

ALBANIANS BETWEEN THE NATIONAL AND THE RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

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Professional Paper

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Abstract

It is a known fact that European nations are created under certain historical circumstances. Some as a result of centralized state systems' developments, while others as a result of cultural developments. Albanians, as other Balkan nations, were created within the system of the Ottoman Empire, based on their background, common language, and relying on the glorious historical past.

Albanians belonged to the Christian religion, but after the Ottoman conquest in the 15th century, the new religion of the East - Islam comes with the ruler. Over time, the majority of Albanians embraced the new religion. Thus, within the Ottoman system, Albanians were divided regarding the religious aspect, remaining the only European nation with the religion of the West (Christianity) and the East (Islam).

In the circumstances of religious separation and the influence that various religions exerted on the cultural development, the Albanian nation was developed under the influence of Western culture as well as of the Eastern one.

In the period of national movements for liberation from the Ottoman Empire, the religious compatibility of the Balkan Christians played an extraordinary role in the liberation fight and the creation of national states. During this period, for the Albanians, on the contrary, the religious division exerted a negative influence, weakening the domestic political power. The Balkan Anti-Albanian circles, like the Ottoman Empire itself, exploited the Albanians' religious division.

Despite the fact that Albanians consider themselves a European nation, as a result of the Islamic religion influence, various dilemmas continue to exist.

Keywords: Nation, Albanians, Christianity, Islam, Balkans.

It is known that in the history of European civilization the concept of the *nation* plays a decisive role in the development of the socio-political processes, with greater influence than the political and religious ideologies. In the basis of this concept lays the origin of the "type", where the spoken language is the determining element.

The concept of the *nation* was born in certain historical circumstances, namely at the time of the collapse of the Universalism of the Christian Church. Early on, the medieval West was fragmented into feudal principals, but at this time the leaders of the Catholic Church have been trying to unify different ethnicities on the principle of religious universalism.²⁴ Based on this concept was created *the Holy Roman Empire*, an "imaginary" empire whose emperor failed to control its own territory and much less to centralize it. The emperors of the Habsburg dynasty were the last who aimed at the Universal Catholic Monarchy.²⁵

Unlike the Holy Roman Empire, the small peripheral kingdoms, such as France, England, and Spain, girded their ranks – strengthened their central royal power and created powerful nation-state systems. From this period, the two different political systems, the imperial and the nation-states, stood facing each other.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, reforms within the Catholic Church and religious wars in Europe eventually fragmented the Catholic Church, and thus Europe as a whole.

The reformation of the Catholic Church put an end to Universalism, cutting Europe off from the Papacy "dream" of a Universal Empire. Meanwhile, the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) defined the strategy of creating a system of European states, which would take shape in later centuries. In the following period of European

²⁴ Universalizmi – koncept mesjetar fetar, sipas të cilit “Bota është një pasqyrim qiellor. Ashtu si në qiell që sundon një Zot, ashtu dhe në Botë do të sundojë një Perandor dhe një Papë në Kishën Universale”.

²⁵Потемкин, В.П. *Историја дипломатије* (прва свеска), Београд, 1949, 193-195.

history, imperial (multinational) systems gradually collapsed, a process lasted until the end of the twentieth century.

Among the first nation states were France and England.

Subsequently were created the following nation states: Spain, Portugal, Sweden, Denmark, Ireland, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, Greece, Germany and Italy.

With the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, were created nation states such as: Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro and Albania; while after the dissolution of Austria-Hungary were created Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Austria.

The nation-state creation process continued until the end of the twentieth century. Following the collapse of the communist system, new nation states were created: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldavia, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Kosovo.

In the period of the French Revolution, the principle of "*sovereignty derives from the nation*" lied in its foundation, which implied that the nation-state was placed over the king and the church. On these principles, the Jacobins created the *national army*, seeking the supreme sacrifice in the name of the nation.

The French Revolution ignited national movements, a process that ended in the late twentieth century, with the creation of nation states of the former Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union.

It is to be noted that in Western Europe, nationalism was the main driver of transition from absolutist society to bourgeois and industrial society. So, nationalism was closely related to technological developments and the industrial revolution.²⁶ It should be noted that the national conscience in the West did not rise above historical "memory". Thus, for ex. the French or English "forgot" that they actually belonged to ethnic groups of different backgrounds. Meanwhile, in the peoples of the Ottoman and Habsburg Empire, enthusiastically "remembered" their historical roots. Or rather, *in the East people "remembered" what had never happened, while in the West they "forgot" what had happened.*²⁷

As far as our region is concerned, where a number of ethnicities claim to be nations, when it comes to the historical developments (similarities and divergences), one of the most distinguished historians of Balkan issues, Ferdinand Schevill, says "The Balkans constitutes the despair of every philosopher who strives to achieve order, as no trace of human effort to attain peace and morality has ever been observed." ²⁸ Indeed, the Balkans failed to find a fortunate solution in the past, and unfortunately they can not find it to this day. According to Schevill, this is due to the blind "patriotism" and the exaggerated pride that characterizes these peoples.

Indeed, the Balkans represents a *Small Europe*, so like Europe, which is a diversified continent from the ethno-cultural and linguistic point of view, with a history of more than two millennia, the Balkans also represents a diversified region from the ethno- cultural and linguistic viewpoint, with a history even more ancient than that of the rest of Europe. During the two millennia, Europe is characterized by its ambition for domination and of its peoples for domination, not only within the continent but also beyond it. Likewise the Balkan rulers and its peoples are characterized by such ambition (excluding periods when the Balkan peoples were enslaved by the greater Empires). Since Middle Age, Europe is characterized by the myth of *the nation-state*, while this myth continues to keep hostage the minds of the Balkan people to this day.

However, despite the similarities, there is an essential distinction between Europe and the Balkans (excluding antiquity). From the Middle Ages and onwards, the entire evolutionary process of social, political and economic changes in the Balkans is delayed, with the Balkans remaining in the "tail" of European developments and as such they become the prey of the new processes that have taken place in the past and that may still be the case today. It is not a coincidence the saying "*Balkans – a powder keg*"²⁹ which has its own meaning, as history is a witness that many great wars have been fomented and have started precisely in the Balkans to spread out across Europe.

To analyze which processes stall in comparison to Europe, just a short answer would not suffice, because they are multidimensional, but briefly we will mention some of them:

- *The dissolution of feudal relations and the emergence of capitalist relations in the West happens much earlier than in the Balkans;*

²⁶ Altermatt, Urs, *Etnonacionalizmi në Evrop*, "Phoenix", 2002, 44.

²⁷ Po aty, 57.

²⁸ Schevill, Ferdinand, *Ballkani historia dhe qytetërimi*, Tiranë, 2002, 144.

²⁹ Mullaj, Abaz, *Historia e Ballkanit, shek. XIX-1918*, Tiranë, 2008, 185.

- *The nation-state in the West has been created much earlier than in the Balkans;*
- *Parliamentary democracy in the West has developed much earlier than in the Balkans;*
- *The industrial revolution in the West happened much earlier than in the Balkans;*

Almost the whole process of social-political and economic development in Europe has been developed earlier than in the Balkans. However, the essential question arises: can the Balkans be blamed for everything? The answer is no, because the Balkans in the 15th century, when the West was moving towards progressive developments, at this time the Balkans' historical development stopped due to falling under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, which changed the course of development for the Balkan peoples as a whole.

In the mid-14th century, a new element - the Ottomans, penetrates the Balkans, who will further deepen the so complex contradictions between the Balkan peoples. Although the Ottomans will remain foreign to the Christian Balkans, they will aggravate even more the conflict between the *Balkanians*.³⁰

The Ottomans occupied the Balkans systematically, according to a well-elaborated plan, which was conducted in two phases: in the first phase the peoples and the Balkan countries were put under their vassal control. During this phase, the Ottomans systematically integrated the local feudal lords into their feudal structure. This is the period when local vassal feudalists were obliged to give their sons to the Sultan court where they would undergo education in the Ottoman system, and then the same ones would replace their fathers, in different regions they would inherit. In the second phase, the Ottomans passed to full invasion of the Balkan regions, which were previously vassal, installing their feudal-military regime. In fact, in the second phase takes place the process of classical invasion, in which case the administrative-military apparatus is placed.³¹

During the Ottoman invasion, the Balkan peoples made strong resistance to the new invaders. Investigating the great danger, perhaps for the first and last time in history, the *Balkanians* created a great alliance to detain the Ottoman invasion. In this alliance all *Balkanians* joined: Serbs, Albanians, Bulgarians, Bosnians, Hungarians, Vlachs ...³² The decisive battle took place on June 28, 1389, known as the Battle of Kosovo. During the battle, Sultan Murat I is killed, but in spite of this, victory would belong to the Ottomans.

The battle of Kosovo represents the crucial historical moment for the fate of the Balkan peoples, because from this period the Balkans not only lost their freedom, but they eventually disengaged from the rest of Europe for the next 500 years.

During the fifteenth century, the last phase of the *Balkanians* resistance was developed. At this time, the Albanians and Hungarians were the bearers of resistance against the Ottomans.

In this crucial period for the Balkans, four prominent historical personalities have been mentioned fighting each other: Janos Hunyadi and Gjergj Kastrioti - Skënderbeu, against two famous Sultans: Murat II and Mehmet II.³³ The Albanian and Hungarian resistance was the last attempt by the Balkans' people to change Europe's historical destiny.

Meanwhile, the Ottoman state was not only consolidated but also strengthened to the extent that the historic turning point for the *Balkanians* was impossible. This is the time when the last remains of Byzantium – Constantinople, which was invaded by the Ottomans on 29 May, 1453³⁴, disappeared.

With the invasion of the Balkan Peninsula, the peoples of this European region entered the system of the Ottoman Empire, which was distinguished by much from the system of European countries. However, the Balkans, which was completely populated by Christians, even after the occupation continued to consider the Sultan as a foreign tyrant, so even though the *Balkanians* fell under the Ottoman rule, most of them never integrated into the Ottoman Empire system. Thus, the Ottoman rule could not solve the centuries-old antagonism of the Balkans, i.e. the contradictions it inherited from the Byzantine period. On the other hand, the Ottoman system was divided into many communities, each of which continued to live according to its own rules and this division deepened even further by the isolated and divided character of the Balkans.

The Ottoman rulers in the Balkans brought a model of administration distinct from the European one, which was created by a Turkish and Arab-Iranian legacy. The interaction of these two models lasted for about five centuries and gave the peninsula a specificity, known as "Balkanian".³⁵

³⁰Po aty, 144.

³¹ Thëngjilli, Petrika, *Historia e Perandorisë Osmane*, Tiranë, 1997, 20-21.

³² Maltezi, Luan, *Beteja e Fushë – Kosovës dhe shqiptarët 1389*, Tiranë, 1999, 17.

³³ Thëngjilli, *Historia*,..., 22.

³⁴ Norwich, John Julius, *Bizanti*, Tiranë, 2005, 350.

During the 18th century, when the ideas of the Enlightenment and the Social Revolution were spread in Europe, nothing new took place in the Ottoman Empire. The French Revolution (1789) exerted tremendous influence on the enslaved Balkan peoples, although its influence was reflected in varying degrees, according to the geographical position, social structure, and the level of cultural development of each nation. At this time, Western Europe's enlightenment ideas would be supported by the subjugated Balkan peoples who exploited the weakening of the Ottoman Empire to start wars for national liberation and independence. Movements for national liberation included all Balkan peoples.

Thus, the 19th century is the period of the liberation movements of the Balkan peoples. The Greeks were the first to win national independence in 1830, while other autonomies, such as Serbia, Montenegro and Romania, were recognized as independent states at the Berlin Congress (1878), and finally Bulgaria and Albania were recognized as independent states at the beginning of the twentieth century, respectively in 1908 and 1912.³⁶

The Great Powers tried to accord their interests to the aspirations of the small Balkan states, and thus to expand the sphere of their influence. But the political elites of the Balkan peoples, seeking the support of any great power for selfish interests, forgot their mutual co-operation and thus became the instruments of the Great Powers.³⁷ This way of action, characterized not by cooperation but by hatred, will leave fatal consequences for the future of *Balkanians*.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a part of the Balkans still lied under the Ottoman rule, but great pressure was exerted on this territory by the small Balkan states which had been formed previously. Under such pressure social processes developed, which left serious consequences that characterized the whole of the twentieth century.

Two of the Great Powers, who were interested in expanding their sphere of interest, were: Russia and Austria-Hungary. Russia played the orchestration role of the *Balkan Alliance*, Austria-Hungary, on the other hand, is considered as the main supporter of the Albanian cause. So, on the ruins of an empire (the Ottoman Empire), which had governed for five centuries with the peoples and the Balkan countries, a new hegemony, the Slav-Greek hegemony, prepared to establish itself, behind which stood Russia.

The Independence of Albania was recognized in the flames of the First Balkan War. Meanwhile, from the partition of the spoils of the First Balkan War, the Bulgarians were unhappy, as they sought the area from Stara Planina to Ohrid Lake. On the other hand, Serbs hoping to take over Albanian lands, with the creation of the Albanian state, were also disappointed and sought compensation in Macedonia. And finally, the Bulgarians and Greeks were fighting for the city of Thessaloniki. So the previous "allies" began to quarrel among themselves. This caused the Second Balkan War, which exploded on June 30, 1913, when the Bulgarian army attacked Serbian and Greek military troops. But Bulgaria, at this time, was isolated from its former allies. This situation was also exploited by Turkey, which restored Edrene. Bulgaria sought truce on July 30, but by this time it had already lost many territories that it had previously acquired.

The first two decades of the twentieth century are characterized by fierce controversy between the Great Powers themselves, which were also reflected on the decisions taken against the Balkan peoples. They were forced to accept a settlement without their will.

At the end of the First World War, apart from the Greeks, Bulgarians, Romanians and half of Albanians, others were forced to settle, creating a new "*experimental*" state, such as Yugoslavia.

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia, known as the *Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes*, was created at the end of the First World War by the winning powers. It was an unsuccessful political "*experiment*" of Great Britain and France. By the time Yugoslavia was created, it was surrounded by the Balkan nation-states, such as Albania, Greece, Bulgaria and Romania. In the territory of Yugoslavia, apart from Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, lived many other ethnic groups (Muslims-Bosniaks, Montenegrins, Macedonians), as well as a large part of the peoples detached from Balkan *nation-states*: Albanians, Hungarians, Bulgarians, Romanians, etc. In such circumstances, Yugoslavia, in which Serbs dominated, could not be a stable state.

In fact, Yugoslavia was a mini-empire in which were included peoples who had lived in various imperial systems before, such as the Austro-Hungarian Empire or the Ottoman Empire.

³⁵ Castellan, Georges, *Histori e Ballkanit*, Tiranë, 1996, 122.

³⁶ Jelavich, Charles & Barbara, *Themelimi i shteteve kombëtare të Ballkanit 1804-1920*, Tiranë, 2004, 70.

³⁷ Mullai, *Historia...*, 46, 53, 125, 147 dhe 253.

The end of World War I was an ideal historical opportunity for the winning Great Powers - to resolve inter-ethnic disputes in the Balkans, according to the principle proposed by the US President Woodrow Wilson - the self-determination of peoples. I call this an ideal opportunity, because the two great powers, which had competed for expansion of their influence in the Balkans, Russia and Austria-Hungary no longer existed. During the time of the Versailles Conference and the creation of Yugoslavia as a state (1919), Russia struggled with the Soviet Revolution and did not participate in the establishment of the European order, while Austria-Hungary was shattered as a state. However, the winning powers, France and Great Britain did not express readiness to reach lasting solutions in the Balkans.

With the creation of Yugoslavia, France and Great Britain did not chose the option of solution of inter-ethnic antagonisms in the Balkans, but that of "drowsiness", covering the contradictions that exploded with all their energy during World War II, as well as in the period of the dissolution of the Federal Yugoslavia (1989/91).

Great Powers and Albanians

In the beginning of the twentieth century, when sensational events took place in the Albanian arena, regarding the creation of Albania's autonomy, in regard to relations between the Great Powers, in particular, the Franco-German relations went towards a great confrontation. France and the French were never comforted with the loss of Alsace and Lorraine. The Franco-German rivalry, which takes on the dimensions of a continental confrontation, would directly affect the unjust resolution of the Albanian cause.

Among the open issues in the troubled Balkan region, which has been dragged throughout the 20th century, is the Albanian issue. The roots of this problem with a European character should be sought mainly in the conflictual relations between France and Germany.

One hundred years ago, that is in 1912, in the year of the general uprising, the Albanian people could not count on the support of France, which because of its macro-politics in the international relations sided with Russia, which was the main supporter of the Slavic Balkan status.

The only supporters of the Albanian cause, Austro-Hungary and Italy, belonged to the Central Powers Alliance. So, with or without the will of Albanians, they were lined up with the Central Powers' sphere of interest. In unfavorable international circumstances, the Albanian people and Albania are thrown into the market to satisfy the appetites of the Balkan Slavic-Orthodox states, which had the protection of Tsarist Russia and its ally, France.

The unjust solution of the Albanian issue, from the Albanian League of Prizren to the London Conference (1913), is directly the result of the Franco-German rivalry, the countries that created the great alliances, as well as the branches of those alliances.

In these very complicated international European circumstances, Albanians remained uninvolved in the alliance system, becoming a prey of the small Balkan states and their supporters in international decision centers.

The Albanian national issue, in the period of its resolution, relied mainly on Austria. But this great power not only lost its former splendor, but it could no longer play any decisive role in the international arena because it was itself a fragile power that was endangered by the concept of nation-state (Prussia led the nationalist German flag and Russia led the interests of the Balkans' nation-states, ZR), as well as by the liberal concepts of the XIX century that spread to Europe.³⁸

The proclamation of the independence of the Albanian state in 1912 was preceded by two international crises, which had direct links to the Franco-German relations: the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (1908) and the Moroccan crisis. These international crises exacerbated international relations to such an extent that it can be claimed that the world war was inevitable, namely it was a matter of time when it would explode. These crises happened, precisely on the eve of the Albanian National Movement; so at the time when Albania's autonomy was approaching, the Franco-German relations were at the highest point of aggression.

In fact, the world war would not begin immediately, it would be delayed for some time. Precisely, at the time when Albanians should have won their autonomy within the Ottoman Empire, the Franco-German controversies were on the verge of explosion. This can be noticed in the announcement of the French President Raymond Poincaré to the Russian ambassador about the developments in the Balkans: "*If Russia goes to war,*

³⁸Kissinger, Henry, *Diplomacia*, Tiranë, 1999, 85.

so will France, because we know that in this issue Germany stands behind Austria".³⁹ Meanwhile, the independent Albania became a necessity for Austro-Hungary, in order to cutoff Serbia's road to the Adriatic.⁴⁰

The Balkan Alliance enabled Serbia to own non-Serbian territories, Macedonia and Kosovo, but its goal was to gain access to the Adriatic via the Albanian territory. The Serbian intentions were in contradiction with the Austro-Hungarian plans which strongly opposed the growth of Serbia. It was also in the interest of Austria-Hungary to pursue a persistent policy for an independent Albania, which would exclude Serbia from accessing the Adriatic.⁴¹ So, independent Albania as much as it was essential to Austro-Hungarian politics, just as much it was fatal to Serbia's dream of entering the Adriatic.

However, it should be noted that the general public in Europe and America was misinformed by the pan-slavic propaganda. Not knowing the history and the efforts of Albanians for a national state, the public gave very wrong estimates for Albania's creation as an independent state. Thus, for instance, the American author Jacob Gould Schurman, in his work "*The Balkans Wars 1912/13*" among other things states: "*The future of Albania is filled with insecurities. The state, after all, was not created for Albanians, who were unable to administer and maintain it. The state was created for the interests of Austria-Hungary and Italy. And it seems these powers will be shaping its future as well*"⁴²

According to Schurman, Albania was the product of Austro-Hungary and Italy. Obviously, Schurman is ignorant of the Albanian nation's attempt for an independent *nation-state* and he is equally influenced by the pan-Slavic propaganda.

On the verge of World War I, when the relations between Austro-Hungary and Serbia were exacerbated, France, as Russia's devout ally, helped openly the latter on the Balkan issues. On this occasion, the Russian diplomat Sazonov warned Austria that: "*Serbia has a very warm friend in the Russian people, he told the Austrian ambassador, and Russia has an ally, France.*"⁴³

After the First World War, in the Balkans was formed a state of southern Slavs, formed by Serbia and the southern parts of the former Austro-Hungary. The new state was more like a creature of an *accident* and *rush*, which oftentimes represent desperate solutions.⁴⁴

At the peace conference in Paris, which began with work on 18 January 1919, France was guided by the idea of defense against Germany. According to her, Serbia and enlarged Romania, and Czechoslovakia and Poland, would provide such a counterweight that Germany would never have the courage to attack France again, and furthermore it would be much better for a strong Serbia to keep Italy in place.⁴⁵ So, Yugoslavia as a state was created at the end of World War I, with the Treaty of Versailles, with France's consent in the first place.

Serbia as an ally of the Entente Powers who triumphed in World War I, received as a reward large territorial areas, which once belonged to Austria-Hungary. Before the Balkan Wars, Serbia stretched in a small territory between the Sava River, the Danube River and the Drin River. The Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 allowed Serbia to expand south, conquering Kosovo and today's Macedonia. The defeat of Germany and Austria-Hungary in World War I enabled Serbia's territorial expansion, to the north of the Danube River and across the Drin River, to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia. So, before the Balkan Wars and the First World War, Serbia did not extend to Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Vojvodina. Serbia's alliance with the triumphant powers and the Anglo-French-Russian tendencies to weaken their opponents, Germany and Austria-Hungary, enabled Serbia to expand its territories into non-Serb areas. In these spaces, the Entente Powers created the new state, the Serbo-Croat-Slovene Kingdom or as was later called the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. In reality, the SCS Kingdom was a territorial expansion of Serbia, as a result of the bargaining of the Great Powers of the Entente. Most of the SCS's geographic areas had a very small number of Serbs, so due to this, the newly Serb dominated regime, led by their king, tried to assimilate the non-Serb territories through the process of colonization and displacement.⁴⁶

³⁹Po aty, 199.

⁴⁰ Cabanes, Pierre, *Historia e Adriatikut*, Tiranë, 2005, 446.

⁴¹ Schurman, Gould Jacob, *Luftërat Ballkanike 1912-1913*, Tiranë, 2006, 70.

⁴²Po aty, 102.

⁴³Rich, Norman, *Diplomacia e fuqive të mëdha 1814-1914*, Tiranë, 2006, 446.

⁴⁴Macmillan, Margaret *Paris 1919*, Tiranë, 2006, 142.

⁴⁵Po aty, 154.

⁴⁶ "Problemi i pakicave në Jugosllavinë e re", nga referati i dr. Vaso Çubrilloviqit i paraqitur para udhëheqjes

When in 1941, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was attacked by the Fascist Powers, it capitulated very fast because nobody wished to defend it from the fascist attack. The Yugoslav communists, during the Second World War, took over the liberation of Yugoslavia from fascism and pledged that the "*New Yugoslavia*" would correct the previous mistakes on the principle of "*self-determination*" of the peoples. Socialist Yugoslavia corrected some errors in the benefit of Slavic peoples, but did not fix and resolve the issue of non-Slavic peoples. The Yugoslav communists, despite the conceptual platform, denied the principle of self-determination and national equality proclaimed during the Anti-Fascist War. They not only denied the will of the Albanian people of Kosovo, expressed at the Bujan Conference, *to join Albania*,⁴⁷ but despite this will, under military pressure, they forced Kosovo to join Serbia.⁴⁸ Thus, the Yugoslav communists not only didn't recognize the Albanian people's right to self-determination, but once more fragmented the Albanian national entirety in socialist Yugoslavia.⁴⁹

Only after World War II, France renounced the old idea of Richelieu, that *France, by weakening Germany, ensures its domination in Europe*. The elite of the new French politicians offered a new idea, which essentially distinguished from the idea of Richelieu. The French offer, at the same time meant the creation of a new climate in the Franco-German relations that would prevent any potential conflict between these two European powers.

The new Franco-German relations, following the historical antagonisms and bloody wars, that developed through the *United Europe* project, had a double effect: on one hand, they met the appetites of these two great powers to "stretch" on the continent; on the other hand, prevented the traditional alliances, which caused very grave consequences for the European society.

In the period before the unification of Germany, the Franco-German antagonism developed mainly due to France's efforts to prevent the unification of the German state, according to Richelieu's doctrine: *France can dominate the continent only if Germany is not united*. After the unification of Germany and the Peace of Frankfurt, antagonism continued with increased intensity, mainly in the formation of various alliances that would lead Europe into bipolar divisions and into two world wars.

The Albanian issue in the Balkans found its resolution in the improving or rapprochement period between France and Germany. The Franco-German rapprochement took place after World War II, when France renounced the old idea of Richelieu. The new generation of French politicians such as Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman and others offered a new project, which opposed that of Richelieu; instead of confronting ideas, agreement was reached between France and Germany. The new French ideas resulted in the creation of a new climate of Franco-German cooperation, which would prevent any potential conflict between these two European powers.

The new Franco-German relations, following many historical controversies and bloody wars, which are taking place currently, are in fact the main pillar of the *United Europe*, which ensures peace in the continent and at the same time the perspective of small nations within the *Large European Family*.

Conclusion

In the Medieval period, from the time of the legalization of Christianity, for more than 1000 years the early Albanians (Arbers) belonged to the Christian faith. This is evidenced by the many monuments of the Christian cult. From the time of the division of the Eastern and Western Church, Albanians and their lands, in the administrative aspect, fell within the Eastern Roman Empire, while in the religious aspect (after the division of the Church - 1054) belonged to the Orthodox and Catholic rite, but although in essence remained Christians, in fact Albanians were divided in their religious rituals.

At the time of the Ottoman conquests, during the 15th and 16th centuries, a great part of Albanians accepted a new faith - Islam. The epilogue of this process was the "great division" on religious grounds, of an ethnic substance of the same origin.

At the time of the French Revolution, when national liberation movements swelled across Europe, the echo of these movements "infected" the Albanians as well, who were in the initial phase of national awareness.

më të lartë të LANÇ të Jugosllavisë, më 3 nëntor 1944. Shih "*E vërteta mbi Kosovën dhe shqiptarët në Jugosllavi*", Tiranë 1990, 546-555.

⁴⁷ Horvat, Branko, *Kosovsko pitanje*, Zagreb 1989, 83.

⁴⁸ Po aty, f. 130, (Rezoluta që u soll në Prizren, në korrik 1945 për bashkimin e Kosovës me Serbinë).

⁴⁹ Koliqi, Hajrulla, *Historia e arsimit dhe e mendimit pedagogjik shqiptar*, Prishtinë 2002, 479.

Although a very delayed process, a consequence that can be attributed to the "millet" system of the Ottoman Empire, which was based on religious and not on cultural principles, still, beyond the great religious division of Albanians, stood the national idea encoded in the works of Naum Veqilharxhi, Jeronim De Rada, Konstantin Kristoforidhi, Sami and Naim Frashëri all the way to the icons of our time – the nobelists: Ferid Murati and Mother Teresa.

However, it must be acknowledged that the religious division of Albanians is the weakest point, which has also been emphasized by our renaissance activists. Therefore, taking into account that the hostilities among the Balkan peoples will hardly cease in the future, when it comes to Albanians, they will "provoke" exactly their weakest point. We hope that civilized Europe has finally realized the Balkan realities.

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