



universität
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MASTER THESIS

Titel der Master Thesis / Title of the Master's Thesis

„Italy and the Emergence of Albania: How the “Least of the
Great Powers” Maximised its Leverage in the Balkans
(1882-1926)“

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Advanced International Studies (M.A.I.S.)

Wien 2023 / Vienna 2023

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt
Postgraduate programme code as it appears on the
student record sheet:

A 992 940

Universitätslehrgang lt. Studienblatt
Postgraduate programme as it appears on the
student record sheet:

Internationale Studien / International Studies

Betreut von / Supervisor:

Professor Thomas Row PhD



diplomatische
akademie wien

Vienna School of International Studies
École des Hautes Études Internationales de Vienne

Abstract

The thesis examines Italy's role in the emergence of Albania. It employs history and international relations theory to demonstrate that Italy, a modest actor within the international system, leveraged a successful foreign policy in the Balkans. On the systemic level, Italy succeeded in counterbalancing the Austro-Hungarian advance southwards, together with the territorial claims of the other Great Powers and regional actors. Internally, the Albanian elites drew international support to the Albanian question of independence, particularly from Italy and Austria-Hungary. First, this thesis analyses the Italian quest to become a Great Power and how it was bonded with the early Italian commitment to Albania and the broader rivalry between Rome and Vienna. Second, this thesis looks at the Italian role during the Conference of Ambassadors in London held between 1912 and 1914, where Italy played an important role in backing Albanian independence and self-determination. A role further developed during the Great War to the point that Italy established a protectorate over Albania. Finally, this thesis examines the ambivalent Italian relationship with Albania in the aftermath of the Great War and during the Paris Peace Conference. Emphasis is put on how this relationship was linked with the growing rivalry between Rome and Belgrade, together with those external and internal changes within Italy that led Albania to achieve its final independence and territorial integrity by 1926. In conclusion, the Italian role in backing the emergence and survival of Albania shows the importance of "comparative advantage" as opposed to "absolute advantage" in the conduct of a successful foreign policy.

In dieser Arbeit wird die Rolle Italiens bei der Entstehung Albaniens untersucht. Anhand der Geschichte und der Theorie der internationalen Beziehungen wird gezeigt, dass Italien, ein bescheidener Akteur im internationalen System, eine erfolgreiche Außenpolitik auf dem Balkan betrieb. Auf der Systemebene gelang es Italien, ein Gegengewicht zum österreichisch-ungarischen Vormarsch nach Süden sowie zu den territorialen Ansprüchen der anderen Großmächte und regionalen Akteure zu bilden. Auf interner Ebene erhielten die albanischen Eliten internationale Unterstützung für die albanische Unabhängigkeitsfrage, insbesondere von Italien und Österreich-Ungarn. In dieser Arbeit wird zunächst das italienische Streben nach Großmachtstatus analysiert und untersucht, wie es mit dem frühen italienischen Engagement für Albanien und der allgemeinen Rivalität zwischen Rom und Wien verbunden war. Zweitens wird die italienische Rolle während der Botschafterkonferenz in London zwischen 1912 und 1914 untersucht, bei der Italien eine wichtige Rolle bei der Unterstützung der Unabhängigkeit und Selbstbestimmung Albaniens spielte. Diese Rolle entwickelte sich während des Ersten Weltkriegs weiter, so dass Italien ein Protektorat über Albanien errichtete. Schließlich wird in dieser Arbeit das ambivalente Verhältnis Italiens zu Albanien nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg und während der Pariser Friedenskonferenz untersucht. Der Schwerpunkt liegt dabei auf der Frage, wie diese Beziehung mit der wachsenden Rivalität zwischen Rom und Belgrad sowie mit den externen und internen Veränderungen in Italien zusammenhing, die dazu führten, dass Albanien 1926 seine endgültige Unabhängigkeit und territoriale Integrität erlangte. Abschließend zeigt die italienische Rolle bei der Unterstützung der Entstehung und des Überlebens Albaniens die Bedeutung des "komparativen Vorteils" im Gegensatz zum "absoluten Vorteil" für die Durchführung einer erfolgreichen Außenpolitik.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Luigi and Andrée, who supported me throughout my studies. And also to my brother, Giacomo and my colleagues Michael, Guillaume, Anubhav (Jananabav) and Kilian, who assisted me with their wisdom and cheerfulness.

A great thank you also goes to Professor Thomas Row Jr, who oriented me towards the choice of the topic for this Master's Thesis.

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1. Introduction

The relationship between Italy and Albania has a long history, starting with the administration of the Albanian lands by the Roman Empire from 146 BC to the demise of the Empire in 476 AD. During the Middle Ages, Albania was a pawn in the power game between the local petty nobles, the Byzantine Empire and the adjacent bigger feudal states.

Essential for the purposes of this thesis is the second half of the 15th century, when, following the death of the legendary Albanian hero and military ruler Gjorgj Kastrioti Skanderbeg, the Ottomans, who already controlled southern and eastern Albania, completed the conquest of its central part in 1479.¹ In contrast, the conquest of the northern areas was achieved in the following successful wars waged by the Ottomans against the Venetian Republic. In this regard, the Ottoman conquest of Albania and its next five centuries of rule over the area left a profound mark on its history, population, and religious beliefs. Moreover, many Albanians, faced with the advance of the Ottoman Empire into their territory, opted to seek refuge in neighbouring countries, with the Italian peninsula being their primary destination. There, these refugees merged and created the community of the Arbëreshë, primarily located in the Italian regions of Calabria, Apulia, and Sicily.²

The primary focus of this thesis relies on an analysis of Italian foreign policy from the signing of the Triple Alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary in 1882 to the aftermath of the seizure of power by Benito Mussolini in October 1922, up until 1926, with a specific focus on the southwestern Balkans and particularly the region of Arnavutluk. This thesis will also mention the role of the Italo-Albanian community and some of its most well-known members in achieving Albanian Independence. Additionally, it will also provide an overview of the changes within the post-1815 European system of power created by the rise of the German Empire and, to a lesser extent, by the unification of the Italian Kingdom, and secondly by the creation of a new world order following the Great War. Indeed, the defeat of the Central Powers in

¹ Stefanaq, Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 84-87.

² Bernd J. Fischer and Oliver Jens Schmitt, *A concise history of Albania* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2022), 23-24; 37-39.

the First World War, together with the Communist Revolution in Russia. provoked a reversal of power from the old and static Eurasian monarchies to new powerful international actors such as the United States, Japan, and all those nations stemming from the demise of the German, Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman and Russian Empires. Hence, if at the turn of the 20th century and throughout the First World War, Italy had rivalled Austria-Hungary in the Balkans, in its aftermath, the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy left a vacuum which the France-backed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (by 1929, Yugoslavia) filled, by becoming the new rival of Italy in those issues concerning the remaining irredent lands, the Adriatic Question and the State of Albania.

The analysis of Albania's route to independence and its entanglements with Italian foreign policy will be separated into three parts, each focusing on a distinct phase of the formation of the Albanian State and the evolution of Italian foreign policy. In this regard, the first part addresses the period leading to the Great War and is divided into two chapters. The first chapter will elaborate on Italy's path to becoming a Great Power, based on examining Italian foreign policy from the signing of the 1882 Triple Alliance until the commencement of the First Balkan War in October 1912. The second chapter will investigate in deeper terms the rivalry and mutual interests of Italy and Austria-Hungary with respect to the southwestern Balkans, particularly Albania, which is crucial to understanding the deep causes behind Rome's early commitment to Albanian independence and is at the root of the Triple Alliance's final unravelling.

The second part will then continue throughout the Great War period, which incorporates the time frame from the First Balkan War until the conclusion of the Great War in November 1918 to ensure continuity within my research, given that the Balkans had been at war for the whole time mentioned previously. This part is structured into two chapters: the first focuses on the Conference of Ambassadors in London (1912-1914), the creation of the Principality of Albania, and the brief rule of Prince zu Wied. Then, the second draws the reader's attention to the fate of Albania through the Great War and how it was intertwined with the 1915 London Pact and the establishment of an Italian protectorate over the country based on the June 1917 Gjirokastër Edict.

Finally, the third and last part will examine the post-war period, starting with the outcomes of the Paris Peace Conference and proceeding to analyse the post-war issues and achievements of the Kingdom of Italy and Albania, how these two were bonded together, and how they reacted to exogen shocks. In this regard, this third part has one chapter, which will address the new international situation stemming from the First World War and the Paris Peace Conference: precisely, the mutilated victory that Italy experienced during the Peace Conference, the rivalrous relationship between, on one side, Italy, and the other, France and Yugoslavia, and finally the ambiguous relationship between Italy and Albania regarding the former's mandate of protection and the legacy associated with the last Liberal governments and Benito Mussolini's actions in Albania during the 1920s which ultimately led to the final recognition of the Albanian territorial boundaries.

The content of this thesis is essential to understand Italian early commitment and support for the emergence and survival of the Albanian State, along with the historical process that led the Kingdom of Italy to achieve a predominant role in the Adriatic Sea and Albania to be internationally recognised and accepted within the European system of power. Notably, this thesis will follow a qualitative interdisciplinary approach based on history, diplomatic history, and international relations theory, attempting to adapt the Ricardian Theory of Comparative Advantage to the successful Italian conduct of its foreign policy in the Balkans. In this regard, this interdisciplinary approach is paramount since it enables us to connect the analysis of Italian foreign policy with the key events that shaped the international system in the period leading to the Great War, during the war and in its aftermath. Therefore, this thesis will initially benefit from a study of the European system in the aftermath of the German and Italian unifications by focusing on how these two nations shaped the international system and how they played an essential role in determining the outbreak of the Great War. Then, this thesis will analyse the international system stemming from the First World War, focusing on the Kingdom of Italy's foreign agenda and the situation in the southwestern Balkans. Finally, the systemic dimension on the European Continent and the domestic dimension within Italy and Albania will also be considered.

Overall, the narration borne by this thesis seeks to question and confute the predominant narrative that primarily Austria-Hungary created the Albanian State since Italy's contribution may be seen as equally important, if not more so, particularly in the period leading to and during the Great War and, to a lesser extent, in the aftermath of the demise of the Habsburg Monarchy following the latter's defeat in the war. Thus, this thesis aims to explain how the Italian actions between 1882 and 1926 directly or indirectly affected Albania's emergence, creation, survival and self-determination. In this regard, it will be fundamental to explain the actions employed by Rome to grow its influence in Albania and prevent other countries, such as Austria-Hungary first and Yugoslavia and France later, from increasing their position in the area to the detriment of Italy. Furthermore, this thesis will examine how the Albanian elites managed to draw international support to the Albanian Question.

Since the nature of the Albanian State and its political, social and religious roots are not easy to understand at first glance, I have offered a brief introduction and overview of Albanian's main societal cleavages and their origins. Firstly, the idea of Albania as a close and isolated ethnically homogeneous nation is misleading. Indeed, this notion traces its roots to the Communist period (1946-1992) when the ideologues of the new regime prioritised statehood and uniformity over elements such as ethnicity, religion and language.³

Following the Declaration of Independence of November 1912, the newborn Albanian State faced a dire situation. Its first governments had to deal with social, territorial, religious and ethnic differences dating back to a process initiated more than five centuries ago, having to rely only on the uniqueness of the Albanian language in the Balkan region and the idea of a mythical origin of the Albanian State tracing its roots back to Skanderbeg.⁴ The Ottoman conquest of Albania profoundly affected the Albanian population's history, culture and habits. The conquest started in the 1380s and ended at the turn of the 15th century. The following five centuries-long Ottoman rule over the area shaped Albania as we know it today.

³ Fischer and Schmitt, *A concise history of Albania*, 7.

⁴ Katarzyna, Kropiak, "Integration concepts of the lands inhabited by Albanians: The process of shaping of the Albanian State borders". *Politeja*, No. 30 (2014): 56.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/24919713>.

The Ottomans used to refer to this newly conquered territory as Arnavutluk (*literal meaning: an area full of Albanians*).⁵ Until 1912, the exact and accurate demarcation of Arnavutluk did not exist. On the contrary, the term referred to an area densely populated by speakers of the Albanian language, who mostly dwelled in the five Ottoman vilayets of Monastir, Kosovo, Shkodër, Bitola and Janina.⁶ Key elements which stemmed from the Ottoman rule over Arnavutluk include Ottomanization and Islamization, the enforcement of the Ottoman rule of law, the introduction of social and legal habits, and the long-term consequences of the bloody Ottoman conquest of medieval Albania. Indeed, whereas the southern part of Albania was spared by destruction, the central and northern parts formerly under the Republic of Venice or Skanderbeg rule had been devastated by the Ottoman raids, with their Catholic and urban dwellers forced either to migrate abroad or find shelter in the highlands, where a new pastoral economy and a tribal system emerged. This division between south, north and centre will play a crucial role in the upcoming centuries, and we can consider it one of the first important cleavages within post-independence Albania. This division was also one of the primary sources at the roots of the divisions and rivalries encountered during the Albanian struggle for independence and self-determination by the turn of the 20th century and in the aftermath of Albanian independence from the Ottoman Empire.⁷

The second cleavage I would like to introduce is religion. The latter had a more divisive impact during the Ottoman rule over Albania, but it became less important in the aftermath of the country's independence, although in some cases, religion was still employed as leverage to incite uprisings or seek legitimacy by unscrupulous politicians. In this regard, once he took over as Prime Minister of Albania during the early 1920s, famous Mati chieftain Ahmet Zogu started employing nationalism as the foremost tool to legitimise and strengthen its rule over the country and also to put to a

⁵ Fischer and Schmitt, *A concise history of Albania*, 61.

⁶ Maria, Todorova and al, *Imperial Legacy: the Ottoman imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1996), 4; 47-49.

⁷ Owen, Pearson, *Albania on the 20th Century, A History (Vol I): Albania and King Zog. Independence, Republic and Monarchy 1908 – 1939* (London, The Centre for Albanian Studies in association with IB Tauris & Co Ltd, 2004), 33-36.

Fischer and Schmitt, *A concise history of Albania*, 56-57.

secondary place the differences among Albanians, which at that time risked of preventing the country from achieving national unity.⁸

In this sense, one of the cleavages that Ahmet Zogu successfully overcame was religion: indeed, Albania has four primary religious beliefs, with Islam being the most important, followed by Catholicism, primarily concentrated in the northwest; Orthodox Christianity, present in the south and Bektashi, a sectarian faith linked to Islam. Whereas the Bektashi never posed a real threat or problem to the achievement of national unity, the rivalry between Christians and Muslims did. As we mentioned, Islamization was one of the key elements brought by the Ottomans in their rule over Arnavutluk. Christians were generally discriminated against or, at least, relegated to a lower level than Muslims. However, following the country's independence from the Ottoman Empire and during the rule of Ahmet Zogu, the introduction of the principle of laicity, freedom of religion, equality among religions, and the recognition of three national churches, Sunni Islam, Orthodox Christianity and Catholicism, help to neutralise the issue. The latter was also possible because of the international situation of the 1920s, with Albanian Muslims and Orthodox Christians who broke their respective foreign ties with, respectively, the caliphate of the former Ottoman Empire, whose power was being undermined by the modernisation led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Turkey, and with the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate.⁹

Now that religion has been introduced, I would like to cast light on the third main issue concerning Albania, namely, the fact that ethnic Albanians are spread across the whole Western Balkans and beyond due to wars and mass migration, therefore making it very complicated to determine the exact territorial boundaries of the Albanian State, as we will see in the second and third parts of this thesis. In this regard, before 1912, the notion of Albania encompassed all those territories inhabited by speakers of the Albanian language: southwestern Balkans, particularly today's Albania, Kosovo, parts of Montenegro, present-day southern Serbia, the north of the Republic of North Macedonia, central and southern Greece and the colonies present in the southern Italian regions of Sicily, Calabria, and Apulia. Moreover, during Ottoman rule, many Albanians emigrated to central Serbia, Bulgaria, Thrace and Istanbul and in the 19th century, due to industrialisation and the relative need for an unqualified workforce,

⁸ Fischer and Schmitt, *A concise history of Albania*, 197-204.

⁹ Ibid., 179-183.

ethnic Albanians could also be found in present-day southern Romania, Egypt, North and South America, and Western Europe. In this regard, essential for this thesis is the outcome of the first major migration wave of ethnic Albanians across the Ottoman Empire and abroad, which started with the Arvanites, who had to leave the Peloponnese after the Ottoman conquest of Morea in 1460, who, together with the Albanians forced to migrate following Skanderbeg's death and the resulting havoc brought by the Ottomans in central and northern Albania, merged and created the Arbëreshë community. Since the Italian Unification, Arbëreshë has been recognised as an official minority in Italy and has produced many political and intellectual figures of Italo-Albanian origins, which played a pivotal role in drawing Italian support to the Albanian national cause (1878-1912) and the country's independence.¹⁰

Finally, the last cleavage within Albanian society is language. As a matter of fact, Albanian is an Indo-European language divided into two main dialects: Tosk, spoken south of the central Albanian river Shkumbin, from the Adriatic coast to the central Macedonian regions of Struga and Bitola. Similarly, close dialects are the Lab and Çam dialects of the south (northwest Greece/Epirus, region of Thesprotia (Çamëria in Albanian)). The second and more widespread group of dialects nowadays are the Geg dialects, located north of the river of Shkumbin, in Montenegro, North Macedonia, Kosovo and South Serbia. Both language groups are divided into several subdialects. Turning to this, although the difference between the Albanian languages and dialects has not been the most challenging cleavage among ethnic Albanians throughout history and for the period this thesis looks after, it is crucial to mention it since language was one of the leading forces that fuelled the birth of the Albanian national awakening and draw the support of the Italo-Albanian community to the process of self-determination in Albania.¹¹

¹⁰ Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 137-140.

Fischer and Schmitt, *A concise history of Albania*, 37-39; 54-56.

Skendi, Stavro, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912. Chapter IX "Contribution of the Italo-Albanians to the National Movement"* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1967), 215-238.

¹¹ Fischer and Schmitt, *A concise history of Albania*, 11.

**Part 1. The Quest for Great Power Status: The Italian Kingdom's Early
Interests in Albania (1882-1912)**

2. Chapter I - Italian Kingdom: A Great Power in the Making

This chapter will deal with the Italian roadmap to attain its Great Power status by the time the First Balkan War started. By examining the key moments of the Italian Kingdom's foreign policy from the 1882 signing of the Triple Alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary to the immediate period before the outbreak of the 1912 First Balkan War, this chapter seeks to explore and describe the exogen and endogen factors that shaped the Italian foreign policy at the turn of the 20th century.

The crucial elements stemming from this analysis entail the Italian obsession with achieving its Great Power status in Europe and establishing its colonial rule. Then, the role that France, directly or indirectly, and to a lesser extent, the other Great European powers, had in influencing the formation and the decline of the alliance between Italy, Austria-Hungary and Germany. In continuation, the radical changes within the Italian colonial policy due to the Italian failure in Abyssinia in 1896 and the subsequent economic boom and military build-up, at the root of the Italian renewed imperialist assertiveness at the turn of the 20th century, which was intertwined by a surge of nationalism and irredentism toward Austria-Hungary among the Italian public opinion. Finally, the audacious Italo-Turkish War of 1911-1912, whose outcomes paved the way for Italy to achieve its Great Power status by the time the First World War started.

The Italian actions and decisions presented in the upcoming chapters were primarily led by the Italian quest to become a Great Power. Bearing this in mind, we will see how Italy reacted to the changes within the international system and the European system of alliances by being very adaptive in its foreign policy but, simultaneously, incredibly stubborn concerning the deep cleavages and resentments towards its northern neighbour. However, Rome always maintained its focus when working to achieve its rightful status within the European system, and eventually, it made it.

2.1 From the Triple Alliance to the Crispi Era

The Italian foreign policy during the liberal age, going from the Italian Unification to the outbreak of the First World War, is peculiar. During that period, many famous Italian statesmen and diplomats put effort into elevating the young Italian Kingdom to the level of the other Great European Powers.

The birth of the Italian Kingdom, together with the unification of the German States under the Prussian aegis, followed by the creation of the German Empire, changed the structure of the balance of power in the European continent. Since the 1815 Congress of Vienna, the European Great Powers had developed and preserved a political and military balance system designed to prevent the rise of any hegemonic state within Europe. Indeed, although this balance system was primarily addressed to avoid a possible French military comeback, the same applied to any European power likely to embark on a military expansion.¹² In this sense, the British *Pax Britannica*, the preservation of the Ottoman Empire, although it was considered the *sick man* of Europe, due to the threat that the Balkan Peninsula would have posed to the European balance of power had Istanbul lost control over it, followed by the concerted actions of the Great Powers to suppress any threat to the continent's stability during the popular revolutions of the first half of the 19th century, they all show the efforts of the European nations to avoid the outbreak of a new conflict in Europe. However, the rise of the German Empire and, to a lesser extent, the Italian Kingdom as strong-nation states jeopardised the balance entirely, giving the final blow to a system already fading as the old logic grew increasingly meaningless since the French aggression seemed less and less likely as time passed. Nevertheless, the notion that the Balkan Peninsula was the main threat to European stability remained and finally proved to be accurate, with the 1912-13 Balkan Wars and the First World War signalling the end and failure of the post-Congress of Vienna efforts to maintain peace and the *status quo* in Europe.¹³

¹² Edward, Vose Gulick, *Europe's classical balance of power: a case history of the theory and practice of one of the great concepts of European statecraft* (New York, The Norton Library, 1967), 30-34.

¹³ Muriel, Evelyn Chamberlain, *Pax Britannica? British Foreign Policy, 1789-1914* (London and New York, Longman, 1988), 12-18.
Gulick, *Europe's classical balance of power*, 30-34.

Turning to the new role of Italy within the European Continent and political system: the Italian role was of particular relevance in the Mediterranean Sea for obvious geographical and historical reasons, especially concerning the Adriatic Sea and the neighbouring Balkan Peninsula. Thus, it should not be surprising that Italy early developed interests and projected its foreign policy towards the Balkans, primarily because of its privileged position towards the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires and the southwestern Balkans. Indeed, Rome knew that it had to prevent Austria-Hungary, Italy's traditional and historical enemy, or any other power from threatening the Italian maritime position in the Adriatic Sea and the Mediterranean. Therefore, the likelihood that the Habsburg Monarchy could advance further southwards in the Balkans from its strongholds in Dalmatia and Bosnia to achieve control of the entire eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea and, in particular, the Otranto Strait was a real threat to the Italian national security. However, at the turn of the 1870s, Italy had few allies, and even fewer were those who would have supported Rome in a fight against Austria-Hungary, which was allied with Germany since 1879 (Dual Alliance). Rome was still too diplomatically, politically and militarily weak to halt the looming Austrian expansion in the Balkans through military means.¹⁴ Nonetheless, that's when the diplomatic skills of Prime Minister Francesco Crispi came to Italy's aid.

The threat represented by Austria-Hungary wasn't the only concern of Rome. A new threat came from the south, namely France. In 1881, Paris established a protectorate over Tunis, where also Rome had vital interests and investments, as well as settlers. Thus, the French move against the Italian interests and the rising rivalry between Paris and Rome forced the latter to find allies who could have shielded Italy against a possible attack from France, and the best candidate was the Dual Alliance of Germany and Austria-Hungary. In this regard, the leading proponent of an alliance with the empires of Germany and Austria-Hungary was Francesco Crispi, an Italo-Albanian statesman and twice Prime Minister of Italy from 1887-1891 and 1893-1896, an admirer of Bismarck and aware of the importance of benefitting from the protection of Berlin against France. Indeed, Germany was the safest choice for Italy since the

¹⁴ Luciano, Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti* (Roma, Società Editrice Dante Alighieri, 2017), 26-31.

relationship between Berlin and France was at its lowest since the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 when the Prussians defeated the French army led by Napoleon III at Sédan and conquered Alsace and Lorraine from France. Since then, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck focused the German foreign policy on maintaining the *status quo* in Europe and isolating France, aware of the likelihood of a French attempt to regain Alsace and Lorraine had the conditions been favourable to them. Therefore, according to the Chancellor's logic, an alliance between Germany and Italy could have further isolated France and ended the historic rivalry between Rome and Vienna related to the Italian territories under Habsburg occupation (*Terre Irridenti*) since the Italian entrance into the Dual Alliance was subordinated to the Italian acceptance of becoming an ally of Austria-Hungary.¹⁵

If the reasons above were insufficient to convince Italy to overcome its issues with Austria-Hungary, other elements supported the idea of an alliance with the Dual Monarchy and Germany. Namely, the Italian government thought to use the alliance with Germany to strengthen its position against the Vatican, which was an antagonist to the Italian State since the seizure of Rome in 1870. Thus, by aligning itself with Bismarck and his *Kulturkampf* effort to reduce the influence of the clergy in Germany, in opposition to the French and Austrian closer ties with the Vatican, Rome hoped to neutralise possible Papal plots against Italy.¹⁶ Furthermore, Italian King Umberto I had reasons supporting the signing of the Triple Alliance since he was concerned about a potential surge of republicanism in Italy and wanted, therefore, to align with other European monarchies. Finally, in an attempt to appease the Italian revendication towards Austria-Hungary, Bismarck offered Rome possible future compensation in the Balkan Peninsula, for instance, in Arnautluk (such as in today's Albania), determining the entrance of the Kingdom of Italy into the broader Balkan Question and planting the first seeds for the future Italian interests and commitment towards Albania.¹⁷

¹⁵ Christopher, Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism, 1870-1925* (London, Methuen & Co Ltd, 1967), 132-133.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Bernadotte, Everly Schmitt, *Triple Alliance and Triple Entente* (New York, H. Holt and Co., 1934), 17-18.

From this perspective, King Umberto I signed the Triple Alliance Treaty with Vienna and Berlin on May 20, 1882. Indeed, this was a reasonable choice for Italy for many reasons: it froze the rivalry with Austria-Hungary concerning the *Terre Irridenti* and kept at bay Vienna from expanding further south in the Balkans at the expense of Italian national security. It also prevented Vienna from leveraging on the Vatican to weaken and create unrest within Italy. Moreover, the alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary, besides deterring France from embarking on hostile actions against Italy, allowed Rome to pursue its quest for glory and colonial prestige as a respectable aspirant Great Power shall do, and it also increased the Italian diplomatic weight and bargaining power vis-à-vis other nations such as France, Great Britain and Russia.¹⁸

The Triple Alliance, known as *Dreibund* in German and with an initial validity of five years with the possibility of renewing it periodically, consisted of a defensive alliance where an attack against one of the three parties would have entailed the entrance into the war of the other two parties. In this regard, the possible attack could come only from France and Russia at that time, and Italy and Germany agreed to defend each other. However, Italy did not agree to defend Austria-Hungary from a possible attack from Russia since Vienna refused to do the same in case of French aggression towards Germany. Finally, the parties all agreed not to fight Great Britain.¹⁹

In this sense, although Italy achieved great diplomatic success and improved its international position, the path towards greatness was still long and perilous. Other examples of how Rome desperately needed to continue strengthening its international status trace their roots to the fact that Italy did not make any gains in the 1878 Congress of Berlin, unlike Austria-Hungary, who obtained a protectorate over Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in the 1885 Congress of Berlin, which resulted in a new partition of Africa for the benefit of the increasingly stronger Germany Empire.²⁰ To understand the Italian reaction to this situation, it is important to look at the year 1887, when Francesco Crispi started his first term as Prime Minister of Italy, inaugurating a more assertive and imperialist Italian foreign policy. Under his leadership, Crispi, aware of the Italian need to keep improving its international position and diplomatic weight, decided to focus on developing better relations with Great

¹⁸ Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 13.

¹⁹ Schmitt, *Triple Alliance and Triple Entente*, 18-19.

²⁰ Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 12.

Britain since London controlled every access to the Mediterranean Sea from Gibraltar to Suez, passing through Malta and Cyprus, and it could have been an ideal ally in case of a conflict with France. As a result, Italy and Great Britain signed the Mediterranean Agreements of 1887 with also Vienna and Madrid and mediated by Bismarck on behalf of Germany, who joined the agreement years later. The agreements entailed respecting and preserving the *status quo* in the Mediterranean Sea and, more specifically, mutual recognition of the North African claims between Rome and London. Respectively Egypt for Great Britain and Tripoli and Cirenaica (Lybia) for Italy, with the addition of British assistance to Italy in case of external aggression.²¹ Moreover, the paramount objective of the Mediterranean Agreements was to halt the Russian advance in the Balkans and towards the Dardanelles Straits, as well as guarantee the survival of the Ottoman Empire, which was essential for maintaining the European balance of power.²²

The year 1887 was also important for two other events, namely a tariffs war initiated by Crispi against France in retaliation for the French actions in North Africa and the renewal of the Triple Alliance Treaty when Rome finally obtained the guarantees that Berlin and even Vienna would have sided with Italy in case of a conflict with France over the latter's claims in Morocco and Ottoman Lybia.²³

²¹ Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 14.

²² Seton-Watson, *Italy from liberalism to fascism, 1870-1925*, 131-132.

Barbara Jelavich, *The Ottoman Empire, the great powers, and the straits question, 1870-1887* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1973), 145-151.

²³ Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism, 1870-1925*, 131-132.

2.2 The Failure of Italy's African Imperialism and its Consequences

As mentioned earlier, the temporary halt of the antagonism between Rome and Vienna allowed the former to embark on its colonial projects and hunt for international prestige. Thus, the first Italian attempts to expand overseas focused on the African Continent, particularly on its eastern flank of the Horn of Africa, where there was still land available to seize. Surprisingly, Prime Minister Francesco Crispi initially wanted to refrain from embarking on the project of colonial expansionism in Africa. Indeed, this process had already started in 1882, before Crispi's first term as Prime Minister, with the Italian government's covert purchase of the Assab Bay in today's Eritrea through the Italian naval company Rubattino to create a bridgehead from which the Italians could have expanded and conquered the whole Horn of Africa, or as it is known in Italian, Abyssinia. However, Prime Minister Crispi soon realised the potential of expanding in Africa and the international prestige that acquiring colonies would have brought to the Italian Kingdom. Thus, he decided to continue the work initiated by his predecessors in power. Consequently, in 1887 the Italian army was dispatched to conquer Massawa, in today's Tigré, to avenge the massacre of an Italian column in Dogali which happened the same year. In 1888, the Italian campaign resulted victoriously, and Crispi decided that the Kingdom of Italy had to stay in Africa.²⁴

Other Italian statesmen, such as Sydney Sonnino, the will-be Italian Foreign Minister during the second term of Francesco Crispi, during the negotiations that led to the 1915 London Pact, and finally during the First World War, also shared this decision. In this regard, they advanced another reason to support colonialism: finding new areas where the exodus of Italian migrants could be directed. Hence, not to other states where these Italian citizens would have cut their ties with the motherland and acquired a new citizenship, but to areas where they could have found new opportunities and helped the Italian State with its colonial ambitions and hunt for colonial prestige.²⁵

²⁴ Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism, 1870-1925*, 138.

²⁵ Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 16-17.

On May 2, 1889, Italian delegates and the new Ethiopian *negus* Menelik signed the Treaty of Ucciali. This Treaty has a tragic story since, due to linguistic misunderstanding between the two parties, Italy, who had already increased its occupied territory by occupying Keren and Asmara and by reaching the southern river of Mareb, believed to have established a protectorate over Ethiopia, although according to Menelik Italy had no right to do so.²⁶ At the same time, Italy began penetrating what one day would become Italian Somaliland. Moreover, by 1890, the land around Asmara and Keren was organised under Colonia Eritrea.²⁷

Although the colonial quest seemed initially successful, the Italian achievements in Africa and their prestige lasted only a short time. Indeed, the Italian situation started to deteriorate already in 1892 when the disastrous tariffs war waged by Crispi against the French goods provoked more damage to the Italian economy than to the French one. Therefore, Crispi was forced to withdraw the tariffs on French goods, but too late for the economic situation in Italy, which had already been jeopardised by his policy, particularly deepening the cleavage between the northern and southern parts of the country, with the former's industrial sector improving at the expense of the latter's, whose historic backwardness persists today.²⁸ However, the key event which weakened the Italian international prestige and that brought to a decisive end Crispi's political career was the Italian defeat at Adua on 1 March 1896 by the hand of the Ethiopians, provided with Russian artillery and rifles, which ended a war initiated by *negus* Menelik and whose humiliation for Rome will eventually drive Benito Mussolini to invade and conquer Ethiopia in 1935, to avenge this ancient defeat.²⁹ This Italian setback in the Horn of Africa in 1896 completely changed the Italian foreign agenda. The end of the Crispi Era and the switch to a more conciliatory foreign policy towards France inaugurated by his successor, Antonio Starabba di Rudinì, led to a slow rapprochement between Rome and Paris, with the former aiming at putting an end to the rivalry between the two nations.³⁰

²⁶ Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism, 1870-1925*, 138-139.

²⁷ Ibid., 139.

²⁸ Ibid., 143-148.

²⁹ Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 18.

³⁰ Ibid., 20-22.

The risks that this approach entailed were a likely improvement of the relationship between Italy and France at the expense of Italy's position face to its allies of the Triple Alliance and Great Britain. In this regard, the rivalry between Italy and Austria-Hungary concerning the *Terre Irridenti* and the southwestern Balkans, which was temporarily paused throughout the period of Italian expansionism in Eastern Africa, resurfaced, recording a surge of irredentism and antagonism between the two historic rivals, although not strong enough to determine a rupture within the Triple Alliance yet.³¹

However, although Italy was still allied with Germany and Austria-Hungary, Rome decided to go onward to improve its relationship with France. On this subject, the milestone of the rapprochement of Rome and Paris culminated with the 1902 Barrère-Prinetti Agreement, which ended the two countries' rivalry for North Africa and entailed, in case of redistribution of Ottoman territories, that France would not have contested an Italian seizure of Tripolitania Vilayet (today's Lybia). In exchange, Italy would not have protested over a French takeover of Morocco. This was a prelude to the Agadir Crisis of 1911, when France established a protectorate over Morocco and the Italo-Turkish War of 1911-1912 when Italy seized Lybia from the defeated Ottomans.³² Thus, at that time, Rome started being aware of the foreseeable benefits a close relationship with France could have brought Italy. Maybe, even at the price of its alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary.

Turning to this growing political dilemma within the Italian Kingdom, which will characterise the relationship between the parties member of the Triple Alliance until the Great War started: besides the new surge of antagonism with Austria-Hungary and the slow rapprochement between Italy and France, the Italian foreign policy in the aftermath of the 1896 colonial failure changed profoundly also due to other external and internal factors. Concerning the relationship between Italy and Germany, in the aftermath of the removal of Bismarck as Chancellor of the German Empire in 1890 by order of the new, more belligerent German Emperor Wilhelm II, the relationship between Rome and Berlin started to deteriorate as well, in part due to the aforementioned partial Italian rapprochement with France and, on the other hand,

³¹ Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism, 1870-1925*, 333-338.

³² Cedric, James Lowe and F. Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy 1870-1940*, (London, Routledge & Kegan, 1975), 82-90.

because of the more assertive German foreign policy inaugurated by its new Emperor. This new expansionist and belligerent foreign policy had a profound impact on the European system of alliances, particularly when, following the Tangiers Crisis of 1905 and the Agadir Crisis of 1911, German actions were met with increasing hostility by France, Great Britain and even Russia who were soon to join in the well-known Triple Entente in 1907, putting aside their differences and past tensions fearing the German appetite for expansionism and also its military threat.³³

Speaking about the internal factors influencing the Italian pivot to the Mediterranean and the Balkans, it is fundamental to look at the timeframe between 1896 and 1914 when Italy experienced an economic boom, created a modern industrial sector concentrated in the “*industrial triangle*” of Milano, Genova, and Torino, and also underwent a military build-up which resulted in the modernisation and enlargement of the Italian military. Indeed, this economic boom, concomitant with the growth and improvement of the Italian military, allowed Italy to pursue its foreign policy objectives more effectively in the early 20th century, strengthening the Italian position in the Mediterranean during a period when Europe was slowly but steadily aligning in two distinct blocs, with Rome in the middle trying to befriend all the other Great Powers.³⁴ Furthermore, starting at the beginning of the 20th century, the Italian renewed assertive foreign policy was also fuelled by new industrial groups looking to expand in foreign markets, mainly in the Balkans or in the territory still under the control of the Ottoman Empire, such as Lybia. Therefore, Italy’s growing self-confidence and military strength drew Rome’s attention to regions and markets where it would not have attempted to expand only one decade before, fearing a possible reaction from the other Great Powers.³⁵ This new foreign policy based on industrial imperialism was therefore fuelled by economic nationalism. It differed from the previous century’s African colonialism since, this time, the objective was not merely territorial expansion but to search for new markets for the growing industrial sector.³⁶

³³ Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 20-22. Lowe and Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy 1870-1940*, 70-71.

Wolfgang, Justin Mommsen, “Kaiser Wilhelm II and German Politics”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 25, no. 2/3 (1990): 293–297. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/260734>

³⁴ Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 25-29. Tommaso, Tittoni, *Italy’s Foreign and Colonial Policy*, (Charleston, BiblioBazaar, 2009), 11-19.

³⁵ Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 87-94.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 29-30; 87-94.

2.3 Italy as a Great Power, albeit the “Least Important”

As we have just mentioned, the Italian Kingdom at the beginning of the 20th century differed from what it was just a decade before. The Italian rapprochement with France at the turn of the 20th century happened during a period when the relationship between Rome, Berlin, and Vienna was slowly but steadily jeopardised.

Indeed, the increasingly aggressive behaviour of Germany in the period leading to the Great War also had another important outcome: pushing Great Britain, Russia and France to overcome their differences and create a common front to counterbalance the German rise. This growing rivalry between Paris, London, Saint-Petersburg and Berlin was also fuelled by the new system of alliances emerging in Europe at that time. Indeed, France and Russia had been on good terms since the late 19th century, and France had invested millions of francs in improving Russian infrastructures and military might. At the same time, Great Britain and Russia had finally reached a *modus vivendi* in 1907 and overcome their disagreements and rivalry stemming from the Great Game in Asia and Persia, as well as their historical rivalry concerning the Ottoman Empire, because of the growing activities and interests of the German Empire in the Middle East and the Anatolian Peninsula, signalled by the German military and industrial assistance to Istanbul, and the ongoing project of the railway Berlin-Baghdad financed with German capitals.³⁷ This rapprochement of the Ottoman Empire with Germany is one of the reasons why the government of Great Britain, France and Russia, who, by 1907, had already gathered in the Triple Entente to counterbalance the Triple Alliance, would not protest over the Italian seizure of Lybia in 1912, which weakened the Ottoman Empire to the extent that the *status quo* in Europe was put in danger, but because of the international situation at that time, was not meet with the usual concerns of Great Britain and France, as it had happened countless times during the history of the 19th century.³⁸

³⁷ Peter, H. Christensen, *Germany and the Ottoman Railways: Art, Empire, and Infrastructure*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2017), 77.

³⁸ Schmitt, *Triple Alliance and Triple Entente 1902-1914*, 449-455.

Turning to another key element of the Italian quest to become a Great Power, namely the Italian Kingdom's domestic politics of the early 20th century. Between 1900 and 1914, Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti, the leading figure in Italian politics at that time, aimed at preserving the rule of the liberals and implementing liberal policies while at the occurrence opening up to the demands of the Left or the Catholic (which did not participate in the political life of the Kingdom since the Seizure of Rome in 1870). However, by 1910, a new political faction started gaining public attention: the Right or nationalists, composed of intellectuals, industrialists, journalists, etc., who called for a more assertive foreign policy, looking at Ottoman Lybia as a military target and anticipating the 1911 Italian declaration of war against the Ottoman Empire, in one of the most destabilising events in the years before the Great War.³⁹ We can look at the Italo-Turkish War of 1911-12 as a turning point in the period leading to the Great War and also in Italian foreign policy. Indeed, besides being the cause of the successive Balkan Wars and one of the leading causes at the root of the outbreak of the First World War, the war between Italy and the Ottoman Empire stemmed from the new international situation and the renewed assertiveness and strength of Italy's foreign policy.⁴⁰

The reason why Italy decided to embark on the war against the Ottoman Empire can be traced back to the 1911 Agadir Crisis, when, following the French takeover of Morocco as a protectorate in exchange for some territorial compensation to the German Empire, Rome's fear of being completely excluded from North Africa led Prime Minister Giolitti to attempt to appease the Right with the promise of a new territorial acquisition.⁴¹ However, the Italo-Turkish War, although successful, proved to be increasingly expensive and lasted more than initially expected (it will never stop in the zone outside the thin Italian control), and undermined Giolitti's rule at home, with the Left becoming more radical on its antagonism toward the war and the government, and the Right not appeased at all. Moreover, the Italian victory over the Ottoman Empire fuelled the independence desires of the Balkan nations, leading to the

³⁹ Christopher, Duggan, *A Concise History of Italy* (Cambridge, Cambridge Concise Histories, Cambridge University Press, 2013), 173–206.

Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 87-94.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 29-30.

⁴¹ Duggan, *A Concise History of Italy*, 173–206.

Tittoni, *Italy's Foreign and Colonial Policy*, 95-108.

outbreak of the First Balkan War in October 1912 and the subsequent Conference of Ambassadors in London, which was entrusted to deliberate about the outcomes of the war and to delimitate the new territorial boundaries in the Balkan Peninsula. Hence, Italy had to deal with the situation it had created by weakening the Ottoman Empire.⁴²

In this regard, an important Italian politician in the years before the outbreak of the First World War was Antonino Paternò Castello, Marquis of San Giuliano, who was Foreign Minister from 1905 until 1906 under the last government of Alessandro Fortis, and again from 1910 until 1914, a period of extreme importance for the Italian Kingdom, and for Europe in general. Significant was the role of the Marquis of San Giuliano in dealing with the Agadir Crisis of 1910-1911, where Italy kept its word given to France during the previous Barrère-Prinetti Agreement not to protest over the establishment of the French protectorate in Morocco and then because of its role during the Italo-Turkish War of 1911-1912, the subsequent Balkan Wars and finally during the Conference of Ambassadors in London held between 1912 and 1914.⁴³ The Marquis of San Giuliano was known to be a strong supporter of the Triple Alliance, and he believed that Italy should develop a closer relationship with Berlin. Thus, it is mainly due to him that during the two years before the outbreak of the Great War, there was a revival of the Triple Alliance, and Italy remained allied with Germany and Austria-Hungary while maintaining good relationships with the other Great Powers. However, the Italian declaration of war against the Ottoman Empire, already under the sphere of influence of Berlin by 1911, was an important sign that the efforts of the Marquis of San Giuliano to keep the Triple Alliance together were undermined by the decay of the relationship between Italy and Germany, let alone the one between Rome and Vienna.⁴⁴

Overall, the Italian victory against the Ottoman Empire in 1912, with the resulting annexation of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and part of the Dodecanese Islands, was a major achievement for the new Italian foreign policy centred on Industrial imperialism. Indeed, the expansion of the Italian colonial power, the military build-up

⁴² Duggan, *A Concise History of Italy*, 173–206.

⁴³ Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 13. Michele, Scammacca Murgo, “Il Marchese Di S. Giuliano”, *Rivista Di Studi Politici Internazionali* 36, no. 3 (1969): 425–40. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42735399>.

⁴⁴ Schmitt, *Triple Alliance and Triple Entente 1902-1914*, 452.

that Italy experienced in the years prior to the Great War, and finally, the participation of the Italian Kingdom as an equally important Great Power during the delicate Conference of Ambassadors in London of 1911-1912 tasked to redrawing the map of the Balkans shows that, by 1912, Italy could be considered a Great Power, albeit the least important, following Great Britain, Germany, France, Russia, Austria-Hungary, and likely also behind the United States and Japan. In this regard, the vital position that the Kingdom of Italy obtained in the negotiations about the new territorial boundaries in the Balkans, also concerning the new Albanian regime stemming from the November 1912 Statute of Vlorë, signalled the other Great Power's recognition and acknowledgement of the Italian role as a stabilising force in the region, converting Rome's ambitions into reality. Indeed, between 1882 and 1912, the Italian Kingdom adopted a Great Power foreign policy without necessarily achieving that status since it was trying to find its space in the European system while being a latecomer in both the colonialisation and the industrialisation processes and by only reaching a sufficiently advanced level of industrialisation and modernisation by the time the First World War started.

3. Chapter II - The Early Commitment of Rome towards Albanian Independence and the Rivalry between Austria-Hungary and Italy

Now that we are aware of the Italian roadmap to achieve its Great Power status by the time the Great War started and the roots of the relationship between Rome, Vienna and Berlin, intertwined with the relations between Italy and France, it is time to analyse more into detail the rivalry between Italy and Austria-Hungary, where today's Albania played a crucial role in the broader Balkan Question.

This chapter will start with the beginning of the Albanian independent cause, namely the Congress of Berlin of 1878, fundamental for the rise of new regional actors in the Balkans, such as the principalities of Serbia, Montenegro, and the Kingdom of Romania, and also for partitioning the territory of Arnavutluk for the first time among its neighbours. Indeed, the 1878 Congress of Berlin weakened the Ottoman Empire to an extent where only through the support of the other Great Powers could survive. The Ottoman Empire's weakening and the setting up of an Austrian protectorate over Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878 prepared the ground for Austria-Hungary to engage the Eastern Question and compete with Russia. However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, by the late 19th century, a new regional actor entered the Balkan Question: the Kingdom of Italy. The latter, fuelled by irredentism towards the Habsburg Monarchy and a renewed assertiveness stemming from economic, industrial and military improvements, began the search for a more powerful position in the Adriatic Sea and the Mediterranean, where the territory of today's Albania, on the opposite side of the Otranto Strait, was the perfect target. This revived Italian foreign policy assertiveness in an international situation that was leading to the formation of two rivalling political and military coalitions, neither of which Italy fit into, it eventually led to a series of events in which Rome had to find its position and also partners who suited its interests.

Overall, this chapter is fundamental to understanding the early commitment of Rome and part of its public opinion to the Albanian quest for independence, how the latter was intertwined with the rise of irredentism and nationalism towards the Habsburg Monarchy, and how it was one of the leading causes of the rivalry between Italy and Austria-Hungary. Finally, this chapter is necessary to understand better the Conference of London coming in the next part.

3.1 The 1878 Congress of Berlin and the Roots of the Austro-Hungarian Pivot to Arnavutluk

The relationship between the Italian Kingdom and the Austro-Hungarian Empire during the second half of the 19th century never healed its deep wound inflicted during the three Independence wars fought between 1848 and 1866 and never overcame the fact that Austria-Hungary still occupied the Italian territories of Trentino, Alto-Adige, Trieste, Istria, Venezia Giulia and Dalmazia, the so-called *Terre Irredenti*.⁴⁵

We can trace back the origins of the rivalry between the Kingdom of Italy and Austria-Hungary concerning Arnavutluk and the Balkans in general to the second half of the 1870s, in particular to the 1878 Congress of Berlin, putting an end to the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878. In this regard, several rebellions against Ottoman control arose in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Montenegro, with the Russian Empire supporting the secessionists, sparking a full-fledged war between the Russian Empire, its proxies, and the Ottoman Empire in 1877.⁴⁶ The ensuing Russo-Turkish War ended with a victory for Russia and its allies with the signing of the Treaty of Santo Stefano, which offered favourable terms to Saint Petersburg and its partners.⁴⁷

The Great European Powers, however, refused to accept the provisions of the bilateral peace deal. They decided to convene a Peace Conference to deal with the issue of preserving the Ottoman Empire and containing Russian expansionism in the region: the Congress of Berlin, headed by German Chancellor Bismarck and lasting from June 13 to July 13, 1878. The outcome was that Serbia, Montenegro and Romania became fully independent, while Bosnia and Herzegovina became an Austro-Hungarian protectorate for the next thirty years. Concerning Bulgaria, the latter obtained autonomy from the Ottomans. Still, its claimed territory was partitioned with another autonomous region, Eastern Rumelia, preventing Sofia from achieving its Greater Bulgaria aspirations.⁴⁸ Turning to Arnavutluk, the Congress of Berlin

⁴⁵ Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 28.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 116.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Stavro, Skendi, "Beginnings of Albanian Nationalist and Autonomous Trends: The Albanian League, 1878-1881", *American Slavic and East European Review* 12, no. 2 (1953): 219–32. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2491677>.

represented the first partition of Albanian territory. On this subject, following the Congress of Berlin, Montenegro obtained Nikšić, along with the primary Albanian regions of Podgorica, Bar and Plav-Gusinje. Two years later, on November 1880, Montenegro also received the district of Ulcinj. As a result, this partition of Albanian territory stemming from the 1878 Congress of Berlin triggered the creation of the League of Prizren in 1878, followed later by the League of Peja of 1899, signalling the beginning of the Albanian struggle with the Ottoman rule that would lead to the series of Albanian uprisings during the 1900s and 1910s which ultimately drove the Albanians to declare their independence from the Ottoman Empire on November 28, 1912.⁴⁹

The negotiations that led to the Congress of Berlin and its outcomes defined the Great Powers' different interpretations of the Eastern Question and the Ottoman Empire's role in the European balance system for the rest of the nineteenth century. From that moment onwards, many Great Powers developed an interest in the Balkans, with all the advantages and disadvantages that could stem from it.⁵⁰ As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Italian Kingdom's role during the Balkan Crisis of 1877-1878 was inexistent. Indeed, at the time of the Congress of Berlin, Italy was still too weak on the international stage, and Rome had not yet drawn its attention to the Balkan Peninsula. Mainly because, at that time, Austria-Hungary was a major regional player in the area, already controlling Dalmatia, Slovenia, and from 1878, Bosnia and Herzegovina. On this subject, the Austrian actions were part of the Habsburg policy concerning the Balkans stemming from the Austrian expulsion from Germany in 1866. By that time, Vienna drew its attention southwards, the only area where expansion was still possible but where the Austrian actions threatened Russian interests, paving the way for the beginning of the Russo-Austrian rivalry concerning the Eastern Question.⁵¹ Here, the 1877-78 Russo-Turkish War, the ensuing victories of Russia, and the independence of Serbia, Montenegro and Romania, besides threatening the European balance of power, also had the effect of endangering the new Austrian ambitions and

⁴⁹ Sommerville, Story, ed., *The Memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey* (London, London Constable and Company LTD, 1920), 299-320.

⁵⁰ Skendi, "Beginnings of Albanian Nationalist and Autonomous Trends: The Albanian League, 1878-1881", 219-32.

⁵¹ Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912*, 238.

interests in the Balkans. Therefore, this is why Austria-Hungary and Great Britain, another Great Power concerned about maintaining the *status quo* in Europe and preserving the Ottoman Empire, denounced the Treaty of Santo Stefano and gathered with the other Great Powers in Berlin to revise it.⁵²

As mentioned earlier, their primary objective was to prevent Russia from extending its influence in the area and becoming the protector of the Orthodox Balkan Slavic populations. Furthermore, Vienna also feared the increasingly aggressive and revisionist behaviour of the newly independent nations of Serbia and Montenegro, especially their pan-Slavic aspirations and ideological, military and political dependency on the Russian Empire. Indeed, with the Reichstadt Agreement of 1876, Austria-Hungary had already declared its opposition to the formation of any great Slavic state in the Balkan since the latter would have posed a threat to the Austrian expansionistic aims southwards in the Balkans and also fuelled independent desires of the Slavic population under the Habsburg Monarchy. Therefore, to secure its position in the Balkan Peninsula, the Austro-Hungarian acquisition of the protectorate over Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 1878 Congress of Berlin had a double objective: firstly, enhancing the Empire's southern border defence and increase the defensive capabilities of Austrian Dalmatia, which some parts of the coast could only be reached by passing through the Bosnian hinterland. Secondly, controlling Bosnia paved the way for Austria-Hungary to expand further south, with Vienna drawing its attention to Arnavutluk.⁵³ Indeed, the territory of Arnavutluk may have played the role of a stronghold against the newly independent Serbia and Montenegro, which threatened both Austrians and the Albanians of Arnavutluk, who feared being further partitioned among their neighbours. Therefore Austria-Hungary and part of the Albanian population thought about merging their interests in the face of a common enemy.⁵⁴

In conclusion, it is essential to mention again that the proximity of Austria-Hungary to Montenegro and the Albanian territories also had another outcome: threatening the Italian position in the Adriatic Sea and the East in general. However, after the mounting rivalry with France reached its apex in the aftermath of the French

⁵² Chamberlain, *Pax Britannica? British Foreign Policy, 1789-1914*, 12-18

⁵³ Amedeo, Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'Unione con l'Italia, 1913-1939*, (Milano, Istituto per gli studi di politica nazionale, 1939), 31-37.

⁵⁴ Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912*, 238.

occupation of Tunisia in 1881, Italy was forced to temporarily relegate to a secondary place its antagonism and concerns towards Vienna and join the Triple Alliance in 1882. This occasion was also welcomed by German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, who, aware of the dangers posed by a possible conflict in the Balkans and the Adriatic Sea, wanted to prevent a potentially destabilising conflict between Austria-Hungary and Italy over the region.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912*, 240.
Schmitt, *Triple Alliance and Triple Entente 1902-1914*, 17-18.
Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism, 1870-1925*, 131-132

3.2 The Beginning of the Italian Commitment to Albania

At the government level, in line with a more assertive foreign policy and in conjunction with the phase of African Imperialism, Prime Minister Francesco Crispi inaugurated the Italian foreign agenda towards Albania after he assumed office in 1887. In this sense, Crispi aimed to prevent the Habsburg Monarchy from setting foot on the other side of the Otranto Strait for strategic and defensive reasons since the Austrian occupation of Arnavutluk would have undermined the Italian naval power in the Adriatic Sea and transformed the latter into an Austrian lake. Thus, Italian foreign policy of that period initially developed around supporting Albanian integrity within the Ottoman Empire or as an independent entity, signalling the early interests of the Kingdom of Italy in supporting Albanian independence in the face of the initial voracious Austro-Hungarian expansionism in the Balkans.⁵⁶

This commitment to the Albanian cause started concurrently with Crispi's decision to renew the Triple Alliance Treaty in 1887 when Italy needed a closer collaboration with Austria-Hungary, especially with Bismarck's Germany. As we know, these moves had a distinctly anti-French character, concomitantly with the tariff war that characterised economic relations between Italy and France from 1887 to 1892. Indeed, Crispi's choice to strengthen its political ties with Austria-Hungary proved helpful in keeping the irredentist tones towards the Habsburg Monarchy low, and at the same time, making it more difficult for Vienna to expand towards Albania since a further expansion southwards would have undermined the Austrian commitments to the Triple Alliance. Finally, this move also allowed Crispi to focus on the ongoing Italian expansionism in the Horn of Africa.⁵⁷ On this subject, as the Italian importance within the European international system and the Triple Alliance grew at the turn of the 1880s, as evidenced by the 1887 Mediterranean Agreements and the renewal of the Triple Alliance Treaty in the same year, Germany agreed to recognise the Italian interests towards Morocco and Lybia, while Austria-Hungary joined the policy of maintaining the *status quo* in the Balkans by signing a separate Austro-Italian Treaty.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912*, 240-241.

⁵⁷ Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism, 1870-1925*, 131-132.

⁵⁸ Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912*, 241.

Moreover, the renewal of the Triple Alliance in 1887 introduced Article 7, whose provisions entailed that, in case of changes or territorial acquisitions made by Italy or Austria-Hungary, the two countries would have divided the profit equally. In 1891, at the time of the second renewal of the Triple Alliance, Article 7 extended equal compensations in case of territorial acquisitions to Germany. This signalled a turning point for the Italian and German positions in the Balkans, in line with the change within the German leadership following Bismarck's removal in 1890 and the new, more belligerent and assertive rule of Emperor Wilhelm II.⁵⁹

In this regard, at the turn of the twentieth century, the steady decay of the Ottoman Empire and rising nationalism and secessionism among Balkan nations drew not only the attention of the Great Powers to the region but this time also their appetite for expansionism. Indeed, it became apparent that the Ottoman Empire was on the verge of collapse, prompting many Great Powers to start laying out the partition of the Balkan region in case the Ottomans were forced to withdraw.

As we already mentioned, although the signing of the Triple Alliance in 1882 between Rome, Vienna and Berlin loosened the tensions between the Italian Kingdom and the Austro-Hungarian Empire due to the rising tensions between the former and France, allowing Italy to embark on its African Imperialism phase, the Italian revanchism towards Austria-Hungary never really disappeared. On the contrary, after the Italian military defeat in February 1896 at Adua, Rome drew its focus back on Europe, strengthening its ties to Paris first and the Triple Entente later and assisting in a revival of antagonism with Austria-Hungary due to the surge of revanchism and nationalism toward Vienna. It was during the period between the second renewal of the Alliance Treaty in 1891 and the fourth one in 1902 that Albania started playing a more important role for Vienna and Rome.⁶⁰ Indeed, the Austro-Hungarians concluded that the troublesome situation in the Balkans would have likely jeopardised the integrity of the Ottoman provinces in the Balkans. On one side, Arnavutluk could have been incorporated by the Slavic principalities of Bulgaria and Serbia, with the resulting dangers these countries would have borne had they reached the Adriatic Sea. On the other side, the Austrian feared that the Kingdom of Italy could have occupied

⁵⁹ Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912*, 241.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 241-243.

Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 26-27.

the eastern side of the Otranto Strait to the detriment of the Habsburg maritime position and security in the Adriatic Sea. Therefore, Vienna opted in favour, in the eventuality of the demise of the Ottoman Empire, of keeping Albania as an autonomous and separate entity in the form of an Austrian protectorate, with the latter having access to the Albanian ports of Durrës and Vlorë.⁶¹

Unlike the Habsburg plans concerning the future of the Balkans and Albania in the case of the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the latter's demise did not seem as threatening for the Italian Kingdom. Indeed, Italy had no territorial claims in the Balkans. On the contrary, Rome was one of the strongest supporters of the self-determination of the Balkan nations and the respect for their nationalities and rights, mainly because Italians saw a similarity between the Balkan struggle for independence and the Italian Risorgimento.⁶² As evidence, the Italian government was the only European state to support the autonomy of Crete from the Ottoman Empire and its union with Greece during the 1897 Cretan Affair. Moreover, fearing an Austrian encroachment on Albania and the subsequent occupation of the eastern shore of the Otranto Strait, the Italian governments of the early 20th century made the defence of Albanian rights and interests a pillar within its foreign agenda. In this regard, it is interesting to mention the role that Professor Antonio Baldacci, a botany teacher at the University of Bologna, had in influencing the Italian approach to the Albanian Question and the relationship between Rome and Vienna.⁶³

Baldacci, who by the turn of the twentieth century made several trips to Arnavutluk, was considered the highest Italian authority concerning Albanian affairs and was often employed as an advisor, to the extent of having the last word on national security matters. Unsurprisingly, Baldacci advocated for a greater role of Italy in Arnavutluk to counterbalance the likely Austrian expansionism in the southwestern Balkans.⁶⁴

This difference between the Austro-Hungarian and the Italian positions concerning Albania and the Balkans led to several attempts to find a solution to solve the issue, which resulted in the December 1900 Austro-Italian Agreement, when

⁶¹ Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912*, 243.

Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'Unione con l'Italia, 1913-1939*, 11.

⁶² Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 28.

⁶³ Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912*, 245-247.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Italian Foreign Minister Visconti Venosta signed an agreement with his Austrian counterpart. This Agreement underlined the importance of maintaining the *status quo* in the Balkans. Additionally, it stressed the need to keep Albania out of the general Article 7 of the Triple Alliance (compensations) in an attempt to neutralise the issue between Vienna and Rome.⁶⁵ However, starting with the beginning of the twentieth century, the international agreements with Austria were soon to feel less binding since the Triple Alliance started losing popularity among the Italian public opinion, mainly because of the rise of new irredentist organisations and anti-Austro-Hungarian sentiments among the Italian population following the colonial failures in Eastern Africa and the pressure of the increasingly more powerful industrial lobby and pro-colonialism journalists.⁶⁶

On this subject, the question of Albania, until that moment, often handled with superficiality by the Italian parliament and public opinion, became suddenly of paramount importance, linking the Albanian independent cause with the Italian irredentist cause entailing Venezia-Giulia and Dalmazia. For example, in 1901, the future Italian Foreign Minister Francesco Guicciardini visited Albania, whereas in 1902, the Marquis of San Giuliano did the same. After their visits, they concluded that since Italy was unable and did not want to seize Arnavutluk to protect it from possible Austrian aggression, the government in Rome had to strengthen the cultural and economic ties between the Albanians and the Kingdom of Italy.⁶⁷ Therefore, unlike Austria-Hungary, Italy had no interest in occupying Albanian lands. Still, it just wanted to prevent any other power, primarily Austria-Hungary, from expanding there to the detriment of Italian interests and national security. In this sense, another element supporting the fact that Italy aimed to back an autonomous Albania and not annex it was that until the 1908 Young Turks seized power in Istanbul, Rome was eager to accept a more autonomous and privileged Albania under the rule of the Sultan, if specific reforms were made, as well as civil liberties and rights conceded, like in the case of the 1903 Münzsteg Agreement for Macedonia, where Russia and Austria-Hungary seemed to converge their interests at the expense of the Italian ones.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912*, 245-247.

⁶⁶ Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 87-94.

⁶⁷ Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912*, 247; 250; 249-250.

⁶⁸ Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 28.

The 1903 Münchener Agreement pushed Rome to try to improve its relationship with Saint Petersburg due to the fear that a possible rapprochement between the Russian and the Austro-Hungarian Empires could have likely threatened the balance of power in the Balkans at the detriment of the Italian interests in the area. Consequently, in 1902, the new Italian King, Vittorio Emanuele III, visited the Tsar in the Russian capital. Still, the visit was not followed up by a visit of the Tsar to Rome, increasing the Italian fear about the earlier mentioned Austro-Russian rapprochement. Therefore, this lack of respect towards the Italian government initially pushed the Zanardelli government to attempt to reacquire Vienna. However, the internal situation within Italy and successive international events challenged these efforts.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 28-31.

3.3 A Crisis Looming on the Horizon

As previously said, the Italian colonial failure in Africa heralded a new chapter in the relationship between Italy and France, which was rapidly normalised and pushed to the point of being nearly contradictory to the Alliance's obligations with Germany and Austria-Hungary. Further, the 1902 Barrère-Prinetti Agreement stipulated that France and Italy would maintain strict neutrality in the event of unjustified aggression. And, indeed, more was said for France, as Italy pledged neutrality even in the event of a war initiated by France as a result of direct provocation.⁷⁰ In this regard, there was no contradiction concerning the provisions of the Triple Alliance. Still, the Italian commitment to remain neutral in the case of war with France showed ambiguity, which was soon to be noted, especially during the 1906 Algeciras conference concerning the future of Morocco. On that occasion, the Italian Foreign Minister at that time, Visconti Venosta, though only the chairman of the conference without holding government office, successfully asserted an autonomous role for Italy, despite Rome's alliance with Germany.⁷¹

While these initiatives were taken on the Italian side, the European system changed profoundly. As mentioned in the previous chapters, the rapprochement between France and Russia at the end of the 19th century ended French isolation. It signalled the beginning of a military, political and industrial partnership between Paris and Saint Petersburg. Furthermore, in April 1904, the colonial diatribes having been overcome, France and Great Britain entered into agreements that laid the foundations of the so-called Entente, and in 1907 even the deep-rooted Anglo-Russian quarrel found a truce with arrangements that defined the limits of their respective areas of influence in Asia and the Middle East. At that point, the Austro-German alliance of 1879, which had resisted all diplomatic shocks, was faced with a force capable of encircling them and left them with an ambiguous ally.⁷²

⁷⁰ Lowe and Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy 1870-1940*, 82-90.

⁷¹ Ibid.

Joanne, Stafford Mortimer, "Commercial Interests and German Diplomacy in the Agadir Crisis", *The Historical Journal* 10, no. 3 (1967): 440-56. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2637846>

⁷² Schmitt, *Triple Alliance and Triple Entente 1902-1914*, 455-459.

In this regard, Italy maintained a formal relationship with the Triple Alliance. Nonetheless, it had profoundly changed its inclinations to the point where it was eventually able to improve its ties with Tsarist Russia by signing the Treaty of Racconigi in October 1909: a treaty designed to limit Austrian actions in the Balkans, to which the Italian side added Russian blessing for action in Tripolitania. Meaning that, after normalising and strengthening new trade agreements and the relationship with France, Italy returned to the tradition of swings between two increasingly coherent coalitions. In this regard, the Austrian decision to convert its protectorate over Bosnia, obtained at the Berlin Conference in 1878, into complete annexation in 1908 posed the issue of the compensation the Italians could demand based on Article 7 of the Triple Treaty.⁷³ Therefore, like the Italo-Turkish War was going to significantly impact the Balkan Question and the relationship between Berlin and Rome, the 1908 Bosnian Crisis considerably affected the relationship between Italy and Austria-Hungary. In fact, Austria's unilateral decision to annex Bosnia became a new powerful source of dissension, heralding the Ottoman Empire's final crisis and raising the influence of irredentism in the relationship between Rome and Vienna, with the former now aiming to force Austria-Hungary to cede Trento and Trieste to Italy, in one of the leading arguments that will later convince Italy to join the Great War on the side of the Triple Entente. Indeed, the Bosnian Crisis signalled a rupture in the relationship between Italy and Austria-Hungary. From that moment onward, the Italian elite started questioning its role within the Triple Alliance. However, Rome remained part of it until May 1915, when it decided to leave the alliance with Berlin and Vienna unilaterally.⁷⁴

Henceforward, the European situation continued to deteriorate after 1909. The Italian nationalists and irredentists were pushing for a strong anti-Austrian shift. Meanwhile, Balkan states began plotting against the Ottoman Empire, causing widespread upheaval in the region. Albania was being considered on the Italian side, but an invasion of Tripolitania was also planned. The situation grew more pressing

⁷³ Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 38-41.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Guglielmo, Imperiali, 1915. *Patto di Londra* (17 novembre 1915 - 14 dicembre 1918). Accessed on April 13th 2023. <https://patrimonio.archivio.senato.it/inventario/scheda/guglielmo-imperiali/IT-SEN-057-000056/1915-patto-londra>

Schmitt, *Triple Alliance and Triple Entente 1902-1914*, 455-459.

after the French extended their dominion over Morocco in 1911. Thus, the Foreign Minister of the fourth Giolitti government, the Marquis of San Giuliano, supported an expedition to Tripolitania that began on September 29, 1911, and ended quickly after a weak Ottoman resistance. This was not an actual annexation, which would be achievable only after the First World War. However, it was a further blow to the Sultan's already fading prestige, which had been eroded since the 1908 Young Turks Revolution, who had been driven into peace in October 1912 by ceding Italy the right to occupy the Dodecanese as an assurance for the fulfilment of the 1912 Peace Agreement.⁷⁵

Overall, the Italian war against the Ottoman Empire and the weak reactions coming from the other Great Powers demonstrated how the European Great Powers were aware of the decadence of the Ottoman Empire, whose logic of maintaining territorial integrity at all costs had become less reasonable due to widespread nationalism and militarisation in the Balkans and changes in the international alliance system that we mentioned before. Indeed, the international situation by 1912 was completely different from the one during the Congress of Berlin in 1878 and its aftermath. On this subject, besides successfully handling the war against the Ottoman Empire, the importance of the Marquis of San Giuliano is directly linked to his choice to bind the Italian foreign policy under his leadership, from 1910 to 1914, with the Albanian cause of independence and its defence against the attempts to undermine it from the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires and the neighbouring Slavic regimes.⁷⁶ (He recovered a theme previously empowered by other Italian statesmen, such as Crispi and Sydney Sonnino). The Italian foreign policy under the second mandate of the Marquis of San Giuliano looked at the region of today's Albania as the perfect territory to exert the influence of Rome for improving the Italian position in the Adriatic Sea. The Marquis of San Giuliano believed that if Italy had managed to secure the eastern shore of the Otranto Strait, where Albania is located, this would have only benefited the Italian strategic situation.⁷⁷ Likewise, in the period leading to the outbreak of the First Balkan War, the Austro-Hungarians also aimed to create an

⁷⁵ Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 47-51.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Murgo, "Il Marchese Di S. Giuliano", 425-40.

Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'Unione con l'Italia, 1913-1939*, 11.

independent nation in the area, abandoning the project of establishing a protectorate, but still in line with their objective to counterbalance the rise of Serbia and prevent the latter from provoking unrest among the Slavic populations under the rule of the Habsburg Monarchy. In conclusion, by 1912, Italy and Austria-Hungary agreed that Albania had to be an independent state, "*Albania to the Albanians.*".⁷⁸ Moreover, under his leadership as Foreign Minister, the Marquis of San Giuliano still believed in the necessity of acting as part of the Triple Alliance, as we will see during the Conference of Ambassadors in London of 1912-1914.

⁷⁸ Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'Unione con l'Italia, 1913-1939*, 12.

3.4 The Arbëreshë Community

Although the Italian foreign policy towards Albania became popular among the public opinion and the political elite at the beginning of the 20th century, it had always benefitted from long-lasting internal support from its Italo-Albanian community and some of its most renowned members. As mentioned in the introduction, Italy had hosted an Albanian community since the end of the 15th century when the Ottomans completed the conquest of medieval Albania and the Peloponnese. This community is known as Arbëreshë or Italo-Albanians. It is primarily located in the southern Italian regions of Sicily, Calabria and Apulia, not so distant from their countrymen on the opposite side of the Otranto Strait.⁷⁹

As mentioned before, Francesco Crispi, a famous Italian statesman and member of this Italo-Albanian community, inaugurated the Italian foreign policy towards Albania focused on preventing any strong power from extending its influence and territory at the expense of the Albanian territory.⁸⁰ However, the first encounters and exchanges between the Albanians living on both sides of the Adriatic dated before Crispi's rise to power in Italy. Indeed, starting in the 1860s, a group of Italians had already established contact with Albanian nationalists like Zef Jubani and Thimi Miko, with ideas about creating a Pan-Albanian Literacy Society.⁸¹ Two linguistic Congresses in 1895 and 1897 were held in Calabria, Italy, respectively in Corigliano Calabro and Lungro, showing the Italo-Albanian commitment to supporting their compatriots through figures like Girolamo De Rada, Guiseppe Schirò, and Anselmo Lorecchio. The first Congress was held in October 1895: Francesco Crispi was elected honorary President, La Società Nazionale Albanese was created, and a newspaper called *Ili I Arbeshëvet* (Star of the Albanian).⁸²

⁷⁹ Fischer and Schmitt, *A concise history of Albania*, 23-24; 37-39.

⁸⁰ Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'Unione con l'Italia, 1913-1939*, 11-12.

⁸¹ Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912*, 215.

⁸² Antonio, D'Alessandri, *Un giornalista arbëresh al servizio dell'indipendenza dell'Albania*. Accessed on March 23, 2023. <http://www.albanologia.unical.it/AnselmoLorecchio/default.html>
Giulio, Iudicissa, *Tra Lingua e Storia. Il primo Congresso degli Albanesi d'Italia*. Accessed on March 24, 2023. <https://www.bitculturali.it/2015/03/in-primo-piano/tra-lingua-e-storia-il-primo-congresso-degli-albanesi-ditalia/>

The second Congress was held in February 1897. The *Ili I Arbeshëvet* was replaced by the *La Nazione Albanese* (1897-1924), directed by Anselmo Lorecchio. Moreover, the congressmen lobbied the Italian government to create a chair of Albanian language and literature at the Oriental Institute of Naples, a role Giuseppe Schirò would cover by 1900. The objectives of these Congresses were: a unified alphabet, the foundation of an Albanian National Society, and enhancing relations with the Albanian motherland. Following the Second Congress of Lungro, Lorecchio made a statement for his countrymen in Arnavutluk addressing the importance of unity between Albanians, regardless of religion and other possible cleavages and stressing that the division was primarily due to foreign and external interferences.⁸³ Italo-Albanians in Italy enjoyed equal treatment as the other Italian citizens. Therefore, the work of the *Società Nazionale Albanese* was more effective than the one of other nationalist societies in Ottoman and non-territories.

In this regard, on April 9, 1897, Marchese d'Auletta founded the Albanian Political Committee with its headquarters in Naples and started lobbying the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, chaired by Visconti Venosta, for more direct involvement in Arnavutluk. In April 1900, every Albanian settlement in Italy hosted the National Albanian League branches. On June 1903, a Congress was held in Naples to strengthen the ties between the Albanian units and societies and promote cultural and political relations with their motherland. The ultimate aim of the Italo-Albanians was the liberation of Arnavutluk, although they still struggled to agree on how that should be achieved. Also, it was essential to revise the provisions stemming from the 1878 Congress of Berlin.⁸⁴

In this regard, there were different approaches to the matter: Girolamo De Rada, Giuseppe Schirò, and Anselmo Lorecchio had three diverse ones. Of particular interest was the position of Lorecchio, which accommodated the Italian interests. He stressed the necessity of reviewing the Treaty of Berlin, and he was in line with the Italian governmental policy of *Albania to the Albanians*.⁸⁵ Furthermore, Anselmo

⁸³ Iudicissa, *Tra Lingua e Storia. Il primo Congresso degli Albanesi d'Italia*. Accessed on March 25, 2023. <https://www.bitculturali.it/2015/03/in-primo-piano/tra-lingua-e-storia-il-primo-congresso-degli-albanesi-ditalia/>

Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912*, 216-217.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 219-220.

⁸⁵ Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'Unione con l'Italia, 1913-1939*, 12.

Lorecchio had close ties with Visconti Venosta in 1897, while his successor at the Italian Foreign Ministry, Giulio Prinetti, sympathised with the Albanian independent cause and had several meetings with the revolutionary Manlio Bennici. Therefore, the activity of the Italo-Albanian Community gave impetus to the Albanian National Awakening process and helped mobilise the Italian public opinion and political elites through the press, parliamentary motions, meetings and conferences. At the same time, it also created concerns for the Austrian authorities, bringing the question of Albania to be discussed and known internationally.⁸⁶

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Albanian independent cause within the Italian public opinion became popular also because of the surge of irredentism and imperialism in the Italian Kingdom. Many irredentists and nationalists started linking the Albanian independent cause with the overall liberation of the *Terre Irredenti* and the ancient Italian territories in the Balkan in a clear anti-Austrian direction. Therefore, Manlio Bennici and Giuseppe Bennici created a Committee of Action, who aligned themselves with many nationalist and irredentist movements gaining impetus in that period. The Committee established contacts with General Ricciotti Garibaldi, son of Giuseppe Garibaldi, who always believed the question of Albanian independence to be linked to the broader questions of Italian irredentism. Moreover, many pro-Patria and Albanian nationalist movements were created in Naples, Italy, Sao Paolo, Argentina, and North America, where the members of the Albanian diaspora pledged to provide funds and manpower in case of an intervention in support of the independence of their motherland.⁸⁷

Another important Albanian figure with close ties with the Arbëreshë community was the Ottoman Albanian statesman Ismail Qemali bey Vlorë, the doer of the November 1912 Declaration of Independence of Albania, the Statute of Vlorë. Ismail Qemali was an ethnic Albanian who reached the higher ranks of the Ottoman Empire. Most important, Qemali is considered one of the Founding Fathers of the modern State of Albania, while also being the first Prime Minister of Albania from December 1912 to January 1914. In this regard, Qemali had an eclectic political career within the Ottoman Empire, as found in his Memoirs.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912*, 235-237.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 226-230.

⁸⁸ Story, ed., *The Memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, 299-320.

Especially after his exile from the Ottoman Empire started in 1900 due to disagreements with the Sultan, Qemali committed more to the Albanian independent cause by meeting other nationalists across the European capitals. Initially, Qemali opted in favour of the support of Austria-Hungary for the independence of Albania, then later switched to Italy due to the influence of the Italo-Albanian community. Still, he soon switched back to Austria-Hungary, believing their interests were coinciding. As mentioned in his Memoirs, Qemali started travelling across Europe following his exile, with Italy as one of his first stops. When he reached Naples in 1900, Qemali had the chance to acquaint himself with Sydney Sonnino and Visconti Venosta at a reception organised by the former British Ambassador to Constantinople. On that occasion, Sydney Sonnino and Visconti Venosta, who was at that time still Minister of Foreign Affairs under the Saracco government, shared their interest in the Albanian independent cause. On the same journey through Italy, this time in the Italian capital, Rome, Qemali also had the opportunity to meet Francesco Crispi. That was one of many times that Qemali travelled across Italy. Indeed, after continuing his journey in Northern Europe, Qemali returned to Naples in the same period the British King Edward VII visited the city in 1907. During that part of the journey, Qemali visited the Arbëreshë colonies of southern Italy, showing its appreciation for their support of the independent cause of Albania and their role in influencing Italian foreign policy during the period.⁸⁹

To summarise, although the Italo-Albanians established fruitful and favourable contacts with personalities like Ismail Qemali bey Vlorë, they did not manage to convince those Albanians living in Arnavutluk to trust the Italo-Albanian cause and efforts. Many Albanian intellectuals at that time thought that the interests of Austria-Hungary and the Albanian nationalists were more intertwined than those of Italy, especially concerning the mutual concerns over the threats coming from the principalities of Serbia, Montenegro, and Ottoman Bulgaria. On this subject, intellectuals such as Faik Konitza and Shahin Kolonj mistrusted the Italo-Albanians because of their link with the Italian government and because the latter was rivalling Austria-Hungary in the Balkans. However, Italy had its reasons not to neglect the critical role of Arnavutluk in Italian regional security. Therefore, Rome kept

⁸⁹ Story, ed., *The Memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, 299-320.

supporting the Albanian independent cause and continued working towards preventing Austria-Hungary from establishing its rule over the region. However, the situation was more delicate than it could appear since Austria-Hungary and Italy were still officially two allied nations, even though the cleavages between Rome and Vienna started to look overwhelming, threatening to jeopardise the *status quo* in the region and the overall eclectic international situation in Europe.⁹⁰ In the next chapter, we will see how the rivalrous relationship between Rome and Vienna impacted the creation and initial survival of the Albanian nation. There, we will discover why, in the end, Italy's position and commitment to Albanian independence outlived the Habsburgs.

⁹⁰ Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912*, 234; 238.

**Part II. The Balkans at War: From the First Balkan War to the End of the
Great War (1912-1918)**

4. Chapter III - The Birth of Albania

Albania officially declared its independence from the Ottoman Empire on November 28, 1912, a month after the outbreak of the First Balkan War. This Declaration of Independence, known as the Statute of Vlorë, put an end to the Albanian National Awakening, tracing its roots to the 1878 Berlin Congress, and it was issued by a group of Albanian nationalists, first among them Ismail Qemali bey Vlorë. However, although Albania declared its independence, the outcomes of the First Balkan War seemed likely to prevent the Albanian right to self-determination. Indeed, the Italian's relatively easy victory against the Ottoman Army during the 1911-12 Italo-Turkish War weakened the Ottoman military and its international prestige. It eventually pushed the countries part of the Balkan League to wage war against their former overlord.

One of the main theatres of the conflict between the Balkan League and the Ottoman Army was the territory of Arnavutluk and the adjacent vilayets. This was due to the territorial claims over Albanian territories advanced by the Principalities of Serbia and Montenegro and by the Kingdoms of Greece and Bulgaria, who profited from the political and military instability within the Ottoman Empire for expanding their territories at the latter's expense. This led to the last intervention of the Great European Powers concerned with the dangers the war could have posed to the European balance of power had the Balkan nations become too powerful and the Ottoman Empire too weak. Therefore, they decided to open the Conference of Ambassadors in London between December 17, 1912, and July 15, 1914, to resolve the issue and decide on the possible outcome of the war and the future shape of the Balkan Peninsula and the Albanian State.

In conclusion, this chapter is essential to understand the Italian commitment to the Albanian independent cause and the importance of Italy during the London Conference. As we know, by the time the Conference started, Italy had already achieved its Great Power status. Now, we are about to see how Rome employed its new prestige and diplomatic power to forward its interests in the region, counterbalance the territorial claims and ambitions of the Albanian neighbours, and counterbalance the Austro-Hungarian interests, which proved to be ambivalent, although initially similar to those of Rome.

4.1 The First Balkan War and the Conference of Ambassadors in London

As mentioned previously, the steady decay of the Ottoman Empire was worsened by the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the subsequent Treaty of Santo Stefano. At that time, it was only thanks to the support of Great Powers such as Great Britain and Austria-Hungary, who wanted to safeguard the integrity of the Sultanate and maintain the *status quo* in the Balkans, that the Ottoman Empire managed to postpone its final demise and survive.

By 1912, the Ottoman Empire still had six vilayets or provinces in the southern Balkans, known to the Ottomans as Rumelia. The six vilayets were, respectively: Adrianople (central and oriental Thrace), Thessaloniki (western Thrace and Aegean Macedonia), Monastir (west and central Macedonia, and central Albania), Janina (southern Albania and Epirus), Shkodër (northern Albania), and Kosovo (southern Serbia/Kosovo and North Macedonia).⁹¹ As we are already aware, the territories inhabited by Albanians were generally addressed as Arnavutluk.⁹²

In the aftermath of the seizure of power by the Young Turks in 1908, the latter overthrew Sultan Abdul Hamid II and replaced him with his brother Mehmet V, opening a period of intense reforms within the Ottoman Empire. The Young Turks, who would later overwhelmingly win the Ottoman parliamentary elections in February 1912, aimed at prioritising Turkish ethnicity and laicity over the other minorities present in their territory and to reduce the importance of Islam, which had been the very source of cohesion within the Ottoman Empire for the longest time. In this regard, these reforms were met with hostility by the minorities and Muslim populations in Rumelia, in primis by the Albanians of Arnavutluk, who began an anti-Turkish insurrection which reached its apex in 1911 and 1912, adding more troubles to an already dire situation in the Balkans.⁹³

The event which ignited the First Balkan War was the Italian victory in the Italo-Turkish War of 1911-1912, where Rome obtained Tripolitania and Cirenaica and islands in the Dodecanese. In this sense, the relatively easy success of the Italians, the further weakening of the Ottoman Empire and the successful Albanian revolt of 1912,

⁹¹ Todorova, *Imperial Legacy: the Ottoman imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East*, 47-49.

⁹² Fischer and Schmitt, *A concise history of Albania*, 61.

⁹³ Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912*, 444-449.

which borne the threat that Albanians could unite and therefore prevent its neighbours' territorial claims, led the monarchies of Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece and Montenegro, gathered in the Balkan League, to seize the opportunity and attack Arnavutluk, by declaring war on the Ottoman Empire on October 8, 1912.⁹⁴

The main sponsor of the Balkan League, in primis of Serbia and Bulgaria, was the Russian Empire, who, following its defeat in 1905 by Japan and the rapprochement with Great Britain, drew its focus back to the Balkans, rivalling Austria-Hungary and attempting to weaken the Ottoman Empire, which at that time was becoming increasingly dependent to Germany. The conflict saw a decisive victory of the Balkan League against the Ottoman Army, which in some cases, was assisted by Albanian irregulars who took up their arms to defend their territories from external occupation, and finally led to the approbation of the Treaty of London on May 30, 1913, which officially concluded the First Balkan War. In this regard, the war had another vital outcome, since during the war, Albanian nationalists led by Ismail Qemali bey Vlorë grasped the opportunity to declare the Independence of the Albanian State on November 28, 1912, culminating the process of the Albanian national movement.⁹⁵ In this regard, it is essential to mention that the Albanian rebels and advocates for independence were initially thinking about obtaining greater autonomy within the Ottoman Empire rather than complete independence since the latter would have likely drawn the neighbouring nations to conquer Arnavutluk. However, when Montenegro started the hostility against the Ottoman Empire and attacked Arnavutluk, the Albanians concluded that the option of autonomy under the Ottoman rule was not an option anymore and therefore opted to declare their independence from Istanbul, hoping that by establishing a new State, Albania could have managed to have its territorial boundaries and ethnicity recognised, as well as attract international support from abroad. Unsurprisingly, the initial claims of the Albanians gathered at Vlorë on the 28 of November 1912 entailed all territories inhabited by Albanians, from Shkodër to Janina to Kosovo, the so-called "Greater Albania", in line with the territorial claims of what was once the League of Prizren.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Fischer and Schmitt, *A concise history of Albania*, 146

⁹⁵ Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 146.

⁹⁶ Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912*, 444-449; 462-463.
Fischer and Schmitt, *A concise history of Albania*, 148-149.

The First Balkan War ended in December 1912 when the Ottomans sued for peace, and a truce between the parties was reached. However, smaller-scale skirmishes continued until May 1913, with primarily the Greek Army advancing northwards in Albania.⁹⁷ Concerned about the defeat of the Ottoman Empire and the threat that the Turkish withdrawal from its European possessions posed to the *status quo* in Europe, the Great Powers intervened and gathered in December 1912 in London to discuss the outcomes of the war and also the question of the Albanian Declaration of Independence from the Ottoman Empire, since thanks to the Italian and Austro-Hungarian delegations, the Albanians had the opportunity to present their case to the other Great Powers.⁹⁸ At the same time, in December 1912, Ismail Qemali created his first government in the city of Vlorë, and although the Great Powers never recognised it, the new Albanian government initially received the support of the Habsburg Monarchy, which from February 27 to March 6, 1913, convened in Trieste members of the Albanian communities from Albania itself and the general diaspora. This convention, known as Congress of Trieste and composed of 150 representatives from Albania, Italy, Romania, Bulgaria, Egypt, Turkey and the United States, recognised the provisional government of Qemali in Vlorë and, with the Austrian blessing, started discussing the possible candidates for the new vacant throne of Albania. However, it is necessary to mention that the Austrian promotion of this congress was not the result of Vienna's benevolence towards Albania but rather a subtle attempt to influence the choice of the future Prince of Albania. On this subject, although the Congress of Trieste did not come out with a final decision, that convention signalled the Austro-Hungarian efforts to expand its influence into Albania.⁹⁹

Turning to the participants of the London Conference, chaired by British Foreign Minister Sir Edward Grey, there were delegates from the Italian Kingdom, which finally had its Great Power Status recognised, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the German Empire, the Russian Empire, the British Empire and the French Republic.

⁹⁷ Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 149.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 150.

⁹⁹ Robert, Eisle, ed., *Reisen in den Balkan: Die Lebenserinnerungen des Franz Baron Nopcsa. Eingeleitet, herausgegeben und mit Anhang versehen*, (2001): http://www.albanianhistory.net/1913_Nopcsa_Congress-of-Trieste/index.html

On the contrary, the Ottoman Empire was not invited to participate and was obliged to accept the decisions of the Conference.¹⁰⁰

Among the participants of the Conference of Ambassadors, Italy and Austria-Hungary jointly supported the creation of an autonomous or independent state of Albania, loyal to their statement: “*Albania to the Albanians*”.¹⁰¹ However, they did it for opposing reasons: Italy was concerned about a possible Habsburg takeover of Albania and the eastern shore of the Otranto Strait. On the other hand, Austria wanted to prevent Serbia from accessing the Adriatic Sea and Italy from occupying southern Albania. Additionally, Vienna aimed to reduce Belgrade’s power increase, fearing the Serbian Pan-Slav ideals and covert actions aiming to incite the South-Slav populations within the Habsburg Monarchy to rise against their rulers.¹⁰² Finally, Russia and France did not support the recognition of Albanian independence since the former supported the claims of Albania territories advanced by Montenegro and Serbia, along with the ones of Bulgaria, while Paris backed the Kingdom of Greece’s claims concerning southern Albania.¹⁰³ In this regard, interesting was the role of Great Britain, which supported the demands of the Greek Kingdom but was eager to meet the requests of the Albanians and their supporters, making it the best candidate for mediating the issue. Concerning these claims of the Balkan League, Montenegro pointed to annexe Shkodër and Drin. In contrast, Serbia aimed at expanding southwards and obtaining the Albanian harbour of Durrës, which would have enabled Belgrade to reach the Adriatic Sea. Then, Bulgaria aimed at obtaining the eastern shore of the Ohrid Lake and occupying parts of Macedonia. Finally, Greece wanted to occupy southern Albania until the river Semani.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Giannini, *L’Albania dall’indipendenza all’Unione con l’Italia, 1913-1939*, 11-12

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 12.

¹⁰² Fischer and Schmitt, *A concise history of Albania*, 150.

¹⁰³ Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 150.

¹⁰⁴ Giannini, *L’Albania dall’indipendenza all’Unione con l’Italia, 1913-1939*, 12.

4.2 The Outcomes of the London Conference

The first outcome of the Conference of Ambassadors in London was May 30, 1913, Treaty of London, which officially ended the First Balkan War, formally recognised the statehood of Albania but not yet its territorial boundaries, and ultimately deliberated about the partition of former Ottoman Rumelia among the Balkan League.¹⁰⁵ The outcome for Albania was its recognition as a sovereign, autonomous, hereditary, and neutral Principality under the guarantee of the six Great Powers participating in the Conference. The following step was the creation of an International Commission of Control (ICC) composed of a delegate for every Great Power and one for Albania tasked to handle the public administration and finances of the newly established Principality until a Prince was chosen and the country's social, political, administrative and economic spheres structured.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, law and order had to be maintained through an international force consisting of Swedish and Dutch gendarmes, who had to enforce the rule of law. At the same time, the Great Powers, the new International Commission, members of the Albanian political sphere and the four religious communities began the negotiations for the territorial boundaries of Albania and its legal statute.¹⁰⁷

With the May 1913 London Treaty, the Ottoman Empire lost all its European territories west of the river Maritsa and the Enos-Midia frontier, leaving only Istanbul and part of eastern Thrace under Ottoman rule. Concerning the partition of Arnavutluk, besides the Albanian territories already obtained following the 1878 Congress of Berlin, Montenegro made some territorial gains in northern Albania but only managed to occupy Shkodër temporarily.¹⁰⁸ On the other hand, Serbia obtained central Macedonia, including Ochrida, Monastir, Kosovo, Istib, Kotchana, and the eastern half of the sanjak of Novi-Bazar. Moreover, Serbia reached the Adriatic Sea by occupying the city of Durrës, which eventually remained under Serbian occupation until the town had to be evacuated, but not before Belgrade was allowed to keep accessing and using

¹⁰⁵ Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'Unione con l'Italia, 1913-1939*, 13.

¹⁰⁶ Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 151.

¹⁰⁷ Fischer and Schmitt, *A concise history of Albania*, 152.

Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'Unione con l'Italia, 1913-1939*, 11-12.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 15

Fischer and Schmitt, *A concise history of Albania*, 151.

the harbour and its facilities. Finally, Greece extended its northwestern frontier to include the great fortress of Janina and most of Çamëria in South Albania. Furthermore, Greece advanced claims on the Albanian territory of Northern Epirus, which had to be addressed in a specific Protocol.¹⁰⁹

Before the Great Powers had deliberated about the official territorial boundaries of the new Albanian State (the leftovers left by its neighbours), a new conflict erupted in the Balkans, the Second Balkan War. In this regard, Bulgaria, dissatisfied with Serbian expansion in Macedonia and the Greek seizure of Thessaloniki, declared war on its former allies of the Balkan League on June 29, 1913. The conflict, although it lasted only until August 10, was a disaster for Bulgaria, who had to fight an overwhelming force composed not only of Serbs, Montenegrins and Greeks but also of Romanians who seized the opportunity to invade Bulgaria from the north and the Ottomans who took the opportunity to take back part of the territory previously conquered by Sofia during the First Balkan War. As a result, the Bulgarian defeat led to the August 10 Treaty of Bucharest, where Sofia had to cede southern Dobruja to Romania, Vardar Macedonia (northern Macedonia) to Serbia and portions of western Thrace to Greece. Moreover, in the separate Treaty of Constantinople between Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire, the former was forced to cede recently conquered eastern Thrace and the city of Adrianople (today's Edirne) back to the Ottomans at that time, led by Enver Pasha. This defeat and the humiliation experienced by Bulgaria during the Second Balkan War pushed the country to the extent of becoming revisionist and later joining, during the First World War, the Central Powers against the Entente, where Greece, Montenegro and Serbia fought alongside the Allied Powers.¹¹⁰

Turning to Albania, the State stemming from the decisions of the Conference of Ambassadors in London differed from what Ismail Qemali and the other Albanian nationalists envisaged when issuing the Statute of Vlorë. Indeed, the new state was a construct which originated from the concerted decisions of the Great Powers gathered in London and the result of the regional and international situation at that time.

¹⁰⁹ Fischer and Schmitt, *A concise history of Albania*, 151-152.

Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'Unione con l'Italia, 1913-1939*, 15.

¹¹⁰ Wasti, Syed Tanvir, "The 1912-13 Balkan Wars and the Siege of Edirne", *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 4 (2004): 61-62. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4289928>

Suppose it hadn't been for the support given to the Albanian interests by Italy and Austria-Hungary. In that case, Albania would likely have suffered the same fate as its neighbouring Macedonia. In this regard, although the Conference of Ambassadors in London ultimately recognised Albanian independence and the creation of a new state, initially, it aimed at transforming it into an autonomous vassal State within the Ottoman Empire and not into an independent one, in a compromise that would have appeased both Russia, Austria-Hungary and Italy, with none of those Great Powers acquiring too much influence over the region.¹¹¹ However, following the Ottoman withdrawal from its European possessions, the Great Powers had to renounce the project and soon agreed to create an independent Principality following the Western polity style.¹¹²

The territorial boundaries of Albania were finally established on December 17, 1913, by the Florence Protocol, covering an area of 28.000 km², with a population of about 800.000 entailed between the former Shkodër and Janina vilayets.¹¹³ The Principality of Montenegro remained in possession of the region of Plav-Gusinje but was forced to withdraw from Shkodër following an ultimatum of the Great Powers, allowing the town to become part of the newly created Albanian State, even though it remained under the control of an international military commission until the Great War broke out in the summer of 1914. On the other hand, the Principality of Serbia kept Kosova and Metohija, and it was allowed to access and use the neutral Albanian port of Durrës. Finally, the Kingdom of Greece annexed Janina and Çamëria.¹¹⁴

Overall, the territories entailed by the new borders of Albania were much smaller than those claimed by the Statute of Vlorë, with more than half of the predominantly Albanian-speaking territories and roughly 40 per cent of ethnic Albanians excluded from the new State, particularly in the south and the north, and with the exclusion of Kosovo, one of the main theatre of the Albanian national

¹¹¹ Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 150

¹¹² Fischer and Schmitt, *A concise history of Albania*, 150-151.

¹¹³ Ibid.

Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 152

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 152-153.

Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'Unione con l'Italia, 1913-1939*, 15.

Kropiak, "Integration concepts of the lands inhabited by Albanians: the process of shaping of the Albanian state borders", 66.

movement.¹¹⁵ This resulted from the victory of the Balkan League during the First Balkan war and the fact that their military success had to be rewarded, a proposal that even the Italian Kingdom and Austria-Hungary did not dare to disagree with.¹¹⁶ Another element that made it challenging for the International Commission to establish the border of the new Albanian State traces back to the difficulty of determining the Albanian territorial boundaries since ethnic Albanians form minorities in neighbouring countries, with their presence still posing problems nowadays.

The only remaining territorial issue was about the Albanian territory of Northern Epirus, primarily Orthodox and where a consistent Greek minority lived and soon expressed dissatisfaction with being part of Albania rather than the Greek Kingdom. At the beginning of 1914, this dissatisfaction led the Greek minority to establish the Autonomous Republic of Northern Epirus, with its capital in Gjirokastër, challenging the central authority of the newly established Albanian State. The solution to this new issue was found by the May 17 Corfu Protocol signed between the representatives of the Autonomous Republic and the Albanian Principality, which granted autonomy to the region under the rule of the Prince. However, the protocol was never implemented due to a series of protests against its implementation and the outbreak of the Great War in July 1914.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Fischer and Schmitt, *A concise history of Albania*, 132.

Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 152.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 152.

¹¹⁷ Kropiak, "Integration concepts of the lands inhabited by Albanians: the process of shaping of the Albanian state borders", 67-68.

4.3 The Brief Rule of Prince Wilhelm Zu Wied

The first Albanian provisional government, unrecognised by the Great Powers and labelled as an indigenous authority, was initially perceived as an Austro-Hungarian attempt to create a buffer state in the area, with the tacit agreement of Italy.¹¹⁸ This provisional government was led by Ismail Qemali, who ruled from Vlorë and could only enforce its authority over the town, Elbasan, Lushnjë, Fier, (Gjirokastër), and Berat, thus only in the country's southern and central regions.¹¹⁹ Indeed, state control over Albania's southern and central parts was possible because Qemali came from the south, where Albanians spoke its Tosk dialect. In contrast, the northern part of Albania was inhabited chiefly by Geg clans who did not recognise the authority of the new state of Albania. Furthermore, the central part of the Albanian state that escaped governmental control did so because, since October 1913, Essad Pasha Toptani, a former ethnic-Albanian Ottoman politician and general, had established the Republic of Central Albania, with its capital in Durrës and encompassing the region around the latter and Mirditës. There, Toptani claimed to be the next ruler of the Albanian State, and its newly created republic started rivalling with the provisional government led by Qemali.¹²⁰

On this subject, Essad Pasha Toptani was a member of a wealthy feudal Muslim landowning aristocratic family who rose to prominence during the 1908 Young Turks Revolution and during the First Balkan War, when he was appointed head of the Ottoman Army in the Shkodër vilayet. Moreover, the Toptani family, like other wealthy Muslim landowners, benefited enormously during Ottoman rule, with the Sultan frequently appointing members of this family to key positions in Arnavutluk. Unsurprisingly, these wealthy Muslim landowners were concerned about losing their privileges under the new provisional government led by Qemali and rallied behind the unrecognised Republic of Central Albania, which was backed by the Principality of Serbia, with a military garrison already present in Durrës aiming to expand Belgrade's influence in the region, as well as to keep the access to the Adriatic

¹¹⁸ Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 155.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 148-149.

Fischer and Schmitt, *A concise history of Albania*, 151.

¹²⁰ Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 148-149.

Sea. This new entity, however, did not last long and ceased to exist under pressure from the Great Powers, primarily because the latter appointed Essad Pasha Toptani as the leader of the Albanian delegation entrusted with travelling to Neuwied, Germany, on February 1, 1914, to deliver the crown of Albania to its new chosen ruler, Wilhem zu Wied.¹²¹

The decision to appoint Wilhem zu Wied as Prince of Albania resulted from protracted negotiations among the state parties involved. Indeed, there were two distinct proposals about who had to be selected as Prince of Albania. The former proposal was more oriented to the East, with the Ottomans advocating for the selection of a member of the Ottoman dynasty, arguing that Albania could survive only as a vassal State of the Ottoman Empire. However, this proposal soon became undoable following the Ottoman withdrawal from Arnavutluk and Istanbul's renunciation of its rights on Albania enshrined in the London Treaty. The second proposal looked at the West, where the Great Powers decided to entrust Austria-Hungary and Italy with the appointment of the new Prince. Unsurprisingly, as it had previously happened in Greece, Bulgaria and Romania, the choice fell on a member of the German aristocracy since Germany was considered the Great Power with fewer interests in the Balkans. The new Prince was Wilhelm zu Wied, nephew of the Queen of Romania and grand-nephew of Emperor Wilhelm II of Germany. Moreover, the fact that the new prince was Protestant, therefore belonging to none of the religions present in Albania, was seen as an added value by the Great Powers.¹²²

Following the choice of the Prince in December 1913 and the loss of support from Italy, Austria-Hungary and the other Great Powers in the aftermath of the Grebene Affair, Qemali resigned on January 22, 1914, and left the country in exile.¹²³ The Grebene Affair was a failed coup d'état organised by a Turkish officer of Albanian origins sent by the Turkish government to Albania to prepare the terrain for a Muslim revolution and the appointment of a Turkish Prince as Albanian head of State. However, the coup was prevented, but not before Ismail Qemali became involved in the matter, resentful towards the unrecognition of its government and the interference

¹²¹ Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 155; 157.

¹²² Fischer and Schmitt, *A concise history of Albania*, 154-155.

Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 155-157.

¹²³ Kropiak, "Integration concepts of the lands inhabited by Albanians: the process of shaping of the Albanian state borders", 68.

of the International Control Commission. His participation in the attempted coup led to the final demise of its provisional government, whose activities had already been jeopardised since the International Commission established its headquarters in Vlorë in mid-October 1913.¹²⁴

On March 7, 1914, Wilhelm zu Wied was crowned Prince of Albania. Within the next month, he disembarked in Durrës, the newly appointed provisional capital of the Principality of Albania and former stronghold of Essad Pasha Toptani, where one of his first acts was to oversee the nomination of Turhan Pasha Permëti as the new Prime Minister, nominate Toptani as the new Minister of war and of the interior, and create a cabinet where he recruited Italian, Austrian and English advisors.¹²⁵ The new regime and the legal basis of the new polity were legitimised by April 10, 1914, Statute of Albania, which officially transformed Albania into a sovereign and independent Principality.¹²⁶ However, throughout the entire rule of Prince Wied over Albania, the latter had to be supported by the Italians and Austro-Hungarians, along with an international force relying on Dutch gendarmes.¹²⁷

In this regard, although it seemed that Albania had finally achieved its independence, the new executive had to face dire straits in its rule over the country. First, the new Principality inherited the same issues that had previously limited the effective functioning of the government led by Ismail Qemali, respectively the disobedience of the northern Geg tribes and the social and religious tensions among the Albanian society. At least, the nomination of Essad Pasha Toptani helped bring central Albania under the authority of the Prince, as we can see also in the choice to move the capital from the southern city of Vlorë to the more central city of Durrës. The second issue was the Albanian economic and social situation as of 1912. Indeed, the country was the most backwards in Europe, with 90 per cent of its population in the agricultural sector, half of the arable land entailed in *latifundia* owned by wealthy feudal families, and mountain tribes who escaped state control and even contacts with

¹²⁴ Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 157-158.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'Unione con l'Italia, 1913-1939*, 15-16.

¹²⁷ Christie, B. Emerson, "The New Albanian Constitution", *The American Political Science Review* 20, no. 1 (2014): 120-123. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-political-science-review/article/abs/new-albanian-constitution/31A199732D4F2FCCE4FCBC71B65D08E8>

other citizens due to the absence of basic public infrastructures, railways and a modern industrial sector.¹²⁸

To these issues was also added the lack of a national culture, which was far more powerful and influent within the Albanian diaspora rather than in Albania itself, and also the problems related to religion, with the northern part of Albania predominantly Catholic, the central and eastern Muslim and the southern Orthodox.¹²⁹ It is no surprise, then, that the newly elected Prince could only enforce his rule over the capital city of Durrës and its hinterland and had to deal with a series of uprisings and the opposition of Essad Pasha Toptani.¹³⁰ Indeed, the latter used its recent nomination to its benefit and tried to influence the new government behind the scenes, causing problems to the rule of Prince Wied and, at the same time, causing unrest within the country. Toptani never abandoned his ambition of becoming head of the Albanian State one day. Soon, he began receiving the support of the Italian Kingdom, which started perceiving Prince Wied as a puppet in the service of the Austro-Hungarians.¹³¹ In this regard, after the failed attempt of Toptani to arrest one of his main antagonists, Ahmet Zogu, a Muslim chieftain belonging to the Mati tribe and head of the largest armed force in Albania, who, after the attempted arrest, decided to turn against the government, Prince Wied started perceiving Toptani as a liability. Eventually, Prince zu Wied went further and proceeded to arrest Toptani and some Italians accused of being the mediators between the government in Rome and Toptani himself, and exiled them in June 1914. Following the order of the Prince, Toptani and his Italian collaborators were escorted out of the country by an Italian warship and later proceeded to disembark in Brindisi, Apulia.¹³²

As happens with most decisions in Albanian politics, the move did not have the expected result because, following Toptani's exile, the wealthy Muslim landowners organised a revolt against the rule of the Prince, establishing a revolutionary government in the central town of Tirana, seizing central Albania and sieging Durrës.¹³³ This new widespread uprising was not an isolated case.

¹²⁸ Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 154.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Fischer and Schmitt, *A concise history of Albania*, 156-159.

¹³¹ Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 160-161.

¹³² Ibid.

Fischer and Schmitt, *A concise history of Albania*, 157.

¹³³ Ibid., 156-159.

As we mentioned, Ahmet Zogu had already turned his back on the government in Durrës and began plotting against Prince Wied. Furthermore, another two rebellions broke out in mid-May 1914, one located in southern Albania against the signing of the Corfu Protocol of the same month, which forced Prince Wied to postpone its ratification to late June and worsened the relations between the Principality and Greece. The second one was among the peasant masses of the central and northern parts of Albania, who, dissatisfied with the new government's domestic policies and initially fomented by Essad Pasha Toptani, rose against the rule of the Prince.¹³⁴ The peasant revolt soon spread without any control, particularly following Toptani's exile, influenced by local Muslim religious preachers and Turkish agents who leveraged the peasant's fears leading them to religious fanaticism and revisionist ideas.¹³⁵

The local garrison in Durrës, entailing Dutch officers, Albanian allies coming from the Christian regions, and small detachments of soldiers sent by friendly European Powers, such as Austria-Hungary and Romania, did their best to resist the continuous attacks of the rebels. However, the fate of the Principality was doomed. The central part of the country was in the hands of the insurgents. The northern part was infiltrated by Serbians, who consolidated their control, strengthening their claims into the country, especially in the aftermath of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo by the hand of a Bosnian Serb, Gavrilo Princip, which provoked the July Crisis and signalled a point of non-return in the relations between Austria-Hungary and the Russian-backed Principality of Serbia, anticipating the conflict between the Central Powers and the Entente. Finally, the southern part of the country fell into the hands of the Greek army, helped by Northern Epirote insurgents, who soon occupied Gjirokastër and Korçë. The only territory still under the control of the Principality was the capital and the city of Vlorë.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 160-161.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 162.

Pearson, *Albania on the 20th Century, A History (Vol I): Albania and King Zog. Independence, Republic and Monarchy 1908 – 1939*, 71.

The final blow to Prinz Wilhelm's reign came with the outbreak of the First World War on July 28, 1914. The Austro-Hungarian declaration of war to Serbia and Vienna's request to Prince Wied that he had to join the war struggle on the side of the Central Powers caused the explosion of the rivalry between the Italian Kingdom and Austria-Hungary, with the former concerned about the Austrian breach of Albanian neutrality and refusing to join its former ally in the war effort. In this regard, Rome was not the only one refusing to join Vienna in the war since also Prince Wied refused the Austrian request. Thus, the Austria-Hungarian abandonment of the Principality of Albania to its fate in the face of the Prince's refusal, and the dissolution of the International Force in Albania with their servicemen returning to their country to join their respective ranks, forced Prince Wied to flee the country together with its government in September 1914, after ruling for merely six months.¹³⁷

The fleeing of Prince Wied to Germany, where he joined the German military and the August 1914 entrance of Germany, Russia, Great Britain, France and Montenegro into the conflict initiated by Austria-Hungary against Serbia transformed Europe and the Balkans into a war theatre, where also Albania was not spared from destruction, invaded from all sides, fledged by civil war and converted once again in a victim of the expansionist desires of its neighbours and its internal problems. Indeed, after Prince Wied left the Principality in September 1914, the insurgents entered Durrës, gathered in a new Senate and claimed to restore the rule of the Sultan of Turkey, nominating the fourth son of former Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid and nephew of the current Sultan Mohammed V, Prince Burhan Eddine as the new King of Albania.¹³⁸ In the month of September, another figure made his way back to Albania, Essad Pasha Toptani, who, with Italian support and military and financially backed by Serbia, captured Durrës the following month, putting an end to the brief rule of Burhan Eddin and proclaiming himself President and Premier of Albania and commander-in-chief of the army. The Senate of Durrës soon recognised his proclamation upon the threat of executing its members if they did not proceed so, and its first act was to declare war on Austria-Hungary to show its commitment to the

¹³⁷ Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 162.

Pearson, *Albania on the 20th Century, A History (Vol I): Albania and King Zog. Independence, Republic and Monarchy 1908 – 1939*, 79-80.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 81.

Entente. At the same time, Serbian and Montenegrins occupied northern Albania, where they backed the creation of a new Albanian government in the north, with its capital centred in Shkodër.¹³⁹

This clear breach of Albanian neutrality triggered a reaction from Italy, who, concerned about the integrity of the Principality and about the possible involvement of the country in the Great War, as well as being the sole Great Power signatory of the Statute of Albania not involved in the war, notified to the other Great Powers its intention to prevent Albania from being further occupied by foreign actors. Thus, Rome sent troops to occupy the Albanian island of Sàseno in front of the city of Vlorë in October 1914, while Greek regular troops, allegedly supporting the Italian decision to protect the Albanian sovereignty, proceeded to legitimise their occupation of Northern Epirus by restoring order. In November, the Ottoman Empire joined the war on the side of the Central Powers, while in Albania, a new widespread insurgency, known as the Union of Krujë, rose against the rule of Essad Pasha Toptani in Durrës, forcing the latter to seek assistance and protection from the Italians. In this sense, Rome answered Toptani's request positively, and Italian troops were dispatched to occupy the city of Vlorë in December of the same year, installing Colonel Fortunato Castoldi as the new military governor tasked with maintaining order.¹⁴⁰

Overall, by December 1914, the picture of Albania was the following: northern Albania was under the control of Serbia and Montenegro, and a local authority ruled Shkodër and its hinterland. In contrast, the north region of Mirditë was separated under the rule of a new prince, Prenk Bib Doba.¹⁴¹ The central areas were under the control of the Union of Krujë, which did not enforce its control only on the mountain region of Malësori, on Dibër and on Mati, where Ahmet Zogu was the local chieftain of the Mati tribe and did not participate in the broader civil war. The new Prime Minister of Albania, Essad Pasha Toptani, recognised by the International Commission before the latter left the country, could only enforce its authority over Durrës and its hinterland and rule from an Italian warship anchored on the bay.¹⁴² Finally, the south was in the

¹³⁹ Pearson, *Albania on the 20th Century, A History (Vol I): Albania and King Zog. Independence, Republic and Monarchy 1908 – 1939*, 82; 84.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 81-84.

Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 161-163.

¹⁴¹ Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'Unione con l'Italia, 1913-1939*, 18-19.

¹⁴² Ibid.

hands of the Greek Army, while Vlorë was under the control of the Italians. In the end, it seemed that the Kingdom of Italy had finally managed to extend its authority on the eastern shore of the Otranto Strait. However, it initially did so as a pre-emptive measure against a further dismemberment of Albania and to prevent other countries, such as Austria-Hungary, from occupying it.¹⁴³ In this regard, Austria-Hungary resorted to trying to undermine the Serbian and Montenegrin positions in the north of Albania, hoping to weaken them and counterbalance the Italian presence in Albania.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Pearson, *Albania on the 20th Century, A History (Vol I): Albania and King Zog. Independence, Republic and Monarchy 1908 – 1939*, 85.

¹⁴⁴ Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 163-165.

5. Chapter IV - The Fate of Albania through the Inter-War Period

The years 1914-1918 are a well-known watershed moment for the international system, and the Italian Kingdom and Albania were not exempted from the changes this period brought. This chapter will examine Italian foreign policy in the aftermath of the outbreak of the Great War of July 1914.

Initially, the first part of this chapter will emphasise the Italian position towards Albania and the process that led Rome from declaring neutrality in August 1914 to the approbation of the April 1915 London Pact, which is crucial for its impact on the post-war relations between Italy, Albania, the other Balkan nations, and the other Great Powers during the Paris Peace Conference and beyond. Then, the second part of this chapter will draw the reader's attention to the critical events of the First World War, focusing exclusively on the Balkan War Theatre, mainly on the Italian military and political strategies concerning Albania. In this regard, particularly important will be the June 1917 Gjirokastër Edict, which established the unity and independence of Albania under the aegis of Italian protection and symbolised the Italian commitment to defending the Albanian State from the offensives of the armies of the Central Powers.

In conclusion, this chapter draws the reader's attention to the deep causes at the root of the renewed post-war Italian rivalrous relationship with France, this time concerning not only North Africa and the Mediterranean but also the Balkans, due to French support to a new actor stemming from the demise of the Habsburg and Montenegrin monarchies: the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the precursor of Yugoslavia, which will replace Austria-Hungary as a regional power rivalling with Rome on matters from the supremacy on the Adriatic Sea to the territorial boundaries and right to self-determination of the Albanian State.

5.1 The London Pact of 1915: The End of the Triple Alliance

As mentioned in the first part of this thesis, the international situation on the eve of the First World War saw the creation of two distinct political and military blocks in the European Continent. One, the Triple Entente, entailed Great Powers such as France, Russia and Great Britain, while the other, the Triple Alliance, consisted of Italy, Germany and Austria-Hungary. However, as we have seen in earlier chapters, the Italian Kingdom was only formally a member of the Triple Alliance, having normalised its relations with France and been on excellent terms with Russia and Great Britain prior to the Great War. On the contrary, the relationship between Italy and Germany had experienced a slow but steady decay since Bismarck's removal in 1890, suffering from Kaiser Wilhelm II's warmongering behaviour and as a result of the worsening of the relations between Germany, Great Britain and Russia who started an arms race in the years leading the outbreak of the Great War.¹⁴⁵ In this regard, even worse was the trajectory of the relationship between Italy and Austria-Hungary, with Rome forced to cohabitate with Vienna from 1882 to 1896, only to see their rivalry grow in the aftermath of the failure of the Italian African Imperialist phase.¹⁴⁶

This rivalry was fostered by the Austrian domination over the *Terre Irridenti*, the expansion and modernisation of the Italian industrial and military sectors at the turn of the 20th century, the rise of nationalism, irredentism and a new kind of imperialism among the Italian public opinion, often intertwined with the Italian concerns and mistrust towards the Habsburg attempts to extend its influence in the Balkans since the 1878 Congress of Berlin.¹⁴⁷ In this sense, Vienna showed an evident desire to improve its position on the eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea at the expense of the Italians, threatening the national security of Italy, particularly in the aftermath of the 1908 annexation of Bosnia and the Austrian attempts at installing a puppet state in Albania not only once but twice. First, when Austria-Hungary influenced the first provisional government of Ismail Qemali through the work of the Congress of Trieste and secondly, at the time of the principality of Prince Wied through military and

¹⁴⁵ Mommsen, "Kaiser Wilhelm II and German Politics", 293–297.

¹⁴⁶ Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 18-22.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

diplomatic means and even coercion.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, these are all measures of the Habsburg true imperialist foreign approach towards the Balkans and Albania, where Albanians and Italians could have played a part only if their actions coincided with the interests of Vienna. Therefore, when Prince Wied refused to join Austria-Hungary in the Great War, Vienna wasted no time in abandoning the Principality to its fate and withdrawing its troops from the Albanian territory, in a clear neglect and breach of its promise to guarantee Albanian neutrality stemming from the 1913 London Treaty. This left only Italy and, to a lesser extent, Greece to keep order in the anarchy left by Prince Wied after he left the country.¹⁴⁹

According to history, the advent of the First World War in July 1914 compelled Italy to choose between remaining faithful to the Triple Alliance or aligning with the Entente.¹⁵⁰ In reality, Italy had no legal obligations to the Austrian and German Empires, stipulating that the war hadn't started with French aggression. It was, therefore, necessary to decide based on the most substantial advantage. For Rome, to keep its alliance with Austria-Hungary and, consequently, with Germany was no longer reasonable nor worthy. Thus, it declared neutrality based on Article 7 of the Triple Alliance, which enabled Italy not to join the war since Austria-Hungary initiated the hostilities.¹⁵¹ As a result, the Central Powers soon replaced the Triple Alliance, welcoming the Ottoman Empire instead of the Kingdom of Italy.¹⁵²

In this regard, the Italians waited nearly a year between the Central Powers' attempt to keep Italy neutral and the demands of the Italian Right for intervention alongside the Entente. Indeed, the outbreak of the First World War in July 1914 came at a moment of great political turmoil within Italy, especially in the aftermath of Giovanni Giolitti's decision to resign in March 1914, followed by the establishment of a more conservative government led by Prime Minister Antonio Salandra, and with

¹⁴⁸ Robert, Elsie. Accessed on April 17, 2023.

http://www.albanianhistory.net/1913_Nopcsa_Congress-of-Trieste/index.html

Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 160-161.

Pearson, *Albania on the 20th Century, A History (Vol I): Albania and King Zog. Independence, Republic and Monarchy 1908 – 1939*, 79-80.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 52.

¹⁵¹ Lowe and Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy 1870-1940*, 135-139.

¹⁵² Günay, Uslu, *Homer, Troy and the Turks* (Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 193.

the Foreign Ministry passing from Marquis of San Giuliano to Sydney Sonnino in November 1914.¹⁵³ This happened right before the killing of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in June, the event that ignited the July Crisis and eventually led to the outbreak of the Great War, and during a period called *Red Week*, where protests and social clashes erupted in centre Italy, leaving the new Italian government, and its new Foreign Minister Sydney Sonnino to deal with domestic problems and with an important political dilemma.¹⁵⁴

Concerning the Italian public opinion, the year between the outbreak of the First World War in July 1914 and the Italian entrance into the conflict in May 1915 was marked by a fierce internal debate about whether to intervene in the conflict. While on the side of the pacifists could be found Socialists, Catholics, and Liberals, the side of the warmongers entailed the new revolutionary Socialists led by the former pacifist and maximalist socialist Benito Mussolini, together with Democrats, Nationalists, Radicals and Anarcho-Syndicalists.¹⁵⁵ However, as mentioned earlier, soon after the Austrian declaration of war against Serbia on July 1914, the Italian government had opted in favour of not intervening in the conflict due to the uncertain economic and military situation of the Italian Kingdom and the fact that Vienna initiated the hostilities and failed to consult Rome before, although it did ask for German support before declaring war on Serbia. In this regard, Rome went further and tried to prevent the conflict from involving other Great Powers.¹⁵⁶ Yet, in less than one month since the beginning of the Great War, Montenegro joined the conflict, followed by Russia, who protected the latter and Serbia, then France, and Germany, who proceeded to invade Luxembourg and Belgium, violating their neutrality which was granted by Great Britain, who, therefore, declared war on Germany and joined the conflict as well.¹⁵⁷ Thus, the Italian efforts to limit the outbreak of the conflict went unheard, and within the Italian government, two distinct lines of action formed.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵³ Lowe and Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy 1870-1940*, 133-143.

¹⁵⁴ Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 52.

¹⁵⁵ Giuseppe, Zichi, "Dal pensiero all'azione. L'interventismo dei repubblicani italiani agli albori della grande guerra." *Studi Storici* 58, no. 3 (2017): 787-793. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45096699>

¹⁵⁶ Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 52.

¹⁵⁷ Hew, Strachan, *The First World War. Volume 1: To Arms* (New York, Oxford University Press Inc., 2001), 179.

¹⁵⁸ Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 53-54.

On the one hand, politicians such as Sydney Sonnino advocated for the Italian entrance into the conflict on the side of the Central Powers. On the other hand, Prime Minister Antonio Salandra wanted to maintain neutrality. The second line of action prevailed, and on August 2 of August 1914, Italy officially declared neutrality.¹⁵⁹ On this subject, one of the main reasons why Sydney Sonnino supported the Italian entrance into the war on the side of the Central Powers was his opinion that the war would have ended quickly with an Austro-German victory and, therefore, Rome had to seize the opportunity to join them and use this leverage to obtain territorial concessions from Austria-Hungary. However, the halt of the devastating German advance into France and the initial victories of the Entente in September bamboozled Sonnino's certainty about the victory of the Central Powers and forced him to change his mind quickly.¹⁶⁰ As a result, from September to February 1915, the Italian Kingdom resorted to waiting and seeing how the conflict would evolve before making a final decision.¹⁶¹ At the same time, for security reasons, Rome took the burden of guaranteeing Albanian neutrality and supported the central government of Essad Pasha Toptani, with Italian troops disembarking on the island of Sàseno and the town of Vlorë to prevent any other country from seizing them. These Italian actions were carried out upon invitation from Toptani, whose government was recognised by Italy and the other Entente Powers as the official government of Albania in the aftermath of Prince Wied's departure.¹⁶²

The Italian stance towards the conflict changed by February 1915. As evidence of this, the Austrian renewed refusals to cede the *Terre Irridenti* to Italy in exchange for Rome's support or neutrality in the conflict, together with the beginning of the war of attrition, the public opinion expressing an increasingly appealing and bold influence to join the conflict against Austria-Hungary, and the fact that Italy could not allow itself to be the only Great Power not entering the conflict led the government in Rome to listen to the offers of the Entente and gather in London in March to negotiate the

¹⁵⁹ Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 53-54.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 54-57.

¹⁶¹ Lowe and Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy 1870-1940*, 146-147.

¹⁶² Pearson, *Albania on the 20th Century, A History (Vol I): Albania and King Zog. Independence, Republic and Monarchy 1908 – 1939*, 81-84.

Italian entrance into the conflict on the side of the Entente, which will lead to the signing of the London Pact on April 26, 1915.¹⁶³

The secret treaty proposed by the Entente entailed, in exchange for the Italian declaration of war against the Central Powers, an expansion of the Italian lands at the expense of the Habsburg Monarchy, with the promise of receiving Trento, Alto-Adige, Trieste, Gorizia, Istria, most of Dalmatia, a protectorate over Albania, parts of the German colonies and Ottoman Anatolia. Needless to say, the following month, Italy declared war on Austria-Hungary and one year later on Germany, eventually ending the Triple Alliance and entering into a conflict that lasted till November 1918.¹⁶⁴

In this regard, had it not been for the First World War, the Entente Powers would likely have never accepted the concessions included within the secret London Pact, fearing a likely jeopardisation of the European *status quo* for the benefit of Italy and at the expense of Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, Great Britain, Russia, and France became eager to meet the territorial claims of the Italian Kingdom to convince Rome to declare war on its former allies. Thus, in the eventuality of a victory of the Entente against the Central Powers, these concessions entailed that Italy would have significantly benefitted from the war, finally answering to the irredentist demands of the Italian public opinion and fighting to take back the Italian lands under the Habsburgs, converting the Great War in the Fourth Italian Independence War and the ideal conclusion of the Italian Risorgimento.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, in the face of the continual Austrian refusal of the Italian requests to cede the contested Italian lands to Rome in exchange for the latter's promise to remain neutral, the Italian Kingdom had no reason to side with the Central Powers, mainly because by siding with the Entente, Italy would have avoided a likely disastrous defeat inflicted by France and Great Britain, possible by land, but especially by sea, and eventually had its territorial claims

¹⁶³ Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 58.

¹⁶⁴ Imperiali, 1915. *Patto di Londra* (17 novembre 1915 - 14 dicembre 1918). Accessed on May 2nd, 2023. <https://patrimonio.archivio.senato.it/inventario/scheda/guglielmo-imperiali/IT-SEN-057-000056/1915-patto-londra>

Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 58.

¹⁶⁵ Tania, Rusca, “«Hand Weg, Verräter!» La ‘Quarta Guerra d’Indipendenza’ e Il ‘Tradimento Italiano’ Nelle Cartoline Illustrate Tedesche Della Grande Guerra (1914-18)” *Annali Della Scuola Normale Superiore Di Pisa, Classe Di Lettere e Filosofia* 2, no. 2 (2010): 513–516. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24308598>

recognised and accepted by the signatories of the London Pact.¹⁶⁶ However, the generosity of the Allies concerning their territorial promises to Rome will soon turn out to be a lie, paving the way to the victorious Great Power's mismanagement of the post-war situation at the Paris Peace Conference.

Indeed, during the negotiations of the London Pact, the first seed of the post-war rivalry between Rome and Belgrade was planted. During the London Pact negotiations, the Russian Empire was the prominent supporter of the Serbian territorial claims concerning Albania and the Austro-Hungarian Adriatic coastline. In contrast, Sydney Sonnino's main objective was to prevent Serbia from expanding further in the Albanian south and on the Adriatic Sea at the expense of the Italian position and claims on the Austro-Hungarian territories. These opposing stances would be at the roots of the cleavages between Italy, Serbia and the post-war protector of the latter, France.¹⁶⁷

Moreover, the role of the London Pact regarding the Albanian Question is crucial. On this subject, the secret treaty's clauses will play an essential role in determining the relationship between Italy, Albania, Serbia (later Yugoslavia), Greece and France, along with the other Great Powers in the aftermath of the Great War. Indeed, the London Pact made consistent concessions to Italy concerning Albania, and at the same time, it attempted not to jeopardise the previous agreement related to the partition of the Albanian territory that the Entente had concluded with the Balkan nations fighting on their side during the war.¹⁶⁸ Turning to this, there is an Italian saying for the Allies' behaviour, which, translated in English, would result in the Allies trying to have the cake and eat it too (*"Avere la botte piena e la moglie ubriaca"*).

As we mentioned before, in the case of the Entente victory over the Central Powers, Italy would have obtained the eastern shore of the Otranto Strait, namely the island of Sàseno and the city of Vlorë and its hinterland. Moreover, the Allies agreed on the Italian request to leave Durrës and central Albania under the rule of an independent Muslim State led by Essad Pasha Toptani, over which Italy would have

¹⁶⁶ Rusca, "«Hand Weg, Verräter!» La 'Quarta Guerra d'Indipendenza' e Il 'Tradimento Italiano' Nelle Cartoline Illustrate Tedesche Della Grande Guerra (1914-18)", 513–516.

Pearson, *Albania on the 20th Century, A History (Vol I): Albania and King Zog. Independence, Republic and Monarchy 1908 – 1939*, 89.

Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 52.

¹⁶⁷ Lowe and Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy 1870-1940*, 152.

¹⁶⁸ Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'Unione con l'Italia, 1913-1939*, 29-30.

extended its protectorate.¹⁶⁹ Therefore, under these circumstances, Italy initially agreed on the partition of the remaining Albanian territory in the north and in the south among the other Balkan nations, allowing Montenegro and Serbia to access the Albanian harbour of San Giovanni di Medua, with the Allies' guarantee that the sea coast would have been neutralised.¹⁷⁰ This solution, although it wasn't the Italian first choice, was the only possible way to prevent other powers from occupying the eastern shore of the Otranto Strait and to protect the existence and integrity of Albania, which would have been reduced to the central part of the country around Durrës, bordering north with Montenegro and Serbia, and south with Italy and Greece, with the latter and Serbia sharing a border in eastern Albania near the western shore of the Ohrid Lake.¹⁷¹

Overall, Italy acted rationally when it signed the London Pact and joined the war effort on the side of the Entente, obtaining much more territories than it had previously demanded from the Central Powers and finally securing the eastern shore of the Otranto Strait, converting into reality the ambition of transforming the Adriatic Sea into an Italian lake. In this regard, Italy also managed to preserve the independence of Albania in a period where the very same Great Powers that signed the May 1913 Treaty of London and swore to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Albania turned a blind eye to it, as they began trading with Albanian territories to convince its neighbours to join the war on their side. Finally, Italy, although it initially agreed to partition the remaining Albanian territories, soon started questioning its choice. This, together with the event of the Great War that we are about to analyse in the next part, is at the root of the issues that Italy, Serbia, Greece, Albania, and France will have to deal with when discussing the sovereignty and territorial boundaries of Albania in the aftermath of the First World War.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'Unione con l'Italia, 1913-1939*, 26.

Pearson, *Albania on the 20th Century, A History (Vol I): Albania and King Zog. Independence, Republic and Monarchy 1908 – 1939*, 89-90.

Imperiali, 1915. *Patto di Londra* (17 novembre 1915 - 14 dicembre 1918). Accessed on May 10, 2023. <https://patrimonio.archivio.senato.it/inventario/scheda/guglielmo-imperiali/IT-SEN-057-000056/1915-patto-londra>

¹⁷⁰ Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'Unione con l'Italia, 1913-1939*, 27-30.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

Pearson, *Albania on the 20th Century, A History (Vol I): Albania and King Zog. Independence, Republic and Monarchy 1908 – 1939*, 89.

¹⁷² Ibid., 90.

5.2 The Italian Kingdom Joins the Great War: The Balkan War Theatre and the 1917 Gjirokastër Edict

During the First World War, the Italian front never achieved the same level of importance and sensibility as the eastern and western fronts, by mainly attaining to distract and keep busy part of the Austro-Hungarian and, particularly following the Brest-Litovsk Treaty in March 1918, German divisions which could have been employed in other parts of the frontline. In this sense, the critical events on the Italian front throughout the war were the May-July 1916 *Strafexpedition*, the Italian defeat in October 1917 at Caporetto and the October-November 1918 Battle of Vittorio Veneto, which gave the final blow to an already decaying Austro-Hungarian army.¹⁷³

Turning to the Balkan war theatre, the latter's extension went from Albania to Romania, and involved troops from Serbia, Montenegro, Greece, Albania, Russia and Romania, joined by expeditionary corps from Great Britain, France and Italy fighting against the armies of the Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria, Austria-Hungary and Germany. The most strategic battles were fought in the Marmara and the Aegean Seas, as well as in Serbia and Albania.¹⁷⁴ The First World War saw the rivalry between Italy and Austria-Hungary transformed into a direct confrontation between two countries which were previously forcibly allies due to the international situation at the turn of the 20th century, and the Italian need to side with Germany, but they never developed a trustful relationship and never overcame their disagreements about Albania, the Balkan Question and the *Terre Irridenti*.¹⁷⁵

As mentioned earlier, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on July 28, 1914, launching an offensive against Belgrade from its stronghold in Bosnia and Herzegovina the following month. However, the effectiveness of the Austro-Hungarian offensive was limited by the entrance of the Russian Empire into the

¹⁷³ Salwyn, Jacob Schapiro, *Modern and Contemporary European History (1815-1952)* (Cambridge, The Riverside Press, 1953), 719-741.

¹⁷⁴ Douglas, Wilson Johnson and Henry Holt, "The Balkan Theatre Of War", *Professional Memoirs, Corps of Engineers, United States Army, and Engineer Department at Large* 10, no. 53, (1918): 635. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44535357>
Douglas, Wilson Johnson, "The Balkan Campaign", *Geographical Review* 2, no. 1 (1916): 27-47. <https://doi.org/10.2307/207460>

¹⁷⁵ Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 28.

conflict in August in support of Serbia first and Montenegro when the latter declared war on Austria-Hungary on August 6. Thus, the opening of the Russian front forced Vienna to divide its army along two frontlines, hindering its success in the initial military offensives against Serbia and Montenegro.¹⁷⁶ The month of August 1914 saw the entry into the conflict also of Germany, who joined Austria-Hungary and declared war on Russia and France, activating the Schlieffen Plan, which entailed the violation of the neutrality of Luxembourg and Belgium, and caused the entrance into the conflict of Great Britain on the side of the Entente.¹⁷⁷ On this subject, although the Germans and Austro-Hungarians expected to conclude the war with a short and relatively easy victory, the halt of the German advance on the western front, the Austrian failures on the Balkan and Russian frontlines, as well as the Italian and Romanian decisions not to join the Central Powers in their war struggle, converted a blitzkrieg into a war of attrition. Not even the entry of the Ottoman Empire into the war on the side of the Central Empires tilted the needle of the scales in the Central Power's direction.¹⁷⁸ It only opened two new frontlines and led the Allies to launch the Gallipoli campaign starting in February 1915.¹⁷⁹

The situation seemed to change during the spring of 1915 when Italy declared war on its former allies in May, opening a new frontline alongside the north-eastern border between Italy and Austria-Hungary, as well as blocking the Austrian fleet in the Adriatic Sea by securing both shores of the Otranto Strait and supporting Toptani's Central Albanian Republic.¹⁸⁰ Indeed, the latter was at war against the Central Powers since October 1914, with Rome sending an expeditionary force to strengthen the Albanian defences in Vlorë, the island of Sàseno, and also in Durrës.¹⁸¹ However, the Italian entrance into the conflict still proved not decisive. In this regard, the failure of the Gallipoli campaign and a series of Russian defeats on the eastern front allowed Germany to mobilise more troops in support of the Austro-Hungarian offensive against

¹⁷⁶ Schapiro, *Modern and Contemporary European History (1815-1952)*, 721-723; 727-728.

¹⁷⁷ Strachan, *The First World War. Volume 1: To Arms*, 179.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 651-653.

Uslu, *Homer, Troy and the Turks*, 193-194.

¹⁷⁹ Ian, Hamilton, "The Tragedy of Gallipoli", *The New York Times Current History of the European War* 3, no. 5 (1961): <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45322982>

¹⁸⁰ Pearson, *Albania on the 20th Century, A History (Vol I): Albania and King Zog. Independence, Republic and Monarchy 1908 – 1939*, 82-84.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Serbia in the Autumn of 1915.¹⁸² Decisive in this regard was the entrance into the conflict of Bulgaria on the side of the Central Powers in October 1915, tempted by the opportunity to regain the territories lost to Serbia in the aftermath of the 1913 Second Balkan War. Therefore, an offensive led by three different armies encircled Serbia and, by the end of October, captured Belgrade and forced the remnants of the Serbian Army to flee through Albania and Montenegro, where the last Serbian soldier was rescued by Italian and Allied warships on February 1916.¹⁸³

Following the dissolution of the Serbian Army, the Central Powers captured Serbia and Montenegro. Consequently, they started advancing southwards in Albania, forcing Essad Pasha Toptani and the Italian forces to flee from Durrës to Italy. There, the Italian government tried to leverage the new opportunity and offered support to Toptani upon his agreement to renounce all relations with the other powers. However, the latter refused and left the country for Paris, pushing Rome to withdraw its support.¹⁸⁴ In this regard, a new Great Power was about to enter into the Albanian Question and the overall Balkan Question, respectively, the French Republic.¹⁸⁵ Indeed, the First World War welcomed France into the Albanian Question when Essad Pasha Toptani left Italy for Paris, where he hoped to gain a new protector. There, the French government overestimated his importance and thought of employing Toptani's influence and knowledge of Albania for future operations in the area and proceeded to ship him to Thessaloniki, where the Allies had established their headquarters for the military operations in the area. Upon its arrival, Toptani established its exiled government, which France and Serbia soon recognised, but not Italy, which had renounced endorsing Toptani.¹⁸⁶

Starting with the autumn of 1915, Italy and France launched a joint campaign in Albania where Italian and French divisions occupied southern Albania, forcing the Greek Army to evacuate the area and halting the Central Powers' advance southwards

¹⁸² Hamilton, "The Tragedy of Gallipoli", 873–75.

Schapiro, *Modern and Contemporary European History (1815-1952)*, 721-723; 727-728.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

Graydon, A. Tunstall, *The Austro-Hungarian Army and the First World War. Chapter IV, Serbian Campaigns 1914* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2021), 119-150.

¹⁸⁴ Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 167.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 163.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 167.

and eastwards, which by then already occupied north and centre Albania. The resulting frontline was set alongside the border dividing Greece from occupied Serbia and Bulgaria and north of the town of Vlorë and Korçë in Albania, where, respectively, Italian and French divisions were tasked to defend the area.¹⁸⁷

On this subject, the Italian presence in southern Albania helped Rome to enhance its military and political mandate over Albania's territory and ultimately convinced the Italian government to establish a protectorate over Albania on the ground of the June 1917 Gjirokastër Edict.¹⁸⁸ On that occasion, the commander-in-chief of the Italian Expeditionary Corp to Albania, General Giacinto Ferrero, declared:

*“To all the Albanian populations; today, 3 of June 1917, auspicious anniversary of Italian statutory freedoms; us, General Giacinto Ferrero, Commander of the Italian Occupying Corp in Albania, in accordance with the order received by the government of King Vittorio Emanuele III, we solemnly proclaim the unity and independence of all Albania under the aegis and protection of the Kingdom of Italy; according to this Edict, Albanians, you will be granted free institutions, militias, tribunals, and schools held by Albanians citizens; you will be allowed to manage your properties, result of your work to the benefit of yours and of the increasingly benefit of your country; Albanians, wherever you are, already free in your lands, exiled around the world, or yet under subjugation from foreign dominance, eager to make promises but actually violent and predatory; you belonging to an ancient and noble bloodline possessing memories and traditions dating back to the roman and venetian civilizations; you who are aware of the commonality of the Italo-Albanian interests toward the sea that separates and unites us at the same time; gather all together you men of faith and good will in the fate of your delightful motherland; all rush under the shadows of the Italian and Albanian banners to swear forever allegiance to what is proclaimed today in the name of the Italian government, for an independent Albania, with the friendship and protection of Italy”.*¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 167.

¹⁸⁸ Francesco, Jacomoni San Savino, “L’Occidente l’Italia e l’Albania”, *Rivista Di Studi Politici Internazionali* 20, no. 3 (1953): 392. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43785231>
Giannini, *L’Albania dall’indipendenza all’Unione con l’Italia, 1913-1939*, 39-40.

¹⁸⁹ Giannini, *L’Albania dall’indipendenza all’Unione con l’Italia, 1913-1939*, 39-40.

(Translation from Italian to English provided by the author of this thesis, Filippo Laurini.)

Once Italy had established its protectorate over Albania and had consolidated its possession of Vlorë, Rome came back to its traditional foreign policy based on preventing any other Great or lesser power from advancing in the Albanian territory.¹⁹⁰ This Italian line of action was well presented by the speech of Sydney Sonnino in front of the Italian Parliament on June 21, 1917, where he legitimised the Gjirokastër Edict and affirmed that the establishment of the protectorate, along with the control over Vlorë and the Otranto Strait were all measures meant at hindering any power to threaten the Albanian independence further. He then continued saying that the Italian military occupation was directed at protecting the rights of the Albanian people until the war was over and the local population was ready to regain control of their institutions. In this regard, this 1917 speech of Sydney Sonnino referred to a previous speech of his in front of the Parliament in December 1915, when Sonnino had already declared the preservation of Albanian independence to be the foremost concern of the Italian foreign policy throughout the Great War, and that the Italian presence on the other side of the Otranto Strait would have benefitted both countries.¹⁹¹

Indeed, Italy was conscious of the Albanian relevance in the broader Balkan Question, and notably in the future Adriatic Question. Both of these issues would be crucial in the aftermath of World War I, particularly concerning the post-war relationship between Italy, Albania, Greece, France, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes following the downfall of the Habsburg Monarchy. The sole thing that Rome did not say about Albania was the matter of the future asset of Albanian territorial boundaries, which would be a significant source of controversy during the Paris Peace Conference and thereafter.¹⁹²

The Gjirokastër Edict, although legitimate and in accordance with the concessions entailed within the London Pact to Italy, was met by the hostility of the Allies and, in the aftermath of the Italian occupation of Janina in Epirus, also by the Kingdom of Greece, which entered the war on the side of the Entente in July 1917, after the pro-Allies line of action of Prime Minister Eleutherios Venizelos prevailed against the pro-German stance of King Constantine I, who abdicated in favour of his

¹⁹⁰ Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 57-58.

¹⁹¹ Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'Unione con l'Italia, 1913-1939*, 42.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 42.

son.¹⁹³ This recrimination from Italy's allies was hypocritical since France had overstepped its boundaries first and declared a French protectorate in the Albanian area under its control. On December 10, 1916, France established the Autonomous Albanian Republic of Korçë, entailing the latter, Bilishti, Kolonja, Opar and Gora in south-east Albania, clearly violating the clauses of the 1915 London Pact Treaty.¹⁹⁴

The French actions were soon met by the establishment of another protectorate over Albania on January 1917, this time by Austria-Hungary in the area under its direct control and centred in the town of Shkodër. Therefore, by the winter of 1917, three different protectorates were enforced in Albanian territory, one backed by Austria-Hungary, entailing central and northern Albania and with a capital in Shkodër. Another was supported by France and centred in the southeastern region of Korçë. Finally, one backed by Italy, extending from Vlorë to Janina in Epirus, under the protection of the Italian XVI Corpo d'Armata, and not recognised by the other Great Powers, although the most legitimate.¹⁹⁵

Although the First World War was undergoing significant changes, only a little occurred in Albania in the early autumn of 1918. Initially, the needle in the scale fluctuated in favour of the Allies in the aftermath of the United States of America's declaration of war against Germany on April 6, 1917. Then, the war seemed to favour the Central Powers following the Italian defeat at Caporetto in the autumn of 1917 and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk between Germany and Russia in March 1918, which also had the effect of dooming the fate of Romania, allied with the Entente since August 1916.¹⁹⁶ However, starting in the summer of 1918, the Allies, strengthened by American support and military engagement, managed to halt the final offensive of the German Army on the Western Front. The Central Powers, isolated and overwhelmed by stronger and better-equipped forces, slowly started retroceding.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ George, Kaloudis, "Greece And The Road To World War I: To What End?" *International Journal on World Peace* 31, no. 4 (2014): 9-47. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24543706>

¹⁹⁴ Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 168.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Schapiro, *Modern and Contemporary European History (1815-1952)*, 732-735.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 735-740.

Concerning the Albanian front, in the autumn of 1918, the Austrians started withdrawing northwards, with the Italian Army after them taking control of central and northern Albania.¹⁹⁸ In concomitance with the Italian advancement in Albania, Rome also launched an offensive in the alpine front against the Austro-Hungarian Army, which was at the edge of collapse due to internal political, economic and ethnic problems within the Empire following the declaration of independence of Czechoslovakia, Slovenia and Croatia and mutinies among the troops belonging to those areas.¹⁹⁹ The resulting Italian victory in the decisive battle of Vittorio Veneto forced the Habsburg Monarchy to surrender and sign the armistice of Villa Giusti on November 4, 1918, while Italy proceeded to occupy Trentino, Trieste and parts of Dalmazia until the city of Fiume. On November 11, also Germany signed an armistice with the Allies, ending the Great War.²⁰⁰

Therefore, only one remained by November 1918 from the three protectorates established over Albania. In this regard, the Autonomous Republic of Korçë was repealed in February 1918 following protests from Greece. However, a French military presence remained in the region until May 1920 and also in the town of Shkodër, which returned to be administered by an international garrison.²⁰¹ Then, in December 1918, the territory under Italian protection saw the creation of a new Albanian Republic, under the *de jure* leadership of the pro-Italian government of Turhan Permëti but the *de facto* administration of the Italian government, controlling almost all the territory forming part of today's Albania, and entailing what was previously under the occupation of Austria-Hungary.²⁰² The Italian protectorate over Albania, which would last until August 1920, was unrecognised by the other Great Powers, who claimed that Italy had jeopardised the 1915 London Pact when it declared the independence and unity of Albania under its protection. According to France and Great Britain, the Italian mandate exceeded the allocated region of central Albania centred in Durrës because it

¹⁹⁸ Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 170.

¹⁹⁹ Robert, John Weston Evans, "Remembering the Fall of the Habsburg Monarchy One Hundred Years on: Three Master Interpretations", *Austrian History Yearbook* 51 (2020): 269–91.

²⁰⁰ Schapiro, *Modern and Contemporary European History (1815-1952)*, 739-740.

Bernadotte, Everly Schmitt, "The First World War, 1914-1918", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 103, no. 3 (1959): 321–31. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/985472>

²⁰¹ Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 169-170.

²⁰² Ibid.

Fischer and Schmitt, *A concise history of Albania*, 161-162.

also included Albanian territories that Italy had previously agreed on partitioning with Greece, Serbia and Montenegro.²⁰³ Therefore, the Italian protectorate over Albania was not legitimised yet when the Great War ended, and the other Balkan nations and their protectors looked at Albania as the perfect ground for increasing their war spoils at the Paris Peace Conference. Most importantly, after Turhan Permëti became Prime Minister of the new Albanian Republic at the end of 1918, the Albanians were denied official representation at the Paris Peace Conference. As a consequence, even though the war was over and the Italian presence less needed, the Albanians had initially to rely on Italian protection and diplomatic support to prevent their country from being once again partitioned among its neighbours.²⁰⁴

Overall, Albania was in dire straits in the aftermath of the Great War, finding itself in a situation not different from 1913, but this time at least protected and under the aegis of the Italian Kingdom. However, Rome had other objectives than the ones of the Albanians it had sworn to protect. In this regard, the international system underwent profound changes following the Great War and the Paris Peace Conference, with new regional actors stemming from the ashes of the collapsed Habsburg Monarchy and a renewed competition concerning the Balkan and Albanian Questions. In the next part, we will see how the perception of Albanian Question was perceived differently by Italy and Albania, which considered it a closed question, and by the other Great Powers and the Balkan States, which saw it as an open one.

²⁰³ Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'Unione con l'Italia, 1913-1939*, 45-48.

²⁰⁴ Fischer and Schmitt, *A concise history of Albania*, 161-162.

Part 3. The Albanian Question in the Post-War Period (1918 – 1926)

6. Chapter V – The International and Domestic Challenges in Post-War Italy and the Ultimate Achievement of Albanian Self-Determination and Frontiers

This final part picks up the international situation stemming from the Paris Peace Conference in January 1920, marking the end of the Great War. In a period characterised by the demise of four empires, namely Austria-Hungary, Germany, Russia, and Turkey, and the advent of new regional actors in the Balkans and beyond, the Italian Kingdom, despite emerging among the winners of the Great War, had to face new overwhelming challenges from a systemic and domestic level.

This part will look at Italy suffering a mutilated victory at the hands of its former allies, who started questioning the territorial concessions entailed in the 1915 London Pact already during the Great War, and then proceeded to reduce them during the Paris Peace Conference at the expense of the Italian war spoils. This humiliation, together with widespread domestic issues within Italy, impacted the Italian political spectrum, resulting in the rise of a new authoritarian and militant Right, later known as Fascism and led by Benito Mussolini, who, together with other Italian intellectuals, employed this narrative of the mutilated victory to win support and forward their revisionist aims. Moreover, the new international system emerging from the Great War transformed Europe into a bomb set to burst, with the Balkans being once again the perfect terrain for the explosion. Indeed, although Austria-Hungary was defeated, a new regional actor, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (referred to as Yugoslavia for simplicity), took its place, backed by France, and renewed the rivalry with Italy concerning not only the Balkans but also the Adriatic Sea. In conclusion, this part will look at the post-war relationship between Italy and Albania, intertwined with the two issues mentioned above, starting with the process that led to the demise of the Italian protectorate and concluding with the Albanian final achievement of its complete independence first and territorial boundaries later. The year 1926 marked the conclusion of a process which traced its roots to the 1878 Berlin Congress, namely the Albanian Independent Cause.

6.1 Vittoria Mutilata

The defeat of the Central Powers in World War 1 and the subsequent Paris Peace Conference are notable watershed moments in the Italian history of the 20th century.

The demise of the Habsburg Monarchy and the ongoing Communist Revolution drawing away the Russians from the Balkans and Central Europe led to a vacuum of power in the region, which characterised the entire inter-war period between the First and Second World Wars. In this regard, the final demise of the 19th century-based European balance of power system initially experienced a revival by the hand of the United States and particularly by President Woodrow Wilson, who attempted to lay out the foundations of a new world order based on liberal and democratic values, on preserving peace and on a new international forum entrusted to deal with threats to peace, namely the League of Nations.²⁰⁵ However, the absurdly punitive clauses entailed by the Paris Peace Conference treaties, followed by the defeat of Woodrow Wilson in the American elections held in March 1921 against Warren G. Harding, who inaugurated a new isolationist phase for the United States, along with the rise of Fascism and Communism in Europe, led to the creation of an international system characterised by a defective balance of power. As previously mentioned, the lack of a collective security system marked the inter-war period. It resulted in the perfect ground for the surge of new hegemonies and revisionist powers within the European Continent.²⁰⁶

Concerning this vacuum of power, the demise of the Habsburg Monarchy in the autumn of 1918 ended the long-standing historical rivalry between Rome and Vienna, which had characterised Balkan politics since 1887.²⁰⁷ On this subject, the year 1918 signalled the beginning of a new proactive Italian approach in the Balkans, different from the primarily pre-war passive stance to contain Austria-Hungary and prevent the latter from expanding in Albania.²⁰⁸ Indeed, in the aftermath of the Great

²⁰⁵ Margaret, MacMillan, *Six Months That Changed the World: The Paris Peace Conference of 1919* (Maryland, Prince Frederick, MD: Recorded Books, 2003), 23-27; 28-33.

Bernadotte, Everly Schmitt, "The Peace Treaties of 1919-1920". *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 104, no. 1 (1960): 101-10. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/985606>

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

MacMillan, *Six Months That Changed the World: The Paris Peace Conference of 1919*, 23-27; 28-33.

²⁰⁷ Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912*, 240-241; 243.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 243.

War, Italy seemed to have the right means to replace the regional stabilising role previously held by Austria-Hungary, especially since it had managed to outlive the latter, sit among the winning powers at the Paris Peace Conference, and establish a protectorate over Albania, finally securing the Otranto Strait and preventing any other power from establishing a greater influence over the area.²⁰⁹ However, although Austria-Hungary was defeated and Albania neutralised, Italy's domestic and international challenges between 1918 and 1922 seemed to prevent Rome from obtaining its coveted glory.²¹⁰

In this regard, it is important to mention the Italian participation at the Paris Peace Conference held between January 1919 and January 1920, which was entrusted to deliberate about the outcomes of the Great War and build the foundations for long-term peace within the European Continent. The Paris Conference witnessed the United States and Japan acquiring a more important role worldwide, whereas the demise of the monarchies of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia and the Ottoman Empire gave birth to new nations, which altered the European structure, especially in Central Europe and the Balkans.²¹¹ At the Paris Peace Conference, the Italian delegates were led by Prime Minister Vittorio Emanuele Orlando and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Sidney Sonnino.²¹² Turning to the other representatives from other major and minor powers who fought against the Central Powers during the Great War, it is worth mentioning that they were present delegates from the newly created Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and delegates from the Kingdom of Montenegro (even though the latter had been incorporated on December 1918 into the bigger Slavic neighbouring nation)²¹³, representatives from the Kingdom of Greece and also an Italian-backed Albanian delegation led by Turhan Pasha Përmeti, which had to compete with another unrecognised and self-proclaimed delegation headed by the former inter-war Albanian

²⁰⁹ Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912*, 243.

²¹⁰ René, Albrecht-Carrié, *Italy at the Paris Peace Conference*, (Hamden, Archon Books, 1966), 66-73.

William, Brustein, "The 'Red Menace' and the Rise of Italian Fascism", *American Sociological Review* 56, no. 5 (1991): 654. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2096086>

²¹¹ MacMillan, *Six Months That Changed the World: The Paris Peace Conference of 1919*, 40-46.

²¹² Albrecht-Carrié, *Italy at the Paris Peace Conference*, 61-62.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 107-108.

exiled leader, Essad Pasha Toptani, who unsuccessfully attempted to organise a new revolt within Albania and who was later assassinated in Paris, in 1920.²¹⁴

Turning to the first international issue that Italy faced in the aftermath of the Great War, namely the Italian spoils of war. On this subject, we know that during the First World War, the Allies started blaming Rome for establishing a protectorate over Albania, which entailed more territory than what had been agreed on in the 1915 London Pact. However, it was at the Paris Conference that the concessions made to Rome within the London Pact were officially criticised and disputed by the other participants, especially by the United States, since the promises made to Italy went against the Wilsonian *Fourteen Points*, namely open diplomacy, along with self-determination concerning German-speaking Tirol, Slav-speaking Dalmatia, and Albania.²¹⁵ Furthermore, the Italian territorial gains were questioned by Great Britain and France, who accused Italy of overstepping its jurisdiction in Albania with the 1917 Gjirokastër Edict, undermining the validity of the London Pact given that the latter only entailed a protectorate over the central area centred in Durrës, with no further territorial compensation except for the city of Vlorë and the island of Sàseno.²¹⁶ Notably, the Italian expansion went on to the detriment of the territories promised to the other Balkan nations who fought alongside the Entente, primarily Yugoslavia and Greece.²¹⁷ However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, it is important to underline that France was the first country to jeopardise the validity of the accords included in the London Pact when it decided to create the Autonomous Republic of Korçë in December 1916, a decision that the other Great Powers seemed quick to forget.²¹⁸

²¹⁴ Fischer and Schmitt, *A concise history of Albania*, 161.

Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 180.

Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'Unione con l'Italia, 1913-1939*, 144; 147.

Pearson, *Albania on the 20th Century, A History (Vol I): Albania and King Zog. Independence, Republic and Monarchy 1908 – 1939*, 147.

²¹⁵ Trygve, Throntveit, "The Fable of the Fourteen Points: Woodrow Wilson and National Self-Determination", *Diplomatic History* 35, no. 3 (2011): 448-450. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24916429>
Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism, 1870-1925*, 527-536.

²¹⁶ Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 169-170.

²¹⁷ Imperiali, *1915. Patto di Londra" (17 novembre 1915 - 14 dicembre 1918)*. Accessed on May 27, 2023. <https://patrimonio.archivio.senato.it/inventario/scheda/guglielmo-imperiali/IT-SEN-057-000056/1915-patto-londra>

Monzali, *Il colonialismo nella politica estera italiana, 1878-1949, momenti e protagonisti*, 58.

²¹⁸ Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 168.

Consequently, in the face of the accusations from its allies, the Italian delegation made the historical mistake of temporarily abandoning the Peace Conference to show its outrage, only to find out that the Allies were not particularly concerned about the Italian absence. Therefore, when they returned to Paris, the Italian delegation felt humiliated, with its international position weakened and its diplomatic weight dramatically reduced.²¹⁹ Hence, Italy went out of the peace negotiations isolated and betrayed by its allies in the so-called *mutilated victory* (*vittoria mutilata*, a term coined by Gabriele D'Annunzio)²²⁰, obtaining only part of the territories and compensations that the 1915 London Pact had promised it. In this regard, Rome received Trentino, Alto Adige, Venezia Giulia, Istria, and some cities in Dalmatia (Zara), but neither Fiume nor Spalato.²²¹

This betrayal from the other Great Powers had a powerful impact on Italian public opinion. It worsened the already ongoing domestic issues that Italy was experiencing in the post-war period.²²² Indeed, countless wartime victims and almost four years of struggle were not enough of a reason for the Allies to give Italy what it rightfully deserved. This *mutilated victory* was further emphasised by the temporary attempt to seize the city of Fiume by Gabriele D'Annunzio in the summer of 1919, known as *Impresa di Fiume*, at a time when Italy was experiencing its *Red Biennium*, characterised by widespread protests and skirmishes between the Italian workforce influenced by the Bolshevik revolution and the idea of Communist Revolution, the petty Italian middle class whose only possible defence relied on nationalist and right-winged militias and the States' security forces.²²³

Overall, the experience of the Great War, the betrayal suffered at the Paris Peace Conference, the post-war widespread dissatisfaction and anger, along with the ineffective responses from the last Liberal governments led by Orlando, Nitti, Giolitti, Bonomi and Facta between 1918 and 1922, paved the way for a new hard-line nationalist and populist propaganda, which created the base for the development of the

²¹⁹ Albrecht-Carrié, *Italy at the Paris Peace Conference*, 153-158.

²²⁰ Giovanni, Sale, *Il mito della «Vittoria mutilata»*, Il Domani D'Italia, 2018. Accessed on May 29, 2023. <https://www.ildomaniditalia.eu/il-mito-della-vittoria-mutilata/>

²²¹ Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism, 1870-1925*, 509-510.

²²² Brustein, "The 'Red Menace' and the Rise of Italian Fascism", 654.

²²³ Ibid.

Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism, 1870-1925*, 536-547.

Fascist ideology within Italy, leading to the creation of the National Fascist Party on November 9, 1921, and finally Benito Mussolini's rise to power in 1922.²²⁴

In this sense, when Benito Mussolini took power in the aftermath of the successful March on Rome of October 1922, the new Fascist government inaugurated a more assertive foreign policy. Indeed, throughout the 1920s, particularly between 1925 and 1926, when the Fascist Dictatorship was established, Benito Mussolini pursued a successful foreign agenda, ultimately restoring the Great Power status of the Italian Kingdom.²²⁵ In this regard, the dissolution of the German, Ottoman, Russian, and Austro-Hungarian Empires made it easier for Italy to fill the vacuum of power within the European system, allowing Rome to increase its bargaining power when dealing with the new nations stemming from the dissolution of the earlier mentioned monarchies. Notably, the demise of Italy's traditional rival, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, paved the way for Italy to replace the Habsburg Monarchy as the element of stability in Central Europe and the Balkans. In contrast, the rise of Yugoslavia posed a new threat to the Italian role in the Balkans and particularly Albania, transforming Belgrade into the new rival of Rome concerning the Albanian and Adriatic Questions.²²⁶

²²⁴ Paolo, Nello, "L'Antefatto (1914-1922)," in *Storia dell'Italia fascista, 1922-1943*, (Bologna, Il Mulino, 2020), 11-40.

Luciano, Monzali, *Il Sogno dell'Egemonia. L'Italia, la Questione Jugoslava e l'Europa Centrale (1918-1941)*, (Firenze, Casa Editrice Le Lettere, 2010), 17-18.

²²⁵ Nello, "La Dittatura (1925-1927)," in *Storia dell'Italia fascista, 1922-1943*, 99-133.

²²⁶ Ibid.

6.2 The Adriatic Question

The second international issue stemming from the Great War and the Paris Peace Conference concerned an element previously mentioned, namely the replacement of the rivalry between Rome and Vienna with the rivalry between Rome and Belgrade. Indeed, the demise of the Habsburg Monarchy was intertwined with the creation of a new unitary Yugoslavian State, initially known as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, centred on the capital of Belgrade and entailing former Habsburg Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo and today's North Macedonia.²²⁷ As already anticipated during the previous chapter, this new entity benefitted from the support of France, who, like Italy, aimed at profiting from the power vacuum in Central Europe and the Balkans to increase its international position.²²⁸ Thus, as one rivalry ended, a new one was formed.

If the Paris Peace Conference was a dark moment in Italian history, the same did not apply to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Indeed, the latter joined the Peace Conference as a newly established nation whose delegation was initially unrecognised by the other Great Powers and whose claims went against other winning powers, such as Italy and, to a lesser extent, Albania. However, Belgrade benefitted from the support of France, and, at the same time, it met the favour of American President Wilson, who supported the self-determination of the South Slavs and their merging into one unitary state.²²⁹ Thus, when the Paris Peace Conference was concluded, the Slavic Kingdom obtained recognition for its sovereignty and independence, as well as for most of its territorial claims in the Balkans. In this regard, the remaining territorial issues concerned the question of the eastern Adriatic, namely Fiume, Dalmatia, Capo d'Istria and Trieste, and the Yugoslav claims towards northern Albania, focusing on Durrës and Shkodër, in line with the historic Serbian need to obtain a harbour on the Adriatic Sea.²³⁰

²²⁷ Monzali, *Il Sogno dell'Egemonia. L'Italia, la Questione Jugoslava e l'Europa Centrale (1918-1941)*, 13-15.

²²⁸ Joel Blatt, "France and Italy at the Paris Peace Conference". *The International History Review* 8, no. 1 (1986): 28-31. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40105561>

²²⁹ Monzali, *Il Sogno dell'Egemonia. L'Italia, la Questione Jugoslava e l'Europa Centrale (1918-1941)*, 13.

²³⁰ Massimo, Bucarelli, *Mussolini, la questione adriatica e il fallimento dell'interventismo democratico*. (Milano e Roma, Nuova Rivista Storica, 2011), 33-41.

Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'Unione con l'Italia, 1913-1939*, 53-56; 65; 74.

Concerning these territorial issues, the event that allowed Italy and Yugoslavia to address the problem of their respective borders was the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye of September 1919, which set the boundaries of the new Republic of Austria, acknowledging the demise of the Habsburg Monarchy and enabling Italy to access its new northern provinces and Yugoslavia to act with more freedom. As a consequence, the issue of the eastern Adriatic between Rome and Belgrade was solved by the Treaty of Rapallo of November 1920, which resulted in, first, the mutual recognition of the respective borders and sovereignties; and, second, the partition of the former Habsburg territory between Italy and Yugoslavia. In this regard, Trieste, Gorizia, Istria, part of Carniola, Zara, and several islands were given to Rome. In contrast, the city of Fiume, whose city centre was inhabited predominantly by Italians, and the hinterland by Slavs, became a Free City.²³¹ Moreover, the agreement between Rome and Belgrade concerning Fiume forced Gabriele D'Annunzio to cede the town to the Italian Army on January 1921, ending its governorate, known as *Reggenza del Carnaro*.²³²

The Treaty of Rapallo signalled the conclusion of the Italian Risorgimento and the Italian Unification since Italy had finally taken control of the remaining *Terre Irridenti* and had ultimately achieved a predominant role in the Adriatic Sea. Moreover, the 1920 Treaty of Rapallo marked the last international success of Italian Liberal rule in the period leading to the rise of power of Mussolini. Indeed, the Italian Liberal government at the time of the Rapallo Treaty, led by Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti, achieved significant success on the international stage, in line with the government's objective to improve the Italian position on the systemic stage, since the domestic one was experiencing social tensions and economic issues. However, as we have seen in the last part, Italian public opinion and an important part of the political establishment did not manage to overcome the mutilated victory experienced during

²³¹ Jesse, Siddall Reeves, "The Treaty of Rapallo." *The American Journal of International Law* 15, no. 2 (1921): 252–55. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2187685>

²³² Maurizio, Carvigno, *D'Annunzio, l'Impresa di Fiume e la Reggenza del Carnaro*. Passaggi Lenti, 2018. Accessed on May 30, 2023. <https://www.passaggilenti.com/d-annunzio-impresa-di-fiume-carnaro/>

Monzali, *Il Sogno dell'Egemonia. L'Italia, la Questione Jugoslava e l'Europa Centrale (1918-1941)*, 27-33.

Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism, 1870-1925*, 570-577.

the Paris Peace Conference.²³³ Consequently, this feeling of loss and humiliation was a fertile ground for Mussolini to plant the first seeds of his foreign policy when he assumed power by the end of October 1922.²³⁴ In line with what was mentioned previously, in the aftermath of the nomination of Benito Mussolini as head of the Italian government in the autumn of 1922, and particularly following the establishment of the Fascist Dictatorship in 1925, the Italian foreign policy of the 1920s was characterised by a new and more assertive Italian approach to the Balkans and Central Europe. In this regard, the foreign agenda of the Fascist regime was characterised by elements such as imperial expansionism, warmongering and revisionism. Whilst during the 1930s, it reached the apex of its strength, during the 1920s, the new Fascist regime kept its revisionist tones low, instead prioritising the improvement of the international prestige and image of Fascism and Benito Mussolini himself. Indeed, after obtaining its political mandate, Benito Mussolini assumed the role of both Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the almost totality of officers within the Italian diplomatic sector opted to keep their positions and continue serving under the new leadership throughout the 1920s.²³⁵

Overall, the situation in the Balkan Peninsula during the 1920s saw Rome rivalling Belgrade, and the latter's godfather, Paris, concerning the Adriatic Sea, Albania, and the Danubian region. In this regard, it is worth noting that the 1920s rivalry between France and Italy was intertwined with their respective support for Yugoslavia and Albania, which brought the two countries to opposite sides by the end of the decade. In this sense, not even the 1924 Treaty of Rome, which marked the annexation of the town of Fiume to Italy, and of its hinterland to Yugoslavia, managed to put an end to the growing tensions between Rome and Paris, with the latter's longstanding support to Belgrade eventually pushing Italy to seek allies among the more revisionist powers of Europe.²³⁶

²³³ Monzali, *Il Sogno dell'Egemonia. L'Italia, la Questione Jugoslava e l'Europa Centrale (1918-1941)*, 27-33.

Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism, 1870-1925*, 577-585.

²³⁴ Nello, "Il Che fare? Del fascismo (1922-1925)," in *Storia dell'Italia fascista, 1922-1943*, 51-81.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ William, Shorrock, "France, Italy, and the Eastern Mediterranean in the 1920s." *The International History Review* 8, no. 1 (1986): 70-82. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40105564>

6.3 The Albanian Achievement of Complete Independence and the Ultimate Recognition of its Territorial Boundaries

The third issue affecting the Italian Kingdom's foreign policy in the aftermath of the Great War, and the most important for this thesis, traces its roots to the Italian occupation of Albania between 1917 and 1920.

Indeed, as we know, Italy established a protectorate over Albania on the ground of the June 1917 Gjirokastër Edict. Moreover, at the Paris Peace Conference, Rome sponsored the Albanian delegation led by Prime Minister Permëti.²³⁷ On this subject, the Albanian delegation in Paris advocated, in front of the Great Powers reunited, for reobtaining the borders of 1913, as stated by the Florence Protocol of that year.²³⁸ However, the issue with that request was that the borders of 1913 were conferred to the Principality of Albania, under the rule of Prince Wilhelm zu Wied, and not to the current Albanian regime established in December 1918 and backed by the Italian government. Therefore, although the question of Albanian sovereignty and borders was closed for the Italians and Albanians, it was not the case for the other state parties at the Paris Peace Conference. Once again, Albania became a pawn in the broader rivalry between Rome, Paris, Belgrade, Athens and the other Great Powers, with no certainty about its future and survival, and obliged to rely on Italy to advance its requests to the other Great Powers. Thus, this is why the Albanians opted to maintain their protectorate under Italy, fearing a likely partition of Albania had the latter become sovereign and thinking that the Italian Kingdom would have likely refused to cede a region under its control, reducing its already thinner war spoils.²³⁹

Unfortunately for the Albanians, the Italian government had different plans concerning Albania, primarily focused on keeping Vlorë and backing Albanian integrity to legitimise and strengthen its protectorate. An objective which seemed under the Italian reach when, at the Paris Peace Conference, President Wilson and the other Great Powers, who initially questioned the legitimacy of the Italian protectorate, eventually acknowledged the necessity for Albania to be guided by a foreign power, with Italy being the best candidate. After reaching these conclusions, the state parties

²³⁷ Fischer and Schmitt, *A concise history of Albania*, 161.

²³⁸ Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'Unione con l'Italia, 1913-1939*, 45-48; 62-68.

²³⁹ Ibid.

began negotiating the recognition of the Italian role in Albania in exchange for some concessions made to Greece and Yugoslavia.²⁴⁰

In this regard, since we are already aware of the Yugoslav claim towards Albanian territory, it is time to mention those of the Kingdom of Greece, primarily directed towards the Albanian region of Northern Epirus, which was attributed to Albania by the 1914 Corfu Protocol, but as we know, never implemented due to the domestic issues that characterised the Albanian Principality during the summer of 1914, and the outbreak of the Great War in the same period.²⁴¹ During the Great War, the Greek government attempted several times to establish a sphere of interest in Northern Epirus, profiting from the chaos of the war. Still, eventually, its efforts failed when Greek forces were commanded to withdraw from the area during the last stage of the war. However, once the war was concluded and the Paris Peace Conference began, the Greek government finally had its chance to bring up the question in the aftermath of the May 1919 Miller-Di Cellere Plan, when the Italian protectorate over Albania and its occupation of Vlorë seemed to be finally recognised by the other state parties, under the condition that Italy allowed Yugoslavia to invest in Albania and that it accepted to negotiate the southern borders of Albania with Greece.²⁴² Therefore, counting on the support of the other Great Powers, Athens initiated talks with Rome and Belgrade about the partition of Albanian territory.²⁴³

These negotiations led to agreements between the governments of Italy, Greece and Yugoslavia. Starting with the question of the southern Albanian borders, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Greece and Italy signed the secret July 1919 Tittoni-Venizelos agreement, where Italy agreed to cede a neutralised and demilitarised Northern Epirus (including Gjirokastër and Korçë) to Greece in exchange for the latter's support for its political mandate in Albania.²⁴⁴ Moving to the northern Albanian borders: by January 1920, Italy accepted the demands of France and Great Britain concerning the Yugoslav claims, approving the concession of an autonomous northern

²⁴⁰ Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'Unione con l'Italia, 1913-1939*, 73-76.

²⁴¹ Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 160-161.

²⁴² Albrecht-Carrié, *Italy at the Paris Peace Conference*, 171-183.

²⁴³ Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'Unione con l'Italia, 1913-1939*, 57-61. 78.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 77-78.

Fischer and Schmitt, *A concise history of Albania*, 163-164.

Albania to Belgrade.²⁴⁵ In exchange for these concessions, Rome received Vlorë, the island of Sàseno, and control over Albania's central and southern areas under the form of a mandate endorsed by the newly created League of Nations to enhance the legitimacy of the Italian rule over the area.²⁴⁶

Thus, by January 1920, it seemed that the Albanian Question had finally reached a compromise among the state parties involved, leaving all of them satisfied but Albania. However, unexpected help came to the rescue of Albania, with President Wilson refusing to accept this further partition of Albania and forcing the state parties to reopen the negotiations and attempt to find a new solution in line with the remarks of the American President. In this regard, the new solution was found to give the responsibility of dealing with the question of the Albanian borders to an International Commission for Greek and Albanian Affairs, chaired by Jules Cambon and operating under the Conference of Ambassadors of the Principal Allied and Associated Powers, which replaced the Paris Peace Conference and continued its work after January 1920.²⁴⁷ However, although the question of the official Albanian borders was not set until 1926, another unexpected event was about to undermine the plans of the state parties interested in obtaining parts of the Albanian territory.

On this subject, when the Greek press leaked the document of the Tittoni-Venizelos Agreement at the turn of January and February 1920, the Albanians felt deeply disappointed and betrayed by the Italian plans for their country.²⁴⁸ Consequently, between January and February, they decided to convene a National Assembly in the city of Lushnjë, where they issued what is often referred to as the Second Albanian Declaration of Independence.²⁴⁹ There, the Albanian nationalists gathered in Lushnjë, influenced by the future ruler and King of Albania Ahmet Zogu, elected Sulejman Delvina as the new Prime Minister, putting an end to the pro-Italian puppet government of Turhan Permëti.²⁵⁰ Moreover, they decided to transfer the

²⁴⁵ Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'Unione con l'Italia, 1913-1939*, 86.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 93-97; 73.

²⁴⁸ Pearson, *Albania on the 20th Century, A History (Vol I): Albania and King Zog. Independence, Republic and Monarchy 1908 – 1939*, 137.

Ibid., 137-140.

²⁴⁹ Fischer and Schmitt, *A concise history of Albania*, 165.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

capital from Durrës to the more defensible and strategic city of Tirana, declared their opposition to any partition of Albanian territory publicly and opened the elections for a new national parliament in Tirana.²⁵¹ Most importantly, Albanian nationalists started a rebellion against the Italian forces occupying Vlorë, which led to the outbreak of the famous Vlorë War between June and August 1920, marking a turning point in the relationship between Rome and Tirana.²⁵² Indeed, the Albanian uprising of the summer of 1920 proved to be successful for the Albanians, pushing the Italian Army deployed in Albania to seek shelter in the town of Vlorë, where the local garrison fought in dire straits since the Italian government was unable to deliver reinforcements due to a series of mutiny among the Italian regiments dispatched to Albania. Namely in early June 1920 in Trieste and in late June in Ancona, where the soldiers refused to embark and clashed against the Italian military police and right-wing groups.²⁵³

Therefore, the Italian government, led by Giovanni Giolitti and weakened by widespread domestic unrest related to the overall period of the *Red Biennium* and protests among the military, eventually resorted to withdrawing from the partitioning agreements with the Albanian neighbours, using the leak of the Tittoni-Venizelos agreement as a clause.²⁵⁴ This led, on August 1920, to the signing of the Tirana Treaty, where Italy agreed to end its protectorate, evacuate all its troops and maintain only a symbolic garrison on the island of Sàseno, the town of Shkodër and to the temporary concession to occupy and fortify Cape Linguetta and Cape Treporti, both dominating Vlorë bay and in line with the Italian paramount objective to secure both sides of the Otranto Strait. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that France had already removed its troops from Korçë in June 1920, ending the local Autonomous Republic.²⁵⁵

The defeat in Albania forced the Italian government to rethink its role in the region, eventually pushing the last liberal governments, and Mussolini later, to return to the Italian foreign policy of 1913 concerning the Albanian Question. Remarkably, the signing of the Tirana Agreement of August 1920 and the end of the Italian protectorate in Albania forced the fifth and last Giolitti government to reverse its

²⁵¹ Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'Unione con l'Italia, 1913-1939*, 95.

²⁵² Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 179-180.

²⁵³ Pearson, *Albania on the 20th Century, A History (Vol I): Albania and King Zog. Independence, Republic and Monarchy 1908 – 1939*, 148.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 151.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

foreign policy and commit itself to supporting the Albanian independence cause internationally and bilaterally, enshrining the survival of the newly independent Albanian nation face to the claims of its neighbours.²⁵⁶ On this subject, the Albanian international position on the systemic level owes its freedom and international recognition to its own success against the Italians and its acceptance within the League of Nations soon after its independence from Italy in 1920. On the other hand, the Albanians owe to the new Italian foreign agenda in the aftermath of the 1920 Tirana Treaty the preservation and obtainment of the borders established by the 1913 London Treaty. Indeed, as previously mentioned, following the conclusion of the Paris Peace Conference, Great Britain, France and Italy gathered at the Conference of Ambassadors of the Principal Allied and Associated Powers tasked to deal with the unsolved issues of the Paris Peace Conference. One of these ongoing issues concerned the territorial boundaries of the State of Albania, with the International Commission for Greek and Albanian Affairs entrusting an *ad hoc* Commission of Experts with the task of delimitating the new borders of the Albanian polity. This Commission gathered for the first time in July 1921. It only achieved the demarcation of the official frontiers of Albania five years later, initially with the Florence Protocol of January 1925 and finally with the decision of the Conference of Ambassadors on July 1926 to declare the Albanian borders to be the same established by the Florence Protocol of 1913.²⁵⁷

Overall, it is essential to conclude that the new Italian foreign policy towards Albania inaugurated by the last Giolitti government was kept and developed by Benito Mussolini during the 1920s and, to a certain extent, until 1939, when Italy eventually annexed Albania.²⁵⁸ During that time, Rome maintained its commitment to supporting Albanian integrity and sovereignty, together with preventing any other power from expanding in the area. As evidence, in August 1923, when the Italian expert sent by the Conference of Ambassadors to delimitate the Greek-Albanian border, General Tellini and four of his companions were murdered on Greek soil near the town of Janina, Mussolini successfully used the diplomatic and military weight of Italy to defend the sovereignty of the Albanian State and prevent the Corfù Incident from

²⁵⁶ Pollo, *The history of Albania: from its origin to the present day*, 180-184.

Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'Unione con l'Italia, 1913-1939*, 145-166; 167-168.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 145-166; 167-168.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 187-189, 191-192.

jeopardising the territorial integrity of Albania and allowing Greece to interfere in the matter.²⁵⁹ Moreover, under the leadership of Mussolini and especially following the rise to power of Ahmet Zogu in Albania in 1925, Rome and Tirana started developing a solid relationship. In this regard, in 1925, Italy backed the creation of the National Bank of Albania, while in 1926, Italy signed a quinquennial Treaty of Friendship with Albania, reaffirming its role as guarantor of the latter's independence and territorial integrity and committing itself to defend the regime led by at that time President Ahmet Zogu. The following year, after the signing of the French-Yugoslavian Act of 1927, Rome and Tirana sealed a twenty-year-long alliance. Finally, in 1928, Mussolini supported the crowning of Ahmet Zogu as King of Albania, strengthening the political and economic relations between the two countries.²⁶⁰ This process was part of a broader project of Mussolini concerning Central and Eastern Europe, which aimed to create a system of alliance formed, on one side, by Italy, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, and on another, by Italy, Greece and Turkey, intending to isolate Yugoslavia, and characterised by anti-French and anti-German stances. In this sense, the issues between Rome and Berlin concerned the German attempts to interfere in Austria and South Tirol, which met the hostility of Mussolini, who was the main guarantor of Austrian sovereignty and integrity during the inter-war period. Turning to France, the issues were related to North Africa, specifically Tunisia, and the too-friendly relations between the government of Paris and Belgrade, whose objective often went against the Italian and Albanian interests in the Balkans and the Adriatic Sea.²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ Shorrock, "France, Italy, and the Eastern Mediterranean in the 1920s," 70–82.

²⁶⁰ Nello, "La dittatura (1925-1972)," in *Storia dell'Italia fascista, 1922-1934*, 99-133.
Giannini, *L'Albania dall'indipendenza all'Unione con l'Italia, 1913-1939*, 171-177; 179-181; 183-186.

Nello, "Il regime prende forma (1927-1935), in *Storia dell'Italia fascista, 1922-1934*, 141-177.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 149-151.

7. Conclusions

Between 1882 and 1926, Italy's actions exerted an essential role in Albania's development, emergence, survival, and self-determination. This period featured Italy's multifaceted foreign policy agenda and its crucial impact on the Albanian Question, instrumental in promoting the establishment of Albania as an independent state. In this regard, several factors affected the Italian choice to focus its international efforts on Albania and the Balkans: Among them are geopolitical and economic interests, with Italy viewing the Balkans, particularly Albania, as a crucial location for projecting its sphere of influence due to its proximity to the Adriatic Sea and the Mediterranean, not to mention the Otranto Strait. Control of this area would have allowed Italy access to crucial trade routes and increased its influence in the region. In addition, there were security concerns, with Rome perceiving the southwestern Balkans, particularly Albania, as a buffer zone that could safeguard the Italian position in the Adriatic Sea from potential threats, notably from Austria-Hungary first and Yugoslavia subsequently. A friendly or allied state in the Balkans would have enhanced Italy's security and limited the influence of rival powers in the region.

Regarding the rivalry with Austria-Hungary, Italy had longstanding territorial disputes and geopolitical competition, particularly over control of the *Terre Iridenti*, the Adriatic Sea, and the Balkans. Thus, supporting Albanian independence and gaining regional influence countered Austrian influence and expansion southwards. To that end, Italy formed alliances with other powers, such as the Triple Alliance, to facilitate Italy's ability to pursue its goals in the region and beyond and to prevent the Habsburg Monarchy from profiting from Italy's "comparative disadvantage" in the Balkans. Finally, nationalism and Rome's Great Power ambitions influenced the Italian focus on the Balkans and Albania. In this sense, Italy, as a rising power, aspired to be recognised as a Great Power on the international stage. Therefore, in the aftermath of the halt to the Italian colonial adventure in Africa, expanding its influence in the Balkans, including supporting the creation of an independent Albania, would have allowed Italy to assert itself as a major player in European affairs.

Overall, the Italian decision to focus its foreign policy in Albania and the Balkans was driven by a combination of geopolitical, security, economic, nationalistic, and strategic factors. By asserting its influence in the region, Italy aimed to secure its interests, counter rival powers, and eventually establish itself as a prominent player in European politics. Turning to the long-standing Italian support for Albanian independence and self-determination, Italy's efforts can be viewed in several key aspects:

First, Italy and its active Italo-Albanian community provided diplomatic support to Albanian nationalist movements and leaders. In this sense, Italian officials recognised the importance of Albanian autonomy and independence in countering Austrian and Serbian ambitions in the region.

Second, Rome used its diplomatic and military weight to protect Albanian interests during the turbulent period of territorial division in the Balkans following the First and Second Balkan Wars in 1912 and 1913. Thus, when the 1913 Treaty of London threatened to partition Albanian-inhabited territories among neighbouring states, Italy, along with Austria-Hungary, advocated for the preservation of Albania's territorial integrity and sought to prevent the complete disintegration of Albanian lands. This diplomatic pressure played a significant role in ensuring the survival of Albania as a distinct entity.

Third, the Italian involvement in Albania extended beyond support for independence. During the First World War, Italy occupied Albanian territory, initially the southern regions, from 1917 to 1920. This occupation aimed to secure Italian strategic interests in the area and establish a degree of control over Albanian affairs. The Italian declaration of a protectorate over Albania in 1917 further enhanced its influence on this subject.

Finally, Italy also contributed to Albania's economic and infrastructural development, particularly during the Great War and its aftermath. Indeed, Italian companies invested in various sectors, such as agriculture, mining, transportation, and banking, which helped stimulate economic growth and modernisation in the country. Moreover, Italy's presence in Albania led to the construction of roads, railways, and other infrastructure, which improved connectivity and facilitated trade.

It is important to note that altruistic motives did not solely drive Italy's involvement in the creation of Albania. Particularly during the Great War and its immediate aftermath, Italy pursued its strategic interests. It sought to establish a friendly, pro-Italian government in Albania to further its influence in the region. Nonetheless, Rome's support and assistance played a pivotal role in the emergence of Albania as an independent state, shaping its early development and establishing a foundation for its sovereignty and territorial boundaries.

In this regard, the Italian role in backing the birth of Albania can be considered significant. Still, it is important to acknowledge that Italy and Austria-Hungary played key roles in establishing Albania as an independent state. Whereas Italy's support was instrumental, particularly during the period leading up to and immediately following the Great War, Habsburg's involvement in the Albanian Question cannot be overlooked. As a matter of fact, the Habsburg interest in Albania stemmed from its desire to prevent the expansion of Serbian and Italian influence in the region and maintain a strategic foothold in the Balkans. Thus, Vienna supported the Albanian nationalist movement and recognised the importance of an independent Albania as a buffer state against Serbian territorial ambitions and the Italian objective to convert the Adriatic Sea into an Italian lake.

Furthermore, in 1913, the Great Powers, including Austria-Hungary, convened in London to discuss the fate of Albania. In this regard, the Treaty of London recognised Albania as an independent state, albeit with limited territorial boundaries. However, while the treaty fell short of granting Albania its desired territories, Italy, together with Austria-Hungary, pushed for the inclusion of a significant portion of Albanian-inhabited lands within the newly established state.

During the First World War, Italy and Austria-Hungary occupied parts of Albanian territory, establishing a protectorate in their respective areas: Italy occupied the southern regions, while Austria-Hungary controlled the north. Although their motivations differed, both powers sought to assert their influence over Albania and ensure their interests were protected. Therefore, it isn't easy to quantify and compare the exact importance of the Italian versus the Austro-Hungarian role in backing the creation of Albania. Both powers had distinct motivations and contributed in their own ways.

Italy's support was crucial during the period surrounding the First World War, particularly in terms of diplomatic backing, military assistance, and occupation of Albanian territory. On the other hand, Austria-Hungary played a significant role in advocating for the recognition of an independent Albania and supporting the Albanian nationalist cause. Ultimately, the combined efforts of various external powers, including Italy and Austria-Hungary, along with the resilience and aspirations of the Albanian people themselves, led to the establishment of Albania as an independent state.

Albania achieved its independence and territorial boundaries through diplomatic negotiations, armed resistance, and international recognition. The process stood out by complex political dynamics and the participation of numerous actors. In this regard, the development of Albanian nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries laid the foundations for the quest for independence. Albanian intellectuals, activists, and nationalist organisations, predominantly abroad, were instrumental in promoting Albanian identity, culture, and self-rule aspirations. As the Ottoman Empire weakened, Albanians took advantage of the opportunity to demand autonomy and independence.

The Albanian Declaration of Independence was issued on November 28, 1912, in Vlorë, officially establishing an independent Albanian State. This declaration came in the aftermath of the First Balkan War, which saw Albania in the crossfire of territorial disputes between neighbouring powers. Albania's territorial boundaries, on the other hand, were far from settled. The Treaty of London, which sought to redraw the map of the Balkans in 1913, posed significant challenges to Albanian sovereignty. At that point, the partitioning of Albanian-populated territories among Serbia, Montenegro, Greece, and Austria-Hungary threatened the newly established country's unity and integrity. As a result, Albanians, both inside and outside the country, vehemently opposed these territorial divisions and launched armed resistance against the occupying forces. The Albanian population rallied behind figures such as Ismail Qemali and Essad Pasha Toptani.

The signing of the Treaty of London in 1913 recognised the existence of Albania, and the Florence Protocol of 1913 set the boundaries of the Albanian State, but not in the form that the first nationalists had envisaged. In this regard, the brief duration of the Principality of Prince Wilhelm zu Wied, the domestic troubles within Albania at that time, and the outbreak of the Great War in the summer of 1914 postponed the struggle for Albania's territorial boundaries to the inter-war period, when the final borders of Albania were achieved only by 1926.

Albania faced further challenges during the First World War when it became a battleground for various powers. Italy, as mentioned previously, occupied Albania from 1917 to 1920, establishing a protectorate over the country on the ground of the 1917 Gjirokastër Edict. However, the Albanian resistance persisted. In 1920, an uprising led by Albanian nationalists successfully drove out Italian forces from Albania, marking a significant turning point in the struggle for Albanian independence and the preservation of its territorial boundaries with the Statute of Lushnjë, which can be perceived as a Second Albanian Declaration of Independence. In this regard, the international community, witnessing the resilience of the Albanian people and recognising their desire for self-determination, played a crucial role in strengthening Albania's independence in the aftermath of the Great War. Indeed, the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 allowed Albania to assert its claims and negotiate its borders. Although the final settlement did not fully satisfy Albanian aspirations, it laid the foundation for recognising the Albanian nation.

Following the Italian withdrawal from Albania in July 1920, the Tirana Treaty was signed between Italy and Albania, affirming Albania's independence and sovereignty. Subsequently, international recognition of Albania's statehood grew, with Albania joining the League of Nations in 1920 and Italy, under the last Liberal governments first and Mussolini later, committing itself once again to back and guarantee the integrity and survival of the Albanian State.

In summary, Albania achieved its independence and territorial boundaries through a combination of nationalist movements, armed resistance, diplomatic negotiations, and international recognition. The Albanian people's determination to protect their sovereignty, coupled with the strategic interests of major powers like Italy and Austria-Hungary, ultimately contributed to establishing an independent Albanian state and preserving its territorial integrity.

The Italian successful foreign policy in Albania can be attributed to several factors:

First, Italy's geographic proximity to the Balkans and Albania provided a natural advantage. It allowed for easier access and faster communication, facilitating trade and cultural exchanges. Indeed, being a neighbouring country, Italy better understood the region's dynamics, cultural nuances, and geopolitical intricacies.

Second, Italy, especially its Italo-Albanian community, had historical connections and cultural ties with certain regions of Albania, such as Venice's historical influence in coastal areas. These connections gave Italy a foundation for building relationships and establishing influence in the region.

Third, Rome actively engaged in diplomatic efforts to achieve its political and economic objectives in Albania. It cultivated relationships with local leaders, supported nationalist movements, and played a role in mediating conflicts. Additionally, Italy's diplomatic initiatives helped position itself as an essential player in the region and gain influence, especially after the demise of the Habsburg Monarchy in the aftermath of the First World War.

Fourth, the Italian support for nationalist movements in the Balkans, including Albanian national movements, helped garner goodwill and support from local populations. In this regard, Italy's perceived alignment with the aspirations of the local people contributed to its success in establishing influence and achieving its objectives.

Fifth, Italy's actions in the Balkans and Albania were also influenced by the timing of events and the broader geopolitical context. The decline of the Ottoman Empire and the competing interests of major powers, such as Austria-Hungary and Russia, created opportunities for Italy to assert its influence. On this subject, Rome's rivalry with Vienna and its desire to challenge its regional dominance gave impetus to the Italian actions in the Balkans. Following the Great War, the vacuum of power left by the demise of the Habsburg Monarchy propelled Italy to exert a more significant influence in the area, strengthen its ties with Albania, and counterbalance the Yugoslav and French objectives.

Finally, Italy demonstrated flexibility and adaptability in its approach to the Balkans and Albania. It adjusted its policies and alliances based on changing circumstances and shifting partnerships, allowing it to navigate complex political situations and maximise its influence.

In this regard, it is worth introducing an interesting perspective based on applying the Ricardian Economic Theory to Italy's foreign policy in the Balkans, particularly Albania, between 1882 and 1926. In this sense, whereas the Ricardian Theory primarily focuses on international trade and “comparative advantage” in the context of economic specialisation, it can be extended to analyse a country's foreign policy decisions. In the case of Italy, it can be argued that the concept of “comparative advantage” played a role in shaping its diplomatic approach in the Balkans and Albania. As a neighbouring country, Italy possessed certain advantages and knowledge of the region that could be leveraged to pursue its interests effectively. Mainly, Italy's “comparative advantage” in the area could have stemmed from factors such as geographical proximity, cultural ties, historical connections, and linguistic similarities. These factors could have provided Italy with a deeper understanding of the local dynamics, enabling it to navigate the region's complexities more adeptly than other nations.

Indeed, while other countries like Austria-Hungary and Russia may have had certain “absolute advantages”, such as military strength or geopolitical influence, Italy's “comparative advantage” allowed it to establish closer ties and exert a unique power in the region. Italy's historical connections with Albania and the Eastern Adriatic and its perceived cultural affinity with the former positioned it as a potential supporter and ally during the Albanian National Movement. However, it is essential to note that foreign policy is a complex and multifaceted endeavour, influenced by numerous political, economic, and strategic factors beyond “comparative advantage” alone. “Absolute advantages”, such as military capabilities or geopolitical interests, also play a significant role in shaping a nation's foreign policy decisions. Therefore, while the Ricardian Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the potential benefits of leveraging “comparative advantage”, it should be considered as one aspect among many in assessing Italy's foreign policy approach in the Balkans and Albania. As Italy faced opposition from rival powers, encountered local resistance, and had to navigate competing interests while pursuing its foreign agenda in the Balkans, the combination of geographic proximity, historical connections, diplomatic engagement, nationalist sentiments, timing, and adaptability contributed to Italy's relative success in the Balkans and its role in the emergence and development of Albania, concluding the latter's quest for independence that lasted from 1878 to 1926.

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9. Appendix

9.1 Chronology

1876	Reichstadt Agreement
03.03.1878	Treaty of Santo Stefano
13.06.-13.07-1878	Congress of Berlin
	Austria-Hungary established a protectorate over Bosnia and Herzegovina
01.07.1878	Foundation of the League of Prizren
13.07.1878	Treaty of Berlin
1879	Austro-German Dual Alliance
28.04.1881-23.12.1881	French conquest of Tunisia
20.05.1882	Triple Alliance – Italy, Germany and Austria-Hungary
1887	First Renewal of the Triple Alliance with modifications to its Treaty
	Austro-Italian Treaty
	Mediterranean Agreements
29.07.1887-06.02.1891	First Government of Francesco Crispi
1891	Second renewal of the Triple Alliance with alterations to its Treaty
15.05.1892-15.12.1893	First Government of Giovanni Giolitti
1894	Franco-Russian Alliance
15.12.1893-10.03.1896	Second Government of Francesco Crispi
01.03.1896	Italian military defeat at Adua
01.10.1895-03.10.1895	Congress of Corigliano Calabro
1896	Renewal of the Triple Alliance without alterations to its Treaty
1897	Cretan Affair
20.02.1897-21.02.1897	Congress of Lungro
14.12.1900-16.12.1900	Italo-French Agreement

12.1900	Austro-Italian Agreement
01.1899-05.1900	League of Peja
15.02.1901-03.11.1903	First Government of Giuseppe Zanardelli
	First Mandate as Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs for Giulio Prinetti
1902	Third renewal of the Triple Alliance with alterations to its Treaty
07.1902	Barrère-Prinetti Agreement
1903	Mürzsteg Agreement
1904	Entente Cordiale between the French Republic and the British Empire
03.11.1903-12.03.1905	Second Government of Giovanni Giolitti
03.11.1903-24.12.1905	First Mandate as Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs of Tommaso Tittoni
1905	Tangiers Crisis
24.12.1905-08.02.1906	First Mandate as Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Marquis of San Giuliano
16.01.1906-07.04.1906	Algeciras Conference
08.02.1906-29.05.1906	First Government of Sidney Sonnino
	First Mandate as Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs of Francesco Guicciardini
29.05.1906-11.12.1909	Third Government of Giovanni Giolitti
	Second Mandate as Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs of Tommaso Tittoni
1907	Anglo-Russian Entente
	The signing of the Triple Entente between the French Republic, Russian Empire and British Empire. Valid until 1917.
1908	Renewal of the Triple Alliance without alterations to its Treaty
	Annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Austro-Hungarian Empire
	Bosnian Crisis
07.1908	Young Turks Revolution

24.10.1909	Racconigi Bargain between the Kingdom of Italy and the Russian Empire
11.12.1909-31.03.1910	Second Mandate as Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs of Francesco Guicciardini
1910	First Albanian Revolt
31.03.1910-16.10.1914	Second Mandate as Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Marquis of San Giuliano
05.1911-09.1911	Agadir Crisis
1911	Malësori uprising
30.03.1911-21.03.1914	Fourth Government of Giovanni Giolitti
09.1911-10.1912	Italo-Turkish War
1912	Fourth renewal of the Triple Alliance with alterations to its Treaty
01.1912-08.1912	Second Albanian Revolt
08.10.1912-30.05.1913	First Balkan War
28.11.1912	Statute of Vlorë
04.12.1912	Creation of the first Albanian Government with Ismail Qemali as its first President
17.12.1912-15.07.1914	Conference of the Ambassadors in London
23.01.1913	Raid on the Sublime Porte
27.02.1913-06.03.1913	Albanian Congress of Trieste
30.05.1913	Treaty of London
06.1913-08.1913	Second Balkan War
29.07.1913	Protocol over the organic Statute of Albania
10.08.1913	Treaty of Bucharest
29.09.1913	Treaty of Constantinople
16.10.1913-07.03.1914	Essad Pasha Toptani created the Republic of Central Albania
17.12.1913	Florence Protocol
28.02.1914-02.03.1914	Northern Epirote Declaration of Independence
07.03.1914	Establishment of the Principality of Albania led by Prince Wilhelm zu Wied

21.03.1914-18.06.1916	First Government of Antonio Salandra
10.04.1914	Approbation of the Statute of Albania
17.05.1914	Corfu Protocol
05.1914	Essad Pasha Toptani is exiled to Italy
28.07.1914	Beginning of the First World War: Italy opted for Neutrality
03.09.1914	Prince Whilhem zu Wied fled the Principality of Albania
10.1914	Essad Pasha Toptani returned to Albania
27.10.1914	The Greek Army invaded and occupied Northern Epirus
29.10.1914	The Ottoman Empire entered the First World War on the side of the Central Powers
31.10.1914	Italy occupied the Sàseno island
05.11.1914-23.06.1919	First Mandate as Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs for Sydney Sonnino
26.12.1914	Italy occupied Vlorë
26.04.1915	London Pact
24.05.1915	Italy entered the First World War on the side of the Entente
29.04.1915	The Principality of Serbia launched its offensive in Albania
11.06.1915-15.06.1915	The Principality of Montenegro invaded Albania and occupied Shkodër
07.10.1915	Bulgaria entered the First World War on the side of the Central Powers
25.11.1915	The Serbian Army is defeated following the joint offensives of the Bulgarian and the Austro-Hungarian armies
01.12.1915	The first Italian forces disembarked in Vlorë
01.1916	Austria-Hungary defeated and occupied Montenegro
	The Austro-Hungarian Army, together with the Bulgarian Army, started an offensive in Albania

02.1916	The Austro-Hungarian Army occupied Durres, forcing the Italian Army and Essad Pasha Toptani to evacuate the area
04.1916	Greece declared the annexation of Northern Epirus
18.06.1916-29.10.1917	First Government of Paolo Boselli
08.1916	Essad Pasha Toptani founded the Albanian Government in Exile in Thessaloniki
08.1916	Allied forces entered Northern Epirus and proceeded with its occupation Italy occupied Gjirokastër
10.12.1916	Creation of the French-back Autonomous Province of Korçë
04.04.1917	The United States entered the First World War on the side of the Allies
03.06.1917	Edict of Gjirokastër and the creation of the Italian protectorate over Albania
06.1917	The Italian Army entered Greece and occupied Janina
27.06.1917	Greek King Constantine I abdicated in favour of his son Alexander I
30.06.1917	The Kingdom of Greece entered the First World War on the side of the Allies
24.10.1917-12.11.1917	Italian defeat in Caporetto
30.10.1917-23.06.1918	First Government of Vittorio Emanuele Orlando
03.03.1918	Treaty of Brest-Litovsk
15.05.1918-17.05.1918	Franco-Italian launched a successful offensive on centre-north Albania
06.07.1918	The Allies launched a new offensive against the Austro-Hungarian positions in the centre of Albania
24.07.1918	Counteroffensive of the Austro-Hungarian Army
14.09.1918	The Allies launched the Vardar Offensive, which led to the evacuation of the Austro-

	Hungarian Army from central and northern Albania, and the collapse of the Bulgarian Army
14.10.1918	The Italian Army entered Durres
24.10-1918-04.11.1918	Battle of Vittorio Veneto between the Italian and Austro-Hungarian Army: Italian victory
04.11.1918	Armistizio di Villa Giusti
11.11.1918	End of the First World War
01.12.1918	Creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes under King Peter I
	The Principality of Montenegro is annexed by the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes
25.12.1918-18.12.1918	Congress of Durres: Creation of an unrecognised provisional Albanian government under Turhan Pasha Permëti
18.01.1919-21.01.1920	Conference of Ambassadors in Paris
05.1919	Miller-Macchia di Cellere Project
23.06.1919-15.06.1920	First Government of Francesco Saverio Nitti
28.06.1919-25.11.1919	Third Mandate as Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs of Tommaso Tittoni
28.06.1919	Versailles Treaty
29.07.1919	Tittoni-Venizelos Agreement
10.09.1919	Saint-Germain Treaty
27.11.1919	Treaty of Neuilly
09.12.1919	The League of Nations give the Mandate over Albania to the Kingdom of Italy
28.01.1920-31.01.1920	Congress of Lushnjë: Creation of a new Albanian government under Sulejman Delvina and moving of the capital from Durres to Tirana
01.1920	Establishment of the Conference of Ambassadors of the Principal Allied and Associated Powers
	Creation of the League of Nations
04.06.1920	Treaty of Trianon

04.06.1920-02.08.1920	Vlorë War
15.06.1920	Evacuation of French troops from Albania and final demise of the Autonomous Province of Korçë
15.06.1919-04.07.1921	Fifth Government of Giovanni Giolitti
25.06.1920-28.06.1920	Rivolta dei Bersaglieri ad Ancona
02.08.1920	Tirana Agreement
	Italy withdrew its protectorate over Albania
09.1920	Italian troops left Albania, except for Sàseno.
10.08.1920	Treaty of Sèvres
12.11.1920	Treaty of Rapallo between the Italian Kingdom and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes
12.1920	Albania is accepted in the League of Nations
21.02.1921-12.03.1921-03.1922	London Conference (Concerning Turkey)
17.06.1921-20.11.1921	Independence of the Mirditës Republic
07.1921	First meeting of the <i>ad hoc</i> Commission of Experts entrusted to define the Albanian borders
28.10.1922	Marcia su Roma
30.10.1922	King Vittorio Emmanuele III entrusted Mussolini to form a new government
31.10.1922	Official beginning of the Dictatorship of Benito Mussolini in Italy
24.07.1923	Treaty of Lausanne
27.08.1923	Corfù Crisis / Eccidio di Giannina
01.1924	Treaty of Rome between Italy and Yugoslavia
31.01.1925	Proclamation of the Republic of Albania under President Ahmet Zogu
02.09.1925	Creation of the National Bank of Albania
01.12.1925	Treaty of Locarno
27.01.1926	Florence Protocol

30.07.1926	Official establishment of the Albanian territorial boundaries
08.1926	Italo-Spanish Declaration of Friendship
16.09.1926	Italo-Romanian Treaty
27.11.1926	First Treaty of Tirana between Italy and Albania
05.05.1927	Hungarian-Italian Treaty on Friendship, Mediation, and Arbitration
11.11.1927	Declaration of Franco-Yugoslav Friendship
22.11.1927	Second Treaty of Tirana between Italy and Albania
06.1928	Italo-Turkish Declaration of Friendship
09.1928	Italo-Greek Declaration of Friendship
01.09.1928	President Zogu is crowned King of Albania as Zog I
	Signing of the Italo-Albanian Alliance
03.10.1929	Creation of Yugoslavia under King Alexander the I

9.2 Maps

Ottoman Europe: “Rumelia”



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²⁶² Turkey in Europe. *Encyclopædia Britannica*. May 31, 2023. Accessed March 26, 2023.
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Balkan-Wars>

Territorial Claims of the Albanian Insurgents Militating in the League of Prizren: “Greater Albania”



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²⁶³ Map of Independent Albania. Wikipedia. July 30, 2020. Accessed on December 10, 2022. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greater_Albania#/media/File:Map_of_Independent_Albania.png

Territorial boundaries of the Principality of Albania, according to the 1913 London Treaty:



264

²⁶⁴ Albania: Karte des Fürstentums Albanien. Antiquariat Dasa Pahor. Accessed on January 20, 2023. <https://pahor.de/product/albania-karte-des-furstentums-albanien/>

Distribution of the Albanian Dialects:



265

²⁶⁵ Map of the Ghëg and Tosk-speaking areas in Southern Europe. *Wikipedia*. February 5, 2021. Accessed on April 7, 2023.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Albanian_language_map_en.svg

The Kingdom of Italy Before World War 1 (Excluding the Colonies)



266

²⁶⁶ Cartina del Regno d'Italia nel 1871 con la suddivisione in provincie. *Wikipedia*. October 29, 2016. Accessed on June 2, 2023. https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quarta_guerra_d%27indipendenza_italiana

Italian Claimed Territories in the Period Going From the Third Independence War and the Fourth (First World War)

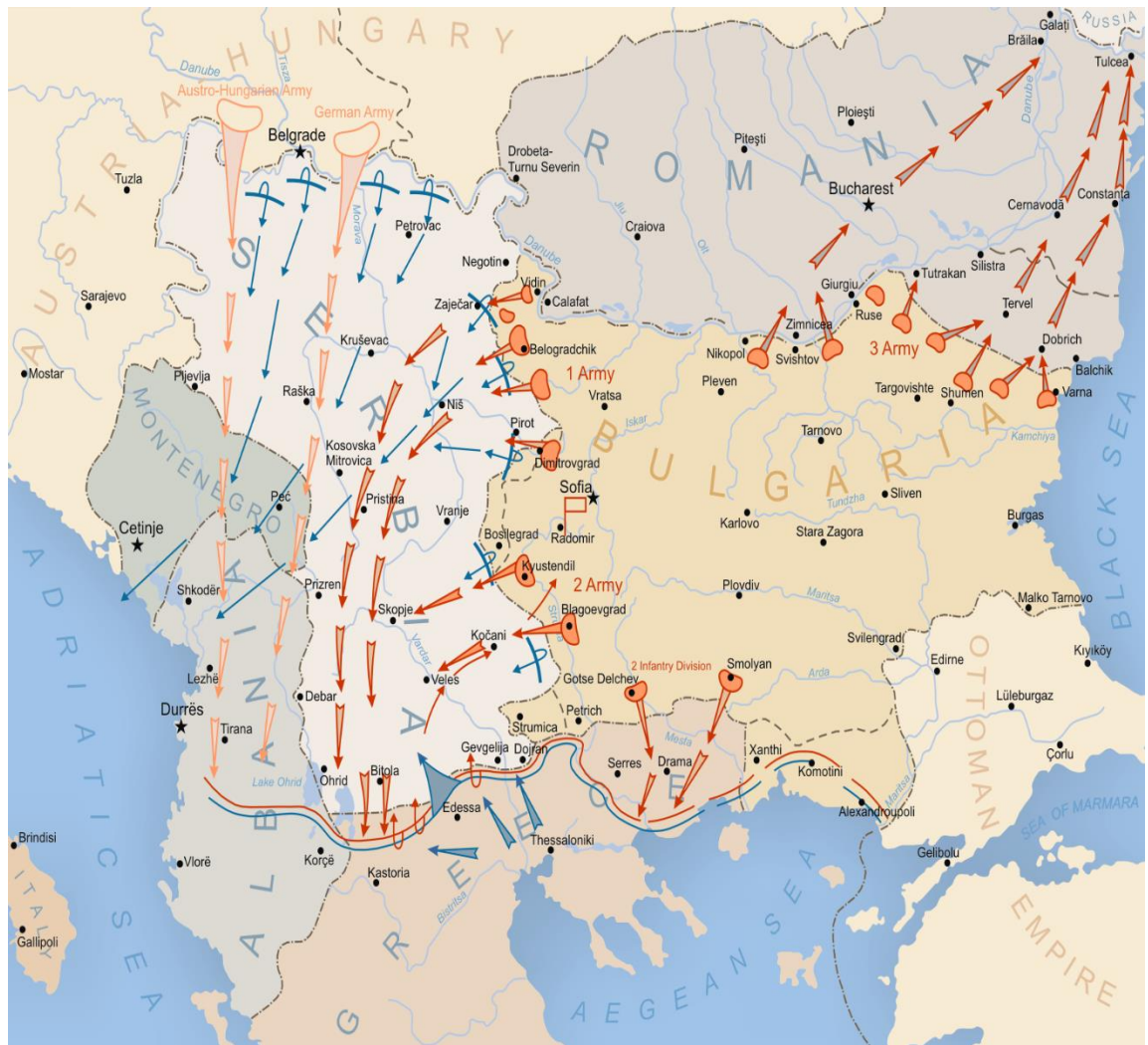


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²⁶⁷ United Italy: What if Italy got what they wanted after WW1? *Reddit*. 2020. Accessed on February 7, 2023.

https://www.reddit.com/r/italy/comments/ijx4wu/mappa_dellitalia_avesse_ricevuto_i_territori/

The Balkan Theatre During World War One:



268

²⁶⁸ Bulgaria during World War I. Wikipedia. April 11, 2011. Accessed on May 3, 2023.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balkans_theatre#/media/File:Bulgaria_during_World_War_I.png

Europe After the Paris Peace Conference:



269

²⁶⁹ Political Division of Europe in 1918-1922. *Edmaps.com*. Accessed on November 29, 2023. https://www.edmaps.com/html/europe_1918_1922_excelsior.html

The Kingdom of Italy After the First World War (1924, Excluding Colonies):



270

²⁷⁰ Cartina del Regno d'Italia nel 1924 con le provincie. *Wikipedia*. June 22, 2011. Accessed on March 8, 2023.
https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quarta_guerra_d%27indipendenza_italiana#/media/File:Kingdom_of_Italy_1924_map.svg

Current Albanian Territorial Boundaries:



271

²⁷¹ Political Map of Albania. *One World – Nations Online*. Accessed on May 27, 2023.

https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/albania_map2.htm

Vita

After successfully obtaining his Bachelor's in International and Diplomatic Sciences at the University of Genova, Filippo Laurini chose to pursue his academic career at the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna. There, he enrolled in the Master of Advanced International Studies, which enabled him to improve his interests and knowledge of International Relations and Contemporary History.

By speaking fluently Italian, English, Spanish, and French, Filippo Laurini aims to develop his post-graduate career within the field of International Relations and Diplomacy. In this regard, his interest in the Spanish-speaking world pushes him to try to find his way in Spain or Latin America. However, this thesis focusing on the Western Balkans, particularly Albania, together with a recent study trip in the region, awoke an unexpected interest in Balkan affairs. Let's see if Filippo Laurini will be as successful as Italy was in his thesis research when trying to achieve his objectives and seek his way on the eastern side of the Adriatic Sea.

Pledge of Honesty

*On my honour as a student of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, I submit this work
in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized
assistance on it.*

- Filippo Laurini

Filippo Laurini