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Doctoral thesis overview:

Inter-Balkan Councils and Albanians during the 16th and 17th century

The methodology used in this thesis, is presented in short parts in this thesis overview. The subject of this thesis spans over a period of two centuries. Studying the relations between the Balkan states and the Albanian territories from this perspective, bears an importance for the Albanian historiography.

This problem has not been treated partially rather than completely in the Albanian historiography. One of the most important qualitative and quantitative types of analysis is historical research which incorporates a systematic collection of data and the objective evaluation of those data related to past events, and which ultimately help us explain the current events and foresee the forthcoming ones. Due to the specificity of scientific research and history in general, this research was conducted through several phases. The main aim of this scientific research is to reflect the developments of the relations between the people of the Balkans and represent the decisions they took in these inter-Balkan Conventions.

In general, we can say that the Albanian historiography and even the historiography produced in the neighboring countries which directly deals with the organization of these inter-Balkan councils, has not paid sufficient importance to these events. My work included the collection of the published archival material, the analysis and comparison and thereafter incorporating these data in the analysis of this treatise. The unpublished documents, published documents and the relevant literature, are fully incorporated in the analysis and we have attempted to portray an understandable and reasonable relation between those sources. The actions of the people of the Balkans through the centuries which we have under observation, override all their narrow interests and tell how they gathered towards a unified cause for

liberating the Balkans from the Ottoman Empire. This was the first methodological principle which we followed throughout the process of research and through the composition of the thesis.

The reason behind researching this subject, lies in the fact that such a subject requires the collection and synthesis of a vast material, by analyzing and comparing it in order to come to conclusions. It also requires sufficient knowledge about the history of the people of the Balkans during the centuries we are analyzing.

The main aim of this scientific research is to represent the development of the Albanian and inter-Balkan Conventions from the 16th to the 17th century, which have not been sufficiently treated in our historiography, although the Albanian and inter-Balkan Conventions present the need for further researching.

In order to achieve the aim that we have presented here, it was required to choose a good working method which would lead us to objective conclusions. The collection of the base material which contains data from various subjects that are directly related to the thesis subject was one of the main methods used in this thesis. As such, the subject problem must be closely related to a theoretical approach, and it must also contain a hypothesis as well as describe the applied methods in bibliographical research. We have chosen the method of analyzing the historical material by situating them in the context of the time when these events took place.

Primary sources used in this thesis are comprised of archival material such as registers, chronicles and others, which represent the main sources through which the subject is treated and analyzed. Aside from written historical sources, legends, myths and stories with a historical character have also been used for our purpose. Other sources have been used as supplementary sources to strengthen the suppositions and scientific hypotheses related to the topic of discussion. These sources are often times analyzed and compared in order to reach scientifically sustainable conclusions. The main materials used in this dissertation are without a doubt the materials collected by a whole generation of researchers. These sources are tagged as unpublished and published sources, which have been collected from the Archives of Rome, Venice, Naples, Spain, Austria, Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia etc. The majority of the material collected from these archives is published, however we have taken into account a considerable amount of unpublished sources as well.

The first chapter deals with the Balkans during the reign of the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century, where the situation of the people of the Balkans is treated in detail, including the

increases number of liberation movements in the Balkans, the insurgencies with a liberation character and the importance that they represented in the international context, the military expedition of Sultan Sulejman II in Himarë and the increase of warfare from the European coalition and Albanians in the 16th century.

The first chapter also deals with how the Ottoman Empire used various methods to denationalize and assimilate the people of the Balkans from the 16th to the 17th century. However, the people of the Balkans preserved their languages, which was an important element in preserving their national identity. In comparison to the other ethnicities in the Balkans, the Albanians were deprived from opening schools in their native language from the Ottoman Empire.

They wanted to assimilate the Albanians and lose their identity at every cost. In the second half of the 16th century, the European states began to oppose with decisiveness the expansion of the Ottoman army. However, the opponents of the Ottoman Empire were not resolute nor strong enough to wage a powerful war. The Ottomans never gave up on the idea of conquering Central Europe. This resulted in the European states to take the Ottoman intents seriously.

The second chapter deals with the projects of the people of Himarë directed to Rome, the contacts of the former with Rome, the policies of Rome in regards to the people of Himarë, the requests of the latter dedicated to Rome in 1578, the first letter addressed to Grigori XIII, the letter addressed to Hydrugeto De Capua, the first letter sent to the cardinal GulielmSirleto, the second letter sent to Grigori XIII, the second letter addressed to the bishop Hydrugeto De Capua, the second letter sent to the bishop GulielmSirleto, the letter from the people of Himarë sent to Grigori XIII, which presented unified projects against the Ottoman Empire, and the response of Grigori XIII to the letter sent by the people of Himarë.

In comparison to the other regions, the people of Himarë were more advanced in regards to their national consciousness because they had immigrated to Italy before the time of Scanderbeg, where they had the opportunity to be educated, and they brought this knowledge back to their place of origin in Albania, especially in Himarë. This was one of the many reasons why the people of Himarë were more nationally conscious to fight for the liberation of their land from the Ottoman invaders. The Albanian people who lived in the resistance zones of Himarë all the way to Dukagjin staged a mutiny and supported the projects of the European states against

the Ottoman Empire, thus hoping that it would be favorable time to weaken the Ottoman invaders in Albanian lands for once and for all.

The third chapter deals with the Albanian conventions that took place at the end of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th century; the project of Mark Samuel for unified actions in Albania, the project of AleksandërKomuloviç for the liberation of the Balkans, the war of Klish and the participation of Albanians in 1596, the Convention of Mat in 1595, the Convention of Blinisht in 1598, the Convention of Dukagjin in 1602, the projects of the people of the Balkans addressed to the European chancelleries, the project of NikollëMekajsh for the liberation of Albania in 1610, the unification of the Albanian Highlands.

The third chapter deals in detail with the organization of armed resistance, the unification of the forces that came about as a result of the convention held by neighboring tribes. Initially, there was only a small number of tribes, which increased in time when several other tribes decided to join the initiative. In order to solve the existing political problems, the unified tribes organized conventions where various leaders would participate, including military leaders and other representatives of each tribe. Although the projects of the Albanian conventions were not supported by West European states, the people of the Balkans did not cease their attempts to convince the European chancelleries to see their projects of liberating the Balkans come to fruition.

The fourth chapter deals with inter-Balkan Conventions in the 17th century, the Convention of Moraça in 1608, the inter-Balkan Convention of Kuçi in 1614, the report on the oath taken at the Convention of Kuçi, the inter-Balkan Convention of Prokuplje in 1616, the inter-Balkan Convention of Belgrade in 1620.

The Albanian and inter-Balkan Conventions were strongly related to their tribal organization, but they also represented the relations between various regions that unified for select causes during difficult times in order to fight against the grave danger that was looming. The conventions held during this period represents an inter-tribal action and thus reflected the first phase of a political unification between these regions, which would unify and strengthen as a result of their successes.

Their unification would bring forth strength as long as they would take on decisions, present projects and wait for the adequate time to wage war. There were instances where the inter-regional unification was more advanced, when the unified convention would select

permanent leaders, who would be in charge of establishing agreements with other leaders or representatives of Europe's princes. The armed movements and the unification of tribal conventions, increased the morale and consciousness of the people in regards to the idea that only through the unification of the Balkans they could complete the projects presented by the inter-Balkan Conventions in removing the Ottomans from the Balkans. The Convention members had planned in detail how to initiate a military undertaking for liberating the Balkan regions, however these projects were not sufficiently supported by the European states. The projects remained on paper and were not completed in practice. Although these plans were not completed, it was important that the leaders and the clergy of the Balkans were unified in a war against the Ottoman Empire. If they were to receive the support from the western states, the projects of the people of the Balkans would have been successfully completed.

The fifth chapter deals with the projects established by the inter-Balkan Conventions and the insurgencies during the 17th century, the project of Athanas in 1615-1616, the projects of Sultan Jahja, the projects of Pjetër Budi in 1615-1621, the project of the French King GjonKler 1618, the policies of the Vatican in regards to Albanians during the first half of the 17th century, Albanians during the European wars against the Ottomans 1644-1699, the insurgencies of Kelmend, the Convention of Gradec and the insurgencies in 1688-1689, the Albanians and the Austro-Ottoman wars in 1683-1699.

The holy war against the Ottoman invaders was transformed into a liberating war of the Christian people of the Empire, but it essentially represented the attempts of the Vatican to regain its lost positions and reestablish its Christian authority. In this way, the Vatican kept the Catholic states of Europe tense. The Albanian people was considered of primary importance for the interests of the Vatican in the Balkans. The Ottoman Empire in the middle of the 17th century had reached a high level of political and military development. The interior situation of the Albanians was difficult in all regards. The Ottoman army had achieved great successes, and it behaved arrogantly to the oppressed people of the Empire.

The Ottoman army initiated continuous aggressive measures against the Highlands. Under the pressure of political and ideological persecution, almost two thirds of the Albanian population was converted to Islam. The international relationships suited the Ottoman Empire, considering that the European states were involved in the Thirty Years war. From all the Balkan

states of the Mediterranean the Albanians and Montenegrins greatly resisted the Ottoman invaders.

A close cooperation between the tribes of Montenegro and the Northern Albanians began at the beginning of the 17th century. This was done because they could achieve liberation only through the unification of the people of the Balkans and waging war against the sworn enemy. The inter-Balkan Conventions proposed concrete projects to the Western European states, by requesting them to cooperate in a unified war against the Ottoman Empire, by relying on their century long tradition of armed resistance.

In such circumstances, the Albanian leaders wanted to take the liberation war further and unify the people of the Balkans, an event which was more widespread than before. They began to set up meetings and reach agreements between the leaders of the people of the Balkans. Despite all the obstacles that existed and which they faced through their journey, the attempts to unify the liberation movements in the Balkans were taken forward.

The relations between the people of the Balkans ever since the first Ottoman invasion in the Balkans, have gone through various periods, which have left their marks in one way or another in their relations in the unified war against the Ottoman invaders. The fact that the Albanians and the neighboring people in the Balkans had managed to live next to each other throughout the centuries influenced their cooperation to achieve their goals. By the end of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th century, the Albanians were unified like never before to cooperate with the other peoples of the Balkans, and coordinate with the latter in order to seek for help from the other European states.

The people from the Balkans were supported by the European countries in their liberation projects. In the following we shall mention the European chancelleries, especially Spain, Vatican, the Kingdom of Naples and many other princes. These places supported either directly or indirectly the war in the Albanian lands and the Balkans.

The European states, and especially Spain, expressed interest in supporting the projects of the people from the Balkans, although they never were completed in practice, and lived only as promises that when the time is right, they would conduct unified actions to expel the Ottoman Empire from the Balkans. The Albanians never lost their hope that the international groups would one day help them. The project of the Balkans were supported by France, especially in the second decade of the 17th century, when the Duke of Nevers made maximum attempts to support

their projects. The Austrians did not remain indifferent towards these developments either, and they also supported the projects that were established by the inter-Balkan Conventions, through their connections with the Bosnians, through which they made contact with the Albanians and the other people from the Balkans.

Another relevant element in why the Albanians were an important factor in organizing war in the Balkans, was that the Slavic countries maintained in a way their vassalage to the Ottoman Empire. This made them less active every time there was an armed resistance against the Ottoman invaders. In the last decade of the 16th century and at the beginning of the 17th century, the resistance of the Albanians and other people from the Balkans reached another level of political and military organization.

In such circumstances, the Albanian unification began to strengthen by initiating contacts with the western countries. The Albanian conventions represented themselves as equal to the western states, to their princes and kings, and thus they began to establish bilateral relations, however not in the highest instances by signing edicts.

The Albanian Conventions aimed to coordinate their actions for an organized war, to expel the Ottoman Empire from the Albanian lands and from the Balkans entirely. The inter-Balkan Conventions enacted concrete projects on how to wage a liberation war and expel the Ottoman army from the Balkans. The people from the Balkans considered it reasonable to request weapons and armies from European chancelleries, because they were aware of their contribution in defending European lands as well. The Albanians gave an extraordinary contribution for the great Balkan and European cause. The conventions, the projects and the war of the Albanians during this period remained at the center of attention in European chancelleries. The Albanians were a main factor and had an important position in the inter-Balkan Conventions together with the Montenegrins, Bosnians, Herzegovians, Serbs, Bulgarians and their unified interests.