

Congress of Berlin and the Place of Albania in this Congress



History

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Abstract

Historiography of the new era pays particular attention to historical events connected with the Eastern Crisis, as a result of which convened the Congress of Berlin (13 June - 13 July 1878). This rally was imposed by the diplomatic European imperialist forces, to develop a new map of the Balkan Peninsula and some other European countries in the interests of their imperialist appetites. Balkan issue as unresolved problem in East crisis was manifested in the Peace of San Stefano, but weighed more in the sessions of the Congress of Berlin. The burden of these combinations of imperialist countries was held over the arms of the part of the Balkan peoples. Through this paper the researcher will try to examine important aspects that have characterized this period of the Albanian people. References for this article are the written sources and documents of that time. This article aims to illuminate these elements: works of the Congress of Berlin, Decisions of the Congress of Berlin and Place of Albania during the Congress of Berlin.

Works of the Congress of Berlin

East crisis which was interwoven with many aspects of Peace of Saint Stephan, excessively troubled Balkan peoples who had begun their national and Balkan fight. However, the major powers, first of all, Austro-Hungary, England, Germany, France and Italy prepared their specific and special plans in order to dismiss the Tsarist Russian Empire beyond the Bosfort abysmal. Albanians protested categorically at the High Gate asking to keep the territories inhabited by Albanians.¹⁶⁹

And at a time when the great powers were preparing to revise the decisions adopted at the St. Stephen's Peace organized by the Congress of Berlin, Albanian National Movement decisively approved the decision of their representatives gathered in a meeting where the decision needed to be approved in conjunction with the European concert organized by the Imperialism of the European countries at the Congress of Berlin.¹⁷⁰

The burden of these combinations of the imperialist countries, held over their arms partly the Balkan peoples. In large lump of this problem, which is a great concert to address it rather than to resolve, because Balkan problems that submitted and decisions that Congress took were closely linked to the existence of the peoples of the Balkans, reactions of the Albanian national movement, decisions related to the Balkans and the appointment of new borders deeply touched their national interests, especially those of the Albanian nation.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Arkivi i Kosovës, fondi: Halil Alidema, Numri i Invenatrit, 534, Kutia numër 1, fq.87.

¹⁷⁰ A K, fo: H. Alidema, v. c, fq. 89.

¹⁷¹ Historia e popullit shqiptar, II, Tiranë, 1965, fq. 126—127.

Berlin Congress began its proceedings with the consent of Great Britain, Austria-Hungary and Russia on 13 June 1878,¹⁷² and lasted until 30 July 1878.¹⁷³

Decisions of the Congress of Berlin

Great Bulgaria, which laid at the foundation of the Russian plan was divided into three parts. Between the Danube and Balkan mountains would extend self-governing principality of Bulgaria, which will not have any obligation to Sultan besides paying a yearly tribute, between the Balkan mountains and Rhodope would stretch Eastern Rumelia which will be held occupied by the Turks, province of the remained Macedonia, shall also be returning to Sultan.¹⁷⁴

Greece secured promise to expand towards Tesalisa.*

Austria-Hungary won the right to administer "temporarily" with Bosnia-Herzegovina. Also holding a military garnizon in Sandzak of Novi Pazar, to control the path towards Thessaloniki.

The decisions of the Berlin Congress were in favor of the interests of the Great Powers, which didn't consider at all the interests and desires of the Balkan countries, in particular those of Albania.

Through the eyes of the Balkan states, we can say that the decisions of the Berlin Congress were deeply disappointing. Thus, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro were recognized as independent states,* but what was not liked by them was that their territorial claims were not met as they wanted. Montenegro took the Albanian port of Ulcinj, whereas Serbia took only a few sites in the southeast direction, Vranje, Nis, where there was also Albanian population.¹⁷⁵

Greek claims were not realized, although Article 24 of the Congress left open the issue of realization of Greek claims in Tesali and Epir (Vilayet of Janina).*

The Congress of Berlin with its decisions did not keep proper accounts for the liberation war of the Balkan peoples. Especially in this imperialist rally, no one wanted to discuss the Albanian matter and the autonomous requirements that with the great seriousness put forward at this time the League of Prizren. States of the Great Powers in the Congress had split their areas of interest beforehand. Tsarist Russia was introduced as pro-Bulgarian, England as pro-Greek, Germany, was helping Austria-Hungary to expand in the Balkans, Austria-Hungary tried to conquer Bosnia-

¹⁷² Gazeta, Neue Freie Presse, nr. 4984, 14, korrik, 1878, Vienë.

¹⁷³ Arkivi i Institutit të Historisë në Tiranë(Dokumente Austro-Hungareze), fondi: A-IV- 220, fq. 3.

¹⁷⁴ Po aty, fq. 328.

* Kjo u realizua pjesërishtë në maj të vitit 1881.

* (Nenet: 43, 26, 34).

¹⁷⁵ Petrit Nathanaili, Marrëdhëniet Ndërkombëtare nga origjina deri më sot, Tiranë, 2009, fq. 410-411.

* Këto kërkesa u propozuan nga diplomacia Franceze, dhe ishte hera e parë që kjo çështje merrte karakter të shqyrtimit evropianë.

Herzegovina¹⁷⁶ but there was no suitable Albanian friend and supporter in this very difficult moment for their fate.¹⁷⁷

In Congress, the Great Powers were not guided by the principle of freedom of the people, but by special interests, who were in deep contradiction between them. Russian Empire fought to sanction the terms of the Treaty of St. Stephen, whereas Great Britain with Austria-Hungary were trying to reduce as much benefits to Russia and strengthen their position in Eastern Europe.

The German Empire was attempting to satisfy Austria-Hungary for not leaving to join with France and to neutralize the opposition of Russia, provoking deterioration of its relations with the British Empire. France's main goal was political isolation of Germany, whereas Italy itself required such solutions that will lead to the weakening of the Austro-Hungary in the Balkan Peninsula.¹⁷⁸

Place of Albania during the Congress of Berlin



Fig. 1. Works during the Congress of Berlin

At the invitation of the Great Powers, the Balkan countries such as Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Montenegro, sent their delegations to the Berlin government, where these delegations submitted and defended their political demands and their territories,¹⁷⁹ but the Albanians were not

¹⁷⁶ Dr. Vasil pepoviç, *Evropa i srpsko pitanje*, Beograd (pa vit botimi), fq. 126-127.

¹⁷⁷ A K, fo: H. Alidema, v. c, fq. 90.

¹⁷⁸ A I H T, fo: A-IV- 193, fq. 9.

¹⁷⁹ H P S H II, v. c, fq 161.

invited to participate in this Congress at least not in the quality of guest or in the quality of a political delegation.¹⁸⁰

Great Powers, but also many authors of that time, the Albanian issue compared as the second-hand,¹⁸¹ even the avoidance to invite an Albanian delegation in Congress and unjust decisions against Albanian territories strengthened even more the anger of the Albanians against the Great Powers and Turkey. This anger has been particularly pronounced in regions that were directly concerned by the decisions of the Berlin Congress. This circumstance has affected that the inspired forces by a sense of patriotism to manage and organize the National Movement towards the defense of the Albanian lands by foreign violations.¹⁸²

Turkey on the other side insisted to use this movement to show to the Great Powers, that have signed the Berlin agreement and that the decisions taken from Berlin cannot be applied because they present the risk of the outbreak of the uprising in the overall muslim population in the Balkans, so that it meant the risk of a new war.¹⁸³

The League of Prizren, since from the first acts of the General Assembly approved a petition for the Albanian issue sent to the Congress of Berlin, then sent to the High Porte, in which people expressed the determination of the Albanian people not to issue any inch of land to the neighbouring states.¹⁸⁴

Berlin Congress disregarded at all calls of Albanian people for not giving Albanian lands to the neighboring countries and in the protocol 8 of the Berlin Congress Montenegro will take the provinces of Tivari, Podgorica, Plava, Gucia, Rugova and the province of Kolashini, while annexation of Ulcinj wasn't acknowledged, but Montenegro won the right to retain Montenegrin merchant ships sailing freely in Buna River and lake Skadar.¹⁸⁵ So Montenegro took from Albanians the land from Pogorica and an area of Shpuza with 379 square kilometers with a population of 22000, Kraja with 376 square kilometers with a population of 16,000, Tivari of Ulcinj with 3778 square kilometers with a population of 92,000.¹⁸⁶

While Serbia didn't expand towards Novi Pazar, Mitrovica and Prishtina, but it took the land from the southeast, taking provinces of Pirot, Tren, Vranje, and Nish, where these regions were predominantly inhabited by Albanians. But as far as Greece is concerned, besides that Cameraia province was given, it was left the possibility that in the future to annex other territories of Albanians in Epirus.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁰ A I H T, fo: A-IV- 312, fq. 5.

¹⁸¹ Kristo Dako, Lidhja e Prizrenit, Konstancë, 1922, fq. 125.

¹⁸² A I H T, fo: A-IV- 312, fq. 12.

¹⁸³ Po aty.

¹⁸⁴ H P SH II, fq. 156.

¹⁸⁵ H P SH II, v.c, fq 163.

¹⁸⁶ S. Kylçe, v.c, fq. 127.

¹⁸⁷ H P SH II, v.c, fq 164.

These decisions taken by the Congress of Berlin seriously impaired vital interests of the Albanian people and the territorial integrity of Albania, this Congress didn't recognize to Albania any national right, even more serious was that the Congress of Berlin neither mentioned the issue of Albania.

From these decisions all the intellectuals and the Albanian people were left shocked. Even the then newspaper published in Istanbul "Basiret" wrote: "After the government at this time is fried more with its oil and unfortunately it is in a state that can not come to the aid to the Albanians, they being armed themselves need to find their future for the protection of their lands."¹⁸⁸

Albanian issue was not discussed at all in this Congress, although the League of Prizren addressed several times to this forum through memorandums. The only decision of Congress that directly affected, but only partly this time as well, was the protocol Nr. 13, which refers to "privileges and liberties of the Catholic population of Mirdita, known anciently."* This was done with the help of France and Austria-Hungary, as a solution that would give a proper satisfaction to both parties,¹⁸⁹ which contended, each for itself, the right for protectorate over Catholic population of the Ottoman Empire. So Albanian question was reduced to a minority religious protection isolated into a small province.¹⁹⁰

Great Powers and the Prizren League of Albanians itself were posing as a tool of the High Porte, but also on its own Turkey in no way was accepting memoranda of Albanians who came to the Berlin Congress from the League of Prizren, and Turkey justified the need for liquidation of League, stressing that at the top of this organization are foreigners, whose goal was to divide the territories inhabited by Albanians from among the Ottoman Empire.¹⁹¹

The Albanian people in the Berlin Congress required nothing more than those rights which were recognized to other peoples of the Balkans. In this Congress were ignored all the requirements from Albanian people which were expressed through memoranda and protest letters sent.¹⁹² The Albanian problem was discussed only in the controversy constellation of the Great Powers.

Conclusions

At the time of the great Eastern Crisis (1875-1878) imperialist circles of large states and those Balkan states broke shingle principles of national liberation struggle of the peoples of the Balkans. The peoples of the Balkan Peninsula, despite five centuries under the yoke of the

¹⁸⁸ Sulejman Kyçle, *Shqipëria në historinë osmane*, Tiranë, 2004, fq.27.

* ab antique(Autonomia e Mirditës).

¹⁸⁹ Arben Puto, *Çështja shqiptare në aktet ndërkombëtare të periudhës së imperializmit*, vëllimi 1, Tiranë, 1984, fq. 179.

¹⁹⁰ P. Nathanaili, v.c, fq. 411-412.

¹⁹¹ Bernard Stuli, *Albansko pitanje (1875-1882)*, rad Jugoslovenske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti, nr. 318, Zagreb, 1959, fq. 384.

¹⁹² Muhamet Shatri, *Aspekte të kundërthënieve ndërmjet Italisë, Serbisë dhe Malit të Zi lidhur me çështjen shqiptare në vitet e Krizës Lindore(1875-1881)*, Vjetar nr. XII-XIII, Prushtinë, 1981, fq. 246.

Ottoman Empire, lived in historical terms almost equally, but the development of national emancipation process was not carried and wasn't completed under the same terms and conditions and at the same time. Albania was divided from the Ottoman Empire later than Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania and Montenegro.

So the 'European concert' despite the Balkan people requests gathered in Berlin, drew the new map of Balkan Peninsula, according to its interests.

In this complex situation, the Albanians had a positive attitude regarding the common fight with the Balkan peoples. They held the correct position on the establishment of the Balkan federation, not being, in principle, against it. Albanian patriotic circles agree with this idea only if it will be ensured equal status to the Albanian people with the other peoples of the Balkans.

The Congress of Berlin and its decisions were given wings to the imperialist claims of some European countries and governments' circles of the Balkan States, which the territorial expansionist intentions had run especially from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and Macedonia. This Congress with the recognition of the right of the Austro-Hungaria to expand in Bosnia and Herzegovina actually prevented the growth of Montenegro and Serbia in that direction.