



Historical Events in Korça Region after the Declaration of Independence until the end of World War I

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Abstract

The paper reflects political, economic, social activities and aspects of Korça during the period of the study. This period is special and important in the history of the Korça region and the Albanian state. During this period were launched the institutions of public life, founded in the form of governance, which included a series of economic activities for Korça based on creating new contemporary legislation increasing the institutions' role in relation to the previous tradition; building up a modern national educational institution in order to change the mentality of the people, basically oriented to the western countries' policy. There are described the key moments of political, economic, social and cultural life of the Prefecture' people of Korça. The main aim and objective of the study has to familiarize the reader with the Korça region people role in the political, social, economic, during 1912-1920 's, and the efforts of this population for freedom and independence and national unity. The most outstanding personalities in the different fields of the life in Korça region in local and national level are recorded, showing their role in certain moments of these developments. The important place has taken the attempts of Greeks for annexation of Korça region using the different political, diplomatic and military means, but there were also the wishes of the population of Korça to be part of Albania. The ability of Korça citizens for self-governance is clearly expressed during WWI when the "Autonomous Republic of Korça" "government was founded.

Keywords: Greek power, Autonomous Republic, administrative council, "National committee of Korça Protection", Kapshtica Protocol

1. Introduction

The period from 1912 to 1920 was a very difficult time for the Albanian people who had faced and challenged to set up their own state after the declaration of Independence on 28 November 1912.

All Albanian territory, particularly around the border regions became prey to the invasion of the Balkan states which occupied large parts of its territory.

The decision of the Ambassadors Conference for the recognition of the Albania independence and delimitation of its Albanian state was not well received by neighboring Balkan countries.

They tried to make the sabotage of the new state as long as they could. They didn't withdraw their armies out of Albanian territory, leaving behind masked soldiers to use in case of need, to strike from within the Albanian state and propaganda of the great powers of the alleged inability of Albanians to self-governance.

Such a situation was created in the region of Korça when during the First Balkan War this region was occupied by the Greek army.

2. The historical events' chronology of Korça Region 1912-1920

Basically the period from 1912 to 1920 can be divided into 4 sub-periods:

- The first period of the Greek invasion,

- The period when this territory was administered independently as the part of the Albanian state,
- The second period of Greek invasion, and,
- The period of French occupation.

Within those sub-periods are distinguished two main phases; firstly when Korça was ruled independently by the own citizens through their representatives and secondly when it was administered by the French, who canceled the agreement of December 1916 and from 1917 to 1920 when they administered Korça region themselves.

3. The first Greek invasion

Korça region since the beginning of independence had some particular specific characteristics. It was related to the fact that in this period it was occupied by Greek forces which previously surrounded Janina during the First Balkan War through Macedonian territory occupied Korça. This occupation lasted 14 months from December 1912 to February 1914 (Harizi Petro, 1919). Greek authority in Korça during the occupation was initially represented by a police chief who tried to apply in the city and county "Greek justice" allowing fanatics of Greece to beat and kill the Christian and Muslim Albanians and put them into the prison simply only because they were Albanian patriots, ... " (Harizi Petro, 1919).

A month after the invasion Kapçambeli was appointed the mayor of Korça, and then as the judge. The rest of the public services rested out as during Ottoman Period.

During this time the various political actions were organized by Greek government which tried to make possible the holding of Korça Region within Greece and for this reason they organized an unprecedented terror against Albanians Patriots.

Following the decision of the Ambassadors' Conference of London which decided that Korça will be within Albanian state these activities were intensified even more.

On the other hand Korça' patriots took heart even more from this decision. But, the Greek invasion authorities organized meetings where trying to manipulate public opinion and especially the Great Powers governments for allegedly Korça population desire to stay under Greece Governance.

The visit of Prince George in Korça served to those purpose like in all other areas occupied by the Greek army including Korça.

During their 14-month of occupation the Greek authorities of Korça didn't carry out anything for the county and town.

They didn't build up any public building. They were concentrated only on three objectives: to spread out their propaganda to the Korça people to make them obedient to seek the union with the Greek State; to bring up all the employees of the government from the Greece and to gather the gold of Korça if it was possible and to bring up it to Greece, leaving their cards to the people of Korça.

3.1 *The period when this territory was administered independently as the part of the Albanian State*

On March 1, 1914, as a result of international pressure, the Greek forces left Korça and the next day the Albanian gendarmerie was decided, which was greeted as liberator by the population of Korça.

The Albanian administration was taken the responsibilities in Korça under the KNK (The International Commission of Control). It was formed a volunteers corps under the command of Themistokli Germeñji. (State University of Tirana, 1965)

Following the decision of the ambassadors Conference of London to establish Albanian principality on March 17, 1914 in Korça entered Albanian army on top of which was Major Mustafa Bey. On this day, with the army came to Korça also the Dutch officer Captain Giralдин.

Mustafa Bey organized a council consisting of Korça Albanian patriots. Later on, in Korça arrived two Dutch officers; Major Shneller and Captain Dermin for the organization of the

gendarmerie. Major Mustafa Bey was sent to Cologne and later on two civilians governments took over Korça Region.

After their withdrawal from Korça on March 1, Greek troops left to the city hospital a number of "sick soldiers" and the "doctors" to take care about them, but their officers and a network of agents and provocateurs played a very negative role; they chaired Germanos, the Greek Bishop, like Bishop of Korça. Additionally the Greek paramilitary armed bands stayed over the highlands of the Region, ready to attack the city.

The Greek masked paramilitary forces carried out the "coup" over the night, on 2 April 1914 in Korça, trying to expel the Albanian administration and conquer the city.

Albanian gendarmerie, Albanian volunteer corps and hundreds of villagers from the surrounding area, under the command of Dutch Major Shellee pressed for a short time the Greek "coup" of Korça.

After the failure of the Greek "coup" of Korça, Albanian gendarmerie and volunteer forces continued strikes against the Greek paramilitary forces in other areas like in Barmash, Nikolica, Arrza, etc. They removed eventually from the territory assigned by the Ambassadors Conference of London ("Koha" Press, May 3 1914). It is noteworthy that Pandeli Evangjeli was appointed by the Albanian government of Prince Wied in the position of Korça mayor.

3.2 *The second period of Greek invasion*

Neighbors took the opportunity to intervene again in Albania at the beginning of the First World War and under the conditions of the development of the Military Movement of Albanian Central Peasants who were directed against the Albanian Government and Prince Wied. The Greek Government military and paramilitary forces achieved in Southern Part of Albania to ensure "the ratification of the Corfu Protocol", but then they began organizing armed actions against the state. They also under the pretext of protecting supposedly the Christian population from the crimes allegedly committed from Albanian Muslims ordered the so-called "Holy Companies" to attack the provinces of southern Albania.

The units of the regular Greek army and the "Northern Epirus" gangs' bands after fierce fighting with Albanian patriots' population and Albanian few units occupied Kolonja, Korça and Tepelena. (State University of Tirana, 1965). The Greek bands accompanied their march with the combustion and new massacres of the Albanian population which was forced to leave the homes around Korça, Kolonja, Leskoviku, Tepelena etc., seeking shelters as refugees in the areas that were under the power of the Albanian Government. The Greek government officially declared the invasion of the Southern Albania on 27 October 1914. (State University of Tirana, 1965)

4. **The period of French occupation**

4.1 *The Autonomous Republic of Korça*

The scope of the Austro-Hungarian occupation of the Northern and Medium Albania at the beginning of 1916 year worsened the situation of the Entente forces in the Balkan sector. The supply of French East Army by the Port of Thessaloniki was complicated as a result of the German-Austrian submarine float, so it was necessary to be found land supply routes for the French army that operated in this region.

Greece was still neutral in world conflict. Greek political class was divided into two groups regarding the position to be held to this conflict; Venizellians who wanted the Greece to enter into the war on the side of Entente and Kostandinians who wanted the Greece to hold the side of the Central Block. Greek troops of King Constantine which were in the South Part of Albania had set up relations with the conquering Austrian authorities. In addition the Greek government had decided in early 1916 that "Members of Northern Epirus" to be considered as the integral part of the Greek Parliament.

This situation had been seen as unsafe for Italian Army which was located in Vlora and also the French Army of the Eastern. So, there was the need for a safe route connecting the Western

Europe and Italy with the front of Thessaloniki. The surest pathway in the situation was the Southern Part of Albania; thus the Albanian Territory that was occupied by Greece.

The initiative for the opening of this corridor was taken by French and Italian armies. The Italian troops in August 1916 began their invasion in the Southern Part of Albania. During the September and October of 1916 they invaded Saranda, Gjirokastra and Përmeti.

On the other hand the French military units of the East Army proceeded from the West to Albania invaded in October 1916 the Korça and spread out to Opari and Gora areas. The relationship between the French and Italian troops became at the Qarri Mountainous Neck, when the Italian forces invaded Leskoviku and Erseka.

The front line between the Entente and the Central Block moved roughly in the Vlora-Berati-Pogradeci line. (State University of Tirana, 1965)

The French command with the French invasion of Korça after Konstandini expelled from the city and county and city administration handed over to their ally followers the Prime minister of Greece Venizelos, who in September 1916 was formed with the help of the Anglo-French forces a deport government in Thessaloniki against the royal government of Athens. Venizelos sent as the prefect of Korça one of the members of his government Argjiropullos who was accompanied by a military battalion. (State University of Tirana, 1965)

The Greek chauvinists set up their administration. They organized the police, military trial. They opened the Greek schools, closed the Albanian schools and began to persecute savagely the Albanian patriots.

Korça patriotic population disagreed with this position of the French. From the town and surrounding villages come daily letters of protest where the outrage put Greek politics.

During those days in the Korça Region were multiplied the patriotic moves. The patriotic military units that were created before the French occupation started to fight against the Greek policy of denationalization. Leaders of these fighting units, as Themistokli Gërmenji, Sali Butka etc., presented the request for the removal of French command from Korça, Greek chauvinists and setting Albanian administration; otherwise, they would be forced to fight against the French.

The new political and military situations created in the Korça Region played a great role on the French Military Forces Commander Descoins who was forced to enter into the negotiations with the National Albanian Movement Leaders. The talks between the two parties took place on 10 December 1916 and they were finalized with the protocol which was signed by the representatives of the Albanians and French who announced the "Autonomous Republic of Korça" (Korça's Historic Museum, 1966)

According to the protocol Albanian authorities took over the administration the Korça County, used as official language the Albanian, Greek schools were closed and instead of them were opened the Albanian ones. The Albanian Flag of the Autonomous Republic of Korça would be waved together with French tricolored stripes. The initiated activity was started when the Albanian flag was raised and took place the ceremony of the announcement of the Autonomous Republic of Korça. The administration then was immediately formed after that ceremony which took subordinated Korça, Bilishti, Kolonja, Gora and Opari districts.

The Judicial Organs of the Autonomous Republic of Korça were established. The main organ was an Administrative Council consisting of the 14 members, who had available a constabulary to maintain order.

The Administrative Council, in which the main role was played by Themistokli Gërmenji drafted some regulations for the welfare of the county and its economy. It was paid the special attention to the Korça county economic development, building up bridges, settling the telephone network, the emission of the banknotes with the sign of the Autonomous Republic of Korça, etc.

Large and important measures were taken in the education field; the close of the Greek schools and kindergartens which were set up on the bases of the "Megalii Idhea" in order to carry out the un- nationalization of the Albanians and the conversation into the Greeks. Instead of them were opened 60 Albanian primary schools and one secondary one, the French Lyceum of Korça, with a very Albanian National Direction.

In all its activities the Autonomous Republic of Korça had a great support from the people of Korça town and its districts population. The Autonomous Republic of Korça was faced with the very

difficult conditions and tried to disconnect the laws and the policy carried out by Greeks and at the same time to paralyze the Greek national - chauvinists' activities.

4.2 *The French Administration of Korça Region*

The Autonomous Republic of Korça didn't live for a long time. It wasn't a desirable administrative entity either for the Greeks or for the Italians and even for the French despite the fact that they were its main supporter. They called the military voluntary units to fight against Austria-Hungary. They also used the thousands of labors to build the roads from Korça to Erseka, from Korça to Voskopoja and from Korça to Pogradeci.

The political party of Venizelos in Greece comes in the power in June 1917 and Greece declared war against the central axis powers. The Entente military situation and especially of France was improved in the Mediterranean Front. The French Army immediately changed the attitude towards "The Autonomous Republic of Korça".

Based on the request of the Greek Government they did back Greek schools in Korça. Republic decisive blow was given on 16 February 1918 when the French general Sal abolished the protocol of December 10 of 1916 year, putting the Region of Korça under the direct rule of the French Military Authorities who pursued the Albanian patriots who were arrested and accused as the spies of the Austrians.

The French invaders also arrested the leaders of Albanian Patriotic Movement and Themistokli Gërmenji was committed by the French Military Court in Thessaloniki and was closed sentenced by the firing squad on November 9, 1917 accusing as the Austrian agent.

The French army, following this way made a secret agreement with the Greek Government to hand over to them the Korça Region. The Greek bands encouraged by this agreement, using semi-official form, announced the population that they will come to Korça and occupy the county replacing the French armies. Even this time the population and Korças' patriots forced French authorities to refuse to hand over the county to the Greeks. This continued up to the end of the First World War.

The setup of the Autonomous Republic of Korça was a great victory for the Albanian people and at the same time a heavy blow against the absurd claims of the Greek chauvinists.

At the end of the First World War, the Albania marks an important moment in its history. This moment carries a huge burden for the continuation of the Albanian created and consolidated with the great's efforts after the declaration of the Independence and its recognition by the Great Powers at the London Conference.

The Albanians' concerns for the future of their country were felt everywhere within the Albania, as well as in the diaspora. Within Albania this concern was seen more in those regions where the risk of the separation from the motherland' state was greater, like Vlora, Korça, north-eastern areas of Albania etc.

This concern was immediately seen as a big risk in the Korça prefecture because the representatives of England and France at the Peace Conference in Paris, respectively D. Lloyd George and G. Clemenceau wanting to satisfy the claims of Serbia amounted to 13 January 1920 with representatives of Italy Nitin an agreement (compromise) under which Albania was pre-seen to be partitioned between three neighboring states, almost as anticipated in the secret Treaty of London. Under this compromise would be passing Fiume to the Italy, and the Northern Part of Albania with Shkodra in the center would be taken by the Serb-Croat-Slovene Kingdom. The Greece was pre seen to annex Gjirokastra, Korça, while Italy would be granted Vlora with a wide hinterland and the rest of the remaining territory of Albania. (Science Academy of Popular Socialist Republic of Albania, 1984)

The news set in motion all patriotic population of Korça town and its villages. The surrenders of Korça and Gjirokastra Regions were the Greek troops as the part of the Entente. The Korça's patriot in response to this compromise and for the protection of Korça Region created the Committee with the name "Committee for the Protection of Korça". The leaders of this committee were Vasil Tromara, Thimi Çikoni, Qani Dishnica, Rifat Shtylla, etc. The Committee took over the protection organization of Korça by all the means, including and the military one. Sali Butka was

charged by them the commander of volunteers' forces who fought for the protection of the Korça Region. The volunteers from Opari, Gora, Tomorica, Skrapari and Kolonja were joined with volunteers' forces of Korça. The volunteers' forces of Pogradeci and Devolli were put under the command of Kajo Babieni.

A group of 300-plus volunteers came from the US in April 1920 included and the musical band "HEARTH" ("VATRA"), to fight with weapons for defense of the homeland. (Selenica E., 1957)

When the French army was retreating from Korça on 24 May 1920 and also a brigade of the Greek army marched from Florina to the direction of Korça, the general alarm was spared out by the Korça's patriots who again mobilized volunteers, who immediately seized the strategic points on the border.

After a huge rally held in Korça on May 26, 1920, publicly was proclaimed the union of Korça with the Government of Tirana. The Pogradeci and Bilishti likewise were joined with the Tirana government.

There was a difficult situation in the city, but very optimistic. The people of the city supply the volunteers with foods cooked by the bakeries and food shops.

The Albanian government ordered neighboring prefectures to help with what they could Korça which was in danger conquest by the Greek army. The Greek government seeing the determination of Albanians who took border, ordered General Trikupis to stop the march on Albanian soil.

The Greek government was forced to conduct a meeting with Albanian representatives in Florina as the result of which was realized the "Kapshtica Protocol" on May 28, 1920. This Protocol would remain in force until the matter was resolved either by the Peace Conference, or by an agreement directly between the two Governments concerned. (Science Academy of Popular Socialist Republic of Albania, 1984). This agreement in fact closed the chapter of the annexation of Korça and its Region by Greece and opened the other developments of the social and economic way in the Prefecture of Korça.

5. Conclusions

The period 1912-1920 is the most important and one of the most troubled in the history of Albania in general and the region of Korca in particular. These years were decisive for the fate of this region and its people for the future. The fact that these territories were claimed to be annexed by Greece and for this purpose the Greek government did everything in its power, including the policy of military intervention to put people in the region of Korca face major difficulties. Greek atrocities committed against the population of Korca region are the most brutal ever recognized humanity. Against these baseless claims of unfair it had in front of Korca patriotic Albanian population beyond that with a heroism without first opposed chauvinistic goals of its actions in Greece aimed at any cost to realize 100% Megali Idea. Only in these chauvinistic claims of vezellonists kostandinists join, and for alliances in World War I had opinions. It was these sinister purposes that accompanied the first years of Albania's independence and the years of World War I. Albanian national movement with the declaration of Independence opposed these goals trying to stop the SAT was possible the progress of Greek troops who tried to invade Albanian lands and the decision of the Conference of Ambassadors Korca and its region to remain part of Albania from these areas trying to leave this invading army. During World War I chauvinist government of Athens, despite the resistance of Albanians, managed to invade southern Albania including Korca region, reiterating burning, devastation of the persecution and killing of Albanian population, especially those patriots who had opposed the Greek occupation policy in Albania. The fact that Greece had not entered World War I and the rear of the French army on the eastern front were not safe from the progress that hosts the Austro-Hungarian forced the French army to invade this territory to secure the rear of it and to have the a supply route from the ground. The opening of this corridor made in practice Korca, Pogradec and Devoll go under French military administration. French authorities of occupation tried in the beginning to make shroud their allies the venizellians tried that after the departure of the Greek army of King Constantine to bring soldiers astray Prime Minister Venizelos, but the opposition of the population of Korca was immediate and determined. It was the opposition that forced the French to create under their authority an autonomous government for Korca,

Pogradec and Devoll, known as the Autonomous Province or the Republic of Korca. This possibility given to the population showed in practice that the administration of the province was effective. There were many public buildings that were undertaken but also the development of education in Albanian language, measures in the financial field, etc. It was a moment when important Albanian people showed that in contrast to the claims of foreigners was capable of self-government and to build a state. The event became the basis for the subsequent development of ANM, which focused after the war to defend at any price the Albanian territory imposed by the ambassadors in London Conference in 1913. endurance and determination of Albanians, new situations regional policy and wider, making it possible that the danger of annexation of the region Korca from Greece to pass and after leaving of the French army from Korca on 24 May 1920, the territory became an integral part of the Albanian state and national government created in Lushnja's congress to extend its authority even in Korca.

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