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REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA

MINISTRY FOR EUROPE  
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# PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE ON THE 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS SWITZERLAND-ALBANIA

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years of diplomatic relations  
1970 - 2020



Switzerland - Albania



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## Traces of Albanian-Swiss relations in the State Central Archive - Tirana

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It is difficult to find the exact date when our countries or inhabitants had the opportunity to cooperate, but it is certain that mutual recognition dates back to earlier times. Nevertheless, it is the archives of our two countries that come to our aid in building the history of relations, or meeting points over the years.

It is trade, a human activity that has provided documents to us that prove that Albanian - Swiss relations date back to the 19th century. Such data on trade relations are provided by archive funds of large Albanian companies from Shkodra.<sup>1</sup>

However, other documents found on the Central State Archive in Tirana provide another view on our countries relations.

Activists of the national Albanian question, living and working outside the country, traditionally had the support of welcoming countries, such as: Romania, Bulgaria, Egypt, Libya, Argentina, United States of America, and Canada among others, since the 19th century, where they had their lives, without ever forgetting about their homeland. They left the country on economic grounds, although many of them were forced to leave due to the persecution by Ottoman invaders, as a result of their involvement in patriotic activities to the support of national language and schools.

It is an established fact that efforts for Albanian language and schools were a long and continuous battle fought by Albanian people over the centuries. Since they were faced with an outrageous pressure from neighboring countries in the North and South, especially with the flat refusal of Ottoman invaders authorities to open Albanian language schools in Albanian vilayets, and to allow the use of the native language in religious ceremonies, thus patriots inside and

mainly outside the country, worked for a long time, so that Albanian language had its own alphabet, rather than Greek, Slavic or Arabic alphabets.

Upon multiple efforts and sacrifices, in 1908, the most renowned activists of this long battle successfully gathered in Manastir, a city that nowadays belongs to the Republic of Northern Macedonia, whose name was changed into Bitole. But, was this city the first option where the Albanian Alphabet Congress was to be held? According to a document, which fortunately survived the years and human kind activities, one year earlier, namely 1907, this historic gathering was to be held in Switzerland. The latter was most likely considered as a state where Albanian patriots, living in different countries, could safely gather, owing to the benevolent position of Swiss state authorities, to discuss and make decisions for the solution of the national question.

Thus, in a letter sent by Sotir Peci, published of "Kombi" newspaper from Boston to Lef Nosi, on 13 November 1907, he was notified among other things on the following "... I received a letter by Bajo (i.e. Topulli) from Naples that an Albanian conference will be held in Helvetia (i.e. Switzerland), where, among others, the question of will be solved. Bajo invites us to this conference and states that the question of the alphabet will be solved based on the Latin alphabet, rather than the Sofia one.<sup>2</sup>

It remains unknown whether this meeting or gathering was carried out, but what is important is that Switzerland was increasingly considered as a welcoming and supportive country, and a model for the organization of the Albanian state in the coming years.

A meaningful event proving the above-mentioned statement is a 1915 publication on "L'Albanie" newspaper, in Lausanne, by Sotir Kolea, Dr. Mihal Turtulli, Hilmi Këlçyra and Pandeli Cale.

However, it is during 1918-1920 that our patriots intensified their patriotic activities to the benefit of the national question. The Declaration of Independence on 28 November 1912 was a great event for all Albanians, yet it did not manage to unite all Albanian territories in one single state. The Balkan Wars and especially the First World War had struck a huge blow to the century-long Albanian dream. The end of war did not mark the end of the Albanian tragedy. The winning forces of the War held an international conference in Paris, where they decided on the fates of small and great people. One of the small countries was Albania and although it was not part of this destructive war, it suffered its consequences, perhaps even more than other countries that were part of it. For every Albanian, but especially for National Movement activists, it was very clear that it was up to the Great Powers to provide their legitimate support for stopping the fulfillment of chauvinist ambitions of their neighboring countries in the North and South, thus forbidding the fragmentation of autochthonous Albanian population lands.

During 1918-1920, a group of patriots from various parts of Albania worked hard in Switzerland. They formed a body called the "Lausanne Committee", consisting of Sotir Kolea, Dr. Mihal Turtulli, Pandeli Cale, Hilmi Këlçyra, etc., who carried out a risky activity during the months of the Paris Peace Conference.

The involvement of Sotir Kolea in the Swiss press of Lausanne is special. Sotir Kolea, a researcher of language, folklore and history, opposed the untruths of various correspondents, which were published on the Swiss press during those months about Albania and Albanians, problems

of the Balkan Peninsula, especially issues related to requests for gaining territory to the harm of Albania. Multiple authentic documents are preserved in the personal archive fund of Sotir Kolea, from which we managed to understand not only his patriotic activities, but also the freedom he enjoyed, although he was not a Swiss citizen, in debating on the local press with various journalists, who had addressed topics related to Albania and Albanians, as well as problems of the European political sphere following the First World War.

Starting from January 1918, several months following the end of the First World War, Sotir Kolea, according to his archive fund documents, was in contact with numerous bodies of the Swiss press.

In the letter to Mr. P.J. Jouve, the administration of "Nation" and "Feuille" newspapers on 14 January 1918, Kolea, using historical arguments, opposed pro-Greek writings by "forgetting" other people that were harmed and damaged by the War.<sup>3</sup>

Once again, from 1 to 2 May 1919, there was correspondence between Kolea and L. Stubbe in Lausanne-Montreux and a letter to J. Debruit, editor in chief of "Feuille" newspaper in Geneva on 16 April 1920, on false notices distributed by the officials of Athens regarding the political situation in Albania, as well as moves and stays of Esat Pasha Toptani, that had only caused damage to the national question.<sup>4</sup>

In this case I would like to mention the strict answer of Sotir Kolea to "Lausanne" newsroom on an article titled "Albania in the Peace Conference", published on 10 March 1919. Kolea titles his answer as "Correcting an Error about Albanians". In his answer, or better yet, his articles containing plausible arguments, he debunks all the untruths published by this newspaper on the Albanian question, especially

information about personalities, who were part of the Albanian delegation on the Conference at issue.<sup>5</sup> As regards the activity of Sotir Kolea to the benefit of the national question during 1920, the archive fund of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs contains documents on his protests addressed to the press in Lausanne against the distortion of facts about Albania.<sup>6</sup>

Starting from 1920, with the Nationwide Congress in Lushnja, Albania, although halved as a territory and population, owing to the arbitrary decisions of the Paris Peace Conference, which instead of Peace actually sowed the seeds of the Second World War, started the journey of becoming a normal state. The government that emerged from this Congress settled in Tirana and immediately started working on the establishment of central and local institutions, without leaving aside international recognition.

In 1921, pursuant to a decision of the Council of Ministers, a representative office was opened in Geneva.<sup>7</sup>

The same year marks the arrival of some foreign Albanophiles in Albania, among whom was the Swiss prof. Eugène Pittard, an anthropologist, ethnologist and archaeologist, who was renowned and well-known in academic settings across Europe.<sup>8</sup>

Two years after the Congress of Lushnja, the Albanian state was de jure recognized by the Swiss Confederation.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, according to the documents of the fund of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs it turns out that in 1924, Albania had a General Consulate in Geneva.<sup>10</sup>

The arrival of visitors from Switzerland to Albania, mainly journalists and researchers, was viewed as an issue by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. So their admission, surveillance and treatment was the activity object of this institution's bodies.<sup>11</sup>

Among the data concerning the relations between Albania and Switzerland is undoubtedly the notification of the Italian Legation in Tirana to the Prefecture of Bari of the measures, to be taken by the state authorities on the occasion of the pass of King Zog during his journey to Switzerland.<sup>12</sup>

Of interest is also the correspondence between the Albanian Royal Legation in Belgrade and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tirana on the news of the decision-making by Bern official authorities to establish a Consulate of the Swiss Confederation in Tirana.<sup>13</sup>

The Albanian Government entrusted the celebration of the 25th anniversary of Self-Government to an Ad Hoc Commission, which sent to all prefectures and diplomatic missions abroad biographical data on activists of the National Movement for Independence as well as foreign personalities, who had contributed to the Albanian question, in order to honor them with various medals. Among the answers received by this Commission is the answer of the Deputy of the Royal Albanian Consulate in Geneva, Th. Luarasi. The latter announced that he was sending the biography and photographs of Professor Eugène Pittard. "... I have the honor to let you know that.... Mr. Eugène Pittard, the sole foreigner in the jurisdiction of the Royal Mission that has greatly supported our Homeland..." - Th. Luarasi wrote. Some of the merits of Professor Pittard are as follows: Commissar of the League of Nations in Albania, founder of the Albanian Red Cross, and the discoverer of the Iron Age in Albania. But apparently Prof. Pittard had another merit. The archive fund of the Ministry of Education provides another interesting fact about this personality. Based on an article by Archbishop Fan Noli published in a newspaper in Geneva, in which he asked young people from Switzerland to be employed in Albania

as teachers, young Rene Rjeben from Geneva sent a letter to the Ministry of Education in Tirana, where he offered to work in the Albanian education system, the organization of which was the responsibility of Prof. Eugène Pittard.<sup>15</sup>

In the framework of these celebrations, the Consul of the Kingdom of Albania for Switzerland based in Bern and defender of trade relations between the two countries, Lieutenant Colonel Armin Aerni sent the biography and picture of the clergyman Lazër Shanto to the Commission of the 25th Anniversary of Self-Government. Attached he briefly provided his appreciation on the clergyman: "... he has been living in Switzerland since late 1927. He has been a chaplain in Schwandegg castle in the vicinity of Menzingen, and he has also been a German vicar in Biel for six months. He has been working as a vicar in La Motte in Jura of Bern. He work as an Albanian language interpreter for German clergymen. He propagandized and promoted Albania through articles in newspaper and radio broadcasts. Although he does not live in his Homeland, he is an ardent patriot."<sup>16</sup>

Of significance is a correspondence among the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Interior, the Royal Consulate General in Geneva in the first months of 1939, shortly before the invasion by fascist Italy, on political, economic and cultural problems between our two countries over the '20-'30s of the last century.<sup>17</sup>

Among the political problems, I would single out the censorship of the press and the control of items sent from Switzerland, as the latter was considered by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Kingdom of Albania, as "...a country where the center of the Bolsheviks is organized".

As regards trade relations of companies and individuals from Albania with their counterparts in Switzerland, it should be noted that during

the '20s until the end of 1944 they marked a significant increase. There are several archive funds, such as the Ministry of National Economy<sup>18</sup>, Ministry of Finance<sup>19</sup>, Ministry of Agriculture and Forests<sup>20</sup>, Ministry of Industry and Trade<sup>21</sup>, Central Directorate of the National Bank<sup>22</sup>, etc., where data was found on the progress of bilateral relations in the area. On this occasion, I would mention the import of watches and jewelry from "Selfo" company, cement, gold coins, etc. However, the archive fund of the Ministry of Finance prior to 1944, which is kept at the Central State Archive, contains statements compiled by this Ministry on the import-export between our two countries.

Based on the documents kept in the Central State Archive, the arrival of the advisor of the Swiss Legation in Rome, in 1941, in Tirana, was announced. No details are known on the reason for this visit, but it is very likely that it may have intended to investigate or obtain data on Albanian citizens who immigrated to the US and American citizens residing in Albania.<sup>23</sup>

The non-involvement of the Swiss Confederation in the conflict of the Second World War, i.e. the choice to be a neutral country, allowed the latter to take over the protection of the interests and rights of Albanian citizens in the USA and vice versa.<sup>24</sup>

The end of the Second World War marks another phase of relations between our two countries, a fact that is reflected in the official documentation found today in the Central State Archive.

There are many archive funds where we can find data on the progress of relations between our two countries, both in the official state level and in the party and individual levels.

Naturally, the accession to power of a communist government, which categorically refused to recognize and accept the achievements of

previous governments at the international level, i.e. diplomatic relations with other states and agreements signed with them in all areas, including relations with the Swiss Confederation were virtually discontinued.

However, trade relations were the first to recover. After the war and also in the following years, Albania suffered difficulties in the provision of raw materials, industrial products, medical drugs, etc. Archive funds of the Council of Ministers<sup>25</sup>, Presidium of the People's Assembly<sup>26</sup>, Ministry of Economy<sup>27</sup>, Ministry of Foreign Trade<sup>28</sup>, Ministry of Industry and Mines<sup>29</sup>, Ministry of Finance<sup>30</sup> General Bank Directorate<sup>31</sup>, Ministry of Education and Culture<sup>32</sup>, Ministry of Health<sup>33</sup>, General Post Office and Telecommunication Directorate<sup>34</sup> are the main data source in connection to the above mentioned.

I believe that the General Directorate of AlbTourism archive fund is of special interest.<sup>35</sup> This state institution, established in 1955, aimed at organizing and inviting tourist groups from various countries to Albania. Groups were strictly controlled not only by this Directorate, but especially the Ministry of Interior. Contact with Albanian citizens was categorically forbidden. This institution's archive fund, which has stopped operating, contains the name list of visitors, a high number of whom were Swiss citizens, itineraries of trips across Albania, hotel accommodations, menus, and reports of Albanian guides about the behavior and positions of these tourist groups members. The most invaluable documents are related to impressions and letters they wrote before leaving Albania or after returning to their countries.

After 1922, the former Archive of the Albanian Labor Party was attached to the State Central Archive. This former Archive contains documents that are of interest to left wing researchers

in Europe and beyond. Among them I would mention documents concerning the relations of the Albanian Labor Party and Swiss Labor Party<sup>36</sup>, the Center (Organization) of Communists of Switzerland / Marxist-Leninist<sup>37</sup>, led by Gilbert Etienne and Swiss Communist Party, led by G. Bulliard<sup>38</sup>. Contact with these left wing political groups was kept through the Albanian Embassy in Paris.

Nonetheless, among the letters sent to the Albanian leader, E.Hoxha<sup>39</sup> there is a letter, which was considered "hostile" by the Central Committee of the Party apparatus and naturally, Hoxha himself, sent from Switzerland in 1968. The author strongly condemns communism, Soviet military intervention to Czechoslovakia and values NATO.

In conclusion one can say that:

1. Based on Albanian archive documents, relations between the two countries improved in all aspects.
2. Switzerland has always been a safe country for the activities of many patriots to the benefit of the national question.
3. Based on the Albanian archive resource, mainly the correspondence among renowned Albanian personalities during the first decades of the last century, and opinions and ideas on the press at that time, that the Swiss state organization model was considered by various patriots as the best and most appropriate model to be followed by Albania. What makes it extremely clear what was happening in the intellectual circles of the 1930s in relation to the above, is a short article by one of the most prominent journalists of those years, Ismet Toto, "Switzerland or Afghanistan?" published in the newspaper "Arbënia" on 1 February 1936.

Some lines from the article are provided below:

“Time and again, the Albanian people and boys proved that they are ready to sacrifice themselves... for their country, for the beautiful dream of a European Albania, the Switzerland of the Balkans... The appointment of young boys, who studied in Europe, as state servants, did not play any role for some of them lacked experience and others had lower level tasks, thus they were obliged to work under the orders of old clerks, who directed work. This explains the fact the country government took undesirable forms... On 21 October (1935 when the Mehdi Frashëri government started operating), a new era of history for our country started with the use of the Latin alphabet. The central group of Levantine (Eastern) Clerks was dismissed and replaced by a group of young people, led by the brightest and most liberal personalities we have. Ever since, a fierce controversy continues between those who imagine Albania as Afghanistan and those who love it and attempt to turn it into Switzerland”.

#### Sources from Albanian Central State Archives:

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- 2.F.32, d.55/2, fl.91-93; F.44, D.21, fl.94
- 3.F.54, D.68, fl.49
- 4.F.54, D.67/2, fl.158-159;D.68, fl.45-46,48
- 5.F.54, D.68, fl.55-56
- 6.F.151, v.1920, D.137
- 7.F.149, D.I-307
- 8.F.152, v.1921, D.166; F.273, v.21, D.48
- 9.F.151, v.22, D.209; F.152, v.22, D.1278; F.235, v.22, D.20
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- 11.F.152, v.24, D.422, 594; v.27, D.85; v.33, D.31
- 12.F.163, v.32, D.488; v.33, D.31
- 13.F.151, v.37, D.141
- 14.F.170, v.37, D.23
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- 17.F.151, v.39, D.49
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- 21.F.175
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- 23.F.153, v.41, D.158
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