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Albania
Albania's Rights, Hopes
and Aspirations



The Strength of the
National Consciousness
of the Albanian People

1917

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To His Excellency,

WOODROW WILSON,

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,
WASHINGTON, D. C.

EXCELLENCY:*

In view of the fact "that the present war had its roots in the disregard of the rights of small nations and nationalities"; in view of the fact that the Allied Powers are determined to effect a settlement in the Balkans on the lines which will clear up the past issues; and hoping that the time to take up such problems is not far distant, we take the honor to forward you, Excellency, the following statement regarding Albania's rights, hopes and aspirations, and humbly beg your Excellency to take the honorable burden of using the influence of your noble nation at the Peace Conference, to defend the vital interests of our friendless nation, as they are stated in the enclosed memorandum.

We have the honor, Excellency, to remain,

Your most obedient servants,

(Mrs.) CHRISTO A. DAKO

DHIMITRI BALA, *Secretary.*

*The following statement is the text of the memorandum sent to His Excellency Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States, to the State Department, and to the Foreign office of all the great Allies, October 12, 1918.

Albania's Rights, Hopes and Aspirations

IT is admitted today as an historical fact that the Albanian people is the most ancient, the most compact, the most homogeneous, and the most important factor of all the Balkan nations. His origin and his strong national consciousness, that of being Albanian by race, language, customs and feeling, distinguish him entirely from the neighboring races, and give him that proper individuality, which enabled him to resist for centuries all endeavours of being denationalized and assimilated.

The history of Albania is a long record of chivalrous struggle, not only to safeguard her integrity and independence, but also to hinder the barbarians from carrying on their invasion any farther into Europe. Two great historical events illustrate this. In ancient times, Alexander the Great saved Europe from the Persian invasion; in medieval times Scanderbeg fought the

Turks for 40 years, when they were in the climax of their conquering power, thus insuring peaceful times for the western nations and enabling them to reach their present stage of civilization and learning.

It is true that during certain periods of its history, Albania was forced to acknowledge a certain amount of foreign, nominal domination, but she never consented to renounce entirely her sovereignty, never consented to give up her national aspirations; her submission being only temporary and apparent. This is evident from the many revolutions which followed one after another, at very short intervals, with the purpose of regaining her complete freedom; but the European Powers, for selfish motives refused to recognize her independence more than once. In 1876, when it became evident that the Ottoman rule was to leave the Balkan Peninsula, the British Government strove to create a strong, independent Albania, including within her boundaries Kosova, Scutari, Janina, and part of Monastir vilayet. Lord Goschen and Lord E. Fitzmaurice, both foreseeing the importance of the Albanian question,

worked hard for this end. Had they succeeded, many of the recent complications and much blood and misery would have been obviated. But unfortunately the Powers could not come to an agreement, so they contented themselves merely with a recommendation for certain administrative reforms for the Turkish Provinces, which were never put into practice.

In 1878 Albania presented her legitimate claims to the Congress of Berlin, asking that her territorial integrity be safeguarded and her independence recognized; but Bismarck with his brutal disregard of facts which did not suit him, rejected to consider them, saying — what Metternich had said a few decades before in regard to Italy — “There is no Albanian nationality!”

The frontiers drawn by the Treaty of Berlin were impossible; in some places they could not be defined, in many other places they floated on blood. The Albanian League proved, even while the representatives of Europe were still sitting around the table of peace, that they were wrong; and a few weeks later, after thousands of lives had been wasted, they receded

from the position they had taken in ignorance and acknowledged that both Scutari and Janina, the first coveted by Montenegro, and the latter by Greece were Albanian territories, as well as Monastir and Uskup.

Nobody can fail today to see that the common action undertaken by the Balkan Allies against Turkey in 1912-1913 was a continuation of the Albanian uprisings of 1909-1912, and that their success *undoubtedly* was the fruit of a struggle for liberty in which the Albanians by their continued insurrections, and by their indefatigable *irredentisme* distinguished themselves most valiantly. We naturally expected, therefore, a fair treatment at the Peace Conference of 1913, where the national rights of Albania were stoutly defended by Sir E. Grey, but in spite of all these, the Powers drew a rough and most unjust and unfortunate frontier, by which the gallant people who had borne the brunt of the fight for freedom in 1909-1912, were awarded to Montenegro, Serbia and Greece and the guilt of handing over these Albanian districts to be butchered and exterminated, rests primarily with Tsarist Russia.

But this was not enough. Some of the Great Powers, just when they were putting their signatures for the recognition of the Albanian nationality and for the independence of their country, advised the Serbian and Greek Governments to defy the decisions of the European Concert. Greece, encouraged by this advice, refused to evacuate southern Albania and at once organized the disguised movement, which they like to call Epirotian, against the Albanian Government. This criminal movement, supported in every way by our neighbors, and carried on by the unscrupulous Essad Pasha, was the chief cause of the dissolution of the newly born Albanian state. Incidentally we wish to call the attention of the Governments of the Allied Powers, that Essad Pasha, to every right-minded Albanian, is as dangerous a man to united Albania, as another Pasha was to France, because of his persistent efforts toward a division or separation of our country for personal ambition, to the effect of creating a limited state out of central Albania and becoming its ruler, while allowing the northern and southern parts of the

country to be sucked in by the greedy neighbors, the Serbians and the Greeks.

Soon greater events followed, washing in blood the boundaries drawn by the London Conference and by the Bucharest Treaty, thus showing once more that it is not safe to underestimate the weight of the ethnographic element in drawing the frontiers of any country.

Albania's earnest desire is to become an element of order and peace in the Balkan Peninsula; but for this it is absolutely necessary that her national unity, which was sacredly safeguarded and conserved during so many centuries of struggle, must be consecrated by the restoration of Albania, and by such a readjustment of her frontiers — and the necessity for such a readjustment is acknowledged today by everybody — as will insure her future existence and her free development. The restoration of Albania cannot possibly have another political status, except that of an independent state, politically and economically, for only under such a status will she be free of all foreign intrigues.

It has been amply proved that a mixed Commission of Control is not

only useless, but even embarrassing, not to say dangerous, as the Commissioners work for their respective countries and not for Albania. Greece and Bulgaria when first liberated, were given *strong* moral assistance and financial aid till they were able to stand alone. "Impartial, justice" requests that Albania should receive similar treatment.

The Albanian people inspired by local necessities, by sentiments of friendship towards the neighboring nations, and being assured that this great war, on the part of the Allies, is not a war of conquest, but a war of liberation, and that all issues involved will be settled by definitely and unequivocally accepting the principle that "the interest of the weakest is as sacred as the interest of the strongest," asks, for the sake of tranquility and peace, that the future boundary must rest upon geographical and ethnographical considerations, impartially applied for all the parties concerned. To leave or put Albanian territory and people under foreign domination is to perpetuate the germs of discord and of trouble in the Balkans. It is for these reasons that

the Albanian nation claims her natural boundaries, which are imposed not only by ethnographic and geographic reasons, but also by the right of being the first inhabitants of the country. We are convinced that the vigilant goodwill and the sense of "impartial justice to all nations," which animate the Allied Powers will see that this fundamental principle is scrupulously applied. The boundary which we legitimately claim includes, with the respective hinterlands, the following towns: Scutari, Ipek, Mitrovitza, Prishtina, Uskup, Monastir, Metzova, Janina and Preveza, and the highlands of Plava, Gusinja, Hoti and Gruda.

The Montenegrins and Serbians have been forced in this direction through the fault of Austro-Hungary, which has debarred them from their lawful outlet to the south Slavonic coast. Had the Montenegrins and Serbians been at liberty to reach the sea through Cattaro and Dalmatia, they would never have tried to reach it through Shkodra, San Giovanni di Medua and Durazzo, by subjugating an Albanian population almost as numerous as their own. The thoroughly non-Slavic character of

Kosovo, "Old Serbia," can be seen by the following impartial testimonies.

Miss Durham says, "Kosovoplain is now by a very large majority Moslem Albanian . . . Albanian predominance is proved by the fact that so far as my experience goes, and I tried repeatedly, the Albanians are almost solely Albanophone, whereas the scattered Serbs usually speak both languages, and when addressed in Serbian, *often* replied *at first* in Albanian."

Mr. N. H. Brailsford speaking on the same subject says, "In the two districts of Prizrend and Ipek there are no more than 5,000 Serbian householders, against 20,000 or 25,000 Albanian families. In all 'Old Serbia' there are as many Serbian families as there are Albanian families in Ipek and Prizrend alone."

Mr. Gabriel Louis Jaray, speaking in his book "L'Albanie Inconue," of the ethnography of Northern Albania says, "Prizrend, Ipek and Jakova are *par excellence* Albanian towns."

Besides, there is a traditional feud between the Servians and the Albanians which would render the peaceable administration of the country under a Serbian hegemony impossible. Far

from considering them as his superiors in culture, the Albanians have learned to despise and to exploit them as his villeins.

It is said that the famous plain of Kosovo must be given to Serbia, for the Serbs have a sentimental claim, as it was there that the Serbian kingdom was finally defeated, and the Tzar Lazar slain by the Sultan Murad on June 15, 1389. But the Albanians have also a sentimental claim to the field, for not only did a contingent of them fight against the Turks, as allies of the Serbs, but Kara Mahmoud Pasha of Shkodra, the semi-independent ruler of northern Albania, defeated the Sultan's army there in 1786.

The Hellenic Kingdom is at enmity with Albania because European diplomacy deprived her of her islands and of her Asia Minor coast: so she has been forced to lay claims upon a land which neither geographically nor ethnographically belongs to Greece. The fact that "Epirus" geographically belongs to Albania can be easily verified by everybody who can examine a map. The rivers of Epirus all empty into the Adriatic on the Albanian

coast. Besides, the majority of the population is Moslem Albanian, while the Christian minority, though members of the Orthodox Church, is Greek neither by race, language or sentiment. The Christian inhabitants of southern Epirus are "Greeks" only in the sense that the Romanians, the Bulgarians, and the Serbians were Greeks a century ago, when they had the misfortune too, of being under the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Church of Constantinople. In fact, all of them are Albanian by blood, language, customs and feeling, and for centuries have proved to be impossible of assimilation.

The thoroughly non-Greek character of Epirus can be seen by the following testimonies: Edward Brerewood, writing in 1625, says, "But at this day the Greek tongue is very much decayed, not only as touching the largeness and vulgarnesse of it, but also on elegance of language. For as touching the former, the *natural languages of the countries* have usurped upon it so, that parts in which Greek is spoken at this day are, in a few words, but these: First, Greece itself — excepting Epirus and the part west of Macedonia . . .

likewise in the isles west of Candie, and along the coast of Epirus and Corfu."

Viscountess Strangford, travelling in 1863, states, "We started on June 1, intending to make Janina, the capital of Southern Albania, our farthest point . . . As we had divided upon the plain into three or four different parts, the first thing to be done when we had reached Delvino, was to find each other; but this was not accomplished until we had wandered far and wide, loudly shouting and inquiring from every man, woman, and child we could see. We were decidedly in difficulties, for it was the hour of the midday sleep, and our inquiries were made in Greek, while the seeming answers were given in Albanian, neither party in the least understanding the other."

Greece is trying to lay claims to Southern Albania, just as she has tried in the past to acquire wide tracts of Slavonic lands by classing all members of the Orthodox Church as "Greek." Rome with equal justice might claim all English, French, and American Catholics, as Italians.

Another objection mentioned against the Greek unjust claim upon Southern Al-

bania is the following: It would rob Albania of its most progressive and enlightened element. Mr. N. H. Brailsford speaking on this point says, "An Albania, which included Epirus would already contain a considerable population on a relatively high level of civilization which might be trusted to leaven the whole mass."

Setting aside their heroes of antiquity, Alexander the Great, Pyrrhus, the king of Epirus, the Ptolemies of Egypt, Emperor Diocletian of Rome, Constantine the Great, etc. — the modern Albanians have shown in Turkey, Italy, Greece, Roumania and elsewhere, that they can produce statesmen. They have given the reigning dynasty to Egypt founded by Mehmet Ali, the famous soldier and statesman, who played, in the nineteenth century, so great a part in the history of Egypt and indeed of Europe. The Küprülü family, who furnished the Sultans with three Grand Viziers, was from Albania. The troops with which Mustapha Bairactar opposed and quelled the Janissaries were principally Albanian. The famous Galip, commonly called Patrona, was Albanian. This man, though a

common seaman and a pedlar, headed the insurrection of 1730, in which Sultan Ahmet III was dethroned, and with a success of which neither ancient nor modern history can furnish another instance, remained for three weeks absolute master of Constantinople.

The fact that for fifteen months the Albanian people, struggling with innumerable difficulties, had been able to maintain order and tranquility without any organized police force, during the Provisional Government, in a country harassed on all sides by enemies, who have sworn its destruction, speaks loudly that they are capable of self-government. Miss M. E. Durham, who has traveled widely in Albania, in her recent book, "The Struggle for Scutari," speaking on the subject says, "The Powers were now treating Albania badly. They neither appointed any Government, nor recognized any local one, and people knew not to whom to look. They were for the most part terrified of offending Europe by recognizing any native as head of Albania. But the local headman was keeping excellent order. The patience with which a whole people, placed in a most

difficult and almost unprecedented position, went on with their daily affairs quietly, has not been sufficiently recognized. While I was riding about the burnt districts I was always unarmed, was frequently with men I had never seen before, and everyone knew I had at least Lt. 200 in gold in the bag at my belt. Men by the wayside would call out to me: "Where are you taking the money today? Come to our village next." But no attempt of any sort was ever made, either to take it from me, or to force me to change my route. I often wondered whether similar sums could be safely carried through England, supposing all police withdrawn, and the Government entirely done away with."

The above instances show that there need be no fear that capable men will be wanting in Albania. Under a wise and strong national constitutional government, with a good system, of education, and an iron discipline the Albanians are capable of great development, and their strongly marked racial and linguistic unity would give them a strength, which not all the other races of the Balkan Peninsula possess.

The Albanian nation has given suffi-

cient proofs of its liberal conceptions in the field of public and political affairs. Amongst us, the national interest has always predominated our religious considerations. In Albania, people are ranged, ranked and valued not according to their creed, age or birth, but according to the depth of their patriotic feeling, for an Albanian is before all else *proudly* an Albanian. In their view the highest nobility and the best religion is to love and write and cultivate their tongue and their nationality.

The best instance to illustrate his liberal attitude towards his neighboring races is the confidence shown from time immemorial, by the Wallachs, which confidence was expressed by them during the London Conference, to associate their political life with that of the Albanians.

These are in short Albania's rights, hopes and aspirations; and today the civilized nations of the world, who are fighting for the great and sacred principle of nationality, have a chance to pay their indebtedness to the oldest nation of Europe, by rendering unto her what, by all tokens of history and

nationality, is hers for more than 4000 years. This measure of "impartial justice" accorded to us, will be of advantage, not only for ourselves, but also for those who sought for their own aggrandizement in our destruction.

SEVASTI K. DAKO,

President of the Albanian National Party.

DIMITRI BALA, *Secretary.*

The Strength of the National Consciousness of the Albanian People

Recently articles have been published in the New England papers on Albania, either by persons that do not know much concerning our country and people, or with the intention of misleading the American public. Some of the writers have dared to make the statement that the Albanian nation *lacks national consciousness*, therefore, they say, the Albanians do not deserve self-government, and the Peace Conference, to put an end to this war, will do well to divide their country between the Greeks and the Serbians.

A short review of historical facts will fully prove that the statement above referred to is *entirely* false, and their opinion of dividing Albania, is not only erroneous but even a dangerous one for the peace of the Balkans.

Through the conquests of Alexander the Great; the Greek language, being

a more cultivated language and possessing a literature, was adopted as a general means of intercourse between the different nations of his wide Empire, which extended over the three continents then known, Europe, Asia and Africa.

Niebuhr speaking of the *hellenizing effect* of the Greek language says, that Asia Minor began to be hellenized while as yet few Greeks have settled among them.

It is true that in Macedonia, Epirus and Illyria the Greek language was imported even earlier than this date; and it is clear that in the days of Philip the Great and Pyrrhus, the courtiers, generals and statesmen conversed in Greek, wrote in Greek and cultivated Greek literature; but this fact did not affect the people either socially or politically; they guarded intact, not only their language—which bears no affinity with either of the various dialects of the Greek—but also their customs, usages and social, civil and military organizations.

Moreover, our ancestors, the Illyrians, the Macedonians and the Epirotes have not shown any sympathy for the Greeks. Two great historical events illustrate

this. When the Persians started to fight Greece and when all the tribes of Greece united to fight the enemy, not only did the Macedonians, Epirotes and Illyrians refuse to join them; but they even became allies of the Persians in their war against Greece.

On the return of the Epirotes from Italy, in 274 B. C. Pyrrhus defeated Antigonus and became ruler of Macedonia and Epirus combined, though on his death the former revolted, and Alexander, son of Pyrrhus, now their king, declared war. From this epoch there followed an alternation of union and disunion between the two people, of greater or short duration; but *neither* had recourse to Greece with a view of annexation or of alliance.

But there is still another series of facts in favor of our opinion, viz., first, that while the Macedonians, Epirotes and Illyrians intermarried among themselves, they never did so with the Greeks; and second, the fact that the Macedonians, Epirotes and Illyrians were not members of the Amphictyonic council, which was the political and religious center of all the Greek tribes.

When the Romans, irritated by Per

seus, declared war, no application was made to the Greek republics for aid. This proves that the alliance, which had existed under Philip, by his admission into the Amphictionic council was purely personal and political. This had ceased with his death and the prior state of things had resumed its sway. On the other hand the Epirotes and Illyrians who were Macedonians in race, language and sentiment, rushed as one man to the aid of Perseus and were involved in the common ruin which followed the defeat of Pydna. Macedonia was divided into four provinces, under Roman supremacy, while Epirus was devastated, its inhabitants reduced to slavery, and its ruler Gentius carried to Rome to adorn the triumph of the conqueror.

The Roman Empire sent over large numbers of Roman citizens to colonize the country and to assimilate the inhabitants of the three Albanian provinces; and although Albania remained under their rule for a period of about six centuries, the Roman conquest and civilization wrought but little influence in the social condition of the Albanians. They still retained their language and their national manners and usages, and re-

mained a distinct people with a *distinct national consciousness*.

After the death of Theodosius the Great, in 395 A. D., the Roman Empire was divided between his two sons, Honorius and Arcadius. The latter took the Eastern Empire, of which Albania became a part, included in the Illyrian prefecture.

The importance of the Byzantine culture and literature, in the history of the world is beyond dispute. They not only guarded for more than a thousand years the intellectual heritage of antiquity, but also called into life a peculiar medieval culture and literature of their own. They communicated the treasures of the old pagan as well as of their own Christian literature *to all* neighboring nations, especially through the Greek Church. Finally the learned men of the dying Byzantin Empire, fleeing from the barbarians (the Turks), transplanted the treasures of the Hellenic wisdom to the West, and thereby fertilized the Western peoples with genius of culture.

An important group of these emigrants settled in the village of *Moskopolis*, in the district of Kortcha, Albania, and thus the little village became a town of

60,000–70,000 inhabitants and for 350 years it boasted a famous school, a public library and a printing press.

The fact which we wish to emphasize is, that while this powerful Byzantine culture and civilization came in contact daily with the Albanian people for a period of 14 centuries, it did not influence them much.

Beginning with the year 276 A. D., Albania was successively invaded by the Goths, the Huns, the Serbs, the Bulgars and the Normans for a period of 12 centuries, but the influence wrought by all these upon the Albanian people amounts to almost nothing; they left as souvenirs of their incursions only a few geographical names.

In 1478 Albania became and remained till 1912 a part of the Turkish Empire, who inaugurated a system of oppression and persecution and deprived the Albanian people of the sacred right to educate themselves in their own language, while the foreign propaganda and intrigue had a wide open door and a free hand to divide and denationalize the Albanian nation. Special note must be made concerning the privilege given to the Greek Orthodox Church to organize

“Greek communities” or “milet” out of the other nationalities which professed the Greek Orthodox religion. And for many years the Hellenic kingdom has thrown dust in the eyes of Europe by confusing Greek religion with the Greek nationality and has prejudiced the national cause of Albania by adopting and making her own Stamboul fashion of calling the Albanians who profess Mahomedanism, Turks, and those who profess Orthodoxy, Greeks.

In 1878 at the Congress of Berlin, the Greeks advanced claims to annex Southern Albania; but the Albanians rose like one man against their ill-founded and unjust pretensions and saved their land from their greed.

But the Greeks did not give up their hope, and after years of unscrupulous religious and political intrigue, in 1897 declared war on Turkey with the purpose of getting Southern Albania, believing that its inhabitants *now* will welcome their army as liberators; but were bitterly deceived in their expectations. E. M. Vogüé, an eye witness, speaking of the Greek campaign of 1897 in Southern Albania says, “En Epire l'événement n'a pas mieux justifié les espérances.

des libérateurs. Les soldats du colonel Manos se sont avancés sur la route de Janina, ils y ont fait entendre le cri d'indépendance: aucun écho n'a répondu sur un sol jalousement gardé par des Albanais. Ces clans difiants et beliqueux tolèrent par habitude la suzeraineté du Turc, ils ne recevront la loi d'aucun autre maître; et on ne plaisante pas avec les Albanais. Les vieux Epirotes de Pyrrhus et d'Alexandre, d'Ali de Tépéleni et de Mehmet Ali n'ont pas dégénéré: ils restent les incomparables sergents qui assurèrent la victoire et maintinrent la domination de tous les conquétants orientaux."

In 1912-1913 the Greeks were forced to recognize that the inhabitants of Southern Albania were Albanians by race, language and customs; but they based their claims on the assumption that they were Greeks by feeling, adding that the sentiment is the decisive factor in matter of nationality.

The events that followed demonstrated fully that the inhabitants of Southern Albania are, as the rest of them, Albanians not only by race, language and customs, *but by sentiment also*. If they were truly Greek by feeling why did 300,-

000-400,000 of them flee before the Greek army when they illegally invaded Southern Albania in 1914, just a few months before the outbreak of the European war, and went to starve under the olive trees of Valona? If they were truly Greeks by feeling, why did the Greek army massacre so many of those who could not get away, and why did they devastate the whole country?

Not only the inhabitants of Albania itself could not be persuaded either by political oppression, or by religious intrigue, or by foreign propaganda of civilization and culture to abandon their national characteristics and national consciousness; but even those who emigrated into foreign countries did not do so, as it may be seen by the survival for centuries of the Albanian colonies in Calabria, Italy, and Attica, Greece.

But what do all these historical facts mean? Do they mean that the Albanians are incapable of civilization and progress? No. They simply tell us that the Albanian nation held itself *always* distinct from its neighbours, neither sharing their sympathies nor their aversions. They tell us that the Albanians *have rejected* with an equal impartiality

the civilization of Greece, Rome, and Byzantium. Moreover they tell us that the Albanians have always considered the Greeks and the Slavs as their hereditary enemies. They demonstrate that the Albanian nation is of a stock with *strong national consciousness* that of being Albanian by race, language, customs and feeling, and therefore impossible to be assimilated; while they are keenly desirous to develop a civilization of their own; and their eagerness for civilization, culture and progress can be easily grasped if we only remember that during the first year of the Young Turkish *regime*, the Albanians held four national congresses, founded 66 national clubs, opened 34 day schools and 24 night schools, founded 15 literary societies and three musical societies, established four printing presses and issued eleven newspapers; in other words they took all necessary measures for the enlightenment and uplift of the nation *in their own way*.

In view of these facts it is erroneous to say that the Albania nation lacks national consciousness. On the contrary the Albanian nation gives us a unique example of how a small nation

without a written literature, without any schools and churches of her own, surrounded by so many and powerful foreign civilizations, which endeavored to force themselves in, and politically oppressed for so many centuries, resisted successfully and survived them all.

It is not too much to say therefore that the *National consciousness* of the Albanian nation is, at least, stronger than that of the other Balkan nations.

Mr. N. H. Brailsford speaking of the strength of the national consciousness of the Albanian people says, "Here at length is a race which neither religion nor education can corrupt."

CHRISTO A. DAKO

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