



A Historical Overview on Fulfillment of the Right to Basic Education Among Albanians from Middle Ages to Beginning of The Last Decade of the XX Century

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Abstract

Albanians are among the peoples of the Balkans who for centuries have faced the denial of the right to be educated in their native language. The attitude and action of the Ottoman occupier for the prohibition of education in the Albanian language in all Albanian regions during all occupational period was added the effect of the prohibitive action of the religious institutions and neighboring countries that aimed at the territorial annexation of Albania. The realization of the right to education in the Albanian language among Albanian people has been one of the main objectives of the Albanian National Movement for freedom and independence. The declaration of independence also marks the beginning of education in the Albanian language for Albanians as a public right. The decisions of the Vlorë government were the first important efforts to realize this right. Economic and social development, the level of culture and traditions, the heritage related to long period under occupation, the geopolitical factors and developments in the first half of the century XX do not promote the process for the development of the basic education system in Albania. At the end of the second world war, Albania was the country with the highest level of illiteracy in the Balkan region. The development of the education system has been one of the main priorities of the Government in the period after the second world war. The right to education was defined as a constitutional right and basic education as a legal obligation for every Albanian citizen. During the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the main characteristic of the education system in Albania was its high level of ideologization.

Keywords: Basic education, Historical overview, Albania

1. Introduction

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights emphasizes that: "Every individual has the right to education. Education should be free, at least primary and basic education. Primary education should be compulsory". In order to reach the formulation and announcement of this declaration, peoples have spent a lot of energy, blood and sacrifices. In particular, the peoples who have gone through regimes under the occupation in comparison to the other peoples and countries, have done more efforts and the struggle to gain rights for education in the mother language. In all times and in all conquered countries, the conquerors have shown a special interest to not allow these peoples to be educated in their native language. This is also the case of Albania. Albanians are part of the Balkans peoples, who for centuries, more than all others, did not have the right to learn in their own language. All the conquerors of the Albanian lands, but also the neighboring countries that historically have always targeted these lands, have tried to deny the Albanians the right to learn to write and read the Albanian language. Thus, they hoped to be able to reward and destroy the Albanian nation and people. The Ottoman conquerors during the entire 5 centuries of occupation have forbidden Albanian people to have Albanian schools. The Albanians did not even benefit from the Tanzimat Reforms that the Ottoman Empire carried out

throughout its territory, also. Being a people that practiced several religious beliefs, the Albanians did not benefit from the services that school and education, in this period, did to the formation of the national consciousness of other peoples.

Albanians were obliged to be educated in Turkish, Greek or Italian, according to the religion they belonged to. In 1892, in the four Albanian vilayets there were more than 1000 Greek schools, 40 Vlach schools, 200-300 Serbian and Bulgarian schools and only 2 Albanian schools.

According to the statistics of the last years of the XIX century, there were 1187 Turkish schools in the four provinces, of which 1125 were primary schools, 57 city schools (ruzhdiqe) and 5 secondary schools (idadiqe).

In the interest of the Empire, the Sultan had made education in Turkish or Arabic compulsory for Muslims, regardless of their national origin.

To face the danger of assimilation, which was one of the most important negative effects caused by the education of Albanians in foreign language schools, the Albanian revivalists focused their efforts on establishing education in the Albanian language. At these time, Konstandin Kristoforidhi was emphasis: "If the Albanian language is not written, for a short period, there will be no more Albanians on the face of the earth and the name of Albania will disappear from the face of the earth" (Loshi, 2005). The revivalists have considered learning in the Albanian language and the distribution of Albanian books as the best tool for national awakening.

2. Albanians` Efforts for Education in their Language

In the period after the Albanian League of Prizren, there was pause in the history of the Albanian National Movement (Loka, n. 2018). In fact, this phase characterized by an other form of development of this Movement, the predominant characteristic of which was the efforts to develop the Albanian national identity. At this time, the development of Albanian education and culture became the main objectives that the National Movement aimed to achieve. The problem of Albanian education was a major concern of Albanian national leaders in the post-Prizren League period, both in terms of language and the alphabet. Sami Frashëri (1923) has succinctly expressed this concern in his book "Albania, what it has been, what it is and what will be done" that was published at the end of the XIX century: "Albania cannot exist without Albanians, Albanians cannot exist without the Albanian language, and the latter cannot exist without its own alphabet and without schools". According to him, "Albania would not be able to save its nationality and language, if Turkey continued to prevent Albanians from establishing their native schools, while allowing other nationalities, enemies of it and Albania, to act as to like it. If the Turkish rule continued, in time there would be no trace of Albania." (Frasheri, s. 1923)

The implementation of the Political Program of the National Movement began with the request to ensure the most elementary right - that of learning the Albanian language. In the Charter of the "Society of printed Albanian letters" (1879) the role of culture in the development of a nation was emphasized: "All the nations that are enlightened and civilized are enlightened and civilized by letters in their own languages".

Education in the mother language was extremely difficult for the Albanian Muslim and Orthodox population. Many petitions were addressed to the Sultan, sometimes even to the Great Powers, for the opening of Albanian schools, but in vain. The Sultan opposed in principle any national movement of the Albanian population, especially its Muslim part. The Ottoman Empire did not allow schools in the Albanian language even after the imperial decree (Hatt-i-Humayun, 1856), when by law, all the peoples of the Empire had equal treatment in education.

Even the Istanbul Patriarchate opposed the Albanian language and education for the Orthodox. The Patriarchate considered teaching in the Albanian language as a factor that would result in the loss of its influence, which could even result in the creation of an independent Albanian church. The Patriarchate worked persistently for the opening of Greek schools, even in the most remote villages of Albania. In 1882, in the vilayet of Ioannina, where there was a concentration of the Orthodox population, consisting of 532,000 people, there was a total of 23,368 students in 665 Greek schools, while the Muslim population of 104,239 of the male (Muslim girls did not went to school) there were only 559 students.

Among the Catholics in the north, the question of schools had found some solution as the part of the Kultusprotektoriat, which Austria had won about three centuries before in the Treaty of Vienna (1616) and had then renewed and expanded with later treaties and decrees which gave the right to Vienna to engage in the construction and repair of Catholic churches and schools. In 1848, the Habsburg Empire introduced the Albanian mother language in its schools. The policy of the dualistic Monarchy, as it is often repeated in the reports of its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, aimed at supporting the development of national consciousness of the Albanians through their national culture, in order to form a united Albania, as a counterweight to the Slavs. In order to weaken the Italian cultural influence that was growing and to strengthen its own influence, Austria-Hungary "nationalized" the Catholic schools in Albania, replacing in many of them the Italian language with the Albanian language. Although to a more limited extent, Italy was also forced to use the

Albanian language in schools that was administrated by them in Albania. In order to oppose the Austrian influence, the Italians, from the end of the nineteenth century, started to establish schools in Shkodër and in the coastal cities, where the Albanian language was taught. Despite the expansionist goals and competition between Austria-Hungary and Italy, Albanians, through the schools opened by these countries, were exposed to Western ideas and culture, becoming aware of their national interests and their national individuality.

The "Society for Writing Albanian Letters" of Istanbul had a great influence on the cultural movement of Albanians, which based its activity on the thesis announced by the first revivalists, that "every nation that does not write its own language and does not have its own national alphabet, is a backward nation". Establishment of this Society was the first step to get out of the stage of isolated actions and to create an organizational and representative core of the Albanian National Movement. Its aim was the establishment of Albanian secular schools, common to all Albanians, regardless of their religion. The Albanian secular schools had the duty to, through the spread of the Albanian language, help in awakening the national consciousness and in increasing the efforts of the Albanians for autonomy. Luigj Gurakuqi, the first director of Normale Center, emphasizes: "When we talk about the Albanian school, we should not only consider those where Albanian is taught but, rather, those where the teaching is always Albanian and responds to the needs of our nationality". Two weeks later, the Albanian schools opened in Pogradec, Ohrid, Reka, Erseka, Leskovik, Polena, Luaras, Elbasan. Albanian learning books were also spread in the villages of Kosovo, such as in Prizren, Gjakovë, Pejë, Ferizaj, Drenica, etc. In order to help the progress of education and the opening of new schools, in 1888 was founded the "Society of Learning in Albanian language", which managed to have 160 members, Albanians of both faiths, where each of them paid a monthly quota, which went to finance schools (Sota, J. 2012)

3. Albanian Education After the YoungTurks Revolution

The doctrine of Ottomanism, according to which all citizens of the Empire were "Ottomans" and are "equal before the law", was the foundations of the Young Turk nationalist policy. The effect of implementation of this doctrine was the establishment of cultural clubs and opening of the schools in the languages of different nationalities. Many cultural clubs were opened in Albania and the Albanian school movement spread throughout the country. Patriotic clubs and societies provided financial means for Albanian schools, through which the premises and teachers were paid. Developments dictated the need to unify the alphabet of the Albanian language. The Congress of Manastir, held on November 14-22, 1908, chose the Latin alphabet. This is an important moment in the process of realizing the right to education for Albanians. The introduction of the Latin alphabet significantly influenced the development of Albanian writing and the cultural unification of the Albanian nation.

YoungTurks, afraid that "by emphasizing common nationality, the Latin alphabet would unite Albanians and eventually separate them from Turkey", organized another congress in Dibër. In this congress it was decided that everyone could use the alphabet they preferred. In fact, such a decision was against the efforts of Albanians to be educated in their mother language. This was also shown by the further action of the Ottoman authorities. After the Congress, they organized activities in different cities of Albania, through which they aimed for Albanians to choose the Turkish alphabet for writing. In response to this action, Albanian patriots increased their efforts to use the Latin Albanian alphabet. In the congress held in Elbasan, it was emphasized that it was the duty of the Club of Manastir to introduce the Albanian language, with the Latin alphabet, in all the schools of Albania. The Congress of Elbasan decided to open, in the autumn of that year, a normal (pedagogical) school in that city, for the preparation of primary school teachers.

The Young Turk project to introduce the Turkish alphabet in Albanian schools was not implemented and the issue of the alphabet became the trigger for the beginning of an open conflict between the Young Turks and the Albanians. The government of Istanbul, which could not achieve its goals using propaganda, ordered the closing of Albanian societies and clubs, banned books and newspapers in Albanian and closed schools in the Albanian language. In those conditions, Albanian schools worked under illegal conditions. In March, 1911, a circular of the Ministry of the Interior in Istanbul ordered their reopening, as well as the opening of girls' schools, in which learning to read and write in the language Albanian is written using the Latin alphabet.

Until the declaration of independence, the efforts of Albanians for education in the Albanian language were crowned with the opening on March 7, 1887 in Korça of the "First Albanian school" which, rightfully, is considered the first national (secular) Albanian school ; in Prizren, the "Albanian School for Boys" (1889) and the "Albanian School for Girls" (1892) were established. Two national congresses were organized in Bitola (1908, 1910), where important decisions were made for the development of education in Albania. In the years 1908 - 1909, 15 Albanian schools were opened. In 1909, the National Congress on Education Problems, also known as the Schools' Congress, held its work in Elbasan. In

this year, the Normal School of Elbasan was also opened, as the first professional training institution for teachers in Albania.

4. The Educational Policy of the Government of Vlora (1912-1914)

A modest but no less important aspect of the activity of the Government of Vlora in the years 1912-1914 was its educational policy. Although in difficult circumstances and with a limited authority that extended to a territory that included Vlora, Fier, Lushnje, Berat and to some extent Gjirokastra, the government of Vlora made efforts for the education of Albanians in the Albanian language to be realized. From the documentation of the time, it appears that the problem of education was treated as a personal initiative of patriotic teachers and the Ministry of Education. Around the middle of the 1913-1914 school year, the Minister of Education Luigj Gurakuqi commissioned some experienced teachers to, for emergency needs of the public administration, conduct courses with some subordinates and military people who did not know how to read and write in Albanian language because they were educated in foreign schools (Kazazi, 2016).

Despite the countless difficulties, the Government of Vlora took measures so that the school year 1913-1914 started regularly. It was decided that Albanian schools should be opened in towns and villages. Meanwhile, it should be noted that the country did not have teachers and staff prepared to run schools. In order to overcome this difficulty and to prepare teachers and school leaders, it was decided to establish a normal school in each prefecture. For the establishment of these schools, the Minister of Education sent an open letter to all those who could serve in normal schools. In this letter it was written: "The issue of education is of great importance, the main one for the rebirth of the Albanian nation, because only with a real education could our nation be resurrected and can gain the right to enter the ranks of the peoples civilized....For this year primary schools will be opened everywhere in cities and villages. A normal preparatory school is opening these days in Elbasan and we still intend to open elementary schools if the income will be enough and knowledgeable patriots will help us with advice and work" (Kazazi, 2016).

According to another ordinance of the Ministry of Education, which was published in the same newspaper on September 6, 1913, Albanian primary schools would open on September 16 and would be mandatory for all Albanian students. Whereas for the functioning of private schools, the fulfillment of the following criteria was required:

- get official permission from the government.
- to use the Albanian language in teaching process
- have the programs, books and teachers' diplomas reviewed and controlled by the Ministry of Education.
- to be subject from every point of view to all the laws of the state.

These criteria were in accordance with the legislation of the most developed countries of the time and in accordance with the national interests of the Albanian state itself.

The educational policy of the government of Vlora was also sanctioned in the legislation drafted by it, published in the newspaper "Përlindja e Shqipërisë" on November 22, 1913 under the name "The current canon of the civil administration of Albania". According to this law, the director of education was part of the central administration of the prefectures, together with the directors of finance, justice, agriculture, trade. In responsibilities of Prefect were part also the duties:

"The prefect, is obliged to put into action with the help of the director of education, the orders of public education; He will carry out tasks that ensure the announcement and dissemination of education; He will improve existing schools and establish new schools".

More specifically, educational problems are defined in the duties of the director of education. According to the law, the duties of the director of education were as follows:

- To build schools that are established and governed by the prefecture.
- To examine primary school teachers and to write and issue diplomas showing the degree of merit of the teachers who were tested.
- To seek and implement the most advanced system of education accepted in the schools established by the government.
- To push and encourage the fine arts.
- To spread and generalize education and to support and help teachers who are old and unable to carry out the education and teaching process
- To express his opinion on the laws and ordinances pertaining to education.

For the short time in which the Government of Vlora acted, it did its best to lay the foundations of an educational system in accordance with the needs and interests of the country.

5. Education Efforts Until the End of the Second World War

During and past the First World War, the General Directorate of Education was created with its center in Shkodër and with three subordinate directorates: Shkodër, Tirana and Berat. Were established two normal schools, the Albanian Literary Commission and a package of texts for primary schools. The educational activity was extended to Kosovo and in Montenegro in the territories inhabited by Albanian People. About 60 Albanian schools were opened in the Autonomous Region of Korça.

In the period 1920-24, three educational congresses took place: in Lushnje (1920, 1922) and in Tirana (1924). Slowly, the way was paved for the unification of Albanian schools, their nationalization and secularism

In the period 1920-1930, other schools were established in Albania: Albanian Technical School (1921), "Kyrias" Female Institute (1925), "Nana Mbretëshë" Female Institute (Tirana) (1933), "Illyricum" Gymnasium (1921), State High School (1922, Shkodër), National High School (1921, Korçë), Gjirokastra High School (1923), Commercial School in Vlorë (1924), Albanian-American Institute of Kavaja (1926) etc.

Between the two world wars, primary education became compulsory in Albania (5 years in rural areas and 6 years in the city), while secondary education was extended to the main cities of the country. In 1933, private and foreign schools were also nationalized.

During the Second World War, Albanian education was extended on a national basis in Kosovo and other Albanian countries in the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

6. Basic Education in Albania in the Period 1945 – 1990

In Albania after the Second World War, deep reforms were undertaken in education. The first step in the field of education was the organization of courses against illiteracy which, in the period 1945 to 1949, spread to every corner of Albania.

6.1 Campaign against illiteracy

According to the census of September 30, 1945, in a population of 1,122,044 inhabitants, the number of illiterates was 911,410 inhabitants, or 81.22% of the total population. In 1945, 566 courses were opened where 10,243 people learned to read and write for the first time. The campaign against illiteracy was mainly implemented on a voluntary basis. In 1949, the Law on education was approved, according to which the ages up to 40 were forced to learn the basics of writing and reading. A census of this year (1949) showed that after 5 years, about 130,000 people had learned to read and write, and 420,000 were still illiterate. In 1955, it was publicly announced that illiteracy up to the age of 40 had been eliminated in Albania. But based on statistical data, it is proven that in this period a part of the population did not manage to learn to write and read, especially the older people. This problem was present in later years, but the war continued, quietly and not announced as a campaign.

6.2 Building the education system

- Primary and 7-year education

In the first years after the Second World War, the government's greatest efforts and commitment was the development of primary education. In the 1950s, the first 7-year schools were opened. In 1960-1961, 557 7-year schools were opened throughout the country.

- Secondary school education

In 1946-1947, only 6 gymnasiums were operating in Tirana, Korçë, Gjirokastra, Shkodër, Durrës and Vlorë, as well as a technical institutes in Tirana. Only one year later, the number of secondary schools reached 20. Secondary education was developed in the 60s and mainly vocational education, as the government was interested in producing secondary professional cadres that the country lacked.

- Higher education

Until the mid-50s, establish the secondary system of education was priority. Together with this process has started the establishment of the system of higher education. The process began in 1946 with the opening of the Pedagogical Institute of Tirana, 2 years old, which had Albanian Language and Literature, History, Geography, Biological Sciences and Physics and Mathematics as branches. After 1951, other 3- and 4-year pedagogy institutes were opened. In the

1955-1956 school year, the higher education system in the country included 6 4- and 5-year institutes with 22 faculties where about 1595 students studied.

On June 3, 1957, by decree of the Presidium of the People's Assembly, the State University of Tirana (USHT) was established, which began to function as such from September of that year. While in 1962, the Agricultural University of Tirana was also established in Kamëz.

6.3 Reforms and ideologization of the Education system

After the Second World War, with the establishment of the communist regime in Albania, Albanian education took a new form. As a model, especially after 1948, with the breakdown of relations with Yugoslavia, Albanian education system has had the Russian school. The reform developed in the 60s and the approval of the law for the reorganization of the education system, made the transition from the compulsory, 7-year basic education system to the 8-year system. The third reform, developed during the dictatorship period, 1967 and following and called "For revolutionizing the school", was developed under the influence of the Chinese cultural revolution. The law on the education system in Albania, approved at the end of 1969, was implemented until the fall of the regime in 1990. This reform had a profound impact on the school. Albanian education was ideologized in an extreme way. The activity of the school was organized on the basis of the principle called "Revolutionary Triangle": teaching, working and physical and military education. The expected and intended effect of this education system was "Creation of the new man".

7. Conclusions

Albanians are among the peoples of the Balkans who for centuries have faced the denial of the right to be educated in their native language.

Together with the Ottoman invaders, the church and neighboring countries that aimed at the territorial annexation of Albania also acted to prevent Albanians from learning the Albanian language.

The realization of the right to education in the Albanian language has been one of the main objectives of the Albanian National Movement for freedom and independence.

The declaration of independence also marks the beginning of education in the Albanian language as a public right for Albanian people. The decisions of the Vlorë government are the first important efforts to realize this right.

Economic and social development, the level of culture and tradition, the legacy left by the long period under slavery, the geopolitical factors and developments in the first half of the century XX have generated the negative effects on the process for the development of the basic education system in Albania. At the end of the second world war, Albania was the country with the highest level of illiteracy in the Balkan region.

The development of the education system has been one of the main priorities of the government in the period after the second world war. The right to education was defined as a constitutional right and basic education as a legal obligation for every Albanian citizen.

During the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the main characteristic of the education system in Albania was its high level of ideologizing its form and content.

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