

*Ledia Dushku**

**“Let’s Take our Eyes off Turkey”!
Perception on the Ottoman Turks in the Discourse
of the Provisional Government of Vlora (1912-1914)**

“Now, what course of government control shall Albania as a kingdom follow? The Turkish model or the one of European states? We are quite convinced that Albania shall stick to the second, namely that of the European states: otherwise it shall be bound to end up as badly as Turkey did...”

Përlindja e Shqipëniës, 27 August 1913¹

“...Albania needs to keep far away [from the Ottoman Empire], as it is not Anatolia and Albanians are not Anatolians either. The dire fatal ending that swept Turkey should serve as a lesson for Albania and Albanians so as to do away with any Anatolian remnant and vestige, not only Turkish mark and spirit, but no trace at all, nothing whatsoever from the rotten Turkey, also none of its laws and judicial system if we really want to play a proper role as a European nation and state and as people of knowledge, civilization and progress.

Let’s leave behind the five hundred year bondage, let’s pass all miseries and scimmages as well as wrongdoings of the Turkish tyranny; Today, when Turkey renounce from us, when it exiled from the Albanian borders, Albanians should take their eyes off Anatolia, they take their eyes off Turkey and inherit nothing from the Asiatic barbaric despotism and laws and canons of Turkey either, which can never lead and forge ahead, among other nations, the Albanian nation and our Fatherland Albania...”

Përlindja e Shqipëniës, 3 September 1913²

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1. Gjon Bud, “Propagandat e masat e Qeverriës” (The propagandas and government’s measures), *Përlindja e Shqipëniës*, August 27, 1913, 2-3.

2. Kristo Floqi, “Gjyqësia në Shqipërië” (Judiciary in Albania), *Përlindja e Shqipëniës*, September 3, 1913, 3.

Introduction

Twelve years after the Albanian Declaration of Independence, Mid'hat Frashëri (Lumo Skëndo), minister of Public Services in the provisional government of Vlora, published the pamphlet *Plagët tona. Çë nga mungon? Çë duhet të kemi?* (Our wounds. What do we lack? What should we possess?) Through concise analysis, of both historical and sociological nature as well, the offspring of Frashëri family seeks to identify the wounds of the Albanian society and also find out “the remedy” to cure them. Notably, in the second part of the study entitled *Të metat tona. Të veprojmë* (Our deficiencies. Let's act), he reveals the long-lasting Ottoman rule as one of the reasons for the Albanians' backwardness.

The five hundred years of Turkish rule, one of the most ominous ever in the world history, Mid'hat Frashëri highlights, added to our past deficiencies, thereby shrinking our virtues: Turkey taught us to be increasingly lazier, more frantic; ...it taught us to dislike the law, disregard and disobey to it. It taught us to live at the expense of others rather than earn our own living... Education acquired among Janissaries made us be worse and unfair against our weaker brothers, lose any feeling and virtue of nation, find ourselves wild, hostile and divided with each other, totally disunited, disdainful to progress, away from every material goods, as disunited as possible, without collaboration and without solidarity...”³

Mid'hat Frashëri's perception over the rule and Ottoman Turks is not a separate case. It runs naturally and in unison with the main lines of the Albanian Renaissance activists' perception, as a constituent basic part of their discourse regarding both East and West, since at least the second half of the 19th century.

3. Lumo Skëndo, *Plagët tona. Çë na mungon? Çë duhet të kemi* (Our wounds. What do we lack? What should we possess?) (Tiranë: Mbrothësia, 1924), 13-15.

1. *The model of the Albanian Renaissance activists for the orientation of the Albanian Society: Away from the East and towards the West*

The political, cultural and social discourse of the Albanian Renaissance activists, in its entirety, runs in parallel with the European classic orientalism⁴ that evidences a constant clash, often dynamic one, between the two worlds.⁵ The East, or as otherwise commonly known the Orient, was regarded as an immovable state, eventually determined and left behind in time. This world is relevant to the meanings of backwardness, disorder, mystery, tyranny, corruption, war, anarchy and misery. Opposite of it, was the other world: the West, which geographically implied the western Europe and America. A western state was perceived to be developed, orderly, peaceful and prosperous and, rushing towards it, was considered progress.

Upon this discourse, Renaissance activists perceived the Albanians and Albania on a long and difficult journey, with a clearly defined destination: the West. This ongoing process, depicted by the sociologist Enis Sulstarova as a flight, as an escape, was perceived as a rescue from anarchy, “scrimmages and evils,” which the East carried per se. Hence, the East and the West were articulated as two opposite mentalities, two political-social systems, two cultures or philosophies, two different worlds that formed opposing binary structures, which had constantly affected the fate of the Albanians.⁶

4. In this article the term “orientalism” is used in the sense vested by the British historian, Alexander Lyon Macfie. According to him, “orientalism” means understanding or knowing the countries and peoples of the East. Orientalism means the existence of a certain subject or author outside the Orient, who specifies the Orient as an object of survey, understanding and classification. A. L. Macfie, *Orientalism* (London, New York: Pearson Education, 2002), 25-30.

5. As to the perception of the East and the West by orientalist, see: Edward W Said, *Orientalism. Western Conceptions of the Orient* (India: Penguin Books, 1991); Macfie, *Orientalism*.

6. Enis Sulstarova states that “Escape of Albanians from the ‘East’ and rushing to the ‘West’ has served as an imaginative horizon, as a regulatory foundation for the views of political and intellectual elites of the modern Albania and European identity of the Albanian nation. As a counter-thesis of what ‘West represented’, both ‘the other’

“Two civilizations have shaped the world: civilization of the West and civilization of the East,” evidenced the newspaper *Shkopi*, in the article entitled “Konstitucioni ndë Turqi” (Constitution in Turkey). The first was shaped by Christianity while the second by Muslimanism. Regrettably, these civilizations were shaped with special habits: properly for this reason they are enemies, they fight with each other; and amid such an unrelenting and unreasonable war, civilization of the West emerged winner and no doubt shall always be as such... I shall never cease saying: be it good or bad, only civilization of the West can save our nation and Albania, and can guarantee our proper place at the heart of Europe, since only this civilization advances all over the world and develops people in compliance with the current requirements, which in turn, are subject to constant change. The world advanced upon the help of such a civilization; remember how Europe used to be and how it is today; look at how Japan progressed since it took to political habits of Europe and civilization... look at where Turkey is, just because it chose to follow a separate pathway while at the heart of Europe.”⁷

As a modernizing discourse of the Albanian domestic political and intellectual elites, the discourse of the Renaissance activists based on West/East distinction. In this approach, it constituted the contraposition of the European-albanian race to that of Asian-turkish one, similar to christian nationalisms of the Balkan, borrowing European-christian-centric clichés over despotism and Turkish-oriental barbarism.⁸ Since at least the second half of the 19th century, Turks were depicted as quite opposite to Albanians, with low features, which Albanians did not have and did not want to have either. They were Asian, barbaric, fierce, destructive people, bigoted as well as backward, without anything in common with Albanians, who did not come from Asia, but were the oldest nation in Europe.

and his lack, stood the ‘East’.” Enis Sulstarova, *Arratisje nga Lindja. Orientalizmi shqiptar nga Naimi te Kadareja* (Escape from the East. The Albanian Orientalism from Naim to Kadare) (Tiranë: West Print, 2013), 26.

7. “Konstitucioni ndë Turqi!” (Constitution in Turkey), *Shkopi*, Kajro, November 15, 1908, 1.

8. Sulstarova, *Arratisje nga Lindja* (Escape from the East), 38.

“Who are the Turks?” Sami Frashëri asked in his work *Shqipëria ç’ka qënë, ç’është e ç’do të bëhet? Mendime për shpëtimt të Mëmëdheut nga rreziket që e kanë rrethuarë* (Albania what was it, what is it and what will become of it? Insights on the salvation of our Motherland from the risks embracing it), first published in Bucharest in 1899, considered the manifesto of the Albanian National Renaissance. “They constitute a cruel nation coming from the wilderness of North Asia with a goad in hand. They captured, upon their characteristic cruelty, the most beautiful and civilized countries worldwide; and after mercilessly exploiting, utterly ruining and still showing interest for them, they are as yet keeping them under ferocity, poverty, tyranny that has terrified the world at large. Among all these countries... one is the miserable Albania... Do we have to do with them? Do we share the same origin? No, never! We are neither Turks nor descendants from the wilderness of Asia. We are the oldest nation in Europe; we have our own rights more than any other nation all over Europe.”⁹

Turks are articulated as the main responsible for the misery and ignorance of Albanians. “Turks, who have been their masters for over five hundred years,” Sami Frashëri stated, “failed to provide Albanians with work, craftsmanship and knowledge, instead, they taught them how to struggle and pillage.”¹⁰ Basically, the same discourse is used even by Kristo Dako. According to him, “...only one nation has remained in the dark and misery. This is the Albanian nation, which is the oldest one worldwide... today they caused it to be forgotten, lost somewhere, away from the civilization!”¹¹

Following disappointment caused by the restoration of the Ottoman Constitution (1908), Albanian/Turk distinction is visibly evidenced in

9. Sami Frashëri, *Shqipëria ç’ka qënë, ç’është e ç’do të bëhet? Mendime për shpëtimt të Mëmëdheut nga rreziket që e kanë rrethuarë* (Albania what it was, what it is and what it will be? Thoughts on saving the motherland from perils that beset it) (Tiranë: Naim Frashëri, 1962), 63-64.

10. Frashëri, *Shqipëria ç’ka qënë, ç’është e ç’do të bëhet?* (Albania what it was, what it is and what it will be?), 44.

11. Kristo Dako, “Cilët janë Shqipëtarët” (Who are Albanians), *Tomorri*, June 10, 1910, 4.

the media, mainly in that of Diaspora. Now publicistic writings are enriched with the use of offensive epithets about Ottoman Turks, such as “dull” and “Anatolian.” These epithets will be constantly used and will also represent mentality or habits of backwardness and conservatism.

Jani Vruho stated in the newspaper *Liri e Shqipërisë* that “Turkey is nothing but the Mongolian-converted Turkey, the tartar-converted Turkey, it is the one that ruined, overthrew, burnt down, grabbed, robbed, broke, overturned, pull down and destroyed anything reminiscent of Enlightenment and civilization!”¹² “Every day appear before us dull people, with their behaviors and instincts, which, except to Anatolians, are irrelevant even to Africans. Although we are the noblest and the most ancient European race; although we have never demonstrated fanatic Anatolian qualities and we have never killed each other on account of religious affairs, Anatolians want to draw us in dirty Anatolian affairs and kill our brothers, with dull people inciting us through religion.”¹³

The same perception line permeates also articles of newspaper *Kombi*, in Boston, America. In the article entitled “Zumë të lëvizim” (We took to rise up), the author who has preferred to remain anonymous, not only identifies the low state that had overwhelmed the Ottoman Turks, but also highlights their inability to lead peoples already “more advanced than their people,” implying so Albanians: “The Turkish people are, as it is commonly known, at the lowest level of all European nations. They possess nothing of what civilization requires; then why are they so selfish as to lead other peoples by the nose or become leaders of peoples actually more exalted than their people?”¹⁴

Meanwhile, the lyric poet A. Shkaba, in his verses, presents a certain kind of ambiguity between the backward Turkey, as a grief that worries Albanians, and Turkey as a friend, which had saved them from covetous neighbors. Through verses, he acknowledges that:

12. Jani Vruho, “Turqia kurrë s’ka dhënë të drejtë përveç se kur ja kanë marrë duk’e i thyer turqit me grusht” (Turkey has never given us the right, except when we got the Turks by smashing with fists), *Liri e Shqipërisë*, September 21, 1911, 2.

13. Jani Vruho, “Tyrqit edhe Shqipëtarët” (Turks and Albanians), *Liri e Shqipërisë*, May 10, 1911, 2.

14. “Zumë të lëvizim” (We took to rise up), *Kombi*, Boston, September 11, 1908, 2.

“Look Albania lamenting,
 A grief is worrying her,
 Which is nothing but,
 An old wound,
 Hundreds of years ago,
 A friend came and there remained,
 It stuck to it so,
 And caused to be irksome
 This friend is Turkey...”¹⁵

Since the end of the 19th century, Renaissance activists would pay special importance to articulation of links between Albanian nation and Europe, therefore conditioning judgment on historical and cultural links of Albanians with Turks within the Ottoman Empire. The latter, in their view, was increasingly representing Asia, despotism and backwardness. As the main founders of Albanian identity, they strove to detach their compatriots from the impact of the East and connect them with the West. To achieve this, they aimed at making use first the *evidence of ancientness* and second *the contribution paid by Albanians to the European civilization*.

In the discourse of Naum Veqilharxhi, Pashko Vasa, Frashëri brothers, Jani Vreto, Jeronim de Rada, etc., the image of Albanians is conceived as a very old European nation, already united far beyond religious affiliation.¹⁶ “Albanians, whether Muslim, Orthodox or Catholic actually are and shall always remain as they were thirty centuries ago the oldest people in Europe, the less mixed race of all known races, a race which as a phenomenon can be best considered a miracle impossible to be explained, it managed to face the time factor which ruins and

15. *Liri Shqipërisë*, Sofje, November 15, 1911, 4.

16. In relation to their views expressed through present publicistic writings see: Nathalie Clayer, *Në fillimet e nacionalizmit shqiptar: Lindja e një kombi me shumicë myslimane* (Aux origines du nationalisme albanais. La naissance d'une nation majoritairement musulmane en Europe), trans. Artan Puto (Tiranë: Përpjekja, 2009), 125, 226-229, 235, 246-248, 264.

transform,” Pashko Vasa, an Albanian intellectual of catholic confession, stated in his book *E vërteta mbi Shqipërinë dhe shqiptarët* (The truth on Albania and Albanians), published in Paris, in 1879.¹⁷

The ancientness evidence was considered as a proof of participation in the European civilization. Therefore, orientation of Albanians towards western modernity was considered as the natural course of their progress.¹⁸ It would be a long and strenuous pathway and as such, it could be faced only with the help of Europe. According to the Renaissance narration on the history of the nation, Albanians constituted not only the roots and kinship to the Old Continent but were also self-sacrificed about it. This is best presented to the reader through the Skanderbeg figure and his wars against the Ottomans.

Sami Frashëri stated that “For over forty years Skanderbeg resorted to fighting by killing and inflicting serious damages to the enemies; ...All European powers, at that time, relied on Skanderbeg and expected salvation of Europe to come from Albanians...”¹⁹

While his brother Naimi, one of the main figures of the Albanian National Renaissance, in his poem *Istori' e Skënderbeut* (History of Skanderbeg) highlights the fact that Europe of the 15th century was incapable of defending itself and salvation from Turks took place only due to Albanians war led by Skanderbeg. In the verses 265-268, song XIV of the poem, Naimi discloses to the reader that:

“Were it not for Albania
The whole blind Europe
Would be under Turkey control

17. Vassa Effendi, *E vërteta mbi Shqipërinë dhe shqiptarët* (The truth on Albania and Albanians) Studim historik. Përkthimi nga frëngjishtja dhe komentim prej Mehdi Frashërit (Tiranë, Shtypshkronja Tirana, 1935), 61; Dritan Egro, “Perceptimi i Perandorisë Osmane dhe Evropës në doktrinën nacionaliste shqiptare” (Perception of the Ottoman Empire and Europe in Albanian Nationalistic Doctrine), *Studime Historike*, 3-4 (Tiranë 2013): 51-61.

18. Sulstarova, *Arratisje nga Lindja* (Escape from the East), 51.

19. Frashëri, *Shqipëria ç'ka qënë, ç'është e ç'do të bëhet?* (Albania what it was, what it is and what it will be?), 25.

And salvation no more.”²⁰

2. Implementing the model: The provisional government of Vlora and the beginnings of the “deottomanization” process in Albania

While the western orientation of the National Renaissance had expressed the desire of the political and intellectual elites that the Albanian nation enter the path of progress, the Declaration of the Independence and the existence of the state offered to them the opportunity to implement the experiment of Albania’s modernization. This would avoid the possible labeling that could be made to the Albanian state as a “Muslim state,” which allegedly belonged to the East rather than Europe.

“Now, what course of government control shall Albania as a kingdom follow? The Turkish model or the one of European states? We are quite convinced that Albania shall stick to the second, namely that of the European states.” This was just the question asked to the reader of the newspaper *Përlindja e Shqipëniës*, official periodical of the provisional government of Vlora and the answer concerned the course of Albania following the Declaration of Independence, on November 28, 1912. Secession from the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Albanian independent state placed institutions and their organization within a new political, legal and administrative reality, other than the one they had already operated in thus far. The Albanian government led by Ismail Kemal Vlora was focused on fundamental issues of governance, in which prevailed building of centralized secular systems, typically a characteristic feature of western governments.²¹ Such an attempt

20. Sulstarova, *Arratisje nga Lindja* (Escape from the East), 70.

21. According to the Professor Bernard Lewis, the term “secularism,” “as first used, it denoted the doctrine that morality should be based on rational considerations regarding human well-being in this world, to the exclusion of considerations relating to God or the afterlife. Later it was used more generally for the belief that public institutions, especially general education, should be secular not religious.... Secularism in the modern political meaning the idea that religion and political authority, church and state are different, and can or should be separated is, in a profound sense,

can be considered as the beginning of a long state formation and “de-ottomanization” process, across which Albanians and their state would go through. Successful conclusion of this process was nothing but implementation in the field of the model of Albanian Renaissance activists: Away from the East and towards the West.

Building of centralized secular system is considered as an important initiative for Albania at that time, which aimed at invalidating the heterogeneity and power of the religious authority, as a leading, organizing and fragmentary power within the new state. Albanians should perceive their own state as a secular one. As such, it could not belong to any specific religion, but to all. Due to this process was enabled homogenization of the relation between the society and governance and was also universalized the state formation process by way of a national administration, a unique education system and one language, not only semantic but also practical. Accordingly, the Albanians’ conscience as well as various social and religious institutions formed cohesion with the political system, beyond borders which kept Albania still fragmented internally.²²

Initially, secularism was designed in the justice system. On May 5, 1913 the provisional government adopted the “Kanun of Jury,” which is a combination of European principles of law with Ottoman Sharia (Shari’ah). Unification of civil and criminal matters was also in place and their judgment would be conducted by state courts rather than by Kadi. As to the criminal matters, was set up the jury system. Sharia trials, chaired by Mufti, would only address cases of religious character.

Christian. Its origins may be traced in the teachings of Christ, confirmed by the experience of the first Christians; its later development was shaped and, in a sense, imposed by the subsequent history of Christendom. The persecutions endured by the early church made it clear that a separation between the two was possible; the persecutions inflicted by later churches persuaded many Christians that such a separation was necessary.” Bernard Lewis, *What went wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 96.

22. Sokol Gjermëni, “Aspekte të jetës komunitare në Shqipëri përgjatë vitit 1913” (Aspects of the religious communities life in Albania during 1913), *Studime Historike*, 3-4 (Tiranë 2014), 86.

Addressing of criminal and civil matters by the new courts, practically, led to the merger of religious courts, inherited from the Ottoman system. The provisional government of Vlorë appointed the grand Mufti, as the titular head of the Muslim community in Albania and also the chief Kadi. Both appointments were made without the consent of the Istanbul, thus breaking subordination to the Ottoman Shaikh ul-Islam (Şeyhülislam). At the same time, this was the first and the biggest step regarding separation of mosques in Albania from the Caliphate. The government adopted the functioning of Mufti post, defining the relevant territorial placement, the salary and the language to be used about decisions of religious matters. From the religious point of view his position was approved only by the grand mufti.²³

The secularization process swept, also, the new state administration. Since 30 August 1913 the provisional government imposed the mastery of Albanian language, as a fundamental condition to all actual employees and those newcomers who wanted to work in state institutions. Meanwhile, was launched the work on administrative reorganization and appointment of new officials, while the government appealed to intellectuals both in Albania and abroad, to make their knowledge available to the state.

The activity of the state administration was put on a legal basis, on November 22, 1913, following announcement of the “Current Kanun of the Civil Administration.” This law was drafted based on the principle of unified power, setting aside the idea of canonization, although it was supported by the head of the provisional government. Rightfully, several ministers and a part of the public opinion considered canonization as inappropriate, under circumstances when Albania, like never before, needed unity. “The Current Kanun of the Civil Administration” was not essentially a fundamental law and as such, it dealt only with local administrative matters, their units and powers. It also contained

23. *Qeveria e Përkohshme e Vlorës dhe veprimtaria e saj (28 nëntor 1912-22 janar 1914)* (The Provisional Government of Vlorë and its activity [28 November 1912-22 January 1914]), botim i Drejtorisë së Përgjithshme të Arkivave Shtetërore të R.P.SH (The General Directorate of Albanian State Archives) (Tiranë: Mihal Duri, 1963), 130.

specifications of certain articles about religious communities. This was intended to establish closer links and to better organize the operation of religious communities in their relations with state civil and administrative institutions. Hence, the government institutionalized the operation, powers, duties and organization of the religious communities pursuant to the Albanian state legislation. Separation of the state from religion and efforts to institutionalize the legitimacy of the governance created premises for further development of secular components, making them part of the institutional, cultural, political and public organization and operation within the Albanian society.²⁴ Despite the drawing up of “The Current Kanun of the Civil Administration,” the provisional government of Vlora was still far from drafting and implementing a comprehensive secular legislation, due to replace the Ottoman legislation.

The Albanian provisional government strove to extend secularism in the area of education, intended to establish a national educational system rather than a religious one. The minister of Education, Luigj Gurakuqi, was seriously committed to such a process. Under this policy, in August 1913, it was decided “to open in every district a preparatory normal school where students would be admitted on the basis of certain conditions.”²⁵ Conditions were set under the decision of the Ministry of Education, dated 31 August 1913, according to which, the elementary education was compulsory to all students of Albania, while special schools would operate only if they met the criteria stipulated by law.²⁶ The whole educational system should be subject to the laws of the Albanian state. Schools should receive official permit from the government, use the Albanian language as the teaching language, have programs and textbooks recognized by the ministry of Education. As decided, the learning process would be conducted in Albanian language, schools of religious and foreign communities included. Regarding

24. Gjermëni, “Aspekte të jetës komunitare në Shqipëri” (Aspects of the religious communities life in Albania), 86.

25. “Urdhër i Ministrisë së Arsimit” (Order of the Ministry of Education), *Përlindja e Shqipënisë*, Vlonë, August 6, 1913, 2.

26. “Urdhër i Ministrisë së Arsimit” (Order of the Ministry of Education), *Përlindja e Shqipënisë*, Vlonë, September 13, 1913, 2.

teachers' preparation was reopened the Normal School of Elbasan, and its director was the devoted teacher Aleksandër Xhuvani. Another normal school started to operate in Berat. Through the educational directorates in the relevant prefectures were organized courses for employees to be better familiar with the Albanian language, both in writing and reading. On the other hand, the provisional government responded positively to the request of the Italian and Austro-hungarian governments with reference to granting scholarships for students to study abroad.²⁷

The ministry of Education paid attention, also, to the preparation of Albanian terminology for branches of administration, education as well as other spheres of life in the country. Accordingly, a commission was set up, which in June 1913 prepared the required words and terms in the military and justice field. In November 1913, the government foresaw the establishment of a scientific center concerned with the study of native language-related matters, syllabuses and textbooks. Basically, this was the project for the establishment of a National Academy regarding the use of language and school programs.

3. Perception on Ottomans in the external and internal discourse of the government of Vlorë (December 1912-January 1914)

In the internal and external discourse²⁸ of the government of Vlorë, perception about Ottoman Turks is not unique. It is fluid, taking different tones depending on the attitude held by the Great Powers against the Albanian Question in the Conference of Ambassadors in London.

27. *Haus und Hof Staats Archiv, Wien, Politisches Archiv, Albanien* in: *Arkivi i Institutit të Historisë në Tiranë* (hereinafter: *AIH*), Vj. 23-20-2057, Circular of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Austro-Hungary to the Albanian youth scholarships, November 1913.

28. In this article the term "external discourse" is used in the sense of the discourse that the Albanian provisional government and its president Ismail Kemal Vlorë use abroad, in relation to the Great Powers and the Ottoman Empire. Meanwhile "internal discourse" takes into account the discourse used by the provisional government of Vlorë within the state, among Albanians themselves.

The weight that the internal and external discourse occupies in the general discourse essence of the provisional government of Vlora, appears to be fluid as well. From December 1912 to May 1913, when the Great Powers in London sustained the decision for Albania's autonomy under the Sultan's suzerainty, the external discourse became the focus of attention. The final aim of Vlora's government was to persuade the Great Powers that Albanians deserved their independent state. In May, the Great Powers changed their attitude by agreeing to suspend any connection of the Ottoman Empire with the Albanian state and take over themselves its future. They expressed the final decision on July 29, 1913. According to it the Great Powers recognized the independent Albanian state, headed by a foreign prince and retained their influence in Albania through the establishment of the International Control Commission. During this period (May-July 1913) in the discourse of the Albanian provisional government is noted a balance in the ratio between both the external and internal discourse. Since August 1913 it was the internal discourse to become the focus of attention.

3.1 Characteristics of the external discourse

In the external discourse of the Albanian government, perception about Ottoman Turks holds diplomatic and institutional connotations, which is a distinctive characteristic even in the earlier speech of its president, Ismail Kemal Vlora.²⁹ As part of the Ottoman political and diplomatic

29. Ismail Kemal Vlora personified the statesman with progressive and liberal ideas, with rare diplomatic skills, whom the Ottoman regime had attempted to make harmless, not only by keeping him away their homeland, but also offering him high ranking positions in the Ottoman state pyramid, which fitted his level. From official in the Legal Office of the State Council or secretary general of the Ottoman Foreign Ministry, Ismail Kemali was appointed mayor of Ioannina Municipality, to continue in the upcoming years as a governor of Beirut and Tripoli vilayet. Qualified as anti-ottoman, but not anti-empire, Ismail Kemal had constantly opposed the centralizing policies of the Porte, occasionally aggravating relations with it. He was partisan of reforms in the Turkish public life, while had openly supported the radical Mid'hat Pasha, the father of the Ottoman Constitution of 1876. I. Kemal shared with him also the sympathy about the Great Britain and France. Following the revolution of Young Turks and restoration of the Constitution, in July 1908, he led the Ottoman Liberal

elite, under continuous and intensive relation with western statesmen, the discourse essence of the publicistic writings of I. Kemal shows moderate tones, usually cold and neutral ones. Although confrontation between East and West is already present, it is articulated devoid of both religious connotations and the presence of sharp terms. In the interview given to *Mokattan* newspaper of Egypt, on March 13, 1901, the offspring of Vlora family stated as follows: “In the East there is a barrier to the progress of Muslims and the cause is Muslims themselves. They are unwilling to benefit from the lessons of their neighbors, they claim to be the most intelligent of all other peoples, they call all those not belonging to their religion as less developed and are quite reluctant to have relations with them. Today’s great civilization belongs to Europeans who are largely Christians. Accordingly, my co-religionists believe that such a civilization is Christian, while it actually is just a social one. Therefore, they do not adhere to this civilization and stay away from those considered as its initiators...”³⁰

In the discourse of Vlora family’s offspring, institutional, political and social reformation of the Ottoman Empire was considered indispensable and necessary to its longevity and preservation of *status quo* in the Balkan. Turkey was part of Europe and its reformation should be done in cooperation with it. According to the researcher Nuray Bosbora, only intervention of the Great Powers would force the sultan to carry out reforms in the Ottoman government institutions.³¹ In the interview given to the Italian newspaper *La Tribuna*, on July 27, 1907, Ismail Kemal courageously stated that “Turkey is part of Europe, even though we

Party (AHRAR). For more information see: Ledia Dushku, *Kur historia ndau dy popuj fqinj. Shqipëria dhe Greqia 1912-1914* (When history separated two neighbour nations: Albania and Greece 1912-1914) (Tiranë: Kristalina-KH, 2012), 59-65.

30. *Ismail Qemali, 1888-1919* (Përmbledhje dokumentesh) (Ismail Qemali, 1888-1919 [Documents edition]), edited by Teuta Hoxha (Tiranë: 8 Nëntori, 1982), 68. The interview of Ismail Kemal, 13 March 1901.

31. Nuray Bozborra, *Shqipëria dhe nacionalizmi shqiptar në Perandorinë Osmane* (Albania and Albanian nationalism in Ottoman Empire), trans. Dritan Egro (Tiranë, Dituria dhe Shtëpia e Librit & Komunikimit, 2002), 236.

should distinguish an oriental mass that cannot be entirely assimilated in real Europe.”³²

As regards Albania, orientation to the West is not openly articulated, but is implied upon its dream, rushing towards “the ideal of freedom and independence.” As it was the case with the Ottoman Empire, even its progress should be made with the support of Europe. Under a candid tongue, in the interview given to the Italian daily *La Tribuna*, Ismail Kemal made known to the public opinion that: “Albania has its own language, its own literature, history and traditions, it has its own right to require national assertion following the ideals of freedom and independence. Her dream deserves the support of the civil civilization, more specifically of Latins in general and Italians in particular.” The Albanians’ evidence of ancientness³³ was brought to the reader’s attention. “We Albanians, he stated, are the oldest nation, the most respectable of all European nations. We were here before Greeks came, before Romans existed, before Byzantines were born!”

Perception about Ottoman Turks in the discourse of Ismail Kemal, commonly corresponds to the format of a careful and experienced diplomat, without using offensive words, such as barbaric, cruel or uncivilized. Only in one case we could find a negative statement, reflected in *Shkupi* newspaper, dated June 2, 1912. There, the Turk is considered “barbaric,” a race that knows no “progress and civilization.” Although the editor of the newspaper is suspicious on the truth of the news, it is important not to detach it from the historical bed. At that time Ismail Kemal Vlora was trying to organize an all-Balkan uprising, which was expected to achieve the overthrow of the Young Turks’ government and arrival to power of an Ottoman liberal government. In this context, he appealed to Albanians, Greeks and Bulgarians: “Albanians, Greeks and

32. “La politika nei Balkani,” *La Tribuna*, July 27, 1907, 1.

33. The evidence of ancientness is part of the discourse of Ismail Kemal Vlora also in the two appeals addressed to Albanians, in 1900 and 1909. “...let’s ensure to our self the assistance of the European nations, whom we can reasonably call brothers, and moreover, just because we are the oldest nation in Europe), he stated in the appeal addressed to Albanians in 1900. See: *Ismail Qemali 1888-1919* (Përmbledhje dokumentesh) (Ismail Qemali, 1888-1919 [Documents edition]), 61.

Bulgarians unite, let's drive this barbaric Turk out today! Turks are a race that knows no progress and civilization.”³⁴

After the Albanian Declaration of Independence, in the external discourse of Ismail Kemal Vlora and the government he headed, the diplomatic and institutional language is not circumvented. Precaution to adopt a balanced position to the Ottoman Empire constitutes one of his distinctive features. In the memorandum of the provisional government of Vlora sent to the Conference of Ambassadors in London on January 2, 1913, the fact that Albania “was unable to follow the western nations in their magnificent development towards progress and civilization” is clearly shown on its front page, but the causes of such backwardness are not expressly articulated. They are generalized with expressions such as “inadequate conditions surrounding it” or “it has suffered so much under the yoke of the foreigners,” without accusing the Ottoman Turks as the cause of the backwardness. In an effort to avoid exacerbations with them, at a time when the Great Powers had decided for Albania to be autonomous, in the memorandum is prudently avoided the use of Skanderbeg figure and his wars, but is not bypassed the definition of the Albanian national identity as opposite to the East as well as treatment of Albanians as different from Turks, although they were Muslims in their majority. The evidence of ancientness is brought to the attention of the international factor as a borrowing from the Renaissance activist's model. Albanians were the oldest nation in Europe which manifested liberal views and had not “lost its merit before the western nations, whose progress it aims to achieve on a land opting solely to flourish.”³⁵

Although with somewhat dim tones, constituent part of the external discourse of the provisional government of Vlora are also the state sec-

34. “Ismail Kemali tha kto fjal” (Ismail Qemali said those words), *Shkupi*, June 2, 1912, 2.

35. *Qeveria e Përkohshme e Vlorës dhe veprimtaria e saj* (28 nëntor 1912-22 janar 1914) (The Provisional Government of Vlora and its activity [28 November 1912-22 January 1914]), 98-100. The memorandum of the provisional government of Vlora sent to the Conference of Ambassadors in London on January 2, 1913.

ularization, religious pluralism, equality of religious communities before the law and state, as characteristics that would grant a European spirit to the newborn state, thus bringing it closer to the West and away from the East. In the interview given to the French newspaper *Le Matin* in April 1913, Ismail Kemal made known to the public opinion that in Albania: "...it shall be spoken a single language, we shall all have the same rights. No differences shall exist between Catholics, Muslims and Orthodox, all shall be equal. No religious division shall ever exist among us."³⁶

3.2 Features of the internal discourse

As to the reports within the state, the discourse of the provisional government of Vlorë assumes the civilizing mission to the society, minorities or certain other suburban categories (peasants, highlanders, etc.), whose perception and way of life did not fit in the elite's vision, namely the government, about the state and society. In this case it concerns what the civilization researcher Ferdinand Braudel considers as "work of oneself on oneself."³⁷ Through publicistic writings, in the newspaper *Përlindja e Shqipëriës*, Albanian intellectuals took over the emancipating role of the nation in the course of state formation and modernization process. Hence, they became the consciousness of the nation, the voice of public moral and visionaries of Albanians' cultural and social development.

Although a significant part of Albanian intellectuals of that time constituted a part of the Ottoman context of state reformation, they strove to separate from the past, by differentiating Albanians from Ottoman Turks insofar as possible, even though their majority belonged to the same religion, namely the Muslim one. The argument already referred to in this case was the same with the one used by Albanian Renaissance activists. It concerned the fact that Turks were Asian people, according

36. "Ç'thotë Ismail Kemali" (What Ismail Qemali says), *Liri e Shqipërisë*, April 22, 1913, 2.

37. Ferdinand Braudel, *Gramatikë e qytetërimeve* (Grammaire des civilisations), trans. Fatos Kongoli, (Tiranë: Instituti i Dialogut dhe Komunikimit, 2005), 66.

to which progress, knowledge and civilization, were considered to be foreign dimensions. By contrast, the Albanian nation had its roots from and was essentially Europe. As such, it could progress rapidly “like all civilized and freed nations among European countries,” especially now following secession from the Ottoman Empire. Unlike external discourse, the language used is direct and devoid of diplomatic gloves. The long-lasting ottoman rule is overtly considered as the main cause of Albanians’ backwardness and their distance from the European civilization. In an article dated 16 August 1913 in *Përlindja e Shqipëniës*, it was perceived as “a black veil, encompassing Albania and as a huge cloud, overshadowed it all around thus hindering the dazzling rays of the Sun to warm the heart and enlighten Albania with the light of civilization and education.”³⁸ The Ottoman Empire was the evil, barbaric, Asian, tyrannical which had plunged Albanians in ignorance, poverty, misery and backwardness, “...without roads, buildings, without any proper city. Turkey left us totally bare-naked. It undid whatever it met, seized everything and left us even worse.”³⁹

The distinction between the two worlds, East and West, is clearly evidenced in the newspaper. In the article of the publicist Dionis Karbonara, they appear figuratively as two queens, obviously with different features and qualities. The first, which personifies the West “...pallid blue-colored, slowly walking along with fragrant and violet sandals on its white feet, wearing a dressing gown embroidered with stars and a silver crown on top, it was called Hope,” while the other, namely the East “...with night-like black eyes, tears always slipping down its face and the chest saddened of groaning, disorderly wearing a fervent garment.”⁴⁰

38. Beri, “Kufiët e Shqipëriës. Shqipëria e lirë” (The borders of Albania. Independent Albania), *Përlindja e Shqipëniës*, August 16, 1913, 2.

39. Grigor Cilka, “Gjindja e Shqipëniës” (The situation in Albania), *Përlindja e Shqipëniës*, January 11, 2014, 2.

40. Dionis Karbonara, “Të dy Mbretneshat” (Two queens), *Përlindja e Shqipëniës*, August 6, 1913, 3.

As a part of the internal discourse on the pages of *Përlindja e Shqipëriës* appears, also, the resistance made over the centuries by Albanians to the Ottoman rule. Unlike the external discourse, in the present case is conspicuously used the figure of Skanderbeg and his wars which carried a dual character: the Albanian resistance and the protection of Europe from “barbaric” Turks. Upon strong nationalist doses he is regarded as “the first of this land,” “great warrior,” “king” who unleashed “fervent spears, dazzling and golden spears over Albania, spears of freedom, European civilization and education,”⁴¹ “the immortal national hero Gjergj Kastrioti, who for too long, obstructed the advance of Asian invaders who came to extinguish the European civilization light, bringing Asian barbaric darkness.”⁴²

The figure of Skanderbeg is now undauntedly revoked also in the discourse of the president of the provisional government, Ismail Kemal Vlora. In his speech, on November 28, 1912, he appeals to the exalted Albanians with the following words: “It seems like a big dream to me such a great change of our fatherland which suffered terribly for 500 years under the Turkish yoke, and which recently, was almost dying, extinct and completely exterminated, this Albania which once was shining from unmatched bravery of its sons; this Albania which, when Europe was threatened by Turkish invasions, under its undying mighty leader, Skanderbeg, became the iron gate against fierce attacks of the most savage sultans ever in Turkey.”⁴³

Another feature of internal discourse is obvious identification of the distinction between Albanians and Turks as well as perception of Albania as the opposite of Turkey, having nothing in common. “Albania is not Anatolia, and Albanians are not Anatolian either,”⁴⁴ while “what is

41. Beri, “Kufiët e Shqipëriës” (The Albanian’s borders), 2.

42. Kostë Çekrezi, “Shpresë, Punë, Bashkim!” (Hope, Work, Unity!), *Përlindja e Shqipëriës*, August 20, 1913, 1-2.

43. *Ismail Qemali*, 232.

44. Floqi, “Gjyqësia” (Judiciary), 3.

good for Turkey may be bad to Albania.⁴⁵ To avoid a fatal end, Albanians should “take their eyes off Anatolia, take their eyes off Turkey,” separate completely from the Ottoman past, look to the future and embrace the European civilization, “whose model is the proper salvation to the progress of our nation.”⁴⁶

“...The dire fatal ending that swept Turkey should serve as a lesson for Albania and Albanians so as to do away with any Anatolian remnant and vestige, not only Turkish mark and spirit, but no trace at all, nothing whatsoever from the rotten Turkey, also, none of its laws and judicial system if we really want to play a proper role as a European nation and State and as people of Enlightenment, civilization and progress. Let’s leave behind the five hundred year bondage, let’s pass all miseries and scimmages as well as wrongdoings of the Turkish tyranny; Today, when Turkey renounce from us, when it exiled from the Albanian borders, Albanians need to take their eyes off Anatolia, they need to take their eyes off Turkey and inherit nothing from the Asiatic barbaric despotism and laws and canons of Turkey either, which can never lead and forge ahead among other nations the Albanian nation and our Fatherland Albania...,” Kristo Floqi, one of the most prominent pens, argued in the newspaper *Përlindja e Shqipëniës*.⁴⁷

The Ottoman institutional legacy, especially in the justice system, is viewed as the main barrier to channel Albania on the Western line. The lack of an organized unique educational network in the mother tongue was also perceived as another barrier to the Albanian elite-supported homogenizing project, which so far considered the Albanian nationalism undetached from the mission for the Europeanization of Albania. Pursuant to the provisional government’s policy, special attention was paid to the secularization in governance. Albanians were to embrace the secular state, as the supreme authority that allowed religious pluralism and provided

45. “Propaganda e armiqve” (The enemy’s propaganda), *Përlindja e Shqipëniës*, January 21, 1914, 1.

46. “Gëzimi” (The joy), *Përlindja e Shqipëniës*, February 18, 1914, 1.

47. Floqi, “Gjyqësia” (Judiciary), 3.

equal conditions to all communities. “In Albania itself people do not differentiate due to religion, out of which many evils may derive –which enemies sought to use as a dirty tool– but Albania, as opposed to it, respects all religions considering all compatriots as brothers...”⁴⁸

In the early 20th century Europe the word “progress” was converted into the word key, while the ability to advance was considered as one of the criteria for accepting and recognizing the new national states from the Great Powers. “The government should press for organization of Albania endowing it with the European color and spirit rather than the Asian one so as to follow the civilization pathway,” appealed to Albanians, the intellectual Mihal Grameno.⁴⁹ In his capacity as the chairman of the Political and Criminal Court of Vlora, Kristo Floqi drew the reader’s attention on the justice system, clearly identifying the necessity to the division of powers. Here’s how he states: “One of the tasks of the government is putting under way the Justice system, which is one of the three greatest and first powers of the Body, as there are also the Legislative and Executive body.”⁵⁰ While Mihal Grameno focuses on the educational system: “We should do away with schools and practices inherited from Turkey since they prove to be harmful and bring nothing beneficial but for lose! Albania is a European state and therefore it should be civilized and follow the European school, or otherwise it is doomed to lose sooner or later... Do you think that Albania will become a minor Turkey and head to the old? No never!”⁵¹

In addition, all those social categories, forms of social organization, subcultures or mentalities, within the Albanian society inherited from Ottomans, which were considered by the elites as unacceptable to modern times, are unhesitatingly termed as oriental and evil, and “im-

48. Mihal Grameno, “Cilët jemi” (Who we are), *Përlindja e Shqipëniës*, August 16, 1913, 2.

49. Mihal Grameno, “Organëzimi i Shqipërisë” (The organization of Albania), *Përlindja e Shqipëniës*, August 27, 1913, 2.

50. Floqi, “Gjyqësia” (Judiciary), 3.

51. Mihal Grameno (1913), “Për nëpunësit” (About officials), *Përlindja e Shqipëniës*, September 3, 1913, 2.

mensely dangerous as they are innumerable and cannot be written either,” emphasis was placed on the low level of the employees, laziness and corruption.

“Employees should be educated, learned, honest, fair and hard-working. Laziness and favoritism should not exist and so bribery either, since except dismissal, even imprisonment and punishment will follow... Only when all Albanians fulfill their own task, more specifically by dealing with trade, craftsmanship, agriculture, industry or official jobs, Albania will soon flourish and advance and will be counted as one of the most civilized countries! Therefore, to achieve this, we should hastily get to work and do away with sinister legacies inherited from Turkey.⁵²

Conclusions

While the provisional government of Vlora proclaimed decisions regarding the implementation of the western model of governance and, its representative *Përlindja e Shqipëniës* was trying “to make Albanians,”⁵³ naturally the question arises: Was the Albanian society prepared to accept it?

The answer is short and flat: No. Despite the will of prominent elements of the provisional government of Vlora, the secularization reform remained on paper and proved to be premature. The basic reasons of this outcome should be sought in the backwardness of the Albanian society, the lack of an organized life over national institutions, the lack of cultivating Albanian as a written language, inadequacy of both material and human infrastructure. It was rather difficult, immediately after secession from the Ottoman Empire, to impose on the Albanian society, a part of the elite included, a secular modern and European system, different from the Ottoman one, moreover, when a significant part of it

52. Mihal Grameno, “Trashëgimet e liga që fituam nga Turqia” (The evil legacies we gained by Turkey), *Përlindja e Shqipëniës*, August 23, 1913, 2.

53. “Albania was made but Albanians are to be made!” - this is how Kristo Floqi stated in his article in 1913. Kristo Floqi, “Gjyqësia” (Judiciary), 3.

had adversely reacted to the reforms that the Ottoman state itself had undertaken before 1912.⁵⁴

The Ottoman civilization basically relied on the doctrine of Muhammad, while the European one in that of Christ, primarily moral, separating religion from governance. By contrast, the doctrine of Muhammad was not only moral and religious, but it was everything: political, social, legal, etc., a fact which gave a theocratic and authoritarian nature to the Ottoman State. Obviously, differences between the Muslim world and European one, involved also legislation which regulated relationship between individuals, families and, also, between state and individual. In addition, religions and beliefs always create certain habits, certain specific mentality, which for their believers becomes an obstruction to accept the other developed civilizations. All mentioned above, was reflected in the Albanian society as an organic part of the Ottoman one. It was evidently stratified, traditional, closed, authoritarian and patriarchal. The Ottoman tradition and heritage already present in Albanians' outlook could not disappear only by drafting in a flash, the legal framework. According to Fernand Braudel, a certain society is generally highly afraid of embracing a cultural good that questions its deeper structures.⁵⁵ "We are Ottomans," Esad Pashë Toptani, an Albanian important political, reminded his supporters in Central Albania, in June 1913. "Although Albania seceded, you, the people as a whole should be comfortable as Ottoman citizens,"⁵⁶ he concluded. Subsequent historical and social developments in Albania will show that Albanians' adaptation to the process of replacing or changing traditions, worshipping system, ecclesiastical organization and their relationship with their state, would prove to be a long-lasting and difficult process.

54. Regarding reaction of the Albanian people to the Ottoman reforms, ranging from those of Tanzimat, see: Bozbora, *Shqipëria dhe nacionalizmi shqiptar* (Albania and Albanian nationalism), 121-128.

55. Braudel, *Gramatikë* (Grammaire), 64.

56. *AIH*, A-IV-335. Archival materials collected by Alex Buda, Kristo Frashëri and Stefanaq Pollo, Volume II (May 1913-September 1913), 83.