



The June Revolution as a Deep Crisis of the Constitutional Order: Constitution of Albanian State June – December 1924

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Abstract

The threshold of 1924 found political Albania with the formation of a Constitutional Assembly, which was a political product of the elections of December 1923. Moreover, the opposition had not managed to win the elections and was represented in the Assembly by 35 deputies, while the "Bloc government had 40 seats", at the time when the other seats were occupied by the "independents". This result put the opposition in a difficult position, at a time when it had calculated and had political confidence that it would come to power. Faced with this situation, the opposition began to articulate the idea that the composition of the Constituent Assembly did not correspond to the real ratio of political forces in Albania, therefore it warned of a fierce not only political war both inside and outside the political institutions. Meanwhile, the opposition press intensified the political struggle and precisely, on February 25, 1924, addressed the Supreme Council through a statement on the issue of "continuing the government". In her opposition judgment, she predicted "complete destruction and internal and external confusion", which could be fatal for the future of the new Albanian state. Under these conditions, the opposition proposed the formation of a new government, outside of which Amet Zogu and other members of the government had to remain. On the other hand, a new prime minister was proposed, who had to enjoy the confidence of all opposition groups. In the end, the opposition expressed its willingness to accept any other proposal, which would be designated by the Supreme Council, which would be authorized by all political groups, for the formation of a new government cabinet. While, at the end, the statement was accompanied by a typical radical spirit: if the opposition's proposal was not taken into account, it "relinquished the responsibility of the fatal conclusions that derive from a cabinet as opposed to the one in power"

Keywords: constitution, state, government, policy, etc

1. Introduction

While, a few days before this statement, an attack was made against Amet Zog but without success, it seemed that the opposition was showing the nails of its radicalism. moreover, he had started to use non-constitutional mechanisms for taking power¹. In the meantime, the parliamentary talks on the formation of the new government had begun, but without Amet Zogun, so it seems that we have a tolerance of the official policy, in order to de-tension the radical situation created by the political opposition.

Whereas, on March 13, the newspaper "Dita" drew the attention of the public opinion, that after many efforts, the new government cabinet was formed with Shefqet Vërlac as the prime minister, which could receive the vote of

¹Akademia e Studimeve Albanologjike Instituti i Historisë Drejtoria e Përgjithshme të Arkivave. Aktet Parlamentare 1920 – 1024, Tiranë 2012, P. "Zgjedhjet e Dhejtorit 1923"

confidence of the Assembly, but not of the people. Meanwhile, on April 17, the new cabinet was completed, creating political ground for the opposition by giving it several ministerial posts, such as Luigj Gurakuqi was given the post of finance minister, F. Rushit, minister of education, while in principle it was accepted that "the opposition to be given the ministry of war". It seems that, in the first months of 1924, Albania was experiencing a deep crisis, which had gripped some of the spheres of social and economic life. This is reflected in the report sent to the League of Nations by Albania's finance advisor I. D. Hunger, for 1924 a state deficit of 7 million gold francs was predicted. In this difficult situation, the Albanian government turned to the League of Nations. It wanted a loan similar to the one given to Austria and Hungary, but the League of Nations did not consider the financial crediting of the country reasonable. Under these conditions, the Albanian Government reflected in a radical way, demanding the removal of I. D. Hunger, with the idea that his salary was a heavy burden for the modest budget of the new Albanian state.

Meanwhile, the League of Nations reacted positively, for the alleviation of the famine that had gripped the population of northern Albania, which on March 13, 1924 decided that Albania should be given the requested aid. But the news that the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was exerting constant political and diplomatic pressure to take over Saint Naum and Vermoshi added to the anger of the Albanians. This pressure materialized, on March 21 through a telegram addressed to the Yugoslav minister in London, from Belgrade, it is said that: The Albanian government had asked the Constitutional Assembly to hold secret meetings every day, in which the problem of borders and Albanian minorities in Yugoslavia. Meanwhile, on April 2, 1924, the Government of Belgrade notified² the Conference of Ambassadors regarding the military preparation of the Albanian Government, and the movement of the Kachaks on the borders with Yugoslavia. We listed these facts to show the political pressure exerted by Belgrade on weak Albania, which was experiencing a deep crisis. Seen in this context, the situation was getting even worse with the murder of Avni Rustemi, who was the harshest critic of Zog and the assassin of Esat Toptan in Paris, but above all he was a member of the Constitutional Assembly. The murder of Avni Rustemi was conceived as a political assassination behind which the "hand" of Ahmet Zog was hidden. Regarding this murder, it is mentioned in a telegram from the Italian consul in Vlora, sent to the Italian Legation in Durrës, where, among other things, it is emphasized: The plot against Avni Rustemi was prepared in the house of Servet Libohova with the consent of Zog. This murder constituted the beginning of a certain program according to which six murders were foreseen³. As the political situation worsened, the fragility of the state order coupled with weak governance made it too difficult to manage. This situation was radically exploited by the opposition, which exploited Avni Rustemi's burial in Vlora, giving it the form of a clear political manifestation accompanied by radical speeches. Halim Xhelo called the people "to the funeral of Ahmet Zog", calling for the beginning of a revolution under the symbolism of the flag of smallness, and to "declare war on feudalism". On this night that we cry for Avni - said Halim Xhelov - his real killer Ahmet Zogu is in the palace rubbing his hands with Avni's blood and preparing other foreign plans for the destruction of Albania. So, Zagolli has been tried⁴ and wounded by the national conscience with death and as a traitor he should be put on the rope. Meanwhile, on May 10, 1924, the newspaper "Ora e maleve", which was published in Shkodër, wrote that Halim Xhelo gave a sensational and revolutionary speech "made the listeners tremble" This wave of violence was accompanied by Fan Noli's call, which attracted attention of the people that we should not "sleep peacefully until the culprits of this murder are found and punished. The political situation was emerging from the Albanian parliamentary institutional life, on May 2, 1924, the assembly was established in Vlora, which examined the urgent tasks that the opposition and the people had to perform.

The Assembly of Vlora addresses you in an ultimate way to the Supreme Council, the Government, prefectures, military garrisons, and newspaper editorial offices. In this ultimatum, the Government of Tirana was accused, which had not arrested the assassin of Avni Rustemi, at a time when the honor, prestige and interest of the Albanian state demanded that the murderers be arrested and punished. Meanwhile, the Government of Tirana was not showing itself as a lady and it was requested that it leave "the place to those Albanian men who were able to perform this task and maintain order and peace". The second ultimatum protested against the actions of the foreign agency that was working "for the destruction of the Albanian state". The Assembly of Vlora invited popular MPs from Tirana and ministers Luigj Kurakuqi and F. Reshiti to resign from the government of Vërlaci. In the meantime, it was requested, from all the army commands, not to obey the orders from the Government of Tirana and the military commander of Shkodra, Reshit Shala, that Ceno bey Kryeziu be considered a traitor to the nation and a spy for foreigners, and that measures be taken for his departure from Albania, or to be physically liquidated. The illegitimately created Assembly of Vlora sought to represent

²Gjurmime Albanologjike, Kriza revolucionare në Shqipëri dhe qëndrimi i Mbretërisë SKS, Prishtinë 1981, P. 181-185. Autor i shkruarit: Emine Arifi - Bakalli

³Mediha Shuteriqi, Revolucioni demokratiko-borgjez i qershorit të vitit 1924, Studime Historike, 1973, no. 3

⁴Mediha Shuteriqi, Revolucioni demokratiko-borgjez i qershorit të vitit 1924, Studime Historike, 1973, no. 3

the political disobedience of the deputies of the Constitutional Assembly.

These actions culminated in the creation of a permanent Committee under the chairmanship of Qazim Koculi, who was tasked with leading this political action. The bitter fruits had begun to taste after the departure of 43 deputies from the Constitutional Assembly, ministers Gurakuqi and Reshiti resigned from the Government of Tirana. As a result, the Constitutional Assembly⁵ fell into a state of constitutional impotence, not having the necessary quorum to approve the legislation, moreover, the idea was created that no deputy of the opposition had a safe life in the city of Tirana. In Vlora, an administrative commission was formed headed by Fan Noli, Delvina, Traxhozi, Paftali, so a "Military Directorate" was created which drew up a war plan, according to which, Bajram Curri was appointed to head the revolutionary forces in the north and Rexhep Shala. Meanwhile, in Shkodër, on May 12, a meeting of officers took place and the issue of taking power through the exercise of military authority was discussed, with this idea all those present agreed "only a military dictatorship can save Albania".

This grouping of soldiers expressed the formation of a military-type government, which would dissolve the legitimate parliament and in six months the announcement of elections for⁶ the Constitutional Assembly was foreseen. Meanwhile, this government was thought to play a neutral policy in domestic politics, while in national foreign policy. On the other hand, the military command in Shkodra and the garrison of Përmet, in the south, had publicly expressed themselves against the Government of Tirana, under these conditions, on May 5, 1924, the Committee of Vlora⁷ gave the consecration of a revolution, for an uprising. Uprising, which can be called "national movement", but in fact it was an uprising, which had the spirit and silent approval of the majority, but, from the de facto point of view, it had the dimensions of an uprising of the Albanian minority, which was politically active, but dissatisfied against a "satisfactory legislation" for the representative majority of Albanians who loved the law and state order, but also obeyed the law. Meanwhile, the Government of Tirana tried to mobilize the military, but the High Council did not accept the signing of such a decree even though the English representative Ejris, who was close to the government, committed himself with all his might to save the Government of Tirana. Meanwhile, on May 31, 1924, the new government was formed headed by Iljaz bey Vrioni, which on the same day received the vote of confidence of the Constitutional Assembly. On this day, a state of curfew was announced. The government of Vrion asked for an agreement with the insurgents, but the latter agreed to stop the march on Tirana with several conditions: The departure of Ahmet Zogu from Albania and the formation of a provisional government, in the composition of which were the leaders of the revolution.

Whereas, Italy and Yugoslavia did not intervene in the solution of the Albanian crisis, which had erupted with the nature of a radical process revolution, which constituted a pure violation of the constitutional order of the new Albanian state. Moreover, between the Governments of Italy and Yugoslavia, there was an exchange of views about the situation in Albania. These two states declared that the purpose of their policy is not to do anything that would hinder the "development of an independent Albania", considering Albania's unrest as its "internal affairs".

In these conditions, the revolutionary forces penetrated from all the arteries of the city of Tirana, concretizing the triumph of the opposition forces through the pure use of military and civil violence. This situation was accompanied by the departure of Prime Minister Iliaz Vrioni, in Bari, Italy, who was received by Albanian students in an "extremely hostile manner, some students were brutally treated before the Brindisi police intervened", throwing eggs and lemons at him. and chanted "down with the traitors"

The cabinet represented opposing interests. Gurakuqi was more moderate and was not a defender of the radical solutions proposed by Fan Noli and Stavro Vinjau, who were more radical. Qazim Koculi less radical at a time when army representatives⁸ like Rezhep Shala and Qafëzezi were simply careerists and had their own plans and could not be classified as moderates, conservatives or radicals. The latter had united against the rule of the feudal lords, not to oppose the old rule, but because "the great feudal lords held power". Qafëzezi was interested in arranging his personal future, taking advantage of Fan Noli's new regime⁹.

In this typical Albanian Cautism¹⁰, Sotir Pecin was the only member of the High Council, who was ten years older than Noli and had very little faith in radical methods and practices. He had not resigned like the other three members even though "he had not shown himself to be a supporter of Noli". Pecin believed that he would better serve the interests of the state by giving even a little legitimacy to the government of Noli, because abandoning the country at this delicate

5L. Ahmetaj, *Konferenca e paqes në Paris dhe delegacionet shqiptare, Tiranë 2012*, p. 124, 145, 156

6Mediha Shuteriqi, *Revolucioni demokratiko-borgjez i qershorit të vitit 1924, Studime Historike, 1973, no. 6*

7L. Ahmetaj, *Konferenca e paqes në Paris dhe delegacionet shqiptare, Tiranë 2012*, p. 124, 145, 156

8Ajet Haxhiu, *Hasan Prishtina dhe lëvizja politike e Kosovës, Tiranë 1968*, p. 222

9Robert C. Austin, *Shtegu i pashkruar i Nolit, Tiranë 2003*, p. 96

10Reshat Këlliçi, *Me djemtë e Bashkimit, Tiranë, 1965*, p. 7

moment would make it possible to deprive the government of "that thin thread of legitimacy". Peci stayed in Albania hoping to convince Noli to legitimize the new government through new elections or through the call of the Assembly, which had been damaged, "due to the coup d'état". Moreover, it was a legitimate creature created by the December 1923 election. But the intensive work, from the Congress of Lushnja until the time of the coup d'état, was a battle to "uproot the feudal class through radical measures". Meanwhile, the Government of Noli found itself in a war without political sense, because Gurakuqi and Shala sought to ensure the role of their city, Shkodra, as the capital of the Albanian state. This city rightfully had a more visible superiority over other Albanian cities, in the field of culture, history and trade, but the realization of this project seemed impossible, due to the political and geopolitical relations that the Albanian state was in, in the 1920s.

The Gordian knot, which constitutes the intractable conflict, was linked to the program of the Government of Noli, in relation to the draft law of Agrarian Reform. This project envisaged that the expropriated lands would be given in the first place to the peasants who did not have their own land and who lived and worked on the expropriated lands, secondly to the peasants who were engaged in agriculture and who did not have their own land. The reform included the proletarians, who had no property, the peasants, who had no more than four to six hectares of land given the supplementary amount, and, finally, the various craftsmen and professionals who lived on the expropriated lands¹¹.

The draft law did not specify the lands that would be given for free or against payment, but from the explanations given, it was understood that the lands were divided into two groups: a) in lands that were given for free and b) in lands that were sold to the peasants. Meanwhile, the peasant had no right to transform or sell the land given for free by the state. While he could sell the land he bought from the state, with or without an auction, but only after he had paid the full value to the state and after ten years had passed. In the meantime, in order to preserve the small property of the land from further fragmentation, the draft law provided for only the eldest son of the peasant as heir, but, at the time when the peasant had no sons, the land was inherited by the daughter, who when she married, the land returned to the state.

Whereas, the draft law defined confiscation measures for all those who received state land, but who did not work it for three years in a row and "lost the acquired right", in these conditions the land was taken from them by the state and redistributed to other farmers or sold by auction. At the time, "state lands to be expropriated" were divided into agricultural districts and determined by the decision of the Council of Ministers, while "state assets to be expropriated" were determined by the Ministry of Agriculture. In October 1924, this draft law was presented for study to the Minister of Justice¹², Stavri Vinjaut, who proposed that the law also include peasant daughters and that the latter have their place in the prefecture commissions that specifically implemented the Agrarian Reform. He declared against the sale by auction of expropriated properties, as in this way big owners were favored, at a time when the draft law aimed "to create small and not big owners"¹³. According to the state mechanism for approving laws, the Decree Law on the expropriation of state property was presented to the Supreme Council, but the regent, Sotir Peci, did not approve it. Under these conditions, the law on agrarian reform was not being formally implemented, therefore its concrete implementation was taking a long time¹⁴.

As a result of the Agrarian Reform, there were two points of view in the critical opinion: first, the reaction of the peasant class was harsh with the reasoning that the Agrarian Reform constituted a type of Bolshevism and Noli's obvious influence from the methods of the Soviet Union "with Bolshevism in the 20s it was understood the taking without compensation of the property of the landowners and the giving of free land to the peasants, it was understood the use of violent methods in solving the agrarian problem".

While, on the other hand, the agrarian reform was evaluated with very positive notes as a favorable mechanism for the eradication of feudalism as a basic condition for the development of civilization in the Albanian society. This political current considered the feudal lords as representatives of "thieves", moreover, they had no right to live and were described as "certain death for Albania". So, it seems that we have two opposite attitudes and theories, which in their ideological¹⁵ essence represent two radically separated political societies, in their political philosophy they had an exclusive content of each other. The High Council produced them through a legal procedure, from the Congress of Lushnja it was reduced to one member, while the other three had left out of fear, because they were afraid of the trial by the Political Court according to the decree law "On political trial". This court would punish the exponents, who were

11Reshat Këlliçi, *Me djemtë e Bashkimit*, Tiranë, 1965, p. 7

12Fan Noli, *Rron o rron dhe nuk vdes shqiptari*, Tiranë, 1976, f. 182; Avni Rustemi, *dokumente e materiale*, Tiranë, 1974, p. 182

13Nuhajta e thellë e Zogut, në lidhje me situatën pa krye në të cilën ishte futur Shqipërinë kuptoi se ekzistenca e Qeverisë së Tiranës (L.A) ishte e pamundur, për këtë arsye Zogu, në 7 qershor 1924, përgatiti familjen për largim nga Shqipëria.

14Vep, cit. Avni Rustemi, *Dokumente e materiale*, Tiranë 1974, p. 182

15E. Arifi-Bakalli, *Ngjarje që tronditi reaksionin evropian*, 25 gusht 1979, p. 14

evidenced against the June revolution. The decree recognized punishments of death or life imprisonment and permanent expulsion from the borders of the state accompanied by confiscation of property. This is proven through the request that the Prosecutor's Office of the Political Trial addressed to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, for the presentation of lists of "authors of fratricide". The Prosecutor's Office of the Political Court supported the request based on the decree-law on the "Political Court" trial. This Prosecutor requested the lists of "principal actors of fratricide", which included Regents, Ministers, commanders of the army and gendarmerie, commanders of civil power. While the penalties expressed through institutionally produced lists expressed the most extreme degree of Nolist politics, which did not exclude the deputies of the Constitutional Assembly, who were the most significant expression of the sovereignty of the Albanian state and nation, that is, the Albanian political society was experiencing its disassembly phase

While, from archival research, we have observed how the Ministry of Internal Affairs addressed the Presidency of the Constitutional Assembly, regarding the submission of lists of "authors of fratricide". Meanwhile, on July 16, 1924, the Ministry of Internal Affairs sent a letter to the Constitutional Assembly and the prefectures, which obliged them according to the law to present official information on the "authors of fratricide". Meanwhile, ironically, to understand the revolutionary regression of constitutional law and order, we are going back in time¹⁶, June 3, 1924, Prime Minister Iljaz Vrioni had prepared the legal situation "for the amnesty of political guilt". The law amnestied all "judged political crimes", the law, for the "amnesty of political crimes" considered as political crimes all those punishable crimes, which "were foreseen in the military Penal Code that had a relationship with insurrection applicable on 8 March". This law provided for the death penalty for those persons who could be involved in propaganda against the Albanian state or in the "formation of secret committees and armed gangs". However, all political crimes would be judged by a special court, with two judges and two officers chosen by the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of the Interior¹⁷. Meanwhile, the law expressed the temporary character of its "special court" operation, which was formed as a result of the situation the Albanian state was going through. But with the passage of time, when order and peace in Albania would be consolidated, it was predicted that the court would no longer have "active power". At the time when, for all amnestied persons, the movable and immovable property that had been confiscated by the law of June 24, 1922 would be returned, with the exception of those properties, which did not exist, because they could have been "lost, sold, wrecked or burned"¹⁸

In conclusion, we can say that the Government of Noli was unable to hold the reins and administer the state, moreover, there was a marked lack of coherence among the members of the Government. Noli as prime minister found himself in a conflict with many nationalists, including Elez Isuf¹⁹, Aqif Elbasanin, Bajram Curri, Luigj Gurakuqi, Ali Këlxyra and Sami Vrioni. These were supporters of a constitutional monarchy who felt they were still bound by their oath of allegiance to Prince Weed. In these conditions, Noli was determined to carry out the agrarian reform, which was not being applied and was being extended in time, due to the malfunctioning of the institutions, which were deformed in a catastrophic way. The reform, meanwhile, had angered the landed aristocracy and, moreover, Noli's colleagues in the government and the army were either against or at best, indifferent to the reforms. So the theory and practice of the government turned out to be two things with completely different tendencies", moreover, they brought government policy into unnecessary conflict. Institutionally, Sotir Peci, the Regent, opposed the reforms openly and harshly, moreover, he was also accompanied by the representative of England in Albania, Mr. Ajris, who worked intensively against Fan Noli's policy, moreover, he managed to fill them the minds of all those who surrounded the prime minister with the idea that agrarian reform was a dangerous Bolshevik innovation²⁰.

But, what ultimately destroys the Government of Noli is related to the memo prepared by Nicholson, for the British Prime Minister it was not only an analysis, but also an official criticism of the Government of Noli conceived from the considerations of the general British policy which was labeled principled. It was reasoned, in relation to the missing legitimacy of the Government of Noli, whose "legality" Zogu and his companions had taken with them. Albania had not yet justified itself as a separate state even though it had been helped by the League of Nations. Consequently, the Foreign Office accepted the option that Albania could find the path of state development through the "international protectorate". But even this possibility was overturned with Noli's coming to power, which had to be left aside, as a result the Foreign Office did not see fit to offer him any help. This decision-making was based on the judgment that the Democratic

¹⁶Robert C. Austin, *Shtegu i pashkruar i Nolit, Tiranë 2003*, p. 96

¹⁷Robert Austin, *Shtigjet e pashkelura të Fan Nolit, Tiranë 2003*, p. 34-40

¹⁸Gazeta, *Shqipëria e re*, 8 qershor 1924, Tiranë, p. 1-2

¹⁹Nuhajta e thellë e Zogut, në lidhje me situatën pa krye në të cilën ishte futur Shqipërinë kuptoi se ekzistenca e Qeverisë së Tiranës ishte e pamundur, për këtë arsye Zogu, në 7 qershor 1924, përgatiti familjen për largim nga Shqipëria.

²⁰Gazeta, *Politike*, 8 qershor 1924, *Shqipëria e re*, 15 qershor 1924; J.Jovanovic, *Vep. cit. p. 374. Vep. cit. Shqipëria ngritja e një mbretërie*, f. 341 "neni 1 parashikonte detyrimin për të shkëmbyer pikpamje në ato rrethana"

Government with Prime Minister Fan Nolin, to come to power, had used violence, breaking the constitutional order. Moreover, it had created the conditions of a dangerous precedent, for the way of taking power, coming to government, which basically constituted a coup "created in a revolutionary way"²¹.

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²¹Robert C. Austin, Shtegu i pashkruar i Nolit, Tiranë 2003, p. 96