

Version 1.0 | Last updated 08 October 2014

Albania

By Isa Blumi

Though largely understudied to date, the regions in the western Balkans inhabited by Albanian speakers were afflicted by World War I in distinctive ways. The parceling out of former Ottoman lands to satiate the needs of neighboring political and economic elite introduced a unique set of consequences for Albanian-speakers. The battles between armies and the residual horrors accompanying war—famine and forced migration—became the reality of the 20th century for most Albanians who were exposed to a violence that ripped apart the largely peasant population. The resulting chaos invariably transformed the region into a contested area inhabited by a politically scattered population whose future would be increasingly decided by the outsiders charged with occupying Albanian lands between 1912 and 1920. These occupations often required considerable collaboration with selected local intermediaries, some of whom became the dominant political actors in Albanian lands for much of the 20th century.

Table of Contents

- [1 Introduction](#)
 - [2 A Genealogy of Occupation](#)
 - [2.1 Precursors to the War, Ottoman Collapse, 1908-1912](#)
 - [2.2 Filling the Ottoman Void: The Scramble for Albania in 1912-1914](#)
 - [3 World War and the Occupation Regime](#)
 - [4 Great Power Occupations](#)
 - [4.1 Austrian and Bulgarian Zones](#)
 - [5 French Occupation of Southern Albania, 1916-1920](#)
 - [5.1 Italy's Push for Albanian Independence](#)
 - [6 Conclusion](#)
- [Notes](#)
- [Selected Bibliography](#)
- [Citation](#)

Introduction

The collapse of two major empires at the end of 1918 had a considerable impact on the inhabitants of the Balkans. In Albanian populated lands, the Christian and Muslim population witnessed a period of territorial disaggregation between 1910 and 1920 that pitted the interests of locals against each other as their desires to live in a unified state remained of little consequence in the larger world. A backwater in this period, Albanian-inhabited lands experienced an inimitable form of violence brought on by the war. In this respect, these lands deserve close inspection as the disparate processes of administering Albanians-under-occupation both took very different forms than elsewhere and shaped the long-term fortunes of the entire Balkans. However, in order to fully appreciate these long-term consequences, historians must expand their understanding of the non-military components of the war. The following initiates this refocus by highlighting that occupation administrations played a role that impacted the quality of life for civilian populations (and thus shaped their political ambitions) as much as did the actual

performance of the larger war.

A Genealogy of Occupation

Precursors to the War, Ottoman Collapse, 1908-1912

One outstanding feature of the Balkans during World War I is the extent to which its inhabitants lived under changing administrations. Crucially, the first phase of [occupations](#) began prior to the larger European powers' entry into the war. It was during the slow process of Ottoman disaggregation, which began in the 1870s and culminated in the [Balkan Wars of 1912-1913](#), that the peninsula witnessed large scale demographic and political change.^[1] In the case of Albanian inhabited lands, the various administrations seeking to impose order throughout the 1910-1920 period - from Ottoman and innumerable short-lived locally-run regimes, to French, Dutch, French, Italian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Habsburg, and Greek occupation forces - contributed to the region's long-term instability. While it is true that such instability took the form of violence between opposing armies, this volatility also reflected the domestic socio-economic, as much as political, challenges caused by imperial disintegration.

Fundamental change came to the region with the so-called Young Turk coup in 1908. Dominated by natives of the Balkans, the ruling party of the new Ottoman government, the [Committee of Union and Progress](#) (CUP), adopted a platform for significant reform that directly threatened certain landed interests in the western Balkans. A struggle followed between the CUP government and "reactionary" forces both loyal to the old order – personified by the deposed Sultan [Abdülhamid II, Sultan of the Turks \(1842–1918\)](#) – and hostile to the increased central state power imposed by Istanbul's new rulers in the name of modernization.^[2] The resulting clash of interests left all the peoples of the region scrambling to form new constituencies and neighboring states exploited these fissures.^[3]

Often ruling through politically weak coalitions, the elite of Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Montenegro saw territorial expansion at the expense of neighboring Ottoman lands as an expedient way to shore up vulnerable political positions at home. With rebellious pockets within Ottoman Albania fueled by domestic populist themes including nationalist [irredentism](#), much of the post-1908 western Balkans fell into civil war.^[4] Most vital for a better appreciation of the subsequent political chaos that left Albania, and much of the Ottoman Balkans, exposed during the 1912 Balkan War, are the seasonal uprisings in parts of Kosovo, Macedonia, and northern Albania between 1910 and 1912.^[5]

These areas saw a flood of force as the Ottoman state and its local allies adopted particularly harsh anti-rebellion measures. The result was a fracturing of local/state relations, a disruption of local life in strategically important frontier regions—the Malësi and western and central Kosovo—and ultimately, the pauperization of the entire region. The consequences of these disruptions were clear at the commencement of war: the Ottoman armies, without a local population to rely on for supplies and auxiliary forces, collapsed within a matter of weeks.

Filling the Ottoman Void: The Scramble for Albania in 1912-1914

In full recognition of both the dangers and opportunities presented by the legal and diplomatic vacuum created by the collapse of the Ottoman Balkans in late 1912, a number of talented Ottoman-Albanian intellectuals and officers attempted to fill the void. A series of tenuous political alliances formed over the next months by rival groups which had often unclear links to neighboring states. Unfortunately, as a result of competing retrospective narratives by historians with conflicted loyalties, the contours of these domestic political relations vis-à-vis occupation administrations have been blurred.^[6]

In a move that was not entirely supported within Albania, a "concert of powers" interfered in late 1912 and early 1913 in the form of a conference in London. The on-going struggles for control over Albania between former allies in the first Balkan War - particularly Montenegro, Serbia, [Greece](#), and [Bulgaria](#) - along with Italy, concerned the powers which feared a larger war. In this respect, delegates in London imposed a set of conditions that both left a future Albania in legal and economic limbo, and animated all the regional and local actors to make rapid adjustments to ensure their long-term interests were addressed.^[7]

Among other things, delegates in London, including Albanians serving various masters, debated the delineation of what would be a distinct Albanian territory under European administration.^[8] The biggest issue was the extent to which Serbia, desperate for access to the Adriatic, would be allowed to expand its occupation of Ottoman Kosovo at the expense of an Albanian entity the

Great Powers agreed to create by March of 1913.^[9] The way these territories were so callously traded away during these meetings, irrespective of the inhabitants' wishes, ultimately frustrated delegates of the Albanian Provisional Government (one of several claimant groups vying for foreign recognition). As reported in the notes of [Herman C. Norman \(1872-1955\)](#), representing the British Foreign Ministry, [Mehmed Konizza Bey \(1881-1948\)](#) and [Philippe Nogga \(1867-1917\)](#), on behalf of the Albanian government

...complained that the question of Albania was being settled without the slightest regard to the Albanians themselves...the boundaries...being delimited solely with a view to prevent a breach between Austria-Hungary and Russia for which the Albanians were not responsible...they feared that the same thing [as the assignment of Gjakova to Serbia] would happen in the south where... T[he Greeks had occupied...as far north as Valona [Vlora] and would...make an effort to keep it...They [Albanian delegates] asked no favours nor even full justice (for it was already too late to ask for that) but they begged for just a little justice which was moreover necessary to avert further disaster.^[10]

While rarely explored from the Albanian perspective, Serbia and Montenegro's occupation of Kosovo and Macedonia in late 1912, coupled with Greece's pestering irredentism throughout Southern Albania (Epirus) and Macedonia, set in motion a number of indigenous struggles. The resulting political crisis reflected the competitive ambitions of many different, temporarily constituted polities who were not going to resign their fates to a hapless German Prince [Wilhelm of Wied \(1876-1945\)](#).^[11]

All these groups necessarily sought patronage from an assortment of outside interests, including the [Ottoman Empire](#), which still had considerable support among Albanians facing occupation by hostile neighboring countries.^[12] The resulting scramble for influence in a volatile, largely disaggregated region throughout 1914 proved the critical element to the emergence of many new kinds of activism. Unfortunately for the region's inhabitants, most of political struggles took Albania further away from political and economic consolidation. This further disaggregation meant it was difficult to create a viable local government to represent the region as a whole. The consequences were multiple competing factions who were beholden to the whims of competing foreign state interests. These conditions opened the door for both outright occupation by rival neighboring interests for the first year of the war (often with the help of local proxies) and ultimately gave the Greater Powers an opportunity to dangle Albania as a prize to the most cooperative regional partners.

Once the greater European war started in 1914, the tensions barely silenced by the Treaty of Bucharest (1913) and the earlier London Conference reigned in the Balkans. The still unaddressed territorial demands of neighboring states explain their occupation regimes in Kosovo and much of Albania which utilized the ready cooperation of some local interlocutors. In this respect, these volatile times empowered pliant local intermediaries like the large land-holding families of Central Albania linked to [Essad Pasha Toptani \(c. 1863-1920\)](#), his nephew, [Ahmed Zogu \(1895-1961\)](#), the future "King of the Albanians," the Kryeziu clan in Gjakova (who worked closely with Serbian occupation forces), and [Prenk bib Doda Pasha of Mirdita \(1860-1919\)](#), who formed temporary alliances with the Italians, Serbs and Austrians. Indeed, Muslim and Christian peasants living under the influence of these Albanian intermediaries would experience the war as a product of the conflicted interests of all these different actors as much as between foreign powers.

World War and the Occupation Regime

As such, these separate spheres of influence became arenas of complex local politics where competing external forces, largely dependent on their proximity to the region, shaped the extent to which each distinctive zone functioned. In this respect, Italian influences over local affairs were limited in those areas deemed essential to Rome's strategic concerns. Similar territorial limitations existed for Habsburg areas of focus which were defined by its already established connections in areas where Albanian Catholics—western Kosovo, the highlands of Northern Albania/Montenegro/Novi Bazaar - predominated. French and British agents, working in distinctive parts of the Balkans, also dealt with the region in aggregates forged by still existent regional orientations. As for Serbia and Greece, while seemingly in agreement over the extent their respective spheres of influence would take - Kosovo and Northern Albania for Serbia and Southern Albania for Greece - Macedonia still constituted an area of dispute. In this regard, Serbian money not only funded the operations of Albanian clients in Kosovo - [Ceno Kryeziu Bey \(1895-1927\)](#) of the prominent Gjakova family, Azem Bejta better known as [Azem Galica \(1889-1924\)](#) from central Kosovo, and Ahmet Zogu, future self-declared King of Albania - but also aimed to undermine Greek inroads in these contested areas by supporting Essad Pasha Toptani.^[13]

Senate." It is this body that attempted to deal with all the major powers and particularly the Ottoman Sultan, seeking recognition in order to negotiate a viable solution to the political conflict that left much of the country under Slav and Greek occupation. For the most part, this group failed because Essad Pasha Toptani proved willing to forge multiple alliances with seemingly contradictory partners, including Serbia and France, a Great Power who eventually recognized him as President-in-exile for the entire World War I period.^[14]

Factions did break from Essad Pasha, however, creating a polity in the Kruja region that ultimately overthrew Essad's administration. In total, four distinctive factions emerged, with the regions of Mati and Dibra, firmly tied to Essad at this time, serving as a conduit for Montenegrin and Serbian troops to enter the area by June 1915. It is largely understood that this Serbian expansion into Essad's region accounts for why the Italians responded to Serbian (and Greek) encroachments. This intervention led to a larger scramble for Albanian territories by all the regional states. This struggle would characterize the region for years to come. Eventually, the collapse of the Serbian monarchy and Austrian (and Bulgarian) occupation of these regions in 1916 compelled Essad to flee to France for the duration of the war.^[15]

The nature of these rivalries influenced the manner in which still neutral Italy and Greece would compete over territorial concessions the Entente powers offered at Albanians' expense. Hashed out in secret on 16 April 1915, France, Great Britain, Russia, and Italy agreed to divide Albania (and Habsburg Croatian lands) for the use of Serbia and Montenegro as access points to the Adriatic, while a central Albanian "Muslim" zone would be secured by Italy, which in turn would administer all the areas south of Vlora until Himare.^[16] It was not determined to what extent Greece would be allowed to maintain its occupation of Korçë, as soon after Serbia's army's defeat left the Entente's forces based in Salonika exposed to advancing Bulgarian troops. Indeed, the rivalry between Greece (still neutral well into 1916) and Serbia had grown so dangerous that France had to divert troops to parts of Albania. This occupation hoped to assure that the advancing armies of Bulgaria and Austria-Hungary in October 1915 did not entirely overrun the Entente positions in northern Greece (Salonika).

Great Power Occupations

Austrian and Bulgarian Zones

As much as Austro-Hungarian agents invested in applying some influence in the events of the region, the Balkan Wars of 1912 left the Dual Monarchy little leverage at the beginning of World War I. One of its early attempts to recapture influence was to insist in the 1913 London Conference that Albania remain independent of Italian intrigue and Serbian and Greek occupation.^[17] In pushing for the recognition of an independent, neutral Albania, Austria-Hungary earned little more than modest support from otherwise marginal locals. That changed with the retreat of Serbian forces across the Albanian highlands in 1916. As Bulgarian and Austro-Hungarian troops consolidated control of these areas, their different occupation administrations of Kosovo, Macedonia, and Albania extending as far south as Elbasan, presented an opportunity for a new set of Albanian constituencies to find outside patronage. As Bulgaria's ambitions were to reconstitute the expanse of Greater Bulgaria originally realized thanks to the San Stefano Treaty of 1878, the Austria-Hungary responded by strengthening an autonomous Albania under their joint administration with empowered Albanian elites. The arrangement immediately produced tensions between Austrians and Bulgarian administrators.^[18]

In this respect, it is crucial to read into these allies' policies towards Albanian territories. Both adopted very different strategies in dealing with local populations. Austria's occupation of Northern Albania and Kosovo, for instance, started in January 1916 under the pretext of expelling occupying Italian, Montenegrin, and Serbian forces. The arrival of these Austrian forces thus received considerable support from Catholic Mirdita leader Prenk Bib Doda Pasha and Central Albanian Ahmet Zogu, among others. Austria's rapid expansion opened much of central Albania to the ambitions of men like Zogu, who successfully chased out Serbia's local allies by February and established a so-called "national assembly" in Elbasan. This changed the dynamics of Central Albanian domestic politics, which had been further animated by Zogu's support from Vienna and its locally based representative [August Kral \(1869-1953\)](#). In a matter of months, a sizable coalition of vetted local allies helped forge a committee on 29 April 1916 to help Austrian administrators manage the crucial Spring/Summer harvest period.

Indeed, under Zogu's initiative and often public outreach to Austria for support, the aim of this assembly was to reconstitute a complete territorial Albania that reflected the notion of ethno-nationality promoted during the negotiations in London in 1913.^[19]

As such, Zogu provided a ready-made infrastructure for the Austrians in their drive to assure that the Bulgarians and Italians did not fill in the vacuum left behind by the defeated Serbian army. This committee based in Shkodër served to help rebuild the productive capacity of these rich regions, a service as much addressing the needs of the Austrian Army as rehabilitating local communities. In time, however, the heavy-handed sequestration of local production produced tensions. For Ahmed Zogu, his close association with the Austrians resulted in difficulties with his local allies who all expressed their frustration at Austrian officials' overt attempts to exploit local compliance.^[20]

While Austrian forces may have earned momentary support from many locals eager to throw out Serbia's occupation forces, the administration soon lost the population's favor. The Austrians were often resented for their exploitation of the economic dependency of locals. As highlighted in correspondence between [Faik Konizza \(1875-1942\)](#) and [Dervish Bey Elbasani \(1867-1918\)](#), Albanians were especially frustrated with Austrian administrators' exploitative demands of money in return for their 'protection.' In what appeared to be a precarious security situation, the selective use of Austrian firepower to protect only those willing to pay for their services quickly pushed many Albanians into open opposition. Beyond this classic "security racket," Konizza reported that Austrian officials constantly cheated locals by way of their control of official money supplies, with all transactions in Austrian paper crowns. Albanians who were long users of Ottoman and French gold coin were forced to exchange their preferred currency for Austrian notes, a frustration compounded by the fact that Austrian officials "cheated" locals with artificially low exchange rates: an Ottoman gold pound exchanged for twenty-two paper crowns while a gold napoleon was valued at nineteen paper crowns. As Konizza wrote to Devish Bey Elbasani, however:

this is theft pure and simple since on the Vienna exchange a Turkish pound is worth more than 32 crowns and a napoleon more than 30. If the government buys something from the peasants it pays them in Austrian banknotes; but with these same notes, the peasants cannot buy anything from the government, which only wants to receive gold. The Wiener Bank Verein itself in Scutari [Shkodër] does not accept Austrian crowns.^[21]

In such abusive conditions, disgruntled local partners increasingly sought opportunities to partner with rival states. This eventually included Ahmed Zogu and the Elbasan assembly he created. Ironically, as [Joseph Swire \(1903-1978\)](#) would later write, Austria feared most the negotiations Zogu had conducted with Bulgarian officials to reestablish an independent Albanian state.^[22] As evident throughout the region, Sofia was keen on negotiating with Albanians who could help secure Bulgaria's 1916 territorial gains in Macedonia. As Austria had to balance the frustrations their measures were creating among Albanians with the larger geostrategic concerns of keeping Greece out of the hands of the Entente powers, government officials granted autonomy on 10 March 1917 to Albanians living under their occupation authority.

While Austrian administration of Northern Albania and Kosovo faced eventual challenges from many living in the region, including prominent Albanian rebel groups around Azem Galicia (later famous for its interwar struggle against Serbian occupation), it was the Albanian regions south of Elbasan that proved the most volatile. As evident from his contact with Bulgarians, Zogu clearly had ambitions that threatened Vienna's diplomatic overtures to Greece. Moreover, despite participating in campaigns to expel Serb forces from Albania prior to 1916, Zogu established links with [Nikola Pašić \(1845-1926\)](#), laying the foundations of a long-term relationship with Serbia after the war.^[23]

It is somewhat ironic that Austrian efforts to placate Greek nationalists' sentiments may have ultimately undermined their efforts to secure most of Albania. While Bulgaria threatened to exploit the weak Greek hold on the generally resistant Albanian-speaking population throughout Epirus, its troops could not break into southern Albania fast enough to exploit Zogu's activities in the region. As a result, by June 1916, French troops were able to secure key areas around Korçë, Manastir (Bitola), and Lake Prespa. By November of 1916, France had formally signed a truce with local Albanians.^[24]

French Occupation of Southern Albania, 1916-1920

Despite the tensions arising from the possibility of an indigenous force securing southern Albania for the expanding Bulgarian and Austrian armies, the primary issue facing the Entente powers in the area was Italy's unilateral decision to send troops to occupy Albania. The quest to halt Italian expansion in part proved important in a southern Albanian context because such an intervention allowed for the development of new alliance-building policies that would assure a Korçë-based, Orthodox Christian Albanian political elite to emerge, led in 1920 by [Fan Noli \(1882-1965\)](#).^[25] At the time of French expansion into Albania, however, the recruitment of Essad Pasha Toptani, Noli's archenemy, would also prove crucial.^[26]

Such an alliance permitted France to secure influence over events in much of Southern Albania for the rest of the war. More importantly, occupation helped control what was promising to be a messy confrontation between potential allies - Greece and Italy - over the spoils of southern Albania.^[27] Pertinent here is the fact French authorities, as the Austrians would do in 1917, decided to empower local Albanians in order to help facilitate the peaceful administration of the territory. This overture to local stakeholders was initiated by a 10 November 1916 agreement that sought to stabilize what seemed to the French at the time to be a dangerously unstable situation.

What made the region fragile were the activities of men like Essad Pasha from central Albania and locals with strong ties to the Bulgarian state, such as [Themistokli Germanji \(1871-1917\)](#).^[28] A native of the Korçë region, Germanji had been based in Sofia since 1912 because of the Greek occupation of his home region after the first Balkan War. From Sofia, with the assistance of the Bulgarian government, he formed a considerable network of exiled Albanians spread throughout the southern Balkans. His activities included organizing the armed resistance against Greek forces that eventually forced the occupying army to retreat. Germanji's units also posed a threat to the French forces led by General [Henri Descoings \(1869-1928\)](#), whose task by occupying Korçë was to ensure that the region did not fall into the hands of the Bulgarians or Austrians.^[29] It was thus key for Bulgarian forces arriving in southern Kosovo and Macedonia to have Germanji work in tandem with a Bulgarian Muslim, [Hasan Bastria \(1887-1967\)](#) also known as Bastri Bey, to undermine French efforts. More than simply support guerilla units, Bastri Bey, who had been an Ottoman administrator and deputy based in Dibre a decade earlier, worked with Germanji on behalf of the Bulgarian quest to secure a calm and useful collaboration between local Albanians and its occupation regime based in neighboring Macedonia.^[30]

It was during this "very delicate" situation that the French military administration signed protocol with local Albanians in order to hand over to them much of the day-to-day administration. Such a gesture seems to have been made to at least assuage Germanji and thus halt his military resistance.^[31] Subduing Germanji's resistance was so crucial because of his complicated relationship with other Albanians. As a major rival to Essad Pasha Toptani, the officially recognized "President" of Albania, Germanji proved a continuous headache for the French administration and the War Ministry.^[32] Ultimately, the rivalry and the violence accompanying this struggle led the French to make the unpopular decision of executing Germanji after his capture in October 1917.^[33]

Realizing their fragile position, French authorities attempted to placate locals by allowing the creation of an autonomous "Albanian" republic whereby natives of all faiths formed and ran the government. Such a move had a long-term impact as the core group formed around this autonomous regime would become the foundation for postwar state-building efforts in Albania. Among other things permitted by this agreement was the permission for the local committee to fly its own "national" flag, administer schools in the Albanian language, and actively shut down Greek-imposed institutions established during occupation.^[34] Indeed, this administration took the form of a "Republic," which even the chief French authorities noted was enthusiastically embraced by, among others, local publishers who thrived under the relative freedom offered Albanians with the arrival of the French.^[35] In this respect, France seemed open to the idea of creating an independent Albanian state, in direct contradiction to would-be allies who coveted these same lands as their exclusive zones of influence. Among other things, the French operations around Korçë blocked [Eleutherios Venizelos' \(1864-1936\)](#) allies from formally laying claim to the area.

As instability in southern Albania continued to spread, in part because of Germanji's continued activity, the violence invited the ambitions of Austrian-supported Zogu. As a result of the subsequent fear that Greece would insist on invading and reoccupying the area, in direct confrontation with Zogu and the Serbs, both Italy and France agreed that a joint occupation of this region was necessary.^[36] With this alliance against the Germans/Ottomans/Austrians proving successful in reconstituting itself by late 1917 to the point of actually pushing the Bulgarians and Austrians back, the utility of local partnerships with the French became marginal. Reflective of this changing dynamic was the decision on 16 February 1918 to roll back the quasi-independent Albanian-run administration around Korçë. This was done in large part to placate Greek interests whose role became crucial to French interests elsewhere.^[37] While useful for France's post-war agenda in Anatolia and Middle East, these concessions to Greek nationalists at the expense of Albanian allies proved detrimental to domestic stability.^[38]

This maneuvering really took form in Albania once the tide of the war in the Balkans changed to favor the Entente Powers. As soon as Austrian-Bulgarian forces began to lose ground, the rivalries between future Italian interests and their French and Greek

allies came to a head. By 30 September, Bulgaria's formal defeat and Austria's withdrawal resulted in a 7 October 1918 agreement in Paris, led by [Georges Clemenceau \(1841-1929\)](#), to allow Italian troops to replace the French based in Korçë. Tensions grew, however, as these same allies disagreed about what role Serbian troops, whose ambitions were to reoccupy Kosovo and assure Belgrade's access to the Adriatic, would play.^[39] Indeed, with the help of the French, Serb troops were the first to arrive in Shkodër, once again pitting Italy against its former allies in World War I.

Italy's Push for Albanian Independence

It is in the context of the last months of the formal war that many of these rival local actors started to identify new opportunities by forging political alliances with other Albanians under the banner of a unified Albania. These forces, however, were primarily found among hitherto disparate Orthodox Christian and Southern Muslim (Bektashi) Albanians (Tosks). These groups' links with well-funded diaspora communities proved crucial to developing a new kind of activism. Contrary to assertions made in the nationalist historiography in Albania, however, the primary push factor behind these ignited "nationalist" projects was the recognition by these same external actors that the creation of an "independent" Albania could serve each of its neighboring countries' interests. The idea for the Italians, British, French, Serbians, and even the Greeks was that Albania could serve as a surrogate for each polity's own long-term interests. What the creation of an independent, weak Albanian state assured was a barrier to any one regional state fully dominating the region. For this, French troops took the aggressive approach of expanding the formal occupation of Central and Northern Albania. To ensure this, General [Louis Franchet d'Espèrey \(1856-1942\)](#) led troops to Durrës and even bombarded the port on 2 October, 1918 in order to thwart the evacuation of the Bulgarian and German armies and presumably to keep the Serbs and Italians separated.

As far as Italy was concerned, it was the extent to which Entente Powers' overtures to the then defeated and thus state-less Serbian political elite was willing to fight for a reconstituted southern Slav territory, with Serbia's formal domination of all of Austria's Slav territories (Croatia, Dalmatia, Herzegovina, Slavonia) that made it especially clear to Rome that a long-term threat to their Adriatic interests existed. Simply put, the partition of Albania between Greece and Serbia did not address Italian interests. For their part, the Italians hoped to allow Albanians living under their zones of occupation to autonomously manage the day-to-day affairs of their communities. Indeed, catering to the interests of allied Albanians would be the primary agenda of a faction within the Italian policy-making elite, leading to a 3 June 1917 declaration that all of Albania would be unified and independent under Italian protection.^[40]

When the war ended on 11 November 1918, Italy's army successfully established troops in most of Albania with Serbia holding the northern mountain regions and Greece some land within Albania's 1913 borders. In this way, geography, and the strategic concerns of outsiders both assured Albania's permanent instability and paradoxically guaranteed its utility as a distinctive entity and thus its very existence in the 20th century. In the end, what "saved" Albania was Italy's need for protection from Slavic or Greek hegemony; in other words, the occupied country remained diplomatically valuable because its independence assured the long-term peace in a postwar Balkans.^[41]

Conclusion

The cynicism of the Great Powers in waging their "principled" wars against German and Muslim/Turkish "tyranny" was most reflected in their secret agreements to divide up the territories of defeated rivals. Such betrayals in the form of secret diplomacy, the 1915 pact, for instance, divided Albania to satiate the territorial demands of smaller regional allies, Serbia and Greece.

By 1918, these ambitions to create proxy independent or autonomous states to serve the strategic needs of neighboring countries had become the constituent interests of a number of Albanians who would lead the way for the creation of a unified Albanian entity in 1920. In light of these events, we are often asked to consider this period in three distinctive phases. The first being Albania's abandonment by the concert of powers who had just recently agreed to protect an Albanian state in the London Conference of 1913. With the outbreak of war, however, all agreements between Germany, Austro-Hungary and the Ottomans with Britain and France lost all relevance. As such, Albania's status in the world was open for reinterpretation. The subsequent period was the actual occupation by foreign armies of Albania, with each trying to work with cooperative locals to administer occupation governments. This period thus contributed to each region's separate development from 1914-1918. The last period would see Albanians forming four rival groups whose regionalism complicated the process of reconstituting Albania which was deemed crucial by the victors of World War I.

These rival groups were highlighted here because they not only reformulated and successfully survived the latter part of the war, but they also influenced the post-war process of building an independent state. Crucially, just as during the war, these factions first and foremost protected what were deemed local concerns; periodic efforts to work towards creating an Albanian nation-state should thus be considered a product of temporary interests, rather than a national polity's fundamental ideological orientation. The primary actors in the north were Essad Pasha Toptani, vacillating between alliances with Italy and Serbia, and Prenk Bib Doda (Pasha), whose resurrected role in his native Mirdita region would prove opportunistic for the creation of an exclusively Catholic polity during the war and briefly, with Serbian encouragement, in the early 1920s.^[42]

Isa Blumi, Georgia State University and Universität Leipzig

Section Editors: [Richard C. Hall](#); [Tamara Scheer](#); [Milan Ristović](#)

Notes

1. ↑ See for instance, Yavuz, M. Hakan and Sluglett, Peter (eds.): *War & Diplomacy: The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the Treaty of Berlin*. Salt Lake City, 2011 and Yavuz, M. Hakan / Blumi, Isa (eds.): *War & Nationalism: The Balkan Wars (1912-1913) and Socio-Political Implications*. Salt Lake City, 2013.
2. ↑ Hanioğlu, M. Şükrü: *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*. Princeton, 2008, pp. 150-202 and Malcolm, Noel: *Kosovo: A Short History*. New York, 1999, pp. 239-263.
3. ↑ While there are some useful summary descriptions of these events in the secondary literature, any useful reinterpretation of events requires investigating the archives of concerned outside parties. The [Austro-Hungarian](#) government was very much aware of the chaos their competition with [Italy](#), [Serbia](#), and [Montenegro](#) had been causing in the Albanian lands. This is described in considerable detail in reports sent by the Military Attaché in Istanbul as late as January 1912. See HHStA PA XIV 40, Military Attaché to Foreign Ministry, dated Istanbul, 14 January 1912. For a local perspective of Albanian-Ottomans late in 1913, especially regarding their plight in the country, a matter of concern for influential members of the diaspora in Vienna, see AQSH F. 56, d. 85, E. Vlora to E. Libohova, dated Vienna, 19 November 1913, written in Ottoman.
4. ↑ On how Serbia patronized various local Albanian agents in this period, see Vučković, Vojislav: *Spoljna politika Srbije za vlade kneza Mihaila. Prvi balkanski savez*. [The Foreign Policy of Serbia under Prince Mihailo. The First Balkan Alliance]. Belgrade, 1963.
5. ↑ Albanian-language literature on these periods uniformly characterize these events in nationalist terms and the participants as dedicated to creating a unified Albanian state, a distortion discussed in Blumi, Isa: *Reinstating the Ottomans: Alternative Balkan Modernities, 1800-1912*. Palgrave, 2011, pp. 31-61.
6. ↑ The literature remains largely inadequate for appreciating the depth of the issues at play. Some recent corrections have added complexity to an otherwise simplistic storyline long supported in official nationalist historiographies in the Balkans. See for instance Guy, Nicola: *The Birth of Albania: Ethnic Nationalism, the Great Powers of World War I and the Emergence of Albanian Independence*. London, 2013, pp. 16-86.
7. ↑ The extent of this intervention was the appointment of a Christian-German “Prince” to help integrate the highly coveted, mineral rich area into the Western European fold. The isolated government of Prince Wilhelm lasted but six months, collapsing in September 1914 in face of domestic rivalries over what was clearly a region in utter disarray. See Heaton-Armstrong, D (Belfield, G. and Destani, B. eds.): *The Six Month Kingdom: Albania 1914*. London, 2005 and NAUK, FO 421/292, report no. 39, Lamb to Grey, dated 17 March 1914.
8. ↑ Guy, *The Birth of Albania* 2013, pp. 55-61.
9. ↑ For how Austria-Hungary finally made concessions to Serbia regarding western Kosovo being incorporated into formal Serbian administrative control, see report written by P. Cambon, dated London, 22 March 1913 in *Documents Diplomatique Français*, 3ème série, T. VI, doc. 49, pp. 70-71.
10. ↑ As reported by Herman C. Norman, London, 26 March 1913, document number 755, found in *British Documents on the Origins of the War*, v. IX, P.II,(London 1934), 618-619.
11. ↑ The best research on this period remains Shpuza, Gazmend: *Kryengritja Fshatare e Shqipërisë së Meseme, 1914-1915*. Tirana 1986.
12. ↑ From Austrian reports, we learn that Essad Pasha Toptani sent delegations to explore the Habsburg Empire’s willingness to pay for his services, which ultimately were secured by the French. See HHStV PA XIV 60/30, d. 263-267, delegation submission dated Durazzo, 10 March 1915. As far as the role of Ottoman loyalists, who sought the appointment of an Ottoman prince to rule Albania, not only would the Ottoman flag once again fly above Albanian territories during the *Shiak* insurgency against Wilhelm, but the alliance would initiate contacts with a number of foreign interests that assured Albanian domestic politics would be slave to foreign intrigue for decades to come. On these Muslim efforts to reinstate the Ottoman Empire in Albania, see NAUK, FO 421/293, report no. 129, Lamb to Grey, dated 27 May 1914 and Ayışığı, Metin: *Mareşal Ahmet İzzet Paşa (Askeri ve Siyasi Hayatı)* [Marshal Ahmet İzzet Pasha. His Military and Political Life]. Ankara, 1997, pp. 121-127.

13. ↑ Vučković, Spoljna politika Srbije [The Foreign Policy of Serbia under Prince Mihailo.] 1963, pp. 241-245.
14. ↑ Mitrović, Andrej: Serbia's Great War, 1914-1915. London, 1988, pp. 132-135.
15. ↑ For an excellent summary of this entire period, see Guy, The Birth of Albania 2013, pp. 125-131.
16. ↑ On the growing rivalry between Italian industrialists and Austrian rivals, see Jones, Simon M.: Domestic Factors in Italian Intervention in the First World War. New York, 1986, pp. 78-123.
17. ↑ Outlined by a memorandum sent by the secretary-general of the foreign ministry, De Martino, to Antonio di San Giuliano in September 1914 who saw Austrian attacks on Serbia as a direct threat to Italian economic interests because Austrian rail lines could then link the Danube directly to the Adriatic, cutting out Italian ports as a result. In this sense, Italian efforts for much of the war aimed to insure that no single state had such advantages to threaten Italian Adriatic economic interests. See DDI, Series 5, vol. 1 dated Roma, 4 September 1914, 328-332. For more straight forward analysis of Italian policies leading up to the War, see Bosworth, R.J.B: Italy, the Least of the Great Powers: Italian Foreign Policy before the First World War. Cambridge, 1979.
18. ↑ Events as understood from British intelligence, NAUK, FO 371/2619, Intelligence Memorandum no. 210652, dated 20 October 1916.
19. ↑ For a useful chronology of Ahmed Zogu's career, see Pearson, Owen: Albania and King Zog, Independence, Republic and Monarchy, 1908-1939. London, 2006.
20. ↑ Hrabak, Bogumil: Muslimani severne Albanije i Srbija uoči izbijanja rata 1914. Godine [Muslims of Northern Albania and Serbia at the outbreak of the 1914 War.], in: Zbornik za istoriju Matice srpske 22 (1980), pp.49-82.
21. ↑ Faik Konitza to Dervish Bey Elbasani, dated Vienna, 6 September 1916, in Bejtullah Destani (ed.), Faik Konitza: Selected Correspondence, 1896-1942, London 2000, p. 79.
22. ↑ Joseph Swire, Albania, the Rise of a Kingdom, 929.
23. ↑ Rahimi, Shaba: Bashkëpunimi i Ahmet Muhtarit nga Mati me Serbinë me mospajtimet e tij me Esat pasha, Toptanit gjatë vitit 1915 , [The Collaboration of Ahmet Muhtari from Mati with Serbia and his Rivalry with Esat Pasha Toptani during 1915], in: Gjurime Albanologjike 11 (1981), pp. 196-215.
24. ↑ NAUK, FO 371/2623 report no. 219594, Elliot to Grey, dated 1 November 1916.
25. ↑ For details of this southern Albanian nationalist's rise and short-lived postwar government, see Austin, Robert C.: Founding a Balkan State: Albania's Experiment with Democracy, 1920-1925. Toronto 2013.
26. ↑ Recognized by France at this time as the President of the Albanian government-in-exile, Essad Pasha would utilize his loyal troops as leverage to gain further concessions from the French throughout the war. For report on the machinations of Essad Pasha Toptani in light of this alliance, see MAE, AD, Vol. X (231), pages 1-4, 10-11, 155-156. De Fontain to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2 January 1917.
27. ↑ Exceptions being Popescu, Stefan: Les Français et la république de Kortcha. In: Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains 213 (2004/1), pp.77-87 and Augris, Etienne : Korçë dans la Grande Guerre, Le sud-est albanais sous administration française (1916-1918), in: Balkanologie 4/2 (2000).
28. ↑ French authorities recognized him as a principled man with nationalist integrity and thus needed to co-opt him, as they had successfully done with Essad Pasha. MAE, AD, Vol. X (231), pages 35-39, Report from Bagerton to MFA, dated 29 January 1917.
29. ↑ Descoins, Henri: Six mois d'histoire de l'Albanie (novembre 1916-mai 1917). Paris, 1930, p. 13.
30. ↑ DDI, Series IV col. XII, doc. 132, page 93, dated 23 July 1920.
31. ↑ MAE, AD, Vol. XIII-XIV (234), page 105, General Sarrail to Minister of War, nr. 7464/2 dated 13 September 1917.
32. ↑ Ministère de la Guerre de France. Archives Historiques (M.G, AH) Carton 20 N. 845, dossier 9, telegram from Colonel Descoins to General M. Sarrail, dated 20 December 1916.
33. ↑ An execution that caused considerable emotions in the streets of Salonika and throughout southern Albania. General Sarrail: Mon commandement en Orient (1916-1918). Paris,1920, pp. 287-288. Salle, Henri: L'occupation française en Albanie. In : Revue Politique et Parlementaire (10 September 1920), p. 411. Protests came from all corners, with 161 towns represented, including 89 Christians signing protest in Korçë. MAE, AD, Vol. XV (235), pages 176-177, Report from General in command to war ministry, report number 9.272/2, dated 25 March 1918.
34. ↑ Descoins, Six mois d'histoire 1917, pp. 25-26; Harizi, P.: Histori kronografike e quarkut të Korçës. Boston, 1919), p. 126. The resulting agreement produced instant results as officials reported that the moment the Albanian flag was raised, the open hostility to the French presence seemed to melt away. Ministère des Affaires Etrangères de France (MAE) Archives X Diplomatiques, Guerre 1914-1918, Balkans (Albanie), vol. X (231), pp. 237-244, dated Rome, report from R. Vosher, 20 November 1916.
35. ↑ Two papers endorsed the French presence whose administration immediately allowed these papers to open their operations, *Koha*, 17 July 1916 and *Dielli* 12 August 1916. Newspapers of organization *Ylli i Mëngjezit*, vol. I, number 4, dated 28 February 1917, pp. 109-110 and *Dielli*, dated 10 December 1918. Indeed many Albanians in the diaspora also saw the move a positive one as groups like Boston-based *Vatra* actively promoted Albanian's value to the Entente war efforts. See Descoins, Six mois d'histoire 1930, p. 52.
36. ↑ It should be noted that, according to some considering French actions, the areas' rich mines certainly gave French incentive to take the initiative. Guy, The Birth of Albania 2013, p. 136.
37. ↑ The Greek invasion of western Anatolia would help distract the still formidable resistance of the Ottoman Army from challenging French territorial ambitions in the Eastern Mediterranean.

38. ↑ Pearson, Albania 2006, p. 111. Indeed, French occupation operations explicitly stated that they would fly the French flag exclusively in occupied zones as of September 1918. MG AH, Carton 20 number 924, letter from Reinar Lespinas to commander of French forces in Macedonia, number 7/258, dated 29 March 1919.
39. ↑ Guy, The Birth of Albania 2013, p. 141.
40. ↑ NAUK, FO 371/2878, no. 63552, Nabokoff to Campbell, dated 25 March 1917.
41. ↑ Swire, Albania 1929, pp. 274-276.
42. ↑ Violence accompanied this transitional era, as expanding Serbian/Montenegrin states imposed on the peoples of Kosovo the kind of violence other postwar societies would face in similar integrationist processes. Newman, John P.: Post-imperial and Post-war: Violence in the South Slav Lands, 1917-1923. In, Contemporary European History 19/3 (2010), pp. 249-265.

Selected Bibliography

- Augris, Etienne: **Korçë dans la Grande Guerre. Le sud-est albanais sous administration française (1916-1918)** in: Balkanologie 4/2, 2000.
- Austin, Robert C.: **Founding a Balkan state. Albania's experiment with democracy, 1920-1925**, Toronto; Buffalo 2012: University of Toronto Press.
- Ayışığı, Metin: **Mareşal Ahmet İzzet Paşa. Askerî ve siyasi hayatı (Marshal Ahmet Izzet Pasha. His military and political life)**, Ankara 1997: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi.
- Blumi, Isa: **Reinstating the Ottomans. Alternative Balkan modernities, 1800-1912**, New York 2011: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bosworth, Richard J. B.: **Italy, the least of the great powers. Italian foreign policy before the First World War** Cambridge 1979: Cambridge University Press.
- Destani, Bejtullah D. (ed.): **Faik Konitza. Selected correspondence, 1896-1942**, London 2000: Centre for Albanian Studies.
- Gilliard, Pierre: **Thirteen years at the Russian court**, New York 1970: Arno Press.
- Guy, Nicola: **The birth of Albania. Ethnic nationalism, the great powers of World War I and the emergence of Albanian independence**, London; New York 2012: I. B. Tauris.
- Hanioğlu, M. Şükrü: **A brief history of the late Ottoman Empire**, Princeton 2008: Princeton University Press.
- Heaton-Armstrong, Duncan: **The six month kingdom. Albania 1914**, London; New York 2005: I. B. Tauris; Centre for Albanian Studies.
- Henri Descoins: **Six mois d'histoire de l'Albanie (novembre 1916-mai 1917)**, Paris 1930: A. Costes.
- Hrabak, Bogumil: **Muslimani severne Albanije i Srbija uoči izbijanja rata 1914 godine (Muslims of Northern Albania and Serbia at the outbreak of the 1914 War)**, in: Zbornik za istoriju Matice srpske (Proceedings in Serbian Cultural History) 22, 1980, pp. 49-82.
- Jaksić, Grgur / Tadić, Jorjo / Vučković, Vojislav J.: **Spoljna politika Srbije za vlade kneza Mihaila. Prvi balkanski savez (The foreign policy of Serbia under Prince Mihailo. The First Balkan Alliance)**, Belgrade 1963: Izd. Istoriski Institut.
- Jones, Simon Mark: **Domestic factors in Italian intervention in the First World War** New York 1986: Garland.
- Malcolm, Noel: **Kosovo. A short history**, New York 1998: New York University Press.
- Mitrović, Andrej: **Serbia's Great War, 1914-1918**, West Lafayette 2007: Purdue University Press.
- Newman, John Paul: **Post-imperial and Post-war Violence in the South Slav Lands, 1917–1923** in: Contemporary European History 19/03, 2010, pp. 249-265.
- Popescu, Stefan: **Les Français et la république de Kortcha (1916-1920)**, in: Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains/213 , 2004, pp. 77-87.
- Shabam Rahimi: **Bashkëpunimi i Ahmet Muhtarit nga Mati me Serbinë me mospajtimet e tij me Esat pasha, Toptanit gjate vitit 1915 (The Collaboration of Ahmet Muhtari from Mati with Serbia and his Rivalry with Esat Pasha Toptani during 1915)**, in: Gjurime Albanologjike 11, 1981, pp. 196-215.
- Shpuza, Gazmend: **Kryengritja fshatare e Shqipërisë së Mesme, 1914-15 (Peasant Uprisings in Central Albania, 1914-15)**, Tiranë 1986: Akademia e Shkencave e RPS të Shqipërisë, Instituti i Historisë.
- Swire, Joseph: **Albania. The rise of a kingdom**, London 1929: William & Norgate.
- Yavuz, M. Hakan / Blumi, Isa (eds.): **War and nationalism. The Balkan wars, 1912-1913, and their sociopolitical implications**, Salt Lake City 2013: The University of Utah Press.
- Yavuz, M. Hakan / Sluglett, Peter (eds.): **War and diplomacy. The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the Treaty of Berlin**, Salt Lake City 2011: University of Utah Press.

Citation

Blumi, Isa: Albania , in: 1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2014-10-08.
DOI: [10.15463/ie1418.10197](https://doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.10197).

License

This text is licensed under: CC by-NC-ND 3.0 Germany - Attribution, Non-commercial, No Derivative Works.