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### **Albanians in the American newspapers (1918-1919)**

#### **Abstract:**

By the end of the First World War (1918), the international public opinion, particularly the US public opinion, paid a special attention to Southeast Europe, where a creation of a new and large state of south Slavic people was going on, comprising in its border regions inhabited by Albanian people. Although the US press did not dispute the formation of the Serb-Croat-Slovene Kingdom, anyway it provided accurate information to US public about the claims of Albanians for a national state, which should include in its frames regions inhabited by majority of Albanians.

**Key words:** Peace Conference, USA, Ottoman Empire, Balkans, Woodrow Wilson, Albania, Kosovo, etc.

#### **Introduction:**

The US press media, in the years following the First World War (1914-1918), particularly during the works of Peace Conference in Versailles (1919), amongst other, provided information about Albanians as well, respectively for their unsolved issue. Certainly, the articles about Albanians didn't bear the weight and importance as to mobilize the American policy-makers in a sense for an Albanian state including in its borders the majority of Albanian population. Due to unfavourable circumstances for Albanians, when Greece and Serbia were enjoying a powerful support from France and Great Britain, and when the Serbian "Myth for Kosovo (1389) was recognized by Western public opinion as a "Serbian tragedy", the victory of Bolshevik Revolution in Russia (1917) brought a fortune to Albanians. Bolsheviks, being in a conflict with Western capitalist world, published a secret agreement between Entente allies, as well as publication of 14 points of US President, W. Wilson.

Numerous articles about Serbs and the issue of union of south Slavic people in a common state testifies the well organization of Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian diaspora, acting as a unique community in US and their strong influence on the foreign policy of the United States.

Thus, the "*Proletarec*" - a Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian diaspora newspaper, in an article published on June 4<sup>th</sup> 1918, rightly emphasized that occupation of Kosovo or as they wrote "The second battle of Kosovo" (1912) and expulsion of Ottoman Empire from Balkans, in fact strengthened the Yugoslavian idea in Balkans, increasing the self-confidence of Serbs and south Slavic people, that their issue can be resolved without the Austro-Hungarian Empire, or against

this empery.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, at the beginning of XX century the Serbian myth about the “Battle of Kosovo 1389” was recognized by public opinion as a historic truth and that the claims of south Slavic people were reasonable.

The “*Evening public ledger*” of June 18<sup>th</sup> 1918 (or “*New York Times*” of June 19<sup>th</sup> 1918 – cited by Serbian Minister for Foreign Affairs – Ivica Dacic) published the article “*President greet Serbs – the World Peace depends by the right for self-determination for small nations*”, in which the US President Woodrow Wilson, through a note addressed to Serbian community in US, gathered around the Serbian League for National Defence, which also represented the Serbian Red Cross in the US, declared that peace in the world depends by the right for self-determination for Serbs and other small nations. The gathering of Serbs happened on the “Day of victory” in Kosovo (by the new calendar the Vidovdan jubilee was celebrating on June 28<sup>th</sup>, whereas by the old calendar in July 15<sup>th</sup>, and it was celebrated by Serbian and Bulgarian Church), which was celebrated as a moral victory of Serbs over “Turkey” or more accurately against the “Ottoman Empire” in 1389. In the same note President Wilson declared: “*the significance of this Day for Serbs, which reflected their fight for freedom and their right to determine their political future through political actions ...and today, more than in the past, they have a support from the world and world leaders*”.<sup>2</sup> So, it was obvious that Serbia, through its propaganda, plans and projects and its participation on the side of allies during the First World War, had implemented all points, not only of Nacertania but even the points of great project of Polish Adam Czartoryski, for a joint state of south Slavic people.

On February 12<sup>th</sup> 1919, the American newspaper “*Albuquerque morning journal*” informed the US public opinion that Albanians handed over a Memoranda to decision makers in the Peace Conference in Versailles. In this Memoranda, Albanians claimed for their rights, as it had been abused in 1878 by Congress of Berlin or in 1913 by Conference in London. The drafters of the Memoranda put attention on the fact that Albanians fought against the Central Powers, that Albanians allowed the retreat of Serbian army through Albania, and that the regions which were given by London Conference (1913) to Serbia, Montenegro and Greece, in fact were regions inhabited by Albanian people. Moreover, the Albanian government claimed for war indemnity to Greece and Central Powers.<sup>3</sup> In meantime, the newspaper “*The Sun*” of January 19<sup>th</sup> 1919, reported that Albanian diaspora in the US held a meeting on December 29<sup>th</sup> 1918 and approved a resolution which asked US and other Powers to recognize a state of Albania which would include in its borders all regions inhabited by Albanians. But, as reported by this newspaper, Albanians asked Americans to occupy the lands inhabited by Albanians, which were out of Albania 1913, in order to provide an opportunity in future to native population to be declared by a plebiscite for its future.<sup>4</sup> “*The Butte daily bulletin*” of May 17<sup>th</sup> 1919, reported that Albanians asked the US to receive the mandate over the Albania; as it was welcomed by Americans, unfortunately that time the US interests were not focused in this region.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, Library of Congress, *Proletarec*, (Chicago, Ill.), 04 June 1918. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045377/1918-06-04/ed-1/seq-5/>>

<sup>2</sup>Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, Library of Congress, *Evening public ledger*, (Philadelphia [Pa.]), 18 June 1918 ;<https://sh.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vidovdan>, qasja më 17 mars 2018.

<sup>3</sup>Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, Library of Congress, *Albuquerque morning journal*, (Albuquerque, Bernalillo, New Mexico, USA), February 19, 1919, f.5.

<sup>4</sup>The Sun (Ney York), Sunday, January 19, 1919, section 4, f.12.

<sup>5</sup>The Butte daily bulletin., (*Butte, Silver Bow, Montana*), May 17, 1919, f.1

The “*Harrisburg telegraph*” of October 18<sup>th</sup> 1919, reported that from a “village of Kosovo” Rexhep bej Mitrovica arrived in Paris; he arrived in Paris to discuss with the Albanian delegation, which according to this newspaper, was fighting to protect Albanian interests based on provisions of London Conference of 1913.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Rexhep bej Mitrovica declared to “*Richmond Times*” of October 19<sup>th</sup> 1919, that Albanians paid efforts to gain support of Italia, as a proper supporter, regardless that Italy was keeping occupied Valona and had an agreement with Greece against the Albanian lands.<sup>7</sup>

### The migration wave to US

The possible occupation of Albanian south regions by Greece, according to “*The Bennington evening banner*” of October 16<sup>th</sup> 1919, provoked a massive wave of migration of population from Korça to Elbasan districts, because the inhabitants of those regions remembered the brutality of Greek forces during the Balkan wars. The population of those regions was displaced to Durres and Valona. The displaced persons claimed for a help and shelter to American Red Cross, and many of them asked Americans to intervene in Albania. A part of displaced persons moved to Italy, to harbour of Brindizi and then to Napoli, planning to migrate to US.<sup>8</sup>

During the year 1920 the press in US wrote about the impact of First World War (1914-1918) in Balkans, respectively in Serbia, which was reflected by Americanization of people, at least in aspect of clothing. In fact, the Serbian villager-soldier, who participated in the war dressed in Balkans or Serbian traditional clothing, known as leather shoes, changed the mentioned clothing and worn modern clothing as supplied by allies. After the war or demobilization, the same Serbian villager-soldier found difficulties to wear back the leather shoes, therefore the American Red Cross collected old shoes as aid for Serbia, which were welcomed by Serbian villagers who started to use them. Consequently, the American shoes makers started to export its products to Balkans and thus the leather shoes became a far memory. Furthermore, the explanation of a traditional Serbian hat was a part of Serbian propaganda; this was explained as a symbol of a national mourning for the “Battle of Kosovo” (1389), and now after the Kosovo was included back within the Serbian state, it was no need for Serbian villager to bear that hat again.<sup>9</sup>

“*The citizen-Republican*” of July 1<sup>st</sup> 1920, reported about the outbreak of a Yugoslavian-Italian conflict near borderline Buccaru or Bakar city in West Croatia, and about a confrontation between Serbs and Montenegrins in Kosovo highlands. Furthermore, the railway line Manastir-Skopje was blocked and many bridges were destroyed. The newspaper reported that Serbian forces have jailed and deported many women, children and old people, and destroyed 40 villages.<sup>10</sup> But the article didn't mention who was fighting, because the Montenegrin revolt

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<sup>6</sup>Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, Library of Congress, *Harrisburg telegraph*, (Harrisburg, Pa.), 18 Oct. 1919. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85038411/1919-10-18/ed-1/seq-13/>>

<sup>7</sup>*Richmond times-dispatch*, (Richmond, Virginia), October 19, 1919, f.7

<sup>8</sup>*The Bennington evening banner*, (Bennington, Bennington, Vermont), October 16, 1919, f.2.

<sup>9</sup>Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, Library of Congress, *The watchman and southron*, (Sumter, S.C.), 24 Jan. 1920. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn93067846/1920-01-24/ed-1/seq-5/>>

<sup>10</sup>Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, Library of Congress, *The citizen-Republican*. (Scotland, Bon Homme County, S.D.), 01 July 1920. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn99062010/1920-07-01/ed-1/seq-3/>>

known as “Christmas Rebellion” occurred on January 6<sup>th</sup> 1919<sup>11</sup>, the Rebellion in Kosovo organized by National Defence Committee occurred in 1919, whereas the war of Dibra occurred in August 1920.<sup>12</sup> This gives an indication that the press in US was not familiar with this part of Balkans and consequently associated the name “Kosovo” with Serbian myth on “Battle of Kosovo” (1389) rather than with the ethnical composition of the population in this province, occupied by Serbs. But, on the other hand the British press, respectively the newspaper “*Birmingham Daily Gazette*” of October 15<sup>th</sup> 1920, reported that Montenegrin forces entered in Danillograd and Nikshiq, whereas Albanians forced Serbian forces to retreat from Kosovo.<sup>13</sup>

The press in the US paid attention even to underground wealth of today’s Kosovo. Thus, “*The West Virginian*” of November 4<sup>th</sup> 1920, wrote that the villagers of Prizren district, not mentioning their ethnicity, on behalf of appreciation awarded the workers of American military hospital, which was working under the flag of American Red Cross in cooperation with Serbian Red Cross, gifts made by iron and chrome. The newspaper declared that Serbia has huge reserves of such minerals, but didn’t mention the region.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>[http://www.montenegrina.net/pages/pages1/istorija/bozicni\\_ustanak/bozicni\\_ustanak1919\\_n\\_adzic.htm](http://www.montenegrina.net/pages/pages1/istorija/bozicni_ustanak/bozicni_ustanak1919_n_adzic.htm), qasja më 17 mars 2018

<sup>12</sup><https://sot.com.al/dossier/lufta-9-vje%C3%A7are-e-dibra%C3%ABs-m%C3%AB-1912-1921-si-u-organizua-kryengritja-e-p%C3%ABrgjithshme-masakrat>, qasja më 17 mars 2018

<sup>13</sup>*Birmingham Daily Gazette*, (West Midlands, England), Friday, 15 October, 1920, f.1. [www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk](http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk), qasja më 17 mars 2018

<sup>14</sup>Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, Library of Congress, *The West Virginian*, (Fairmont, W. Va.), 04 Nov. 1920. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86072054/1920-11-04/ed-1/seq-1/>>

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