



The Perception of Fascist and National Socialist Ideologies During the Second World War in Albania

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Abstract

The Albanian Communist Party was born as a Bolshevik-style party, endowed with a non-Bolshevik but social democratic program, such as popular democracy. To shed light on the factors that determined the arrival of the communist regime in Albania, it is necessary to start the analysis from its roots, that is, since the establishment of the communist regime in Albania. For his part, although the communist regime was established in Albania immediately after the end of World War II, the roots of the phenomenon must be sought from the beginning of the war, even a few months earlier when Albania was invaded on April 7, 1939, by fascist Italy. When Albania was invaded by fascist Italy, no one inside or outside the country predicted, nor could have predicted, that at the end of World War II, the Albanian Communist Party would take power into its own hands. There were subjective and objective reasons for this. First of all, when World War II broke out, Albania was the only country in the Balkans that did not have a Communist Party. However, the absence of the Communist Party was largely a subjective factor. The establishment of the communist regime in Albania was for objective reasons a completely paradoxical phenomenon. Albania, the youngest state in Europe, at the same time its most backward state, with a population of one million and forty thousand inhabitants, had no developed industry, ie no working class in the eyes of the proletariat, as conceived by Marxist doctrine. According to Marxist definitions, Albania was a micro-bourgeois country, that is, without capitalist owners and capitalist institutions, to the extent that they justified the socialist revolution. In addition, the Albanian population was overwhelmingly still illiterate. There were only a few isolated nuclei or communist groups with few members composed mainly of artisans and students, who were further characterized by ideological perversion and worse still by political rivalries between them. The question before historians is this: How can it be explained that despite all these disadvantages, the Albanian Communist Party, which was founded two and a half years after the occupation of the country by fascist Italy, on November 8, 1941, managed to face the war against the occupiers within three years. Nazi fascists and against internal nationalist factors, to take political power in Albania at the end of the Second World War? In addition, how is it that the Albanian Communist Party, unlike its Eastern European counterparts, seized political power on its own, without the presence of Soviet armies, which are not known to have invaded Albania? Albania's position during the Second World War and especially the National Liberation War must be judged by ourselves, regardless of who led it. We must judge it as we do in every historical event. The communist dictatorship that was established in Albania should not blind us to the judgment we give in the national liberation war. The communist regime is not a necessary offspring of the National Liberation War. In my opinion, the establishment of the communist regime is the result of mistakes made during the national liberation war, it is a consequence of the poverty of the political culture of the Albanian people, the lack of traditional political parties, the naivety of the Communist Party leaders, the illusions of united nationalists with the National Liberation Front, of myopia, of the leaders of the National Front, which were used by Enver Hoxha to realize under the umbrella of patriotic war his dictatorial ambitions.

Keywords: Fascist, National Socialist, Ideologies, Albania

1. Introduction

Despite its relatively minor role in the grand scheme of the Second World War, Albania was of interest to both the Axis Powers and the Anti-Fascist United Nations. However, the attention it received was inconsistent and was influenced by strategic factors, operational usefulness in the theater of war, and geopolitical projections after the war. Italy and Germany, the occupying powers in Albania, had similar objectives but different means and methods. Even the Anti-Fascist United Nations, comprising Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union, had moments of unity and disagreement on the Albanian issue but maintained some essential principles in their approach. While the strategic, political, and ideological divide between the Western powers and the Soviet Union softened in the face of the Axis threat, it was still present in many ways. It is typical for relations and strategic interests, even among democratic countries, to have temporary differences and diplomatic tactics. This was evident in the relationship between the United States and Great Britain during the war, as shown in historical documents. Albania may have been considered a peripheral issue, but it still had a role to play in the complex inter-allied relations of the time.

2. Purpose and Objectives of the Study

This study aims to uncover the factors that influenced the Albanian territories during the Second World War. It seeks to shed light on the historical truth surrounding this period. The study is not meant to emphasize Albania's role in the war but rather to explore the four main reasons that led to its involvement:

Albania was among the first countries to fall to fascism.

It became a strategic target for the warring powers seeking control of the Balkans after the summer of 1943.

The Albanian anti-fascist armed resistance was successful in the Balkans and Europe.

Albania was liberated from fascist occupation without the intervention of foreign armies.

The study aims to answer the central question: How did the Albanian Communist Party, which was founded two and a half years after fascist Italy occupied the country, manage to take political power in Albania after eliminating all its political opponents despite facing internal nationalist factors and the war against Nazi-fascists, despite Albania's disadvantages during the Second World War?

3. The Methodology of the Study

The study was conducted using a combination of primary and secondary data. The data were obtained by reviewing literature in the historical field, which covered the fascist and Nazi occupation of Albania. Additionally, the study explored how Albanian society adapted to the new communist occupation that lasted for 45 years. To accomplish this study, various methods were employed, including research, comparative, and cartographic methods.

The research method involved analyzing existing literature on the causes and consequences of the Nazi-fascist occupation in Albania. The study also explored the impact of the establishment of the communist regime on Albanian society. To this end, different publications by local and foreign researchers were consulted to understand the significance of the Albanian struggle during the Second World War.

Furthermore, the comparative method was used to compare how authors treated the fascist occupation to the Nazi occupation. The study also compared whether the Albanians' War was the Anti-Fascist National Liberation War or simply the Anti-Fascist War or the Civil War.

Lastly, the cartographic method was employed to illustrate the extent of the Nazi-fascist occupation in Albania and whether it managed to penetrate the entire Albanian territory.

4. Research Questions and Study Hypothesis

4.1 Research questions

The history of the Anti-Fascist National Liberation War in Albania is a complicated and disputed topic. Through examining documents from the communist era and other sources, many questions arise. This research aims to determine whether the Nazi-Fascist invasion of Albania was accurately portrayed in communist-era documents, which emphasized the country's significant role in the Anti-Fascist National Liberation War. Some critical research questions include:

Did Mussolini and Hitler have a joint strategic plan to invade Albania due to its geographic location?

Was Albania indeed a focus for Italy and Germany during the war, as has been claimed for years?

Was Albania entirely dependent on the communists' war efforts?

Could Enver Hoxha have acted differently than the communist supporters regarding other political groups, such as the National Front and Legality?

Did the Albanian people genuinely support the communist-led fight against the Nazi-Fascist invaders, or was Enver Hoxha manipulated into interpreting and acting in a certain way?

Did the communists accurately represent the Albanian struggle as their own to gain power?

What was Albania's most important aspect during World War II?

4.2 Hypotheses of the study

The hypothesis of a study is a crucial aspect of its structure as it serves as a response to the research questions. This study presents a hypothesis that poses a significant problem, and its validity is explored throughout all its paragraphs. It focuses on the central question of the Albanian struggle during the Second World War: was it an Anti-Fascist National Liberation War, Anti-Fascist War, or Civil War? This question is crucial as it concerns the essence of the War and is a topic of both professional and speculative interest. Although the concepts of the National Liberation War and the Anti-Fascist War are complementary, they differ in their attitude toward the war's essence, dynamic forces, stance on foreigners, and future goals.

4.3 What was the reason behind the war for national liberation?

During World War II, Albania was occupied by Italian and German fascism, leading to the Albanian people and the nation fighting for liberation from foreign invaders. While the war was primarily focused on national liberation, some have opposed this name for different reasons. The first group believes that the war was civil, fought between Albanians themselves instead of against foreign invaders. Former Albanian collaborators with fascism and anti-communist political forces have championed this perspective. The second group interprets the war as a form of liberation from Serbian chauvinism in Kosovo, but with the new conquerors bringing only temporary and incomplete unity. These two groups have their own reasons for opposing the term "national liberation," but ultimately, they have failed to make a significant impact.

Some historians have studied the relationship between the National Liberation War and the civil war in historiography. It is essential to respect academic freedom in a democratic society, which has been discussed in scientific debates¹. The issue of selectively quoting Albanian or foreign documents to prove that there was no National Liberation War in Albania after October 1943, but only a civil war, is an attempt to obscure the truth.

In reality, Albania did not have a civil war but instead faced elements of civil war due to the occupation of two and a half German divisions. The Albanians fought against this enemy, also an enemy to other European, Soviet, and American peoples. The National Liberation Movement fought against the German occupier, considering them the main enemy. The National Front, on the other hand, called the Albanian Communist Party and partisans their main enemy and cooperated with the Germans to fight against them.

It is important to note that there was no civil war in a country occupied by foreigners, as seen in the experiences of Albania, Yugoslavia, Greece, and other European countries. The Chetnik movement in Yugoslavia initially had Anglo-American support but was eventually abandoned when it began cooperating with the Germans against Tito's national liberation army. In Greece, the counterpart party of the National Front was EDES, which collaborated with the German invaders and opposed EAM-ELAS. However, the civil war in Greece was only fought as a power struggle in 1946-1949 when there were no foreign invaders.

Albania did not have a civil war because most Albanians supported the National Liberation Movement instead of the National Front and Legality. The National Liberation Army was the main force, with 15,000 organized fighters in the summer of 1943, which increased to 30,000 in the fall and eventually reached 70,000 partisans by the war's end. On the other hand, the National Front only managed to have around 15,000 armed individuals, while Legality had at most 5,000 people. The National Liberation Movement also had many young women, 6,000 Albanian girls, and women organized in the partisan ranks. This contrasts the National and Legality Front, which had almost no women in their ranks. It is important to note that there is no civil war between the strong and the weak.

¹ Puto Arben, *In the annals of English diplomacy*, Tirana 2001, p.32.

4.4 What were the motives and objectives behind the invasion?

One of the main issues to be addressed is whether the period of German occupation was an invasion. Some local authors have depicted the arrival of the Hitlerian army as the liberation of Albania and an alliance that ensured the country's independence and neutrality in the war. Consequently, many considered continuing the National Liberation War against the German occupier unfair and harmful.

It's important to clarify whether the invasion of Albania was a spontaneous response to a particular situation created due to Italy's sudden capitulation or if it was part of a well-thought-out strategic plan to establish and rule Hitler's Germany in this part of the Balkan Peninsula. Most historians and analysts of the Second World War perceive the period of German occupation as an occupation of a small sovereign country² whose sovereignty had already been violated by Fascist Italy. Hitler's Germany invaded Albania for its strategic goals and regional interests.

The invasion of Albania was planned even before the Allies' landing in Southern Italy and before Italy's capitulation³. It was part of the strategic plans of Hitler's Germany to create a Nazi empire comprising several countries and peoples of Europe and beyond, including Albania⁴. Albania was part of the Balkan complex, which Germany viewed with particular greed due to its strategic position.

The German occupation of Albania was driven by their need for economic and human resources during the War. Germany's economy, geared towards war, struggled to source raw materials for its military industry. The country's resources could only sustain the production of military equipment for a few months. This created an urgent demand for materials like chrome, iron, and oil, with chrome being of particular interest. Turkey's decision to cut off chrome sales to Germany made the situation even more pressing. Germany calculated that Albania could provide the entire chrome ore needed. This explains why Germany invaded Albania, as it served their long-term strategic interests.

However, other historians and analysts argue that Germany's military action was a response to the war situation created after the Allied forces landed in Sicily and the departure of Italian troops after Italy's capitulation. According to them, Germany occupied Albania to prevent a possible Allied landing there, which could threaten their positions in Southeast Europe⁵. They see the invasion of Albania as a result of the concrete war rather than a well-thought-out plan or long-term strategic interest. Bernd Fisher writes that Germany's occupation of Albania was primarily driven by their need to prevent an Allied landing. It is evident from the available information that the invasion of Albania was a well-planned and strategic move by Germany. The Wehrmacht high command had included the invasion of Albania as a part of their larger plan to invade Italy and the Balkans⁶. However, the Allied forces landing in Southern Italy and Italy's subsequent capitulation expedited the plan's implementation. The German Foreign Minister, Ribbentrop, had been closely monitoring the situation in Albania and the wider Balkan region. He received the latest information in August 1943 and elaborated the objectives of the German plan accordingly⁷. The British had devised a game to distract the Wehrmacht command, but the Nazis had taken it seriously. Despite Italy's eventual capitulation, it is clear that Germany had planned the invasion of Albania beforehand. The strategic significance of the Albanian coast on the road to Otranto⁸ made it imperative for Germany to defend it militarily."

4.5 It is believed that the National Front sought assistance from the Germans, who in turn sought the support of Enver Hoxha.

Bally and Legality's downfall was due to their flawed strategy and tactics. Instead of standing up to the invader, they collaborated with them to preserve their resources for a hypothetical final battle for power that never materialized. There is irrefutable evidence, both Albanian and foreign, that Bally aligned with the German invaders. However, there are lesser-known facts, such as the Meeting of Mukje, where Hysni Lepenica, Skënder Muço, Isuf Luzaj, Uan Filipi, and other radical members of Bally sought to partner with the Albanian Communist Party and the National Liberation Movement to

² Adhami Stilian, *Years that made an era*, Tirana 1984, p.15

³ Gjecovi. Xhelal, *The German Invasion of Albania*, Academy of Sciences, Institute of History, Tirana, 2004, p.8.

⁴ Dela Roka & Roberto Moroco, *Nationality, and religion in Albania, 1920-1944*, Tirana, 1994, p.233.

⁵ Bernd J. Fisher, *Albania during the War, 1939-1945*, Tirana, 2000, p.355.

⁶ Albert Kesseiring, *Memoria di Guerra*, Garzanti, Milan. 1954, p. 188.

⁷ *History of the Anti-Fascist National Liberation War of the Albanian People*, vol. III, Tirana, 1988, p.11.

⁸ *Documents of German institutions for Albanian history 1941-1944*, Pristina, 1998, p.54. Neubacher's telegram, no. 1250, dated August 20, 1953, addressed to the German Embassy in Rome.

overthrow the central leadership and unite against the German invaders. In September of 1944, the National Front's senior representatives engaged in confidential discussions with the mandated delegates of the KPSH and the National Liberation Front. They aimed to collaborate on the condition that their lives would not be endangered. It is documented that the communist and partisan leadership did not follow in Bally's footsteps in seeking an agreement with the invader. It was the Germans who made not one but two attempts to negotiate with the National Liberation Movement. The first attempt was made when German troops entered Albania. The German command proposed that the Movement take power and create a government under the condition that the German forces would not be attacked as long as they remained in Albania. The second attempt was made in March 1944, when the German High Command sent a senior officer to Korça for talks with the General Staff to sign an agreement. In both instances, the proposals were rejected by the National Liberation Movement's General Staff, as they had already allied with the Anglo-Americans and were committed to fighting the German occupation forces in Albania.

Opponents of the name and content of the National Liberation War can be divided into two categories. The first category consists of "Greater Albania" supporters under fascist occupation who saw this as an opportunity to achieve ethnic Albania. Their judgment about freedom, the nature of fascism, and lack of knowledge about international law and the legal bases on which the United Nations Alliance was built are narrow and naive.

4.6 Using nationalism as a political tool to gain power.

Since the War, nationalism has been utilized as a political tool for gaining power. The National Front and Legality, the nationalist forces, made nationalism their own⁹ to counter the National Liberation Movement. This was a sensitive issue for Albanians, particularly in Kosovo and the "Land of the Free" region, where they believed that uniting with the motherland under the same conqueror would create a "Great Albania." The National Front accused the National Liberation Movement of being anti-national,¹⁰ using the relationship between the Albanian Communist Party and the Yugoslav Communist Party to their advantage. While this propaganda was successful in Kosovo, it was less effective in Albania, where most Albanians supported the "national liberation" movement. The National Front's nationalist platform, centered around the slogan of ethnic Albania, caused a significant problem for the Albanian Communist Party. However, the National Front failed to take action and lacked the will to fight, resulting in passive and compromising attitudes. The traditional school of politics that the central leadership of the National Front belonged to failed to capture the rhythm and message that the time called for¹¹. Instead of organizing and leading a decisive anti-fascist and nationalist war, the National Front attempted to hinder the Communist-led National Liberation Movement in the name of tomorrow's power. While the Albanian Communist Party is at fault for not offering cooperation and honest communication with the National Front, the essential difference lies in their approach to gaining power. Without revealing the original text's context, I will provide a neutral and objective rewrite that follows the instructions.

Different political parties had contrasting strategies to gain power during a tumultuous period. One party fought fiercely against invaders and their allies, while another waited for outside intervention and formed alliances. However, the latter party's actions ultimately diminished its reputation as a credible anti-fascist and anti-communist force among Albanians and its allies. A grave error by this party led to inevitable consequences.

4.7 The aftermath of the war and the ensuing communist regime

Even after 70 years, there is still debate surrounding the relationship between the Anti-Fascist National Liberation War and the establishment of communism in Albania. Unfortunately, some criticize the war and diminish its significance because they believe it led to communism. However, this perspective needs to recognize the larger historical context. The primary goal of all United Nations members was to combat fascism and the Axis Powers. Stalin, Tito, Enver Hoxha, and others were communists, while Roosevelt, Churchill, De Gaulle, and others were anti-communists. Nevertheless, they came together to fight against fascism, the greatest and most dangerous threat to humanity at the time.

Albania and its people did not determine the outcome of the Second World War, and their contribution to the Anti-Fascist National Liberation War was modest compared to the overall victory. The 70,000 Albanian fighters made an essential contribution to their people. Still, it did not carry significant weight in achieving the strategic objectives of the United Nations in the fight against fascism. This fact is recognized by both the winners and losers of the war and by the

⁹ Frasherri Kristo, *Armed struggle of the Albanian people, volume I, Tirana, 2003, p.89.*

¹⁰ Frasherri Kristo, *The National Liberation Anti-Fascist War and its place in the History of Albania, December 19, 1992, Tirana, p.34.*

¹¹ Hoxha Enver, *The Anglo-American Danger for Albania, Tirana 1982, p.149.*

Communists, Bellists, and Zogists. It is immoral to associate the heroic sacrifices made by the Albanian people during the war with the undesirable consequences that followed, which were not a direct result of the conflict.¹² The introduction of communism in Albania was not possible even with the assistance of 2500 communist instructors from Communist International. Most Albanians did not understand the concept of communism and its unfavorable aspects. However, the communists managed to attract them through their anti-fascist stance, contribution to the war effort, sacrifices, and social welfare programs. The agrarian reform, a dream for the impoverished Albanians, was not a communist policy. Interestingly, the rise of communism in Albania was aided by those who proclaimed to be anti-communists. Unfortunately, they failed to offer a compelling anti-fascist and anti-communist alternative that appealed to the Albanians.

5. Conclusions

Albania may have made a modest contribution to the world conflict, but its participation was honorable. This is a fact that history reveals. Any attempt to connect the liberation movement and its martyrs with a forty-year ruling order is an illusion and goes against the truth.

The National Liberation War is a significant event in Albania's 20th-century history. It brought freedom and hope for a better future, instilling dignity and pride in most Albanians who made the right choice during a time of great trial for the world's people. The National Liberation War significantly boosted Albania's global standing and aligned the country and its people with the victorious United Nations in the fight against Fascism. Without it, Albania faced the risk of fragmentation after the Second World War. It is a fact that may be overlooked by those whose perspectives have been influenced by political biases, familial or tribal affiliations to the War, or the misguided belief that modernization and avant-garde intellectualism negate the importance of national values.

Suppose one were to rely solely on the British and American archives regarding the Second World War in Albania and the Balkans. In that case, it becomes clear that discussions of dismemberment and potential massacres were circulating within government cabinets regarding Albania and Albanian territories in the Balkans. The events that took place at the Peace Conference in Paris during August of 1946 were merely a minor example of a larger anti-Albanian plan that would have undoubtedly been carried out in Southern Albania, much like it was done in Transnistria, Moldavia, the Baltic countries, Transylvania, Dobruđa, and other regions in countries like Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Finland, which sided with the fascist Axis instead of the United Nations, unlike the majority of Albanians.

Albanian partisans saved Albania twice, once from fascism and once from dismemberment.

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¹² Alia, Ramiz, I, *Ramiz Alia, testify to history*, Tirana, 1993, p.43.