



Italian Foreign Policy between Albania and the Balkans (1910-1939)

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Abstract

This paper analyses the dynamics of Italian diplomacy in Albania from the beginning of the 20th century until 1939, when the Fascists occupied Albania. The primary purpose of this paper is to show how the interests of Italy, combined with the political and economic conditions of the country and, more broadly, of the Balkan peninsula, have changed constantly. Considering the Italian and Albanian diplomatic documents and broader literature, this paper will show the dynamics that shaped the development of Italy's foreign policy concerning Albania and the Balkans in the first three decades of the century. Therefore, in the beginning, it will explain why Albania was relevant to Italian interests. In the context of the Balkan wars, Italy shared its interest with the Austria-Hungarian Empire because it aimed also to control the Adriatic Sea. Afterwards, Yugoslavia was one of Italy's rivals on the Peninsula. Being aware that Albania, like other countries in the Mediterranean, enjoys high interest from the great powers, Italy often tried to receive the UK's and France's approval on some of its moves. Hence, international events like the Balkan wars and WWI and Italian and Albanian political leaders did have a relevant role in shaping foreign policy toward the Balkans and Albania.

Keywords: Albania, Italy, diplomacy, Balkans, fascism, foreign policy

1. Introduction to the Italian interest in the Adriatic

The earliest links between Albania and Italy go back to antiquity, between 168 and 395 AC, when the Albanian territory was a province of the Roman Empire. Even after the Ottoman Empire occupied the territory in 395 AC, the Italian interest did not vanish completely. Indeed, some relationships persisted, thanks to the geographical proximity between the two countries. On the other hand, several colonies were created in southern Italy by refugee waves after the Ottoman occupation.¹ Hundreds and thousands of Albanians called Arbëresh, from the antique name of Albania (*Arbëri*), were located and still live in southern regions like Abruzzo, Catanzaro, Taormina, Apulia, etc.²

Likewise, in 1897, during the Congress of Berlin organised by Bismarck, Austro-Hungary and Italy needed assistance to reach an agreement due to the common interests alongside the Adriatic Sea, including Albania's territory.³ In 1887, Italy obtained a free handover of Albania from Bismarck in case Austria extended further into the Balkans.⁴ Therefore, in 1897, the two countries signed an agreement in Monza (Italy) based on which none would have the initiative to conquer Albania. On the other hand, they would not allow any other power to do so. Moreover, the agreement defined two alternatives for Albania: it would be declared an independent principality detached from the Ottoman Empire, or if this

¹ Silvia Trani. *L'Unione fra L'Albania e Italia Censimento delle fonti 1939-1945*, Pubblicazioni degli Archivi di Stato, Strumenti CLXXIII. Roma: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 2007 p.23

² Çabej. E (2017). *Në botën e arbëreshëve të Italisë*, Tiranë, Çabej, 2017 p.35

³ Franc Maloy Anderson, Amos Shortle Hershey. *Handbook for Diplomatic history of Europe, Asia and Africa 1870-1914*. Washington: Government Printing, 1918, p. 288

⁴ Carocci, G., *Course of History, the Contemporary Age*, Zanichelli, Bologna, 1999, p. 1052

were impossible, Italy and Austria-Hungary would be involved in helping Albania to obtain full self-government.⁵

Under these circumstances, in early 1900, while the Balkans were still under the occupation of the Ottoman Empire, the two European countries were seriously competing regarding Albania. Hereafter, according to the Italian foreign minister, Marquis San Giugliano, Italy had to cultivate a particular interest in the Balkans through the tool of economic development. In other words, it would aim to improve sea and road communication and to build schools and post offices, were necessary. Nevertheless, he was aware of the Albanian national spirit, as he admitted: "Today, the Albanian nation does not have the necessary qualities to govern itself, so it needs to support a large military and naval force. However, Albanians are nationalists, and nowadays, it is impossible to conquer this place without the help of the Turkish military or another army". In addition, he claimed that: "With the strong (Austria-Hungary), we can agree while regarding the weak, it can be overlooked."⁶

Italy was interested in Albania because of its geographic position. The territory enjoys strategic significance in the Adriatic Sea due to the Gulf of Vlorë in the South, which has a valuable natural harbour with deep waters protected from the winds. In front of the gulf is the island of Sazan, about 30 meters high and 2.5 miles long. In addition, the Otranto channel, in front of the city of Vlorë, which divides the two countries, is only 70 km wide and can serve as a gateway to the Adriatic.⁷ The island of Sazan was like a point from which it was possible to monitor the whole bay of Vlorë and, in this way, to create a Gibraltar of the Adriatic.⁸ Indeed, according to the Italian Minister Titoni, "Albania itself is without importance. The only thing that matters is the coast and ports that can give Italy and Austria-Hungary absolute control of the Adriatic Sea. Neither of the two countries will allow the other to conquer Albania, which is the gateway to the Adriatic."⁹

Therefore, Italian interest in Albania increased after the Ottoman Empire's decline. Furthermore, the Italian Prime Minister of this period, Francesco Crispi (1887–1891), was of Albanian descent, and his advisers strongly encouraged him to visit Albania because it served as a gateway to the Adriatic and Balkan region.¹⁰

2. Methodology

This paper analyses Italian foreign policy in Albania and the Balkans, mainly based on the archives. Therefore, the paper aims to show how Italian foreign policy changed over the Balkans, including Albania, Yugoslavia, etc., from time to time. Such changes resulted from Europe's political, economic, and political situation. In order to highlight as clearly as possible the transformation of the objectives and strategies of Italy, the primary resources of the Albanian and Italian archives will be explored. Hence, the paper will be based mainly on the State Archives of Albania (AQSh) and precisely on the archives of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Most of these documents are articles published in European countries in the historical period, from well-known newspapers, and reports of the Albanian ambassadors in the continent. Moreover, we will discover Italian diplomatic documents from this period (DDI). These documents consist primarily of reports on meetings between ambassadors and Albanian politicians, including Ahmet Zogu, and guidelines from Rome to Tirana and vice versa. Nevertheless, the paper will follow the chronological method of events by dividing the period following the main factors that marked it. Therefore, the first part of the paper will explore how Italy managed to cultivate its interest in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which was also interested in controlling the Adriatic Sea. The second session will explore Italy's approach at the Paris Conference after WWI and the efforts made in some dimensions, like towards Greece and the Albanian government. The successive session is on how the King of Albania, Ahmet Zogu, opened the door to Italian imperialism indirectly in the Balkan area. The last session will discuss Italy's advance in the Balkan through Albania and the occupation of Albania and Greece. Ultimately, the conclusions will show some aspects of Italy's foreign policy.

3. The Shape of Interest between Italy and the Austro-Hungarian Empire towards Albania (1900-1914)

The documents of this period show that Italy did not have a clear action plan towards Albania. In a 1912 publication in the Journal "Il Resto del Carlino," the parliament member Crispi firmly blamed Depretis, the former prime minister, for not

⁵ Thimo Çollaku. *Shqipëria Palë në Traktatet Ndërkombëtare*. Tiranë: Asd-Studio, 2013, p. 87

⁶ *Arkivi Qendror i Shtetit (AQSh)*, F. 251 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), V. 1929, D. 373, Fl. 1 (Article published in the newspaper "Poster Loyd" dt. 16.9.1929 with title "Italy and Albania")

⁷ Gabriel Louis Jarey. *Shqipëria e panjohur në mbretërinë e re të shqiptarëve*. Tiranë: Dituria, 2006, f. 114

⁸ Nina Smirnova. *Historia e Shqipërisë përgjatë Shekullit XX*. Tiranë: Ideart, 2004, p. 35

⁹ Francesco Jacomini Jacomini. *Francesco di San Savino. La Política dell'Italia in Albania*. Roma: Capelle, 1965 p.35

¹⁰ Antonello Biagini, *Historia e Shqipërisë nga Zanafilla në ditët tona*, p. 98-99

exploiting the opportunity given by Austro-Hungary. According to Crispi, it was a mistake for Depretis to not agree to the occupation of Bosnia Herzegovina by Austro-Hungary in 1877, which, in exchange, would have allowed Italy to enter Albania.¹¹

Nevertheless, Albania proclaimed its independence on 28 November 1912. Italy and Austro-Hungary immediately recognised the new state with a joint telegram sent by their ambassadors: "*Austria-Hungary and Italy, who have long had great sympathy for the Albanian people, have the greatest interest in the independent development of Albania and will always give their moral support*".¹²

The support of Austro-Hungary and Italy continued to the London Conference of Ambassadors in 1913. The two states kept the same position, "*Albania to the Albanians*". However, the conference proclaimed Albania as a sovereign principality with autonomous, neutral and heritable status, but under the guarantee of six powers. Based on this decision, an International Commission composed of representatives of the six Great Powers and an Albanian representative with a good opportunity for renewal would control the civil and financial administration of the country. Such a decision did not convince Italy and Austro-Hungary. Moreover, they did not have faith in each other. Therefore, they set their intentions through the Secret Treaty of Rome, signed on May 8, 1913, where they established the respective measures to carry out in case of intervention or external actions against the decisions of the London Conference. Indeed, the treaty was kept secret for a long time until the Bolsheviks released it at the end of the Russian Revolution, who dug out the secret Russian archives.¹³

In addition, to assure access, in 1913, the Italian Society for the Progress of Science in Albania organised a scientific expedition where mineral resources and bituminous sand substances were discovered in the regions of Berat and Devoll. Such discoveries increased the importance of Italian interests towards Albania.

Following both the Conference and the International Commission's decisions, in March 1914, Albania settled under the monarchy of the German Prince Vilhelm Vied, who remained on the throne for only six months. He abandoned it at the first days of the beginning of the First World War, leaving the country in chaos and uncertainty. Taking advantage of the war and through a careful diplomatic operation with the Great Powers, Italy organised a Humanitarian Sanitary Mission in Valona, through which the Italian Admiral Patris landed at San Nicola Bay on the island of Sazan, in front of the city of Vlorë, together with a navy regiment aiming to occupy the town.¹⁴

Meanwhile, in Albania with the withdrawal of Prince Vied, three governments were formed: one in the central part of the territory, the government of Durrës directed by Esat Pashë Toptani and supported by the Serbs; one in the north by the Muslim community of Scutari; and one the South in Vlorë as a municipal commission. Nevertheless, due to a lack of organisation and resources, the governments could not resist. In 1914 came the capitulation of Esat Pasha Toptani, who, having not found support in Serbia, asked for help from Italy. Such a request was enough for Rome, who sent Sonino as a foreign minister to Albania.¹⁵

4. Italian Strategy at the Paris Peace Conference

Italy's position changed with the evolution of the war, especially after the pact with Russia, France, and the United Kingdom in London on May 23, 1915, from which it assured the territories of Istria and Dalmatia up to Plank. Nevertheless, Italy did not ask for Fiume as it was sure that the Austro-Hungarian Empire was interested in accessing the Adriatic Sea¹⁶. Likewise, the pact officially recognised the Italian sovereignty over the island of Sazan¹⁷ and assured the control over Vlorë.

In July 1917, the Kingdom of Serbia-Croatia Slovenia was established, and it also had interests in Istria and Albania. Meanwhile, Austro-Hungary occupied territories in North Albania, while Greece entered the South. The Italian troops replaced the Austrian Hungarian ones after the empire's defeat. The Albanian government, composed of pro-

¹¹ Paskal Milo. *Politika e jashtme e Shqipërisë*. Tiranë: Toena, 2013, p. 58-59

¹² Antonello Biagini, *Historia e Shqipërisë nga Zanafilla në ditët tona*, p. 98-99

¹³ Amedeo Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'unione con l'Italia 1913-1939*. Milano: ISPI, 1949t, p. 26

¹⁴ Silvia Trani. *L'Unione fra L'Albania e Italia Censimento delle fonti 1939-1945*, *Pubblicazioni degli Archivi di Stato, Strumenti CLXXXIII*. Roma: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 2007 p.23

¹⁵ Borgogni Massimo. 2007. *Tra continuità ed incertezza, Italia ed Albania (1914-1939): La strategia politico – militare dell'Italia in Albania fino all'operazione Oltre Mare Tirana*. Roma: Franco Angeli p.16

¹⁶ Ennio di Nolfo, *Storia delle relazioni internazionali 1918-1999*. Rome: The Third, 1999, p.61

¹⁷ Massimo Borgogni. *Between continuity and uncertainty. Italy and Albania (1914-1939). The political-military strategy of Italy in Albania up to the "Oltre Mare" Operation*. Milan: Franco Angeli, 2007, p.16

Italian members, known as the Government of Durrës, was founded with the help of Italy. Headed by Turhan Pashë Përmeti, the government of Durrës represented Albania at the Paris Conference.¹⁸

During the conference, Italy had a privileged position as it was included in the core discussion and decision-making because, on the one hand, it was part of the Council of Four through the participation of Orlando, together with Wilson, Lloyd George, and Clemenceau. On the other, it was part of the Council of Ten.¹⁹

Nevertheless, Italy had some issues to resolve regarding the Balkans, including Albania and Yugoslavia. Italy aimed to control the Adriatic Sea against the new Serbo-Croat-Slovenian Kingdom, so Italy's priorities were Istria, Fiume, and Dalmatia. The new kingdom had problems with international recognition, so Italy encouraged movements of autonomy in Croatia.

Regarding Albania, Italy exploited Greece's interest in the southern territories and signed an agreement on July 29, 1919, named "Tironi-Venizelos", following the names of two respective foreign ministers. Based on this, Italy would support Greece in obtaining the Aegean islands except for Rhodos and the south of Albania, which are, concretely, the cities of Gjirokastra and Korça. In exchange, Greece was supposed to support the Italian request for a mandate over Albania and the sovereignty of Vlorë. The pact was supposed to remain secret, but it was discovered and triggered deep disappointment in the government and people of Albania.²⁰

Moreover, the Italian government worked on implementing the Secret Pact of London and on manipulating the Albanian government by signing a secret agreement on 20 July 1920. According to such an agreement, a High Council directed by Italy's Ministry of Foreign Affairs would control the government.²¹ Moreover, a second memorandum was signed between the United States, the United Kingdom, and France on Italy's claims over the Adriatic. In a certain way, this memorandum approved once again the sovereignty of Italy over Vlorë.²² The Italian Prime Minister Orlando and the Foreign Minister Sonnino aimed to extend the Italian influence beyond the Adriatic Sea and obtained Dalmatia and Fiume.²³

The situation changed in the early months of 1920 when the war of Vlorë began. Even though it was a form of popular protest, with primitive means and without a proper organisation, it was powerful. Therefore, Italy's approach towards Albania took a different turn. In his speech to the Italian Senate, Prime Minister Giolitti stated on 15 September 1925, "We have talked about our protectorate over Albania, but Albania is a country that has always been jealous of its independence. Albania does not want our protectorate, and we have no right to impose ourselves on it. We must remain true to our position for Albania's absolute independence. We need friendly people beyond the Adriatic."²⁴ Despite this official claim, Giolitti, in his memoirs on the European war, stated that Italy was more interested in a completely independent Albania so that no power could stop in its waters. According to Giolitti, Albania would never be a power to fear or a power that could stop Italy's shipping. Under wartime circumstances, if Italy had been strong, it would not have needed Vlorë. Otherwise, if it was weak, it had to abandon her. In the end, Italy was only interested in the island of Sazan, through which it could control and stop every ship anchored in Vlorë.²⁵

The war of Vlorë finished with a protocol signed on February 20, 1920. It established the withdrawal of Italian troops from all Albanian territory except that of Sazan Island. The protocol, which gave an unclear status to Italy, was never registered at the League of Nations, and none of the parties ever published it.²⁶

Hence, Italy could succeed in achieving its objectives towards Albania, as it was recognised as a guarantee of Albania's independence. Such a role was justified by the fact that a considerable number of the Albanian population was already living in Italy. It intended that Italy was the guarantee of all the borders, especially if Italian strategic interests were touched.²⁷ Nevertheless, the author Borgogni explains that Italy agreed with the UK not to hinder the work of the British Oil company in Albanian territory. However, the British government directly negotiated with the Prime Minister of the Durrës government, based on which the Albanian government recognised the exclusivity of the Anglo-Persian company

¹⁸ Akademia e Shkencave, *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, Tiranë, 2000, p. 261

¹⁹ Ennio di Nolfo, *Storia delle relazioni internazionali 1918-1999*. Rome: The Third, 1999, p. 135-136

²⁰ Antonello Biagini, *Historia e Shqipërisë nga Zanafilla në ditët tona*, p. 138

²¹ Akademia e Shkencave, *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, Tiranë, 2000, p. 135

²² A. Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'unione con l'Italia 1913-1939*. Milano: ISPI, 1949t, p. 76

²³ Carocci Gianpiero. *Corso di Storia Contemporanea*, Zanichelli, 1999, Bologna p. 1138

²⁴ A. Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'unione con l'Italia 1913-1939*. Milano: ISPI, 1949t, p. 103

²⁵ Giolitti, G. *Memorie di mia vita*, Milano, Treves 1922. P. 669

²⁶ Silvia Trani. *L'Unione fra L'Albania e Italia Censimento delle fonti 1939-1945*, Pubblicazioni degli Archivi di Stato, Strumenti CLXXIII. Roma: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 2007 p.23

²⁷ Borgogni Massimo. 2007. *Tra continuità ed incertezza, Italia ed Albania (1914-1939): La strategia politico - militare dell'Italia in Albania fino all'operazione Oltre Mare Tirana*. Roma: Franco Angeli, p. 89

to explore almost 200,000 hectares and another 50,000 hectares in case of joyous exploration.²⁸ On the other hand, the territories of Kosovo were given to Yugoslavia and Çamëria to Greece. With the end of the Peace Conference, Italy declared "war zones" in all of Albania's occupied areas, causing obstacles to the free movement of goods and people.²⁹ In addition, it initiated a policy of cultural expansion towards Albania by building elementary and professional schools in Vlora, Durrës and Shkodër, where Italian was the only language.³⁰ Italy's strategy was based on Albanian society's Italianization and the national spirit's neutralisation. Somehow, it was in line with Wilson's 14 points, which stated that some European states needed the assistance of a developed country.³¹

The schools established in Albania were part of the strategy to compete with the Austro-Hungarian schools opened mainly in the northern part of the country, where the Catholic religion is more relevant. However, the cultural approach followed in Albania was different from the one followed in the Balkan states because it was most oriented toward fascistisation, not just the Italianization of society. On the other hand, Italian diplomacy neutralised every kind of influence from any other European country. In addition, the focus was to enforce the nationalist sentiment of the Albanians to enhance the irredentist policy that was part of fascism. Therefore, the Italian government financed several publications on the national Albanian hero Gjergj Kastrioti Skenderbeu, the Journal of Albanology, etc.³²

However, this autonomous policy helped to birth the nationalistic wave in Italy, which later brought Mussolini to power in 1922.

5. How Ahmet Zogu Opened the Doors to Italy (1924-1928)

The coming of Ahmet Zogu to power was good news for Italy because Zogu, on the one hand, was a fan of Mussolini. On the other, he intended to rely on Italian support for the country's economic development. Italy was the only choice because the League of Nations could not support Albania financially; Serbia was not a choice as it supported its opponents in 1920-1924; the USA and UK did not show interest in helping, except for some weak humanitarian resources.³³

Nevertheless, Mussolini did not accept immediately, but he first asked for the opinion of the United Kingdom.³⁴ He hesitated because Zogu refused to acknowledge the role given to Italy by the Ambassador's Conference.³⁵ However, Mussolini accepted contributing to the development of the Albanian economy by recognising the just-established Republic of Albania. Such a step opened the way for the signature of the Navigation Pact between the two countries, based on which Albania would not allow any other country to build monopolies or request concessions that could affect the Italian economic interests. Hence, the Italian merchant ships were excluded from the taxes on the Albanian territory. The agreement also regulated the workers' exchange, the creation of settlers, and other interests in the field of work for Italian and Albanian citizens. Nevertheless, the Albanian Parliament never ratified the pact, but one month later, it was followed by the agreement on consular services.³⁶

However, the Italian hegemony was enforced with further agreements in 1925. In May, the agreements regarding the SVEA company "Society for Economic Development of Albania", the contract for the establishment of the Bank of Albania, the Pact on Friendship known as the First Pact of Tirana, with a duration of five years, which guaranteed a military alliance between the two countries and aimed at strengthening mutual relations.³⁷ According to the estimations of this period, there are about 50 million golden francs invested in Albania by Italy, where 14.800.000 francs were invested in streets, 11.265.000 francs in bridges, 8.800.000 million in harbors, constructions, 2.200.000 francs in railways,

²⁸ Borgogni Massimo. 2007. *Tra continuità' ed incertezza, Italia ed Albania (1914-1939): La strategia politico - militare dell'Italia in Albania fino all'operazione Oltre Mare Tirana*. Roma: Franco Angeli p. 93

²⁹ Akademia e Shkencave, *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, Tiranë, 2000, p.261

³⁰ Nina Smimova. *Historia e Shqipërisë përgjatë Shekullit XX*. Tiranë: Ideart, 2004, p. 162-164

³¹ Amedeo Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'unione con l'Italia 1913-1939*. Milano: ISPI, 1949t, p. 168

³² A. Basciani, *Preparando l'annessione. La politica cultural italiana in Albania negli anni di Zog (1924-1939)*. Roma Orientale, 22, 2008, p. 95

³³ Bernd J. Fischer, *Mbreti Zog dhe përpjekja për stabilitet në Shqipëri*. Tiranë: Çabej, 2006, f. 99-100

³⁴ Ennio di Nolfo, *Storia delle relazioni internazionali 1918-1999*. Rome: The Third, 1999 135-136

³⁵ Borgogni Massimo. 2007. *Tra continuità' ed incertezza, Italia ed Albania (1914-1939): La strategia politico - militare dell'Italia in Albania fino all'operazione Oltre Mare Tirana*. Roma: Franco Angeli p. 93

³⁶ B. Fischer, *Mbreti Zog dhe përpjekja për stabilitet në Shqipëri*. Tiranë: Çabej, 2006, f. 99-100

³⁷ A. Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'unione con l'Italia 1913-1939*. Milano: ISPI, 1949t., p.178

6.735.000 for buildings, 485.000 for posts-telegraph, 5.000.000 for agriculture and 335.000 as scholarships.³⁸ Nevertheless, most of the infrastructures built in this period were aimed at military reasons. For instance, the streets selected for construction led towards Yugoslavia.³⁹

The Pact of Friendship alarmed Yugoslavia, who immediately, with the support of France, undertook a military action on the Albanian North border and reported the fact to Germany and the UK. As a counterweight, France and Yugoslavia signed a treaty of friendship and alliance. As for the United Kingdom, it agreed to accept that because Italy would bring prosperity, peace and order, which would benefit political stability in the Mediterranean. These developments made Zogu insecure, so he pushed for the second pact with Italy in 1927, which lasted twenty years.⁴⁰ Hence, Mussolini succeeded in having direct control over the Otranto channel. Zogu, on the other hand, managed to defend itself from Greece and Yugoslavia because the pact determined that Italy had the right to intervene militarily in case of attacks towards Albania.⁴¹

Also, Italy implemented economic hegemony with the SVEA fund, which invested in a debt of 50 million lire, with the participation of Italian companies in a series of public works on the infrastructure, starting from 1927.⁴² This was necessary to enforce Italian imperialism and, simultaneously, to enforce the power of Ahmet Zogu, whose presidential mandate would end in 1928.⁴³ The fund seemed a possibility for development, but indeed, it was a possibility to ensure the Italian monopoly on almost all Albanian products, like tobacco, salt, etc.⁴⁴

The Italian money invested in Albania, but especially in Zogu's pockets,⁴⁵ would go missing if he could not be re-elected as head of state after 1928. Therefore, the contribution of money given to him for enforcing his power would disappear. In this case, Italy would necessitate investing from the beginning. For this reason, Italy planned to transform the Republic of Albania into a kingdom with Zogu as a King. Minister Ugo Sola proposed to Zogu⁴⁶ the regime's transformation from republic to kingdom. The plan was part of the Italian strategy, which included the defence alliance and the future king's marriage.

Just one night before the proclamation of the kingdom, on August 31, 1928, Zogu signed another secret agreement for building the necessary infrastructure for the implementation of the Second Pact of Tirana⁴⁷, which was all about the military enforcement against Yugoslavia. After the proclamation of the Kingdom, a complex relationship between Italy, the King and the Balkans just started.

6. The Advance of Italy in the Balkans through the Kingdom of Albania

Mussolini asked Chamberlain in the meetings in Livorno in 1926 and Florence in 1929 before starting his hegemony in Albania. The British Prime Minister agreed to approve such hegemony because, for the UK, the only interest in the Balkan was the economic interest of the oil resources to be exploited.⁴⁸ They have agreed to keep the status quo in Albania and the Balkans. Moreover, based on the press publications, the UK even agreed to peace between Italy, Yugoslavia and France.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, all of Europe commented that the Kingdom of Albania was a product of Italy and for the Italian interests in the Balkans.

The relations between Italy and Zogu started to change immediately after the proclamation of the Kingdom. The Italian diplomatic documents, mainly consisting of reports from the Italian ministers in the country, show that Zogu was a complex figure who tried to discharge himself from every responsibility. Based on these documents, Zogu, most of the

³⁸ AQSh, *Fondi 251, D. 256, V. 1935, Fl. 10* (Article published in newspaper "Pravda" with title "Albania as Italian military supplier", dt. 27.11.1935)

³⁹ Bernd J. Fischer. *Zogist contributions to the development of an Albanian national consciousness. Monarkia Shqiptare 1928-1939. Qendra e Studimeve Albanologjike, Instituti i Historisë. Tiranë: Toena, 2008, p. 24*

⁴⁰ Nina Smimova. *Historia e Shqipërisë përgjatë Shekullit XX. Tiranë: Ideart, 2004, p.162-164*

⁴¹ Massimo Borghogni. *Between continuity and uncertainty. Italy and Albania (1914-1939. The political-military strategy of Italy in Albania up to the "Oltre Mare" Operation. Milan: Franco Angeli, 2007, p.95*

⁴² Antonello Biagini, *Historia e Shqipërisë nga Zanafilla në ditët tona, 157*

⁴³ AQSh, *Fondi 251, D. 77, V. 1932, Fl.7* (Article published in the newspaper "Vita industriale e commerciale" with title "Albanian under the Italian imperialism", dt. 4.8.1932)

⁴⁴ Roselli, Alessandro. *Italy and Albania: Financial Relations in the Fascist Period. Londër: I.B. Touris & Co., 2006, p. 185*

⁴⁵ DDI, *Series VII, V. 6, No. 317, f. 280* (Telegram of Sola for Mussolinin dt. 8.5.1927)

⁴⁶ DDI, *Series VII, V. 5, No. 406, f. 390* (Telegram of Mussolinin for Sola dt.11.9.1927)

⁴⁷ Akademia e Shkencave, *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar, Tiranë, 2000, p.261*

⁴⁸ B. Fischer, *Mbeti Zog ... p. 108-109*

⁴⁹ AQSh, *Fond 251, V. 1929, D. 376, Fl. 63* (Letter of Ambassador Milto Tutulani in Rome to the Minister of Foreign Affairs)

time, was ambiguous and selfish. Italian diplomats' reports show that maybe it was Italy's responsibility to enforce his position and power within the country. Nevertheless, Zogu tried not to repress the anti-Italian forces in the country. Therefore, Mussolini signed the Italian–Yugoslavian Friendship Pact in 1928 to give the new king a lesson.⁵⁰ Italy continued to invest in Albania's military enforcement through investments and the military presence in the country. On the other hand, Italy invested in schools to gain the people's sympathy. As author Di Nolfo claims, Mussolini knew that the Balkans were not soil for the colony; therefore, other sophisticated ways were necessary.⁵¹ Part of this approach was the debt of 10 million francs to Albania in 1931, with the condition of sending Italian colons into the most fertile zone of Albania and the army to pass under the total control of Italy.⁵² Meanwhile, the fascist propaganda admitted in the press that Italy was aiming for the destruction of Yugoslavia and getting the territories of Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Dalmatia and Croatia.⁵³

In October 1930, the Balkan states, led by Turkey, started the organisation of a Balkan Entente (Treaty) to ensure common borders. The pact was signed in 1934 between Greece, Turkey, Romania and Yugoslavia to guarantee the security of their Balkan borders. They would cooperate to protect their common interests as provided by the treaty itself, and the Balkan states would not take any initiative against any other Balkan state that was not part of the Entente. On the other hand, these four states pledged not to undertake political obligations against any other Balkan country without the consensus of the signatories. The pact would be opened to other states that would not harm any parties.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Albania stayed away from the pact because Zogu was interested in improving its relationship with Italy, even though a considerable number of Albanian minorities were living inside the borders of Yugoslavia.⁵⁵ Turkey tried to include Albania in the Treaty, but in a meeting of the Turkish ambassador in Rome and Mussolini, it was harsh and automatically refused this option.⁵⁶ Albania never showed any official request to be part of the pact, and according to the author Tomas, Zogu was aiming to be paid by Italy not to be included in the pact.⁵⁷

The exclusion of Albania from the Balkan Entente showed to the world that Italy was de facto the controller of Albania and, as a consequence, of the Adriatic Sea. At this time, even the big powers, like the UK, understood that Italy had become influential in the Balkans.⁵⁸

Hence, the pact was a significant turning point in Italian foreign policy in the mid-30s. On one hand, Italy realised it could not cross the Albanian border to jump into the Balkan. On the other hand, Zogu realised how relevant he was and increased his claims for more money, for which he received further isolation in return. Moreover, the great powers like the UK realised that Italy now had possession and control of the Adriatic Sea, somehow with their permission.⁵⁹ Consequently, it changed the approach towards Yugoslavia. In 1935, the foreign minister Ciano started the negotiations for a treaty of non-attack and trade in the Adriatic. Zogu tried to be part of it, but Italy denied the negotiations. Such negotiations were accompanied by public declarations that the Entente was against the League of Nations principles and aimed to annex 12 islands from Greece. The idea of Italy was to confuse the Balkans and to teach Zogu about its reduced importance in the area.⁶⁰

Nevertheless, Mussolini was manipulating international public opinion on the peace in the Balkan because, in 1935, he occupied Ethiopia. In addition, in 1937, he made a gentlemen's agreement with London to keep the peace in the Mediterranean Sea. In the same year, it signed an agreement with Turkey, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia and tried to do the same with France. However, it did not accept to recognise the Italian Empire's expansion in Africa.

After the occupation of Ethiopia, the League of Nations undertook sanctions against Italy, which Albania voted against. At this point, Zogu was isolated from the great powers, as the British ambassador argued in a meeting in Sofia when he was asked to support Albania with a friendship treaty.⁶¹

⁵⁰ DDI, Serie VII, V.7, Nr. 133 (Letter from Mussolini to King Zogu through Sola, dt. 28.12.1928)

⁵¹ Ennio Di Nolfo, *Mussolini e la Politica Estera Italiana 1919-1933*. Padova: Cedam, 1960, f.164

⁵² Ali Këlcyra. *Shkrime për historinë e Shqipërisë*. Tiranë: Onufri, 2012, f. 348

⁵³ AQSh, Fondi 251, D. 77, V. 1932, Fl.7 (Article published in the newspaper "Vita industriale e commercial" with title "Albanian under the italian imperialism", dt. 4.8.1932)

⁵⁴ Ungariches Institute Munchen <http://www.forost.ungarisches-institut.de/pdf/19340209-2.pdf> [accessed on 11.08.2014]

⁵⁵ DDI, Serie VII, V. 14, Nr. 429, f. 467 (Note of Alios for Mussolini, dt. 30.11.1933)

⁵⁶ AQSh, Fondi 251, V. 1934, D. 55, Fl. 95 (Article of Turkish journal "Xhemhurijet", dt.31.3.1934)

⁵⁷ Jason Tomes. "The Italo-Albanian Enstrangement 1933-35", *Monarkia Shqiptare 1928-1939*. Tiranë: Toena, 2011, f. 64

⁵⁸ AQSh, Fondi 251, V.1934, D. 54, Fl. 56, (Letter from the Albanian ambassador in Turkey from his talks to the turkish foreign minister)

⁵⁹ AQSh, Fondi 251, V. 1934, D. 55, Fl. 148 (Article in the newspaper "Near East and India" with title "Albania and its members in the Balkan", dt. 9.5.1934)

⁶⁰ AQSh, Fondi 251, V. 1934, D. 55 (Article in the newspaper "Everyman", with title "Albania and Italy", dt. 22.1.1934)

⁶¹ AQSh, Fondi 251, V. 1937, D. 86, Fl. 86, (Letter of Embassy of Albania in Athens dt. 27.3.1937)

In 1937, Italy concluded an economic treaty with Yugoslavia, where it recognised the Empire of Italy over Ethiopia and where the two states also engaged in defending the common borders over the Adriatic Sea.⁶² Moreover, Italy started to negotiate by signing agreements with Turkey and Bulgaria, and it seemed like it was hoping for peaceful relations in the Balkans. However, the situation changed with the setting of power of Hitler in Germany. Mussolini extended his ambitions with *Mare Nostrum*, intending to develop his imperialism in the African continent. In 1939, he occupied Albania, and in 1940, he attacked Greece from the south of Albania, but it was a miscalculation. Italy pretended to win quickly and gain control over the Mediterranean. The invasion was a disaster because Italy not only lost militarily but almost lost control over Albania because soldiers from Albania refused to fight with their neighbours.⁶³ (Cliadakis, 1974).

7. Conclusions

At the end of this paper, we can conclude that Italian foreign policy towards Albania and the Balkans has been complex, multidimensional and always on metamorphosis.

First, Italy's interest in Albania and the Adriatic Sea has been evident since ancient times. However, the occupation of the Balkans by the Ottoman Empire took such interest aside for centuries. However, Italian interests had to be shared with the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which also needed access to the sea. Domination over the Adriatic was an idea that had been around since the coming of fascism into power in 1922.

However, Albania was just a part of the Balkan interest in Italy. Dalmatia and Fiume were also strategic points and objectives to obtain in the interest of Italy.

Second, the Italian idea of foreign policy is based on treaties and diplomacy when dealing with powerful states. On the other hand, it is based on imperialism through economic control when dealing with weak ones like Albania. Hence, Italian diplomacy carefully maintained good relations with the UK and France and tried to have sustainable agreements until 1935. This is confirmed, for instance, with several meetings between Mussolini and the Prime Minister of the UK to support its policy over the Balkans.

Third, Italian foreign policy is often based on secret treaties with the great powers, as explained in the session on the Conference of Peace in Paris, such as the secret treaty Tittoni – Venizelos or the secret treaty of Rome. Sometimes, manipulation and rumours are used as working tools in Italian diplomacy, as shown in the case of the Balkan Entente.

Fourth, we can conclude that Italian foreign policy towards Albania has been a policy of imperialism and colonialism. Such imperialism could build a multidimensional hegemony like military, economic, financial, cultural, educational, agricultural, and administrative because, as Mussolini stated, the Balkans are not lands for colonies; therefore, we must conquer them using other methods.

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⁶² AQSh, Fondi 251, V. 1937, D. 86, Fl. 91-94 (Agreement Italy-Yugoslavia, March 1937)

⁶³ Cliadakis, H. (1974). *Neutrality and War in Italian Policy 1939-40*. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 9(3), 171–190. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/260029>

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