Research Article



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# The Cham Issue: International Factors and Albanian Efforts at the Peace Conferences

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***Abstract***

*The Cham issue emerged as a diplomatic problem after Albania's independence and the First Balkan War. In particular, the Cham issue was discussed at the 1913 London Conference, where it was decided to join the region with Greece, fulfilling a long-held Greek aspiration to annex the Ottoman-administered territory. Meanwhile, the Albanians of Chameria and Albanian National Awakening leaders, particularly after the 1878 Berlin Congress, aimed to include Chameria in an independent Albanian state. Thus, the Cham issue was a national concern for Albanian leaders before it became a diplomatic dispute. In 1913, the London Conference of Ambassadors decided to cede Chameria to Greece as part of the negotiations to define Albania's southern borders. The Albanian delegation, including Chameria's representatives, provided evidence to the London Conference about the region's Albanian character. However, the Conference ignored the Albanian delegation's arguments and ceded Chameria to Greece, fulfilling Greek claims supported by European powers like France, Russia, and Britain. Chameria lacked strong support from Albania. Albania, newly independent and with a government in its early stages, controlled only a small territory due to the Greek occupation of Southern Albania, limiting its ability to effectively advocate for Chameria.*

***Keywords:*** *Chameria, Albanians, Greece, London, Paris*

## 1. Introduction

The Cham issue is one of the problems that has not yet found a solution, at least from the Albanian point of view. This is an issue that in terms of time is as old as the history of the Greek state itself. Chameria is located in the southwest of the Balkan Peninsula and lies in the western part of Epirus. It is a generally mountainous province, with an area of 4,000 km2 and a considerable stretch of coastline measuring 100 km in length. (Akademia, 2007, p. 496)

Chameria, like all lands inhabited by Albanians, was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire for

almost five centuries. It was subject to Ottoman administrative organization and was part of the Vilayet of Ioannina, along with other Albanian territories. The Cham population suffered all the consequences of the long Ottoman occupation. Coexisting with the Greek population of Epirus, they often shared their fate and the common struggle against Ottoman imperial rule.

Not all territories with an ethnic Greek population were included in independent Greece, as many remained under Ottoman rule. Since 1828, Greek governments sought to unite these territories with Greece, but they also aimed to incorporate all of Epirus, including Chameria and southern Albania. Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, Greece pursued policies to justify these claims, presenting them to European chancelleries, the Berlin Congress of 1878, and other international forums. Meanwhile, in Chameria and southern Albania, there was significant pressure to Hellenize the population through religion and Greek-language schools.

## 2. Source Collection and Methodology

For carrying out this research article, extensive selection and analysis of primary sources, including diplomatic correspondence and speeches by key political figures, were conducted. These sources were collected from the Central Archive of the Albanian State, various diplomatic archives available on the internet, and through the examination of historical publications concerning the Cham issue.

Little has been done to analyze the Cham issue in detail. Given the descriptive and analytical nature of this research article, qualitative methods are essential for examining the materials and understanding decision-making processes at both local and international levels. The methodological approach helps to understand the continuity and changes in the treatment that both sides gave to the Cham issue, and allows for a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics at play in this rivalry, analysing official policy documents and initiatives of both countries to discern their strategic objectives, priorities, and approaches.

This study combines the *analytical method*, which focuses on explanation and is essential for fully utilizing both archival sources and academic books, with the *historical method*, which examines primary sources—both archival and research documentation—to clarify the historical context of the Cham issue. This dual approach aims to fill the research gap and further clarify the geopolitical context of the time when these events occurred.

Researching primary sources and relevant literature has been one of the main objectives for carrying out this work, as a way of maintaining impartiality in the treatment of the Cham Question.

## 3. The Emergence of the Cham Issue at the London Conference of the Ambassadors

The London Conference of Ambassadors, which started on December 12th, 1912, examined the legal and political status of Albania. The conference addressed the Albanian question as early as its first session, where, in addition to determining the legal status of Albania, the definition of the borders between Albania and its neighbours was also discussed. (Puto, 1978, p. 160)

From the very start of the conference, the Provisional Government of Vlora had to face the aggressive diplomacy of the Greek government, which, in addition to the occupied provinces, aimed to annex other Albanian territories, which it included in the territory called Northern Epirus. In order to get ahead of the expansionist policy of the neighbouring states, the head of the Provisional Government of Vlora Ismail Qemali decided to send prominent Albanian diplomats to the London Conference who were well aware of the historical problems with the neighbours. Ismail Qemali ensured that the Albanian provinces occupied by foreign forces were also represented at the conference. Rasih Abedin Dino from Chameria, who had previously been Foreign Minister of the Turkish government during the Eastern crisis, was appointed as head of the Albanian delegation. (Frashëri, 2015, p. 202) In addition, Rasih Dino, who had previously shown strong patriotic feelings towards the Albanian cause, would be a strong voice at this Conference. Since 1909 he participated in the efforts to open Albanian schools in Chameria. Other members of Albanian delegation were Sotir

Kolea, Mehmet Bej Konica and Filip Noga. On December 23rd, 1913, Ismail Qemali, ordered Rasih Dino to telegraph the aforementioned delegates and together draft a memorandum for the Conference of Ambassadors and the European Great Powers, in which Albania's claims regarding the definition of its borders were set out. (*Fondi 145, V.1913, D. 18,* 1913, p.15)

Ismail Qemali instructed the Albanian delegation in London to negotiate for Albania's independence and territorial integrity, aiming for a politically unified Albania including Chameria and all Albanian provinces.

The delegation sent a memorandum to British Foreign Secretary Edward Grey who chaired the London Conference of Ambassadors, emphasizing the need to preserve Albanian territory and gain recognition of its independence by the Great Powers. They urged that Albania's borders reflect the ethnic composition and Albanian language, extending from Montenegro in the north to Preveza in the south. (*Fondi 145, V.1913, D. II-19,* 1913, p.31-34) They warned against any solution that would compromise Albania's future and independence. (*Fondi 145, V.1913, D. II-19,* 1913, p.31-34)

At the end of January, the Albanian delegates sent an appendix to the memorandum at the Conference of Ambassadors, presenting statistics on the Albanian population in provinces occupied by Serbia, Montenegro, and Greece. They emphasized that the entire coastal population from the border with Montenegro to Preveza is entirely Albanian. (Puto, 1987, doc. 7) (*Fondi 145, V.1913, D. II-19,* 1913, p.11-14) The Government of Vlora, in reclaiming Albania's borders at the Conference of Ambassadors, insisted that the southern border should go as far as Preveza. (Akademia, 2007, p. 24) The delegation stated that "The borders we claim are those that will start from the current borders of the Kingdom of Montenegro and will include the cities of Peja, Mitrovica, Pristina, Skopje and Metzovo together with the respective districts, maintaining the current borders up to Preveza." (Puto, 1978, p. 186)

The memorandum from the delegates of the Provisional Government of Vlora emphasized that Chameria had about 75,000 Albanians, including 18,000 who were Grecized. (*Fondi 145, V.1913, D. II-19,* 1913, p.11-14) It detailed the Albanian Cham population as 16,000 in Reshadija, 26,000 in Margelliç, 20,000 in Filat, and 13,000 in Paramithi. (*Fondi 145, V.1913, D. II-19,* 1913, p.11-14)

The Greek government supported its demands at the Conference by stating that the territories under its occupation and those in Albanian territory had a population of Orthodox faith. The Greek Prime Minister argued that all of Epirus should be part of Greater Greece. (Vickers, 2008, p. 79)

On January 3rd, 1913, Greek Prime Minister Venizelos presented a memorandum to the Great Powers at the Conference of Ambassadors. (Agalliu, 2016, p. 280) It proposed that Greece's border with Albania start from the Gulf of Grama, north of Himara, extend east to Këlcyra, then northeast to Panariti Mountain, and include Lake Ohrid and the province of Chameria, occupied by Greek forces.

The delegation of the Provisional Government of Vlora argued that the mother tongue should be the key factor in determining the border with Greece, not religious affiliation. However, the Greek delegation, led by Prime Minister Venizelos, believed that the spiritual value was defined by Greek and church traditions acquired with the Orthodox religion, rather than the language spoken. (Frashëri, 2015, p. 208)

The decisions of the London Conference ultimately disadvantaged the Albanian lands, indicating that the saga of damage inflicted on the Albanians was far from over. To oppose the unjust decisions of the Conference, demonstrations and protests were organized across many Albanian cities. (Agalliu, 2016, p. 280) Various associations inside and outside the country issued protests, memorandums, and petitions in defense of the national issue. The Albanian national press, along with memoranda and petitions from demonstrations in Albanian, European, and American cities, consistently called for the reunion of Kosovo and Chameria with Albania. (Rama, 2014, p. 264)

In June 1913, after a protest in Lushnja, representatives addressed a letter to British Foreign Secretary Edward Grey, protesting the Great Powers' decision to exclude Chameria from Albania. They emphasized "Albania's rights, which have existed from generation to generation in this country, cannot be denied and it is not fair that the people of Chameria should be deprived and separated from the country to which they are linked by blood and language." (*Fondi 848, V.1913, D.6,* 1913, p.67)

The petition strongly condemned the London Conference's decisions and the damage to Albania, as well as the anti-Albanian policies of Serbia, Montenegro, and Greece. The protesters warned that separating Albanian provinces and Chameria from Albania would affect future relations between Albania and Greece. Condemning the Conference's decisions to the detriment of the Albanian question, the petition stated that: "Press reports inform that a border is being drawn for Chameria, which does not meet the interests of either government and will lead to the destruction and disappearance of this country, in terms of language, traditions and, above all, life, history and geographical position, which proves beyond a doubt that it is part of Albania." (*Fondi 848, V.1913, D.6,* 1913, p. 67) At the end of their letter, the authors declared that "driven by this news, people of all ages and faiths gathered today to protest, appealing to the fairness of the Conference and tearfully demanding that Chameria, which constitutes a good part of Albania and now suffering under the enemy yoke, remain within Albania's borders." (*Fondi 848, V.1913, D.6,* 1913, p. 67)

British diplomacy played a key role in the Conference. The Conference focused on the division of spheres of influence after the Balkan wars. British diplomat Edward Grey admitted that the main goal was to preserve the agreements between the great powers. (Puto, 1978, p. 260) For him, decisions on Albania satisfied the appetites of neighbouring countries and failed to ensure the missing peace, at the expense of Albanian interests. (Puto, 1978, p. 260) The decisions satisfied neighbouring countries' expansionist demands, leaving Chameria and other Albanian regions outside Albania's borders.

These decisions would have negative consequences for Greek-Albanian relations for decades to come. Albanian leaders and diaspora organizations warned European powers of the potential harm. Albanian patriotic societies unanimously emphasized that "the separation of the southern region will lead to deep-seated irredentism. Tensions will arise between Albanians and Greeks. These two non-Slavic peoples, meant to coexist, will end up hating and being intolerant of each other." (Drejtoria..., 1999, p. 19) The prophecy of Albanian patriots proved accurate; even after a century, the Cham issue remains a contentious point in Albanian-Greek relations.

When Chameria fell under Greek rule, the Albanian population, particularly Muslims, faced significant pressure and deprivation of basic rights, especially regarding property and language. The Greek government's main goal was to Hellenize the Orthodox Albanians and expel the Muslims from Chameria. In October 1913, Harry Lamb, Britain's representative to the Provisional Government of Vlora, reported to British Foreign Secretary Edward Grey that "the Greeks used mass murder and terror to silence those Albanians who did not accept their 'Greek' identity." (Duka, 2012, Vëll. I, p. 249) After condemning the violence by Greek civilians and the army against Muslim Albanians, the British High Representative in Vlora emphasized that "the Greeks' actions were cynical and unjustifiable. These actions were carried out in provinces beyond the borders assigned to Greece by the Conference of Ambassadors, aiming to erase all traces of the non-Greek population before the Boundary Commission's arrival." (Duka, 2012, Vëll. I, p. 249)

The British diplomat in Vlora regularly reported on events in Albania and closely observed Greek actions in the occupied Albanian territories. In early 1914, he stressed that "Public opinion has been deeply disturbed by recent news that three Muslim landowners in Chameria, in an entirely Albanian part of Lower Epirus now ceded to Greece, were taken from their homes at night and beaten to death by Greeks in military uniforms." (Duka, 2012, Vëll. II, p. 209)

Another British diplomat in Albania, responsible for defining the border between Greece and Albania, reported that "in any case of violence against Albanian Muslims, if the Albanian side objects, Greek circles are prepared to will kill, burn and destroy everything, leaving the surviving Albanians nothing but ashes." (Duka, 2012, Vëll. I, p. 262) Faced with these painful facts and the Greek government's demands that the Albanian gendarmerie protect the Orthodox population of Northern Epirus, Harry Lamb informed Foreign Minister Edward Grey that "given these circumstances, it's challenging to determine which part of the population His Majesty, the King, and the Prime Minister of Greece believe would feel safer with the involvement of the Albanian gendarmerie, members of the Holy Legion, or locals who served in the Greek armed forces." (Duka, 2012, Vëll. I, p. 262)

On the same wavelength as the British diplomat was his Austro-Hungarian counterpart in

Albania, Buchberger, who denounced to the Vienna government the crimes committed by the Greek army and gangs against Muslim Albanians in the territories occupied by Greece. In his report, Buchberger emphasized that in the vicinity of Ioannina many Muslims were found on the streets killed and with their eyes gouged out. According to the Austro-Hungarian diplomat these crimes were committed by Greek armed gangs, with the aim of eradicating any traces of Albanians in these provinces. (Buchberger, 1972, p. 141-177) Almost the same scenes were seen in the towns of Paramithia, Filati and Margelliçi where as a result of various reprisals the Albanian population of these towns was almost halved. (Isufi, 2012, p. 59) In order to solve this situation, an Austrian representative, Bilinks, proposed the exchange of the Muslim Albanians of Chameria with the population of the Orthodox faith found in the villages of Southern Albania. (Duka, 2012, Vëll. I, p. 263)

After the Florence Protocol was signed in December 1913, Albania retained most of the provinces of Gjirokastër and Korçë within its borders. However, in a controversial and arguably unjust decision, the province of Chameria was excluded and handed over to Greece, contrary to international principles of population determination.

## 4. Chameria during the World War I, 1914-1918

The outbreak of World War I in August 1914 found Albanian state weakened by civil conflicts since its formation in November 1912. With the start of First World War and the departure of Prince von Wied, warring European armies entered Albanian territories and neighbouring countries pursued expansionist policies. Protecting Albania's territorial integrity within the boundaries set by the London Conference of Ambassadors became crucial. The reunification of Chameria, Kosovo, and Albanian areas of Montenegro was sidelined. However, many Albanians abroad, along with various associations and political parties, continued to advocate for the Albanian and Cham questions.

In December 1915, the Albanian Committee in Lausanne sent a resolution to the German Foreign Office, stressing the need to protect the rights of Albanians and condemning the violation of Albanian territory by neighbouring military forces. (*Fondi 848, V.1915, D.6,* 1915, p.26-30) They emphasized that the secession of southern Albania and its handover to Greece would inflict a deep and incurable wound, as they considered it the cradle of Albanian nationalism. (*Fondi 848, V.1915, D.6,* 1915, p.26-30)

Fearing further dismemberment of Albania during World War I, the Albanian Committee of Lausanne two months later sent a letter to U.S. President Woodrow Wilson. (*Fondi 848, V.1915, D.6,* 1915, p.1-3) Pointing out the threat of southern Albania being taken by Greece, they asserted that "Albania and the Albanians have no claims or ambitions; we only seek our freedom, our independence; we seek our historical and national borders in the South, East and North." (*Fondi 848, V.1915, D.6,* 1915, p.1-3)

In April 1916, amid efforts to safeguard Albania's territorial integrity, Mihal Turtulli sent a memorandum to the U.S. State Department, expressing his concerns about the future of Albania and a broader peace in the Balkans. (Drejtoria..., 1999, p. 28)

During the fighting between the invading armies on Albanian territory, the Italian army managed to push the Greek army back outside Albania's political borders. However, in April 1916, the Greek army took control of the entire Epirus region, including Chameria. This Greek intervention in the Italian military influence zone prompted the Italian government to order the takeover of Southern Albania and Northern Greece.

In June 1916, the Italian army crossed into Greek territory, occupying Ioannina and the entire Epirus, including Chameria. (Isufi, 2002, p. 152)

In the spring of 1917, the Albanian population of Chameria, feeling unprotected and frequently threatened by Greek armed forces, requested the local Greek administration to end the repressive measures. In response to the resistance from the Albanian population, the Greek command ordered a temporary withdrawal. Concurrently, the Greek army split into smaller detachments and ceased

combat operations against Southern Albania, focusing its forces in the Ioannina and Chameria areas. (Agalliu, 2016, p.VII)

During World War I, the Albanians of Chameria, Konica, Florina, Kostur, and other areas within Greek state boundaries viewed the Entente states as their allies. (Rama, 2014, p. 269)

In the summer of 1917, the Italian army occupied most of Chameria, along with Zagoria, Pindus, and other areas of Epirus. (*DDI, QS, V8*, 1980, p. 107) Then, in March of that year, the Italian army occupied the village of Sagiada. While preparing to occupy Chameria, Italy's diplomacy was also considering declaring Albania's independence and seizing the cities of Agirocastro and Vlora. (*DDI, QS, V8*, 1980, p. 113)

On June 10th, 1917, during military operations, the Italian army captured the city of Parga with little resistance from Greek forces. (*DDI, QS, V8*, 1980, p. 184) The Italian military appointed Captain Francesco Frazi as general commissioner to administer occupied Chameria, dividing it into seven districts. (Rama, 2014, p. 270) The Albanian population initially welcomed the Italian army as liberators, viewing the occupation as temporary. The Muslim Cham community sought opportunities under Italian rule, requesting the Commissioner General to stay in Chameria and end Greek governance. (Meta, 2002, p. 30-31) To advance invasion objectives, the Italian military pursued a policy of rapprochement with Chameria's Albanian Muslim population.

Italian circles encouraged separatist actions among the Vlachs of Pindus and Muslim Chams of Chameria to detach them from Greece. (Papafloratos, 2015, p. 172) Subsequently, the Italian military declared Parga independent and annexed it to Albania. (Papafloratos, 2015, p. 173) The Italian action provoked a strong response from the Greek government, which demanded Italian troop withdrawal and the return of territories recognized by the London Conference of Ambassadors.

To gain support from Chameria's Albanians, the Italians permitted the use of Albanian symbols in some areas. On August 30th, 1917, the Italian General Commissioner endorsed local demands for Albanian language instruction and the establishment of Albanian schools in areas under Italian control. (Rama, 2014, p. 270)

After Greece joined the Entente, the Italian army ceded Chameria back to Greek army control. In September 1917, pressured by French troops, Italy evacuated Chameria, disappointing local Albanians as the province reverted to Greek rule. Following the Italian withdrawal, the Greek government ordered the 9th military division to secure Chameria up to the Albanian border.

In a push for Albanian lands unification and to prevent national fragmentation, the Albanian diaspora in Europe and America held demonstrations. In November 1917, Mihal Turtulli, from Lausanne, wrote to British diplomat Harry Lamb, emphasizing that the Cham Albanians, mostly Muslim, would thrive alongside their Albanian kin. (*Fondi 848, V.1915, D.6,* 1915, p.1-3) Turtulli argued "that Greek claims were illegitimate, noting that in Epirus, areas like Chameria had a predominantly 80,000 people of Albanian race, with Greeks as a small minority. (*Fondi 848, V.1915, D.6,* 1915, p.1-3)

In early December 1917, Mihal Turtulli raised similar concerns with American ambassador Colonel House in Paris. He warned of the threat of Albania's dismemberment due to the ambitions of neighbouring powers, supported by European powers. (*Fondi 848, V.1917, D.6/1,* 1917, p.108-118) Regarding the Cham issue, Turtulli emphasized that Chameria, in Southern Epirus, had been inhabited by Albanians or a majority of Albanians since ancient times. (*Fondi 848, V.1917, D.6/1,* 1917, p.108-118) He also argued that religious differences among Albanians should not justify the division of the country, as Albanians were united by a shared history, language, and territory, and that religious distinctions would soon fade. (*Fondi 848, V.1917, D.6/1,* 1917, p.108-118)

The upcoming Peace Conference would become the stage for European diplomats to address the Albanian issue. To prepare, Albania's neighbouring states, particularly Greece and Italy, began formulating plans to divide Albanian territories. Italy, in particular, stoked Albanian irredentist sentiments, seeking to strengthen its influence among Albanians in Southern Albania.

In a report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome in mid-September 1918, the Italian plenipotentiary minister in Athens noted that during the inauguration of the Vjosa River bridge in Përmet, Italian General Ferrero remarked that the bridge would later serve to unite Albania with

Ioannina, the land of Ali Pasha Tepelena. (*DDI, QS, V9*, 1980, p. 407-408) Italy also aimed to incite the Cham and Vlach populations in Greece to oppose the Greek government's claims in Northern Epirus. (*DDI, QS, V9*, 1980, p. 407-408)

In addition to Ioannina and Chameria, which had been occupied since 1913, Greece sought to expand its borders into Southern Albania, claiming other Albanian-inhabited areas, including provinces of Epirus that lay within Albanian territory. (*DDI, QS, V9*, 1980, p. 440-441) Furthermore, Italian diplomatic reports revealed that the Greek government had engaged in secret talks with the Yugoslav government to advance its objectives. (*DDI, QS, V9*, 1980, p. 440-441)

The end of World War I and the start of the Paris Peace Conference sparked a mobilization of the Albanian community both within Albania and abroad. Central to this movement was the goal of uniting Chameria with the Albanian state, an effort that steadily gained momentum.

## 5. Albanian Diplomacy and the Cham Issue at the Paris Peace Conference

The risk of Albania's territorial fragmentation once again drew the attention of Albanians. The Paris Peace Conference, convened after World War I, revisited the Albanian issue. The Albanian delegation faced two critical concerns regarding the future of the country. One was the preservation of Albania's territorial integrity, as recognized by the London Conference of Ambassadors, which was under threat due to the chauvinistic ambitions of neighbouring countries, including Italy, a member of the European Great Powers.

While the Great Powers sought to establish peace in the region at the expense of smaller nations like Albania, the Greek government continued to pressure the Cham population, particularly the Muslim community. In January 1919, the Italian consul in Ioannina, Nuvolari, reported to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome that the Greek government had stationed over 400 military troops in Filati to intimidate the Muslim Cham population. (*DDI, SS, V 1*, 1980, p. 182)

The Greek government reinforced its border with Albania, citing the presence of a group of Albanians near Konispol as justification. According to the Italian consul, the large deployment of Greek soldiers in Chameria was merely a tactic to create a negative impression among the Albanian Muslim population and a clear attempt to pressure and subjugate them. (*DDI, SS, V 1*, 1980, p. 182) At the same time, the Greek army's presence in the cities of Chameria served as a means of controlling and repressing any irredentist movement among the Albanians of Chameria, aiming to prevent their union with Albania. According to contemporary documents, the Greek government also sought to exert pressure on the Paris Peace Conference, openly signalling its intention to occupy the much-desired Northern Epirus. (*DDI, SS, V 1*, 1980, p. 109-110)

The developments surrounding the Albanian issue at the Paris Peace Conference, along with the ongoing debates about Europe's borders, prompted the Albanian community to organize in defence of their cause. In January 1919, representatives of the "Chameria" society in Worcester, Massachusetts, sent a request to Georges Clemenceau, president of the Paris Peace Conference, urging the revision of the London Conference of Ambassadors' decisions and advocating for the union of Chameria and other Albanian territories with the Albanian state.

In defence of the Albanian cause, the Provisional Government of Durrës sent a delegation led by Prime Minister Turhan Pashë Përmeti to the Paris Peace Conference. One of their key demands was the reclamation of Chameria and its reunification with Albania. Prime Minister Përmeti effectively opposed the Greek government's claims at the conference for the annexation of Southern Albania, presenting convincing arguments against Greek expansion. (Agalliu, 2016) In the memorandum sent to the Paris Peace Conference on February 12th, 1919, Prime Minister Përmeti highlighted that "Chameria, located 30 to 40 km deep into Southern Albania, had a population of 63,000 before the Balkan War, including 40,000 Muslim Albanians, 14,000 Christian Albanians, and 9,000 Greek speakers." (Drejtoria..., 1999, p. 39) Believing in the principles of justice and the self-determination of nations, the government of Durrës presented its demands for the return of territories unjustly separated at the Congress of Berlin and the London Conference of Ambassadors. (Akademia, 1975,

p. 65) (*Fondi 151, V.1919, D.10*, 1919, p. 22-25)

In early March 1919, faced with the looming threat to Southern Albania and under pressure from Italian diplomacy, which was in open conflict with Greece over Epirus, Prime Minister Përmeti sent a further protest note to Georges Clemenceau, president of the Paris Peace Conference. In the note, he requested that the province of Chameria, under Greek control, along with several provinces in Northern Albania occupied by Serbs and Montenegrins, be placed under the mandate of the United States for one or two years. (*Fondi 151, V.1919, D.14*, 1919, p. 22) Përmeti emphasizes that "if the arguments presented to the Conference are not convincing enough to protect our right and prevent the enslavement of hundreds and thousands of people by our neighbours, we request that the Conference grant the United States government the mandate to occupy and administer the territories we claim, specifically Chameria, occupied by Greece, and the regions to the north and east of Albania, for one or two years in preparation for a future plebiscite. (*Fondi 151, V.1919, D.14*, 1919, p. 22)

The Albanian Government asked the Great Powers to allow a plebiscite during the period of American or European administration, so the Albanian population of Chameria and other provinces could express their will regarding the administration by a neutral foreign power. (*DDI, SS: 1918-1922, V1*, 1980, p. 539) The Albanian government stated that massacres and arson in Southern Albania aimed to create a Greek majority by forcing Albanians to leave. (Akademia, 1975, p. 540) These requests were supported by Italy. Protests were organized in major Albanian cities to counter Greek and Serbian-Montenegrin claims and prevent the dismemberment of Albania from neighbouring countries. (Akademia, 1975, p. 540)

Patriotic associations and Albanian emigrants opposed Greek interests in southern Albania and Chameria. In March 1919, Kristo Dako, head of the US-based Patriotic Association "Vatra," sent a resolution to President Wilson and a request to Paris Peace Conference President Clemenceau, urging the reunification of provinces separated from Albania by the 1913 London Conference. (*Fondi 30, V.1919, D.7*, 1919, p. 18) The letter declared that "The letter declared that, on behalf of all Albanians, the Executive Committee of the Albanian National Party, which met 7-13 March, unanimously passed a resolution advocating for Albania's national unity, based on ethnographic grounds, and the inclusion of Kosovo and Chameria within its borders." (*Fondi 30, V.1919, D.7*, 1919, p. 18)

The measures taken by the Greek government, aimed at prohibiting the sale or alienation of the properties of the Albanians of Chameria, as well as at depopulating this province from the Albanian element, provoked the reaction of the Albanian side at the Paris Peace Conference. The Greek government's actions to restrict the sale of Albanian property and depopulate Chameria sparked Albanian protests at the Paris Peace Conference.In March 1918, a Royal Decree activated Law No. 924 (passed in November 1917), barring real estate sales by residents in Greek-annexed lands. After Muslim residents in Chameria learned of the law, Albanian delegation head Luigj Bumçi condemned it as a clear violation of Greece's commitments to protecting minority rights. In his protest to Georges Clemenceau, Bumçi emphasized that "the Muslim population of Chameria, annexed by Greece, faces the grim prospect of forced exile, leaving behind their possessions, real estate, and fields—their primary source of wealth." (Drejtoria..., 1999, p. 58) (*Fondi.151, V.1919, D.14*, 1919, p. 45-46)

The Albanian delegation in Paris firmly asserted the Albanian nationality of Chameria's Muslims, rejecting Greek demands to label them as Turks and force their relocation. In this regard, the delegation emphasized that "Chameria's Muslim Albanians, whose sole desire was unification with mother Albania, had been compelled to choose Turkey after their land was annexed by Greece, as Albania was not yet officially recognized as an independent state." (Drejtoria..., 1999, p. 58)

Fearing Greek reprisals that could forcibly relocate the Cham population, the head of the Albanian delegation urged the Paris Peace Conference to prevent any expulsion of this population until Albania's borders were definitively determined. "We ask for your mercy and urge you to request Greece delay the expulsion of Muslim Albanians from Chameria until Albania's reconstruction." - he stressed. (Drejtoria..., 1999, p. 58) Among other things, in the letter Bumçi did not forget to remind the Conference of the issue of Albanian properties in Greece. In his letter, Bumçi also reminded the

Conference about the issue of Albanian properties in Greece. The Albanian side requested that Greece also postpone the ban on property sales, particularly for Cham Albanians, especially those with Muslim affiliations who had been forced to emigrate to Turkey. (Drejtoria..., 1999, p. 58)

As anxiety grew over decisions regarding Albania, protests erupted across the country demanding the protection of its borders. The common denominator of these protests was the demand to reunite Albanian-inhabited provinces, separated from Albania by the London Conference of Ambassadors. In September 1919, the Switzerland-based National Committee of Albanians appealed to the Chairman of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, citing Wilson's principles, to rectify the London Conference's errors and support Albanian claims. (Drejtoria..., 1999, p. 60) In their letter, Albanian representatives in Switzerland stressed that to rectify the mistakes of the 1913 London Conference, Kosovo and Chameria—entirely Albanian provinces—should be included in the Albanian State. (Drejtoria..., 1999, p. 60)

In December 1919, the Cham refugees sheltered in Delvina and other parts of southern Albania, facing difficult conditions and unable to return to Chameria, sought help from both the Albanian and Italian governments. (*Fondi 163, V.1919, D.1*, 1919, p. 1) The Cham residents accused the Greek government and local authorities of Chameria of coercive measures against the Cham community. They alleged property confiscation and unjust transfer to Greek settlers from Turkey.

Meanwhile, the Greek government continued efforts to displace the Albanian Muslim population of Chameria and dismantle their presence.

The revelation of the secret Titoni-Venizello agreement to dismember Southern Albania alarmed both the Albanian political class and the general Albanian population, both domestically and internationally. Kristo Dako, representing Albanian Americans, protested vehemently at the Paris Peace Conference against the Greek-Italian agreement. He warned the Great Powers that Albanians would resist with force any decision based on this secret pact to further divide Albania. Dako's protest also demanded complete Albanian independence, including the provinces of Kosovo and Chameria, which the London Conference had granted to Serbia and Greece. (*Fondi 30, V.1919, D.7*, 1919, p. 56)

The Albanian Students' League in Brienfield also sent a similar request to the Conference, demanding territorial integrity for Albania and the inclusion of Kosovo and Chameria. (*Fondi 30, V.1919, D.7*, 1919, p. 56)

Despite Albanian complaints, the Paris Peace Conference decisions continued the logic of the 1913 London Conference. As a result, Chameria and other Albanian territories were again excluded from Albania's political borders as defined by the Florence Protocol of 17 December 17$^{th}$ 1913.

## 6. Conclusion

During the Balkan War I, when Chameria was occupied by the Greek army, Albanian resistance was sporadic and lacked a unified national platform to articulate its goals. At that time, Chameria was more known for Greek pressure on the Cham population than for Cham resistance against the new rulers. It's also important to note that Chameria lacked a secure environment and strong support from Albania. Albania had recently declared independence and established a fledgling government in Vlora, controlling only a small territory, when southern Albania was occupied by the Greek army. Given these circumstances, Ismail Qemali's government lacked the strength and opportunity to aid Chameria beyond raising its voice and requesting the London Conference of Ambassadors to unify it with independent Albania.

Albania's position at the end of WWI and during the Paris Peace Conference was weak and uncertain. Its status was uncertain, and it was not treated as a victorious nation at the Paris Peace Conference. Instead, its very existence as a state and its ability to govern itself were called into question. Given Albania's weak position, the Cham issue had no chance of gaining support or attention at the Paris Peace Conference. Greece, a member of the victorious Entente, aimed to gain territory, including completing the annexation of southern Albania, rather than losing any. The

Albanian delegation and government in Durrës had little influence at the Paris Peace Conference, unable to effectively advocate for Chameria, Kosovo, or even Albania's territorial integrity in 1913. Albania's international position at the Paris Peace Conference was weaker than at the 1913 London Conference. Unlike in London, where Albania had the support of Austria-Hungary and Italy, it lacked support from any major power in Paris.

The Cham issue continues to affect Albanian-Greek relations, despite general improvements in recent decades. However, despite being NATO allies, Greece maintains a "Law of War" with Albania. This anachronistic law, rooted in the Cham issue, allows for the sequestration of Albanian properties in Greece. Consequently, Albanian properties throughout Greece were placed under conservative sequestration and administered by the Greek state.

The law originated with Greek Royal Decree No. 2636, issued on November 10th, 1940 "On the legal actions of enemies and the conservative confiscation of enemy property." (Bushati, 2018) This decree was enacted following Italy's invasion of Greece via Albanian territory (then occupied by Italy and part of its colonial empire established by Mussolini on May 9, 1936). Although the Greek collaborationist government of Prime Minister Georgios Tsolakoglou repealed the Law of War during the German occupation, it was reinstated by the post-war government in 1945 with Decree No. 13, effectively keeping the two nations in a state of war. This decree is now widely known as the Greek-Albanian Law of War. (Bushati, 2018)

Albania has repeatedly requested its repeal, while some Greek officials have recently expressed willingness to abolish it.

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