarian authority was comprised of Albanian officials. Local administration employees were subjected to quality selection criteria. The main criterion for hiring public officials was the educational level and their ability to write and read the Albanian language fluently¹⁷. During this period, the Albanian administration had a standardized model on how to formulate and present official documents¹⁸. Building a regular public administration under Austro-Hungarian control helped the Albanians in later years to build a nation-state based on the

¹⁴ HHStA. PA. A. at AIH. Vj. 26-7- 737. Ciphred and very reserved telegram of the Austro-Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to the Austro-Hungarian representative in Sofia, Tarnovski, Vienna, January 16th, 1916.

¹⁵ Ibidem, Vj. 26-18- 1816. Telegram no. 107 of Count Thurn to Count Staphan von Burian, February 1st, 1916.

¹⁶ Alizoti F. 2012. 101-102.

¹⁷ AQSH, F. 271, D. 8, fl. 5. Letter from the General Directorate of Finance to the Finance Office in Elbasan, Shkodër, November 2nd 1917.

¹⁸ Ibidem, F. 235, D. 11, fl. 1. Letter from the General Directorate of Finance to the Finance Office in Kruja, Shkodra, August 1st, 1916.

Western model. Consequently, the positive influence that Austro-Hungary has done during the years of its presence in Albania contributed towards the strengthening of Albanian sovereignty and a common national conscience.

In February 1916, the Albanian nationalists introduced an idea of organizing a national congress. This convention made the following decisions: 1. To invite the Albania's Prince of German descent Wilhelm von Wied to Albania's throne; 2. To form a national government of Albania. Ahmet Zogu, who became one of the most popular political figures in Albania in the 1920s-1930s, was one of the main protagonists of these ideas. In the course of developing national project Ahmet Zogu and other nationalists hoped that since the Austro-Hungarian government had supported Prince Wied, it would not refuse to restore it back to the throne of Albania¹⁹. Also, Albanian nationalists thought that with the formation of the national government, the Austro-Hungarian authorities would accept it as the only governing authority of Albania²⁰. In spite of what was expected, the Consul General, Kral, called on the Austro-Hungarian troops command in Albania to "order the ban on congress, taking into account the curfew state and the order to ban the political meetings". General Kral doubted that this initiative of Albanian nationalists was only aimed at Albania's independence but on the contrary it aimed at hegemonic unification of all ethnic Albanians²¹. These initiatives of the Albanian nationalists contradicted the political platform of the Austro-Hungarian government.

In March 1916, the Austro-Hungarian authority announced a new administrative arrangement, according to which the territory of Albania was divided into four districts. These administrative districts were placed under the command of the Austro-Hungarian Army. On April 1, 1916, the commander of the Austro-Hungarian troops in Albania, Ignaz Trollmann, announced the deployment of military administration to occupied territories in Albania²². Military leaders urged Albanian nationalists to abandon any political initiative for Albania, as the country was under the military occupation. This move shook the foundations of the Albanian and Austria-Hungarian relations²³.

¹⁹ HHStA. PA. A. at AIH. Vj. 26-6-620. Report of the Austro-Hungarian General Consul in Shkodra Kral to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vienna, Shkodra, March 22nd, 1916.

²⁰ Ibidem, Vj. 26-18-1850. Annex to the report no. 16 / pol. of the Imperial and Royal Command Station in Elbasan, Shkodra, March 23rd, 1916.

²¹ Ibidem, Vj. 26-6-635. Cypher telegram of the Austro-Hungarian General Consul Kral to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vienna, Shkodra, March 16th, 1916.

²² Nosi L. 2007. 253-254.

²³ Swire J. 2005. 216.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs functionaries and the command chiefs of the Austro-Hungarian Army arrived at a “modus vivendi” with regards to the future of the Albanian question. Both sides agreed “to suspend plans for the establishment of an occupation administration in Albania”. The interim civilian administration of the occupied territory of Albania would remain under the military command. They also decided that the Consul General Kral should be charged with the duty of the Civil Commissar for transferring the command of the Austro-Hungarian Army in Albania to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The purpose of the Austro-Hungarian military administration in Albania was to achieve two main objectives. To carry out diplomatic, political, administrative and civil activities in the favor of the country to win the sympathy of Albanians and at the same time not to hurt the feelings of Slavic people within its territories²⁴.

Austria-Hungary paid special attention to the cultural development of the Albanian population. Officials from the Austro-Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs thought that the development of the Albanian language was of primary importance and that is why significant support was extended to the publishing of books and the Albanian press. This Ministry took over the subsidies of several newspapers in Albanian, such as the “Vëllazënia” (Brotherhood) published in Vienna and “Post of Albania” published in Shkodër. For instance, the Foreign Affairs Ministry with the help of the military command distributed to the Albanians about 300 copies of the “Vëllazënia” newspaper²⁵.

During the school year of 1916/1917, the Austro-Hungarian authorities made primary school education compulsory for children 7 to 12 years old. In 1917 in Albania there were 224 primary schools opened²⁶. Then, 84 Albanian boys and girls were sent to study at Austria-Hungarian universities²⁷. In 1917, a course for

²⁴ Vlora S. 2013. 163.

²⁵ HHStA. PA. A. at AIH, Vj. 26-20- 2012. Letter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Austro-Hungarian Consul Kral in Shkodra, Vienna, April 8th, 1916; Ibidem, Vj. 26-19-1973. Letter of A. Rappaport to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vienna, September 29th 1916.

²⁶ Ibidem, Vj. 27-1-108. Report of the Austro-Hungarian General Consul, Kral on the Education of Albania in April 1917, Shkodra, June 17th, 1917; “Lajme vendit. Kshilli shkolluer i Shkoders” [Country News. School Council of Shkodra] at *Posta e Shqypniës* [“Post of Albania” newspaper], No. 33. Shkodër. March 31st, 1917. p. 3-4; “Kumtim. Detyra e të ndjekunit të shkollës. Drejtorija e Arsimit të Shkodrës, nr. 713/1” [Proclamation No. 713/1. The task of attending the school. Directorate of Education in Shkodra], at *Posta e Shqypniës* [“Post of Albania” newspaper], No. 78, Shkodër, September 14th, 1918, p. 4.

²⁷ “Djelmt shqyptarë n’Kadetenxhule” [Albanian guys in military schools], at *Posta e Shqypniës* [“Post of Albania” newspaper], No. 79, Shkodër, September 5th, 1917, p. 3; “Lajme vendit. Zansa shqyptarë n’Monarkië” [Country News. Albanian students in Monarchy], at *Posta e Shqypniës* [“Post of Albania” newspaper], nr. 87, Shkodër, October 6th, 1917, p. 3.

reserve officers was opened in Shkodër for 80 young Albanians. After finishing this school, 46 of them were sent to military high schools in Austria-Hungary to be purposefully trained as military officers. This group of military officers constituted an important contingent for running Albanian military formations while a part of them was engaged in civil services²⁸.

Another achievement in the field of education was the establishment of primary schools in Albanian-inhabited territories in Montenegro and Kosovo. At the proposal of the Civilian Commissioner August Ritter von Kral and with the consent of the Supreme Military Command, an “Albanian Literary Commission” was established in Shkodra, which was in charge of laying down the foundations of a standardized Albanian language. The Commission was also in charge of monitoring literary usage of language, spelling, and word creation as well as publishing and proofreading books and textbooks in Albanian language²⁹. The Commission decided that the standardized Albanian language should be based on the dialect of Elbasan, which was a city in the Central Albania.

Civilian leaders at the Command of Corps XIX in Albania argued that the best approach for strengthening the Austrian influence in Albania was through socio-economic change and development. There was the need for the improvement of the economic conditions of the Albanian population in general and of the common people in the rural areas in particular. They felt that economic development would bring about the modernization of Albania’s social life. Kral was of the opinion that economic development could be achieved through the investment of Austro-Hungarian companies, the presence of banks with their capital for the establishment of the bank in Albania, the purchase of real estate by Austro-Hungarian citizens and the use of raw materials of this country by the Austrian industry³⁰.

Albanian relations with Austro-Hungarian military authorities remained relatively good. At the beginning of the occupation, Albania’s population had big expectations from the Austro-Hungarian regime. Since Austro-Hungary was a developed country the similar model was expected to be introduced in Albania. However, soon after the occupation these and similar expectations began to fade away. The Austro-Hungarian administration not only began to be called “bad” but on the contrary “it was worse than the administration of Turkey”. Albanians

²⁸ HHStA. PA. A. at AIH. Vj. 27-10-1013. Secret report of the Austro-Hungarian General Consul Kral to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Shkodra, June 21st, 1917.

²⁹ Gurakuqi K. 1941. 15; Elsie R. 1997. 285.

³⁰ HHStA. PA. A. at AIH, Vj. 26-7-755. Secret report of General Consul Kral to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which contains the economic proposals that the Command of 19th Corps addresses to the Command of the Army, Shkodra, May 2nd, 1916.

were constructively critical towards the Austro-Hungarian administration. They argued that: the Austro-Hungarian administration was bureaucratic, slow and ineffective; there was no harmonious relationship between local administrations; there was no equal treatment of income among the country's administrative districts; and the way of the disarmament process of the Albanians, created a bad impression among Albanians³¹. In addition, some other factors included forcible housing of Austro-Hungarian soldiers in Albanian homes, the ruthless military punishment of the army against Albanian population groups, the forceful containment of domestic products or their purchase with banknotes, and not in precious coins by the Austrian authorities were actions that did not match the mentality of the Albanians of that time. When the Austro-Hungarian troops entered Albania, a high price rise of food products was noted, which hampered the economic situation of Albanians³².

The Austro-Hungarian diplomats thought that "the responsibility for the excitement of Albanians had to fall on the military authorities" in Albania³³. They estimated that the best way for military troops to increase their influence was to "be led by the same pro-Albanian principles as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs", relying on the ability and co-operation offered by the Consul Kral³⁴. Meanwhile, the High command of Austro-Hungarian army was of the opinion that the creation of "the unity of Albania" through the establishment of Austrian patronage was of no political significance as the country was occupied by four states that had different purposes regarding the future of Albania³⁵.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared themselves against the military operations that were undertaken in July 1916 in a northern province of Albania. The military command in Albania had engaged in these operations, Albanian troops from the Catholic district of Mirdita. Of these military actions, around 100 Albanians were killed while the Albanian Catholic forces used this case to commit acts of robbery against residents of the neighbouring province belonging to

³¹ Ibidem, Vj. 26-19-1921. Relation no. 75 on the situation in the Central Albania from the Imperial and Royal Command Office in Elbasan, Elbasan, June 3, 1916.

³² Ibidem, Vj. 26-17-1794. Secret letter of the Consul Kral to the Consul General A. Rappaport at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vienna, Shkodra, September 29, 1916.

³³ Ibidem, Vj. 26-19-1936. Order no. 2313 of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs addressed to D. Thurn, Vienna, May 15th, 1916.

³⁴ Ibidem, Vj. 26-11-1187. Report of the Austro-Hungarian General Consul Kral to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Shkodra, June 15th, 1916.

³⁵ Ibidem, Vj. 26-4- 437. Report of D. Thurn to Baron I. von Burian, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Teschen, August 7th, 1916.

the Muslims³⁶. Austro-Hungarian troops were accused of infidelity by Albanians after executing nearly 27 Albanian captives, who were alleged for attempting to escape along the way to Shkodër city³⁷. However, the Austro-Hungarian military executives also executed four Albanian officers in Fier, accusing them as enemy collaborators. The truth was that they had contradicted Austro-Hungarian officers on how to handle Albanian volunteer forces³⁸. Terror exercised by the Austro-Hungarian army in Albania sparked “a cooling against the Monarchy” to Albanian nationalists. Among them circulated the opinion that the Austro-Hungarian army had killed the innocent Albanian people. With these actions, the army was turning Albanians from an allied nation of dualist monarchy, to its determined opponent.

In August 1916, the aggravation of relations between Albanians and Austro-Hungarian army forces reached the boiling point. According to the estimates of the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry “if no rapid measures are taken, it is necessary to calculate the possibility that Albanians will rise up against us and take the side of our enemies”. The chiefs of this department considered that the main causes were related to the negative statements of military officers. The military administration continued to adhere to the view that Albania was an occupied enemy country and not a friendly country; the military authorities in Albania continued to look despised by the national and religious peculiarities of the Albanian population³⁹.

The heads of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requested the Army General Staff to replace the commander of the Austro-Hungarian forces in Albania and to expand the competencies of the civilian commissar in Albania. Military commanders stated that “the beautiful words of Albanians should not be trusted, as many of them are now with us now, only we have the power”⁴⁰. In fact, after September 1916, the Consul General, Kral, expanded his field of action in Albania, becoming the main leader of the political, financial, justice and education

³⁶ Ibidem, Vj. 26-17-1797. Secret report of General Consul Kral to the Minister of Foreign Affairs Baron Burian, Shkodra, October 6th, 1916.

³⁷ Ibidem, Vj. 26-11-1195. Report very reserved of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Austro-Hungarian representative D. Thurn, Vienna, September 29th, 1916.

³⁸ Ibidem, Vj. 26-17-1193. Report of the Austro-Hungarian General Consul Kral to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Shkodra, September 17th, 1916.

³⁹ Ibidem, Vj. 26-19-1937. Very reserved letter of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to its representative F. Wiesner at the Austro-Hungarian Army Chief Headquarters in Teschen, Vienna, August 25th, 1916.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, Vj. 26-11-1200. Report of Army 19th Corps command, signed by feldmarschall I. Trollmann, Shkodra, September 9th, 1916.

administration. His goal was to establish the Civilian Administration in Albania as an independent body from the country's military administration⁴¹.

The officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Austria-Hungary argued for much more proactive policy in Albania. According to them, national feelings had to be strengthened among Albanians. The support of the national interests of Albanians aimed to maintain their sympathy for Austria-Hungary, so that the Albanians would not go to the side of Entente bloc, and especially Italy⁴². In a report written by General Consul, Kral, for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it was stated that ensuring the friendship and support of the Albanians was of great importance for the interests of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The departure of Austro-Hungary from the Albanians in the Balkans would enable Italy to implement the irredentism recipe in Albania through the Italo-Albanians in Calabria and Sicily. The abandonment of a friendly foreign policy with the Albanians built for years meant for the Austrian diplomatic authorities to abandon an old road without being still sure of the possibility of moving to a new road⁴³.

On December 9, 1916, an important meeting was held between the Austro-Hungarian Army Staff Chiefs and the officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Austro-Hungarian Army Staff Headquarter. The meeting projected the conclusion that the Austro-Hungarian government should order its army in Albania to declare to the Albanian people that it was in favor of "its autonomy in the future". However, the military chiefs opposed the idea of enlargement of the functions of the civilian commissar, Kral, equating his position with those of civilian commissars in the neighbouring countries⁴⁴.

Austro-Hungarian's policy towards religions in Albania

The Austro-Hungarian occupation authorities in Albania followed a moderate policy towards multi-religious population. In July 1916, a *fetva* (religious document of the Muslim religion) issued by Sheikh-Ul-Islam in Istanbul, required that

⁴¹ Ibidem, Vj. 26-11-1193. Telegram of the Austro-Hungarian General Consul Kral to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Shkodra, September 25th, 1916.

⁴² Ibidem, Vj. 26-16-1653. Personal letter of Baron Alexander von Musulin to F. von Wiesner, October 4th, 1916.

⁴³ Ibidem, Vj. 27-2-255. Report of the Austro-Hungarian General Consul Kral to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Shkodra, December 20th, 1917.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, Vj. 26-12-1216. Report of A. Rappaport to the Austro-Hungarian General Consul Kral in Shkodra, Vienna, December 15th, 1916.

all Muslim Albanians, based on patriotic and religious sentiments should obey the military and civilian Austro-Hungarian authorities⁴⁵. The military command of the 19th Corps ordered that the forces of the Albanian militia that comprised of Albanians of Muslim faith should be located in the provinces with Muslim population, while the Catholic ones in the provinces with population of Catholics. This was done in order to avoid any possible religious incidents and clashes⁴⁶.

Despite the moderate attitude of Austro-Hungarian authorities, the Albanians of the Muslim faith perceived and felt that Austro-Hungarian authorities favored Catholic Albanians. They feared that Muslim Albanians could become a depressed element in Albania. Indeed, in spite of any disconnected case of support for Catholics, the administration of the Dual Monarchy had learned lessons from the events of 1914 in Albania. It was clear that any government, which wished to harvest continuous victories and gain the confidence of the local population, or at least of its majority, should be absolutely impartial, honest, and fair and treat all parties equally⁴⁷. On the contrary, if one step was taken to favor one of the religious beliefs in the country, it could have fatal consequences for Albania's political direction by Austria-Hungary.

During the fall of 1916, the Muslim population of Shkodra made demonstrations against the Austro-Hungarian military authorities for exclusively supporting the Albanian Catholics. The demonstrators were questioning arrests of Muslims by the monarchy troops⁴⁸. During this period, the rivalry between the Catholic and Muslim population of the city of Shkodra was ignited. In fostering inter-religious rivalry among the Albanians, there was the Turkish propaganda, which was run by the Ottoman military commission and a number of traders. Propagandists said that "Albania should be declared as independent principedom in a short period of time" presided over by a Turkish prince, alluding to Burhanedin, a Prince from Ottoman dynasty. This propaganda found support and it took roots, especially among craftsmen and traders who intended to cancel the compulsory measures applied by the Austro-Hungarian administration for their products

⁴⁵ Ibidem, Vj. 26-15-1555. Report of the Austro-Hungarian General Consul in Shkodra Kral to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Shkodra, July 7th, 1917.

⁴⁶ Ibidem, Vj. 26-9-934. A secret and very urgent letter of the Austro-Hungarian diplomatic representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at Army Staff Command Headquarter, Teschen, January 29th, 1916.

⁴⁷ Ibidem, Vj. 27-9-925. Very reserved report of the Austro-Hungarian General Consul Kral to Foreign Affairs minister, Otokar Czernin, Shkodra, October 14th, 1917.

⁴⁸ Ibidem, Vj. 26-18-1802. Report of the Austro-Hungarian General Consul Kral to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Shkodra, October 10th, 1916.

and goods⁴⁹. Austro-Hungarian authorities feared that Muslim Albanians could become part of a Pan-Islamic propaganda, which aimed at uniting all Muslims against the Catholic element⁵⁰.

There were several incidents that affected religious harmony between the inhabitants of Shkodra city. Establishing the foundation stone of a Catholic church near Buna (Bojana) River in Shkodra affected the Catholics and Muslims relations in this city. Consul Kral said that it was not right that “for the pleasure of Catholics” the military authorities allowed the beginning of the construction of new churches in Shkodër, Berat and Elbasan, while the construction work on damaged mosques for Muslim residents had not yet begun. Moreover, he accused military authorities for permitting the site of church building to be settled in the vicinity of the mosques or on the *waqf* property; actually the cities with small Catholic population. Actions of this nature were expected to fuel the dissatisfaction of the Muslim population⁵¹.

The headquarters of the Austro-Hungarian Army based in Shkodra called for the inclusion of Mufti Head Office within the “Reis-ul-Ulema of Sarajevo” as well as to invite Bosnian *imams* to Albania. The military authorities thought that among the Albanian Muslim population “for a long time, there were signs of dissatisfaction and distrust ahead of the sovereignty of our authorities”⁵². Consul Kral opposed this proposal and demanded an appointment of an Albanian Head Mufti in the Albanian territories under the occupation of Austria-Hungary after the approval of Sheikh-ul-Islam in Istanbul⁵³. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Burian, supported the position of Consul Kral against the military project. Austro-Hungarian diplomats stated that the religious community in Albania had to be treated as completely and permanently independent of the Ottoman Empire. However, the Viennese government did not support the idea of appointing a local Head Mufti, since it was not in the interests of Austro-Hungary and Albania⁵⁴.

⁴⁹ Ibidem, Vj. 27-5-529. Very reserved report of Anton von Storck to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Baden, December 25th, 1917.

⁵⁰ Ibidem, Vj. 27-9-926. Annex to the report no. 193 / Pol. of the Command of Shkodra Bezirk, Shkodër, October 14th, 1917.

⁵¹ Ibidem, Vj. 28-7-789. Very confidential report of the Austro-Hungarian General Consul Kral to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Shkodra, July 1st, 1918.

⁵² Ibidem.

⁵³ Ibidem, Vj. 26-1-173. Report of the Austro-Hungarian General Consul Kral to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Shkodra, August 11st, 1916.

⁵⁴ Ibidem, Vj. 26-1-173. Ciphred telegram of the Foreign Minister, I. Burian to the Austro-Hungarian General Consul Kral in Shkodra, Vienna, August 22nd, 1916.

The most serious inter-religious incident occurred on March 1, 1918 in the city of Shkodra. At the door of the main mosque of Shkodra city, a dead pig was found whose blood had been splashed at the doorstep. After this provocative act, the Council of the Mufti Office said that “the Muslim population, even in the case of the worst excesses in the future, will use the defence means that respond to civilization”. At the same time, they stated that “if the perpetrators will not be punished severely...the Muslim population will consider this act as a testimony that their sacred religious rights do not enjoy protection...”⁵⁵. Military executives hindered Consul Kral’s inquiries to identify the culprits of the incident at the mosque of Shkodra city. They stated that “the direction of the work in Albania was in the hands of the chief of the army and not of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs”. The deterrence of investigative actions occurred because military officers had a profound disdain for Albanians and especially for Muslim Albanians. A part of Austro-Hungarian officers dreamed of returning Muslim Albanians to the Christian faith.

The Catholic Albanians expected much more from the Austro-Hungarian authorities in Albania, because of shared religious beliefs. They expressed uneasiness when the Consul Kral during the exercise of his duty protected the interests of the Muslim Albanians. Catholic Albanians complained that the Austro-Hungarian civil administration preferred more the Albanian Muslim element. Because of the previous collaboration with the Italians, the leader of the Catholic province of Mirdita, Preng Bibë Doda, was not preferred among the authorities of the Austro-Hungarian military administration⁵⁶. The difficult economic situation and the removal of Preng Bibë Dodë from the task of the *kajmekam* in Puka province, irritated residents of the province of Mirdita who opposed the Austro-Hungarian administration. Seeing the gap that existed in relations between civil and military authorities, Catholic Albanians sent a petition to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vienna against the civilian commissar August Ritter von Kral. They complained that there was a preference for Muslim Albanians in appointments to the local administration. They accused the civil authorities of having opened 134 schools in Central Albania, mostly inhabited by Muslims, while in “Northern Albania nothing was done yet”. The Civil Commissar, Kral, was accused of not paying due attention to the Catholic clergy and of not cooperating with them. For these reasons, the complaint ended, “the [Catholic] clergy is losing its influence and prestige, to great disadvantage of religion and of the Monarchy”⁵⁷.

⁵⁵ Ibidem, Vj. 28-7-794. Article of the monthly magazine “Our Lady of Shkodra, Light of Albania”, July 1918, written by the Mufti Head Vehbi Dibra, Shkodra, March 3rd, 1918.

⁵⁶ Alizoti F. 2012. 104.

⁵⁷ HHStA. PA. A. at AIH, Vj. 27-8- 852. Letter no. 113 of the Austro-Hungarian General Command in Shkodra to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Shkodra, March 28th, 1917.

The civilian authorities of the administration in Albania argued that the Catholic clergy exaggerated the situation. They were proudly displaying some sense of victory over Muslim Albanians. At the same time, Albanian Muslim clerics felt insulted because if during the previous official visits, state authorities gave priority to the Muslim clergy after the Austro-Hungarian occupation, the priority had passed over to the Catholic clergy. In Albanian festive occasions, Austro-Hungarian officials went to the Catholic Cathedral earlier and then visited the mosque. In order to avoid possible disputes between the two religious faiths regarding the priority, the Austro-Hungarian military authorities decided that in case of official expectations, "the clergy of all faiths would appear before the commander of the corps". However, in the first case, this kind of ceremony caused a tempest of anger among the Catholic bishops, as these authorities had to give up from the common official receptions⁵⁸.

On January 28, 1917, the high commander in Albania announced the Proclamation stating that Austro-Hungary had always tried to preserve the entirety of Albania. The military authorities promised Albanians that once the right conditions were created, Austro-Hungary plan to give up self-government to Albanians⁵⁹. According to the Proclamation, Austro-Hungary would fully respect the religion, language, rights and customs of the Albanian people. It would give to Albanians a regular administration, which would guarantee the security of the people, the honor and their property. The leaders of the Austro-Hungarian state expected the progress of the Albanian nation. Most of the Albanian population hosted this proclamation with indifference, but it paved the way for the national propaganda activity of Albanian patriots⁶⁰. In 1917, an Albanian delegation went to Vienna to urge the Austro-Hungarian Emperor to grant autonomy, but the situation remained unchanged⁶¹.

Clashes between "civil" and "military" authorities continued throughout the war. In early 1918, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs asked to expand the powers of the civilian commissar, according to the Belgrade model⁶². August Ritter

⁵⁸ Ibidem, Vj. 28-7-789. Very confidential report of the Austro-Hungarian General Consul Kral to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Shkodra, July 1st, 1918.

⁵⁹ Ibidem, Vj. 27-8-819. Ciphred telegram of the Austro-Hungarian General Consul Kral to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Shkodra, January 28th, 1917; Swire J. 2005. 218.

⁶⁰ Ibidem Vj. 27-6-610. Raport of the Bezirk Command V. E. V, (Feldmarschall Braun) to the Command of 19th Corps, Tirana, February 14th, 1917.

⁶¹ Swire J. 2005. 218.

⁶² HHStA. PA. A. at AIH, Vj. 28-6-647, Statement on the issue of establishing a general military government in Albania, January 12th, 1918.

von Kral presented two proposals. First, he requested that the provincial civilian commissar should lead all civil administration and his post to be separated from the duties charged by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Secondly, if his military superiors did not accept this proposal, then he suggested “to cut off the entire administration of Albania from Corps command and depend exclusively on civilian bodies under the direction and responsibility of the Imperial and Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs”⁶³. Since the military authorities proposed his deployment under the military authorities in Albania, the General Consul, Kral, demanded his resignation of the provincial civilian commissar which he had held until then⁶⁴, but this request was not accepted by his superiors.

Albanians urged the Austro-Hungarian government to take over Albania’s defence and “to strive for the establishment of the natural ethnographic boundaries of Albania”⁶⁵. Between the command of Austro-Hungarian troops in Albania and the civilian commissar, Kral, continued to have deep divergences. For this reason, at the end of September 1918, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and military commanders agreed to split the post to the Provincial Civilian Commissar in Albania by the representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Baron Gyula Bornemisza was assigned to the office of the General Consul, while Kral remained in that of the Civilian Commissar⁶⁶.

These changes in the way of administration of the country were realized in the conditions of the withdrawal of Austro-Hungarian troops from Albania. Taking into account the general state of the country, it was decided that the Austro-Hungarian troops would be withdrawn from a part of Albania to the Shkodër - Pejë (Peć) line. At the end of September 1918, the background administration began to quench. The Austro-Hungarian families of high official serving in Albania as well as some senior Albanian military officials were asked if they wanted to retreat from Albania. On October 1, 1918, German and Austrian forces were ordered to withdraw northward from Macedonia, while the main representatives of the Austro-Hungarian administration remained in Shkodër⁶⁷.

⁶³ Ibidem, Vj. 28-2-231. Chief of Military Staff report - Chief of General Staff addressed to Foreign Affairs Minister Stefan Burian von Rajecz, A. O. K, June 11th, 1918.

⁶⁴ Ibidem, Vj. 28-2-256. Report of the Austro-Hungarian General Consul Kral to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Shkodra, June 20th, 1918.

⁶⁵ Ibidem, Vj. 28-4-492. Cyphered telegram of the Austro-Hungarian General Consul Kral to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vienna, Shkodra, February 24th, 1918.

⁶⁶ Ibidem, Vj. 28-2-228. Cyphered telegram of the Foreign Affairs Minister, I. Burian to the Austro-Hungarian General Consul Baron Bornemisza, Vienna, September 27th, 1918.

⁶⁷ Ibidem, Vj. 28-2-222. Cyphered telegram of Foreign Affairs Ministry to Consul Lejhanec in Shkodra as well as to Count Trautmansdorff in Baden, Vienna, September 29th, 1918.

Most Albanians held an indifferent attitude towards withdrawal of Austro-Hungarian troops. Only the Albanian nationalists group and the middle class of the country began to express regret. The poorer strata of the Albanian society welcomed their departure, because the harsh measures of the Austro-Hungarian military authorities had created dissatisfaction among them⁶⁸. On October 9, 1918, Albania's territories were temporarily included within the General Government of Montenegro. With the withdrawal of Austro-Hungarian troops from Albania, Montenegrin troops entered in Shkodra on October 30, 1918 under the command of Colonel G. Ristić⁶⁹.

Conclusions

1. During 1916-1918, the Austro-Hungarian government decided to keep Albania as an autonomous state under its protectorate. An Albanian nationalist group articulated an idea that Austro-Hungary defended the Albanian question.
2. In general, the relations between Austro-Hungarian military authorities and Albanians remained relatively good throughout the war. However, soon after the occupation the Albanians' expectations began to fade away gradually.
3. The Austro-Hungarian diplomat August Ritter von Kral played an important role in Albania during 1916-1918. He established the central Albanian administration based in Shkodra under the control of the Austro-Hungarian authorities.
4. The Austro-Hungarian authorities gave Albanians political and socio-cultural rights. Building a regular public administration under Austro-Hungarian control helped the Albanians in later years to build a nation-state based on the Western model.
5. The Austro-Hungarian authorities applied a moderate attitude towards multi-religious population in Albania.
6. The Albanian nationalists group and the middle class of the country expressed regret towards withdrawal of Austro-Hungarian troops, but the poorer strata of the Albanian society held an indifferent attitude or welcomed their departure, because the harsh measures of the Austro-Hungarian military authorities had created dissatisfaction among them.

⁶⁸ Ibidem. Vj. 28-8-816. Telegram of the Austro-Hungarian General Consul Kral to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Shkodra, October 8, 1918.

⁶⁹ Alizoti F. 2012. 107.