



The Role of American Diplomacy on Albania During the Peace Conference of Paris

Zhuljeta Kadilli

Professor, "A. Xhuvani" University in Elbasan, Albania

ABSTRACT

Through the accumulation of the facts and the interpretation of the historical sources, this research tends to give a full picture of the valuable contribution of the American diplomacy, its representative at the Paris Peace Conference, President Wilson and the American public opinion toward the Albanian issue during 1919 – 1920. With respect to this approach, we have seen a period of extraordinary awareness of the American press of the time in favor of the Albanian issue, direct result of the valuable contribution of the Albanian diaspora in USA, organized in the "Vatra" federation. Simultaneously, as a representative of this federation, we have to mention the direct commitment and contribution of Fan S. Noli

in defense of the Albanian issue. This was evidenced in his meeting with President Wilson, taking his promise which he will make a reality in the Paris Peace Conference. This research will be based on analysis of the historical resources before and after the '90ies, seen from a comparative context.

KEYWORDS : Peace Conference of Paris, "Vatra" federation, Albanian diaspora, President Wilson.

1. Introduction

The experience of establishing and consolidating the Balkan States in the XIX-XX centuries, showed that the selection and definition of the allies have been one of the key and in some cases the determinant factors in the direction of the political and economic development of these countries. In this context, on the eve of the opening the Paris Peace Conference, the Albanians tried all means to find and create new allies, who in turn would defend their rights.

Referring to relevant documentation, it appears that the Albanian-American relationships started somewhat late, in the second half of the XIX century. More specifically, the first contacts between Americans and Albanians were in 1886, when the Americans came as religious missionaries. The first Albanian immigrant in America though was in 1876. However, we can say that the Americans knew about Albania and the Albanians much earlier. According to the documentation of that time, there is a very interesting fact which suggests that Abraham Lincoln had a good knowledge about Albania and the Albanians. In an autograph awarded in 1853 to Admiral Millo, he said that *"The whole peninsula should be joined under the axis of a single nation...from Fiumes up to the estuary of Kataras to continue throughout Dalmatia. All this unimpinged area needs to join Albania"*¹

Also, the former President, Theodore Roosevelt was very aware of the Albanian and the Adriatic issue. In a speech he made during the First World War, he ranked Albania among the countries that should be helped, saying that the independence of Albania should be recognized by the great powers². The fact that Theodore Roosevelt knew about Albania and the Albanians was also confirmed by Fan Noli in a meeting with him in 1918, where he said: *"Albania's independence must be renewed in the future Peace Conference and placed under the care of the impartial allied powers. I will make every attempt to make sure that the decisions of the conference are in full compliance with the aspirations of the Albanian brave people"*³. In an article published in English in the "Adriatic Review" it was mentioned that "two prominent names such as W. Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt were added to the list of friends of Albanians".

However, if I refer to the most important events that affected Albania and the Albanians in 1912-1918, I think that the interest of Americans in Albania was minimal. In addition, the independence of Albania was not officially recognized by the United States of America.

2. The Status of Albania in the Paris Peace Conference

In November 1912, Albanians declared the independence, and later the Albanian state was born and lived for a short period of time as a half state, as a result of the compromise of the European Great Powers at the Conference of Ambassadors in London in 1913. Specifically, in 1914 Princ Wied was placed at the head of the state. He left Albania at the start of the First World War in September, 1914. We can say that the

only thing that Wied made for Albanians was not placing Albania in any European alliances that were created at that time, despite the efforts of Austro-Hungaria to use it to counter Serbia. After the departure of Wied from Albania, the Great Powers, which had recognized the Albanian State, in cooperation with the Balkan states, turned Albania into a battle ground. In one of his studies on the Balkans, Georges Castellani, a researcher, wrote this about the Albanian situation during the First World War: *"Its territory became an exchangeable object by the Great Powers. Antanta used it as a bait to lure Greece and later Italy into her camp"*⁴. In this context, with the beginning of the First World War, the Albanian State ceased to exist, and the Albanian territory remained occupied until the end of the First World War.

The fact that in the first projects of the US State Department, Albania was ranked with Finland, Iceland, Poland and Czech-Slovak State considered newly created powers, to exist at the Peace Conference, apparently constituted a positive premise for the future of the Albanian State. However, from the same source of information, we conclude that although eventually was named as such, Albania was excluded from the right of signing the Peace Treaty. This was justified by a remark that the attempts to create an Albanian State during 1912-1914 were not successfully materialized. The source document stated: *"Albania has no international status as to justify its admission to the Peace Congress. Its interests will be protected by a committee of powers [other countries] in which the United States is also a member."*⁵

From this stand point, and as mentioned before, this document confirms us once again the fact that the Albanian interest in the Peace Conference would not be protected by the Albanians but from the Great Powers. This time though, there was a change in the interest of the Albanians: (as it was found later) one of these great powers was a new political actor, across the ocean, in which Albanians would keep their hopes for justice.

3. What did Albanians expect from the Peace Conference?

At the Paris Peace Conference, Albania was represented by an official delegation headed by Turhan Pashe Permeti, as the Prime Minister of the Albanian government. In February 1919 the delegation presented two memoranda at the Peace Conference, respectively on February 12 and 24. Basically, requests contained the political program of the Albanian national Movement adopted at the Congress of Durres, a product of which was the government of Prime Minister Turhan Pasha. However, it is worth noting that the Albanian State and the government of Durres Congress had not been recognized either by the Great Powers or by the neighbouring countries. This fact made it even more difficult the work of the official Albanian commission.

The representatives of the Albanian catholic clergy played an important role in the work of the Albanian delegation in Paris. Luigj Bumçi replaced Turhan Pashe Permeti as the head of the Albanian delegation

in Paris, after the latter left. Luigj Bumci selected Gjergj Fisha, poet and franciscan father, whose contribution was never appreciated in the Albanian historiography before 90's. At the same time, members of this delegation were Luigj Gurakuqi, Mihal Turtulli, Mehdi Frashëri, Mehmet Konica and the patriot from Elbasan, Lef Nosi. Also, Mihal Turtulli and Mehmet Konica represented the Albanian diaspora of America. They had participated in the Durres Congress, where Mehmet Konica was appointed foreign minister of this government.

In March 1919, Luigj Bumci and Gjergj Fishta met with Pope Benedict XV in Rome and asked him to intervene to the Great Powers in the defence of the Albanian case. However the first meeting with Pope failed to produce any promise or any concrete result, just the Pope's blessing. At that meeting Pope said to Gjergj Fishta: "*What the century [history] say when they see a poor man in the high level circles [elites]?*", and he continues: "*I hope your mission is successful, so I'll give you a special blessing*".⁶ In December 1919, Luigj Bumçi, this time accompanied by Mehdi Frashëri, went back to Rome and met with Pope Benedict XV again. The Pope promised to intervene at the England and U.S Ambassadors in favor of the Albanian issue, especially with regard to the request of Luigj Bumçi to save both Albanian provinces: Korca and Gjirokastra which were threatened by the Titoni-Venizellos agreement.⁷

In addition, at the Paris Peace Conference, besides the Albanian delegation headed by Turhan Pasha the delegations of the Albanian Colonies in exile would be present. More specifically, the delegation of the Albanian federation "Vatra" in America, the delegation of the Albanian colony in Romania represented by Prince Gjika and Pandeli Evangjeli, the delegation of the Albanian colony in Turkey represented by Halil Pasha, the delegation of the political parties and Albanian women in America represented by Parashqevi Qiriazi and the National League delegation in America represented by Mihal Grameno. It is worth mentioning the attendance in the Paris Peace Conference of Esad Pashe Toptani, one of the most controversial political figures of the foreign and Albanian historiography of the communist period. In this Conference he appeared with the status of the only representative of the Albanians, the president of the Albanian Government in exile. He also declared himself an ally of the Antant Powers during the First World War.

Initially, at the opening of the Peace Conference, the official Albanian delegation in Paris demanded the recognition of the Albanian State in its ethnic boundaries, and the correction of unjust acts as done by the Conference of Ambassadors in 1913 in London. But referring to the meddling of the Great Powers, which were part of the European Diplomacy from the beginning and during the Conference sessions and the fact that neighbouring claims (Greek claims of Venizellos and Serbian ones) had the maximum support of England and France, the hopes of the Albanians not only remained a dream, but also the Albanians lands were continuing to serve as a compensation for the winning powers of the First World War.

From this stand point we can say that Albanians at that Conference at the most would try to protect the territorial sovereignty of its borders in 1913. On these borders new fragmentation agreements were being planned. Also on their demands to determine the most depending on the new political conjunctures that will be created with the start of the Conference, will be seen a tendency to move from the collective guarantee of the Great Powers determined in 1913 towards the authorization of a single power.

Among the many issues that the Paris Peace Conference would solve, the most delicate and directly related to the fate of the Albanian territories was "*The Adriatic issue*". This is what the head of the Italian delegation at the Peace Conference, Tomasso Titoni said: "*The issue of the Albanian mandate can not be separated from the Adriatic issue and the concessions that were promised to the Italians in Dalmatia, which are two inseparable issues*".⁸

The Adriatic issue was one of the most complex ones of this Conference as it contained two contradictory components: on one side was the secret Treaty of London (1915), and on the other side was the program of 14 points of President Wilson, where one of the most important principles was the self-determination by the nations. Rightly so, Professor Arben Puto calls the Paris Peace "A Different Peace".⁹

4. The Evolution of U.S diplomacy towards the Albanian

issue

The American politics became an important factor of the developments in Europe, when the U.S entered the First World War. U.S President Wilson had a strong position in the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. During the Conference, he constantly refers to the secret Treaty of London of 1915. The Treaty established the partition to Albania, inconsistent with the principles that he had decided to defend in the Peace Conference and to create a new international order. Initially, the reports from the American experts' project suggested the creation of an autonomous Albania with its Northern part going to Yugoslavia. Korca and Gjirokastra in the south would go to Greece. They presented several new reasons, of course already known, which justify the annexation of the Albanian territories to Yugoslavia and Greece. First they considered the need of Yugoslavia for a port on the Adriatic Sea and therefore they thought to give Shkodra. Secondly, they thought that the Albanians were not capable of economic development; change the border in the south in favor of Greece was justified with the ethnic, economic and strategic argument. With regard to the middle Albania, left from the removal of the Northern and Southern parts, the American experts thought to declare it as an independent state under the mandate of the League of the Nations since they considered Albanians as politically immature.

Although, the Americans knew the strategic goals of Italy to control the entrance to the Adriatic, the concession that the American experts provided to Italy consisted of a provisional mandate on Vlorë, instead of full sovereignty the Italy requested. However, it became clear that the American attitude towards the Albanian issue in the coming months evolved significantly. In this context, on February 18, 1919, the American project contained the idea according to which Korca would remain within the Albanian territory.¹⁰

The attitude of America in the Peace Conference was related on one side to the pressure from the contradictory information on the Albanian issue, and on the other side to the fact that the British and French commissions were inclined to separate Albania and establish a balance in the Balkans at the expense of the Albanians. The memorandum of December 9, 1919 was a clear indication of the cooperation and compromise among the Great Powers to settle the issue of the Adriatic with the old tactics.

Here is how Prof. A. Puto described the American position of December 9, 1919. "*Overall the memorandum of December 9, 1919 was a slightly revised edition of the secret Treaty of London. It marked a setback compared to the developments in the Peace Conference and the efforts of the Great Powers on the same subject. The Memorandum also contained the signature of the American delegation Polk, from which it is inferred that all criticism of President Wilson was ignored. Even the Albanian hopes vanished*".¹¹ The vanishing of hopes was expressed very clearly by Turhan Pashe Permeti, Prime Minister that was elected by the government of Durres. He expressed the deep disappointment of the Albanians to President Wilson. They had counted on him and his noble principles that were against the partition of the Albanian territories.

On January 20, 1920, Washington sent a memo to Lloid Xhord and Klemanson on January 20, 1920, which emphasized that the path followed with regard to the Fiumes issue was not consistent with the views of President Wilson. In this context, on 22 January in response of the memorandum that Washington sent to the Prime Ministers of England and France, they justified themselves saying that they had not removed the American view by stating that: "*Details of the administration of the country by Italy, Yugoslavia and Greece were not designed yet and that, at the right moment, the feelings and interests of the future of the Albanian people would be taken into account*".¹²

It became clear that the Albanian issue and its partition was a challenge. By way of informing him, European Prime Ministers sought to put the U.S president before a done deal. The American President stressed that America could not accept a deal that separates northern Albanian with Shkodra (Yugoslavia) and Korca with the Greek surroundings. Wilson's attitude showed clearly that he was favoring Greece, because he did not mention Gjirokastra at all. The Albanian Patriotic Circles protested his attitude. After the reaction of Wilson on the Albanian issue, which was discussed again in the Paris and London governments on February 17, 1920, these countries came up with the same idea that Albania was not able to govern itself. Albania would be placed under the mandate,

which contradicted the decisions taken at the Ambassador Conference in London in 1913. The two Prime Ministers of England and France were disappointed by the attitude of the U.S who did not agree with their idea of Albania. *"Washington did not agree with any of the plans of the partition of Albania that Paris and London proposed. Twice during the month of February and finally on March 6, 1920 he insisted on the development of the Italian- Yugoslavian talks to resolve the Adriatic Issue leaving aside the Albanian problems"*¹³

Wilson's statements during January-March, 1920 were vital to the future of the Albanian people. With these statements he achieved what the Albanians could not stop in 1913. For the first time he managed to curb the Albania's further partition. The way how Wilson's attitude to the Albanian issue evolved was a result of a variety of external and internal factors.

Among external factors the most important issue was related directly to the Adriatic, where the European powers tried to finalize their projects behind Washington. According to Prof. P. Milo, *"The discrepancy between the attitudes on this issue was part of the whole range of contradictions that divided the U.S from England and France at the Paris Peace Conference"*¹⁴

Important internal factors that impacted the U.S policy towards the Albanian issue, were the mass movements led by Albanian patriots at home and abroad seeking territorial independence. The result of this movement was the Congress of Lushnja held in January 1920, which showed the world and the representatives of the Peace Conference, the Albanian readiness to defend its territories from a new partition. These important events in Albania, undoubtedly positively influenced the evolution of the American diplomacy towards the Albanian issue.

Albanian National Movement was a very strong message to America, showing that these people wanted independence and its territorial integrity, according to the program of 14 points. In the Congress of Lushnja in January 1920, the Albanian elite created a new government which was established in Tirana and gradually exercised its authority in the entire country, by driving out of Albania all the foreign armies.¹⁵ Under these circumstances, the European countries could not change Wilson's decision on the Albanian issue. They proposed that Italy and Yugoslavia reach a compromise on the issue of Adriatic. The Paris Peace Conference ended its developments and decisions on April 10, 1920.¹⁶

On December 17, 1920, upon the request of the Albanian government, and with the support of the British, Albania was accepted with full rights in the league of Nations, by becoming its 43rd member. Credit would go to Fan Noli as President of the official Albanian delegation at the League of Nations. E ke lene per gjysem fjaline ne shqip Also the Conference of the Ambassadors.

But the question that naturally arises is: "why a President of a powerful state, the most powerful state after the First War World, vetoed in favor of a small nation towards which there were no strategic, territorial, or economic interests?! This is a question that has not had an answer until to date. Perhaps when the Conference was finalizing its decisions, Wilson had consolidated the idea of the practical application of the principle of self-determination. Although as he himself said in the late 1919 before the U.S Congress when he stated that: *"When I pronounced those words (that all nations had the right of self-determination), I had no idea that all these nationalities existed"*¹⁷ Also referring to the principles of self-determination Henry Kissinger said: *"It soon became clear that practically the principle of self-determination can not be strictly enforced as provided in the fourteen points"*¹⁸ Maybe in diplomatic terms Wilson wanted to show the US superiority over the European states after World War. As Eric Hobsbawm claims in his Age of Extremes, where he says: *"President Wilson... whose thoughts were seen as representative expression of the power without which war would be lost ..."*¹⁹ and also to counter the European policy of secret diplomacy.

Conclusion

In this context, we can say that the Paris Peace Conference was the expression of the big differences that existed between the new American diplomacy and old European diplomacy based on the concept of power balance that had worked during the previous centuries. The differences between them were noticed in the positions they held towards the Albanian case, focusing directly on the philosophies that they supported and represented during this period.

It was exactly in this conference that the European diplomacy was oriented mostly towards the implementation of the secret treaty of London of 1915, whose implementation considered the Albanian territories as a means of compensation and reward for the other states. In this context, the European diplomacy expressed once again its inconsistency through the decisions taken at the Conference of Ambassadors in London in 1912 where the European Great Powers had recognized the independence of Albania and had also decided on its borders (the Albania of London).

Opposed to the European diplomacy was standing the American one that was adequately represented by President Wilson that aimed to create a new world order based on the principle of self-determination. In this context we can say that America did not share the same attitude with the European philosophy, and stood as an opponent to the concept of the balance of powers. For the Americans, the dissonance between their philosophy and the European thought, was that the Europeans had failed to understand a significant and meaningful element: *"The Peoples that were granted self-determination would have no reason to make war or to suppress the others"*²⁰

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