

Austria-Hungary and the Albanian Project

A Comparative Case Study: Between support and imperialism

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Introduction

The Decisions of the Congress of Berlin in 1878 molded a new map of the Balkans, where the insurgencies, revolts and discontent of the natives and Ottoman authorities were constant. Between attrition and expansion, Austria-Hungary thought to pursue a policy of “peaceful penetration”, where a possible exit to Thessaloniki would have secured the long-sought dream of a gateway in the riches of the Orient. In this prospect after the oppression of the Albanian League of Prizren in 1878, the diplomatic missions of Danubian Monarchy started to show more interest to the Albanian political element.

The diplomats in the Ballhausplatz foresaw a possible collapse of the Ottoman Empire and this prediction became a sour reality during the Crete Crisis and the Greek-Ottoman War in 1896/1897. At the same time the uncertainties grew from the possible cooperation of the Serbian-Montenegrin forces along with the Italians in the Western Balkans. In order to remedy this situation and to put the entire Albanian policy of the Monarchy on a broader and more successful basis, were organized three secret conferences (political readings). The possible triggers for these confidential discussions were the current Crete crisis in 1896 and two memorandums from two prominent southern Albanian Muslim notables, Ferit Bey Vlora (ex-Grand Vizier of the Sublime Porte) and his brother Syrja Bey Vlora addressed to Ballhausplatz in the same year, through the mediation of the Austro-Hungarian ambassador in Constantinople Heinrich von Calice. If the Viennese “Albanian Action” would have been successful, the Monarchy would have established a protectorate over the Albanian territories while maintaining Ottoman sovereignty and driven a wedge between Montenegro and Serbia by means of the western Sandshak of Novipazar.

Two decades later in 1916, the situation in the peninsula had changed drastically, where the “peaceful penetration” policy had surrendered to the force of arms. Two Balkan Wars, the decisions of the London Treaty and the entry into the Great War after the assassination of the *Thronfolger* in Sarajevo, had reframed the geopolitical objectives and interests of the Monarchy in the area. Albania had won the independence after many deliberations and bargains over her borders, later to fall into a civil war in 1914-1916. Austria-Hungary in the same prospect had struggled in a war in three different fronts: Italy, Russia and the Balkans. After three Austro-Hungarian offensives, the end of 1915 brought greater military and diplomatic success for the Central Powers, with the entry of Bulgaria in the war on 14th of October 1915 and the fall of Serbia along with the expected conquest of Montenegro.

Following these military victories, in early 1916 it was organized the meeting of Councils of Ministers for the Commons Affairs (GMR). In this meeting the joint Ministers made a number of adjustments to the *War Aims* initially proposed on the GMR of 19th of June 1914, and subsequently dealt with a number of issues, such as the legal base and administration method of the new conquered areas. The main debated topics were those related with the Austro-Hungarian imperial policies over Poland and Serbia. Leading to the question of how to deal with the Slavic population of the newly acquired territories, it was brought up the Albanian problem and a possible reshaping of her territories and status as an independent state.

Secret Conferences of 1896

Between 17th of November and 23rd of December 1896, were organized three secret conferences in the Ballhausplatz in Vienna, the outcome of which was a Memorandum and a new position regarding the Austro-Hungarian foreign policy in South-Eastern Europe. Under the title "*Eine energische Aktion*" the secret sessions lead by the Joint Foreign Minister, Count Agenor Gołuchowski, proposed the creation of an independent Principality of Albania.¹ Following the tradition of the Ministerium des Äußern (MdÄ), the conferences were held secretly, especially due to the sensitive nature of the policies discussed. The other institutional bodies, such as the respective parliaments and governments, were informed in a later date via formal acts on the position of the Ministry and its organs.

The following actors took part in the conference: Joint Foreign Minister Agenor Gołuchowski, the Joint Finance Minister Benjámín Kállay, the ex-minister and extraordinary ambassador Erich Zwiedineck, the Head of Section for the Orient in MdÄ Eduard Horowitz, the General Consul Norbert Schmucker, and the Consul Constantin Baum acting as secretary for the three conferences. Beside the participants, in the second and third conference took part also von Fuchs as diplomat and adviser for the K.u.K court.

1st Secret meeting (17th of November 1896)

The first speaker of this secret session was the Joint Foreign Minister Gołuchowski. He initially made a statement on the foreign policy of Austria-Hungary toward the Balkan areas. After the decisions of the Congress of Berlin and a number of incidents in the region, it was projected that the Ottoman rule over *Rumeli* could not be sustained for long. In case the territories would be dismantled from competing Great Powers, an analysis of the interests of the Danube Monarchy had to be assessed. Of great relevance was the position of the Albanian Catholic populations of the north and the Muslim ones in the south, and in the opinion of Gołuchowski, these Albanian speaking territories should be independent in the form of a principality under the protectorate of Austria-Hungary.²

¹ HHStA, PA I, k. 473. See also the wonderful book of T.Toleva *Der Einfluss Österreich-Ungarns auf die Bildung der albanischen Nation 1896–1908*, and the analyzes done by the book of K. Gostentschnigg, *Wissenschaft im Spannungsfeld von Politik und Militär*, 347–357.

² Ibid. k. 473.

In the opinion of the minister, Vienna should not be unprepared if the rule of the Ottoman authorities in the area cease to exist. The interest of the rivaling powers (Russian Empire and Italy) and the Balkan countries were known, and the power vacuum would soon be filled if the Monarchy would not act in advance. For this reason, the speaker advocated for further preparation in the diplomatic corpus in the area of interest. Additionally, it was proposed to test a possible cooperation with Greece. Her interests were well-known in the southern *vilayet* of Ioannina up to the Shkumbini River in central Albania. According to Gołuchowski, securing a possible agreement with the Greek counterpart could pose a barrier for the expanding influence and interest of Italy.

The second speaker of the conference was Joint Minister of Finance Kállay. In his opening statement he agreed with Gołuchowski on the geopolitical necessity of the Monarchy in having an independent Albania. But he underlined a number of difficulties for the realization of Albanian project. The main issues were related with the internal divisions between the Albanians (regional, linguistic and religious), the lack of a historical Albanian state in the past and the absence of a middle class, from where the social and political life was not subjected to small local personal interests.³

The action, on the other side was facilitated by a number of positive elements. The most important one was the rising belief among the Albanians that they could not endure as a nation without the “help of a Great Power”.⁴ On the long run, with a proper strategy of action, the majority of Muslim Albanians, would understand, and accept that salvation for their current geopolitical situation would not come from Constantinople, but from the creation of an independent principality. The minister and other participants, held the view that the Catholics of the north wouldn’t had any objections, since historically they had found support via the *Kultusprotektorat* of the Monarchy.

Kállay proposed a number of additional measures. He advised that initially the action had to be implemented in the Catholic areas, gradually and simultaneously to be introduced later on into the Muslim ones. It was pivotal that the measures shouldn’t be seen by the Muslim community as an imperial Catholic action. The smuggling of weapons and ammunition had to continue, especially in the Kosovo and Shkoder *vilayets*, and by doing so, disrupting a possible cooperation of the mountainous tribes with the Montenegrin authorities against the Monarchy. Beside the weapon and propaganda support, a third pillar would had

³ HHStA, PA I, k. 473, Fol.100.

⁴ In 1896 the Albanian nobleman Surya (alb. Syrja) Bey Vlora, the brother of the previous Ottoman Grand vizier Ferit Bey, wrote a Memorandum addressed to the Ministerium des Äußern. In his memo, Surya Bey posed the view that the rule of the Ottomans would fall soon in the Balkans and the Albanians needed to seek the support of a new Great Power to help them elevate as a nation. A part from his memorandum: “We the Albanians, know very well that sooner or later the Turkish rule in Europe will end. The Epirotes will be taken by Greece, the Bulgarians as well from Bulgaria and the Serbians will go to Serbia or Montenegro. What about us, the Albanians, what it will happen? As I know well the soul of my fellow Albanian patriots, we will be favorized if we fall under the protectorate of Austria-Hungary, through the creation of an autonomous province. Italy has never been popular among us, despite the propaganda of some priests and Italian diplomats in Albania. If we as Muslim must be integrated under a foreign government, because for the moment we do not possess the necessary maturity to establish an independent Albania, we prefer Austria-Hungary over any other foreign power. Even the lowest strata of our people know until what point the Austro-Hungarian government respects our religions and customs.” Ibid. Fol. 173.

been the wide financial and material support for the Albanian leaders [done discreetly to the Ottoman authorities], who would agree with the course of action proposed by Ballhausplatz.

Regarding the cooperation with Greece for a joint policy toward Albania, Zwiedineck argued that the vilayet of Ioannina had to be excluded from the course of action, because the Hellenization process was in an advanced phase. Kállay in principle accepted the proposition for a cooperation with Greece. But before excluding the *vilayet* of Ioannina from the course of action, he wanted to test in reality how strong was the Greek influence in the Albanian speaking areas of Epirus.

2nd secret meeting (8th of December 1896)

The previous conference was concluded with the assignment of Schmucker and Zwiedineck to the task of producing a concrete study in relation with the possibilities, circumstances and situation of the discussed areas. After three weeks, the two experts produced a report titled “*Memorandum über Albanien*”, which served as the main subject of analyzes of the second secret conference. The speaker for it was Zwiedineck and it was comprised into three main topics: the action area, the political and national conditions of Albania and finally the action measures.

The action area:

According to Zwiedineck, there was no clear political and geographical territories, where the Albanians were localized as political-administrative entity in the Ottoman territories in the Balkans. Under this auspice, the imperial authorities had to draw imaginary lines on areas where the Albanian element among the population was dominant. In this regard, in the north, the border passed through Montenegro and Bosnia, and partially in the southern part of Serbia, while the Adriatic Sea served as a natural border in the west. In the east, it was defined by the line Kostur – Manastir – Ohri – Vrranjë – Prishtinë – Novipazar, while the southerner border run along the line Preveza – Ioannina– Gjirokastër – Kostur.

The total population of the four Albanian *vilayets* was around 2.5 million inhabitants, according to the statistics of the Ballhausplatz. There were used two principles in the records: nationality and religion, and the Albanians were respectively 43% of the total population (around 1.1 million people),⁵ and none of the other nationalities passed this majority in any of the *vilayets*.

Zwiedineck continued his report in front of the other representatives by passing to the other element of analysis.⁶ The nation was comprised by two ethno-linguistic groups:

1) the *Gegë*, who were concentrated in majority on the *Vilayets* of Kosovo, Shkodra and Manastir, and used the Albanian dialect called *Gegërisht*. The *Gegë* were generally viewed as stronger physically, braver and with a stronger feeling of honor and independence. Their socio-economic structure was organized around the tribe (alb. *Fis*), and the areas where it was located. On top of the tribes stood as judge and military figures, the *Council of Elders*

⁵ HHStA, PA I, Fol. 170.

⁶ HHStA, PA I, K 473, Fol. 172 b.

or *Bayraktar* (Turkish for *Flag holder*), from where were taken the decisions of war and peace. Generally, they wrote their language in the Latin transcript among the Christians and by using mixed forms of Arabic-Ottoman Turkish transcripts among the Muslims. Among them, the main religious groups were the Catholic and the Sunni sect.

2) the *Toskë*, who were concentrated in majority in the *Vilayet* of Ioannina, were numerous after crossing the southern shore of the Shkumbini River and used the Albanian dialect called *Toskërisht*. Differently from the *Gegë*, they were characterized by three religious groups, two Muslim sects (the Sunni and the Bektashi) and the Christian orthodox sect. While the *Gegërisht* dialect was considered stronger and deeper into pronunciation, the *Toskërisht* dialect was softer and used generally Greek letters among the orthodox Albanians, and Arabic-Ottoman Turkish letters among the Muslims. The *Toskë* were viewed as more prone to foreign influence, and with deep penetration in the power courts in Greece and Ottoman Empire. The *Beys* of the south had more privileges in their respective areas of influence. Differently from the tribal lords of the north, there were visible clear distinctions on socio-economical terms between poor and rich Muslims. This characteristic made them more pragmatic and more dangerous to control. Under this auspice, the Baron proposed that the *Toskë*, would be excluded from the activity of the action plan.

Table 1. Demographic data from the report “Memorandum über Albanien”

Vilayets\Data	Surface area in km ²	Population		Religious affiliation		
		Total	Albanians	Muslim	Catholics	Orthodox
Shkodra ⁷	8190	241000	222000 (91.2%)	140000 (63%)	82000 (37%)	-
Kosovo ⁸	32000	865000	276000 (31.9%)	251000 (90.9%)	25000 (9.1%) ⁹	
Monastir ¹⁰ (Bitola)	32000	890000	250000 (28.1%)	250000 (100%)	-	-
Ioannina ¹¹ (Janina)	16664	510000	330000 (64.7%)	Approx.220000 (66.6%)	-	Approx.110000 (33.3%) ¹²
Total ¹³	88854	2506000	1078000 (43%)	861000 (79.8%)	Approx. 102000	Approx. 60000

⁷ Ibid. Fol. 170.

⁸ HHStA, PA I, K 473, Fol. 171 and 171 b.

⁹ Unclear the disposition of the believers between the two Christian sects.

¹⁰ Ibid. Fol. 171 b.

¹¹ HHStA, PA I, K 473, Fol. 172.

¹² The religious disposition of the Muslim and Orthodox community (Albanians) of Ioannina is unclear. The authorities couldn't distinguish between the Greek Orthodox, the Hellenized Orthodox Albanians and the Nationalist Orthodox Albanians, so approximately the Ballhausplatz judged that 1/3 of the population was Orthodox and the rest Muslim.

¹³ Regarding the religion affiliation, it's was difficult to do an assessment regarding the Albanian element, but the authorities calculated that 78-79% were Muslim and 21-22% were Christians, respectively 102000 Catholics and 60000 orthodox. The data between single invoices and total number differs, showing that the demographic sources Austria-Hungary had, were incomplete and approximate. HHStA, PA I, K 473, Fol. 170.

According to the analyzes, the two groups were foreign to each other in many elements, but there was no sign of hostility among them. No form of compact unity in nationalistic terms was evident between the two groups, while no political goal or common interest was visible. But, despite the many differences, the two groups had an agreement in broader political lines for an autonomous unified Albanian province.¹⁴ The continuous threat perceived generally by the Albanians from the interventions of the Russian Empire in the peninsula, had formed even among the loyal Muslim elements, the belief that the Austro-Hungarians would be their natural allies, in order to block “*the rising hated slavs*”,¹⁵ in case the Sublime Porte fails to protect them.

Zwiedineck based on the premises mentioned above, drove three general conclusions: 1) the Catholics of the north supported Austria-Hungary, 2) the orthodox of the south were oriented toward Greece and 3) the Muslims were loyal subjects to the government. This loyalty generally stemmed from two factors: the idea that Turkish rule was the only rule where their freedoms and privileges were secured and their social benefits would not be taken away; secondly, the religious imposition toward a Christian foreign power.¹⁶

As a final remark of this part of the report, from the reports of the former General consul in Shkodra Lippich¹⁷, the main difficulty of communication between the south and the north stemmed from the lack of a unified language and alphabet. The absence of this instrument had been detrimental toward the political goal of unification by the Dual Monarchy, and was accepted as a problem that had to be solved beforehand.¹⁸

The action measures:

The first proposed measure was the creation of a propaganda in the Albanian *vilayets*, that Austria-Hungary had no desire for territorial expansion in the mentioned areas. The goal was to promote the idea that the Monarchy was “*a supporter and protector of the Albanian people in case of the fall of the Ottoman Empire, [...] because [the action] it’s not about the invasion of their land by our side, but for defending and helping their endeavor for the creation of an autonomous Albania*”.¹⁹ For this reason, three sets of propositions were presented in order to raise the influence of Austria-Hungary among the Albanians: a) to the Catholic community²⁰, b) toward the Muslim community²¹, c) for the general public.²² The actions toward these three specific social communities were addressed in order to win their favorable support, mainly by giving regular payments to influential leaders, gifts, humani-

¹⁴ Ibid. Fol. 172 b.

¹⁵ HHStA, PA I, K 473, Fol. 173.

¹⁶ Ibid. Fol. 173 b.

¹⁷ Friedrich Lippich (1834–1888), served for 15 years (1864–1879) in the Albanian-speaking vilayets as vice-chancellor up to the status of General consul in Shkodra. His insight was valuable for the officials to produce the report of the conference. See E. Deusch, *Die effektiven Konsuln Österreich(-Ungarns) von 1825-1918*, 432–433.

¹⁸ HHStA, PA I, K 473, Fol. 174 b.

¹⁹ Ibid. Fol. 175.

²⁰ Ibid. Fol. 180.

²¹ Ibid. Fol. 181.

²² Ibid. Fol. 180.

tarian aids, and a wider and more public interaction of the Austro-Hungarian consuls into the areas proposed by the plan.

Zwiedineck pointed also in his report to test of the actual political conditions among the Albanians. This measure was advised in order to prove if the minimal conditions existed, for the creation of an Albanian autonomous state, and if there were tools in order to protect it.

Later on, he analyzed the current situation of the religious Catholic mission in Albania, safeguarded by Austria-Hungary under the legal Status of *Kultusprotektorat*.²³ In his analyzes, the primary interlocutors for the action, especially in the mountainous areas, were the Catholic priests. With the religious center in Shkodra, the religious Catholic mission in Albania was organized in the following manner: 1 - the Archbishop seat in Shkodra (with the diocese of Pult, Sapa and Alessio); 2 - the Abbey of Saint Alexander (alb. Shën Aleksandri) in Mirditë; 3 - the Archdiocese of Durrës; 4 - the Archdiocese of Uskup (alb. Shkup).

The clerical body was divided among the laic and monastic religious elements, where the main ones were the Franciscan and Jesuit orders. They were assisted also by the Stigmata Nuns and Charity Sisters in Prizren. The secular elements used to preach in the cities, fields and valleys near the urban areas, while the Franciscans were active in the mountainous areas, and rarely were seen in the lower lands. Stationed in Troshan, they were teachers for the *novices* and had a school for boys in Shkodra.²⁴ The Jesuit Order was more active in the urban areas, and generally preached in the streets and rarely in the churches. The Order was in charge of the education in the religious seminar and the trade school in Shkodra.²⁵

After the contextual remarks, Zwiedineck pointed out that the clerical attitude toward Austria-Hungary despite the continuous help of the Monarchy, had been disappointing. Especially among the priests of different orders and different nationalities, the political agenda proposed by the Ballhausplatz, had been of second or tertiary relevance. The material and personal conflicts over hierarchical religious positions and benefits had stopped the creation of a unified national political view and its implementation among the northern Catholic tribesmen. The Albanian religious figures such as Don Primus Docci (alb. Preng Doçi) were constantly viewed as ambitious and dangerous personalities.²⁶ In this regards Zwiedineck viewed that the economical sacrifices done by the Danube Monarchy were in disproportion with the expected results. In his remarks he pointed out:

²³ Ibid. Fol. 176.

²⁴ According to Zwiedineck analyzes: "Despite that in general, the Franciscan missions have friendly attitude toward Austria-Hungary, it must be kept in consideration that the Italian propaganda has risen up among them in the last years. The Franciscans with Italian origin, despite they are grateful to the imperial and royal government (k.u.k), are first of all loyal toward Italy. [...] The Franciscans don't have a good relation with the Albanian clerics. At the same time, they consider the Jesuits as rivals. The Bosnian Franciscans of Troshan beside being honest, support the patriotic ideals and despite the difficulties, they have managed to preserve among the students appointed to the them, the loyalty toward the Monarchy." Ibid. Fol. 177 b.

²⁵ According to the analyzes of the baron: "...the Jesuits deal exclusively with the novices, so in principle they are distant toward any political activity; this is the reason why they don't try to instigate among the students the sympathy toward Austria-Hungary. They consider as help for their religious mission the support from the k.u.k. government, and they strictly forbid their (imperial) representatives to interfere in their program." HHSStA, PA I, K 473, Fol. 176 b.

²⁶ Ibid. Fol. 177.

*“...if we want positive results and to continue to support economically the Catholic institutions in Albania to use them for our political action in the future, we must do some reforms that will secure us a greater influence over the clerics and their education system. It’s not about opening new routes of action, but using with effectivity all the resources, in favor of the political and religious activity in Albania.”*²⁷

Besides controlling directly the clerical educational and political agenda, the speaker suggested that this measure must go hand in hand with other instruments. The first one was that of finding, energetic and loyal figures in the positions of the bishops and archbishops, who had the intelligence, stability and full understanding of the current situation of the Albanian Catholic Church.²⁸ The Albanian and foreign clerics stationed there had shown little promise, so Zwiedineck proposed bringing candidates from Dalmatia, Istria and South Tirol.²⁹

Secondly, it was suggested to further indoctrinate the Albanian students in the religious institutions. According to him:

*“[...] for the last 10 years the Albanians had studied with the Jesuits under the expenses of the Austro-Hungarian state, [...] but after finishing their studies and vowing as priests, they show little gratitude and loyalty toward the cause. It is urgent that before vowing, these clerics must be sent to an Austrian or Hungarian seminar for further formation, where they will be indoctrinated in the interest of the Empire, and prepared as they should for their future obligation as priests.”*³⁰

This period of indoctrination would serve two purposes: firstly would lead the students to abandon or forget the foreign enemy agendas, and secondly familiarize the candidates with the political action of the Danube Monarchy.

Regarding the schools, it was vital to increase in quality and in number the available buildings and the staff, possibly bringing educators from the Monarchy, especially in the mountainous and rural areas. The clerics beside the religious duties toward their flocks of believers, had to do educational works and use curricula translated from the empire. More emphasis had to be shown toward the educational institutions for women.³¹

Regarding the material texts, especially newspapers in Albanian, it was thought primarily to use a publishing house in Vienna. But due to complications and the possibility of alienating different actors it was thought the usage of existing ones, especially the Albanian pamphlets and newspapers of the diaspora such as Bucharest and Borgo Erizzo near Zadar in Croatia. Unfortunately, the high illiteracy (around 99.5%) and the lack of a standardized

²⁷ Ibid. Fol. 178.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid. Fol. 178 b.

³⁰ Ibid. Fol. 178.

³¹ According to Zwiedineck: “the role of the Albanian woman was ambivalent; in society, she had little socio-political relevance, but in the close courters of the house she was vital for the survival of the family.” Ibid.

language, diverted this idea toward printing pamphlets and writing articles by influential intellectual Albanians.³²

On the economic prospect the monarchy viewed, that a number of incentives must be brought forward in order to encourage the Albanian traders toward her own ports and trade hubs. Primarily the intellectual contacts would rise among the Albanians the desire to trade in the ports of Trieste and Venice. Later on, a number of financial incentives and privileges like lower trading tariffs and permission facilities, would had been allowed toward Albanian traders.³³

The last part of the memorandum discussed the reorganization of the consulates in Albania. The participants agreed that the number of diplomatic centers was low and had previously operated without major success. Therefore, new missions had to be opened and the existing ones had to be reorganized, while keeping an eye to the quality of the future diplomats. It was essential to introduce the Albanian language in the K.u.K. Academy of Eastern Studies. This action was considered fundamental, so that the future consuls would easily interact with the local population and familiarize with the area, its cultural customs and problems.³⁴

The 3rd secret meeting in Ballhausplatz on 23rd of December 1896, was briefer than the previous two, and the majority of the debates revolved on the matter of the Memorandum composed by Zwiedineck and Schmucker.³⁵ A number of additional propositions were made by the participants related generally with the increase on the number of clerics and nuns from the empire, and also into the new sets of requirements for the potential new candidate consuls. Nonetheless the new proposition remained solely optional, and the meeting was concluded with the signature of the acts from all the participants.³⁶

Gemeinsame Ministerrat (GMR) meeting of 1916

On 7th of January 1916, it was organized the meeting of the Councils of Ministers for the Commons Affairs (*Gemeinsame Ministerrat*), commonly labelled as GMR.³⁷ After the *Ausgleich* of 1867, the GMR served as a forum where the different power and policy makers gathered in order to propose and implement common solutions for the problems of the Empire, under the supervision of the Emperor. But generally, they were led by the Common Foreign Minister, who due to his constitutional position was considered and had taken, the role of Chancellor in the absence of the Monarch.³⁸

The following actors participated in the conference: as Chairman the Joint Foreign Minister István Burián, Austrian Prime Minister Karl Stürgkh, Hungarian Prime Minister István Tisza, Joint Finance Minister Ernest Koerber, Joint Minister of War Alexander von Kro-

³² Ibid. Fol. 179 b.

³³ Ibid. Fol. 180.

³⁴ The suggested offices of the Ballhausplatz proposed in Mitrovica, Tetovo, Prishtinë and Gjirokastër, after many debates were taken out of the proposal with the consideration as outside the viable reach of the action plan. Ibid. Fol. 181 b and 182.

³⁵ Ibid. Fol. 140.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ HHSStA, KA KK Vorträge 6-1916, K.ZI. 526

³⁸ Williamson, *Austria-Hungary and the Origins of WWI*, 72–3.

batin, Chief of the General Staff Conrad Hötzendorf and as secretary for the meeting Legation Councilor Alexander Hoyos.³⁹

The opening statement was made by the Foreign Minister Burián, who pointed out that the primary goal of the conference was to secure a responsible and brilliant administration of the latest military victories. Nonetheless, he urged the participants to be calm and rational in their positions, advices and especially not to be partial. They had to take into consideration the interests of the whole Monarchy, and not one-sided goals. The positions had to be formulated upon legal and constitutional elements, and how to implement them with the current financial and military conditions. It was vital to agree toward a unanimous *War Aim Policy*⁴⁰, especially from the cooperation between the army command and the political branch. According to him:

*“At today’s conference, an attempt must be made to get an idea of how far the war goals can already be determined. The decisions resulting from such a determination could only be conditional, because their implementation naturally depends on the final success of the war. When making decisions, one must also consider future effects. Any solution could be won in a successful war by the power of arms, but in peace such violent solutions are often politically very harmful and put a heavy burden on the living conditions of a state.”*⁴¹

After initially discussing the Serbian problem, he proposed his idea regarding Albania. In his view:

*“it is absolutely necessary that the created independence of Albania is preserved, which is quite possible if to the country are given back those Albanian areas, that were lost to Serbia and Montenegro after the start of the Balkan wars. One should not be misled by the failure of the first attempt to establish an independent Albania. As a people, the Albanians had always expressed their will to live with the greatest tenacity and had also implemented it. The fact that their nationality, despite national fragmentation and the greatest arbitrariness in all traditional folk peculiarities has been preserved, shows the ability of the Albanians to live nationally.”*⁴²

Burián argued that according to the London Treaty of 1913, the country was not viable by itself (*stand on its own two feet*)⁴³. The reason was the implementation of unsuitable methods, only applicable to the European culture style states, in an area that had been ruled nominally for the last four centuries by an anemic Ottoman administration. The Treaty of 1913 had introduced international controlled institutions and by doing so, bypassing and

³⁹ Komjáthy, *Protokolle...*, 352–3.

⁴⁰ The War Aims were a set of military and political objectives for Austria-Hungary, sanctioned from the GMR meeting of 19/06/1914, after her entry into war. Due to the fluid nature of warfare, the Monarchy had to constantly to renew these objectives and the GMR meetings served as a medium for these discussions between the military and the executive branch.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* K. Zl. 526.

⁴² Komjáthy, *Protokolle*, 358.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

alienating customary based political organizations. A second reason for the initial failure of the Albanian experience was the rivalry with Italy. Despite an arranged political common agenda with the Italians, they had pursued from the beginning, an antagonizing approach toward the Austro-Hungarians interest in Albania.

The third argument of Burián analyzes for the failure of the Albanian State was appointing a weak monarch, such as Prince Wied. His inexperience on the Albanian matter, had created the space for political fermentation between rivaling inner and outer forces in the country. Possibly with a better ruler, the chances for success would be higher. He commented:

“We would have to do this work by exercising an effective protectorate over Albania, not with the intention of appropriating this country, but with the desire to set it up on our own feet and to prevent any interference by third countries.”⁴⁴

Later on, Burián draw a parallel between the Russian protectorate over Bulgaria and the future Austro-Hungarian protectorate over Albania. If the primary role for the support from the Russian diplomacy to the Bulgarian’s national aspiration was to use them as tool for further territorial aggrandizement toward the Ottoman Straits, the Albanian case was different:

“the establishment and consolidation of the independence of a state, that serves its own life interests in accordance with our interests in the Balkans and must follow the conservative and purely defensive policies of the Central powers. Our policies in Albania could help us secure definite supremacy in the Balkans without falling into Russia’s mistakes and using the country as a tool for any desire to expand.”⁴⁵

Further on Minister Burián argued its policy regarding the southern Albanian territories, namely by exchanging them for a political support with Greece. This proposition would favor the Albanians in two aspect: firstly, the lost territories would be compensated with enlargement into the Serbian and Montenegrin areas, and secondly this would lead the country toward a more peaceful and less conflictual relationship with the Greece⁴⁶. On the Greek position, this acquisition would mean controlling areas that were already subjected to Greek language and culture. Beside a territorial gain, this would had been a political card for those Greek politicians, who viewed the Central Powers as potential allies and wanted to preserve the neutrality of the country despite the interference of Entente.

Regarding Bulgaria, the minister had difficulties to accept a further expansion of the ally in the region, with a possibility to reach the Adriatic Shores. Despite the cordial relations, it was advised to stop any further Bulgarian flag waving outside the concorded areas of the agreements between the Central Powers. The reasons for this denial were of geo-strategic and practical logic:

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Burián stated: “The neighborhood with Greece also offers advantages to the Albanians, which means that they would be less isolated and a closer political relationship between the two countries could develop over time.” Ibid. 358–9.

*“they [the Bulgarian politicians] are aware of the fact that Bulgaria will have enough difficult tasks to do in the near future, if Macedonia and the eastern part of Serbia will be assimilated. Bulgaria has access [ports] to the Aegean and Black Seas, which is sufficient for its economic development. If we let the Bulgarians to penetrate Albania, we would lose the advantages that we expect of an independent Albania for the monarchy.”*⁴⁷

The Italian adversary most probably wouldn't cease to pose a threat for the Monarchy in the Albanian areas, as much the Russians didn't stop after the failure in Bulgaria. If the risks would had been higher, the minister proposed an exit strategy, meaning a division of the country:

*“In any case, it was worth the effort to try the Albanian autonomy under Austro-Hungarian protectorate. If it failed, nothing would be lost and we could still resort to other means, although it would be cheaper to carry out the division with Greece alone [...] Northern Albania [in itself] would not be of benefit to the monarchy, [so] we would have to organize and administer the country in a completely different way, in order to make it equal to the other areas of the monarchy.”*⁴⁸

The next speaker was the Hungarian Prime Minister István Tisza, who generally agreed with the view of Burián. Mainly, this support stemmed from the wish of the Hungarian side, to prevent more territorial gains toward Serbia, meaning a further incorporation of 1.5 million Serbians into the monarchy. A bigger Albania with the added territories and the support of Germany for a reduced Serbian state, were seen as the most rational and interesting proposition for the Hungarian politician. But nonetheless, Prime Minister Tisza doubted a possible transformation of Albania into a modern state. Due to internal struggle and the gold poured into Albania from the enemies of the Monarchy, the proposed idea of the Foreign Minister was an expensive and dangerous project. If this proposition would had failed as in the case of rule of Prince Wied, the Austro-Hungarian image would be shattered diplomatically. Under this analyzes, he opened the door for both options, but leaned for the idea of Minister Burián due to national Hungarian interests.⁴⁹

The Austrian Prime Minister Stürgkh was sceptic and initially linked the binding decisions regarding the fate of the country, with the peace negotiations after the war. In his view, securing a military foothold in the area, would had been of vital importance for the Monarchy on the short-term period. After this point, he saw the direct protectorate as the only viable choice. The Joint Finance and War Minister, had more or less no clear answer to this problem, mainly, advocating prudency over two primary conditions: the ability of the Monarchy to absorb new ethnic groups (what legal bases), and the ability to conduct long-term policies of such magnitude in a time of war.⁵⁰

The last speaker was Chief of the General Staff Conrad. His reflections were proposed in two forms: orally in the GMR, and by official note sent to each one of the members,

⁴⁷ AIH. A. IV, K.239, 12–14.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 14.

⁴⁹ Komjáthy, *Protokolle*, 362–3.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 366–7, 369–371.

prior to the meeting, on 4th of January 1916.⁵¹ Differently from the opinion of the other members of the GMR, he sought that the decisions would have a binding characteristic due to the nature and the danger that the military forces would had to be exposed, in order to implement them. Only this way would Austria-Hungary have a road map, upon which to build a long-term policy that could be protected militarily. He proposed that all the statesmen present, would agree unanimously. Regarding Albania he had the following arguments:

Firstly, he saw the *ambiguous term protectorate* as problematic, due to the fact that this type of political entities were a constant source of friction, difficulties and crises for the protector, in political and material terms. This situation would had been magnified to a greater extent, if applied to the *Botched Balkan States*. According to him:

*“The primitive cultural, economic, complicated, never calming internal political situations of the sovereign Balkan states, would impose on us only political and cultural difficulties that cannot be foreseen; the overcoming of which, is only possible through the full incorporation [of them] into the monarchy.”*⁵²

Further on, he argued that the protected or stubborn states, were an easy prey by the influence of rivaling states. Additionally, it existed the danger that the protected could empower and clash in the future with its protector, such as the case of Bulgaria. The artificially, internationally protected and failed Albania, along with her one-day monarchy, was the *par excellence* case why he objected on principal to the idea of Burián.

Secondly, he believed that an Independent Albania was not viable. In case of a protectorate advocated by Burián and a sponsored smaller Serbia by Tisza and the Germans, the Austro-Hungarian control over the area would have been *de facto* only in paper. For this reason, he argued a full annexation for all the *three botched Balkan states*.⁵³ The new monarchy southern border would had been mediated with the Greek counterpart, but generally he saw as most advantageous following the traditional division line between the Gegë and the Toskë.⁵⁴ Any other solution was considered by him as *reductio ad absurdum* to the reasons why the Monarchy entered into the war.

The meeting continued with debates on the viability of the Albanian protectorate between Foreign Minister Burián and the Chief of General Staff Conrad. Despite the arguments from both sides, no decisive decision was taken over this matter after the closure of the GMR of 7th of January 1916. Both lines of thought were pursued on the terrain, while maintaining a rather strange half military and half civil administered protectorate, in the conquered areas of the Albania in 1916–1918.

⁵¹ Komjáthy, *Protokolle* (see note 44), 4. 1. 1916, p. 374–381.

⁵² *Ibid.* 377–8.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 372.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Support or a never changing imperial policy?

The two sets of conferences showed above were willingly written without an extensive analyzes, in order to show to the reader in details, how the *political thought* in the Austro-Hungarian Empire manifested. One may argue why the two different contextual conferences were putted into confrontation and above all, with two decades of differences between them. The answer lies in the *unique* role that Austria-Hungary appointed on herself, and her supposed *Civilizing Mission*⁵⁵ toward the Albanian problem. The conferences were the only two cases where the Albanian question was discussed extensively into the main halls of power in Vienna. Before that and in between them, separate talks of minor importance were done, but no clear position was manifested.⁵⁶

Another unique aspect was *the time* when they were organized, closely related with a rather calm and culminant moment of power for the Danube Monarchy in the Balkan. In late 1896, the empire had a rather secure foothold in the political *Raum* in the peninsula, established by the peaceful cooperation with the Ottoman Empire in order to maintain the *status quo*. The Serbian kings were still under the golden economical leash, and the Bosnian territories were being absorbed through the colonialist policies of Kállay. The triple Alliance with the German and Russian empire was secure, while the Italians were still at bay from crossing the eastern shores of the Adriatic. In early 1916, the imperial double eagle flag was waving over the capital of Belgrade and Cetinje was soon to fall. With the help of the German and Bulgarian armies led by General Mackensen, the Macedonian theater of war was pacified. In the west the Adriatic Sea was soon to be balanced by the taking of Lovcen Hights and the Albanian territories, meanwhile the Russian, Italian and French front had no major breakthrough, but yet remained calm.⁵⁷

With these two unique traits the imperial power actors posed their view on solving the Albanian problem in their favor and, above all by *themselves*. In no other context had the Monarchy such an ample possibility to manifest her position and imperial power, with such extensive territorial decisions. Some authors, mainly Albanians and Serbians argue that Austria-Hungary had a decisive position after the Independence of the country in 1912, especially by the mediation of Count Berchtold to start a new war, unless the country was not cleared by the Balkan Armies. But this view is mainly incorrect, due to the fact that Aus-

⁵⁵ The *Civilizing Mission* of Austria-Hungary in the Balkan area, was a fusion between Scylla of expansion (*Drach nach Osten*) and Charybdis of absorption (*Einheit durch Vielfalt*). From this fusion, two separate line of thoughts regarding imperialism and colonization were molded on the basis of ethnical ruling lines. The Austrian colonizing thought was that “*of a westerner duty to civilize, improve in conditions and regain for Europe the lost lands*”, closely resembling the German Reich policy. The Hungarian counterpart under the name “*Turanic movement*” appointed the same obligation for these lost lands, not to the westerners (Austrians), but to the Hungarians and their self-image as eastern people. Regarding the Hungarian colonial movement see the book of Demeter, *Diplomatic Struggle for Supremacy over the Balkan Peninsula*, and as an Austrian counterpart the voluminous and impressive work of Gostentschnigg, *Wissenschaft im Spannungsfeld von Politik und Militär*, 17–18, 78–83, 269–272.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*; Gostentschnigg, *Wissenschaft*, 230–262.

⁵⁷ Komjáthy, *Protokolle*, 375.

tria-Hungary (unwillingly) along with other Great Powers molded an anemic and internationalized state, in a territory of continuous war, social and political upheaval.⁵⁸

Taking into account these two unique traits, what is striking is the unchanging policy of the empire toward the Albanian territories, mainly that of a *future imperial protectorate* (which due to her internal and external situations can easily relegate to a colony or newly annexed territories). The country was generally viewed with big internal divisions (linguistic, religious and regional) toppled by a superiority complex toward the uncivilized tribes. With a rather illusional view, the diplomats posed the solution of protectorate in the first phase and later on annexation in the context of a second Bosnia. Nonetheless in the frame of this wrong view, it's visible the first difference between the two sets of conferences, mainly the position and tool on how to implement this policy.

The conference of 1896 saw the usage of the *faith* as a political medium for imperial expansion, initially thought pacifically.⁵⁹ Via the pretext of the *Kultusprotektorat*, the clerics and Catholic institutions would be used to spread the proposed political agenda, through national teachings of the Albanian language and mass indoctrination. The church would be the "militant agent" of the Empire for the Albanians⁶⁰, seeding the political views via the language teachings.

The conference of early January 1916 desired to implement the same policy by the *force of arms*. The military occupation would serve as pretext, and as a normalization phase, where the native political actors would be assessed into friendly and non-friendly to the empire, and acquire from them the decisional power.⁶¹ Both these instruments, as shown from the historical path that the Austro-Hungarian politicians and diplomats took, would fail on the long run. Surprisingly, the Empire chose to implement her imperial policies with a new method unknown before, even though existing methods of colonialization had proven more efficient. The French style of colonialization – *Assimilation*⁶² and the British one – *Basutoland*⁶³, were shunned by the *modus operandi* of the Ballhausplatz officials and AOK (Armeeoberkommando) generals. The imperials either didn't share power or made serious

⁵⁸ See Puto, *Pavarësia Shqiptare dhe Diplomacia e Fuqive të Mëdha* and also Bataković, *The Kosovo Chronicles*. Both authors have a number of similarities, such as being prominent historians of the communist era and later on during democracy, having a soft revisionism of their communist ideals toward nationalistic positions.

⁵⁹ There is a continuous shifting of the Austro-Hungarian policy and diplomacy toward indirect mechanisms of action, especially adopting the correlation religion = consolidation of nation used by the Serbians since 1863. See Okey, *Taming Balkan Nationalism*, 28.

⁶⁰ According to Zwiedineck: "the Franciscans have been working in Albania for many centuries and have cordial relations with the population, are well positioned among the mountainous tribes and possess authority. They are, as we can say, the militant church of Albania." HHStA, PA I, k. 473, Fol. 177 b.

⁶¹ Schwanke, *Militärverwaltung in Albanien*, (unpublished PhD thesis) 436.

⁶² Mainly by eradicating physically the native ruling class to appoint a new one. See the work of Lewis, *One Hundred Million Frenchmen*, 129–153; and Crowder, *Senegal: A Study in French Assimilation Policy*, 22–24.

⁶³ Mainly by bounding indirectly the existing native class via economic rule. See the book Egerton, *A Short History of British Colonial Policy*.

efforts to eliminate other native actors from the Albanian playground.⁶⁴ This led to a situation, where the Austro-Hungarian approach was seen as unreliable and double faced by the Albanian notables⁶⁵ and the tribesmen of the north.⁶⁶ The Italians on the contrary with little effort and expenses, made great progress to infiltrate and almost control vast economical areas such as the Maritime transport⁶⁷, oil industry and the salt mines in Kavaja and Durres.⁶⁸

The next element of similitude in the approach of the Empire toward the Albanian problem was the *policy of drawing maps*. The Austro-Hungarian diplomacy and AOK had literally little information on the outset of the geographical and ethnographical background of the western part of the peninsula. Partially, due to the fear of the Ottomans from espionage activities of enemy forces, and partially from the xenophobic attitude of the population toward any foreign elements, the data was poor. The first revelations were made between the years 1867-1870, with triangular measurements on the northern coasts of the area. The data was later enriched with topography information about the mountainous areas in the north by using photogrammetry methods and only in 1912-1914 the joint War Ministry commissioned the first maps of the Balkan area in general.⁶⁹ On the demographic elements and economic ones, there was a lack of information and misreporting of the numbers either from the official Ottoman documentation⁷⁰ or from the Austro-Hungarian diplomats.⁷¹

Despite these two missing important components, the imperial policy was not withdrawn from the original idea of reshaping the area with new borders and states. In the first set of conferences in 1896, the proposed territory of the Albanian nation (soon to be an in-

⁶⁴ According to Galtung theory of imperialism there were 5 forms how it was exerted: economically, diplomatically, militarily, culturally and by communication. All these forms were never exerted primarily and constantly by Austria-Hungary. The monarchy diplomatically switched her position toward ambivalent relations with different antagonist actors, partially due to her inability to act and partly to disinterest in the area. This led, that the void created by her influence to be filled by other actors such as Italy. See Galtung, *A Structural Theory of Imperialism*, 81–117.

⁶⁵ The most visible change of position from pro Austro-Hungarian to distrust toward the Danube Monarchy, is seen from Noblemen from Vlora family, Syrja and his son Ekrem. See the memoirs of S. Vlora, *Kujtime* and E. Vlora, *Kujtime (1885-1825)*.

⁶⁶ See Gostentschnigg, *Wissenschaft*, 333–7 regarding the failed uprising of 1883, organized by Thallóczy. Also Clayer, *Në fillimet e nacionalizmit shqiptar*, in relation with the uprising of 1910–1911 in North Albania and Kosovo.

⁶⁷ Gostentschnigg, *Wissenschaft*, 309–312; and Csaplár-Degovics, *Albanien in der Konferenzpolitik der Großmächte*, 15–17.

⁶⁸ Schwanke, *Militärverwaltung*, 319–322, 370.

⁶⁹ In 1912 it was commissioned a general map of the Balkans with ratio 1:750000, and in 1914 two additional ones: one general map with ratio 1:2000 and a special one with ratio 1:75000. See Schwanke, *Militärverwaltung*, 8.

⁷⁰ The first Ottoman censuses were carried in late 1890' and during WWI, when the Austro-Hungarian armies entered the territories had to redo a census since no official record was available. See Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, 144–145.

⁷¹ According to Williamson, the imperial diplomats had no keen observation on the demographic and economic elements on the reports they made. This explains the problems on the data with Orthodox population according to the diplomats in the Monastir records according to Toleva. See also the paper of Demeter, Bottlik, and Csaplár-Degovics, *Ethnic maps as instruments of nation – building on the Balkans*.

dependent principality) was thought to be molded on the *lines of the four Albanian vilayets*. The political agenda had to be implemented as lengthily as possible, where the demographic element was numerically in favor of the Albanians. Some areas like Mitrovica, Tetovo, Prishtina and Gjirokastër (up to the Shkumbini river line, where the Greek influence was thought dominant) were excluded. The nucleus of the new principality would had been the northern area, where the Catholic tribes were under the direct protection of the Monarchy.

The GMR in 1916 saw the same approach toward map drawing, but in this moment two groups antagonized, due to political and ethnical struggles inside the empire. The approach of Burián was that of a *Maximalist Albania*, where the new country would reach not only the old Kosovo vilayet territories, it would enlarge by compressing additional lands from Montenegro. Regarding the south, the Monarchy had always seen with doubt the position of the Southerner orthodox Albanians, mainly by viewing them as unreliable and possible betrayers in case of influence by third party powers.⁷² For this reason their incorporation to the Hellenic Kingdom up to the Shkumbini River, was seen as the most rational option. On the other side, Conrad Hötendorf wished an *Annexed Albania* inside the monarchy. Any sacrifice made by the imperial troops, could only be justified with territorial benefits for the Monarchy.⁷³ In his view, as far as the imperial armies would had had the possibility to march and defend militarily, the most plausible southern new border for the Monarchy would had been the Mati river line.⁷⁴

The next similitude was the *geostrategical importance* that these territories had for the Monarchy. Almost naturally after the unification of Germany and Italy, the position of the Danubian Empire had to be redirected toward new areas where the chance for further aggrandizement was available. The only possible source for further expansion was seen in the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire. In this context, the role of the Albanian speaking territories become detrimental for the policy makers in Austria-Hungary.

According to the conferences of 1896, an enlarged Albania possibly as far as the border of Bosnia, would be of triple importance for the Monarchy. On a strategical level, the new Principality would pose two advantages to the monarchy: on the short-term it would serve as wedge between Serbia and Montenegro, stopping any future military action against the monarchy and vice-versa, and also in order to prevent any future union between the two south Slavic states. On the long-run, the existence of this new state would prevent any possible influence and advancement of other Great Powers (respectively Italy and Russian Empire) to access and control the eastern shores of the Adriatic Sea. Additionally, Austria-Hungary would have used the southern borders as a negotiating asset only with Greece, and no other state.

In 1916 the importance of Albania for the Empire grew exponentially, mainly due to her inability to monopolize the Balkan Area as her primary colonized backyard. Over the last three decades since the Congress of Berlin, Germany had pierced economic deals with the Balkan states via multiple separate agreement.⁷⁵ Additionally, among the ruling class of the

⁷² Fried, *Austro-Hungarian War Aims in the Balkans during World War I*, 181–2.

⁷³ Conrad to Franz Joseph, 22. 11. 1915, KA, MKSM, 1915 18-27, 25-1/5.

⁷⁴ Komjáthy, *Protokolle* (see note 44), 4. 1. 1916, p. 380.

⁷⁵ See Palairot, *The Balkan Economies (1800–1914)*, also Lampe and Jackson, *Balkan Economic History*.

royal Balkan families, the Germanic bloodline had come to power into Greece,⁷⁶ Bulgaria,⁷⁷ Rumania⁷⁸ and later on in Albania.⁷⁹ The general attitude in Vienna had been that of a cautious relationship with an ally that constantly had pushed his own position in favor of the idea of *Mitteleuropa*, meaning a broader control over the Central and South-East European affairs. In early 1916 and afterwards, the Germans pushed Austria-Hungary for a political dialog with Serbia, in order to win a peace treaty. From it, a smaller Serbian and ruling family (possibly unified with Montenegro) would have risen with a potential new German ruler.⁸⁰ These plans were discussed in numerous occasions with the Hungarian Prime minister István Tisza, who endorsed this idea in order to lower the number of Slavs in his country.⁸¹

The Bulgarians on the other hand had constantly shown an increasing appetite for new territories, especially with the renewed attitude to reach the Adriatic shores and control the port city of Durrës in central Albania, like the Medieval King Simeon I had done in 896. Despite an agreement that led to the alliance with the Central Powers, the Bulgarian forces had stretched even further the concorded line Prishtinë–Gjakovë–Prizren, and running south of the Albanian-Macedonian borders of 1912. For multiple months under the excuse of military discordance in the chain of command, the Bulgarians had entered in central Albania and controlled the city of Elbasan. From there, rumors that the son of Tsar Ferdinand, Prince Kyril, was chosen as the new royal head of the country, were spread via Albanian agents.⁸²

In this situation in early 1916 the role of the Albanian territories was magnified in the eyes of the policy makers of the Monarchy. If in the previous decades the country had served as a deterrent for the southern Slavic states, and a barrier for the Italians, in 1916 the most imminent danger was posed by the ambitions of the allies. Not only the territories had to be protected from the traditional Italic and Slavic enemies, but now the Germans and Bulgarians had entered in the bargain table beside Greece. In this prospect, Burián policy viewed the *Maximalist Albania* as the best proposition, in order to expel and stop further requests in the area, by holding the monopoly of influence as a protector. On the other side, Conrad envisioned the *Annexed Albania* as the only pragmatic choice, where under no legal term, any bargaining proposition could be made by the allies or enemies in the peace negotiations in the end of the war.

The last element of similitude between the two sets of conferences is the *imperial ideological contradiction*. After the failed anarchist movements all over Europe, later on followed by the Unification of Germany and Italy, a new political movement had spread all over the continent. Like a rising fever, the unitarian feeling based on ethno-linguistic elements had turned into a political mantra for the majority of the leading states. Based on the

⁷⁶ The first ruler was chosen Otto of Bavaria, later on 1863 replaced by the Danish royal George I from the House of Glücksburg.

⁷⁷ House of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha.

⁷⁸ Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen dynasty.

⁷⁹ Prince Wilhelm of Wied from the Prussian House of Wied-Neuwied.

⁸⁰ Fried, *Austro-Hungarian War Aims*, 145.

⁸¹ Afflerbach (Ed.), *The Purpose of the First World War*, 117–140.

⁸² The most controversial figure was Hasan Basri, an Albanian from the Macedonian side of the border. The Austrian authorities arrested him on the accuses that he was a Bulgarian agent. See Bego, *Albanian-Bulgarian relations in the frame of the Great War*, 9–12.

position of the Monarchy, and its multi-ethnicity, this pan-European aspiration was seen as dangerous and had to be stopped.⁸³ The empire made of 11 different ethnicities, counting around 52 million inhabitants on the eve of World War I, had a German ethnic rule on the Cisleithanian side and Hungarian ethnic dominance on the Transleithanian half.⁸⁴ Together these two groups had silenced violently any alternative nationalistic view, proposed by the rest of their compatriots.⁸⁵

Nonetheless, regarding the Albanian question, the imperial policy-makers pushed for the promotion, consolidation and strengthening of the Albanian nation. This fundamental contradiction stood like the sword of Damocles on top of the heads of MdA and AOK, posing constant debate on how to implement it. In this prospect the contradiction was eased by two characteristics: the premature phase of the national self-awareness among the Albanians and the possibility to use it against other ethnicities as a political and military weapon (*inimicus inimici mei amicus meus est*). In the meetings of 1896, the primary objective was the creation of the avalanche effect in nationalistic terms, where the Albanians would have been used as an *external force*. Pushing naturally toward the “*hated Slavs*”, they would have secured a constant shield and spear effect on both sides (Slavic and Italian influence) due to their peculiar ethnolinguistic characteristics.

In 1916 GMR, the conditions remained immovable regarding this matter. The only change was the opening of a second possibility by the propositions of Conrad, meaning the usage of Albanian nationalism as an *internal force*. This course of action would have countered the rise in numbers of the Slavic population after the annexation of Montenegro and Serbia. In this prospect the Albanians would have been promoted,⁸⁶ guided with paternal support⁸⁷ and enjoyed the imperial peace, after many years of war:

*“So they still tell [the Albanians], with a kind of melancholy of the time when the Austro-Hungarian soldiers had been in the country and [...] in the middle of the bloodiest war had forced a two and a half year old Bessa [alb. Oath]. And they succeeded in doing, something that all the pashas of the Grand Lords of Istanbul and their warriors had not been able to do in five centuries, [...] was the most impressive thing of all the works of peace among our soldiers among the wild mountain people.”*⁸⁸

As a final remark, one of the main questions of this analysis still hangs in the air, meaning was Austria-Hungary invested into the Albanian state-building process, as much as the nation-building one? The question is unclear not only from these conferences, but also from the whole activity of the imperials in the Albanian question. Posing the Herderian line of thought, the nation-building process was a necessity and prerequisite for the latter evolution

⁸³ Demeter, *Diplomatic Struggle for Supremacy over the Balkan Peninsula*, 15.

⁸⁴ Williamson, *Austria-Hungary and the Origins of WWI*, 22.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 129.

⁸⁶ Schwanke, *Militärverwaltung*, 105.

⁸⁷ Franz Joseph I proclamation to the Albanians in April 1916: “...but just as these commanders will exercise paternal care, so you have to show them full trust and constant obedience.” San Nicolò, *Handbuch der Militärverwaltung Albanien*, 3.

⁸⁸ Kerchnawe, *Militärverwaltung in Montenegro und Albanien*, 304.

toward the State-building process. The imperials on both cases, never diverted their focus from the main issue, the creation of a nation molded under their image. Even though artificially and inconsistently advocated, the Foreign Ministry saw as a stepping stone the realization of the Albanian nation for the sake of the Empire geo-political position, more than a humanitarian case in 1896. The latter GMR meeting of 1916 added the Albanian question as an appendix (but rather a major one) to the issue of Serbia. The participants had all moved from the initial position of 1896, meaning that the Albanian nation was accepted as *fait accompli*. The continuous rebellions pushed and hushed from the Danubian diplomats against the Sublime Porte, the unification of the alphabet (fourteen existing ones in usage) under the continuous suggestion and rather skillful intervention of consul Kral in 1908; the independence after many mediations in border disputes stemming from Istria up to Arta Bay in 1912-1913; had created among foes and allies the generally accepted perception, that the Albanian nation existed and Austria-Hungary was its defender.

After this initial and crucial phase was completed, the future of the Albanian state remained a commodity question, based on the wrong assumption that the imperials had to operate in a perfect environment without external and internal pressure. The question of the Albanian state dwindled between existence or a full and slow annexation, where in both cases it was under an imperial protectorate. In this regard the terms imperial or colonial protectorate have no major differences, since the outcome would had been the same. In 1896 after the successful closure of the nation-building process, if we analyze the life and experiences of the participants, we can see that this outcome would had been the most desired one. Zwiedineck⁸⁹ had served in Beirut, Constantinople, Syria and Bucharest. Baum⁹⁰ had been posted in Izmir, Thessaloniki, Beirut, etc., while Schmucker⁹¹ had travelled and served half a world between Shkodër, Odessa, Ioannina, Shanghai, etc. The Head of the Orient section Horowitz⁹² also had his fair share of obligations abroad in Bucharest, Alexandria, Constantinople and Bosnia; while Kállay long life experience in Bosnia was well known. All the mentioned people, beside Baum, had been educated in the Oriental Academy. They had learned about the Orient and served for the empire as consuls and diplomats, in places where colonialism and the imperialistic aspirations were the main line of thought and the generally accepted *modus operandi*. In this regard is safe to assume that, after the successful closure of the Albanian nation-building process, they would had been more open to a colonizing policy under the term protectorate, than with the formation of an independent state.

In 1916 beside Burián and the undecisive Tisza, the rest of the participants who were members of the War Party, had no vivid interest to protect the Albanian state as a political entity. The foreign minister had posed a second option, based on pragmatic reasoning for the safeguarding of the empire. This meant less intervention militarily, economically and above all with a cautious eye over the future relations with the Albanians. Antagonizing openly another ethnicity, while the empire had open wounds from 11 national groups at home, would had been a destructive political myopia. In addition, his professional years as a diplomat in Greece, Germany, Russia, Bulgaria and in Bosnia, had taught him that it was

⁸⁹ Deusch, *Die effektiven Konsuln*, 714–5.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 197.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 586–7.

⁹² *Ibid.* 349–350.

too dangerous to operate with open colonial policies in the region. Above all reasons, the Monarchy was too weak and too divided to implement such actions unilaterally and openly. In this regard, the preservation of the Albanian state (loudly advocated by Thallóczy),⁹³ was more an extra option thrown in the table of the imperial policy-makers by the astute Burián, than a desired and real possibility.⁹⁴

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⁹³ Demeter, *Diplomatic Struggle*, 139–154.

⁹⁴ In the first years of the Albanian Independence, the empire had played a dangerous game in relation with the Albanian state. Ambiguously, the Ballhausplatz had endorsed a weak and inexperienced monarch as Prince Wied, with the hope of gaining a pretext to militarily intervene; had stopped the financial support as part of the international obligations from the London Conferences of 1912-13 and didn't take an active role into the civil uprisings of 1914-1916 in Albania, considering her duty as protector. Either from impossibility, lack of interest due to major issues, or pure imperial pragmatism, the answer for this ambiguous position toward the Albanian state is still unknown.

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Austria-Hungary and the Albanian Project. A Comparative Case Study: Between support and imperialism

The purpose of this paper, is to analyze the role of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in the creation of Albania as a geopolitical entity and its continuity up until the end of World War I. This process is investigated by comparing two pivotal moments, that link the Danubian Monarchy and the Albanian nation and state-building processes, especially the conferences of 1896 by the officials of the *Ballhausplatz* and the conferences of the Common Ministerial Council (GMR) in January 1916.

The paper is organized in three parts. The first one will introduce the shifting position of Austria-Hungary on the Eastern Question, regarding the methods and policies to be introduced via the local diplomatic Attaché in different consulates around the Albanian speaking *vilayets*. Additionally, it will highlight their role on moulding the Albanian latent nationalism into a political nation-building tool. The second part will investigate the Danubian Monarchy policy in the context of World War I and the controversial debates of the main imperial actors on the Albanian matter. The third part will compare the two above mentioned conferences and the shifting policies between colonization, imperial protectorate and independence.

The importance of this paper is manifold. Primarily, it addresses the role of the Dual Monarchy in the creation of the Albanian state. Secondly, it points out the pragmatic reasons why the Dual Monarchy had to pursue these policies. Thirdly, it points out the diversity of opinions suggested by different imperial actors, which spanned from direct annexation, partial independence and partition of Albanian territories for geopolitical benefits. Fourthly, it's a comparative study that has not been done regarding the two conferences, either from the Albanian or Austrian authors.