

Section 4. History

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ST. NAUM ISSUE

Abstract. Establish the borders between Albania and Serbia was one of the most important duties of the time for the albanian government. Considering the intentions of Serbia, which was in competition with Italy for having a larger impact in Albania, will be easy for them to affect in the internal development of a small country.

The request of serbian government to possess St. Naum and Vermoshi, is based on a secret agreement between Ahmet Zogu and yougoslav prime minister Nikola Pasic, on august 1924, stating that if Yougoslavia will help Ahmet Zog to take the lead on december 1924, monastery of St. Naum and Vermoshi will be donated to Yougoslavia.

The purpose of this commentary is show the decisions of international authorities regarding the issue of St. Naum and Vermoshi, the objections of Jougoslavia regarding these decisions, the mediation of Jougoslavia on the Conference of Ambassadors in order to adress the issue in their favour, the change from an international issue to an agreement between two parties, presentation of the issue as of exchange of territories, and the circumstances which lead to the final solution including the consequences for albanian government.

Keywords: St. Naum, Vermoshi, Albania, Jougoslavia, Conference of Ambassadors, exchange of territory.

Since the Conference of Ambassadors held on 1913, between Albania and Yougoslavia, the nationality of St. Naum and Vermosh has been unsettled. Vermoshi was part of albanian-montenegrian border, while the monastery of St. Naum after the defeat of Ottoman Empire was part of albanian-serbian border. Albanian-montenegrian borders and albanian-serbian borders were set in principle by the protocol signed on the Conference of Ambassadors, on 11 August 1913. As albanian- montenegrian border, was approved the previously existing border line between Montenegro and Turkey [1, 54]. Meanwhile,

St. Naum had been occupied by Serbia since the first balkan war in october 1912, and was still under serbian occupation. The protocol appointed to Albania the area from Lin village till St. Naum [2, 156]. Discussion started whether to include or not St. Naum within albanian borders [3, 366].

Serbia continued the occupation of St. Naum, under military forces, pretending that it belongs to Serbia [3, 145]. During the first world war St. Naum change from the serbian occupation to the bulgarian, and at in the end it was conquered by Serbia. When Montenegro joined the Serbo-Croat-Slovene

Kingdom, the yougoslav government revised the border in the St. Naum area and also requested to revise the border in the Montenegro area [4, 87].

Belgrade appropriate St. Naum's monastery based on religious arguments. According to Belgrade, the monastery was a saint place for serbians and belonged to Serbia because St. Naum was a slav [2, 157]. In fact St. Naum monastery had not serbian ethos, but had albanian-macedonian ethos [5, 259]. It was built in the 9th century at the time of Bulgarian Empire by slav Naum preacher, who had been acting for a long time in southern Albania. The present church was built, on the groundwork of the old church, by the macedonian and albanian christian residents of the area. The walls of the church were painted by albanian painters Nikolla (Onufri's son), Kostandin Jeromonaku (the great painter of the seventeenth-eighteenth century), Terpo (son of Athanas Zograf) etc. Some mentors of the St. Naum monastery were of albanian nationality. Also in this monastery practice pilgrimage both the macedonian and the albanian residents [6; 8].

Differently from St. Naum Monastery, Yugoslavia had no ethnic or historical arguments regarding Vermoshi, because with catholic albanian residents and inseparable part of Kelmendi area, with beech and pine forests, with rich pastures, did not include any argument to justify its appropriation from Yugoslavia [1, 55].

On December 6, 1922, the Conference of Ambassadors stated that monastery pertain to Albania, but in april 1923 Belgrade declared that doesn't agree with this decision, based on historical, ethnic, religious, legal etc "rights" [2, 158]. The dispute of St. Naum started in 1923 and peaked cap in the first half of 1925. Belgrade insisted with regard to Ahmet Zog's agreement with Pasic, on august 1924, stating that after Ahmet Zog will take the lead, monastery of St. Naum and Vermoshi will be donated to Yugoslavia [6; 11].

The Conference of Ambassadors on june 4, 1924 regarding St. Naum issue requested the suport of the Permanent Chamber of The Hague, which on 4 sep-

tember 1924 decided in favor of Albania. Regardless this decision Belgrade hasn't the intention of renouncing from St. Naum [7, 246]. The Conference of Ambassadors, affected by yougoslav government, suggested a direct agreement between Albania and Yougoslavia, while recognizing the opposite attitude of both sides in resolving this issue [8; 15]. The pressure of Great Powers led Ahmet Zogu to start negotiations with Belgrade on february 1925.

In order to provide an acceptable solution for the albanian and international opinion, and to ensure Ahmet Zogu's prestige, the yougoslav government suggested the idea of compromise and compensation. Yugoslav government requested that Vermoshi issue to be discussed separately of St. Naum issue. In exchange for Vermoshi area riched in forests, Belgrade offered a small region, which had only shrubs and stones [3, 370]. The "exchanges" project was in favor of Belgrade [8, 15]. Ahmet Zogu had not the intention to agree in favor of Yugoslavia, because his power could be affected due to the large dissapointment that would arise [9, 13]. Based on this he tried to extend the negotiations as long as possible. On february 21, 1925, the albanian government informed Belgrade that will discuss the case of St. Naum and Vermosh as one single case.

On March 1925, yugoslav legation in Rome invokes Mussolini for reaching an agreement with the albanian government based on Belgrade's proposals. [10, 3] With regard to the border contest between Albania and Yugoslavia we must say that in generally, Italy was in favor of Albania [11, 27]. Considering that at time Italy was close to the acqusiton of the National Bank and the kerosene in Albania, was attentive to the political situation of Albania with regard to secure a long period a national and international stability. At this point Rome was neutral and was not involved in the albanian government agreements with other authorities [8, 17].

After failed negotiations with Jugoslavia, albanian government requested from Conference of Ambassadors to decide on this matter [11, 30] Belgrade

reacted and threatened Zog with albanian political refuges located in Yugoslavia [12, 46].

In april 1925, Conference of Ambassadors decided to recognize St. Naum as part of Albania, but this decision was not obligatory for Yugoslavia, meaning that Yugoslavia can continue the occupation over St. Naum territory [7, 247].

Zog wanted to show Belgrade that he will continue to act accordind to the decision taken by international authorities in favor of Albania, and not to dissapoint albanian poeple that were very satisfied with this decission [13, 2-3].

Zog called Chamber of Deputies and the Senate eventhough the issue evoke a strong reaction over the deputies. Zog attain and secured the approval of the Senate and the majority of the parlament for exchange of territories between Albania and Yugoslavia [12, 47].

Under the negotiation of the Conference of Ambassadors, Albania and Yougaslavia reached an agreement on cession of St. Naum and the western part of Velipoja in Vermosh in exchange of a small territorial compensations from Yougoslavia [14, 25].

Protocol of the albanian-yugoslav border was signed in Florence Italy, on 26 july 1926. In addition, were signed other three protocols and one additional convention [1, 55]. The final protocol composed by 12 articles, designed in detail the albanian-yugoslav borderline. The first additional protocol recognizes to residents of Plava, Gucia and Podgorica the right of free transition through Vermosh valley and to the residents of Kelmend the right of crossing yugoslav territories for going to Hoti lake [15, 122]. The second protocol provides albanian religious pilgrimage leave up to three days and free transition to St. Naum Monastery [2, 164]. The protocol related to the use and navigation of Shkodra lake and Buna river pro-

vided a full use and navigation of the vessels in these waters. The additional convention recognizes residents living on albanian borders areas, the right of transition to Gjakova marketplace [12, 50].

On july 30 in Paris, was signed the final act regarding the definition of the albanian borders, which was registered at the League of Nations Secretariats [16, 1]. Regarding this issue in his memoirs Mehdi Frashëri wrote: "With this agreement, the albanian border question, which had been suspended since 1913, for 13 consecutive years, got a definitive and a favorable solution for Albania, because the unncertainty of the final borders creates a way for the units against the future of Albania" [17, 205].

It is thought that Ahmet Zog speculated on St. Naum and Vermosh issue in two main forms: In respect of the strong religious beliefs of the neighbor's people and as a concession, as it did with other agreements. In view of a solution he chooses the devaluation of St. Naum and presented the issue as a temporary cession [4, 121].

The agreement of albanian government with Belgrade for the monastery of St. Naum and Vermosh was followed with multiple contestations against the League of Nations, by important figures of the nation such as: Fan Noli, Hasan Prishtina etc. [18, 80].

The cession of St. Naum and Vermosh to Yugoslavia, despite the efforts to make it appear as acclaimed, was a crudeness act of albanian government. To be noted that Ahmet Zogu choosed to exchange territories in view of a stabile country, and to realize it requested stabile relations with neighbours countries. Considering that de juro St. Naum was assigned to Albania but de facto it was conquered by Yugoslavia, and to avoid future issues with Yougoslavia, Ahmet Zog choosed easily to exchange the territories.

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