

## Albanian Political Currents March-June 1913



## Political Science

**Keywords:** Political currents, opposition, prefectures, noblemen, institutions.

Heral Saraçi

Institute of History at the Center for Albanological Studies, Tirana, Albania

## Abstract

Ismail Qemali held confidential negotiations with the Duke Montpensier. Meanwhile, he thought to use the yacht to undertake a cruise around Europe with the purpose to protect the Albanian issue that was seriously threaten. The Austro-Hungarian Consul in Vlora, Lejhanec, reports that a group of Beys “outside the government, under the governance of Eqerem Bey Vlora formed the so-called opposition. On 23rd April, Esat Toptani handed Shkodra over to Montenegro. In general, the handing over of Shkodra was considered as a treason of Esad but as in this case and in other previous or later cases, he showed that was a prominent politician. In Durrës and Tirana showed up the Oxhak of Toptani family, with Hamit and Refik as representatives. During this period, even in Elbasan showed up the political current represented by Aqif Biçaku, who was appointed by the Noble of that city and the Beys of two Oxhaks, Biçaku and Vërlaci, both agreed for the Head of the Government. Esad used as a political strategy the national flag and the guessing of his political rivals. The case Aziz Vrioni and Myfid Libohova is that of the formalization of the political lines in the institutions of Vlora Government starting from 1912. The disagreement between the minister-prefect is an evidence of their national values and of the feudal antagonism in the government. The constitution of the Sheh Islam institution headed by Vehbi Agolli shows the fulfillment of the religious, conservative, Muslim current. It is an achievement for the spiritual independence of the Albanian nation. On 23rd May 1913 the Albanian state had established the central power and its institutional structure.

On 28<sup>th</sup> March 1913 arrived in Vlora the candidate for the Albanian throne, Duke Ferdinand Montpensier.

The arrival of the Duke was an indication that was removed the Greek blockade against Vlora. Ismail Qemali held confidential negotiations with the Duke Montpensier. Meanwhile, he thought to use the yacht to undertake a cruise around Europe with the purpose to protect the Albanian issue that was seriously threaten. Ismail Qemali was determined to follow his approach, even though some members of the Government were against this move of the Prime Minister. In reality, existed two groups within the government, one headed by Ismail Qemali and the other that thought as crucial his staying in Albania to keep the order and the unity of the country. It was not achieved any agreement between the parties, Ismail Qemali accompanied by both his sons, Ethem and Qazim, the Minister of Education Luigj Gurakuqi and Isa Boletini with one of his sons<sup>7</sup> sailed toward Italy, meanwhile Mit’hat Frashëri,<sup>8</sup> Abdi Toptani and Nikollë Kaçorri<sup>9</sup> followed each other by giving their resignations.

<sup>7</sup> *Archive of Institute of History Tirana, (AIHT), records of documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Austro-Hungary (Haus und Hof Staats Archiv, Wien, Politisches Archiv, Albanien), (HHSa), Vj. 23-34-3411, 31 March 1913, 178*

<sup>8</sup> Mit’hat Frashëri submitted his resignation on 17<sup>th</sup> March 1913. Albanian Noble, Mit’hat Frashëri (Lumo Skëndo), Tirana 2009, 389.

<sup>9</sup> *Provisional Government of Vlora and its Activity: November 1912-January 1914, (Tirana: 8 Nëntori, 1963), doc. no. 180, 127*

In the government, “... Ismail Qemal Bey Office as the Prime Minister was assigned to Mufti of Dibra<sup>10</sup> and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was assigned to the Ministry of Interior, Myfid Bey Libohova”.

Besides the above data, the Austro-Hungarian Consul in Vlora, Lejhanec, reports that a group of Beys “outside the government, under the governance of Eqerem Bey Vlora<sup>11</sup> formed the so-called opposition, who were located in Fier during this critical period .....”<sup>12</sup> It is obvious that by the end of March in the Albanian government aroused the issue of priorities, if the actions had to be taken within the internal or external plan. Ismail Qemali before leaving Vlora addressed these words to the prefectures: “Because some issues of the Motherland have remained unresolved I have to visit temporarily the Europe, to protect our national rights ..... The governance ..... was assigned to the Head of the National Council, His Majesty Vehbi Efendi.

I require you to execute accurately the orders of the Council ..... Try harder than any other time to keep calm”.<sup>13</sup> Ismail Qemali by parting for Europe involves himself directly in the foreign policy, lobbying for the motherland issue; meantime in the internal level he outlines two points: firstly, execution of the Council of Ministers` orders from the prefectures and secondly to be kept the public order. The ministers` politicians` approach was for his staying in Vlora. The disagreement aroused between Ismail Qemali approach and that of the three ministers regarding the priority of two policies caused the first government crisis in the history of the Albanian state.

On the other side, Ismail Qemali by appointing Vehbi Agolli, former Chairman of the Albanian Senate, as head the government aimed the strength of the government institutions by a religious and political personality to fill the emptiness created after the non-function of this body. In meantime, this political current points out the group who supported the former Deputy Chairman of the Senate, Eqerem Vlora. The crisis affirms the parting of the three Albanian politicians from the Government of Vlora and points out the distinction of the existing political currents involved in the government. Therefore, withdrew three professional politicians, one was the representative of Beys of Tirana, Abdi Toptani, one representative of Catholicism, archbishop of Durrës, Nikollë Kaçorri and the third was a representative of Frashëri family, Mithat Frashëri.

However, the Albanian movements continued with vigour. The Council of Lejhanec in the telegraph dated 16<sup>th</sup> April 1913 gives an extensive overview of those persons considered as group of Beys outside the government. According to him, those are Fazil Pasha Toptani, Masar Bey Toptani, Monsieur Nikoll Kaçorri and Murad Bey Toptani adversaries of Ismail Qemali, who wants to fight him via an agreement with the Austro-Hungarian government. Eqerem Bey Vlora and Eqerem Bey Libohova also knew their purpose<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Haxhi Vehbi Dibra, signatory of the Independence Declaration, Chairman of Vlora Senate, in 1912.

<sup>11</sup> Eqerem bej Vlora, Deputy Chairman of Vlora Senate, Member of the delegation to coronate Prince Wied, Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Government of Turhan Pasha.

<sup>12</sup> AIHT HHStA, Vj. 23-34-3411, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1913.

<sup>13</sup> *Provisional Government of Vlora and its Activity...*, doc. no. 179, 126-127.

<sup>14</sup> AIHT HHStA, Vj. 23-23-3000, 16 April 1913.

It is noticed that to this group of Beys, Toptani-Vlora-Libohova is joined even Nikollë Kaçorri, the political image of the Albanian Catholicism. Eqerem Vlora appears as a crucial character of this group even though he was only 26 years old.

The handing over of Ioannina and Shkodra marked the first government political crisis in the internal Albanian policy.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> April, Esat Toptani handed Shkodra over to Montenegro. In general, the handing over of Shkodra was considered as a treason of Esad but as in this case and in other previous or later cases, he showed that was a prominent politician. Shkodra was handed over to Montenegro after 22<sup>nd</sup> March when the London Conference of Ambassadors decided the south and east boundaries of Albania. In this decision, it was defined that this city belonged to Albania. The handing over of this city, contrary to the several months' resistance for the city protection, was not a heroic or glorious act. In reality, we can consider it an example of the combination of the foreign and internal policy, where an Albanian politician makes the distinction. Maybe Esad by handing over Shkodra, gave to the Montenegrins only 3 weeks of glory, just to be remembered in the history books. He left Shkodra via an agreement, which started with the words "Esad Pasha made an agreement with Prince Danilo, Head of the Montenegro Army, to hand the city over to Montenegro and upon the decisions they mutually took. He gave notice to all the representatives of the Great Powers via this letter that is cited as follows: "Neither Montenegro nor the Turkish Deputy Vali, Esad Pasha, did not have power over the city and therefore why not to negotiate as per the Balkan way with each other in order to gain some profits from the war? Therefore, both of them "gave immediate notice to all the representatives of the Great Powers". By the 15 articles agreement, Esad would take all the soldiers, nizam and redif together with the armament (automatic guns and cannons), military documents and food. Montenegro ensured Esad that no punishment would be given to the persons who participated in the war. This means non-punishment for the citizens of Shkodra who remained in Montenegro. As a continuity of handing over conditions, a Montenegrin general and some officers would accompany the Albanian-Turkish army. The agreement signed on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1913<sup>15</sup> by the Commander-in-chief of the Montenegrin army Princ Danilo and the Deputy-Vali and ruler of the army in Shkodër, Esad, brigade General, in reality was the beginning of a new policy from an Albanian factor, current, politician, Esad Toptani. It cannot be excluded the obscure part of the agreement of Esad with Montenegro. According to the Montenegrin delegate in the Finance Commission in Paris between Kral Nikolla and Esad was made a secret deal and according to it he not only had handed over the city and had ensured the free exit of the army but had also provided the support of Montenegro to reign the throne of Albania<sup>16</sup>. He fought as a Turkish along with the Turkish troops to end the battle, and then he would leave Shkodra by having the support of Montenegro. Which was the political purpose of Esad? Was he a pro Turkish or a pro Montenegro, but anyway Shkodra remained part of Albania, even with an unaccomplished glory he was powerful to fight any future political challenge.

<sup>15</sup> *Freedom of Albania*, Sofia, 1913, 21 June, no. 78, 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Leka 1937*, vj.IX, no. VIII-XII, 12-13.

A few months ago they have said to him “..... it is up to the decision of your consciousness of Noble Sir to confront this situation, to take an approach as per the need of the country and in honour of the nation.”<sup>17</sup> Esad, by own decision led to his motherland with an army of 15.000 Turkish and Albanian soldiers. By the end of the First Balkan War, in the Albanian policy there was no other rival under such conditions. All remained in attendance of what Esad would do. With so many people under his guidance, he was almighty to do anything in Albania. Some days after the handing over Shkodra, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Empire, Sazanov said to the Italian ambassador in San Petersburg “Esad is a good Vali for Albania”.<sup>18</sup>

The Montenegrin troops, under the pressure of the international powers were forced to leave Shkodra on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1913. This withdrawal would complete the frame of withdrawal of the armies of Balkans` states from the north and centre of Albania that had started since the beginning of April with the withdrawal of the Serbian troops from Shkodra and then from Durrës, Tirana, Kavaja, Elbasani etc.

The liberation of the Central Albania from the Serbian troops created the circumstances for the development of an internal policy of various domestic political lines, aiming the further extension and establishment of the Albanian state.

Sixteen noblemen of Durrës, on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1913 gave notice to the Head of the Provisional Government of Vlora that has established the Independent Government of Albania, and with a unanimous decision had appointed Hamid Toptani as the Head of the Prefecture<sup>19</sup> (Hamit Bey Toptani). After some days, the same circumstances are noticed even in Elbasan. Via the telegram date 4<sup>th</sup> May 1913 Aqif Biçaku (Aqif Pasha Elbasani; Aqif Pasha Biçakçiu), Head of the Provisional Government of Elbasan by mentioning the establishment of the National Government Commission in Elbasan gives notice to the Kaza of Gramsh and Peqin noblemen to establish provisionally the Government Commissions in those countries.<sup>20</sup> Meantime, after some days, on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1913, Aqif Biçaku signs as the Prefect of the Provisional Government of Vlora in the telegram that sends to Esad.<sup>21</sup> It is noticed a cooperation and goodwill between the centres of the Central Albania. Refik Toptani (Refik Bey Toptani) Head of the Government of Tirana<sup>22</sup> and Hamdi Toptani<sup>23</sup> from Durrës congratulate Aqif Biçaku for the establishment of the Government of Elbasan. The patriotic activity of the noblemen in Durrës, Tirana and Elbasan is an example of the national spirit of these cities, represented by Hamit Toptani, Refik Toptani and Aqif Biçaku.

<sup>17</sup> *Provisional Government of Vlora and its Activity...*, doc. no. 137, 2 January 1913, 102.

<sup>18</sup> *Leka* 1937, vj. IX, no. VIII-XII, 13.

<sup>19</sup> *Provisional Government of Vlora and its Activity...*, doc. no.183, 21 April 1913, 128.

<sup>20</sup> Central State Archive of the Republic of Albania (AQSH), F. 145, D. III-9/1, doc. no.11.167.

<sup>21</sup> *Provisional Government of Vlora and its Activity...*, doc. no.184, 23 April 1913 (6 May 1913), 128.

<sup>22</sup> AQSH, F. 145, D. III-9/1, 21 April, doc. no.11168

<sup>23</sup> AQSH, F. 145, D. III-9/1, doc. no.11181

In this time, besides the Prefecture of Berat where was located the seat of central government, in Vlora city, the Albanian territory was extended even with two other prefectures that of Durrës and Elbasan, which with the confirmation in duty of Aqif Biçaku and Hamid Toptani are included in the administrative structure of the Albanian government. During April and May 1913, was done the union of the local bodies (prefecture of Durrës and Elbasan) with the central bodies in Vlora and simultaneously the formalization of these two political currents in the Albanian institutions. In Durrës and Tirana showed up the Oxhak of Toptani family, with Hamiti and Refik as representatives, pointing out the current of Toptani landlords in the Albanian internal policy.

During this period, even in Elbasan showed up the political current represented by Aqif Biçaku, who was appointed by the Noble of that city and the Beys of two Oxhaks, Biçaku and Vërlaci, both agreed for the Head of the Government.

It seemed like everything was going smoothly and all had the same opinion. In this joyous period for the Central Albania, Esad with his army arrived in Tirana, and proclaims his future political view by giving notice to the Kaza of the Prefecture that he wants the decentralization of the empire. He continued with his pro Turkish policy by removing the Albanian national flag and raising the Ottoman Empire flag.<sup>24</sup> Such anti national political attitude was a throwback in the Albanian policy, but Esad had still the grade of General of Ottoman Army Brigade. On May 1913, the Albanians were under the circumstances of the establishment and recovering of the national state, and not under the circumstances of the period August–October 1912 when the Albanians fought for the rights of a decentralized vilayet of the Ottoman Empire. Esad used as a political strategy the national flag and the guessing of his political rivals. In reality, the game had just started. It was Aqif Biçaku that to see his reaction or by believing in his patriotic commitment, such as that toward the other Toptani Beys, Hamit and Refik, required 300 guns with munition to arm the battalion of gendarmerie that was being established in Elbasan.<sup>25</sup> The question was if Esad, the commandant of the Turkish Golden Horde would be involved in the Albanian policy. Would Esad be involved in the Albanian institutions? If yes, how? If not, would he go to Turkey with his troops?

Esad continued his work by organizing the administration aiming to reinforce his power. To reinforce his powers and in a wider plan, he organized in Kruja an Assembly and invited the representatives of all the regions of the Central Albania. In the Assembly took part the delegates of Durrës, Kavaja, Tirana, Lesh and Kurbin. The vice-prefect of Tirana and simultaneously the Mufti of the city, Musa Qazimi<sup>26</sup>, comrade in arms with Esad in protecting Shkodra, in the meeting proclaimed three points<sup>27</sup> as follows:

<sup>24</sup> AQSH, F. 145, D. III-9/1, doc. no.11169

<sup>25</sup> *Provisional Government of Vlora and its Activity...*, doc. no.184, 23 April 1913, (6 May 1913), 128.

<sup>26</sup> *History of the Albanians (HPSH), vol. III*, (Tiranë: Toena, 2007), 46.

<sup>27</sup> *Provisional Government of Vlora and its Activity...*, doc. no.205, 25 May 1913, 142.

- a. To be enthroned a prince from the kingdoms, who is aware of our general situation.<sup>28</sup>
- b. Kruja, having an historic importance and is located in the centre of Albania to be announced the Capital.
- c. Esad Pasha to be appointed provisionally as Head of the Government and to implore him to accept this duty in order to provide peace and order in Gegëri until the arrival of the Prince.

Hamdi Toptani, Prefect of Durrës is the one who gives notice to Aqif Biçaku for the Assembly gathered in Kruja. It is obvious that the Toptani Beys do not agree with Esad Toptani. With the central government or alone, centralism or particularism? Even the participation in the Congress was not in such proportion that could change the balance of the political groups. It was May. The power was under his administration, it was not extended in the territories liberated lately from the Serbian army. However, such behaviour was not for the good of Albania, it was against the nation union. The behaviour of Esad was cunning by not participating in the Assembly. In fact, in the Assembly participated his two loyal persons, Musa Qazimi comrade of Shkodra resistance and Tefik Mandiqi former-Director of correspondence in the Sanxhak of Durrës. Esad remained one-step distant from the theatre stage, pretending he was not aware of the request of the Assembly to appoint him provisionally as Head of the Government. For this proposal, the members of the Assembly were confronted with each other. Abdi Toptani<sup>29</sup>, the delegates of Durrës and the catholic priest in the Assembly were against these three points. The national flag was raised in Kruja and the Assembly was dissolved by not taking any mutual decision. It seems that against Esad was not only Hamit from Toptani Beys but also Abdi, former-Minister of Vlora Government until March 1913. The latter, being concerned about the individualist current of Esad wanted to find a solution and went to Vlora.

Within one month it is noticed a development of the political current of Esad Toptani. Initially, he came from a political threshold passed since 28 November 1912. He comes in Tirana, raises the ottoman flag and announces the decentralization. In Kruja of Scanderbeg, not him but his followers claim the need of a Prince with the condition that he could not be anyone but someone who was aware of the general state of the Albanians. This declaration was more appropriate for Esad than for any other candidate, moreover that the third point of the agenda requires the establishment of a provisional government headed by him. By not pronouncing for an ottoman prince, in reality the Esad current changes the initial attitude by moving toward an occidental prince even though it does not define it. The raise of the national flag in Kurja is in itself a detachment from Turkey and once again an occidental political show of Esad current. In this stage the muslim cleric Musa Qazimi, who would have a distinguished role in the following episodes, joins him.

<sup>28</sup> According to the “*Provisional Government of Vlora and its Activity...*,” doc. no.196, 18 May 1913, 136, first point of the issues in the Assembly started with the words “Let’s address to Europe...”

<sup>29</sup> *Provisional Government of Vlora and its Activity...*, doc. no.196, 18 May 1913, 136.

The third point of the Assembly, the establishment of a government in Gegëri is the evidence of his contestation regarding the cooperation with the other political currents. Referring to this political view of Esad it is obvious that he does not recognize the Provisional Government of Vlora, even though he does not declare it publically.

The Esad current became present even in the Prefecture of Elbasan. Kadri Bonati (Kadri Bey Bonati), son of Demir Bonati (Demir Pasha Bonati) went from Peqin in Krujë to support Esad.<sup>30</sup> Dervish Biçaku (Dervish Bey Biçaku) had shown his readiness to join Esad before the organization of the Congress of Kruja. He was testing his forces and possibilities for further actions. By the end of May, Esad required entering in agreement with Wien but the reply of the latter was that it recognized only the Government of Vlora as the representative of Albania. On June, it was decided the withdrawal of the Turkish troops, and therefore the military force of Esad was reduced in half.<sup>31</sup>

\* \* \*

We will proceed with our approach by submitting firstly an overview of the activity of the Provisional Government of Vlora for all the period May 1913 – January 1914 as the central pillar of the Albanian institutional government activity, based on which were involved more or less all the political currents of that time. We are presenting this overview by staying faithful to the text of the History of the Albanian People. In this way, we are aiming to explain the political currents related to the activity of the Provisional Government of Albania, seated in Vlora. Briefly, the main points of the activities are as follows:

- During May-June, the Government extended the administrative power in Central Albania.

Legal administrative actions:

On June 1913 was established the military body "Army Headquarter" and it was drafted the "Regulation of the Albanian Militia". The Militia would serve to protect the country until the establishment of the regular army.

It were created commissions to study the organization of justice, gendarmerie and police force.

The Albanian language was declared the official language. The "writing and speaking of the national language" was a necessary condition for the appointment of the officials.

---

<sup>30</sup> AQSH, F. 145, D. III-9/1, doc. no.11206.

<sup>31</sup> HPSH, vol. III, Year 2007, 46.

In regard to the organization of the justice system, on May 1913 the Provisional Government decided to empower the existing laws and normative acts of the ottoman rule.

It was decided the detachment of the justice system from religion. It was decided that the criminal and civil cases to be proceeded by the government court.

The issues with religious character would be proceeded by the Sharia courts headed by Muftis.

The General Kadi and Mufti were appointed without the approval of Istanbul, and this leded the detachment from Caliphate.

It was approved the “The Appropriate Canon of the Albanian civil administration” that was published by the end of November 1913.

#### Economic and financial measures

The financial incomes gathered by the ottoman state and those to be gathered would pass to the Albanian state.

The Turkish Agricultural Bank in Albania was closed.

Started the efforts for the establishment of a National Bank. In October was signed the concessionaire agreement for the establishment of the “Albanian National Bank” with Austro-Italian capital for a 60 years term.

The government had to gather the customs` fee. The customs` authority administered the Customs of Vlora and Durrës.

Other financial sources served the financial obligations in favour of the state such as one-tenth of the agricultural produce and xhelep (tax on livestock). The government removed the addition of 6% of xhelep that was defined by the ottoman administration for military needs.

The government thought to develop the industry and communication via the concessionaire agreements.

The government treated also the agricultural issue. The first measure that it took was to pass the Chifliks of the state under its administration. I. Qemali on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1913 promised that his cabinet would undertake “any measure to make the Albanians landlords”.

– Cultural measures

The education issue was also one of the objectives of the government. Albania had 250 primary schools and dozens of secondary schools. The objective of the government was to lay the foundations of a national laic oriented educational system.

The Ministry of Education established a commission that would draft the Albanian terminology for the different branches of administration, of education and in other spheres of the country. The Commission started its works on June 1913.

In November, it was decided to be established even a scientific centre for the study of the national language of the scholastic programmes and texts.

The Ministry of Education organized courses for the officials to learn the Albanian language, reading and writing.<sup>32</sup>

As it can be noticed during the 14 months activity of the Provisional Government of Vlora it can be considered a government institutional policy within the framework of establishment and consolidation; but we are aware that there were no special institutional policies in specific fields because the country was in its first stages of the projects` undertaking and implementation.

\* \* \*

As we have mentioned it as per above, the withdrawal of the Serbian invader army from the Central Albania created a possibility for internal political developments. Via the telegram dated 4<sup>th</sup> May 1913, Aqif Biçaku, Head of the Provisional Government of Elbasan by marking the establishment of the National Government Commission in Elbasan and by starting the work in the name of God, writes to the cities of Gramsh and Peqin for the establishment of the National Government Commissions and keeping of the public order in these cities.<sup>33</sup> Two days later, Aqif acting as the Prefect of Elbasan addresses to Esad Toptan the request for 300 Mausers for creating the battalion of gendarmerie.<sup>34</sup> These telegrams are significant because while pointing out the three levels of the government power from up down, Central Government, Prefecture of Elbasan and local government (kaza of Gramsh and Peqin), they reveal also the figure of Aqif Biçaku in exercising the state power from the centre to the districts. According to Aqif “Until the organization from the Central Government of Albania .... here (in Elbasan) was established a national government commission and in the name of God started the work. You are kindly required to appoint suitable people from the noblemen and to establish provisionally a national government commission”.

Therefore, the organization from the Central Government had not started yet, but in meantime the Head of the Provisional Government of Elbasan (former ottoman Sanxhak of

<sup>32</sup> HPSH, vol. III, Year 2007, 39-45.

<sup>33</sup> *Provisional Government of Vlora and its Activity...*, doc. no.187, 130.

<sup>34</sup> *Provisional Government of Vlora and its Activity...*, doc. no.184, 128.

Elbasan), is undertaking this step by his own initiative by addressing to the former ottoman local structures (kaza of Gramsh and Peqin) that traditionally have been under the direction of Elbasan. The words of Aqif Biçaku are selective “in the name of God”, “we are kindly requiring You .....”, “Please try”. The telegram is a notification delivered among the local authorities that were being created, and the authority of Elbasan by mentioning God kindly requires to Gramsh and Peqin to act under its example. In this phase, the offspring government authorities do not have any power toward each other and Elbasan cannot give orders to Gramsh and Peqin. These local bodies are in attendance of ....” The organization from the Central Government.<sup>35</sup>

The political institutional activity of Aqif Biçaku continues further when via the telegram dated 7<sup>th</sup> May 1913 by predicting “When the holy national Government will be well established, obviously, it will be done even the appropriate organization” defines the necessary stages to engage the local administration. Respectively they are: employment of the officials, employment of the gendarmerie, provision of the financial means via the tax on properties (vergi), employment of the officials to treat the Sharia issue, issues of the civil and criminal rights, appointment of Notary Public for the trade issues.<sup>36</sup> Upon describing these necessities for the establishment and proper operation of the local administration, he requires to the Internal Affairs Ministry of the Provisional Government “Please be kind to authorize me to appoint provisionally these officials”. After suggesting with devotion what it has to be done for the start of local administration work, he requires the authorization of the Central Government to appoint the officials. At the end, Aqif Biçaku signs as the Prefect of Elbasan. On 7<sup>th</sup> May was created the dependency Ministry of Internal Affairs – Prefecture of Elbasan. Aqif Pasha confirmed by the Centre to perform his duty, started with the appointment of the officials in specific sectors. Aqif Pasha appoints as officials of the local administration, Alush Saraçi (Rushdi Alush Saraçi) – Head Secretary of the Prefecture and Fuad Biçaku (Fuad bej Biçaku) as Major of the City.

In a second telegram, on the same date 7<sup>th</sup> May 1913, the Prefect Aqif Biçaku continues to give information about the organization of the gendarmerie and appointments for its controlling, Kamber Efendi from Elbasan and Ismail Haki Efendi from Delvina.<sup>37</sup>

In continuity to the telegraphic exchanges on 19<sup>th</sup> May, it was given the notice from Elbasan to Vlora that “The organization of the Finance was finished. After two or three days will start the generation of the incomes. ....” and is required the appointment of the justice officials from the Centre.<sup>38</sup>

The institutional organization in Elbasan marks also the establishment of a collegial body in the frame of the newly established prefecture, the Administrative Council. This body consisting of six members and one Chairman had consulting and decision making powers. On 11<sup>th</sup> June 1913,

<sup>35</sup> *Provisional Government of Vlora and its Activity...*, doc. no.187, 130.

<sup>36</sup> *Provisional Government of Vlora and its Activity...*, doc. no.190, 131-132.

<sup>37</sup> *Provisional Government of Vlora and its Activity...*, doc. no.191, 132.

<sup>38</sup> *Provisional Government of Vlora and its Activity...*, doc. no.199, 138-139.

the Administrative Council of the Prefecture discusses and approves the regulation of the gendarmerie of Elbasan, which consisted of ten articles.<sup>39</sup>

As it can be noticed, within one month, the noblemen of Prefecture of Elbasan, headed by Aqif Biçak succeeded to establish the Prefecture, Municipality, Gendarmerie, Kaza of Gramsh and Kaza of Peqin by collaborating closely with the Provisional Government of Albania. The Council of Ministers, under the governance of Minister of Internal Affairs, Myfid Libohova sends acknowledgements to the Prefect of Elbasan via the Decision dated 17<sup>th</sup> May 1913.<sup>40</sup>

As per above, we think that it has been disclosed another Albanian political current of that time. Elbasani current, which is a conservatory current. The representative personality of this current was Aqif Biçaku, acting in the duty of Prefect of this region. One interesting part of this current is that whereas is proven its quick progress with the formalization in the Central Government, in the local plan it is in contradiction with the rival current of the Provisional Government of Vlora, Esad Toptani current. Firstly, such contradiction is national. The attitude of this current against Esad was summarized in the Assembly of Kruja, according to which “Elbasani, and especially His Excellency Aqif Pasha, has considered this initiative as a warning that would bring the destruction of Albania. Aqif Pasha had decided not to adhere under the name of Elbasan, but had stated that we are with the Government of Vlora, therefore we would never believe the intrigues of Esad Pasha, neither to the promises or proposals that he can make tomorrow or after tomorrow to the members of Government of Vlora. In the reply of Aqif Pasha to Esad Pasha, he has said that if the meeting, e.g the Congress is for the liberation of the Nation it should be held in Vlora, which is the Centre”.<sup>41</sup> Elbasani could not take part in an Assembly where would be defined the capital, would be appointed the Head of a rival government, even though there would be raised the national flag. The Albanian nation had taken once the decision, on 28<sup>th</sup> November 1912. This principal attitude of the Elbasani noblemen, headed by Aqif Biçaku caused consequences to the future of the city, but due to this loyal attitude toward the government power, centralizing policy, nowadays we talk about a 14<sup>th</sup> months history of the Provisional Government of Albania, seated in Vlora. The Aqif-Esad contestation is noticed even in the confrontation that happened within the noblemen of the Prefecture of Elbasan, where Dervish Biçaku, Demir Bonati and Kadri Bonati withdrew from it and joined Esad Toptani.

\* \* \*

May 1913 would bring novelties in the internal Albanian policy, even to the Prefecture of Berat. Between the Mytesarif of that centre, Aziz Vrioni and the Minister of Internal Affairs, Myfid Libohova aroused a contradiction, which was institutional and private at the same time.

<sup>39</sup> *Provisional Government of Vlora and its Activity...*, doc. no.215, 150-152.

<sup>40</sup> *Provisional Government of Vlora and its Activity...*, doc. no.195, 135.

<sup>41</sup> *Provisional Government of Vlora and its Activity...*, doc. no.194, 196, 134-136.

The Minister of Internal Affairs dismissed two Greek propagandists in Berat, the Director of Papajorgji School and the official of Tobacco Regie, Bertodule. Aziz Pasha required the cancelation of the order and he emphasized that the Christian inhabitants of Berat would not welcome such measure. However, the government insisted for the order implementation and Aziz Pasha resigned. Myfid Bey accepted without hesitation the resignation of Aziz Pasha and replaced him with Mehdi Frashër (Mehdi Bey Frashër). The Metropolis of Berat, Monsieur Joahim addressed an appeal to the Government and on behalf of the Christian inhabitants required to not be dismissed Pasha because of his virtues, which were reflected especially during the anarchic period. Myfid Bey replied that regretfully he was obliged to take into consideration the wish of Pasha to leave his duty because they both did not share the same opinions. According to Myfid, the Provisional Government opinion about the anarchy in the country was that it would be faded if anyone would perform their duty and the leaders have to give their good example for the implementation of the country`s laws. He explained that the behaviour of Aziz Vrioni could be explained by the relationship that he had with the Greek Government for settling a property disagreement in Ioannina. Because of the war, Myfid himself had suffered a damage of 70.000 Lira from the requisition of his estates in Gjirokastër and Ioannina and could not tolerate that his officials of the administration driven by material interests to damage the state interests<sup>42</sup>.

This event was an example of the complexity that was facing the Albanian government. Meanwhile, Myfid acting as a national Albanian (nationalist<sup>43</sup>) in fighting the Greek propaganda in Berat was confronted with the contestation of the Head of Oxhak of Vrioni family that was also the Prefect, and with the Head of the Orthodox Church, the Greek Metropolis, Joakim. The dismissal of the two Greek propagandist employees was very sensitive for the “anchient regime” in Berat. The Albanian central power was spreading in the local borders by destroying the Ottoman status quo, which strings had started to detach institutionally from 28<sup>th</sup> November 1912. It was a whole society that in the vortex of the centuries had created its own boundaries and did not understood and did not want to accept the new national reality. Myfid was aware of this society because he was part of it, even though he tried to take a step toward the change by dismissing the two Greek propagandists; one was official of the Education and the other official of the Trade. In fact, he is in front of two Heads of Berat, one the representative of the local feudalism and the other the representative of the Greek Church. For Myfid, a feudal offspring, Head of Oxhak of Arslanpashali of Ioannina, was the time to succeed in his duty as the Minister of Internal Affairs. In the material loss that he had suffered from the Greek and Turkish requisitions in the War of Ioannina he saw not only the financial side but also the detachment of the national land that was invaded by Greece, including his birth town, Libohova. Even though, everyone knew their weak points and Berat with its troubles was not guilty about Ioannina or Libohova. In Berat, the affairs were settled between Aziz Pasha and the Metropolis Joahin. Regarding the Albanian State, Aziz Vrioni was the Albanian State himself in Berat and the

<sup>42</sup> AIHT HHStA, Vj. 23-1-115, 29 May 1913.

<sup>43</sup> The term “nationalist” is often used in the public speeches of the years that are subject of our study (1913-1915). We have tried to avoid the often use of this term to not cause an ambiguity regarding the persons that use it. We have mentioned it with the purpose to go beyond its propagandistic character.

understanding that he had with the Metropolis and Christians of the city was in his interest for the properties that he had in Berat and Ioannina.

It was needed good understanding between the people that headed Albania because it was too small to fight with each other. The city of Vlora was a kaza of Sanxhak of Berat. However, was it possible to be constituted the Albanian State without the understanding of Myfid Bej Libohova and Aziz Pasha Vrioni, without the cooperation of Berat and Vlora? Aziz could not be left dismissed and resentful for two propagandists that were expelled from Berati by the police force. To be consoled, he was appointed Minister of Public Affairs, replacing Mit'hat Frashëri<sup>44</sup>.

The above-described event discloses two other political currents of that time, which are typical conservatory. One is of the group of Vrioni Beys of Berat, headed by Aziz Vrioni and the other current was that of Myfid Libohova. Both of them have been deputies in the ottoman parliament before 1912, both represents two feudal oxhaks and both are officials of the Albanian Government. The case of these two Beys is that of the formalization of the political lines in the institutions of Vlora Government starting from 1912. The disagreement between the minister-prefect is an evidence of their national values and of the feudal antagonism in the government.

\* \* \*

Meantime within the institutions of the Provisional Government of Vlora it is noticed another current. The government affirms the application of the ottoman law and reorganization the system of justice bodies. "The civil and criminal trials which were divided in two branches, now are united ..... Kadiluks are suppressed and their men Muftis manage the Sharia issues. It means that the judicial right of Kadis passed to the Muftis..... Muftis that would be appointed in sub-prefectures and that of the centre of prefectures would be proposed by You (the prefect) to the Eminence Vehbi Efendi, Sheh Islam of Albania. .... "<sup>45</sup>

It can be noticed that it is an unstoppable period of work. It is mobilized the whole civil and religious administration of Albania. During this activity of the state, it is to be marked the appointment of the cleric Vehbi Agolli as the Grand Mufti Sheh Islam. He resigns from his duty as the Deputy Head of the Albanian Government, appointed on March by the Prime Minister Ismail Qemali and is appointed as the Head of the Albanian Muslim hierarchy.

In this case, the religious, conservative, Muslim current, represented by Vehbi Agolli fulfils its historical objective. The constitution of the Sheh Islam institution and its representation via a cleric and Albanian highest officials is an achievement for the spiritual independence of the Albanian nation, as a continuity of the national independence of the 28<sup>th</sup> November 1912.

<sup>44</sup> *Freedom of Albania*, Sofia, 1913, 21 June, no. 78, 3.

<sup>45</sup> *Provisional Government of Vlora and its Activity...*, 12 May 1913, doc. no.193, 133.

With the extension of the state administration beyond the prefecture of Berat, toward Elbasan and Tirana, with the reorganization of the system of justice bodies in Vlora, with the constitution of the Sheh Islam institution that had the right to appoint Muftis in the prefectures and sub-prefectures, the Albanian state had established the central power and its institutional structure.

The Albanian state on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1913 was headed by:

#### Council of Ministers

Prime Minister - Ismail Qemali

Deputy Head<sup>46</sup> and Minister of War - Mehmet Rushdi Dralla

Minister of Internal Affairs and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs - Myfid Libohova

Minister of Justice - Petro Poga

Minister of Public Affairs - Aziz Vrion

Minister of Education - Luigj Gurakuq

Minister of Post-Telegraphs - Lef Nosi

Minister of Agriculture - Pandeli Cali

#### Sheh Islam

Vehbi Agolli

#### Prefects

Elbasan: Aqif Biçaku

Durrës: Hamdi Toptani

Berat: Mehdi Frashëri

---

<sup>46</sup> *Rebirth of Albania*, 1914, Year II, 14 March, no. 18, 5.