

The Involvement of the International Control Commission on Border Setting with Greece

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Abstract: In the bosom of the Ambassadors' Conference in London in 1913 had been several controversies about Albania's southern border. Albania, though a small country in terms of land area, it's a very important place in the geostrategic perspective. For this reason, it would be coveted by the great powers and its bordering neighbors. This paper aims to analyze the reasons that led to such decision-making. Controversies and disputes between the great powers. And the role that Vlorë government had during this period. The problem has been analyzed through a bibliographic search, addressing issues in the historical plan. The research method is historical description. This theoretical approach is thought of as the most appropriate methodology for the study, because it provides the possibility of interpretation and organization of the materials found. The issues inside the article are: The establishment of the International Control Commission, the South Border Agreement, and the role of Prince Witte in realizing the aspirations of Albanians.

Keywords: Southern Borders; Conference of Ambassadors; disagreement; Greek government; Albanian delegation

1. Introduction

The London Conference began addressing the borders between Albania and Greece during the second half of May 1913. The problems continued to be present in terms of setting the borders of Albania even after the end of the London Conference of Ambassadors. The problem first posed to the South border. Ambassadors in the meeting of 11 August 1913 had decided on the boundaries of the border line, such as Korça and Stillo, as far as Gjirokastra they were unable to make a final decision

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whether it would belong to Greece or Albania. This important and at the same time vital decision for Albania and Albanians, was left in the hands of the Border Commission. The removal of troops from Albania should happen, not later than one month after the completion of the Border Commission's work.

San Giuliani's proposal for an agreement on the southern border was put forward in the preliminary talks of the chancellors of the great powers. The project left Korça and Gjirokastra within Albania. On March 19, 1913, the Italian ambassador presented at the London Conference, the project they had drafted together with their Austro-Hungarian ally.

According to this project, Korça and Gjirokastra would remain in Albania, while Janina and another part of the south of Albania would pass to their neighbor Greece. This project found strong opposition by Greece, which did not seem at all pleased.

After a long period of disagreement between the Great Powers, an agreement was reached regarding the bordering line of the southern border of Albania. The Conference of Ambassadors decided that the border between Albania and Greece should pass from Lake Ohrid to the easternmost border of Korça and stretch straight to the coast to the Gulf of Ftelias, to a point south of Cape Stillos.

This stretch would include within Albania the cities of Korça, Tepelena, Gjirokastra and Delvina, St. Naum Monastery and Sazani Island. Also, in this agreement it was determined that the province of Çamëria had to pass to Greece, despite that province was inhabited with Albanian population and no residents of Hellenic origin. This decision of the Great Powers was not guided by the ethnic factor, but by the fulfillment of strategic interests in the region. As a supplement to this decision it was decided that the Corfu Channel should remain neutral. Based on this decision it should be determined within four months, by an International Border Commission, consisting of six delegates of six great powers. The line would be set by the commission and there should be a compromise between the alleged borderline of Greece and that protected by Italy and Austria-Hungary.

Despite the indifferent attitude towards the city of Gjirokastra, however, with Vienna's insistence, the Conference set two deadlines: first, with regard to the beginning of work of the Commission, and the second deadline had direct link with the withdrawal of Greek troops from the lands to be assigned to Albania. The

removal of troops from Albania should happen, not later than one month after the end of the Border Commission's work.

2. Paper Preparation

2.1. Establishment of the International Control Commission

The creation of the International Control Commission was envisioned by the decision of the Great Powers. Its formation was foreseen in the Conference of Ambassadors, on 29 July 1913, which was tasked with the organization of the Albanian state. The main mission of the ICC was to organize the Principality of Albania and to complete the transition of this entity. The ICC has been the instrument of a kind of international protectorate under which the new Albania was established.

The mandate of the International Control Commission, will last only six weeks, until the day of the Prince's arrival. The danger which impended on Southern Albania from Greece threats prompted ambassadors in London to warn Greece, if they do not withdraw from Albania, they will not discuss its claims to the Dodecanese islands in the Aegean Sea which belonged to Turkey. (Jasques, 1995)

In the Ambassadorial Conference there were two views: the one of Austro-Hungary and Italy, which sought the recognition of the Vlorë government as a temporary government. On the other hand the claims of France, Russia and Great Britain, which considered the Government of Ismail Qemali as a local power. (Omari, 2005)

The International Control Commission would have only control competence over a 10-year, repeatable timeframe. ICC intervened to paralyze the actions that Vlorë Government was taking to review the boundaries, returning to the State and to the Albanian citizens the lands that were robbed. The ICC was established in Vlorë and did not recognize the government of Vlorë as the National Government. Its location in the city of Vlorë is considered as the only concession to be made to the international factor, but in fact the main reason was, to control every action of the Government until its elimination. (Anastasi, 2007)

The International Control Commission, according to the decision of July 29, 1913, which was decided at the London Conference of Ambassadors, in order to act legally, beside the six delegates of the Great Powers, should include a seventh

delegate who would represent Albania. The problem was what would be the right governmental organization that would have the right to choose the seventh delegate.

The right solution, under the national principle, it would be the Vlora government. But such an action would not be acceptable at all for London, who considered it a local government and not a government that could have the right to be a party. They did not take into consideration the proposal of Ismail Qemali to appoint Luis Gurakuqi as the seventh member of the ICC. This led the Commission to continue working without the seventh delegate. (Puto, 1978) This place was taken by Myfit Libohova, this selection was not left to Albanians but it was a choice of the internationals. (Puto, 1978) ICC concentrated all power in its hands and forced in this way Ismail Qemali to resign on 22 January 1914.

The ICC began and continued its activity under the light of profound contradictions about the main problems of the Albanian State. The Commission held several meetings in Bitola, Erseka, Leskovik and Gjirokastra. Obstacles were constantly struck by the Greek side, which held Albanian lands occupied, making great efforts to present them as Greek lands.

According to a telegram that the Foreign Minister Edward Gray sent to F. Elliot, Mr. Venizelos had come to meet him personally. He told the ambassador that he had discussed in Rome a given exchange regarding the details of the southern border of southern Albania. He had also made a proposal under which it would accept decisions concerning the border, but only according to the changes that he had discussed in Rome. He stated... *“That he wanted to have as fast as possible the powers of communication on the southern border and the Aegean islands”*. Another claim to the Great Powers that Prime Minister Venizelos had shown at his meeting with the British ambassador was that of the belief and the freedom of religion for the Christian element in Epirus. (Duka, 2014) The last meeting of the Commission was that of 10 December 1913, which determined the Greek-Albanian border. (Dervishi, 2006)

In practice, the Commission encountered continuing obstacles caused by the Greek side. The arbitrary actions of the Greek authorities were so impermissible that even the representatives of Antant, who had been supportive of the Greek side and of their claims, found it hard to resist to their claims regarding the South of Albania.

3. Agreement for the Southern Border

After repeated interruptions, the Commission finally was forced to ascertain at its last meeting, held in Gjirokastra, that a tense situation was created in the area which was the object of the dispute, and called on international authorities that such a situation had to be taken into consideration and could not be left in the hands of the troops of the Greek invaders.

Greece could not openly oppose the decisions that had already been made in December 1913, precisely with the Florence Protocol, but absolutely did not stop its efforts to detach the “Northern Epirus”. In this way, they played a dual role: on one hand, they obeyed to the orders given by the great powers, giving orders for the withdrawal of troops, while on the other hand, Greeks continued to sow terror on Albanian lands.

But in the time of the repression of the southern provinces and of the “Northern Epirus uprising” the problem was complicated and reached the crisis. (Puto, 2010)

The issue of emptying Albanian lands by Greek troops would continue to be the subject of bargaining between the representatives of the Great Powers and the Greek side. The border between Albania and Greece could be considered an inseparable part of the Aegean Islands issue. (Duka, 2014)

The final agreement for the south border was linked on the basis of a promise, whose initiators were Italy and Austria-Hungary. Italy promised to release the Dodecanese Islands, which it had taken from Turkey in 1911.

According to a telegram that Mr. Rod sends Prime Minister Gray Edward, he had personally met Greek Prime Minister, after the interview that the latter had conducted with Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, who said that he accepted the South Albanian border, as it was defined by the Commission, taking into account the conditions set by it, so that the islands occupied by Greece were left to Greece. (Duka, 2014)

The Greek Prime Minister before giving his final assessment of the borders with Albania set another very important condition, which required a territorial exchange between Albania and Greece. The required area was the Pogonian province, which included about 500 km sq. (Duka, 2014)

Meanwhile, the negotiations between the Greek side and the representatives of the great powers continued to a very high level, until a joint agreement was reached, which was submitted to the Greek Government on 13 February. (Duka, 2014)

There was a strong link between two very important issues, that of the Aegean islands and the departure of Greek troops from Albanian lands. Despite numerous attempts to provide solutions, none of them did find a definitive solution.

According to this note, the Aegean islands that had been occupied by Greeks themselves were known to Greece, but it was absolutely not the case for much discussion of the Dodecanese. (Duka, 2014) Athens was made clear that they could legally own the Aegean islands only after withdrawing troops from Albanian lands, according to the borders set by the Florence Protocol in December 1913.

Controversies continued to be present even in a broader plan, even between the Great Powers, due to the aggravation of the establishment of the Southern border. Austro-Hungary claimed that it did not make any concessions regarding the removal of Greek troops from Albanian lands, as this deadline, which coincided exactly on 18 January, was decided by the London Conference itself.

After many discussions, Rome and Vienna agreed to extend the deadline from 18 to 31 January. Both sides felt that this extension of the deadline would be positive as an immediate departure from the Greek troops would not give the opportunity to occupy these lands by the Albanian gendarmerie. (Duka, 2014)

Immediately Rome and Vienna proposed to other powers the extension of the deadline from 18 to 31 January. This was one of the main goals that Greek Prime Minister Venizelos had during his visit in the capital of Europe in early 1914. He stopped in Rome and Vienna, where he had long conversations with Bertold and San Giuliano. (Puto, 2010)

The Greek government did not want to oppose directly and openly the Great Powers. She accepted the proposed plan for the removal of Greek troops from Albanian lands. In the meeting that the Greek Prime Minister had personally with the British Foreign Minister during his visit to England, he had been clear in what he claimed from the Powers: *he hoped the Great Powers would agree that the withdrawal of Greeks from the southern provinces had to be gradual.* (Duka, 2014)

From the correspondence of the British ambassador in Rome with the Foreign Minister, it was given “another test of goodwill towards Greece”. He reported that the Italian Government had instructed its representative in Athens to act in cooperation with his Austrian counterparts. (Duka, 2014)

Both sides in cooperation had taken a second decision regarding to the period of withdrawal of Greece from the Albanian territories. Evacuation of Greek troops would begin precisely on 1 March 1914 by the Korça area and Sazan Island and would continue until 31 March, which coincided with the time that would end the removal of Hellenic troops. (Duka, 2014)

4. The Role of Prince Wilhelm Witte for the Signing of the Corfu Protocol

The Greek government accepted the proposal of the Great Powers for the evacuation of the Greek troops divided into several phases from March 1-31. But its dissatisfaction over the diplomacy of the Great Powers, Greece would turn into bloody revenge against the Albanian population in the South. (Duka, 2014)

In the last week of February, Greek agents declared autonomy in some southern centers. As a sign of greatness toward this unjust action, on 2 March in Gjirokastër was convened a congress which not only recognized the autonomy of “Northern Epirus” but also proclaimed a temporary government with Zograf as prime minister. (Duka, 2014) After this farce, the Athens government and the Great Powers did not have the right to interfere in their internal affairs, stated the Prime Minister of the Provisional Government, Zagrofi. (Duka, 2014) (Puto, 1978)

The problem was present during the entire coexistence between Prince Wilhelm and ICC Government. Prince Wilhelm Witte arrived on the Albanian territory on 17 March 1914. Many Albanian representatives from all the provinces of Albania had come to meet him at the port of Durres with the conviction that he would fulfill the aspirations of the Albanians.

It was supposed that with the arrival of the Prince and the establishment of a regime, which was in fact a product of European diplomacy, the ICC would find an instrument to carry out the functions assigned to it. But, indeed, that did not

happen, the ICC continued to be the arena of conflicting interests of ICC. (Puto, 1978)

The first problem the Prince faced was that of the “Northern Epirus” uprising. To resolve this issue, he entered into talks with the “Northern Epirus” government proclaimed in Gjirokastra, which had become an attempt to create a state within the state.

Prince Witte somehow to calm the tense situation that was created in such a problematic area, appointed as extraordinary commissioner for the southern Albania, the Dutch officer Thompson, who had come to Albania to restructure the Albanian gendarmerie. In addition to the aforesaid duty, Prince Witte appointed him as a representative of the talks to be held in Corfu.

Thomson held talks with Karapanos, Zograf's foreign minister. Thomson did not have a well-defined platform; apparently, he had complete freedom of action. He proposed that the South provinces be divided into two provinces, Korça and Gjirokastra, which will be self-administered. (Puto, 1978)

Thomson, knowing that the Great Powers, the ICC and Prince Witte did not want to have many headaches, promised to the Greeks some “special rights” for the population of “North Epirus”. On April 24, 1914, major powers informed the Greek Prime Minister that they were willing to make “Northern Epirus” concessions and could accept the revision of the Greek-Albanian border in favor of Greece. The Albanian government was forced as a result of many pressures on May 5 to entrust the ICC with resolving the Albanian-Greek conflict.

Talks between the ICC and “Northern Epirus” representatives were held in Corfu and lasted from 10 to 17 May by signing a protocol called the “Corfu Protocol”.

By the correspondence of Ambassador Lamb for Foreign Minister Edward Gray, it is clear that the claims of the Epirus were gradually increasing. He describes the negotiations in Corfu together with the proposals of the Epirus. Ambassador Lamb said: *There appeared to be several different versions of the proposals of the Epirus, which were more inclusive than those on which we had received private information through Mr. Vassassi.* (Duka, 2014)

Despite the difficulty of the discussions, at the first four meetings, an agreement was reached on the language, schools and gendarmerie issues, and the Epirus delegates were forced to abandon their claims that both the Korça and Gjirokastra regions should join in one. (Duka, 2014)

At the meeting of Corfu, the Albanian delegate did not support any of the great powers. As a result, the International Commission decided that the Prefectures of Korça and Gjirokastra would form an autonomous government under the jurisdiction of the Albanian government. This protocol provided that the two prefectures in the south of Albania, Korça and Gjirokastra, although formally part of the Albanian state, would have a separate administration, the organization of which was left to the International Council for Control. The Greek government proposes that the agreement should be approved and guaranteed by the great powers. (Duka, 2014)

From another telegram of Edward Gray to Mr. Bartie, it is made known that the Greek Minister continued to be clear on the Greek claims. He demanded that the six powers guarantee the interim agreement between the Control Commission and Epirus. (Duka, 2014)

The Albanian delegation in the International Commission of Control Mehdi Beu informed the members of the ICC that the Albanian Government had accepted, with some remarks, the interim agreement between the Commission and the Epirus delegates in Corfu. (Duka, 2014)

In the memorandum of May 17th were included the remarks of the Albanian side. Mehdi Beu says ... *the Albanian government is fully convinced that the Great Powers .. will not allow an administrative subdivision, except the one that it was drafted in the Project of the Organic Statute developed by ICC itself.* (Duka, 2014) *The government has charged me to declare that it accepts the provisions that are set in Corfu, as long as their implementation will not bring a single domestic violation against the national development and the Albanian unity.* (Duka, 2014)

As a result of the actions of many factors, the Great Powers failed to resolve the evacuation of Greek troops from South Albania. The Great Powers failed to finally resolve this issue so important to Albania, leaving room for great domestic riots and endless complications in foreign relations.

The southern border would continue to be the prey of the bargaining of all those who saw Albania as a gem that they wanted to possess at all costs, violating any legal principle and any national entity. This complicated situation paved the way not only to old but also new plans of Balkan neighbors and beyond.

5. Conclusion

The creation of the ICC failed to fulfill its purpose, the establishment of borders between Albania and Greece, in a way, its work failed, even though an agreement was reached with the Epiriote Party, which culminated in the signing of the “Corfu Protocol”. It appears clearly that the claims of the Albanian side were not supported by the great powers, enabling in this way, to be met the Greek party aspirations. As a result of the actions of many factors, the great powers failed to resolve the evacuation of Greek troops from South Albania. The Great Powers failed to finally resolve this issue so important to Albania, leaving room for great domestic riots and endless complications in foreign relations. The southern border would continue to be the prey of the bargaining of all those who saw Albania as a gem that they wanted to possess at all costs, violating any legal principle and any national entity. This complicated situation paved the way not only to old but also new plans of Balkan neighbors and beyond.

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