

# The National Movement within the Albanian Diaspora in 1919-1920

---

DEONA ÇALI

This article examines the importance of Albanian émigré societies as active supporters of Albania's membership in the League of Nations at the Paris Peace Conference, and their role in the establishment of the modern state of Albania. Albanian immigration societies such as *Vatra* (the Pan-Albanian Federation of America) as well as the Society of Albanians of Romania were critical actors in the efforts to advance the cause of their homeland during and after World War I. This article analyzes the migrant networks that operated during this period by considering the work of local and foreign representatives of these societies, such as Fan S. Noli (one of the key figures being discussed in this article), Luigj Bumçi, Dr. Mihal Turtulli, Mehmed Konica, and Edith Durham. It illustrates how these figures played an intricate role in Albania's admission process to the League of Nations via their lobbying in the European chancelleries, gradually changing the Great Powers' attitude towards the Albanian candidacy. Partly relying on a novel investigation of documents from the Albanian Central State Archive that pertain to the activity of the representatives of Pan-Albanian Federation *Vatra* in the Parliament of Great Britain, this article will clarify the postponement of the decision of the Albanian issue as part of the broader 'Adriatic question' from the Peace Conference to the proceedings of the League of Nations. As a result of the activity of the representatives and delegates of these societies, Albania was admitted to the League of Nations on 17 December 1920 without defined boundaries, constituting a special case in the history of the League of Nations.

**Keywords:** World War I, Albanian Diaspora, Paris Peace Conference, League of Nations, Immigration Societies, Balkans.

## **Introduction**

In this article, the role of émigré societies supporting the Albanian national cause is analyzed and it explores how, and to what extent, delegates of Albanian emigrant and diaspora organizations shaped political life in their former homeland after World War I. A special focus is given to the analysis of the activity of *Vatra* (Hearth), the Pan-Albanian Federation of America, because of its importance in the defense of the Albanian national cause. *Vatra's* members made a significant contribution to the Albanian cause ever since the Lushnje Congress of 1920, dominating Albanian political life from abroad until they finally returned to Albania in 1921. Communist-era Albanian historiography treated this period in a very ideological manner, and the subsequent historians who have addressed Albania's entry into the League of Nations, such as Arben Puto<sup>1</sup>, Paskal Milo<sup>2</sup> and Muin Çami<sup>3</sup>, have primarily focused on Fan Noli's contributions to this process. Nevertheless, they have not addressed how the admission took place, the role of Albanian immigration societies, and the reasons why the 'Great Powers' changed their attitudes toward the country. The policies and lobbying of members of the émigré societies in the European chancelleries however are crucial to consider, as Albanian historiography has hitherto only emphasized personalities who contributed to the process of state formation but disconnected these from the émigré societies they belonged to, and whom they drew political and economic support from.

The Great Powers' changing attitude towards the Albanian candidacy to the League of Nations is important to both Albanian historiography and the wider context of interwar diplomacy, as Albania represents a special case in the League's history in that it was eventually admitted without a defined status or borders. In this article, previously unexplored archival documents from the Albanian Central State Archive are used, examining

how the representatives of *Vatra* sought to ascertain why an important issue for Albania had been postponed by the Great Powers. The issue concerned Italy's mandate over Albania according to the frontiers of 1913, and its sovereignty over the Albanian city Vlorë and its hinterland, which was crucial to Albania's economy and security. This issue was part of the 'Adriatic question',<sup>4</sup> a key diplomatic concern during the Peace Conference and subsequently for the League of Nations. Before analyzing the role of these societies, their creation and program will be addressed, starting with *Vatra*.

### **The foundation of the Pan-Albanian Federation of America, *Vatra***

Albanian emigration to America was part of a broader trend of 'new immigration' to the USA from mainly southern and eastern European destinations, with the first wave of Albanian emigrants dating back to the late nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Mostly comprised of young males who hoped to return home after making money on the 'new continent', this first wave of Albanian immigrants hailed from Korçë and other areas of southern Albania, and settled around Boston, which would become the first major center for Albanian immigrants up until the 1870s. The experience acquired abroad would play an important role in the nurturing of a national movement and distinct collective identity among the Albanians.<sup>6</sup>

In the late nineteenth century however, the absence of an urban and intellectual elite had hampered the emergence of a national consciousness. The majority of the first wave of Albanian immigrants to the United States shared a rural background and had little knowledge of Albanian literature. Only a minority had received an education and went on to strive for national independence. Boston became a focal point for

the movement, where the first Albanian weekly newspaper, *Kombi* (The Nation), was founded in 1906. Its founder, Sotir Peci, a graduate of the University of Athens, was instrumental in instilling a sense of Albanian nationhood among his fellow nationals and in encouraging the augmentation of immigrants' proficiency in the Albanian language.<sup>7</sup>

As Albanian immigration continued to grow, proposals were raised to unify all Albanian organizations in the United States. A commission, comprised of instrumental figures such as Faik Konica, Fan Noli, Kristo Floqi and Paskal Aleks, was set up in 1911, ultimately resulting in the founding of the Pan-Albanian Federation of America, *Vatra* on 28 April 1912 by the merger of the societies *Besa-Besën*, *Flamuri i Krujës*, and *Kombëtare dhe Dallëndyshja*. It was officially recognized by the State of Massachusetts on 13 June 1912, as its charter was granted by State Secretary Albert P. Langtry. *Vatra* also created a journal, *Dielli* (The Sun), which was headed by Kristo Kirka<sup>8</sup>, organizer of the Federation branch, Faik Konica and Kristo Floqi<sup>9</sup>, and its board, the Temporary Council of Elders, appointed Fan Noli as its secretary.

Born in Ibrik-Tepe (Albanian: *Qytezë*) in Easter Thrace in 1882, Noli was a graduate from Harvard University and founder of the Orthodox Church of Albania in the United States, which was recognized as an independent diocese in 1919. Conducting his services in Albanian, Noli introduced the Albanian language in the liturgy, prompting the Church to assume a national character. In 1922 Noli was appointed as the foreign minister of Albania, and in the 1923 he was consecrated as the Bishop of Korça and the Metropolitan Area of Durrës, Albania. As one of *Vatra's* founders, Noli would fulfil an instrumental role in the society's aspirations and would ultimately serve as Albania's Prime Minister in 1924. Faik Konica, a politician, thinker, writer, and editor, completed his formal education at Harvard University. From 1897 onwards, Konica published the monthly review *Albania* in Brussels, written both in Albanian and French. This review became one of the most important propaganda instruments

during the period of the Albanian 'awakening movement.' In 1911, he started publishing the newspaper entitled *The Trumpet of Croya*. By the end of 1912, Konica returned to Europe and, in 1913, visited Albania. After the war, Konica moved to Boston to assume the leadership of *Vatra*.<sup>10</sup>

During *Vatra's* Sixth Assembly, held at Lewis Hayden from 1-12 July 1917, the delegates ultimately decided on the society's program. The aim was to establish – in every legitimate way, with the consent of the Great Powers – an Albania within its ethnographic boundaries, with full royal independence, an Albania that would address Albanians' political and economic woes, and would recognize the rights of Albanians through the European press and through conferences held all over the world.<sup>11</sup>

Before analyzing *Vatra's* activities in the European chancelleries, it is important to provide a short summary of Albania's geopolitical position in the years prior and during the war. Before the war, the regions that were to make up the state of Albania were under Ottoman dominion until Marko Adams' proclamation of Albanian independence on 24 December 1911, which ultimately resulted in the first Albanian Assembly announcing Albania's independence<sup>12</sup> on 28 November 1912, during a Conference of the Ambassadors from the Great Powers gathered in London. The Great Powers would recognize Albania as an independent state that was placed under the protectorate of an international regime,<sup>13</sup> and the new Albanian government was recognized *de jure* in 1914 by the six Great Powers (Great Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia and Italy)<sup>14</sup>, as well as by Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Greece, who all sent diplomatic missions to Durrës.<sup>15</sup>

With the outbreak of the First World War, Albania proclaimed itself neutral. Several nations however violated this neutrality. In the autumn of 1914, Greece occupied southern Albania, including Korçë and Gjirokastër. Meanwhile, Italy seized Vlora, and Serbia and Montenegro

annexed parts of northern Albania. Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian forces then occupied about two-thirds of the country.<sup>16</sup> These infringements proved problematic from the Entente perspective, as the violation of Belgian neutrality by Germany was a *casus belli* for Britain, and it is still often invoked as one of the reasons that drove Britain into the war in 1914. Yet there was no similar international outrage when Italy occupied Vlora, or Greece annexed the Autonomous Republic of Northern Epirus, thereby violating the Protocol of Corfu signed in 1914.<sup>17</sup>

France, Great Britain, Russia, and Italy even agreed to divide Albania (and the Habsburg Croatian lands) in a secret treaty concluded in London on 16 April 1915. According to its stipulations, Serbia and Montenegro were to become access points to the Adriatic for the allied forces. A central Albanian 'Muslim' zone would be put under Italy's supervision, which would gain control of the areas south of Vlora until Himare.<sup>18</sup> Northern and southern Albania were to be transferred to respectively Serbia and Greece.<sup>19</sup> In the post-war world, Albania was a negotiable entity. The Great Powers however did nothing to consolidate the Albanian borders.<sup>20</sup>

For Albania, the end of the First World War did not bring any political changes, because the defeated armies of Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria were replaced by the armed forces of some of the winning countries. After the armistice was signed, it was decided that temporary occupation by the Entente troops would only be lifted after the Peace Conference of Versailles had decided on Albania's post-war status.<sup>21</sup> In this context, Albania, similar to other small Balkan countries, struggled to gain international recognition and develop as an independent nation-state. It was the weakest of the Balkan states, small in size, and had a deeply fragmented society divided along regional, religious, tribal, family, and geographic lines. The Great Powers exploited these weaknesses to

further their own interests, often to the detriment of Albania's political and economic development.<sup>22</sup>

Leaving London after the signing of the truce, Mehmed Bey Konica, *Vatra's* London delegate, hurried to Durrës where, in collaboration with Myfit Bey Libohova, he convoked a National Assembly with the aim of electing an Executive National Committee, on 25 December 1919. He welcomed those who came to the Assembly by saying how

I should not mention today the great danger in which Albania is, as all of you are in the condition to understand well the international situation and reflect on the consequences that it might have on the freedom and integrity of our homeland. We know well that in a few days the Peace Conference shall meet, which will be attended by the representatives of all governments and where the fate of the nations of the world will be decided and the geographic map of Europe will be changed and rearranged. Knowing the great importance that this Congress has, considering that our nation nowadays does not have a national body to represent it officially to try to protect our rights, we took the initiative in collaboration with my friend M. Myfit Bey Libohova to organize this meeting...<sup>23</sup>

The Congress of Durrës was attended by fifty-four representatives from different regions of the country, and decided on the creation of a temporary government that would be headed by Turhan Pasha. The Congress also approved the composition of the delegation that would go to the Paris Peace Conference, and included representatives of different regions and of different religions.<sup>24</sup>

It was assigned a special duty to protect the country's independence and integrity, and reject all the secret provisions of the Treaty of London, along with all the subsequent benefits that Italy derived from this treaty.<sup>25</sup> The press attributed the creation of the temporary government

with all her duties to Mehmed Konica.<sup>26</sup> The government program was similar to that of *Vatra* regarding this issue. At this time, *Vatra*, through its representative Mehmed Konica, tried to enter talks with Italian diplomats on the possibility of reaching a cooperation between the Albanian national movement and Italy for a fair solution of the Albanian issue. Kol Tromara, as head of *Vatra* in charge of talks with Italian diplomats in Washington, stated that *Vatra's* conditions for this cooperation with Italy included the cancellation of the Secret Treaty of London, and also the unification of Kosovo and Chameria with Albania. Such requests however were not supported at all by the Italian government.<sup>27</sup>

## **The activity of Albanian émigré society during the Paris Peace Conference**

The representation of the country at the Paris Peace Conference was one of *Vatra's* main objectives. Its leaders and other public personalities published articles in the Boston-based journal *The Adriatic Review*; which was sent to American high officials and other distinguished American personalities. One of its issues included a memorandum sent to President Wilson and Secretary of State Lansing a few days before a delegation of Albanian-Americans left for France to join the Paris Peace Conference on 27 November 1918, at a time when the Great Powers were once again planning the separation of Albania. The memorandum stated the following:

The aim of the text and of the delegation was to ensure the continued recognition of Albania as a sovereign state. Many of the idealized views expressed in this memorandum can still be heard among Albanians today. The document was signed by leading clergymen of the Albanian Orthodox Churches of America,

including Fan Noli. Copies were sent to the foreign ministries of the Allied Powers and their ambassadors in Washington.<sup>28</sup>

Dr. Mihal Turtulli published an appeal in *Dielli*, calling for the Albanians of America to defend their homeland. Turtulli, together with Mehmed Bey Konica, argued that it would be helpful to send delegates to Europe in defense of the rights of Albanians. The delegation's initial purpose was to secure the recognition of Albania and its ethnographic borders at the Peace Conference. It was then to head to Albania in order to secure Albania for the Albanians.<sup>29</sup>

The reason why *Vatra* had Albanian representation at the Paris Peace Conference as a top priority was the absence of a political organization in the country proper. As a result of this, *Vatra* became the initiator of a proposal to convene an extraordinary Convention of Albanian immigration in America, which would take the relevant decisions in this respect. The Convention met on 29 December 1918, and around seventy organizations representing the Albanian Diaspora in the USA took part in it. It eventually resulted in an expansion of the *Vatra* delegation in Paris to include personalities such as Fan Noli, Anselmo Lorekion, Nikolla Kasneci, Rasih Dino, with Telford Erickson and British military officer Aubrey Herbert as honorary delegates.<sup>30</sup>

The Convention also decided that the delegates should try to lobby in European chancelleries and at the Peace Conference to secure an independent Albania, which would include within its borders the territories that had been separated from it by the 1913 Treaty of London. At the same time, it decided that Albania's foreign policy should be oriented towards friendship with Italy, since it expected that Italy would have a special interest in the restoration of a strong Albania beyond the Adriatic.<sup>31</sup> To raise finances for the delegation's work, *Vatra* held a fundraising campaign, which was a huge success, as a significant part of

the Albanian diaspora donated to this campaign and their contributions were acknowledged in multiple issues of *Dielli*.<sup>32</sup>

Immediately after the end of the First World War, Fan Noli wrote an appeal to the Albanian people in *Dielli*, arguing that 'it is a matter of life or death for us for our voice to be heard at this world conference, and Albanians have to realize that this is the most critical time in all of Albanian history'.<sup>33</sup>

The gravity of the situation was partly due to the delegation's weak position. At the opening of the conference on 19 January 1919, Albania was no longer recognized internationally as an independent state. Analyzing Albania's international situation, the delegation thought that securing the support of a foreign power would ensure Albania's recovery and consolidation. In this they were united with the émigré community in Romania, which also played an important role in the promotion of the Albanian cause. Their aims were to obtain the moral and intellectual support of a liberal power which would be as far from Albania as possible and not have direct political or commercial interests in the country.<sup>34</sup>

For both *Vatra* and the Romanian Albanians, American support was viewed with considerable enthusiasm as a way to save the country.<sup>35</sup> In their call to the American Albanians, the Albanians of Romania pointed out that they supported the American mandate, stating that

We, the Albanians of Romania, heartily desire the moral support of the United States, as the only way to save the motherland from future dangers and to embark it on the path of civilization and prosperity. The principles proclaimed with great tact by President Wilson at the time when the World War was at the highest point of severity, especially the principle of securing small peoples' national territorial integrity and freedom of self-government, was greeted by Albanians with joyful hastiness as they saw the

fulfillment of their centuries-long desires, that is, the unification of all national lands of Albania.<sup>36</sup>

*Vatra's* point of view in this matter was clearly expressed by its representative Dr. Mihal Turtulli in a letter sent to President Wilson at the end of 1918. In his letter, Turtulli mentioned political, material, financial, and legislative support as necessary conditions for the independent political life of Albania. He proposed to Wilson to supply Albania in the first instance with an armed task force meant to ensure internal order, and to affirm and maintain the government's authority. This military force would be foreign until a well-organized national militia could replace it. This was in keeping with earlier events, including the Bavarians in Greece, the Russians in Bulgaria, and the Americans in Cuba.<sup>37</sup> *Vatra* also asked Wilson in November 1918 to support the Albanian demands at the Paris Peace Conference. In the end, Albania and the Albanian case were not mentioned in the famous 'Fourteen Points' of the American President, but its eleventh point noted the following:

Rumania, Serbia, and Montenegro should be evacuated; occupied territories restored; Serbia accorded free and secure access to the sea; and the relations of the several Balkan states to one another determined by friendly counsel along historically established lines of allegiance and nationality; and international guarantees of the political and economic independence and territorial integrity of the several Balkan states should be entered into.<sup>38</sup>

Noli believed in Wilson's rhetoric about the rights of small nations to 'self-determination' and the effect that it had around the world, in what Erez Manela calls 'the Wilsonian moment'.<sup>39</sup> On 4 July 1918, the United States' Independence Day, the representatives of all national groups in America had been invited to accompany Wilson aboard the *Mayflower* in his pilgrimage to the tomb of George Washington at Mount Vernon.<sup>40</sup> On the return trip, the Albanian representative Fan Noli had the opportunity

to state the case of Albania informally before the President, and made his case to him for the country's restoration. President Wilson listened to his plea with a benevolent interest, assuring him of his sympathy and expressing his solemn determination to help Albania in her hour of need.<sup>41</sup> He replied as follows:

I shall have one voice in the next Peace Congress, and I shall use that voice on behalf of Albania. I need not tell you how strong that voice is and what a respectful and submissive attention it commands all over the world, prompted as it is by justice and backed by mighty American hosts, the mightiest the world has ever seen.<sup>42</sup>

During this time, Fan Noli also arranged a meeting with Theodore Roosevelt at the Harvard Club of New York, from which he understood that he was well informed not only specifically on the Albanian issue, but more generally about the Adriatic one. Noli noticed that Roosevelt had studied the Albanian issue carefully, and put forward a detailed solution, which hardly deviated from the one desired by the Albanians. In Roosevelt's opinion, territorial questions in the Balkans and in the Adriatic littoral had to be determined in accordance with racial lines, and Albania had to have its own seacoast from Montenegro to Greece.<sup>43</sup> Through Noli, Roosevelt sent a message to the Albanians:

The independence of Albania must be restored at the next Peace Congress and put under a disinterested guarantee by the Allied Powers. I shall do anything in my power for the achievement of that result and for the recognition of the just claims of the ancient and brave Albanian race.<sup>44</sup>

For six months in the year 1919, the world's eyes were fixed on Paris,<sup>45</sup> as it saw the first determined effort by a Western leader, President Wilson, to impose a pattern of humanitarian idealism on world affairs.<sup>46</sup>

'The world', meaning the Great Powers that had won the war—not to mention the Central Powers, which had lost it—accepted Wilsonianism as the foundational discourse for a redesigned international system.<sup>47</sup> Wilson intended that the conference would be based on his Fourteen Points and the principle of national self-determination, but these 'new' ideals faced opposition from those who endorsed the secret treaties signed during the war, above all the Treaty of London, in which the Great Powers' interests remained protected. Despite the alleged 'new diplomacy', there would only be a limited role for the small states at the Peace Conference, and the Great Powers' representatives would make the key decisions.<sup>48</sup> Representatives, official and semi-official, delegations, and deputations came to Paris in throngs from every part of the earth to lay the claims of their respective nationalities before the 'high tribunal' of the world and await its decisions.<sup>49</sup> All the Albanian diaspora communities were represented in Paris. The Albanian delegation was officially received at Paris and the presentation of the Albanian case was made by Turhan Pasha, Mehmed Konica, and Dr. Mihal Turtulli. In the newly-formed government, the Nationalist Albanian Party held the majority of the seats for the first time in the history of the country.<sup>50</sup>

The official Albanian delegation was presided over by Turhan Pasha, a former premier of Albania and head of its provisional government. Mehmed Bej Konica was in Paris in a dual capacity: he served both as a member of the official delegation as well as the senior delegate of *Vatra*. Dr. Mihal Turtulli was another member of both delegations<sup>51</sup>, and like Turtulli and Pasha, made a great contribution to the national cause. The fourth and fifth members were Luigj Bumçi and, Mit'hat Frashëri, and Father Gjergj Fishta was an expert adviser.<sup>52</sup> In addition to the official Albanian delegation, there were a number of semi-official ones representing the aspirations of several Albanian diaspora communities which had been founded over time as a result of historical circumstances

in other lands. The first such Albanian community was that of the Albanian diaspora of Constantinople. On 3 January 1919, it convened to elect delegates to the Peace Conference, ultimately choosing Mit'hat Frashëri, Fuad Dibra, Male Shan Tepelena, Mr. Blinisht as well as Mr. Halil Pashë Gjirokastra as its representatives.<sup>53</sup>

All delegates at the Paris Peace Conference saw the restoration of Albania as their duty. They also recognized the need to publish books in support of the national cause.<sup>54</sup> A few days later, the Albanian delegation was reinforced with the arrival of Telford Erickson, an American missionary who had been unanimously elected as a *Vatra* delegate by the extraordinary Convention held in December 1918. These Albanian delegations had different political orientations, according to their personal beliefs regarding which state was the best suited to defend Albanian interests.<sup>55</sup> The diaspora community of Romania was represented at the Paris Peace Conference by Prince Albert Ghica, a descendant of the Albanian dynasty of the Ghicas, and Pandeli Jano Angjeli, president of the Albanian community of Bucharest and the former governor of the province of Koritza. The delegates of the territory of Koritza were Vangjel Turtulli, Dhimitri Mano, and Captain Selaheddin Blosmi. A number of people representing minor Albanian societies in the United States were also present in Paris.<sup>56</sup>

In the extraordinary assembly held on 4 January 1919, *Vatra* approved a resolution which was made known to the U.S. government through a letter sent to Secretary of State Lansing. In it, an appeal was made to the United States to help with the preservation of Albanian independent statehood by placing American troops on all disputed territories where the Albanian population represented a majority.<sup>57</sup> From January to April 1919, *Vatra's* representatives made efforts at the Peace Conference to secure the return to Albania of the territories that had been granted to neighboring states at the 1913 Treaty of London. They sent telegrams and memoranda to the Great Powers in which they demanded the return

of these territories,<sup>58</sup> and also sent a memorandum to Wilson which denounced the cruel persecution of the Albanian population of Peja at the hands of the Serbian army.<sup>59</sup> Since the beginning of its work, the Peace Conference had analyzed the requests of the Greek delegation, among which were claims over territory held by Albania. On 4 February 1919, the Council of Chairpersons of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the United States of America, Great Britain, France, and Italy, decided to appoint a commission to analyze these claims. The commission appointed a team headed by the French Jules Cambon, which worked from 12 February to 21 March 1919, meeting twelve times during this period.<sup>60</sup>

During that time, the Peace Conference was dealing with the 'Adriatic Question', which addressed the former territories of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the region and was thus inextricably connected with the Albanian issue.<sup>61</sup> On 9 December 1919, Great Britain, the United States of America and France addressed a memorandum to Italy proposing a solution to the 'Adriatic Question'.<sup>62</sup> It recommended leaving Vlora, together with its hinterland, under Italian sovereignty.<sup>63</sup> It also proposed that

Valona shall be retained by Italy, as provided for in the Treaty of London, and, in addition the mandate over Albania shall be given to Italy. In northern Albania, the boundaries shall be readjusted. Those districts of Albania which will thus go to Serb-Croat-Slovene State will enjoy a special régime as an autonomous province similar to that which the treaty with the Czechoslovak republic provides for its autonomous provinces. The southern boundary of Albania shall be the line which was proposed by the British and French delegations on the Commission on Greek Affairs. This leaves Greece Koritza and Argyrokastron.<sup>64</sup>

In October 1919, several representatives of *Vatra*, Rasih Dino, Sotir Koleka, Mit'hat Frasheri, and Hilmi Këlcyra, denounced the Tittoni-Venizelos Agreement before the Peace Conference,<sup>65</sup> as efforts in the circles of *Vatra* intensified during this time. In September, Mehmed Bey Konica sent a letter to the American delegate William Buckler, in which he asked that Albania be governed temporarily by an international commission which would be composed of three Americans, two Italians, and two Albanians. After Erickson's efforts to persuade American political circles to accept this solution failed, *Vatra* asked for an independent Albania governed by an Italian Prince.<sup>66</sup> The memorandum of 9 December 1919, which gave Italy Vlorë and a protectorate of Albania, was shocking to the political circles,<sup>67</sup> immediately activating *Vatra's* Albanian circles. A harsh reaction was issued by Noli, in a *Vatra* assembly, where he accused the American president of violating all the points of the peace program. Noli made an appeal to the US Senate not to approve the exchange of Fiume with Vlorë.<sup>68</sup> Because of its appeal to the sensibilities of the American public opinion, *Vatra* had an undoubtable impact on the attitude the US government took towards the Albanian issue. Taking into consideration the Great Powers' attitude towards this issue, it is clear that both the national movement as well as the émigré community were actively promoting the Albanian cause in the European chancelleries at this time.<sup>69</sup> Other influential allies, such as Aubrey Herbert and Edith Durham, also played an important role in the struggle for Albanian independence, as they promoted the Albanian territorial integrity claims before the public.<sup>70</sup>

From 5 to 27 March 1919, Luigi Bumçi and Dr. Turtulli undertook intense lobbying in London, aimed at changing the attitudes of the Great Powers regarding the Albanian issue. To this purpose, they lobbied friendly allies of Albania in order to change the British government's stance. Bumçi and Turtulli met many influential British political figures while campaigning, including the Secretary General of the League of Nations Eric

Drummond, as well as Lloyd George's Secretary Filip Kerr and the British expert in Balkan affairs, M. Leaper. At the initiative of Aubrey Herbert, two meetings were arranged in a room of the Parliament, where participating Deputies and Lords discussed the Albanian issue. In these two meetings, Turtulli and Bumçi tried to use all the necessary arguments and their strongest reasoning to inform the British that Albania's neighbors did not have any right to ask for parts of its territory. Rather, Turtulli and Bumçi argued that, if the issue was to be treated fairly, they return what they seized according to the 1878 Treaty of Berlin and the 1913 Treaty of London, as they believed that these two treaties constituted irrefutable proofs of Albanian nationhood since 1878. The Treaty of Berlin had granted part of South Epirus, comprising the towns of Arta and Preveza, and the river Calamas, to Greece. Following forcible protest from Albania, the signatory powers were forced to revert their decision and draw the border at Arta. However, the Treaty of London once again granted this and even more territory to Greece.<sup>71</sup> Turtulli and Bumçi strongly contradicted the slanders of their neighboring states, who suggested that Albanians were divided by conflict and were not capable of governing themselves. They also showed that Albania had no religious problems, and that Muslims and Christians lived in total harmony.<sup>72</sup> Regarding the meeting with Robert Cecil and Eric Drummond, the report sent by the delegates on 30 March stated that

Lord Cecil was clarified at length regarding our issue and we sent him some documents, he promised orally and in written form that he would do what he can to help the Albanian issue. We met with the Secretary-General of the League of Nations M. Eric Drummond who nowadays is in charge of almost all its work. We also informed him thoroughly on our issue and told him we do not accept any mandate, any turmoil in our affairs from Italy, Greece, and Yugoslavia.<sup>73</sup> Looking at the attitudes of the Great Powers toward

the Albanian issue, the only hope seemed to lie with the League of Nations and for this purpose Aubrey Herbert insisted in the League of Nations circles close to Philip Kerr, that Albanian borders should not be decided hastily in Paris, but left to the League of Nations to decide on different sectors where there were doubts. It is indubitable that the continued efforts of Mehmed Konica, Rasih Dino, and Aubrey Herbert had an effect on British diplomacy.<sup>74</sup>

Consequently, the main result of the Peace Conference, regarding the Albanian case, was the denunciation of the secret Treaty of London of 1915, and the lack of recognition from the United States of America until the Albanian case was resolved. At this time, movements against Italy began in Albania.<sup>75</sup> The celebration of Independence Day on 28 November 1919 was marked by a huge manifestation in Italian-held Vlora. In the manifestation, the local population strongly expressed its anger at the dealings of the Peace Conference, and at the politics of Italy, with the popular slogan “foreigners out of our country”.<sup>76</sup>

## **Albania in the League of Nations**

The political situation in Albania in 1919 was getting worse because the Peace Conference in Paris had not solved the Albanian issue. The only option for Albania remained a resolution of the League of Nations. Albania appealed to it for international recognition, restoration of its borders, their assignment and its status. At this time, mass turmoil ensued in the north of the country against the Italians, while the interim government in Durrës, which was prone to collaborate with them, lost the support of the population.<sup>77</sup>

In the meantime, the Greek press reported the Tittoni-Venizelos Agreement, which encouraged both sides (Italy and Greece) to support

each other's claims, which further increased Albanian discontent.<sup>78</sup> The Albanians, disappointed with the oscillations of European diplomacy regarding the solution to their problems, mobilized their political activity as soon as possible, assembling the National Congress of Lushnje. It was convened on 28 January 1920 and headed by Sulejman Delvina. Its main purpose was "the full independence of the country".<sup>79</sup> These two events, the Congress of Lushnje and the opposition to British-French-Italian pressures for the dismemberment of Albania, represented a historical turning point for the position of *Vatra* towards the United States. Disappointed by the lack of foreign support, *Vatra* started referring more and more to the domestic factor in Albania, focusing increasingly on independent political and military action in Albania to solve the national issue, because it was disappointed by the lack of foreign support it had received. Its disappointment with the western powers was expressed through the press, especially *Dielli*. It made an appeal for the organization of a national army, with 100,000-150,000 troops, supported by a domestic loan. However, it still did not exclude the possibility of ensuring political and financial support from a foreign country.<sup>80</sup>

At the request of Prime Minister Sulejman Delvina, *Vatra* sent volunteer troops to Albania which would serve in a civil guard. Sulejman Delvina's government focused its attention on the international reaffirmation of the decisions of 1913 on the recognition of Albania's independence and its borders. For this reason, in the autumn of 1920, it moved the center of its foreign policy activity to the League of Nations, which had just been created and was based in Geneva, Switzerland.<sup>81</sup> Undoubtedly, the League of Nations presented certain advantages compared to the Peace Conference. The conference was a body operating in the narrow circle of the Great Powers, outside the scrutiny of public opinion, while the League of Nations brought a new element to the international arena: it had to deal with problems relating to publicity.<sup>82</sup>

Moreover, the League of Nations option also proved important because American politics was embarking on an isolationist course that put an end to Wilsonian 'internationalism', and would eventually keep America away from Europe until the Second World War.<sup>83</sup> On 19 October 1920, a month before the opening of the First Assembly of the League of Nations, Herbert wrote to Drummond, reminding him of the desire expressed by Bumçi in the name of the Albanian government to be admitted to the League of Nations. He reminded Drummond of a telegram sent by the Albanian government in November 1919, asking to be admitted as a member to the League and to be treated in the same way as other countries, mentioning as an example the case of Lithuania, which was admitted to the League.<sup>84</sup>

During this time, Herbert had a meeting with the British representative Fisher and the British politician Robert Cecil.<sup>85</sup> It was Herbert's luck that Cecil – one of his closest political associates – would attend the First Assembly of the League of Nations as the representative of South Africa. Upon arrival in Geneva, Cecil was chosen as chairman of the second sub-commission of the Fifth Assembly (in which the admission of new members to the League of Nations was discussed), and charged with the preliminary assessment of the requests for membership from Albania, Bulgaria, Austria, and Liechtenstein. Moreover, the representative of Albania in the League of Nations, Fan Noli, made an excellent defense of the Albanian case.<sup>86</sup> However, on 4 December 1920, the sub-commission voted against the admission of Albania, because the French delegate René Viviani and the British delegate Fisher argued that the League of Nations should not antedate the decisions of the allied Great Powers regarding the future of this country. Cecil promised Herbert that he would continue to exert pressure to reconsider Albania's membership.<sup>87</sup>

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister of Greece, Eleftherios Venizelos, an ally, had just lost its power, and on 5 December a plebiscite decided the rise to power of King Constantine I, which the Allies had dethroned three

years earlier because of his pro-German claims. His return to power urged Britain and France to reconsider their support for the territorial expansion of Greece.<sup>88</sup>

Consequently, on 17 December 1920, Albania was admitted as a member to the League of Nations with thirty-five votes in favor, seven abstentions, and no votes against.<sup>89</sup> It became the first state that joined this international organization without previously obtaining diplomatic recognition.<sup>90</sup> The admission to the League of Nations subsequently led to a decision on Albania's borders, at the Conference of Ambassadors in 1921, which was followed by the establishment of diplomatic relations. With its entrance into the League of Nations, Albania found extraordinary strength in its quality as a member and made an appeal to have an arbiter if necessary or to raise its voice in the court of military penalties. This was due to the fact that, since its admission to the League, it faced anxieties regarding potential invasions, as well as being confronted with the insecurity of diplomatic actions. Albania considered its admission to the League of Nations as a positive act of justice.<sup>91</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Albania's admission to the League of Nations constituted a significant moment in Albania's history, as well as an important and complex part of the global history of the League of Nations. In the historiography, the process of state formation has to date always been portrayed as a product of domestic political forces. However, most of the important political figures who ruled Albania in the years 1920-1925 had been part of émigré societies. Albanian nationalism developed differently from that of its neighbors, due to both its origins in emigration, and its lack of religious homogeneity that could be found in the neighboring countries. It was 'natural' for the Albanian nationalists to seek unity in language,

since religion, and indeed almost everything else in Albania, seemed divisive rather than unifying, as Eric Hobsbawm adduced in his work.<sup>92</sup> The émigré communities printed and disseminated the idea of 'Albanianism' first among themselves, and then among the citizens in Albania.<sup>93</sup> *Vatra* carried out a very important role in defense of the national cause from the end of the First World War until Albania's admission to the League of Nations. As Haris Silajdžić summarizes in his work,<sup>94</sup> *Vatra* developed its activity in three main directions. The first of these involved persuading the American delegation to the Paris Peace Conference of the righteousness of the Albanian demands, and lobbying European chancelleries with the same purpose. Secondly, *Vatra* aimed at a rejection of the Greek propaganda, which associated the Christian Orthodox religion of the South Albanian population with Greek nationality. Thirdly, through its delegates, *Vatra* organized numerous activities in order to revitalize Albanian political life. Following its practice of lobbying European chancelleries through its representatives and Albanian allies like Erickson or Herbert, *Vatra* managed to postpone the decision of Albania's recognition from the Peace Conference to the League of Nations, which was its greatest achievement in the service of the Albanian cause. This achievement brought the discussion of this issue to the League of Nations, whose workings were much more open to public scrutiny. Through its activity, *Vatra* contributed to a change in attitude of the Great Powers. Through its contacts with President Wilson and the memoranda it sent to him and the American Senate, *Vatra* managed to sensitize the American public opinion to the Albanian issue, also influencing President Wilson's attitude. It also gained the support of Great Britain, which subsequently helped with the membership of Albania in the League of Nations. This all indicates how *Vatra* constituted an essential factor in the history of the Albanian national movement.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> A. Puto, *Shqipëria politike (The political Albania): 1912-1939* (Tirana, 2009).
- <sup>2</sup> P.Milo, *Shqipëria dhe Jugosllavia (Albania and Yugoslavia): 1918-1927* (Tirana, 1992).
- <sup>3</sup> M. Çami, *Shqipëria në Konferencën e Paqes (Albania in the Peace Conference): 1919-1920* (Tirana, 2015).
- <sup>4</sup> E.L. Woodward & R. Butler (eds.), *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939*, Volume III (London, 1949), 124.
- <sup>5</sup> D.L. Nagi, *The Albanian-American Odyssey: A Pilot Study of the Albanian Community of Boston, Massachusetts* (New York, 1989), 45–50.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> N. Ragaru & A. Dymi, ‘The Albanian-American Community in the United States: the story of a diaspora’, in: *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism*, 31/1-2 (2004), 54-64.
- <sup>8</sup> Kristo Kirka was an Albanian patriot, diplomat, politician, and activist. He accompanied Noli during his trip to Albania as a representative of *Vatra*. Kirka was elected as a representative of the Korçe region in the first Albanian parliament.
- <sup>9</sup> Kristo Floqi was a lawyer, and one the main contributors of *Vatra*. During the years 1912-1913, he started his short-lived newspaper *Zëri i popullit* (Voice of the People). After the First World War Floqi edited the local newspaper *Agimi* (The Dawn) for the *Vllazënia* (Brotherhood) society in 1919. In December 1920 he became Minister of Education in Albania.
- <sup>10</sup> F. Konica, ‘Kriza politike në Shqipëri (The political crisis in Albania)’, in: *Dielli* (7 April 1923).
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid, 51.
- <sup>12</sup> N. Clayer, *Në fillimet e nacionalizmit shqiptar (In the early days of Albanian nationalism)* (Tirana, 2009), 634.

<sup>13</sup> Albania was deprived by half of its ethnic territory (Kosovo). Albania was constituted as an autonomous, sovereign and hereditary principality by right of primogeniture, guaranteed by the six Powers. The sovereign would be designated by the six Powers.

<sup>14</sup> B. Destani & R. Elsie (eds.), *The London Conference and the Albanian Question (1912-1914). The Dispatches of Sir Edward Grey*, (London, 2016) [Albanian Studies, vol. 27], 361.

<sup>15</sup> Archive of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Albania, Tirana [33], 78, 1920.

<sup>16</sup> R. Zickel & W.R. Iwaskiw (eds.), *World War I and its Effects on Albania* (Washington, 1994).

<sup>17</sup> J.N. Tallon, 'Albania's Long World War I, 1912-1925' in: *Studia Historyczne* 57/4 [228] (2014), 437-455.

<sup>18</sup> I. Blumi, 'Albania: World War I 1914-1918', in: *International Encyclopedia of the First World War* (<https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/albania>) [accessed 23 April 2020].

<sup>19</sup> E.L. Woodward & R. Butler (eds.), *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939*, Volume IV (London, 1952), 61-62.

<sup>20</sup> Tallon, 'Albania's Long World War I', 453.

<sup>21</sup> J. Swire, *Shqipëria: ngritja e një mbretërie (Albania: The Rise of a Kingdom)* (Tirana, 2005), 231.

<sup>22</sup> J. Tomes, 'Guy, N. (2012) The Birth of Albania: Ethnic Nationalism, the Great Powers of World War I and the Emergence of Albanian Independence', in: *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 25/1 (2014), 167-168.

<sup>23</sup> Central State Archive of Albania [AQSH], Tirana, Urdhëri Franceskan, 792, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> A. Buda, K. Frashëri & H. Myzyri (eds.), *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar (History of Albania)*, (Tirana, 2007), 126-129.

<sup>25</sup> Puto, *Shqipëria politike*, 222-223.

<sup>26</sup> 'The Provisional Albania Government', in : F. S. Noli (ed.), *The Adriatic Review*, (Boston, 1918), 185-187.

- <sup>27</sup> B. Meta, *Federata panshqiptare Vatra (The Pan-Albanian Federation Vatra): 1912-1920* (Tirana, 2001), 195-197.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup> F.S. Noli, *Kalendari I Vatres I Motit 1918* (Boston, 1918), 63-64.
- <sup>30</sup> Meta, *Federata panshqiptare Vatra*, 191-192.
- <sup>31</sup> *Dielli* (3 January 1919).
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>33</sup> Noli, *Kalendari*.
- <sup>34</sup> *Dielli* (3 April 1919).
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>37</sup> Meta, *Federata panshqiptare Vatra*, 191.
- <sup>38</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/event/Fourteen-Points>
- <sup>39</sup> E. Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York, 2007), 10.
- <sup>40</sup> H. Silajdžić, *Shqipëria dhe SHBA në arkivat e Washingtonit (Albania and USA in the Washington archives)* (Tirana, 1999), 34.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>42</sup> Noli, *The Adriatic Review*, 1-8.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>45</sup> M. Macmillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World* (London, 2001), xxv.
- <sup>46</sup> M. Dockrill, *The Paris Peace Conference, 1919. Peace without Victory?* (London 2001), 7.
- <sup>47</sup> L.V. Smith, *Sovereignty at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919* (Oxford, 2018), 287.

- <sup>48</sup> N.C. Guy, *Ethnic Nationalism, the Great Powers and the Question of Albanian Independence, 1912-21* (PhD., Durham University, 2008), 222.
- <sup>49</sup> Noli, *The Adriatic Review*, 267.
- <sup>50</sup> C. Chekrezi, *Albania Past and Present* (New York, 1919), 69.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 267-268.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>53</sup> AQSH, Fund. Albanian society in Turkey, File.5, years. 1919-1923, p. 1.
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>55</sup> M. Frashëri, *Kujtime (Memories)* (Tirana, 2005), 64-68.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 267-268.
- <sup>57</sup> 'Dëmi që i solli çështjes e vetëquajtura Parti Politike (The damage that the so-called Political Party brought to the question)', in: *Dielli* (26 April 1919).
- <sup>58</sup> A. Herbert, *Miku i madh i shqiptarëve: Aubrey Herbert dhe krijimi i Shqipërisë së sotme: ditarë dhe letra: 1904-1923* (Tirana, 2012), 361.
- <sup>59</sup> Meta, *Federata panshqiptare Vatra*, 214-217.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>61</sup> Milo, *Shqipëria dhe Jugosllavia*, 72-75.
- <sup>62</sup> Swire, *Shqipëria: ngritja e një mbretërie*, 246-251.
- <sup>63</sup> *The Adriatic Question* (presented by Mr. Hitchcock) (Washington 1920) <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044066211467&view=1up&seq=1> [accessed 12 May2020].
- <sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.
- <sup>65</sup> AQSH, Fund. 251, File. 17, Year. 1919, p. 3.
- <sup>66</sup> R.L. Woodall, *The Albanian problem during the Peacemaking 1919-1920* (Tirana, 2019), 202.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 246-251.
- <sup>68</sup> AQSH, Fund.251, File 39, 1919, p. 2.

<sup>69</sup> D. Çali, *The Relations of Albania with the League of Nations during 1920-1924* (PhD diss., University of Tirana, 2016), 23-40.

<sup>70</sup> The Somerset Heritage Centre, Taunton, DD/DRU/47, Correspondence of M. Edith Durham to Aubrey Herbert, M H, and Auberon II Herbert. 1914-1942.

<sup>71</sup> *The Adriatic Review*, 27.

<sup>72</sup> AQSH, Fund. 251, V.1920, File.34/1, p. 381-384.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Meta, *Federata panshqiptare*, 272.

<sup>75</sup> Frashëri, *Kujtime*, 66-68.

<sup>76</sup> Puto, *Shqipëria politike*, 252-253.

<sup>77</sup> Swire, *The Rise of a kingdom*, 253.

<sup>78</sup> AQSH, Fund. 251, V. 1919, File. 37, p. 1.

<sup>79</sup> AQSH, Bisedime Parlamentare (National Council Discussions), V.1920, p. 72.

<sup>80</sup> 'Politika e Shqipërisë (The Albanian Politics)', in: *Dielli* (25 February 1920).

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

<sup>82</sup> A. Puto, *Çështja shqiptare në aktet ndërkombëtare pas Luftës I Botërore: përmbledhje dokumentesh me një vështrim historik (The Albanian issue in international documents after World War I: a summary of documents with a historical overview)* (Tirana, 2001), 313.

<sup>83</sup> E. Hobsbawm, *Epoka e ekstremeve: i rrëmbyeri shekull i njëzetë: 1914-1991 (Age of extremes: The short twentieth century, 1914-1991)* (Tirana, 1997), 37-38.

<sup>84</sup> B. Destani & J. Tomes (eds.), *Albania's Greatest Friend: Aubrey Herbert and the Making of Modern Albania: Diaries and Papers 1904-1923* (London, 2011), 383.

<sup>85</sup> At the Paris Peace Conference, Cecil was the representative in charge of negotiations for a League of Nations; from 1920 through 1922, he represented the Dominion of South Africa in the League Assembly.

<sup>86</sup> Destani & Tomes (eds.), *Albania's Greatest Friend*, 383.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> D. Çali, 'The admission of Albania in the League of Nations' in: *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs* 1/3 (2016), 67.

<sup>90</sup> Destani & Tomes (eds.), *Albania's Greatest Friend*, 383.

<sup>91</sup> J. Godart, *L'Albanie en 1921* (Paris, 1922), 256.

<sup>92</sup> E. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. (New York, 1990), 53.

<sup>93</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin & Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York, 1983), 44.

<sup>94</sup> H. Silajdžić, *Shqipëria dhe SHBA në arkivat e Washingtonit*.