

**Relations of the “Vatra”, (The Hearth),
Federation with "Free Albania"
organization, in United States of America
during 1945-1960**



History

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Abstract

The activity of the Albanian emigration organizations in the United States grew more after the Second World War. Their actions and programs were generally consistent with US policy. The federation “Vatra” and the “Free Albania” organization disagreed with the policy pursued by the United States against the communist regime of Albania. The fact that these two organizations had long been unaware of the events in Albania and of the nature of the new post-war regime. Also influenced was the low level of intellectual and political formation of some of the “Vatra” leaders as well as their left-wing tendencies. Since the beginning of 1945, the “Vatra” federation called for the Albanian government to be known by the allies and to be admitted to the San Francisco Conference. The “Vatra” federation's campaign to collect material and food aid to send it to Albania was vast. It started immediately after the end of the war. For "Vatras" it was necessary not to miss basic and vital products to survive, such as clothes and food. For the bread problem, the newspaper the “Sun” wrote: “The bread problem in Albania, especially in Tirana, where a large population is gathered, is one of the most serious problems that the governor is trying to alleviate. The maize that went to 37 Lek was now regulated and deducted in 27 leks. It is hope to be subtracted below.” This was one of the main letters of the “Vatra” federation. Since the end of 1945, the Albanian government prepared a project for a state loan that would be derived from Albanian colonies. What was most interested in the communist regime was the colonies of America, as there was a large number of Albanians, about 70,000, and their economic status was better than other colonies. Under the Albanian government's plans, this project would have economic but also political impact in the colonies of America. In this campaign, the Albanians of America would notice the “great advances” that Albania had made, thanks to the communist government, in the economic and cultural fields. The success of this loan would depend on good organization of work and the choice of suitable persons.

I. Introduction

Until the year 1944, the issue of Ahmet Zogu was a barrier to unity between the two organizations, and after this year the main divisive factor would be the attitude and relations with Enver Hoxha's communist government. With the victory of the Communists and the coming to power of Enver Hoxha, the behavior of the federation “Vatra” and the “Free Albania” organization towards each other did not change. Both sides unconditionally supported Enver Hoxha. In some cases there was also a rivalry about who would win first the sympathy of the communist regime. Ahmet Zogu was now thrown behind their back, and the rivalry would take place to win the support of Enver Hoxha. At the end of December 1944, the “Free Albania” organization called for both of these organizations to stay away from Albania's internal affairs. In fact, it meant abandoning any critical attitude towards the internal and external politics of the communist government. The newspaper “Liria” at this time, wrote: *“The facts shows that the Albanian people are no longer the same as before 1939. The Albanian people, more than any other Balkan people, put their own chest on the common enemy. Again, the Albanian people, according to the word given in Tirana by Enver Hoxha, have been fleshly and spiritually rebuilding Albania. So, in this case, we, the foreign Albanians, should in no way be confused with their affairs or to remind them of Albania what politics or traitor they will condemn or forgive. These are their jobs. They are completely entitled to play Albania's internal or external politics according to their will. Our task*

towards the homeland and the Albanian people is more than ever to help them morally and materially".¹

The same zealous support of the communist government was given also by the "Vatra" federation in United States. She took care to link this government to democracy and the power of the people. The newspaper "Dielli" also known as the "Sun", was the first newspaper in the United States that wrote a long biography of Enver Hoxha. To some extent a kind of support was shown to Ahmet Zogu. But this was for one reason: helping to cope with the Greek risk.

But on the other hand, the "Vatra" federation attacked the organization "Free Albania" and its leaders, whenever it was given the case. At the beginning of 1945, "Vatra" was at the height of the commitment to recognize the government of Enver Hoxha at the Department of State. On this occasion, its leaders accused "Free Albania" and the group in London of causing obstacles that were created for the recognition of Enver Hoxha. In the newspaper "Sun", it was emphasized that "Vatra" had been the initiator for forming a common front for more than three years, and the main blame for the failure to accomplish this front was to charge Tajar Zavalan and Chekrezi. But now, they are also blamed for criticizing E. Hoxha's government by calling it red communist. In this newspaper it was written: "For the policy that held the "Vatra" until September 17, 1944, we do not demand anyone or General Enver Hoxha to account. We were all in the dark about the real situation in Albania. When we saw that in Albania the work did not stand as we believed, when we saw that the Albanian people had been busy working with their flesh and soul, we realized that our policy did not help them, but it could ruin work. Both twins - Tajar Zavalani and Chostandine Chekrezi - why did they do so? Both were small, irrelevant agents. Sadly, other rumors are coming out. Mr. Chekrezi we have heard that he has started to say that the Enver Hoxha provisional guverns are "Red" like "Easter Eggs" and should not be supported. This is a horrible propaganda that Greek newspapers are doing."²

In fact Chekrezi had not yet made any statement against the Albanian communist government. On many of her pages, the newspaper "The Sun" made offensive tags for Chekrezi as "spy", "foolish", or even "traitor".³ In an article of April 1945, Chekrezi was considered a fascist. There was also a kind of jealousy by the leaders of the Federation "Vatra", as the organization "Free Albania" was sympathetically viewed by the communist regime. These positions of the federation "Vatra" Chekrezi later denounced, accusing "Vatras" for unconditional support of E. Hoxha's regime. He wrote that: "By leaving further comments on the position of this second-hand organization of the Albanians of America, the question of what made the "Sun" declare, from time to time, that the governor of Enver Hoxha should support 100 percent and without any reservations or criticism? This policy continued "Sun" even after the declaration of the government of Tirana as a communist dictatorship. In fact, it was the body of Vatra who

¹ "Let's stay out from the internal politics of Albania", *Liria*, Vol.IV, nr. 160, 15 Decembre 1944, fq. 2.

² "Binjakët e Shqipërisë së Lirë bëjnë propagandë kundër Enver Hoxhës", gazeta *Dielli*, nr. 5652, 6 janar 1945, fq. 2.

³ "Cilat janë karakteristikat e një fashisti", gazeta *Dielli*, nr.5666, 14 prill 1945, fq. 2.

published a long biography of Enver Hoxha, sent from Tirana, where it is proved that Enver Hoxha was communist even when studying in Europe with Zog's government scholarship.”⁴

With counter-accusations the parties continued to blame each other for failing to reach a union. Apparently unification negotiations had not stopped but they had been unsuccessful. The "Vatra" federation began to show signs of changing its profile by becoming a cultural organization and moving away from politics. In this case she criticized the rival organization, calling it an organization that had only one political program and therefore she had to cease to exist. "The Sun" wrote that: "Negotiations were extended as the tail of a beast. Vatras members have always had the issue of united and heartfelt union. Now the union remains in the hands of the other side. Then "Free Albania", which until yesterday made a ballistic politics, today felt the mind and supported the provisional government of the people. Then Vatra is primarily a cultural organization and wants to give Albania the assistance in the field of education, while "Free Albania" has a whole political program and now that the political role of the Albanian people as soon as it is known is apparent in Albania together with this phase, must likewise see Free Albania.”⁵

With the deepening of the contradictions and the inability to resist them, Chekrezi leaves the organization "Free Albania". Chekrezi had displayed critical attitudes towards the communist regime and then he would deepen them. This apparently put him in opposition in to his organization, who unreservedly supported Enver Hoxha's regime. Albania had already been liberated and the main problem was recognition of the communist government. Chekrezi explained his departure with two main reasons: "The first thing I had been mindful of before meeting the Assembly was that it could not give the organization any benefit from my leadership and the second, that with my removal, perhaps the union would be realized.”⁶ Chekrezi had promised that move since 1943, when he proposed the development of a plebiscite.

The only thing that could keep alive the activity of two rival organizations in the United States was the battle against the Greek threat, for which the two organizations had common points, as well as historical legacy through book publishing and keeping alive Albanian culture in the United States.

Even after leaving Chekrezi from the leadership of the "Free Albania" organization, "The Sun" continued to hit him and Tajar Zavalani, his collaborator in London. The newspaper "Sun", with the purpose to win the sympathy of the communist government, published a denigrating script for regime opponents. She wrote: "Many of the debris believe that in Albania it was unexpected when the people themselves took their fate in your hand and put the rubbish to you. The fact is that Albania did not look unexpected but expected and necessary. It was pulled from middle time to modern times. That is why the debris can not understand, so they are trying out from abroad to turn the clock back and bring back the middle time in Albania. In London, the man

⁴ Chostandine Chekrezi, *Plani i tretë i coptimit të Shqipërisë*, Tiranë: Botimet "Naimi", 2013, fq. 69.

⁵ "Çështja e bashkimit: një sëmundje kronike e kuvendeve", gazeta *Dielli*, nr. 5679, 14 korrik 1945, fq. 2.

⁶ Chostandine Chekrezi, "Përse nuk u bë bashkimi edhe këtë vit?", gazeta *Liria*, Vol.IV, nr.191, 20 korrik 1945, fq. 1.

who has launched the campaign of insistence against the democratic regime of Tirana is Tajar Zavalani. His colleague in America, Chostandine Chekrezi, does all that work, lies always and denounces the democratic regime of Tirana.”⁷

The "Vatra" federation, by means of the newspaper "Sun", did not let to anathemais other elements of the organization "Free Albania". In any case, the "Sun" highlighted the links of an unwanted person from "Vatra" with elements of the "Free Albania" organization. One of them was Ali Kuçi for which "The Sun" wrote that “it has come to divide the Albanians of America, to discredit Vstras and Monsignor Nolin and then to establish an organization to leave the democratic government of Enver Hoxha.”⁸

For her part, "Free Albania" also criticized Fan Noli. The newspaper "Sun" took refuge after any attack by the organization "Free Albania". "The Sun" wrote that: "In the Liria newspaper on 24 May, Demetrio Viso as chairman of the "Free Albania" “meeting in New York publishes a long article by which Bishop Noli affirms and without shame at all , calls Noli, the intriguing bishop. In my opinion, Albania is not over, so we need a man like Mr. Noli to have him in charge of the job. These quarrels between us serve the enemy and are a pungent propaganda of Greek reactionaries.”⁹

The book that was published, "The third plan of partition of Albania" by Chekrezi encouraged the reaction of the Federation "Vatra". In this book, Chekrezi analyzed his entire career as a journalist in various newspapers and to his activity as chairman of the organization "Free Albania". He maintained a critical attitude towards the communist government of Albania but also publicly attacked Vatra's leaders for the support he was giving to them. The "Vatra" federation opposed the labeling of Fan Noli as a red bishop and editor of "Sun" Qerim Panariti as communist or pro-communist.¹⁰

She also started to crack down upon Chekrezi's projects to overthrow the communist regime in Albania. The newspaper the “Sun” wrote: “Mr. Chekrezi wants to organize a congress with the Albanians of America, in which Zog can participate as a spectator. The conquest of the communist regime in Albania must be established in this convention. Now the question comes: after making this master plan, who will bring Enver Hoxha out of Albania?”¹¹

In the early 1950s the positions between the two organizations would be more moderate. The main factors were the growth of Greek risk, the emergence of several anti-communist emigration organizations such as the Balli Kombëtar, the National Free Albania Committee and the recognition of the reality in Albania by these two organizations.

⁷ “Guverna e Tiranës dhe Grupet Anti-demokratike”, gazeta *Dielli*, nr. 5694, 31 tetor 1945, fq. 2.

⁸ “Këlyshi i Musolinit kërkon t’i japë mësimë patriotike Peshkop Nolit”, gazeta *Dielli*, nr. 5730, 3 korrik 1946, fq. 2.

⁹ Ramo Cika, “E bëjnë plak dhe pastaj i rruajën mjekrën”, gazeta *Dielli*, nr. 5730, 3 korrik 1946, fq. 4.

¹⁰ “Çështje të Ditës”, gazeta *Dielli*, nr. 42, 5 dhjetor 1951 fq. 1.

¹¹ Një libër, një aventurë dhe një kongres, gazeta *Dielli*, nr. 42, 5 dhjetor 1951, fq. 2.

The United States and Great Britain would oppose Albania's accession to the United Nations and the sending of aid. For this reason, as the federation "Vatra" and "Free Albania" tried to help the mother country with material help in different ways.

II. Federation "Vatra" and the "Albanian Relief Found" organisation

The "Vatra" federation, in addition to the political and moral support for Albania in the first years, provided significant material and financial support to the newly emerging Albanian people from World War II. For this purpose she worked closely with the Albanian Relief Found organization, founded in the United States in 1943, under the direction of Nicholas Prifti. Albania's economic difficulties openly proclaimed Koço Tashko via a telegram sent to Fan Noli. He wrote: "We send you greetings and assurances that thousands of Albanian fighters remind with you and have hope that you, as a veteran of democracy, are doing your precious part to help us. You can not guess how our people have changed under the leadership of our fighters. Please assure the Albanians of America that we are steadfast and we will go live. Give us your moral and material support to alleviate the suffering of the victims of war and support us to strengthen more of our country for a free, popular and democratic republic."¹² After this telegram the Federation "Vatra" made an advertisement on the front page of the newspaper "Sun" in which he wrote: "If there is no help from abroad, thousands of people will die, most of them hungry. To those of America, living in the midst of wealth and among all things, have a moral duty to help this wretched people. The first thing you should do, send medicines, which are more necessary than the bread. The service you can do to America to help your brothers in Albania can not be described in words but needs to feel heart and soul."¹³

The "Vatra" federation was put in the head of relief efforts but also engaged other organizations such as Albanian Orthodox churches in the US. In January 1945, the newspaper "The Sun" reported that some of the major churches in the United States had collected some sums like: The National Church in Worchester, about 1100 dollars, St. George's Church in Boston, 1000 dollars, St. Trinity Church, 2000 dollars.¹⁴

On January 20, 1945, the federation "Vatra" and Fan Noli announced that: "On Sunday, on the 21st of this month, the campaign of mercy from the Albanian Relief Found organization is open. The whole of Albania looks forward to what her daughters are doing in America with all the best. We need to give as much as possible, breaking the record of any other campaign we have made. Considering that we are today, at least four times richer than before, we will work and will need to collect at least \$ 1 million."¹⁵

¹² Koco Tashko, "Populli Shqiptar kërkon ndihmë morale dhe materiale nga Shqiptarët e Amerikës", gazeta *Dielli*, nr.5639, 7 tetor 1944, fq. 1.

¹³ Lum Labi, "Populli Shqiptar ka nevojë për bukë, rroba dhe ilaçe", gazeta *Dielli*, nr. 5648, 9 dhjetor 1944, fq.1.

¹⁴ "Gjylet e para për fushatën e popullit shqiptarë", gazeta *Dielli*, nr. 5653, 13 janar 1945 fq. 1.

¹⁵ Fan Noli, "Për fushatën e mëshirës", gazeta *Dielli*, nr. 5654, 20 janar 1945, fq. 1.

With the impetus of the "Vatra" federation, the Albania Relief Found organization tried to make a demarcation with US institutions, such as the State Department. The US government considered this request more seriously and found the difficult situation in Albania as well as the lack of infrastructure to send aid. In January 1945, Melvin Glasser, a foreign aid assistant, informed the State Department that "a few days ago, as a result of a request from the Albanian Relief Fund, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, to consider the possibility of sending medicines to Albania, we asked our representative for Balkan civil aids to give us some tips on opening an aid program for Albania. Today, we received a telegram in which he explained that he had received a report about the medical situation in Albania. According to this observation, the Albanian Red Cross has already been destroyed and its activity is limited only in the Tirana area. The organization has no funds and medication supplies are limited."¹⁶

Also, the Albanian Relief Fund organization was active in many meetings and rallies held by the federation "Vatra" to collect aid for Albania. At the end of April 1945, after a major meeting in Boston, members of the "Vatra" federation and the Albanian Relief Fund organization, a letter was sent to US Secretary of State Edward Stettinius asking him to establish postal links as soon as possible Albania to help the Albanian people. This letter reads: "Delegates from twenty-one local Albanian organizations gathered in Boston, with the presence of the Albanian Relief Fund, appeal to you Secretary of State to take emergency measures to send food, clothes and medicines to Albania. It is urgent that the postal service between the United States and Albania be restored in order to enable friends and relatives in this country to help with different materials. The Albanian people have been an ally of democracy, but to date, for various reasons, it has not been sufficiently helped by the United Nations. We believe this injustice to the Democratic Republic of Albania to be regulated without delay."¹⁷

Albanian Relief Fund also had a communication with the American Red Cross about the aids and especially the medicines needed for Albania. But new challenges were emerging as a result of communist leadership's suspicions of United States representatives. As a result, the aids were delayed and mail often did not work. It seemed that the extremist politics of the Albanian communist leadership had become a serious obstacle to the delivery of aid. American Red Cross representative Philip Ryan assured Nicholas Prift that "the medicines and other aids you send will be distributed in accordance and in principle with the American Red Cross. It has prevented the Albanian Red Cross's refusal to request from the competent Albanian authorities the necessary passage for our representative so that he is able to observe and report on the distribution of the proceeds from the Albanian Relief Fund and the Cross American Red Cross and, in this way, we

¹⁶ NARA, V.1945-1949, Roll 3, fl. 1, "Letër e Kryqit të Kuq Amerikan për Eldred Kuppinger në lidhje me një kërkesë të "Albanian Relief Fund" për ndihmat në ilaçe për Shqipërinë", 01.01.1945.

¹⁷ NARA, 1945-1949, Roll 3, fl. 1, "Letër e Elias Tromara dhë "Albanian Relief Fund" për Edward Stettinius për çështjen e ndihmave në Shqipëri", 08.04.1945.

meet the obligation against the Albanian Relief Fund. However, we hope to clarify the situation in Albania.”¹⁸

To clarify in detail the representative and chair of the Albanian Relief Fund, the American Red Cross sent a long letter to Nichola Costa, which read: “Some days ago, the Albanian Relief Fund handed over US \$ 100,000 to the Red Cross to be used for aid in medicines and various commodities that would be distributed in Albania. Albanian Relief Fund experience, in an effort to extend assistance in Albania, has been almost a failure as much as the American Red Cross activity. Dr. Prifti said they have never received any acknowledgment from the authorities in Tirana and there has been no sign of recognition of the Albanian Relief Fund. In fact, he said that the Albanian Relief Fund was ignored and many official Tirana letters were sent to two political organizations in America, advising them to send aid. Being in this situation, we propose the Albanian Relief Fund to send their assistance through the UNRRA mission, which will soon come to Albania.”¹⁹

Fan Noli took the campaign for the help of the Albanian people. In many conferences of the "Vatra" federation, the sums of money they collected were delivered to Noli. "Vatra" worried about the lack of bread in Albania. She was referring to the news that the UNRRA members were doing in Albania. The newspaper the "Sun" reported that according to Lowell Rooks, director of UNRRA in Europe, Albania lacked daily bread. Concerned by this situation, the leaders of the federation "Vatra" stated that they were able to send a lot of aid after the Albanians of America had wealth and were able to fill some vapors with the most necessary goods, mainly flour.²⁰

"Vatra" sent a considerable amount of aid. The Albanian representative, Theodor Heba, confirmed the receipt of these aids. But, surprisingly, the leaders of the Federation "Vatra", he did not express any gratitude for such aid. Rather, it devalued the human and patriotic action of the federation "Vatra". In his letter to Vatra, in June of 1946, he wrote: “I take advantage of this opportunity, once again, in the hope that you will be kind enough to publish it in your paper to show my appreciation of the futility of sending flour in Albania, its need does not feel at all. Some Albanians continue to argue that the economic situation in Albania is the same as the first days of liberation. But the people's government took vigorous measures to improve the situation right away.”²¹

Indeed, the situation in Albania was very difficult, but the Communist leaders did not want to accept US aid because of their political interests and ideology. Despite these negative attitudes of the Albanian Communist government, federation "Vatra" continued its campaign of aid to

¹⁸ NARA, 1945-1949M, Roll, 4, fl. 1, “Letër e Kryqit të Kuq Amerikan për Nicholas Costa në lidhje me problemin e shpërndarjes së ndihmave në Shqipëri si pasojë e ndërhyrjes politike dhe mosbesimit ndaj Shteteve të Bashkuara”, 01.04.1946.

¹⁹ ¹⁹ NARA, 1945-1949, Roll, 4, fl. 1-2, “Letër e Kryqit të Kuq Amerikan për Nicholas Costa ku i bën të njohur situatën në Shqipëri dhe të ardhmen e ndihmave të “Albanian Relief Fund”, 27.06.1946.

²⁰ “Në Shqipëri mungon buka e përditëshme”, gazeta *Dielli*, nr. 5776, 28 maj 1947, fq. 2.

²¹ Theodor Heba, “Në Shqipëri s’mungon asgjë thotë Zoti Heba”, gazeta *Dielli*, nr. 5800, 19 nëntor 1947, fq. 1.

Albania. In 1949, "Vatra", together with the Albanian Relief Fund, decided to send about \$ 11,500 to buy medicines in Albania.²² But again, the "Vatra" Federation and Albanian Relief Fund could not find the common language with the communist regime leaders in Albania regarding the aid that Albanian emigration was sending. The Albanian government did not want the aid to weaken its "economic success" and feared that sending aid would be used as a propaganda tool that would damage the regime's position in power. Although far from the homeland, the federation "Vatra" understood the miserable situation in Albania, hence it never ranks to support its homeland.

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²² “Vatra do të dërgojë një sasi ilaçe në Shqipëri”, gazeta *Dielli*, nr. 5882, 22 qershor 1949, fq. 1.

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