

# Issues concerning the first political elections in Albania (February - April 1921)

LAMBROS ANAST. PSOMAS

The first political elections in Albania constitute a matter about which both Albanian and Greek authors have supported different ideas trying to present the arguments either of the Albanian or the Greek side. Even foreigners support the one or the other side, according to their sympathies. Thus, their opinions are considered biased, as they try to see the part of the truth that interests their side. One of the few scholars who tried to be objective was Basil Kondis. Among his significant works there are publications of unpublished primary material from different sources: from the League of Nations, the British, Italian and Greek Foreign Offices. From the latter he published four volumes concerning matters of Northern Epirus - nowadays Southern Albania - and the Greek-Albanian Relations between the years 1900 and 1939, when the Italian occupation of Albania took place.

An effort will be made here to investigate the problem of the first political elections in Albania and especially the subject of the participation of the Orthodox Christians in these elections. We shall use the Archives of the British Foreign Office in order to proceed, in the first chapter, in another interpretation beyond the classic Albanian and Greek views concerning the participation of the Orthodox Christians in the elections. However, the British primary sources will be used critically. From the Greek archives, published by B. Kondis, it will be proved that the British were informed wrongly in a particular case. Using again British primary and secondary material we shall be able to examine in the second chapter why this took place and to explain the British views on the matter.

## 1. The Participation of the Inhabitants of Southern Albania (Northern Epirus) in the Elections

The Albanian nationalists desired the creation of a central government, independent from any foreign political influence. Thus, they called on a National

Assembly at Lushnja (28 January 1920), a little town near Vlora, and created a higher administrative council - consisted of four members, one from each religious group, i. e. a Sunni Muslim, a Bektashi Muslim, an Orthodox Christian and a Roman Catholic - and a provisional government. In the beginning of 1921 they believed that they were ready enough to proceed in the first free elections of the country in order to have the first democratic government. However, the southern part of the country was not yet a full part of it. In the Peace Conference of Paris, in which the Albanian Question was also discussed together with the other European issues, Greece had managed to gain the support of the Council of the Allies in order to annex Southern Albania (13 January 1920), the so called Northern Epirus by the Greeks. The region was under Italian (Gjirokaster and its region) and French (Korcha and its region) control temporarily, but, when these troops started withdrawing, the Conference refused to allow the Greeks to replace them, mainly because of the change of England's political attitude in favour of Albania. Thus, the Albanians declared the union of these regions with Albania<sup>1</sup>.

The situation was critical. The Greeks continued to believe that the region belonged to them, whereas the Albanians thought that it was Albanian and should be granted to them. With the proclamation of the elections of 1921 the latter formed electoral districts in the South. The problem possessed a national significance not only for the Albanians but also for their Greek neighbours. If the population was to participate in those elections, the Albanians would very easily prove the Albanian character of the region and this could be a very strong argument<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, the Greeks did not want the participation of the

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1. About these developments see in KONDIS B., *Ευαίσθητες Ίσορροπίες: Ελλάδα και Άλβανία στον 20ό αιώνα* (*Sensitive Balances: Greece and Albania in the 20th Century*), (Thessaloniki: Paratiritis, 1994), pp. 120-151.

2. This is proved by the fear of the people that, if they did not participate, they would face the cruel reaction of the Albanian authorities. Kotzonanos, Greek Substitute Governor - General of Epirus, to the Greek Foreign Office, Janina, 1 December 1920. Greek Foreign Office (hereafter cited as GFO) 1921, A/5, no. 16167 in KONDIS B., *Ὁ Ἑλληνισμὸς τῆς Βορείου Ἠπείρου καὶ οἱ ἑλληνοαλβανικὲς σχέσεις: Ἐγγράφα ἀπὸ τὸ ἱστορικὸ ἀρχεῖο τοῦ Ὑπουργείου Ἐξωτερικῶν* (*The Hellenism of Northern Epirus and the Greek-Albanian Relations: Documents from the Historical Archive of the Greek Foreign Office*), vol. 2, (Athens: Estia, 1997), p. 290. Kotzonanos to the Greek Foreign Office, Janina, 8/21 December 1920. GFO 1921, A/5, no. 1429,

population in the elections in order to prove the Greek character of the region<sup>3</sup>. The Greek Foreign Office informed the General Administration in Epirus that the population should not participate in the elections and they had to use all their influence on this purpose<sup>4</sup>. This chapter aims at exploring the reasons behind the refusal of the Orthodox Christian minority of Southern Albania or Northern Epirus to participate in the elections. The contemporary Greeks supported the opinion that this was because of the strongly Greek character of the region and the population found this way to present its Greek national sentiment. We shall prove that this applies only to the inhabitants of the region west of the Vjosa River (the ex-Ottoman Sanjak of Gjirokaster), but not to the region east of the Vjosa River (ex-Ottoman Sanjak of Korcha). We shall argue that in the latter region this took place because of the Muslims' tension of domination upon the Christians, which caused the reaction of the latter. The reasons that caused this development there were religious and social and were not based on the ground of national sentiment.

The elections took place during February - April 1921 being extremely slow in progress<sup>5</sup>. The attitude of the Christian Southern population was definitely against the Albanian plans. In Gjirokaster, the first of the two main urban centres of the South, the population did not participate in the elections<sup>6</sup>, although there are no exact details about the proportion of the population who did so.

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in *ibid.*, p. 291. Vlastaris, Greek Prefect of Corfu, to the Greek Foreign Office, Corfu, 26 December 1920. GFO 1921, A/5, no. 300.

3. Kotzonanos to the Greek Foreign Office, Janina, 1 December 1920. GFO 1921, A/5, no. 16167 in *ibid.*, p. 290. Bairas, Lieutenant General Commander of the 8th Division, to the Greek War Office, Janina, 2 January 1921. GFO 1921, A/5, no. 5 in *ibid.*, p. 293.

4. The Greek Foreign Office to the General Administration in Epirus, Athens, 3 January 1921. GFO 1921, A/5, no. 61, 115 in *ibid.*, pp. 293-294.

5. In Shkonder the elections finished on 25 June 1921. Sir Harry Eyres, British Ambassador in Albania, to Earl Curzon of Kedleston, British Minister of Foreign Affairs, 'Annual Report about Albania, 1921', Durazzo, 1 May 1922. British Foreign Office (hereafter cited as FO) 371/7332, C 6726/6726/90.

6. The Greek Community of Gjirokaster to the Greek Prefect of Corfu, Gjirokaster, 17 February 1921. GFO 1921, A/5, no. 401-22 in KONDIS B., *The Hellenism*, vol. 2, pp. 298-299. John Spyromilios to the Prefect of Corfu, Corfu, 22 February 1921. GFO 1921, A/5, no. 22, in *ibid.*, p. 301.

The people there were in close touch with the Greek authorities in Epirus and Corfu and acted following the desires of the Greek Foreign Office.

In Korcha, the other urban centre of the South, 'large proportion of Christian citizens abstained from voting'<sup>7</sup>. The Commissioner of the League of Nations, Dr. J. J. Sederholm, sent to examine the situation in Albania and the conditions under which its minorities lived, reported that the proportion of Christians who did not participate in the elections in Korcha reached the 97% of the Christian voters of the town:

Only very few people in Koritza<sup>8</sup> took part in the elections for the present parliament. In the town of Koritza, out of 7,000 to 8,000 voters, only 220 took part in the elections. Although some Christian representatives were elected, this does not mean that they really represent the Christian population of Koritza<sup>9</sup>.

The Albanians reacted in two ways. They started terrorizing the population and tried to give a wrong impression about the events in the international community. Thus, they started persecuting the population by imprisoning important personalities of the Orthodox Christians in the region and taking a variety of

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7. Eyres to Curzon, Durazzo, 20 April 1921. FO 371/5726, C 8178/580/90. See also Eyres to Curzon, 'Annual Report about Albania, 1921', Durazzo, 1 May 1922. FO 371/7332, C 6726/6726/90.

8. Koritza was the international name for Korcha.

9. Sederholm to Sir Eric Drummond, Secretary General of the League of Nations, 'Report by the Commission of Enquiry on its work from December 19th, 1922 to February 1st 1923: The Enquiry in Southern Albania', Geneva, 6 April 1923. FO 371/8531, C 7811/211/90. The part of this report about the political situation in Albania is published in KONDIS B. and MANDA E. (ed.), *The Greek Minority in Albania: A Documentary Record*, (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1994), pp. 36-45 (the quotation above p. 39). The last Sederholm's observation, that the Christian deputies of Korcha did not represent the Orthodox population of the region, applies to the Gjirokaster district too. The deputies there were appointed rather than elected. Vlastaris to the Greek Foreign Office, Corfu, 26 December 1920. GFO 1921, A/5, no. 300, in KONDIS B., *The Hellenism*, vol. 2, p. 292. Kotzonanos to the Greek Foreign Office, Janina, 9/22 February 1921. GFO 1921, A/5, no. 165, in *ibid.*, p. 300. Spyromilios to the Prefect of Corfu, Corfu, 22 February 1921. GFO 1921, A/5, no. 22, in *ibid.*, p. 301. Kotzonanos to the Greek Foreign Office, Janina, 11/24 February 1921. GFO 1921, A/5, no. 181, in *ibid.*, p. 303.

measures against them<sup>10</sup>. It is characteristic that the Albanian prefect of Gjirokaster Kol Tromara called the inhabitants 'traitors' and insisted in increasing the number of arrests<sup>11</sup>.

What is more interesting, however, is the effort made by some Albanians to create a wrong impression about the event abroad. Fan Noli, an Orthodox Christian nationalist who opposed the movement of his co-religionists and represented Albania in the League of Nations, informed the Secretary General of the League, Sir Eric Drummond, that the character of Southern Albania or Northern Epirus was Albanian. According to him, that could be proved by the participation of the inhabitants in the elections. This assertion caused the immediate reaction of the Greeks who informed the League about the opposite, using the above document by Tromara, who admitted the facts and suggested persecutions of the Orthodox element<sup>12</sup>. In the region acted also Morton Fredrik Eden, a pro-Albanian English, who tried to misinform the British Ambassador in Durres. The issues concerning his attitude will be examined in the next chapter of this article.

This reality described here shows that the effort of the Greek government was successful enough, proving clearly the absolute Greek sentiment of the population in Southern Albania or Northern Epirus. This was the conclusion reached by the Greeks that time<sup>13</sup>. However, a more detailed thought can lead us to different conclusions. First, we have to make clear that the influence of the Greeks expanded only to the Orthodox population of the region and definitely not to the Muslim one. Moreover, the majority of the Southerners during the period in question were not Orthodox Christians but Muslims.

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10. The Greek Community of Gjirokaster to the Prefect of Corfu, Gjirokaster, 17 February 1921. GFO 1921, A/5, no. 401-22, in *ibid.*, pp. 298-299. Kotzonanos to the Greek Foreign Office, Janina, 3 March 1921. GFO 1921, A/5, no. 231 in *ibid.*, p. 310.

11. Translation of the document in English see in N. J. Cassavetes, head of the Pan-Epirotic Federation of the U.S.A., to Drummond, Boston, 18 April 1921. FO 286/762, C 11556/ 4280/90.

12. *Ibid.*

13. N. J. Cassavetes to Drummond, Boston, 18 April 1921. FO 286/762, C 11556/ 4280/90.

STATISTICAL DATA PRODUCED BY THE COMMISSION OF EN-  
QUIRY OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

Region	Christians	Muslims	Total
Korcha	45,250	54,900	100,150
Gjirokaster	60,881	58,598	119,479
Himara	6,032	1,480	7,512
Total	112,163	114,978	227,141

Table

Source: Sederholm to Drummond, 'Report by the Commission of Enquiry on its Work from December 19th 1922 to February 1st 1923: The Enquiry in Southern Albania' Geneva, 6 April 1923. FO 371/8531 (and FO 286/838), C 699/211/90. And in Kondis - Manda, pp. 42-43.

The results of the statistic calculations made by Sederholm are very clear (Table). Although the Orthodox constituted the majority in Gjirokaster and its region (50.96%) and in the strongly pro-Greek Himara (80.30%), they did not have the majority in Korcha and its region (45.18%) and the overall population (49.38%). Thus, the Muslims constituted the 50.62% of the population of Southern Albania. If in these people we add the very few Orthodox Christians that participated in the elections of 1921 we can come to the result that a clear majority of the inhabitants of this divided region finally took part in the first Albanian elections.

The second important element that must be taken into serious consideration is that not all the Orthodox Christians proceeded in this behaviour having pure Greek nationalistic motives. From the years of the emergence of the Greek nationalism in 1830s the Greek intellectuals and politicians considered all the Orthodox Christians as Greeks<sup>14</sup>. Nonetheless, after the First World War (1914-

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14. KONDIS B., *Greece and Albania, 1908-1914*, Thesis, (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1976), p. 15. METALLINOS G.D. (Rev.), 'Σχετικά με τη σύγκρουση μεταξύ της ρωμαϊκής και της Μεγάλης Ίδεας: Τὸ Αὐτοκέφαλο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ἀλβανίας (About the Conflict between the Roman and the Greater Ideas: The Autocephalous of the Church of Albania)' in METALLINOS. G. D., Rev., 'Ἑλληνισμός Μετέωρος: Ἡ ρωμαϊκή ἰδέα καὶ τὸ ὄραμα τῆς Εὐρώπης (Hellenism in Suspense: The Roman Idea and the Vision of Europe)', (Athens: Apostoliki Diakonia, 1992), pp. 337-338. XYDIS St. G., 'Modern Greek Nationalism' in Peter F. Sugar and Ivo J. Lederer (ed.), *Nationalism in Eastern Europe*, (Seattle - London, 1969), pp. 235-237.

1918), the Orthodox Albanians of the Korcha district - east of the Vjosa River - were deeply influenced by the contemporary ideas of the linguistic nationalism and, as they were, in their vast majority, Albanian-speaking, they considered themselves Albanians. This is due to the fact that many people from that region had migrated in the U.S.A. and had been affected by the contemporary ideas of nationalism. 20-30,000 of them returned to their homeland after the Great War and between the years 1919-1925<sup>15</sup>. The Orthodox Christians of Gjirokaster district used to migrate within the Ottoman Empire and to Greece remaining under Greek influence<sup>16</sup>. Moreover, in Gjirokaster district the Greek-speaking minority was gathered<sup>17</sup>. Thus, the Orthodox of Gjirokaster acted under the auspices of the Greek Foreign Office, something that does not apply to the Orthodox of Korcha. Although the latter were not against Greece, which they considered an eminent and civilized Orthodox State<sup>18</sup>, they felt Albanians and they wanted to remain within the Albanian State and not to be annexed by Greece. Thus, the attitude of resistance against the Albanian government, not only within the first elections of 1921 but also in various other ways expressed later, cannot be viewed as Greek nationalism or irredentism, as the Greeks desired to show<sup>19</sup>.

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15. VICKERS M., *Albania: A Modern History*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 1995), p. 111.

16. GLAVINAS A., *Τὸ Αὐτοκέφαλον τῆς ἐν Ἀλβανίᾳ Ὀρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας Ἐπὶ τῇ βάσει ἀνεκδότων Ἐγγράφων* (*The Autocephalous of the Orthodox Church in Albania based on unpublished Documents*), (Janina: Institute of Studies on the Ionian and Adriatic Regions, 1978), p. 71.

17. CASSAVETES N. J., *The Question of Northern Epirus at the Peace Conference*, (New York: Pan-Epirotic Union of U.S.A. - Oxford University Press, American Branch, 1919), p. 77.

18. Manifesto of the Albanian Christians of Koritza, attached in Eyres to Curzon, 'Confidential Report on Albania', Durazzo, 18 March 1921. FO 371/5726, C 669/580/90.

19. Sederholm to Drummond, 'Report by the Commission of Enquiry on its work from December 19th 1922 to February 1st 1923: The Enquiry in Southern Albania', Geneva, 6 April 1923. FO 371/8531, C 7811/211/90 and in KONDIS - MANDA, p. 44. PIERPONT STICKNEY E., *Southern Albania or Northern Epirus in European International Affairs (1914-1922)*, Thesis, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1926), pp. 155-156. SWIRE J., *Albania: The Rise of a Kingdom*, (New York: The Times, 1971<sup>2</sup>), p. 406. It is characteristic that the Orthodox Albanian mayor of Korcha Kotsos Kotta, well known for his pro-Albanian feelings and a protagonist of the politics of Albania, was, according to Eyres, the man who organised in Korcha the movement against the participation of the inhabitants in the elections. Eyres to Curzon, Durazzo, 22 April 1922. FO 141/669/10, C 9284/580/90. Eyres, himself a supporter of Albania and her independence and integrity, was in favour of the movement too. Eyres to Curzon, 'Confidential Report on Albania', Durazzo, 18 March 1921. FO 371/5726, C 669/580/90.

In order to understand better this reality we shall use the way that the British diplomats in Albania used to categorize the Orthodox Albanians of the South, for this way appears more flexible and closer to reality. The Greeks divided the Orthodox inhabitants in a simple way: the pro-Greeks and the Albanian nationalists. According to them, the vast majority of the Orthodox were Greeks by sentiment, as it was shown by their refusal to take part in the elections. The Albanians, on the other hand, divided the Orthodox population in the same simple way, asserting, nevertheless, that the majority were nationalists, as the vast majority were Albanian-speaking. The more flexible and acute British observation divided the population into three categories; the pro-Greeks, the nationalists and the moderates. This observation, made by the first Ambassador of Great Britain in Albania Harry Eyres and his substitute Heathcote - Smith, could understand that the two extremes of the pro-Greeks, who desired union with Greece, and the nationalists, who were fanatically anti-Greeks, constituted two small parts of the population. The majority consisted of moderate people who wanted to remain within the Albanian State, although they did not feel hostility against Greece<sup>20</sup>.

The question which comes up is why the moderate Orthodox Albanians of Korcha region did not participate in the elections, if it is not true that they did it in order to prove their Greek national sentiment. For the pro-Greeks it is clear that they acted this way exactly because of this reason, that is to prove their Greek nationality. It is also clear that the few Orthodox Christians who participated in the elections were the members of the small nationalist part described above. The reasons of the attitude of the Christian's majority, that is the moderates, can be found in the policy of the Albanian provisional governments prior to 1921.

The majority of the Albanians in the whole Albanian State was Muslim. Until 1912, just few years before the period, which constitutes the scope of this article, Albania was a part of the Ottoman Empire, in which the Muslims constituted the privileged citizens of the State and the Christians its oppressed ele-

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20. Eyres to the Earl of Balfour, 'Report on Southern Albania', Durazzo, 23 August 1922. FO 371/7330 (and FO 286/817), C 12535/818/90. See also Heathcote - Smith to Curzon, Durazzo, 2 January 1922. FO 371/7328, C 506/506/90. The latter text is published in Kondis - Manda, p. 33.



ments<sup>21</sup>. Thus, the Muslims were used to this reality and they did not desire to abolish their former privileged position in order to follow a nationalism which viewed all the citizens of the State, across religion, as equals. The majority of those Muslims had even opposed, prior to 1912, any idea of complete independence suffering from lack of national sentiment and ‘...took up the flag of the Albanian “nationalism” only when they saw that the Ottoman Empire was collapsing’<sup>22</sup>, following the First Balkan War (1912-1913). It was difficult for them to bring themselves to admit that ‘...a Christian can be anything but an inferior’, as ‘...the word equality has not penetrated their minds’<sup>23</sup>. The Christians were able to realize that their Muslim compatriots were suspicious towards them, even towards the most dedicated nationalists among them<sup>24</sup>, as the Muslims considered Orthodox Christianity strongly connected with Greek nationalism.

What is more, the Albanian governments of 1920-1921, controlled mainly by Muslims, followed a policy of financial exploitation of the South taking advantage of the wealthy Christian merchants of the region. They increased the taxes without supporting the financial development of the South. Dr. J. J. Sederholm wrote later about that:

The provinces of Koritza (Korcha) and Arghirokastro (Gjirokaster) have paid the greatest part of the revenue of the State budget of Albania, but only a small portion of it has been used directly for the needs of Southern Albania. The greatest part has been used for paying the central administration in Tirana,...

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21. SARRIS N., *Ἡ Ὄσμανική πραγματικότητα: Συστηματική παράθεση δομῶν καὶ λειτουργιῶν*, τ. 1, *Τὸ Δεσποτικὸ κράτος (The Ottoman Reality: Systematic Presentation of Structures and Functions, vol. 1, The Despotie State)*, (Athens: Arsenidis), pp. 245-250.

22. YLLI K., ‘The Revolution of June 1924’, *Albanian Notes*, no. 1 (May 1965), p. 24.

23. Eyres to Curzon, ‘Confidential Report on Albania’, Durazzo, 18 March 1921. FO 371/5726, C 669/580/90.

24. Ibid. The British Commissioner of the Serbo-Albanian Boundary Commission to the British Foreign Office, Struga, 10 July 1923. FO 286/838, 1806/338/A2. IOANNIDIS V. CHR., *Ἡ Ἀγωνία τῆς Βορείου Ἠπείρου (The Agony of Northern Epirus)*, (Thessaloniki: Company of Macedonian Studies, 1947), pp. 52-53.

25. Sederholm to Drummond, ‘Report by the Commission of Enquiry on its work from December 19th 1922 to February 1st 1923: The Enquiry in Southern Albania’, Geneva, 6 April

Some pro-Greek authors had realised the intentions of the Muslims<sup>26</sup>. However, the rest of the Greek or pro-Greek authors have not referred to the matter. The given explanation, by one of them, is that the Albanian government did not follow anti-Southerner financial policy<sup>27</sup>. Nonetheless, as it is proved here, this is not true.

This reality led some of the leaders of the Orthodox Christians to ask for administrative autonomy of Southern Albania or Northern Epirus by establishing a cantonal system. The arguments they used to support their demand describe effectively the situation that we presented here. Thus, they accused the Muslims that they followed the old Turkish methods and they feared that this threatened ‘...the national life from its foundation’<sup>28</sup>, as the Muslim landlords, that desired to be in power controlling the affairs of the newly established state, belonged to the class that brought decay to the Ottoman Empire. According to the Christians of the South, such people were unable to proceed in westernising reforms and civilised administration. Therefore, the Christians feared that they would find themselves ‘...in an inferior position as compared with our neighbour Greece which is an eminently civilised state’<sup>29</sup>. However, they made clear from the beginning that they considered themselves Albanians and that Albania was ‘a homogeneous state’<sup>30</sup>.

The Muslim arbitrariness proceeded even further by the way that the electoral districts in the South were formed. They weakened the proportion of the

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1923. FO 371/8531, C 7811/211/90 and in KONDIS - MANDA, p. 38. Marinakis, Prefect of Corfu, to the Greek Foreign Office. GFO 1921, A/5, no. 5795 in B. Kondis, *The Hellenism*, vol. 2, p. 340. See also PHILON PH. A., *The Question of Northern Epirus: Its Historical and Diplomatic Background*, (Washington D. C.: Greek Government Office of Information, 1945), pp. 29-30 and VICKERS, p. 108 STICKNEY, p. 154, SWIRE J., *Albania*, p. 407 who follow Sederholm’s report.

26. REEVES W.P., ‘The Aegean Islands and Epirus: A Practical Suggestion’, *The Anglo - Hellenic League*, vol. 4 (December 1914), p. 6.

27. KONDIS B., ‘Η οικονομία της Ἀλβανίας καὶ ἡ ἑλληνικὴ μειονότητα (The Economy of Albania and the Greek Minority)’ in Thanos Veremis, Theodoros Kouloumbis, Elias Nikolakopoulos (ed.), *Ὁ Ἑλληνισμὸς τῆς Ἀλβανίας (The Hellenism of Albania)*, (Athens: ELIAMEP - J. Sideris, 1995), p. 103.

28. Manifesto of the Albanian Christians of Koritza, attached in Eyres to Curzon, ‘Confidential Report on Albania’, Durazzo, 18 March 1921. FO 371/5726, C 669/580/90.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

Orthodox Christians by separating purely Orthodox towns and villages from their Orthodox districts and attached them to regions with a clear Muslim majority. Thus, in order to weaken the majority of the Christians in the Gjirokaster district, they separated Himara, a purely Orthodox town (Table), from that region and united it with Vlora district in which the Muslims constituted the 60% of the population. Therefore, the Orthodox Christians were unable to elect a sufficient number of deputies<sup>31</sup>.

Harry Eyres identified two reasons why the Christians of Korcha district did not participate in the elections. The first was the Greek propaganda and the second the manifesto of autonomy<sup>32</sup>. As the first applies, as we proved above, only to the pro-Greeks of the region, the main reason appears to be the second which expressed, again according to H. Eyres, ‘...a very widespread feeling of the Orthodox Epirotes’<sup>33</sup>.

In this chapter we tried to offer a new interpretation of the facts of the first elections in Albania in 1921. After presenting the facts and their political importance, we proved that the Greek assertion, that the refusal of the Orthodox Christian inhabitants of Southern Albania or Northern Epirus to participate in the elections proved the Greek character of the region, was only partly true for two main reasons. First because the majority of the population of the region in question was not Orthodox but Muslim and the latter took part in the elections, and second because the majority of the Orthodox Christians in Korcha district felt Albanians, though in a ‘moderate’ way, rather than Greeks.

We also tried here to find out why the Orthodox Christians of Korcha refused to take part in the elections, if they did not do it for pro-Greek reasons. We argued that this was due to the Muslim attitude over the Orthodox minority of the South during the first years of Albania’s independent life. The Muslims desired to maintain the power they used to have within the Ottoman Empire by keeping in power the Ottoman reality. They did so by preventing the Orthodox

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31. Sederholm to Drummond, ‘Report by the Commission of Enquiry on its work from December 19th 1922 to February 1st 1923: The Enquiry in Southern Albania’, Geneva, 6 April 1923. FO 371/8531, C 7811/211/90 and in *KONDIS - MANDA*, p. 39. *STICKNEY*, pp. 154-155.

32. Eyres to Curzon, Durazzo, 1 May 1922, ‘Annual Report about Albania, 1921’. FO 371/7332, C 6726/6726/90.

33. *Ibid.*

to participate in the administration and by taking advantage of the prosperity of the South in order to weaken the Christian merchants. Finally, by the way they created the electoral districts in the South they proved clearly their intention to reduce by any means the number of deputies that the Christians were to elect in the Assembly. This Muslim attitude of domination over the Christians was expressed also by the way they reacted after the elections, for they took measures to terrorise the population. This anti-Christian situation in the first Albanian State was well described, as the pro-Albanian British diplomat H. Eyres pointed out, by the manifesto of the Orthodox Christians of Korcha who asked for autonomy of the South. Later this situation caused also a stronger pro-Greek feeling, especially among the older inhabitants of the region, but this can be the topic of another article in the future.

## 2. The Mysterious Role of Morton Fredrik Eden

Although the truth is that the Orthodox Christians of Southern Albania, the so called Northern Epirus by the Greeks, abstained from voting, the British Minister at Durres, Harry A. Eyres, informed his government that the movement of the Orthodox Christians of Gjirokaster had failed and the people participated in the elections. This will be the main concern of this second chapter; to investigate the reason why the British Minister misinformed his government. Eyres' knowledge about the events in Gjirokaster was based on information sent to him by an English subject, Morton Fredrik Eden<sup>34</sup>, an eyewitness and one of the very few foreigners in Albania<sup>35</sup>. I shall argue that Eden tried to mislead the British Embassy on purpose and gave to Eyres wrong information about the events in Gjirokaster concerning the elections there. I shall also argue that Eden was an ardent pro-Albanian who tried to help the Albanians. In the end of this chapter I shall try to prove that Eden was the author of a secret report on Alba-

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34. Eyres to Curzon Durazzo, 29 April 1921. FO 286/762, C 10079/4280/90. Eden informed directly England that problem with the elections existed only in Shkonder in the North. Communicated from the War Office, received by FO in London on 22 June 1921. FO 371/5727, C 12826/580/90.

35. SWIRE J., *King Zog's Albania*, (London: Robert Hale & Co., 1932), p. 19.

nia suggesting Great Britain's support for the creation of a big and strong Albania.

When the Foreign Office received Eyres' report on Albanian elections it replied very carefully. Actually, the Assistant Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Charles Tufton, asked Eyres to pay more attention on the matter of the elections, because Eden might have been biased in favour of Albania. It must be stressed here that the wrong information given by Eyres concerned only Gjirokaster and not Korcha, about which Eyres informed correctly his superiors in London<sup>36</sup>. The Foreign Office was well aware of Eden's pro-Albanian views. This can be clear from the report by Major Harold Temperley, specialized on Albanian affairs at the Foreign Office, sent to inform the Swiss minister at London about Eden's role in Albania. According to Temperley, Eden was a member of the British Adriatic Mission in 1915 'employed as a civilian for intelligence report' initially in Korcha (1916-1919) and then in Shkonder (1919-1920). He had stopped working for the Foreign Office since March 1920 and '...Mr. Eyres has recently reported him travelling in Albania, where he appears to have shut his eyes to anything he did not want to see'<sup>37</sup>. Thus, when the Swiss minister asked the Foreign Office if Eden acted in an official or semi-official capacity<sup>38</sup>, it replied that he acted as just an individual<sup>39</sup>. The Swiss Minister's interest was due to Eden's presence in Switzerland. M. F. Eden used to spend days of his life in the Chateau of Maerchlingen in Bern's canton, where he had a 'pro-Albanian activity'<sup>40</sup>.

Eden was one of the very few foreigners acting in Albania. The British journalist Joseph Swire who visited Albania few years later mentioned as foreigners the members of the Commission of Enquiry of the League of Nations, the British Minister at Durres, the British advisor in the Albanian Ministry of the

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36. Eyres to Curzon, Durazzo, 20 April 1921. FO 371/5726, C 8178/580/90. See also Eyres to Curzon, Durazzo, 1 May 1922, 'Annual Report about Albania, 1921'. FO 371/7332, C 6726/6726/90.

37. See Temperley's report, London, 3 June 1921. FO 371/5727, C 11576/580/90.

38. The Swiss Minister at London to the Foreign Office, London, 25 May 1921. FO 371/5727, C 11576/580/90.

39. Tufton to the Swiss Minister, London, 6 June 1921. FO 371/5727, C 11576/580/90.

40. The Swiss Minister at London to the Foreign Office, London, 25 May 1921. FO 371/5727, C 11576/580/90.

Interior, Lieutenant-Colonel W. F. Stirling, and Eden<sup>41</sup>. If Swire is right, then Eden can be also the man who informed the League's Commissioner Dr. J. J. Sederholm that the Greek Metropolitan of Durres James, Exarch (i. e. representative) at Korcha of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, to which the Albanian ecclesiastical dioceses belonged, was deported from Korcha without protests on behalf of the people either in favour or against him<sup>42</sup>. This assumption is made because the members of the Commission arrived in Albania few days after the Bishop's exile and they needed information about the events. W. F. Stirling and H. Eyres lived in Durres and could not provide them with such information. Thus, only Eden was 'travelling in Albania', could be present in Korcha and know what took place during the Bishop's deportation. However, even that information was a problematic one, as he reported that the people did not react in favour or against James, even though the Serb consul at Korcha reported popular reaction against the Bishop's deportation and protested against the violent reaction of the Albanian authorities<sup>43</sup>.

The Commission saw the opinion of a foreign eyewitness as an objective one. Nevertheless, it is well proved that M. F. Eden was a biased observer. This can be very easily explained if we examine the history of the Anglo-Albanian Association in England. This Association was founded by Colonel Aubrey Herbert, a Man Parliamentary, and some other pro-Albanian English in 1913 in order to protect the rights of the Albanians after the end of the First Balkan War (1912-1913) and the defeat of the Ottoman Empire. The Association ceased to exist in 1914, when Albania was officially recognized as an independent and neutral state. Nevertheless, it was reestablished by the same protagonist, Colonel Aubrey Herbert, on 28 February 1918, when Albania's independence and integrity was again in question. This time, one of the members of the Association, according to the very well known supporter of the Albanians in England, the traveler Mary

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41. SWIRE J., *King Zog's Albania*, pp. 16-19.

42. The Commission of Enquiry to the League of Nations, 'Report on Southern Albania', Tirana, 18 January 1922. FO 371/7328, C 2135/735/90. The Commission of Enquiry to the Council of the League of Nations, 'General Report on Albania', Geneva, 12 April 1922. FO 371/7329 (and FO 141/669/10), C 6071/735/90.

43. The Greek Legation at London to Curzon, London, 24 November 1921. FO 371/5737, C 22345/4280/90.

Edith Durham, was M. F. Eden<sup>44</sup>. The target of the Association was to help Albania to be recognized as an independent and sovereign state in the frontiers of 1913. This meant that the southern part of the country, called Northern Epirus by the Greeks, was to be granted to Albania. Eden worked in Albania for this purpose supporting these views. By providing the English Ambassador and the Commission of Enquiry with misleading information he thought that he worked for the target of the Albanian independence and integrity.

A document written on 4 April 1919 at Shkonder and received by the Foreign Office on 19 April 1919 as 'secret' under the title 'Present attitude of the Orthodox Population of Southern Albania', informed the British about the views of the Southerners in 1919<sup>45</sup>. The author denied the assertion that the Orthodox Christians were in favour of Italy and the possibility of Italian protection over Albania<sup>46</sup>. He also stated that this dislike against Italy was expanded among the Muslim population too<sup>47</sup>. He pointed out that there were two possible solutions for the Albanian Question: either the partition of the country between her neighbours, namely Greece and the Serb-Croat-Slovene Kingdom, or the creation of a Great Albania. He argued that the first solution was not possible after World War I, for nationalism had grown among Albanians. Thus, he concluded that only the creation of a great and strong Albania was the appropriate solution<sup>48</sup>. He added that there was a clear pro-English sentiment among the Albanians and that Great Britain had to take part in the Albanian affairs supporting the idea of an independent and sovereign Albania<sup>49</sup>. These last views lead the research to the conclusion that the author of the report was a supporter of the Albanian nationalists. He thought that the only possibility for the creation of a great and strong Albania, free from any foreign influence, was the one of British interference on

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44. DESTANI B. (ed.), *M. Edith Durham, Albania and the Albanians: Selected Articles and Letters, 1903-1944*, (London: Centre for Albanian Studies, 2001), p. 205. See also J. Swire, *Albania*, p. 281.

45. British Intelligence Secret Report, 'Present Attitude of the Orthodox Population of Southern Albania', FO 608/29 in Beytullah Destani (ed.), *Albania and Kosovo: Political and Ethnic Boundaries, 1867-1946*, (London: Archive Editions, 1999), pp. 433-439.

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 433-434.

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 435-437.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 438.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 439.

the matter in favour of Albania. As a result, the author could not be anything but pro-Albanian English.

We think that we can identify Morton Fredrik Eden as the author of this report. We support this opinion based mainly on Major Harold Temperley's report about Eden's role in Albania. Temperley reported that Eden acted as 'a civilian employed for intelligence report' in Korcha (1916-1919) and Shkonder (1919 - March 1920)<sup>50</sup>. The above intelligence report is written in Shkonder in 1919. From Temperley's information we can see that Eden was in that town of the Albanian North at that time. Moreover, it mentioned facts and impressions about the Albanian South, again in 1919. Korcha is one of the main urban centres of this region and Eden was there in 1919 too. In addition, the views that exist in the report, as it was shown above, came from pro-Albanian English and Eden was such a man, as he was a member of the Anglo-Albanian Association. Thus, it can be asserted that Eden arrived in Shkonder in April or late March 1919 and reported about the experiences he had gathered from the South till that time.

If this is true, we can construct better the picture of Eden's activities in Albania. He stayed in Korcha and, in general, in the South from 1916 to late March 1919. In April 1919 he was in Shkonder and remained at the services of the Foreign Office until March 1920, a year later. He returned to the South and he was found in April 1921 giving wrong information about the elections at Gjirokaster and in November 1921, probably, about the deportation of the Metropolitan of Durres James. Obviously, M. F. Eden's interest concentrated on Northern Epirus. The reason of such an interest has to be examined in a future research.

In this chapter we tried to investigate the question why the British Minister at Durres misinformed the Foreign Office about the Albanian elections of 1921 in Gjirokaster. It was shown, from the archives of the British Foreign Office that this was because of the man who provided Eyres with information, Morton Fredrik Eden. It was proved that Eden was an ardent pro-Albanian. We supported this opinion, based on the information of the Foreign Office about him and on the information of two other people who knew the Albanian affairs very

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50. See Temperley's report, London 3 June 1921. FO.



well; the traveler Mary Edith Durham and the journalist Joseph Swire. As a result, we proceeded in making two more possible assumptions. We argued that Morton Fredrik Eden was maybe the man who informed the League's Commissioner Dr. J. J. Sederholm about the deportation of the Metropolitan of Durres James and the man who wrote the unsigned secret intelligence report concerning the attitude of the Orthodox Southerners towards the Albanian affairs in 1919.