

Diplomatic Differences over Autonomy of Albania on the Eve of the First Balkan War

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ABSTRACT

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This article analyzes the issue of Albania's autonomy at the turn of the century from the prism of the interests of the Great Powers and the new Balkan States. In 1897 and 1901-1902, Austria-Hungary and Italy had on each occasion brought unanimous agreement for creating an Albanian autonomous state in the event of the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. Nonetheless, during the Albanian national uprisings of 1909-1912, the idea of autonomy for Albania seemed to gain ground even without the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. These new events and the prospect of Albanian autonomy caused widespread alarm amongst Albania's Balkan neighbors. At the 1912 Albanian uprising, they drew up an unending set of agreements to founding a Balkan Alliance against the Ottoman Empire. Drawing upon archival and other primary and secondary sources, this article discusses the conditions, the causes, and the consequences of Albanian historical struggles of 1912 to secure autonomy and provides insights into the diplomatic campaigns against Austro-Hungarian policymaking toward Albania.

Keywords: Sublime Porte, Albanian autonomy, Count Berchtold proposal, Balkan states, progressive decentralization.

ÖZ

RIZAJ, Gazmend, **Birinci Balkan Savaşı'nın Eşiğinde Arnavutluk'un Özerkliği Üzerine Diplomatik Farklılıklar**, CTAD, Yıl 18, Sayı 35 (Bahar 2022), s. 233-266.

Bu çalışmada yirminci yüzyıl başında Büyük Güçler ve Balkanlar'da yeni kurulan ülkelerin çıkarları açısından Arnavutluk'un özerkliği konusu ele alınmıştır. Avusturya-Macaristan ile İtalya 1897 ile 1901-1902 yıllarında, Osmanlı Devleti'nin dağılması halinde özerk bir Arnavut devletinin kurulması hususunda ittifak etmişlerdir. Ancak, 1909-1912 Arnavut ayaklanmaları devam ederken, Osmanlı Devleti dağılmaksızın bile Arnavutluk'un özerkliği fikri kendine yer edinmiş gibi görünmektedir. Bu yeni gelişmeler ve Arnavutluk'un özerkliği perspektifi, Arnavutluk'un Balkanlar'daki komşularının genelinde bir telaşa sebebiyet vermiştir. Balkanlar'da yeni kurulan monarşiler 1912 Arnavut Ayaklanması sırasında Osmanlı Devleti'ne karşı bir Balkan ittifakının kurulması için bir dizi anlaşmaya varmışlardır. Arşiv evrakıyla birincil ve ikincil kaynaklar esas alınarak, bu makalede, Arnavutların özerklik elde etmek için ortaya koydukları tarihsel mücadelenin koşulları, nedenleri ve sonuçları tartışılarak, Avusturya-Macaristan'ın Arnavutluk'a yönelik politikasına karşı yürütülen diplomatik çabalar hakkında bilgi verilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bâb-ı Âli, Arnavutluk'un özerkliği, Kont Berchtold Teklifi, Balkan ülkeleri, aşamalı ademimerkezîyetçilik.

Introduction

Regarding the Albanian issue on the eve of the Balkan Wars, much has been written, both by Balkan and Western historiography. However, there remain certain confusions and misunderstandings regarding the views of the European Powers and the Balkan monarchies on the autonomy of Albania. Referring significantly to the historical sources of diplomatic provenance and relevant literature, we will focus mainly on the diplomatic impact of the Albanian uprising of 1912 and Count Leopold von Berchtold's proposal for the Progressive Decentralization of Ottoman territories in the Balkans.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, in addition to Constantinople (Istanbul) and its hinterland, the Ottoman Empire had six vilayets or provinces in Europe: the Vilayets of Edirne, Thessalonica, Kosova, Shkodra, Manastir, and Janina. Since their establishment, the Ottomans recognized the last four

vilayets under the similar ethnic-geographic name *Arnavutluk* (Albania).¹ European territories under the sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire at that time spanned 169,300 km² and numbered 6,130,000 inhabitants.² As Norman Rich points out, “*all Balkan states, except Romania, had borders with the Ottoman Empire and all of them were eager to seize lands close to these borders.*”³

The ambitions voiced by these new Balkan States for territorial expansion were by no means casual. From the mid-nineteenth century, they experienced economic decline rather than growth.⁴ However, although slow, industrialization spurred demand for markets and complete financial and political independence. To achieve those objectives, they needed to strengthen their military establishment. Hence, despite its weak financial position during the early twentieth century, the Balkan countries began assiduously arm themselves with weapons purchased primarily from Western manufacturers. All the Balkan states raised their army budget. Thus, the military budget of Serbia increased to 22% of total state expenditure, Bulgaria's to 24 %, Romania's to 18.7%, and Greece to 22.7%.⁵

Historical circumstance contributed to three of the six Great Powers having a direct interest in the Balkans: Austria-Hungary with Italy, as powers of the Adriatic, and Russia, as a power which, through the Slav element in the Balkans, aimed to access the Adriatic and the Mediterranean, as well as to control Istanbul and the Straits. Each of these powers chose its path to reach its goals in this part of southeastern Europe.

The Albanian National Movement's View of the Autonomy of Albania

The path of Balkan states to independence had mainly passed through a stage of autonomy, an experience that served as a model for the Albanian

¹ Richard C. Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913: Prelude to the First World War*, Taylor & Francis e-Library, New York, 2002, pp. 8-9. Western writers and diplomats, on the other hand, identified these regions as Albania or Upper Albania and Lower Albania because, as Hall points out "Albanians made up the majority of the population in the Ottoman provinces of Janina, Kosovo, and Scutari, and a significant portion of the population of the province of Manastir." *Ibid.*

² Jacob Gould Schurman, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, Coppell (Texas), 2019, p. 27. Bulgaria having 96,300 km² and 4,329,000 inhabitants; Greece 64,600 km² and 2,632,000 inhabitants; Serbia 48,300 km² and 2,912,000 inhabitants; and Montenegro 9,000 km² and 250,000 inhabitants. *Ibid.*

³ Norman Rich, *Great Powers Diplomacy 1814-1914*, McGraw-Hill, Boston, 1992, p. 425.

⁴ Cf. Michael Palairt, *The Balkan Economies c. 1800-1914: Evolution without Development*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997. Particularly see: Part II. Economic decline and the political freedom 1878-1914.

⁵ Dimitrije Đorđević, “Srbija i Balkan na početku XX veka, 1903-1906”, *Jugoslovenski narodi pred Prvi Svetski Rat*, SANU, Beograd 1967, pp. 207-210.

national movement. The view that demand for autonomy for Albania was rational prevailed in the Albanian national movement during the second half of the nineteenth century. Both Albanian Muslim and Christian intellectual elites were convinced that an independent Albania could not survive knowing the intentions of neighboring states on ethnic Albanian territories. On the other hand, the experiences of many Albanians who had been active participants in the national revolutions of Greece, Romania, and Serbia had convinced them that the achievement of national independence was impossible without the decided support of at least one Great Power in Europe. During the nineteenth century, neither the Sublime Porte nor any of the Great Powers had shown a willingness to support Albanian national demands for autonomy. The Treaty of San Stefano and the national claims of Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, and Greece on Albanian vilayets prompted the establishment of the Albanian League of Prizren in 1878, which “marked the beginning of a growing national sentiment and as awareness of Ottoman weakness.”⁶ The Albanian intellectual elite believed that the Ottoman Empire was the only protection from the fragmentation of Albanian territories by the Balkan countries and the Great Powers. Therefore, the Albanian national program included a demand for autonomy, which prevailed until the end of the nineteenth century.⁷

At first, the Sublime Porte encouraged Albanian nationalism as a counterweight to Greek and Slavic expansion in the Balkans. The League of Prizren petitioned the Sultan to unite the vilayets of Kosova, Shkodra (İşkodra), Manastir, and Janina (Yanya) into a single political and administrative unit, but the Porte rejected this. Still, in spring 1880, the Albanian League declared itself to be the autonomous provincial government of Albania. This action led to the swift end of Ottoman tolerance of the activities of the League. In 1881,

⁶ Feroz Ahmad, *The Young Turks, and the Ottoman Nationalities: Armenians, Greeks, Albanians, Jews, and Arabs, 1908-1918*, University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City, 2014, p. 56.

⁷ The prevailing view of Albanian political thought on the autonomy of Albania within the Ottoman Empire took a significant turn after the publication by Shemsedin Sami Frashëri of the work *Shqipëria, ç'ka qenë, ç'është e ç'do të bëhet* (1899). Frashëri was the most significant thinker of the Albanian national movement in the second half of the nineteenth century. In this political tractate, which sets out a new programme for the Albanian national movement, Frashëri advances Albanian political thought with the idea of complete secession of ethnic Albania from the Ottoman Empire. In his analysis of the political circumstances of the late nineteenth century, Frashëri argued that Albania should secede as soon as possible from the collapsing imperial edifice, and an independent Albanian state should be created before its Balkan neighbors could divide it among themselves. Frashëri also stated that independence and a nation-state could not be achieved by pleading to Istanbul and the Great Powers but rather by armed struggle.

Ottoman forces re-established control over Albanian territory, and the leaders of the League were persecuted or exiled.⁸

After the dissolution of the League of Prizren, the Albanian national movement focused on strengthening Albanian nationalism through engagement in the cultural sphere. Its first request was to open schools in the Albanian language, but the Ottoman government systematically denied this request. The Albanian Cultural Movement⁹ was mainly represented by the Albanian diaspora. Due to the censorship of all forms of national expression, they emerged from the educated middle class, members of which were forced to migrate to different places in the region and beyond, establishing colonies in countries such as Romania, Bulgaria, Egypt, and Italy.¹⁰ Its activity fostered extensive cultural mobilization by founding societies, writing and publishing books, journals, and newspapers in the Albanian language. Inspired by nineteenth-century philosophical concepts of the nation-state, it promoted secularism as part of Albanian national consciousness. This concept of the nation was determined primarily by religious circumstances in Albania, as

⁸ Ahmad, *The Young Turks*, pp. 56-57; Victor Roudometof, *Nationalism, Globalization, and Orthodoxy: The Social Origins of Ethnic Conflict in the Balkans*, Greenwood Press, London, 2001, pp. 147-148.

⁹ On the impact of cultural emancipation, Gellner stresses “*what is being claimed is that nationalism is a very distinctive species of patriotism, and one which becomes pervasive and dominant only under certain social conditions, which prevail in the modern world, and nowhere else. Nationalism is a species of patriotism distinguished by a very few important features: the units which this kind of patriotism, namely nationalism, favours with its loyalty, are culturally homogeneous, based on a culture striving to be a high (literate) culture; they are large enough to sustain the hope of supporting the educational system which can keep a literate culture going; they are poorly endowed with rigid internal sub-groupings; their populations are anonymous, fluid and mobile, and they are unmediated; the individual belongs to them directly, in virtue of his cultural style, and not in virtue of membership of nested subgroups. Homogeneity, literacy, anonymity are the key traits.*” Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1983, p. 138.

¹⁰ “*Albania came very late to national statehood, and only had a short space of time – essentially the period 1878-1921 – in which to build the sort of national consciousness and national ideology that, in most other European countries, had been developing since at least the first stirrings of the Romantic movement. Also, more than in the case of any other country, Albania depended for the development of its national ideology on intellectuals who lived outside the Albanian lands. This was mainly a consequence of the Ottoman policy of hostility to Albanian-language education; but it was also a reflection of the fact that the crucial battle for Albania’s independence had to be fought not in the mountains and plains of the Balkans, but in the hearts and minds of Western politicians, within whose gift it lay.*” Noel Malcolm, “Myths of Albanian National Identity: Some Key Elements, as Expressed in the Works of Albanian Writers in America in the Early Twentieth Century,” in: *Albanian Identities: Myth and History*, eds. Stephanie Schwander-Sievers and Bernd Jürgen Fischer, Hurst & Co, London, 2002, p. 72.

Albanians belonged to three different religions, supposedly a hindrance to the consolidation of nationalism.¹¹

The Albanian intellectual elite invited their compatriots to reject the sermons of church and mosque if they were against the national interests.¹² Unlike neighboring Balkan nations, where Orthodox religious affiliation was among the factors leading to national awakening and the struggle for independence, in their writing Albanian intellectuals promoted the pursuit of secular or cultural nationalism, considering the Albanian language to be a crucial element of national unity. At that time, however, Albanians were also faced with economic problems. The isolation of the provinces, the lack of roads connecting Albanian provinces, and the general economic backwardness of the Albanian vilayets certainly contributed to the delay in consolidating Albanian nationalism.¹³

Consequently, through the second half of the nineteenth century and until the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, besides the obstacles of the Ottoman administration and the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul, the Albanian

¹¹ An important theoretical essay on nationalism and religion is that by Şener Aktürk, “Nationalism and Religion in Comparative Perspective: A New Typology of National-Religious Configurations”, *Nationalities Papers*, 50 (2), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, pp. 205-218.

¹² “Albania is the one country in the Balkan region in which the feeling of nationality seems to be independent of religion.” This statement by Allen Upward in 1908 expresses the long-term commitment of Albanian intellectuals of the time. Cf. Allen Upward, *The East End of Europe: The Report of an Unofficial Mission to the European Provinces of Turkey on the Eve of the Revolution*, John Murray, London, 1908, p. 267.

¹³ On the Albanian national movement and Albanian nationalism in particular, see: Nathalie Clayer, *Në fillimet e nacionalizmit shqiptar – Lindja e një kombi me shumicë myslimane në Evropë*, Botime Përpjekja, Tiranë, 2012; *Albanian Identities: Myth and History*, eds. Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers and Bernd Jürgen Fischer, Hurst & Co., London, 2002; Nurray Bozborra, *Shqipëria dhe nacionalizmi shqiptar në Perandorinë Osmane*, Dituria, Tiranë, 2002; Nader Sohrabi, “Reluctant Nationalists, Imperial Nation-State, and Neo-Ottomanism: Turks, Albanians and the Antinomies of the End of Empire”, in: *Social Science History*, 42 (4), pp. 835-870; Nathalie Clayer, “Local Factionalism and Political Mobilization in the Albanian Province in the Late Ottoman Empire,” in: *Popular Protest and Political Participation in the Ottoman Empire*, Christoph K. Neumann et al., İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, İstanbul, 2011, pp. 197-208; Charles and Barbara Jelavich, *The Establishment of the National States, 1804-1920*, A History of East Central Europe, Volume VIII, University of Washington Press, Seattle WA and London, 1993; Mark Mazower, *The Balkans: A Short History*, The Modern Library, New York, 2002; *Late Ottoman Society – The Intellectual Legacy*, ed. Elisabeth Özdalga, Routledge, London and New York, 2005; Mark Biondich, *The Balkans: Revolution, War and Political Violence since 1878*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011, especially Chapter 1: “Nation, Nationalism and Violence in the Balkans”; Victor Roudometof, *Nationalism, Globalization, and Orthodoxy: The Social Origins of Ethnic Conflict in the Balkans*, Greenwood Press, London, 2011, especially pp. 147-153.

National Movement faced continual internal divisions, especially provincial, social and political particularism. However, Nathalie Clayer asserts that Austria-Hungary and Italy helped “Albanian nationalism to reach supra-provincial level” in the early twentieth century.¹⁴

The Foreign Policy of the Adriatic Powers toward Albania (Italy and Austria-Hungary)

Since 1615, when a peace treaty between Austria and the Ottoman Empire was signed at Zsitvatorok, the imperial house of Habsburg was recognized as having rights of protection over Catholic inhabitants in the Ottoman Empire. After the Austro-Russian-Ottoman wars (1683-1699), these rights were extended to the entire Christian population in the Ottoman Empire in the Treaty of Carlowitz (1699). However, Austria's Balkan orientation would be determined only after her defeat by Prussia at Sadowa in 1866 and her subsequent loss of Venetia. In the wake of that loss, the fragility of Austria's power did not portend a policy of active colonization. Instead, Austria's Balkan policy remained the only viable option that could restore the prestige of the Habsburg dynasty and rescue the country from the financial crisis.¹⁵ Henceforth, the Balkans would be included in Austria's political and strategic program of *Ostpolitik*. At the same time, the *Kultusprotektorat* would become the most efficient tool for expanding Austria's influence throughout the Balkan Peninsula.¹⁶

Italy, fueled by imperialistic aspirations after her unification (1861-1870), could not bear to fall behind, especially not behind Austria-Hungary, which from the beginning emerged as her rival in the Adriatic and the Balkan Peninsula. Hence, the Italian bourgeoisie took an active role in the irredentist movement (*Italia Irredenta*) by requesting that Trentino, Trieste, Dalmatia, and Albania be annexed to Italy, and the Adriatic Sea become the "Italian Sea" while the Mediterranean would become *Mare Nostrum* ("Our Sea").¹⁷ In her ambitious pursuit, Italy was determined not just to secure Vlora (a port city in

¹⁴ Clayer, *Në fillimet e nacionalizmit shqiptar*, p. 622.

¹⁵ Zef Prela, “Problemi Shqiptar dhe Politika Austro-Hungarez 1896-1902”, *Mbi Lëvizjen Kombëtare Shqiptare*, Universiteti Shtetëror i Tiranës, Tiranë, 1962, pp. 102-103; According to M. B. Fried “since the unification of Italy, Vienna had no influence on the western Adriatic, and was forced to seek influence in the eastern Adriatic, namely the Western Balkans, to protect its nautical lifeline.” Cf. Marvin Benjamin Fried, *Austro-Hungarian War Aims in the Balkans during World War I*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2014, p. 25.

¹⁶ Prela, *op.cit.*, pp. 104-107.

¹⁷ The Italian maximalist claims included Nicon, Corsica, Malta, as well as all the territories once belonging to Venice, including the Albanian, Greek, and Ottoman territories.

southern Albania with significant economic and strategic importance) as her principal naval base in the Adriatic but also to curb the expansion of Austrian influence in Albanian territory.¹⁸

The rivalry between Italy and Austria-Hungary for influence in Albania was characteristic of the circumstances of the time; however, this tug-of-war did not correspond well to the interests of the Triple Alliance. On German insistence, both parties were forced to make an initial agreement on Albania. The agreement was concluded between Marquis Visconti-Venosta and Count Agenor Maria Adam Goluchowski in Monza (Italy) on November 5 and 6, 1897. At Monza, the foreign ministers of both countries made an initial oral agreement under which Albania was to be granted autonomous statehood provided if Ottoman rule there ended. This verbal agreement was later put in writing. It was exchanged in diplomatic notes between the two Foreign Ministers, from the Italian side on December 20, 1900, and the Austro-Hungarian on February 9, 1901.¹⁹ The agreement underlined three points: 1. The *status quo* would be maintained for as long as circumstances allowed. 2. If failure to maintain the current situation, which rendered changes inevitable, efforts would be made to ensure that both parties generally agreed to any relative modification in favor of Albanian autonomy. 3. Both parties would prove their readiness to seek in any given moment appropriate ways and means to reconcile and uphold their mutual interests.²⁰ This Austrian-Italian reconciliation over Albania remained in effect through other bilateral talks and agreements until 1912.

Needless to say, both powers had their political agenda that shaped their views about autonomous Albania. Vienna saw it as “*a rock in the Balkan equilibrium.*” Rome as “*a bridge to the region.*”²¹ Since the Austro-Italian rivalry also held a geo-economic connotation because both powers fought for control over the maritime and land routes to the Thessaloniki port, it is understandable why Albanian territories were so important to both powers.

After the Treaty of San Stefano and the Albanian League of Prizren (1878), Austria-Hungary developed a balancing policy between the Sublime Porte and the Albanians. On the one hand, Austro-Hungarian diplomacy intervened to

¹⁸ Arben Puto, *Shqipëria Politike 1912-1939*, Toena, Tiranë, 2009, p. 21.

¹⁹ Ferdo Šišić, *Predratna Politika Italije i Postanak Londonskog Pakta*, Pomorska Biblioteka Pomorske Straže, Split, 1933, p. 44.

²⁰ Prela, *op.cit.*, pp. 114-115; Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe went to War in 1914*, Harper Perennial, New York, 2014, p. 93; George Fred Williams, *The Shqipetars*, Argeta LMG, Tiranë, 1999, p. 28.

²¹ Egidio Ivetic, *Lufjërät Ballkanike*, Dituria, Tiranë, 2008, p. 53.

save the dying Ottoman Empire; on the other, it emerged as a "protector of Albanian interests" by raising a strong voice to meet the Albanian national demands. Austrian policy continued to flow unadulterated from the chambers of Ballhausplatz (the Foreign Ministry of Austria-Hungary in Vienna) even during the Albanian uprisings of 1909-1912 against the Young Turks regime.²²

Despite this "balance of interests" policy, the pro-Austrian sentiment was more than evident among many Albanian political and cultural elites and intellectuals of the time. Faik Konica, Abbot Prenk Doçi, and Kristo Luarasi, for example, held that "*of all foreign assistance that of Austria was the most advantageous to Albania,*" for Austria was the only power which was not striving to occupy and annex Albania (...) "*the only power which would support the racial individuality and the language of the Albanians*" as well as facilitate the social and economic development; and, last but not least, only Austria would "*protect Albania from her enemies.*"²³ Likewise, Ismail Qemal Bey Vlora, a prominent statesman and member of the Albanian national movement, believed that Austria-Hungary, unlike other powers, was genuinely concerned about Albania's safety and her very existence. However, Austrian historian Kurt Gostentschnigg held a peculiar view of Albania's Austro-Hungarian policy. He defined it as a "*structural violence [strukturelle Gewalt] against the Albanian National Movement in the interests of its own goal to strengthen Albania as a stronghold against the Serbian and Italian expansions in the Balkans.*"²⁴

Here one may add that Austria's legitimacy in "structural violence" was firmly tied to maintaining regional stability. A feat not easy to accomplish, as at the time, "*active nationalism provided a ready torch to unify dissident minorities in the Balkans and galvanized the minor Balkan powers to plan for war. Italy declared war on the empire [igniting the Tripolitanian War or the Italo-Turkish War] and encouraged the Albanians [and Montenegrins] to revolt, adding a new dimension of tension to an already uncertain diplomatic situation.*"²⁵ But at that time, Austria-Hungary was interested

²² Kurt Gostentschnigg, "Qëndrimet e Austro-Hungarisë ndaj Lëvizjes Kombëtare Shqiptare në kontekstin e marrëdhënieve të përgjithshme austro-shqiptare" in: Shqipëri-Austri: Reflektim Historiografik, Botimet Albanologjike, Tiranë, 2013, pp. 44-45.

²³ Stavro Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening 1878-1912*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1967, pp. 267-268.

²⁴ Gostentschnigg, *op.cit.*, pp. 44-45; The term "structural violence," coined by Johan Galtung, refers to an indirect violence generating from system structures (state, economic, etc.). See: Susanne Kailitz, "Johan Galtung, Strukturelle Gewalt. Beiträge zur Friedens-und Konfliktforschung, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1975", in: Susanne Kailitz, (ed), *Schlüsselwerke der Politikwissenschaft*, VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, pp.133-136.

²⁵ Edward J. Erickson, *Defeat in Detail: The Ottoman Army in the Balkans, 1912-1913*, Greenwood Publishing Group, Westport, 2003, p. 74.

in maintaining the *status quo* in this part of the Balkans. Albanians were advised that "their security was best assured by remaining within the Ottoman Empire."²⁶ However, domestic and external circumstances forced Albanians to take the path of insurgency to secure national emancipation. M. Hakan Yavuz justifies the Albanian position concisely and comprehensively:²⁷

“While this alliance [Balkan Alliance] was being formed, Albanian Muslims were quite worried about their fate under a weak and collapsing Ottoman state. The Albanian local elite was much more astute than the elite in Istanbul in its reading of events in the Balkans and worked closely with Austria and Italy to counter Serbian expansionist ambitions. The Albanians thus come to the conclusion that the Ottoman demise was inevitable and that their lands would become the primary target of the irredentist policies of Serbia, Greece, and Montenegro. The last source of discontent was the CUP's [Young Turk's *Committee of Union and Progress*], centralizing policies, along with education in Turkish, perceived by many as an attempt to deny Albanian identity.”

The Political and Diplomatic Impact of the Albanian Uprising of 1912

The Albanian national movement of 1909-1912, which initially erupted in opposition to the Young Turks' hostile stance towards Albanian national claims, reached its zenith with the general uprising of Spring and Summer 1912. The beginning of this general revolt was preceded by extensive diplomatic activity on the part of Albanian patriots and intellectuals who lived abroad or traveled there solely to elicit the support of the Great Powers for the Albanian cause. In late 1911 and early 1912, Ismail Qemali, Luigj Gurakuqi, Hasan Prishtina, and other political notables developed and maintained a broad diplomatic presence in the capitals of the Great Powers, including Istanbul. The possible dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans constituted an existential threat to the survival of their people, for they would be left entirely unprotected against the expansionist aspirations of the Balkan monarchies. However, the disturbance of the *status quo* in the Balkans was not in the immediate interests of the Ballhausplatz. Nor did it seem to be in the nationalist interest of the Young Turk government. In January 1912, the Ottoman parliamentary deputy for Kosovo, Hasan Prishtina, made vigorous efforts to persuade Turkish Foreign Minister Mustafa Asim Bey that the official recognition of the Albanian

²⁶ Miranda Vickers, *The Albanians: A Modern History*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, New York, 2019, p. 64.

²⁷ M. Hakan Yavuz, “Warfare and nationalism: The Balkan Wars as a Catalyst for Homogenisation” in: *War and Nationalism: The Balkan War, 1912-1913, and their Sociopolitical Implications*, eds. M. Hakan Yavuz and Isa Blumi, The University of Utah Press, Utah, 2013, p. 53.

borders would also be in the interest of the Ottoman state. However, the Young Turk government, viewing it as a route to the secession of Albania from the Ottoman Empire.

The deteriorating situation between the Albanians and the Turkish authorities impelled the Albanian leaders to take the decisive step of organizing a new armed revolt. This revolt was better organized and had a more advanced program than previous uprisings, and encompassed all the Albanian vilayets with Kosovo as their center. The decision to revolt was taken on January 12, 1912, at a meeting held in Istanbul under the chairmanship of Ismail Qemali.²⁸

The principal leader of the 1912 uprising, Hasan Prishtina, at a meeting with British Vice Consul W. D. Peckham in Skopje, on April 28, 1912, stated that under the existing circumstances, the only solution was to conduct a complete fiscal and military detachment from the Ottoman Empire and the creation of an Albanian principality. As a result, Albania would have a nominal connection to the Porte, citing developments in Bulgaria since the Treaty of Berlin. The Albanian leader also informed the British diplomat about the Albanian national insurrection organized from Shkodra to Janina and sought Britain's support.²⁹ Peckham closed his report with the following notes:³⁰

“I asked him what they were waiting for before they revolted. He replied, nothing but the answer of H.M. Government. At the same time, an unfavourable reply would not avert the revolt. Throughout the interview Hassan Bey manifested considerable optimism, this was, I think, the optimism of a man who feels that things cannot be worse, and may well be improved by strong measures.”

The chief goal of the Albanian national revolt of 1912 was the recognition of an autonomous Albania within the Ottoman Empire that would include the entire ethnic Albanian territories within the vilayets of Kosova, Shkodra, Manastir, and Janina. Even in the early twentieth great part of the Albanian political leaders continued to demand autonomous status of ethnic Albania rather than independence.³¹ In the memorandum

²⁸ *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, vëllimi II: *Rilindja Kombëtare vitet 30 të shek. XIX–1912*, ed. Kristaq Prifti, Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, Instituti i Historisë, Tiranë, 2002, pp. 461-463. Ismail Qemali took on the responsibility to secure support for the uprising from the European diplomatic community, while Hasan Prishtina, together with Bajram Curri and Isa Boletini, were to start the Albanian uprising in the Vilayet of Kosova. *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Kosovo, A Documentary History: From the Balkan Wars to World War II*, eds. Robert Elsie and Bejtullah Destani, I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., London and New York, 2018, pp. 19-21.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ As Barbara Jelavich notes, "Instead, they feared that should the empire fall their lands would be divided among their neighbors. Autonomy within the Ottoman state appeared to be the best

of the Assembly of Junik (May 21-25, 1912), Albanian political leaders and the members of the Central Committee submitted the following demands to the Sublime Porte: 1. The four Albanian-inhabited vilayets to be constituted into one Albanian vilayet and its borders to be established and confirmed. 2. The Albanian flag was to be raised instead of the Ottoman flag. 3. The Governor of Albania was to be appointed by the Sultan. 4. Trained officials to be employed who spoke the Albanian language. 5. Albanian-language schools be allowed to be established and opened. 6. The official language to be Albanian. 7. Military service to be in Albania, except in times of war. 8. The granted demands to be guaranteed by the Great Powers.³²

The national platform of the Assembly of Junik had echoes in central and southern Albania. In June 1912, influential rebels at the Berat Assembly introduced additional demands in the legislative, judicial, administrative, and cultural spheres.³³ During the months between April and July 1912, Albanian insurgents claimed victories in the vilayets of Manastir and Janina, gaining control over all the sanjaks of the vilayet of Shkodra and the western sanjaks of the vilayet of Kosova. On July 22, they succeeded in taking Prishtina.³⁴ In the vilayets of Kosova and Shkodra, the initial successes of the uprising fostered great enthusiasm amongst Albanians. According to Austro-Hungarian diplomats, there were other factors that united ethnic Albanians: the Young Turks' attitude and their unjust persecution of Albanian nationalists; the well-organized propaganda campaign by the leaders of the Albanian national movement; the desertion of Albanian officers and men from the Ottoman army to join the insurgent forces; the Porte's decision to have no direct

guarantee of their national safety." Cf. Jelavich, *The Establishment of the Balkan National States*, p. 222.

³² Vlado Popovski, *Lëvizja Kombëtare Çlirimtare Shqiptare 1830-1912*, Tetovë: Universiteti Shtetëror i Tetovës, 2012, 210-211; Skendi, *op.cit.*, p. 428. This memorandum was then sent to both the Sublime Porte and the Great Powers.

³³ Popovski, *op.cit.*, p. 212.

³⁴ According to the report of the Russian consul in Mitrovica, N. Lobachev "in the evening of July 22, 1912, about 15,000 Albanian insurgents from all parts of the Vilayet of Kosova entered Prishtina without fighting. Cf. *Dokumente Ruse mbi Lëvizjen Kombëtare të vitit 1912*, (in edition: DRLKSH: 1912), eds. Muhamet Shatri, Ramiz Abdyli, Doc. No. 154, 155, Instituti i Historisë, Prishtinë, 2006, pp. 172-175.

confrontation between the insurgents and the Ottoman troops; and the Porte's preoccupation with Italian claims on Libya.³⁵

As the revolt progressed and the insurgents seized control over more cities and towns in the vilayet of Kosova, they released prisoners in every single one.³⁶ They also took control over the railway stations, preventing the transportation of the Ottoman military troops on the route between Mitrovica and Skopje.³⁷ According to the Macedonian historian Vlado Popovski, “*The Albanian uprising of 1912 surpassed the character of the guerrilla movement and became a general national war for Albania's autonomy, both from the national-political and the governing-administrative point of view.*”³⁸

The establishment of Albanian control over most of the Albanian vilayets forced the Sublime Porte to commence negotiations with the insurgent political and military leaders to find a solution to the political status of Albania. Under pressure from the Albanian uprising, the Young Turk government fell on July 17, and was replaced by a new government formed by the opposition, which had long maintained a cooperative stance with Albanian insurgents. The new Government led by Grand Vizier Gazi Ahmed Muhtar Paşa (July 22 – October 29, 1912) was keen to resolve the Albanian question as soon as possible, to forestall an eventual attack by the Balkan Alliance.³⁹

³⁵ *Shqipëria në Dokumentet Austro-Hungareze, 1912* (in edition: SHDA-H: 1912), Vol. IV, ed. Ana Lalaj et al., Doc. No. 32, 33, 34, 35, 38, 46, 50, 57, 64, 119, Qendra e Studimeve Albanologjike dhe Instituti i Historisë, Tiranë, 2012, pp. 87-206.

³⁶ *Dokumente Franceze për Shqipërinë dhe Shqiptarët në vitin 1912* (in edition: DFSH: 1912), ed. Muhamet Shatri, Doc. No. 119, 122, 126, 131, 210, Instituti i Historisë, Prishtinë, 2004, pp. 214-217, 223-224, 241-242; DRLKSH: 1912, Doc. No. 152, 154, 155, 170, pp. 172-175.

³⁷ DRLKSH: 1912, Doc. No. 152, p. 170; “By the middle of July the Albanians found themselves masters of the situations throughout Albania. Their organization was good, and complete harmony existed between the various leaders, who possessed the confidence of both Moslems and Christians. The Serbian and Bulgarian [Macedonian] minorities, incited by the agents of their respective fatherlands, supported the Albanians as a means of weakening Turkish power. Hasan Bey [Prishtina] with some 50,000 men installed himself at Prishtina as director of the movement.” Cf. Joseph Swire, *Albania, The Rise of a Kingdom*, Williams & Norgate Ltd, London, 1929, p. 121.

³⁸ Popovski, *op.cit.*, p. 209.

³⁹ Stanford J. Shaw & Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey: Reform, Revolution and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey 1808-1975*, Vol. II, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 293; According to Mehmet Hacisalihoğlu “The collapse of the CUP government encouraged the Balkan states to declare war against the Ottoman Empire.” Cf. Mehmet Hacisalihoğlu, “The Young Turk Policy in Macedonia: Cause of the Balkan Wars?” eds. M. Hakan Yavuz and Isa Blumi, *War and Nationalism: The Balkan Wars, 1912-1913, and Their Sociopolitical Implications*, The University of Utah Press, Utah, p. 124.

Gazi Ahmet Muhtar Paşa, an experienced figure, was convinced that the military measures against the Albanian insurgents did more harm than good, turning Albanians against the Ottoman state. Thus, he decided not to crush the insurgency by force but to negotiate a consistent compromise with the Albanians.⁴⁰ On July 27, the new Ottoman cabinet of Ahmet Muhtar Paşa sent a commission to Prishtina composed of three high officials, all of Albanian origin. However, the Ottoman-Albanian talks yielded no particular results since neither party could find common ground on questions of a major political character. Since a continuation of the Albanian revolt might threaten a confrontation with the Ottoman army of nearly 70,000 men, Ismail Qemali and Luigj Gurakuqi assessed that under those circumstances, the armed Albanian-Ottoman confrontation was not going to be in the interests of either party. Considering the threat from the neighboring Balkan states and the lack of support from the Great Powers, they advised Hasan Prishtina to reduce their demands from autonomy to socio-political and cultural rights acceptable to the Ottomans. However, this downgrading of demands was unacceptable to some Albanian nationalists who insisted upon greater autonomy because the Fourteen Points of Hasan Bey Prishtina would be less than the level of autonomy in the platforms of the assemblies of Greça, Junik, Berat, and Vlora.⁴¹ Following the failure of the initial negotiations held in Prishtina and the disagreements that broke out between Albanian leaders at the Assembly of Ferizaj over the "Fourteen Points" autonomy demands (submitted to the Turkish Government on August 5, 1912, exactly on the same day that the Ottoman Parliament was dissolved) the radical insurgent leaders decided to march to Skopje with tens of thousands of compatriots behind them. After taking over the Kaçanik Gorge between August 12 and 15, they captured Skopje, the capital city of the Vilayet of Kosova.⁴²

Albanian leaders tried to motivate the Macedonians to be part of the uprising for "liberty, justice, and autonomy." Hasan Prishtina had talks with the former deputy for Skopje in the Ottoman parliament, Todor

⁴⁰ Fahri Maden, "Arnavutluk'un Bağımsızlık Süreci (1877-1913)", *Avrasya Etiüdləri*, Vol. 1, No. 39, 2011, p. 177.

⁴¹ Cf. Popovski, *op.cit.*, pp. 213-217.

⁴² Peter Bartl, *Shqipëria: Nga Mesjeta deri Sot*, Drita, Prizren, 1999, p. 125; "For now, all of Northern Albania," French Consul P. Carlie reported from Skopje, "can be called independent from the central government since the Ottoman troops that have remained in their positions have been given the order to take no actions against the insurgents. Cf. "DFSH: 1912, Doc. No. 123, 126, 217-219, 223.

Pavlov, and other Macedonian political leaders. However, as V. Popovski pointed out, “*nothing came out of the proposal for a joint revolt as the Macedonians at that time were cognizant of the [Balkan allies] planned war against Turkey, believing that war would bring Macedonia its autonomy.*”⁴³

As early as 1911, the new Balkan monarchies had been engaged in secret talks during which they looked into the possibility of securing autonomy for Macedonia. However, “*Albanian nationality was ignored, and the proposed aggrandizement of Serbia, although nominally at the expense of Turkey, was almost wholly at the expense of the Albanians.*”⁴⁴ Although Serbia supplied the Albanian revolt with arms, the aid concealed a broader aim: to lead the Albanians and the Ottomans into a conflict that would weaken both sides, enabling the Balkan allies' planned offensive to be accomplished more quickly.⁴⁵

The Ottoman-Albanian negotiations moved into a new phase in August 1912 as more radical autonomist requests from the vilayets of Shkodra and Janina began to flood the Porte,⁴⁶ placing it under increased diplomatic pressure. However, as these negotiations between the Porte and the Albanian insurgent leaders were launched with the intention of granting Albania autonomy, news of them spread great anxiety in capital cities throughout the Balkans and did not spare far-off Saint Petersburg. The coalition partners – Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, and Montenegro – now in the final phase of founding the Balkan League, at once set in motion a vigorous diplomatic campaign to hinder any steps made towards the granting of autonomy to Albania. From the perspective of the coalition partners, an autonomous Albania would stand in the way of their

⁴³ Popovski, *op.cit.*, 199.

⁴⁴ Swire, *op.cit.*, 117. “To the Albanian leaders, especially to Ismail Kemal Bey, who, as leader of the Liberal Opposition in the Turkish Parliament, was in the closest possible touch with the political situation, the intentions of the Balkan States daily become clearer. (...) These considerations convinced Ismail Kemal Bey that unless the principle of Albanian autonomy was recognized before the Balkan States began hostilities, his country would be partitioned.” *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁴⁵ Popovski, *op.cit.*, p. 198; Zekiria Cana, *Lëvizja Kombëtare Shqiptare në Kosovë 1908-1912*, Rilindja, Prishtinë, 1979, p. 262.

⁴⁶ The Memorandum of Sinja (near Berat) of July 23, 1912; the Memorandum of the Revolutionary Committee of Vlora of August 4, 1912; the Memorandum of Mirdita, etc., Cf. *SHDAH* (1912), IV, Doc. No. 120, 128, 141, 195, pp. 206-2011, 223-224, 236-239, 304-305.

ambitions, which meant the shattering of all their painstakingly devised plans to partition the region.

Initially, the Balkan States began their campaign by exerting pressure on the Great Powers to prevent the Sublime Porte from recognizing autonomy in vilayets where the Albanians constituted the majority of the population. In this regard, the representative of Serbian diplomacy in Athens, M. S. Bošković, announced on August 9, 1912, that the claims of Albanian insurgents of the Vilayet of Kosova in the north, and of the vilayets of Manastir and Janina in the south, had prompted a fierce reaction in Greek public opinion and government circles. Greek Foreign Minister Koromilas has called for a "joint diplomatic action of Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria to suspend the realization of the usurpation goals of the Albanians in the event of Turkish concessions."⁴⁷ Meanwhile, M. Spalajković, the representative of Serbian diplomacy in Sofia, announced on August 9, 1912, that the Bulgarian Prime Minister, Ivan Evstratiev Geshov, had told him that "*if the Albanians were to gain some kind of autonomy or concessions similar to autonomy, that would disrupt his plans.*"⁴⁸ The eventual autonomy of Albania was especially threatening to Serbia, whose intentions for the Vilayet of Kosova had long been known. At that time, the Serbian diplomat Spalajković put extraordinary pressure on the Ottoman Chargé d'Affaires in Sofia, Refik Bey, regarding the Albanian uprising in the Vilayet of Kosova. Spalajković reported:⁴⁹

"I said it would be very dangerous for Turkey if the Albanians were to be granted any concession concerning autonomy. The Albanians have finished their revolt and now should return home. (...) They should be content with the fulfillment of their demand by Istanbul that the parliament is dissolved. Their uprising should end with that result. Istanbul should be master of the situation because the Porte continuing negotiations with the Albanians, or granting them any concessions, as the southern Albanians want, would be a dangerous precedent. It would be dangerous for Turkey to bring up the Albanian question alongside so many domestic problems, for this would certainly raise the Macedonian question."

According to the reports of the Serbian diplomatic representative in Cetinje, M. Gavrilović, the Government of Montenegro considered the autonomy of Albania to be calamitous "*if the Balkan states remained silent, while Turkey was unable*

⁴⁷ *Dokumenti o Spoljnoj politici Kraljevine Srbije 1903-1914 (in edition: DSPKS 1903-1914)*, ed. Mihajlo Vojvodić, Knj. V, Sv. 2, Doc. No. 53, SANU, Beograd, 1985, pp. 211-212.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Doc. No. 86, pp. 258-260.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Doc. No. 92, pp. 265-267.

to break the autonomist demands of the Albanians."⁵⁰ The Serbian Government also made concerted diplomatic efforts with the Great Powers, mainly in Saint Petersburg, Paris, and London, seeking their intensive engagement in opposition to the autonomy of Albania.⁵¹

On August 12, 1912, Ivan Geshov, the prime minister of Bulgaria, revealed his position to the British diplomat at Sofia, Sir Colville Barclay, when he stated:⁵²

“If the Porte accorded to the Albanians any political concessions whatever tending to autonomy – e.g., the appointment of the Governor-General, the delimitation of frontiers, &c. (...) If any such concessions were granted to the Albanians and similar ones were withheld from the Macedonians there would be such an uproar among the latter, followed by acts of violence on the part of various organizations to provoke massacres, and the consequent indignation of the people in country, that no Bulgarian Government would be able to resist the pressure. It was not that we did not wish the Albanians to obtain reforms and privileges, but what they got the Macedonians ought to have also, otherwise, the danger to the peace could not be overestimated.”

From the conversation between the Bulgarian prime minister and the British ambassador Barclay, it was clear that the outcome of the Albanian revolt in the vilayets of Kosova and Janina had seriously alarmed the Bulgarians, Serbs, and Greeks.⁵³

Diplomatic Discourse on Count Berchtold's Proposal

While Serbia and Bulgaria, supported by Russian and French diplomacy, raised open objections to the autonomy of Albania, Austria-Hungary, on the other hand, took a different approach. The Austrian program for *progressive decentralization* of the Balkan vilayets, issued on August 13, 1912,⁵⁴ by Count Leopold von Berchtold, the Foreign Minister of Austria-Hungary, provoked

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Doc. No. 109, pp. 286.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Doc. No. 120, pp. 301-302.

⁵² The National Archives of the UK, London: Foreign Office (in edition: TNA: FO), 424/234. No. 33. Mr. Barclay to Edward Grey, Sophia, August 14, 1912.

⁵³ *Ibid.* According to Barclay, "It is hardly necessary to point out the anxiety caused in Bulgaria as well, doubtless, as in Servia and Greece by the success of the Albanian revolt; these three States would view the autonomy of Albania as a fatal blow to their aspirations. They wish to see Albania remain a thorn in the side of Turkey – a source of weakness – and not become a semi-independent Mahommedan State, a strong pillar of the Empire."

⁵⁴ The day Albanian rebels captured Skopje.

strong reaction and varied interpretation.⁵⁵ According to Count Berchtold, this reform program would show the joint commitment of the Great Powers to put pressure on the Sublime Porte to carry out the implementation of the decentralization policy in the vilayets of Kosova, Manastir, Shkodra, and Janina, where Albanians either made up the majority of the population or were in considerable number. Under the program, decentralizing reforms would be implemented in accordance with the factual ethnographic situation in the Ottoman Empire. To initiate the program, the Austro-Hungarian Government first approached Berlin to secure its approval. In a diplomatic note, written after an official meeting on August 15, 1912, the German Foreign Minister, Alfred von Kiderlen-Wächter, was informed that:⁵⁶

“Count Berchtold wishes to initiate an exchange of opinions among the Great Powers regarding the issue since, in view of national awakenings as well as the weakening of the Young Turks' excessive centralization, it is important that Bulgaria, Serbia, and Greece understand that the national rights inaugurated by the Turkish cabinet would be positive not just for the Albanians but also for the others.”

Based upon her observance, Germany had to lend support to Austria's proposal. Thus, after due consideration, Berlin responded positively to Vienna's request but called the proposal a slight exaggeration.⁵⁷ The German press was also generally favorable to Berchtold's proposals and the idea of the possible exertion of pressure on the Sublime Porte to induce her to adopt the so-called “*policy of decentralization*.”⁵⁸

Until the outbreak of the Albanian uprising of May 1912, the Ballhausplatz believed that it was still too early to take any action towards realizing an autonomous Albania. However, when Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Montenegro entered into an alliance and prepared for war against the Ottoman Empire, Austria-Hungary was impelled to accelerate its engagement in creating an Albanian state. With Serbia and Bulgaria and their fervent supporters in Russia and France banding together to oppose an autonomous Albania, Vienna responded by claiming publicly that the Albanian demands for autonomy

⁵⁵ TNA: FO. 424/234. No. 1. Note communicated by French Chargé d' Affaires, August 15, 1912. Ambassade de France, Londres, Le 15 août, 1912.

⁵⁶ Ismije Beshiri, *The Albanian Question of 1912 according to German Diplomatic Records* (pp. 1- 188) Ph.D. Thesis, University of Prishtina, Faculty of Philosophy, 2018), p. 112.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ TNA: FO. 424/234. No. 68. Sir V. Corbett to Sir Edward Grey, Munich, August 24, 1912. British diplomacy believed that "German public opinion would welcome Austrian intervention in Constantinople, but only as long as such intervention was inspired and directed by Berlin, and relied for its efficacy on German support." *Ibid.*

arising from the uprising of Spring 1912 were not just reasonable but legitimate. Thus, Russian diplomats began harboring suspicions that Count Berchtold's proposal might have been behind the request for autonomy in the Albanian Fourteen Points. The Count himself was also encouraging the other powers to support the Albanian demands. In addition, Vienna requested that the Balkan countries adopt moderate politics toward the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁹

Looking at recent Austro-Hungarian policy on the issue of Albania, the first question that suggests itself is: what was, did Berchtold aim to achieve through his decentralization policy? The answers, gleaned from the diplomatic sources of the Great Powers, could be wrapped up in three main goals: 1. To compel the Sublime Porte to accept the basic Albanian demands so that the Albanian uprising would not jeopardize the *status quo*. 2. To prevent the intervention of the Balkan monarchies, whose aspirations were already known to Vienna. 3. To facilitate Albanian political autonomy at the same time through the process of decentralization. Thus, given the complex nature of the prevailing security situation in the Balkans, Berchtold strongly suggested that the Great Powers should jointly advise the Balkan monarchies to maintain a peaceful stance.

However, rather than pacifying the situation, Berchtold's proposal provoked concern and ultimately rejection by the Entente Powers⁶⁰ and the Sublime Porte, especially from the Balkan States.⁶¹

The first to react to Berchtold's proposal was the Russian Government:⁶²

“It would not, however, be agreeable to Russia were Austria to try to 'patronise' Balkan States. Anything, moreover, in the shape of collective representations would be resented at Constantinople. Much, also, would depend on what was meant by decentralisation, and on whether it was to apply to Macedonia as well as to Albania.”

A few days later, Russia's Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs Sergey Dmitryevich Sazonov had informed Buchanan in the confidence of what he had learned from the Turkish Ambassador in Saint Petersburg, namely that the

⁵⁹ William Miller, *The Ottoman Empire and its Successors 1801-1927*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1936, p. 498.

⁶⁰ Britain and France initially supported Berchtold's proposal, but their position changed following negative reactions from Russia, the Sublime Porte, and the Balkan States.

⁶¹ In August 1912, shortly after the publication of Berchtold's plan, representatives of Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria presented St. Petersburg with a collective motion – the first of its kind – in which they requested urgent Russian intervention to secure the same rights and privileges for them as those claimed by the Albanians. Cf. Ivetic, *op.cit.*, p. 54.

⁶² TNA: FO. 424/234. No. 3. Sir G. Buchanan to Sir Edward Grey, St. Petersburg, August 16, 1912.

projected reforms "will apply to Albanians in four vilayets of Scutari, Janina, Kosovo, and Manastir, which according to the latter, are comprised in the term Albania."⁶³ At the same meeting, Sazonov told Buchanan, "We [Russia and Great Britain] shall have to do something for the Macedonians, who will not be satisfied with vague promises for the future. (...) Austrian Proposals will do more harm than good."⁶⁴

Nevertheless, Count Berchtold had instructed his representative in Sofia, right from day one, to give the Bulgarian Government the following explanation:⁶⁵

"In our opinion, there is nothing here that could damage the interests of Bulgarian Macedonians. Rather, like other nationalities of Rumelia, they have all the reasons to welcome the proposal of administrative decentralization in the Ottoman Empire. Since the rigid centralization of the Young Turks is already being annulled, under which not only the Albanians had suffered, but also other nationalities, Bulgarian Macedonians have the door of peace open to protect their legitimate interests. (...) Austria-Hungary has always followed the policy that supports the peaceful and tranquil development of all Balkan peoples. It would be wrong to think that our caring is devoted more to the Albanians than to any other nationality, especially the Bulgarians."

Seeking to defend his proposal, Berchtold tried to make his approach more specific rather than theoretical. He, therefore, voiced his concerns about the signs of emerging threats to the *status quo* in the Balkans, emphasizing the conflict on the Turkish-Montenegrin border, the appearance of Greek guerrilla bands in Epirus, the Bulgarian public rage following the massacre at Kotchana, and others. The Bulgarian, Serbian, and Greek reactions to Albania's eventual autonomy saw them as "a pretext for propagating their national aspirations" in the Ottoman Empire.⁶⁶

The Balkan states, who were already in the final phase of concluding the Balkan Alliance, took ever more frequent joint diplomatic action in opposition to the autonomy of Albania apropos the Great Powers. United around a mutual premise, Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia agreed on one point that the continuation of unrest in the Ottoman Empire and the outbreak of conflict between

⁶³ TNA: FO. 424/234. No. 38. Sir G. Buchanan to Sir Edward Grey, St. Petersburg, August 21, 1912.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ SHDA-H (1912), IV, Doc. No. 161, 266-267.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, Doc. No. 170, 275-277.

Albanians and the Sublime Porte was in their common interest. In this context, the Serbian diplomat Spalajković observed:⁶⁷

“It is then in our joint interest that by no means does the Porte accept any of the political demands of the Albanians following the desires of Vienna. On the contrary, if the policy of Count Berchtold would be crowned with success, the Albanians would become masters of the situation, and we would be confronted with a weighty dilemma: either to accept the creation of a Great Albania in our neighborhood or to fight to the death against the Albanians and Turks behind whom stands a hostile Austria. The first must be rejected; the second would mean war, that in such difficult circumstances we could not avoid. We must then work to eliminate at least one hostile element or reduce the danger it presents. That element is the Albanians, and we must incapacitate their hostility towards us. This can only happen if Berchtold's initiative fails and if hostilities between the Albanians and Turkey are renewed.”

It is evident that Berchtold's proposal expanded the number of diplomatic players and the range of conflicting interests. The position of Greece quickly rose to the forefront of diplomatic analysis. In his report to Count Berchtold on his meeting with the Greek Foreign Minister Lambros Coromilas, the Austrian Chargé d'Affaires in Athens, Prince Fürstenberg, mentioned how the Greek minister had spoken spontaneously about the Austro-Hungarian démarche in Istanbul. Though in principle he welcomed any action by the Powers to restore calm and order in the Ottoman territories, he still feared that their joint step “*would benefit the Albanians in the first place.*”⁶⁸ The German ambassador to Athens also spoke about the same meeting:⁶⁹

“Prince Fürstenberg had requested another audience with the Foreign Minister [of Greece, Coromilas], in which he will perorate against any possible Greek obstruction or interference in the Albanian question. Prince Fürstenberg has made it clear that the Albanian insurrection is viewed as local in character in Vienna and thus poses no threat to the neighboring countries. He hopes this view will also be shared in Greece. Coramilas, it seems, agrees with this view, but he has pointed out that the Albanian question is still troubling him. According to him, the current state of the Ottoman Empire is fragile, and if the Albanians realize all their demands, it will make them very strong. Nonetheless, Coramilas hopes that Turkey would find a solution to the Albanian riots, which the Greek Government would welcome.”

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Doc. No. 181, 185, pp. 377, 379-381.

⁶⁸ *SHDA-H (1912)*, IV, Doc. No. pp. 205, 319-320.

⁶⁹ Beshiri, *op.cit.*, p. 112.

Although Vienna consistently advised the Balkan states through its diplomatic representatives that “*the Sublime Porte in no way would consider granting autonomous privileges to the Albanians, nor set their land borders,*”⁷⁰ nonetheless, their concerns were evident. A British diplomatic report dated August 26, 1912, revealed how the proposed autonomy for Albania continued to be viewed with dismay by Bulgaria and Greece. In the same way, Russian diplomats did not hesitate to warn European powers that the Russian Government was likely to heed Bulgarian and Greek demands and was ready, if necessary, to engage in “*the reduction of reforms accorded to Albanians, then seek from Turkey to give a similar dose to Macedonia.*”⁷¹ Sazonov considered Berchtold's proposal as a political move toward autonomy for Albania and anticipated that it would encourage aspirations for autonomy amongst the other Balkan nationalities.⁷² Furthermore, in a meeting with Wenzel Leyhanec, the Austro-Hungarian Consul at Vlora, Sazonov expressed there would be a significantly worse outcome if Albania were “*granted a certain autonomy with borders extending beyond the framework of Albania proper, i.e., to the territories inhabited by the Serbs.*” The latter, according to him, “*will be exposed to the Albanian arbitrariness, which would be worse than that of the Turks.*”⁷³

Though always stressing the importance of maintaining the *status quo*, French diplomacy was in accordance with the Russian views. On August 26, 1912, the French and Russian foreign ministers set out on a mission to send a joint message to their Austrian counterpart Berchtold, urging him to allow no disparity in privileges between Albanians and Christian peoples in the Empire.⁷⁴ Also, a message sent to Berchtold by French Prime Minister Raymond Poincaré, reads: “*(...) Whatever privileges the Ottoman Government decides on her own to confer upon Albanians, the French Government is prepared to do whatever it takes to ensure that the Serbs, Bulgarians, and Greeks are conceded the same concessions or similar ones.*”⁷⁵ Thus, French diplomacy showed its readiness to enter into discussions with

⁷⁰ SHDA-H (1912), IV, Doc. No.170, 171, pp. 275-278.

⁷¹ TNA: FO. 424/234. No. 77. Sir Edward Grey to Sir G. Buchanan, Foreign Office, August 26, 1912.

⁷² TNA: PRO, FO. 424/234. No. 57. Sir F. Bertie to Sir Edward Grey, Paris, August 24, 1912.

⁷³ SHDA-H (1912), IV, Doc. No. 175, pp. 281-283.

⁷⁴ Beshiri, *op.cit.*, pp. 112-113.

⁷⁵ Raymond Poincaré, *Lufta e Parë dhe e Dytë Ballkanike si dhe Konferenca e Londrës 1912-1913*, Logos-A, Shkup, 2005, p. 162. French diplomacy was convinced that Berchtold's proposal for decentralization would “*ultimately raise the issue of autonomy for Albania.*” According to the French government, the situation over the ethnic Albanian borders was particularly complicated. Cf. DFSH: 1912, Doc. No. 140, pp. 260-262.

Vienna on the issue of decentralization, always counting on Saint Petersburg and London for agreement on further steps toward reaching a final proposal.⁷⁶

To calm the reaction from Balkan states, the Ottoman Foreign Minister, Gabriel Efendi Noradunkyan, stated that “*Sublime Porte wants to please all peoples equally and is absolutely opposed to giving privileges to some by neglecting others.*”⁷⁷

Having followed the diplomatic debates over Berchtold's proposal with some attention, the British Government refrained from issuing any open declaration of support. All the Foreign Secretary Edward Grey gave was a general statement that London would maintain an “*amicable attitude*” toward reform policies in the Ottoman Empire.⁷⁸ The Italian Government, on the other hand, regarded the Austrian initiative with a dose of skepticism as its Charge d'Affaires to Belgrade Sabino Rinella reported on the concerns of the Serbian Government regarding “*the alleged direct or indirect aid, moral or even material support given to the recent insurrection, would contribute toward reaffirming the Albanians' conviction that Austria-Hungary is the arbiter of the situation and that nothing can be done without its word and without its intervention.*”⁷⁹ Yet, in another report, Rinella called attention to an important Franco-Russian underlying issue that Austria obviously could not ignore. The following is the gist of what he reported to Rome:⁸⁰

“It is not to be believed that he [Count Berchtold] has made an insufficient assessment of the full impact and consequences of his action. In this action, there appears to be an element that could be considered successful in fulfilling his intentions. Austria would not let an occasion pass to take a position of predominance in the Balkans and thus pays scrupulous attention to the prevention or at least the making of an adequate response to the actions that others, particularly Russia, might attempt in this area. This time it was necessary to prevent a probable plan drawn up between Poincaré and Sazonov.”

The evidence suggests that Berchtold's proposal to the Powers to help the Ottoman Empire with the policy of “decentralization” has particularly “struck

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *DSPKS 1903-1914*, Doc. No. 216, pp. 415-416.

⁷⁸ Muhamet Shatri, *Kryengritja e Përgjithshme Shqiptare Kundërosmane e vitit 1912*, Libri Shkollor, Prishtinë, 2016, p. 858.

⁷⁹ *Archivio Storico Diplomatico, Ministero Degli Affari Esteri, Roma (in edition: ASD-MDAE)*, Documenti Diplomatici, A Stampa, Documenti Diplomatici – Confidenciale, serie XXII [L.7]:1912, Il R. Incaricato d'affari in Belgrado al Ministro degli affari esteri. Belgrado, 28 agosto 1912.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

the Servian area," creating festering resentment. The Serbian Government vehemently rebuffed the proposal, and the fact that it originated from Austria was, in the eye of the Belgrade press, viewed with automatic suspicion, as something that would imminently imperil Serbian territorial aspirations to "Old Serbia". British Minister to Serbia, Sir Ralph Paget, pointed out the Austrian proposal implications:⁸¹

“If 'decentralization' means the granting of autonomy to an Albania, which will include the vilayet of Kossovo, probably also the Sanjak of Novibazar, Servia's worst fears will be realized, whilst if 'decentralization' means less than autonomy it will mean practically nothing, and merely result in continuance of the present state of affairs.”

Count Berchtold, too, became the target of great opprobrium. Just as the Belgrade press accused him of "*Jesuitism and for hiding his real motives behind apparent benevolence towards Turkey*,"⁸² he was likewise accused by British diplomacy for being timid, diffident, and irresolute. Sir Paget remarked that Berchtold "*has not had the courage to pronounce the word 'autonomy,' but that is in effect his idea.*"⁸³ Following the Balkan States' incessant polemics, and especially Serbia's unrelenting propaganda war against an autonomous Albania, Paget reported that:⁸⁴

“An autonomous Albania, as understood by the Albanians, embracing [in the North-East] vilayets of Kossovo and Manastir, would of course absolutely conflict with Serb and Bulgarian interests, and an autonomous Macedonia, as understood by Bulgaria, would necessarily make bad blood between Servia and Bulgaria. As a result there would be constant friction between Servia and Turkey, Servia and Bulgaria, and Bulgaria and Turkey, and Austria would fish in troubled waters, all the while preparing her own advance to Salonica. This is Austria's countermove to the rumoured Servo-Bulgarian treaty of alliance.”

The Serbian Government was convinced that the Austrian proposal was directed against Serbia and the Serbian people because through it, "*a Great Albania under the Austro-Hungarian protectorate would be created at the expense of Serbia.*"⁸⁵ In the process, Serbia, and in effect also her patron and protector Russia, would not only be prevented from securing an outlet to the Adriatic

⁸¹ TNA: FO. 424/234. No. 135. Sir R. Paget to Sir Edward Grey, Belgrade, August 26, 1912.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Dimitrije Popović, *Borba za narodno ujedinjenje 1908-1914*, IKP Geca Kon A.D., Beograd, 1914, p. 77.

Sea, but her scheme for a united South Slavic state would also be thwarted. In the meantime, as far as the Austrian proposal was concerned, Greek estimated: “*decentralisation was a very vague expression, and was very near akin to autonomy, which might mean paving the way for eventual absorption [by Austria- Hungary].*”⁸⁶

Montenegro also joined in to oppose Berchtold's proposal on “decentralisation.” The British Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary at Cetinje, Count de Salis, described the Montenegrin King's outlook on the matter as follows:⁸⁷

“[A] few days ago the King [Nikola I Petrović-Njegoš] referred to Count Berchtold's proposals, remarking that he was without any information as to what might be the practical effect which it was desired to produce. An Albanian autonomy was an idea which it was hard for him to grasp. (...) They [Albanians] were a people but not a nation, and it was hard for him to imagine how they could become one.”

There was a similar reaction from *Cetinjski Vjesnik*, a newspaper dependent on the Montenegrin Government.⁸⁸

Although the Austro-Hungarian commitment to maintaining the internal stability of the Ottoman Empire suited Istanbul, Berchtold's proposals for decentralization were still met with great anxiety by the Sublime Porte.⁸⁹ Despite the reactions of the Great Powers and the Balkan monarchies, the Porte feared that “*any talk of autonomy would be very dangerous, as it would encourage similar aspirations all over the Balkans.*”⁹⁰ Ottoman Prime Minister Rifat Pasha had stated with anger that the proposals made by Count Berchtold were unacceptable to Istanbul, describing them as “*an attempt to interfere in the internal affairs of the Empire.*”⁹¹ As a result, Istanbul sought support and diplomatic commitment from the British Foreign Office to prevent any eventual Austro-

⁸⁶ TNA: FO. 424/234. No. 132. Sir Tudor Vaughan to Sir Edward Grey, Bucharest, August 26, 1912.

⁸⁷ TNA: FO. 424/234. No. 373. Count de Salis to Sir Edward Grey, Cetinje, September 24, 1912. This attitude of the Montenegrin king was the result of the non-recognition of the Albanian people as a nation by the Sublime Porte, a request addressed to the Sultan and the Sublime Porte since the nineteenth century.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ TNA: FO. 424/234. No. 72. Sir Edward Grey to Mr. Marling, Foreign Office, August 26, 1912.

⁹⁰ TNA: FO. 424/234. No. 42. Sir Edward Grey to Mr. Marling, Foreign Office, August 21, 1912.

⁹¹ Poincaré, *op.cit.*, p. 165.

Hungarian intervention if the Austrian proposal was rebuffed.⁹² Diplomatic documents suggest that it was continuous pressure from the Balkan monarchies, backed up by Russia that forced the Porte to veto Berchtold's proposal, and even to revise the Fourteen-Point demands for autonomy presented by the Albanian insurgents.⁹³

With the official acceptance of most of the insurgency leaders' demands by the Sultan on September 4, 1912, the Albanian revolt ended. Shortly before the Porte made the awarded concessions official, the insurgency leaders had to resolve their political differences. At a meeting in Skopje on August 18, they accepted the agreement with Istanbul, known as the Skopje Agreement,⁹⁴ as a compromise owing to several circumstances (frequent incidents at the Montenegrin-Albanian border; the creation of the Balkan Alliance; polarization over the autonomy program and the end of the uprising). Though Albanian historiography partially justifies this compromise by referring to the unfavorable circumstance of the time, it does not justify the dismissal of the administration in the liberated cities, which could have been as effective and successful as the organs for maintaining peace and order had proven to be.⁹⁵

Subsequent Reactions to Berchtold's Proposals and the Albanian Autonomy

The Austro-Hungarian proposal continued to provoke mixed reactions among diplomats. Alfred von Kiderlen-Wächter, a man of political sagacity and diplomatic tact, who seemed to have read all the small print in Berchtold's proposal and to have made an astute analysis of all its political angles, issued the following comment:⁹⁶

⁹² *TNA: FO. 424/234. No. 72.* Sir Edward Grey to Mr. Marling, Foreign Office, August 26, 1912.

⁹³ *TNA: FO. 424/234. No. 135.* Sir. R. Paget to Sir Edward Grey, Belgrade, August 26, 1912; *TNA: PRO-FO. 424/234. No. 71.* Sir G. Buchanan to Sir Edward Grey, St. Petersburg, August 26, 1912; *TNA: FO. 424/234. No. 133.* Mr. Barclay to Sir Edward Grey, Sophia, August 26, 1912; *TNA: FO. 424/234. No.137.* Sir. R. Paget to Sir Edward Grey, Belgrade, August 27, 1912; *TNA: FO. 424/234. No. 177.* Mr. Beaumont to Sir Edward Grey, Athens, September 2, 1912.

⁹⁴ Chiefs of the Albanian revolt were categorical that all Fourteen Points be accepted, but the Ottoman Commission refused to fulfill the demand for the impeachment of the two Young Turk cabinets that had attempted to suppress the revolt, as well as the demand for regional military service and appointment of a special commissioner, which could be deemed as recognition of autonomy to the Albanian Vilayets. According to the Ottoman government, these autonomous privileges would have encouraged not just the Bulgarians, Greeks and Serbs, but also the Arabs to demand the same concessions. Cf. Shatri, *op.cit.*, p. 658.

⁹⁵ Cana, *op.cit.* p. 271.

⁹⁶ *TNA: FO. 424/234. No. 67.* Sir E. Goschen to Sir Edward Grey, Berlin, August, 23, 1912.

“The idea which some of the papers seemed to have that the proposals aimed at autonomy either for Albania or Macedonia was entirely false; what Count Berchtold wished was that the Powers should say to the Balkan States: ‘The present Turkish Government is moving in the right direction, it is preparing to give back to the Albanians the old rights and privileges, the old system of decentralization which they used to enjoy; no doubt when it has finished with Albania it will apply the same principles to Macedonia, in the meanwhile your best policy from every point of view is to keep quiet, to avoid adding to the difficulties of the Turkish Government, and watching with patience the development of events which will almost certainly be satisfactory to you’; to the Turkish Government he would propose merely to say that the Powers are glad to see the principle on which it seems to be acting and that they trust it will continue in the same course.”

However, given Albania's geographical and political importance, and thus the enhanced tendency and intense rivalry among the Powers and Balkan monarchies to occupy the country or increase their influence there, Berchtold's proposal, despite all the accusations, was hurled at it, was not *prima facie* unserious or implausible. As Count Francesco Guicciardini, a distinguished Italian historian and statesman, had once observed:⁹⁷

“The autonomy of Albania as the logical solution (...) would guarantee the equilibrium of the Adriatic and would produce stability in the internal affairs of Albania. It would not imperil or damage Montenegro, Austro-Hungary, or Italy. It would also harmonize with the legitimate wishes of Greece (...).”

The Albanian revolt of 1912 had also excited much discussion. European public figures' views on the subject became more exact as their knowledge of the matter became more extensive. Many of them engaged in politics or scholarship saw a connection between the Balkan alliance and the acceleration towards war against the Ottoman Empire and the Albanian national movement for autonomy. Thus, French Prime Minister Poincaré, in his memoirs about the Balkan Wars, stated that “*the one thing that had spurred their [Balkan allies'] appetites the most were the concessions given to the Albanians [by the Sublime Porte].*”⁹⁸ Likewise, his Bulgarian counterpart, Geshov, regarded the Albanian uprising and demands for autonomy as the main reason for bringing the Balkan states together and for establishing the Balkan Alliance.⁹⁹ Moreover, Antonio Baldacci, an

⁹⁷ Skendi, *op.cit.*, p. 249.

⁹⁸ Poincaré, *op.cit.*, p. 177.

⁹⁹ I. E. Gueshoff, *The Balkan League*, John Murray, London, 1915, pp. 48-49.

Italian scholar, and specialist in Albanian studies, laid great stress on the role of the Albanian uprisings in his *Studi Speciali Albanesi*. In his words,¹⁰⁰

“An impartial narrative of the Albanians for freedom, against the centralization of the Young Turks (1909-1912), form one of the true vagaries of the great and rapid progress of the Allied war. This, the Balkan peoples will always have to remember with gratitude, because it was the Albanians who made the fortune of others.”

While "*the takeover of Skopje by Albanians*," Baron Ferenc Nopcsa affirmed, "*was a signal for the allies to attack*."¹⁰¹ In this light, Edith Durham, through the first-hand evidence at her disposal, inferred that the concessions on autonomy granted to the Albanians made the Balkan allies, "*heedless of Russia, hastened to make war before Albania should have time to consolidate*."¹⁰²

Be that as it may, with the Skopje Agreement, the Porte officially recognized the ethnic Albanian character of the vilayets of Janina, Shkodra, Kosova, and, in part, of the vilayet of Manastir. These vilayets were given the right to be administered by native governors, which meant that they were accorded self-government within the empire under local laws. Albanians were also afforded exemptions from military service outside the frontiers of Albania, except in times of war. Public education in the Albanian language was also guaranteed.¹⁰³ But there was no opportunity to implement this hard-earned administrative autonomy because Montenegro moved into northern Albania and the Sanjak of Novi Pazar on October 8, 1912, while Serbia marched on the Vilayet of Kosova, defeating the Ottomans and taking over the territory. Other Balkan allies – Bulgaria and Greece – quickly followed in Montenegro's and Serbia's expansionist footsteps, igniting the First Balkan War. "*This event* – notes Barbara

¹⁰⁰ Antonio Baldacci, *Studi Speciali Albanesi*, Vol. I. Seria storico-politica, Anonima Romana Editrice 1932-1937, Roma, 1932, p. 188. “Una narrazione imparziale pomenti degli Albanesi per la libertà, contro la centralizzazione dei Giovani Turchi (1909-1912), formano una delle vere vagioni dei grandi e rapidi progresssi di guerra degli alleati. Ciò dovranno sempre ricordare con gratitudine i popoli balcanici perché sono stati gli Albanesi che hanno fatto la fortuna degli altri.” *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Robert Elsie, *Udhëtime nëpër Ballkan: Kujtime nga Jeta e Franc Baron Nopça*, Plejad, Tiranë, 2007, pp. 368-369.

¹⁰² Edith Durham, *Twenty Years of Balkan Tangle*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1914, p. 226.

¹⁰³ Costa Chekrezi, *Albania Past and Present*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1919, pp. 68-69. “Of all these concessions, however, by far the most important was the recognition on the part of Turkey that Albania extended to the four vilayets. This was the first official delimitation of the frontiers of Albania.” *Ibid.*

Jelavich – *was to produce an emergency situation for the Albanian leaders. Their national lands were again in grave danger of partition among the Christian Balkan states.*"¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

The path of the Albanians to independence, initially through the demand for recognition of the autonomous status of ethnic Albania, was very difficult both politically and diplomatically. The historical sources of diplomatic provenance used in this essay reflect the complexity of the Albanian issue concerning Sublime Porte, the European Powers' diplomacy, and the state policies of the new Balkan monarchies. 1912 was a turning year and a decisive year whether the Albanians would achieve political emancipation or this historic chance would eventually be lost. The Albanian revolt of 1912, to which we paid particular attention in this essay, had a significant impact. Not only did the uprising bring the Albanian question to international attention like never before, but it also brought about the collapse of the Young Turk government. However, the diplomatic documents cited in this essay clearly show that the full realization of the Albanians' demands for autonomy was impossible because of decisive opposition from the Entente Powers and the Balkan monarchies.

Even if the insurgent forces in Skopje had made a unilateral declaration of Albania's autonomy, it would have not have had any practical effect without recognition by the Sublime Porte and the Sultan. The revolt accelerated Austria-Hungary's engagement in creating an autonomous Albania, albeit indirectly. And it is here that Count Berchtold's proposal for "progressive decentralization" came into play. However, besides causing a veritable storm on the European diplomatic stage, Berchtold's proposal settled nothing. Although Vienna failed to reach its initial goal through progressive decentralization, it soon changed its focus to preventing the intervention of the Balkan States in the internal affairs of the European part of the Ottoman Empire. At the start of September, Berchtold made a new proposal to the Great Powers for joint European action in Istanbul and the Balkan allies to forestall the onset of war. This Austrian proposal did not mention progressive decentralization, which influenced France and Britain to view Berchtold's new proposal with sympathy. Nevertheless, Berchtold's proposal had an important diplomatic impact on the Albanian question because the Great Powers and the Balkan states now understood Austria-Hungary's advocacy for an autonomous or independent Albania as a fact.¹⁰⁵ Under these new circumstances, then, the foreign ministry of Austria-Hungary engaged itself exclusively with preserving the *status quo* in

¹⁰⁴ Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans: Twentieth Century*. Vol. 2., Cambridge University Press, New York, 1995, p. 89.

¹⁰⁵ DSPKS 1903-1914, Doc. No. 315, 330, pp. 537-539, 558-559.

the Ottoman Empire. However, because of the sudden outbreak of the First Balkan War in October 1912, the *status quo* would not last more than two months. The importance of a solution to the Albanian question to the preservation of peace in the Balkans and Europe was proved in 1912 and 1913 when Serbia and Montenegro instigated three major diplomatic crises on the issue: the Adriatic Crisis (November-December 1912) between Austria-Hungary and Serbia; the Shkodra Crisis (April-May 1913) between Austria-Hungary and Montenegro; and the Albanian Border Crisis (September-October 1913) between Austria-Hungary and Serbia.

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