DE GRUYTER OPEN

SEEU REVIEW
review@seeu.edu.mk

Albulena Halili

THE ALBANIAN NATIONAL QUESTION - THE FINAL PIECE OF THE UNSOLVED BALKAN PUZZLE?

DOI: 10.2478/seeur-2014-0015

"If the Big Powers condemn this brave and freedom loving people to remain under occupation, or still worse, if they split it up among the neighboring countries, the Balkan Peninsula will never find peace, because the Albanians will never give up fighting for their national independence. On the contrary, if they recognize Albanian national rights, Albania will become a contributing factor to peace in the Balkan Peninsula"

- Abdyl Frashëri (1839-1892), Albanian political ideologue of the Albanian National Awakening and Leader of Albanian League of Prizren

1. The History of the Albanian national question

The shaping of the Albanian idea and national consciousness began in the second half of the nineteenth century as an intellectual movement known as the Albanian National Renaissance. This movement was a key catalyst of many important processes for the organization of Albanians. The Albanian National Renaissance stimulated the Albanian pan-national intellectual, political and military arrangements aiming at the liberation, unification and creation of the Albanian national state. 'Political Albanianism' (*Shqiptarizma politike*) as it was propagated in particular by Branko Merxhani, the Albanian

Unauthenticated
Download Date | 3/27/15 2:42 PM

publicist, idealist, and founder of the school of Neo-Albanianism, was created in 1912, at the same time as the Albanian state.[1]

On the transnational scale, the genesis of the Albanian question appeared at the Congress of Berlin in 1878 when Bismarck denied the existence of an Albanian nation in the Balkans, although the British Ambassador in Istanbul, Goschen, in July 1880 wrote about the inevitability of affirming an Albanian nation and the creation of a strong and united Albania.[2]

After the Balkan wars, the Conference of Ambassadors in London was an attempt at perpetuating an absurd state, and the violent Balkan puzzle of unequal people was presented by Albania's neighbors as an unexamined *cliché*. It was a wicked puzzle, badly made-up by official expansionist propaganda and by the doctrines of Balkan countries and allowed by the Great Powers of the time.

While forging the Versailles international order, the principle of self-determination of peoples and public diplomacy constituted the most essential part of the *Fourteen Points* of American President Wilson. He proclaimed that the solution of the so-called *Adriatic Question* should be sought along clearly recognizable lines of nationality. Throughout the twentieth century, certain trends continued: despite conferences, congresses, and international forums, the century-long struggle of the Albanian nation for recognition was incomplete. The puzzle was not solved. Whenever the Albanians sought review and correction of this situation, they were labeled belligerent nationalists.

2. Albanian *sui generis* nationalism

Nationalism is not an archaic and anachronistic idea as it is often considered.[3] It is an idea which mobilizes and protects peoples. This nationalism has had a direct impact on the national awakening of peoples, their liberation from rules, whatever they were, and has led to higher stages of their

---

1 Branko Merxhani, *Vepra,* (Tiranë: Plejad, 2003), 26-30.

2 Arben Puto, *Shqipëria politike 1912-1939*, (Tiranë: Toena, 2009), 20.

3 There is a rising debate within EU among Euro-sceptics and Euro-enthusiasts. See, for example, "The political class in Europe (...) has demonised the direct expression of national sentiments", quoted from Roger Scruton "The need for nations" *Hungarian Review* Volume IV, No. 4, Budapest, July 2013: 12. See also, Daniel Hannan "Nationalism doesn't threaten peace, nor does the EU preserve it", *The Telegraph* 7 February, 2014

Unauthenticated
Download Date | 3/27/15 2:42 PM

development. It has been the driving force of all European peoples in creating their nations, and as such is undoubtedly natural and in line with any historical tendency.

Albanian nationalism represents a *sui generis* nationalism, which has undergone transformations over time. Created as an intellectual and cultural nationalism through a nationwide movement, today Albanian nationalism is moderate. Unfortunately it does not represent anything beyond an occasional popular and folkloric nationalism; this contrasts with the nationalisms of its neighbors, who traditionally and consistently foster nationalisms that rely on official state doctrines and policies.[4]

3. What the Albanian national issue represents today

In the Europe of values, people should develop naturally, without rules and restrictions for certain nations. The famous Albanian writer Kadare writes:

> *"If it is necessary to wait for calmer and more emancipated times for the implementation of the principle of self-determination of peoples, Europe does not necessarily need to try to bury this idea of salvation, in an arrogant way."*[5]

If matters remain otherwise, the Albanian people will continue to be, as suggested by Academician Rexhep Qosja, "A prohibited people".[6]

The Albanian national question is a real issue and it should not be disregarded. It is an important issue because of the number of Albanians, their autochthony, language, geography, history and their unique provenance. This issue is becoming increasingly important due to the increased geopolitical significance of Albanians in the Balkan Peninsula. They already have their two states. Until recently part of geographical Europe, today Albania is also a vital part of the transatlantic link between Europe and the United States of America and is coming back slowly and safely into political Europe. Although

---

4 Serbia's *Naçertanije, Greece's Megali Idea*. The "state of war" still exists between Greece and Albania since 1940. Albanians have never had any official project for 'Great Albania' as it is often claimed. It is a term invented by Serbs and used by non-Albanians.

5 Ismail Kadare et al., *Ballkani i jugut*, (Tiranë: Onufri, 2005), 21

6 More on his thesis: *Populli i ndaluar*, (Prishtinë: Megamedium, 1990), *La question Albanaise*, (Fayard: Paris, 1995)

Unauthenticated
Download Date | 3/27/15 2:42 PM

with an almost truncated sovereignty, Kosovo is also an important geopolitical factor.

The Albanian national question itself poses an unresolved sub-puzzle within the larger puzzle of the Balkans. The issue of Albanians in Macedonia, those in the Preshevo valley, in Montenegro and the Cham issue are all part of this sub-puzzle, and all represent real, and unsolved issues. They are not the product of Albanian nationalism, but are rather a consequence of the meaninglessness of official policies and institutional expansionist nationalisms of their neighbors, legitimized by the European powers of the last century. As a result, they should also serve as a cause of remorse for the European consciousness.

Albanian demands have never been outside reality and inconsistent with international provisions. They have always been natural, reasonable and right. Qualified more than any other Balkan people as nationalists, Albanians are a nation suffering from cosmopolitanism[7]. The official policy of the Albanian people wherever they may reside is unnecessarily moderate.

One of the most prominent Albanian thinkers, Arbën Xhaferi, said:

"There are cultures that live in another time, and there are cultures that live in the future".[8]

'Albanians are a nation living in the future.'

4. Albanian National question – Quo vadit?

The fall of the Berlin wall and collapse of communism have brought about radical changes in international relations, and in the world order. As almost everything went wrong in the Versailles international order, so was the case with the artificial multi-ethnic creatures: the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. They were dissolved. National states were created, and re-created afterwards. Old and unsolved issues have been revived.

---

7 The author is aware of the usage of term 'cosmopolitanism' in the late Stalin years in the campaign against the Trotskyist conspirators as well as an euphemism for the victimization of the Jewish intelligentsia. In this paper 'cosmopolitanism' is used in a sense of 'a person who is free from local, provincial, or national bias or attachment; citizen of the world; cosmopolite.' Defined by Dictionary.com. Retrieved 10 February 2014. Based also on Kant's conception of Cosmopolitanism and how this concept is treated in International Relations Theory today.

8 Rudina Xhunga, *12 porositë e Arbën Xhaferit (Shqiptari që i mungoi këtij 100 vjetori),* (Tiranë: Dudaj, 2012), 140-141

Unauthenticated
Download Date | 3/27/15 2:42 PM

Today, geopolitical reconstruction is a difficult puzzle to be solved. Re-edging the Balkan Peninsula is a process almost inconceivable in the current historical context, when Euro-Atlantic integration is the foundation to its stability and prosperity. EU financial crisis and enlargement fatigue as well as bilateral contests between the Balkans countries, have decelerated the process. While in time-out mode, there is a need for new approaches. David L. Phillips speaks of "the Albanian neighbourhood – a community of shared values based on a commitment to democracy, human rights and free markets".

> *"It is based on the recognition that groups have natural affinities, reflecting their common history, culture, and commercial relations. Allowing organic affinities to flourish can act as a safety valve, by allowing groups to blow off steam. Frustrations naturally arise when aspirations are thwarted either by geography or irredentist politics."*[9]

David L. Phillips, writes about the reality of 'Albanian ethnic solidarity' in the Balkans,[10] but this concept is not appropriate in either current historical, or geographical context. Ties between Albanians not only are organic and natural, but they are also historically related to ethnically compact territories. Rather than fostering and building ties of common interest which already exist, what is needed is an Albanian national integration based on Western standards and European principles and ideals. Cross-border and regional cooperation, economic, educational and cultural integration, development of the regional infrastructure, and common projects and activities related to media and communications are at the core of an Albanian national integration.

This integration complements and benefits regional integration into the Euro-Atlantic structure.

---

[9] David L. Phillips, "A Flourishing Albanian 'Neighborhood' Benefits the Balkans." *BalkanInsight.* 13 February 2012. Accessed January 2014

[10] 'Ethnic solidarity' is a concept where ethnicity reflects the consciousness of belonging to a group so as duties of solidarity it imposes on members inside and outside, versus the challenges of survival of the group. It is a concept widely used for diasporas and immigrant neighborhoods worldwide.

Unauthenticated
Download Date | 3/27/15 2:42 PM

Bibliography

- Hannan, Daniel. 2014. "Nationalism doesn't threaten peace, nor does the EU preserve it." *The Telegraph*, 7 February.
- Kadare, Ismail. 2005. *Ballkani i jugut.* Tiranë: Onufri.
- Merxhani, Branko. 2003. *Vepra.* Tiranë: Plejad.
- Phillips, David L. 2012. "A Flourishing Albanian 'Neighborhood' Benefits the Balkans." *BalkanInsight.* 13 February. Accessed January 2014. http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/a-flourishing-albanian-neighborhood-benefits-the-balkans.
- Puto, Arben. 2009. *Shqipëria politike 1912-1939.* Tiranë: Toena.
- Qosja, Rexhep. 1995. *La question Albanaise.* Paris: Fayard. - 1990. *Populli i ndaluar*. Prishtinë: Megamedium.
- Scruton, Roger. 2013. "The need for nations." *Hungarian Review Volume IV* IV (4): 11-22.
- Xhunga, Rudina. 2012. *12 porositë e Arbën Xhaferit (Shqiptari që i mungoi këtij 100 vjetori).* Tiranë: Dudaj

Unauthenticated
Download Date | 3/27/15 2:42 PM

***

Albulena Halili is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Tirana, Albania working on the field of Transatlantic Relations. She works at the South East European University. Some of her research articles include: *'Post-Lisbonian Europe: EU Foreign Policy towards the Western Balkans'*, '*Construction of the international system of Versailles, according to the doctrine of Woodrow Wilson*', '*Philosophy and Political Spirit of the Ohrid Framework Agreement*', '*The Unresolved Issues that Cross the Way to Euro-Atlantic Integrations: The Case of the Western Balkans*', etc.

Unauthenticated
Download Date | 3/27/15 2:42 PM