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29 SEPTEMBER 2020



years of diplomatic relations
1970 - 2020



Switzerland - Albania





**years of diplomatic relations
1970 - 2020**

IMPRESSUM

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50 YEARS OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS SWITZERLAND - ALBANIA

Dr. Franziska Anna Zaugg, M.A.Samantha Guzman, M.A. Zef Ahmeti

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Dr. Franziska Anna Zaugg, M.A.Samantha Guzman, M.A. Zef Ahmeti

On behalf of the Swiss representation in Tirana, Albania

1 Introduction

The year 2020 marks the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Switzerland and Albania. This anniversary presents a great opportunity to discuss the past 50 years and take a closer look at the history of the development of these intergovernmental relations. The present project, which was initiated by the Swiss Ambassador in Tirana, Adrian Maître, is made up of a Swiss and an Albanian project team. The Swiss project team consists of Dr. Franziska Zaugg, M.A. Samantha Guzman from the University of Bern, and M.A. Zef Ahmeti from the Albanian Institute in Switzerland. The two perspectives of the Swiss and the Albanian subproject will be brought together in a joint presentation in autumn 2020: The Swiss and Albanian perspectives will not only show how diplomacy between the two countries have developed since 1970, but also how it has been perceived by the individual countries and at the international level.

Since Albania is still a blind spot both historically and politically for many Swiss people, and since many people refer to the small state on the Adriatic Sea in the same breath as Kosovo, the Swiss sub-project will begin with a brief introduction on the history of Albania in the 20th century, in order to provide readers with a basis on which the development of diplomatic relations between Albania and Switzerland can be explained.

The introductory part discusses the eventful first half of the 20th century in Albania; for example, the proclamation of Albanian independence on 28 November 1912 by the Albanian national movement under Ismail Qemali, the effects of the two Balkan Wars in 1912/1913 on Albania,

the appointment of Prince Wilhelm von Wied by the London Ambassadors' Conference in May 1914, Albania as a theater of war in the First World War from 1914-1918, Albania's path to democracy under Fan Noli, the seizure of power by Ahmet Zogu and his self-staged coronation as King of Albania followed by the transition into a dictatorship, the growing dependence on and later occupation by fascist Italy in April 1939, the enlargement of Albania to a "Greater Albania" after the German-Italian Balkan campaign in April 1941, the Italian capitulation in September 1943 and the occupation of Albania by Nazi Germany, the victory of the Communist Albanian Liberation Front in late 1944 and then later, the ensuing dictatorship of Enver Hoxha until his death in 1985.

In the main part of the work, against the background of international developments (1945-1990), the first unilateral Albanian contact and growing cooperation between socialist Albania and democratic Switzerland will be discussed under the heading "Cold War". In particular, the role of the first Swiss ambassador to Albania, Hans Keller, will be highlighted. It was not until 48 years after Switzerland recognized Albania that diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of Albania were officially established following Keller's appointment in 1970. To this day, Switzerland and Albania go beyond international cooperation by taking part in numerous political, social and economic exchanges; notable examples include Switzerland's current involvement in the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) project on the 870 km long natural gas pipeline and also with Swiss support for the victims of the November 2019 earthquake in Albania.

This brochure is based in particular on primary sources, i.e. on files from the Swiss Federal Archives, the Austrian State Archives (OeStA/HHStA), the UN and League of Nations Archives in Geneva and the Archives of Contemporary History (AfZ) at ETH Zurich; online, digitized documents from the Diplomatic Documents of Switzerland (Dodis.ch) as well as documents published by the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (EDA) were used. Secondary literature on Swiss-Albanian relations is scarce, however, the following publications provide a good foundation: Zef Ahmetis' publication *Der lange Weg zur Errichtung diplomatischer Beziehungen zwischen der Schweiz und Albanien* (2012), Robert Elsie's *Historical Dictionary of Albania* (2010), Elez Biberaj's *Albania in Transition: The Rocky Road to Democracy* (1998), Thomas Bürgisser's *Wahlverwandtschaft zweier Sonderfälle im Kalten Krieg, Schweizerische Perspektiven auf das sozialistischen Jugoslawien (1943-1991)* (2017) and Heinz Klarer's *Schweizerische Praxis der völkerrechtlichen Anerkennung* (1981). Contemporary newspaper articles on significant historic events are also included in order to illustrate the reactions from both the Swiss and international public.

2 Beginnings

In the 15th century, the Albanian territories, divided up at that time between various principalities, were gradually conquered by the Ottomans. Between 1478/79 and 1912, Albania, along with numerous other areas of the Balkans, was part of the Ottoman Empire and divided into various administrative districts referred to as vilayets. Therefore, Albania was not an independent state, but rather belonged to the periphery of this great empire. Albania's first mention in Switzerland's diplomatic files can be

found in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, although it was still part of the Ottoman Empire at that time. Throughout the sources analysed, Albania was repeatedly mentioned as a possible destination for Italian expansionist desires:¹

- > "... il est à craindre que les Italiens n'aient certaines ambitions [...] en Albanie ..."²
- > "...qu'il existe, ainsi que je Vous l'ai déjà écrit, une entente spéciale entre l'Italie et l'Autriche-Hongrie sur la question de l'Albanie."³

2.1 The Early Years, 1912-1939

As a result of Ottoman rule, a nation-state movement formed relatively late in the Albanian territories compared to other European states. In the autumn of 1912, the representatives of the Albanian independence movement led by Ismail Qemali felt it was the right time to put their goals into practice and founded an Albanian state. The Ottoman Empire had recently found itself participating in the First Balkan War with Serbia and Bulgaria and therefore had no means of reprimanding or acting against the secessionists.⁴ The representatives who travelled from the Albanian provinces of the Ottoman Empire finally proclaimed Albanian independence on 28 November 1912 in Vlorë, a city in southern Albania.

This first declaration of independence was followed by three different letters of recommendation to the Swiss government, but Switzerland found it difficult to declare Albania as an independent country.⁵ At the London Ambassadors' Conference on 16 December 1912, however, the major European powers of Russia, Austria-Hungary, Italy, the German Empire and Great Britain recognised Albania's separation from the Ottoman Empire.⁶ The



Representatives of the Albanian national movement under Ismail Qemali

official creation of an Albanian state only came about after the end of the Second Balkan War - and not under Ismail Qemali; the six major powers: Germany, France, Great Britain, Italy, Austria-Hungary and Russia recognised the independence, sovereignty and neutrality of Albania at the 54th session of the London Ambassadors' Conference on 15 July 1913, but appointed a foreigner, Prince Wilhelm von Wied, as their new ruler.⁷ After his coronation on 3 May 1914, he sent a letter to the Swiss government. However, the Swiss government still hesitated to recognise the Adriatic state, because they argued that Austria-Hungary, which the Swiss representation in Vienna considered as "Créatrice de l'Albanie", had not yet recognised the young state itself.⁸ In July 1914, when World War I began, Switzerland completely denied recognition of Albania and throughout the four years of the war, Italian, Serbian, Greek, Austro-Hungarian and French units besieged and crossed into Albanian territory.⁹

It was only several years after the conclusion of the war on 3 March 1922 that the Swiss government decided to recognise the newly formed Albanian state, *de jure*.¹⁰

Benedikt (Benoît) Blinishti, who represented Albania in the League of Nations, addressed Federal Councillor Giuseppe Motta with these enthusiastic words, "Je suis convaincu, que le Gouvernement Albanais, qui a pour unique but le prompt développement du pays, emploiera tous ses efforts pour affermir et développer les bonnes relations entre la Suisse et l'Albanie".¹¹ As a result, two Albanian consuls in Bern and Geneva began their work in the interwar period. Even though Albania had only a relatively short national history, the country on the Adriatic Sea had one distinct and progressive advantage over Switzerland: women's suffrage was introduced as early as 1920 - more than 50 years before Switzerland. Under Fan Noli, the country embarked on a path towards democracy. However, its progressive government was overthrown in late December of 1924 by Ahmet Zogu with the help of Russian White Guards and the government in Belgrade.¹²

2.2 The Years of Fascist and National Socialist Occupation

After 1924, Albanian foreign policy under King Ahmet Zogu, who was self-appointed in 1928, showed a clear and growing dependence on Italy.¹³ This was most vividly illustrated in the First and Second Tirana Pacts of 1926 and 1927. On the one hand, Italy's economic and military influence increased further, while on the other hand Albania's independent foreign policy was curtailed. The First Tirana Pact was signed on 27 November 1926 and established for five years as a "friendship and security pact". In the Second Tirana Pact, the "Defence Alliance", was even

extended to twenty years.¹⁴ Other foreign entities were forced out of the country by the Italians and although Switzerland recognised Zogu as King of Albania in 1928, ultimately, Italy was the only country he could turn to for foreign policy and cooperation.¹⁵ When Zogu became aware of this overwhelming dependence, he desperately sought support from the Little Entente and the Balkan Entente;¹⁶ however, both refused. The end point of this development culminated in the Italian invasion of Albania in April 1939 by the Italian fascist leader Benito Mussolini. Albania now became part of the fascist “mare nostrum” and



de facto, a sort of Italian colony.¹⁷

Source: Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, PAAA Altes Amt, Tirana 4/8

On 7 April 1939, Mussolini and his troops occupied Albania. Switzerland officially represented the interests of Albania alongside the American

government, as the USA had not approved the Italian takeover of Albania. Finally, fascist Italy capitulated in September 1943. This did not mean the end of the war for Albania however, because it was subsequently occupied by the German *Wehrmacht*.¹⁹ This historic chapter concluded with the retreat of the German forces in November 1944, when the Albanian Communist Liberation Front (Lëvizja Nacional- Çlirimtare) won the war against the occupiers and also against domestic adversaries with the help of Western, particularly British, support. Ultimately, this development helped pave the way for the beginning of Enver Hoxha's dictatorship.²⁰

3 The Cold War and Swiss Albanian Relations

Albanian foreign policy during the period of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania from 1944 to 1990 can be divided into four phases: the first three being the Yugoslav, Soviet and Chinese phases, and a final fourth phase of total isolation from other socialist states and also, for the most part, from the western world.

It is striking that, after varying levels of contact between 1944 and 1969, Switzerland had already appointed a permanent representative in Albania from 1970 while the Chinese phase was still ongoing. This further emphasises that diplomatic contact between Switzerland and Albania continued to exist even during the greatest period of isolation for the small Adriatic state. This exchange was possible in large part because Switzerland was one of the non-aligned states.²¹

3.1 Sporadic Diplomatic Exchanges, 1944 -1970

3.1.1 Under Yugoslav Patronage: The Period Between 1944 and 1948

Only a few months after the end of the Second World War, the Albanian delegation during a congress of the Red Cross Societies submitted a request on 9 November 1945 to the Swiss representation for contact and exchange.²² Although the Swiss representation was still waiting for socialist Albania to be recognized as a state, there was already great interest in economic exchange from official representatives as early as 1946. Diplomatic records show that the Yugoslav diplomatic mission was in fact representing the interests of Albanian citizens in Switzerland during this period and thus acted as a link between the two states. However, in autumn 1948, Hoxha broke with Tito's Yugoslavia and, after the closure of the Albanian legation in Belgrade, the Swiss legation in Belgrade was no longer able to fulfil its obligations towards Albania.

3.1.2 Under Soviet Patronage: The Period Between 1948 and 1961

In the following years and until autumn 1954, the Swiss representation in Budapest was responsible for Albania. After that, sporadic contact was established via Belgrade, since once again, the Albanian embassy had an existing branch there, beginning in 1954. In the period up to 1961, (the period of Russian patronage) Swiss-Albanian relations were limited to only a few exchanges. However, as the following document shows there were an increasing number of Albanian requests to establish lasting relations with Switzerland.

Die Albanier haben vor einigen Jahren, im Januar 1956, einerseits unserem Vertreter in Budapest gegenüber und andererseits durch ihre Delegation bei der Europäischen Wirtschaftskommission in Genf gegenüber Vertretern der Handelsabteilung den Wunsch geäußert, diplomatische Beziehungen mit unserem Lande aufzunehmen und einen Handelsvertrag abzuschliessen. Im Juni 1958 wurde gegenüber unserer Vertretung in Belgrad mündlich diesen Wunsch erneut Ausdruck gegeben, und im vergangenen Dezember gelangte schliesslich der albanische Gesandte in Paris im selben Sinne an unseren dortigen Botschafter. Wir haben diesen Vorstössen keine Folge gegeben. Unsere Vertretungen haben noch immer Weisung, bei ihren offiziellen Kontakten mit den Albanern alles zu vermeiden, was als Anerkennung der Volksrepublik oder als Einleitung diplomatischer Beziehungen gedeutet werden könnte.

Source: 26. July 1962, BAR, E2001E#1980/83#364*, dodis.ch/18981

3.1.3 Under Chinese Patronage: The Period Between 1961 and 1978

A 1961 report by the Swiss legation in Belgrade discussed the deteriorating relations between Albania and Yugoslavia.²³ Due to rising tensions between Russia and China, Switzerland decided in 1962 to continue waiting for official recognition of the Albanian state. Through this approach, Switzerland hoped to avoid the possible accusation of taking sides from any of the involved states. However, a trick was to be used in everyday diplomatic life: As the following document shows, Swiss outposts should act under the façade that Switzerland had long since recognised Albania. The declaration was as follows: Switzerland would indirectly recognize Albania by approving the two Albanian consulates in Bern and Geneva in the interwar period.²⁴

Notiz betreffend die Anerkennung des volksdemokratischen Regimes in Albanien durch die Schweiz

Eine ausdrückliche Anerkennung kommt allerdings heute kaum in Frage. Sie riskierte, vor dem Hintergrund der ideologischen Auseinandersetzung zwischen Moskau und Peking im Ausland als Parteinahme gedeutet zu werden und andererseits in der schweizerischen Öffentlichkeit unnötig Aufsehen zu erregen.

Wir glauben daher, dass dem Bundesrat vorgeschlagen werden sollte, das Departement zu ermächtigen, das albanische Regime durch konkludentes Handeln de iure anzuerkennen. Wir würden unseren Aussenposten lediglich Weisung erteilen, sich künftig gegenüber den albanischen Vertretungen so zu verhalten, als ob wir das volksdemokratische Albanien schon bisher anerkannt hätten.

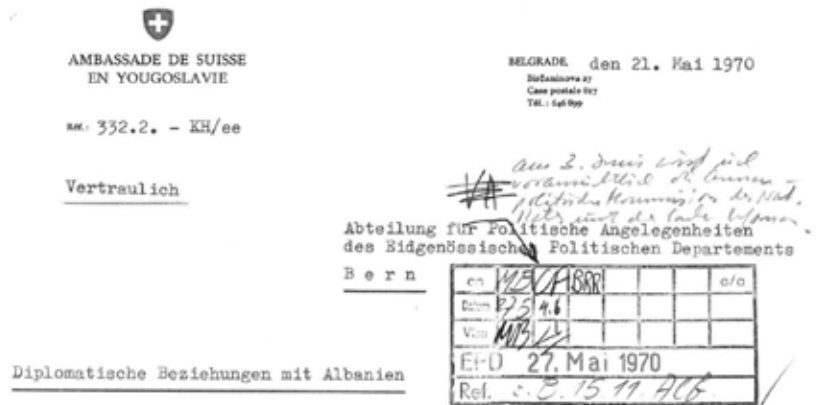
Source: 26 June 1962, BAR, E2001E#1980/83#364*, dodis.ch/18981

Although diplomatic relations remained inconsistent, Swiss-Albanian trade intensified between 1965 and 1968. In March 1969, there were already concrete ideas about what future cooperation between Switzerland and Albania might look like.²⁵

3.2 The Beginning of Constant Diplomatic Relations

In May 1970, the Swiss Ambassador to Belgrade, Hans Keller, wrote a letter to the Federal Political Department or *Eidgenössische Politisches Department (EPD)* encouraging the establishment of diplomatic relations with Albania. Keller's suggestion came as no surprise since the Albanian mission had already expressed the same desire to him during his term of office in Beijing in 1966. China's patronage of Albania lasted until 1978 and it was a great advantage towards the development of permanent Swiss-Albanian diplomatic relations that the first Swiss ambassador for Albania, Hans Keller, had already been appointed ambassador to Beijing from 1963 to 1966.

Keller himself stated that during his term of office in Beijing he had been in contact with three diplomatic representatives from Albania, including former diplomat Nesti Nase, who was appointed in 1969 as the Albanian Foreign Minister. In order to get a picture of the situation within the country itself, Keller and his wife travelled to Albania for several days early in the summer of 1969.²⁶ During his stay he was even allowed to visit some factories - a rare opportunity in Albania at the time. Keller also reported that the visa applications for himself and his wife were issued fairly quickly - in contrast to other people he knew who had also applied for visas.²⁷



Source: Schreiben des Botschafters Hans Keller, 21 May 1970, BAR, E2001E#1980/83#907*, dodis.ch/34480.

3.2.1 The Role of the First Swiss Ambassador to Albania

In the spring of 1970, the establishment of diplomatic relations with Albania was rigorously discussed within the Swiss government. On 1 July 1970, the Federal Council finally took an affirmative decision: Hans Keller was appointed the first Swiss ambassador to Albania, 58 years after the first proclamation of an independent Albanian state.²⁸ Franz Blankart, secretary to the head of the Federal Department of Political Affairs (EPD) - today known as the EDA - congratulated Keller in a letter and also emphasised the positive influence of the intensification of diplomatic contact between the two states. He wrote, "Once again you are called upon to perform a pioneering diplomatic feat. [...] A step whose negative consequences I believe has always been overestimated has now become possible and has been accepted without criticism by the public and also by Moscow. This is essentially your merit and shows that - contrary to the often-held opinion - an ambassador has the possibility of feedback, i.e. of influencing the decisions of headquarters, by all means is given."²⁹

From 28 September to 5 October 1970, Keller travelled to Tirana for his inaugural visit.³⁰ The fact that Keller was simultaneously serving as ambassador to Belgrade and also accredited as “Ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary” in Albania was not out of the ordinary due to the fact that such side-by-side accreditations still exist today in the Swiss diplomatic service. What was particularly extraordinary about Keller’s dual role was that he was deployed between two countries that had a tense relationship with each other. What immediately stands out in Keller’s career is his tenure as First Secretary in the newly opened Swiss legation in Moscow from 1946 to 1949 and an ambassador in Beijing from 1963 to 1966. Switzerland was one of the first Western countries that had established diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China and was already recognized on 17 January 1950. Therefore, Keller can be considered a diplomatic pioneer when it came to establishing and maintaining stable political contact with socialist states. It is hardly surprising after his service in Beijing that Keller was sent to the two Southeastern European countries mentioned above. The documents in Keller’s estate in the Archiv für Zeitgeschichte at ETH Zürich also provide insights into the fact that Keller was extremely critical of autocratic leadership styles. However, he always had an eye on the positive aspects of socialist states and was able to build a bridge between those states and the Western states through his own personal commitments.

3.2.2 Hans Keller: A Dedicated Figure

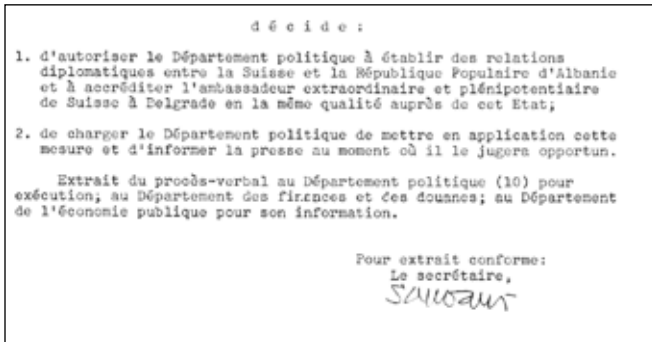


Source: <https://dodis.ch/P184>

- Born on 19 August 1908 in Zurich
- Studies law in Zurich and Lausanne, receives a doctorate in political science
- During the Second World War served as a delegate in Bratislava and liaison man between Switzerland and Slovakia, appointed Vice-Consul of Switzerland in 1942 after opening official consular representation.
- Participated in the rescue of persecuted Jews by issuing so-called “letters of protection”.
- At the end of the Second World War the Soviet Army took him to Budapest and interned him.
- 1945 - Second Secretary of the Swiss legation to Prague
- 1946-1949 - First Secretary at the newly opened Swiss legation in Moscow
- 1949-1952 - First Secretary at the Swiss legation in Ankara
- 1956 - Swiss business manager in Colombo (Ceylon) and Bangkok
- 1960 - Head of the new Technical Cooperation Service in the EPD and Delegate of the Federal Council in Asia and Africa
- 1962-1966 - Swiss ambassador to Beijing (first contact with Mongolia and Vietnam)
- 1967-1974 - Swiss ambassador to Belgrade (also to Tirana from 1970)
- Dies on 14 December 1999

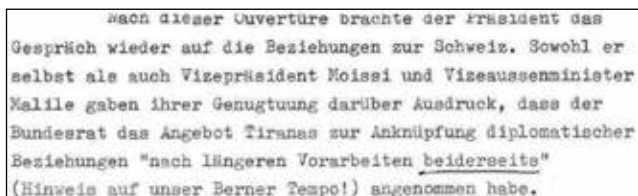
Source: Nachlass Hans Keller, Archiv für Zeitgeschichte, ETH Zürich

The decision of the Swiss Federal Council on 1 July 1970:



Source: 1 July 1970, BAR, E2001E#1980/83#907*, dodis.ch/34482.

Keller reported on his inaugural visit to Belgrade that Haxhi Lleshi and Spiro Moisiu expressed their pleasure in establishing diplomatic relations and proclaimed:³¹



Keller's inaugural visit to Tirana:

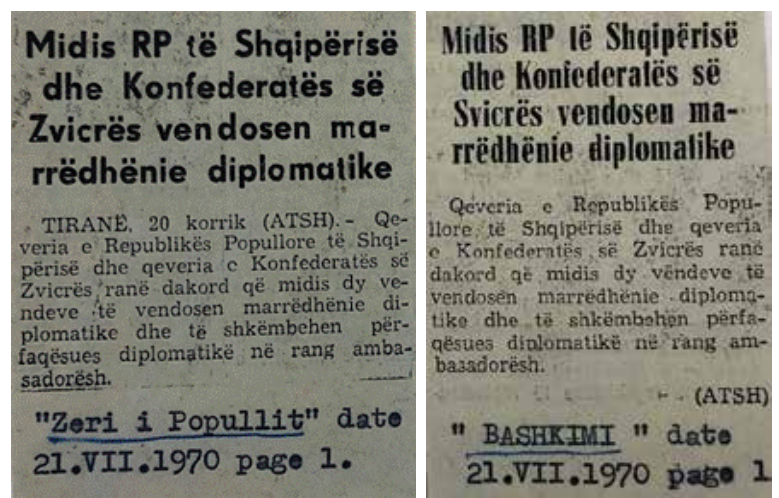


13. October 1970, BAR, E2001E#1980/83#907*, dodis.ch/34485.

Press reviews: The few Albanian newspapers reported briefly while Swiss newspapers included more detailed reports.

Zeri i popullit

Bashkimi

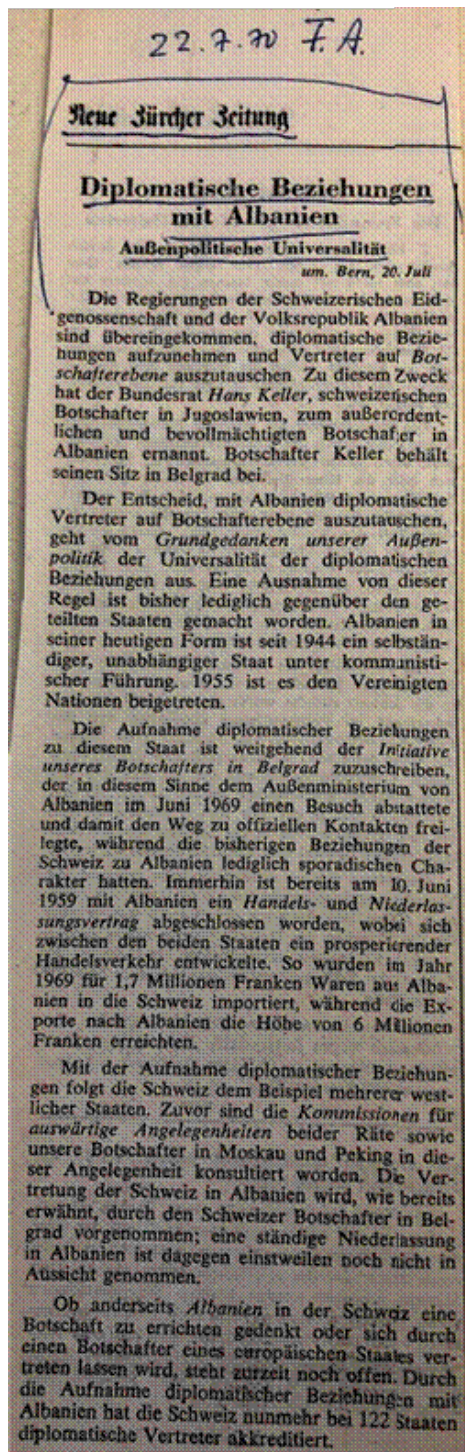


Source: 21 July 1970, BAR, E2200.48#1994/166#10*

From left to right:

- 1) Translators
- 2) Spiro Moisiu, Vice President
- 3) Hans Keller, Swiss Ambassador
- 4) Haxhi Lleshi, President of the Presidium of the People's Assembly of the People's Republic of Albania
- 5) Charm Malile
- 6) Musin Kroj
- 7) Koco Prifti
- 8) Secretary

Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 22.07.1970:

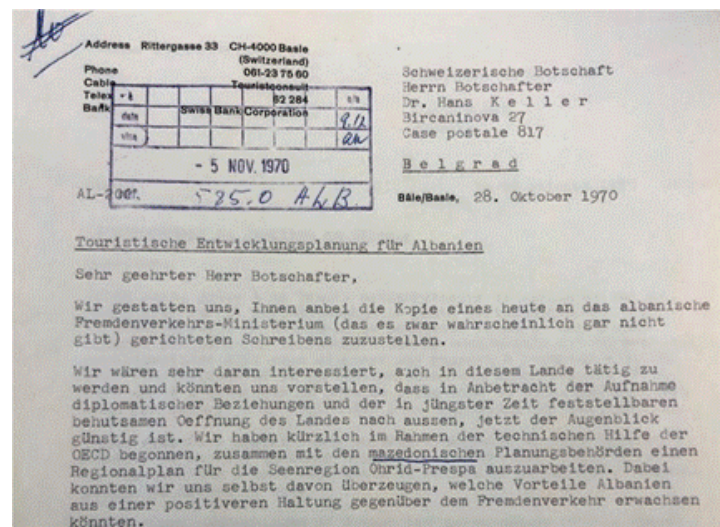


Source: 22 July 1970, BAR, E2200.48#1994/166#10*.



Source: Badener Tagblatt, 21 July 1970 BAR, E2200.48#1994/166#10*.

Naturally, the appointment of a Swiss ambassador to Albania had not escaped the attention of various interested parties in the economy – for example, as early as 1970, the Basel-based company Touristconsult advertised possibilities for tourism at Lake Ohrid and other destinations throughout Albania.³²

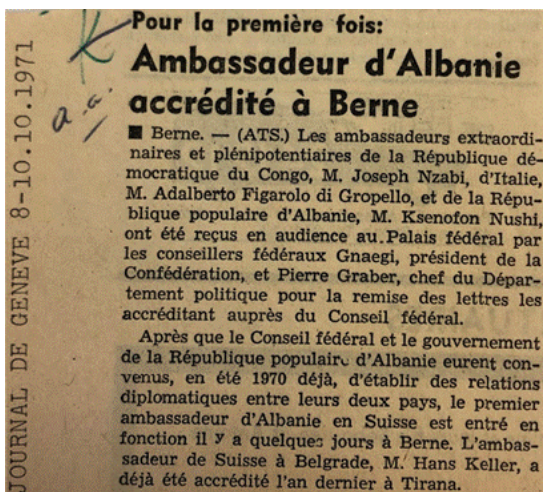


Source: Touristconsult an Botschafter Keller, 28 October 1970, BAR, E2200.48#1994/166#17*.

3.3 Development of Diplomatic Relations from 1970 -1985

After his visit to Albania from the 7th to the 14th October 1971, Ambassador Keller wrote in his report numerous perceptions he had during his first year as the Swiss Ambassador to Albania. He always tried to emphasise the positive and to advance cooperation despite obstacles. Today, the cultural, scientific and social cooperation is in the foreground, however, at that time economic aspects seemed to be of the most interest: "Economically, Albania is still a humble economic partner. But even so, this market, as small as it is, should not be neglected. The urge for better living conditions grows stronger year after year. Like everywhere else, Albania will not be stopped. The sooner you put down business roots there, the more likely you will be to make your mark in later years. Therefore, it should be worthwhile for the further development of this country to closely follow the expansion of bilateral economic relations and not to grow tired despite the difficulties."³³

One year after Switzerland appointed its first ambassador to Albania, the first Albanian ambassador to Bern was also accredited in 1971:



Source: Journal de Genève, 10 October 1971, BAR, E2200.48#1994/166#1*.

The following table shows the growth in trade relations; however, growth was less intensive in 1975/76 following an increase before 1974. Whether this decline was related to Keller's retirement in March 1974 is unclear to this day.³⁴ In the table from 1976 it is easy to see what the main exports were from Albania to Switzerland: tobacco, tomatoes, essential oil and various types of carpets were imported. From Switzerland to Albania, other goods were in demand in much larger quantities and at higher prices: television equipment and spare parts, medicines, coffee beans, chemical dyes, various other chemicals, including triacetin and cellulose acetate, which is used, among other things, to manufacture textiles.³⁵

SWITZERLAND AND ALBANIA						
The trade exchanges between Switzerland and Albania are promoted as follows :						
	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976
Import 000/dollars	1.545	3.600	3.100	1.530	2.265	2.245
Export 000/dollars	820	1.051	1.285	3.650	750	1.294
Amount "	2.365	4.651	4.385	5.180	3.115	3.539

Source: BAR, E2200.48#1994/166#17*.

Exports from Albania to Switzerland for the year 1976	
The following commodities are contracted so far :	
- Tobacco	200 tons
- Tomatoes	500-1000 tons
- Etero-oil essences	26.000 dollars
- Rugs	10.000 m ²
- Carpets	6.600 m ²
- Stamps	2000 dollars
Imports from Switzerland to Albania for the year 1976	
The following commodities are contracted so far :	
- Television equipments and spare parts	566.000 dollars
- Chemical colours	306.000 dollars
- Various chemicals	335.000 dollars
- Medicaments	268.000 dollars
- Cellulose acetat	136 tons
- Coffee in beans	300 tons
- Triacetin	7 tons, etc.

Source: BAR, E2200.48#1994/166#17*

During his stay from 27 May to 3 June 1976, the then ambassador, Hansjörg Hess, noticed that he and his wife were often able to move around without further accompaniment or supervision. Although he reported to the Federal Political Department (EPD) and the Federal Department of Economic Affairs that there was little to buy in the stores in Albania, most people were happy. Overall, Albania has made significant progress in providing for its population since World War II and political independence has allowed the regime's disadvantages to fade into the background.³⁶

However, Albania had long been a big step ahead of Switzerland in one essential way: women's equality was well advanced in the public sector. For example, women worked as mechanical engineers and did military service long before this was made possible in Switzerland.



Factory worker in Fieri 1971, Source: BAR, E2200.48#1994/166#24*.

2. #efters nachten meine Frau und ich ohne weitere Begleitung Spaziergänge in der Stadt Tirana und Autoausflüge in die Umgebung. Fremdenfeindlichkeit konstatierten wir nicht; dagegen wurden wir und unser Mercedes überall als Weltwunder angestaunt. Die Leute in Dörfern, die Mädchenbrigaden auf den Feldern, wie auch die jungen Leute beim täglichen Corso in Tirana scheinen gut gelaunt, fröhlich, einfach aber nett und sauber gekleidet. Verblüffend ist das geringe Angebot und die schlechte Qualität der Artikel des täglichen Gebrauchs; ein niedriger Lebensstandard, wie wir ihn uns kaum vorstellen können, doch ist glaubwürdig, dass seit Kriegsende bedeutende Fortschritte in der Versorgung mit elementaren Lebensmitteln wie Zucker, Brot, Früchten, Gemüse etc., mit Elektrizität und öffentlichen Transportmitteln, in Leistungen des Gesundheitswesens (Medikamente, Aerzte und Erholungsheime), in Haushaltgegenständen, Radio, Fernsehapparaten und Fahrrädern gemacht wurden. Dieser relative Fortschritt und das Gefühl, nach jahrhundertelangen Kämpfen endlich unabhängig zu sein (abgesehen vom fernen China) scheinen bei der grossen Masse die Nachteile des Regimes aufzuheben.

Botschafter Hess, Aktennotiz «Über meinen Aufenthalt in Albanien 27 May to 3 June 1976» an EPD und EVD, BAR, E2200.48#1994/166#17*.

Economically, Albania did not catch up in the last two decades of socialist rule. In fact, Enver Hoxha's turning away from China and his growing fear of possible attacks from both the West and the East plunged Albania into an economic crisis.³⁷ Instead of investing urgently needed funds for education and social services, Hoxha pushed ahead with the construction of over 200,000 single and multi-person bunkers.



Women in Albanian military, 1980, Source: BAR, E2200.48#1994/167#21*.



Source: Tirana, Stern, April 1980, BAR, E2200.48#1994/167#21*.

Tito's death in 1980 also had indirect impact on Albania as the unity of Yugoslavia began to crumble. In 1981, there was severe unrest in Kosovo: ethnic Albanians, including numerous students, demonstrated in Pristina and in other towns throughout Kosovo against discrimination in the social and educational system. The Yugoslav government reacted with brutal reprimands.³⁹ Therefore, Albania amongst others became a country of refuge for ethnic Albanians from Yugoslavia.⁴⁰ For foreigners from Western European countries, however, Albania remained a closed country, as the Tribune de Lausanne wrote on 20 October 1980, it was: "Pays sans églises, sans voitures, sans touristes".⁴¹ For many Swiss, Albania was still "the Land of the Skipetars" – a title created at the end of the 19th century by Karl May, who himself had never travelled to Southeastern Europe at the time of writing his novels.⁴² It was a country far removed from the Swiss way of life, somewhere on the Adriatic Sea, and whose head of state, Enver Hoxha, was only known to have allowed a very select few compatriots to leave the country and was not interested in letting tourists

enter. Therefore, the Tages Anzeiger proudly announced an exclusive reader's trip planned for autumn 1979, for it was precisely this secrecy that had aroused the interest of Swiss investigative journalists.⁴³ Albania did not behave like the rest of Europe - no country, whether capitalist or socialist, could be compared to it.

The fact that a certain admiration resonates in those early reports becomes clear when one reads the advertisement for the Tages-Anzeiger's reader's trip more closely:

Albanien, der Kleinstaat im Südwesten der Balkan-Halbinsel, ist wohl die eigenartigste Erscheinung auf der Europa-Karte.
Ungeachtet der Entwicklung in Ost und West hat Albanien seit Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs unbeirrt den Weg zu einer eigenen Staats-, Wirtschafts- und Gesellschaftsform gesucht.
Rund herum, ob sozialistisch oder kapitalistisch, wurde die bevorzugte geografische Lage für den devisa-bringenden Fremdenverkehr genutzt.
Albanien tat das Gegenteil. Um ungestört von Fremdeinflüssen den geplanten Sozialstaat aufbauen zu können, wurden alle Grenzen geschlossen: für Touristen, für Güter, für Kapital und Kultur.
Jetzt sind diese Grenzen im Begriff, sich zu öffnen. Natürlich ist für den Tages-Anzeiger Albanien weder von der Wirtschaftspolitik noch von der Gesellschaftsordnung her ein Leitbild. Dennoch möchten wir unseren Lesern die einzigartige Gelegenheit nicht verbauen, dieses Land voller Fragezeichen zu entdecken. Die Reise ist dank der Mitarbeit des Reisebüros Hotelplan und des staatlichen albanischen Reisebüros Albtourist zustande gekommen.
Wie gesagt, über Albanien ist bislang wenig bekannt. Um Sie dennoch ein wenig auf diese faszinierende Exkursion einzustimmen, haben wir hier wenigstens das wenige Bekannte zusammengetragen.

Source: Tages-Anzeiger, Werbung Lesern- und Leserreise, 7-14 October 1979, BAR, E2200.48#1994/167#21*.

Ultimately, even for admirers and interested persons, the journey to Hoxha's realm was paired with certain personal restrictions, as the newspaper warned: "Bearded people must go home. Journey to communist Albania - probably the most closed country in Europe".⁴⁴



Source: Tages-Anzeiger, 13 September 1979, BAR, E2200.48#1994/167#21*.



Source: Tages-Anzeiger, Werbung Leserinnen- und Leserreise, 7-14 October 1979, BAR, E2200.48#1994/167#21*.

When Switzerland subsequently invited Albanian journalists to visit the country at the end of 1979, Javer Malo, head of the Committee for Cultural and Friendly Relations with the Outer World in the Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that it was not excluded that Albanian journalists could accept an invitation. But the Albanian Foreign Ministry did not think so highly of these plans and the Swiss ambassador in Tirana, Hansjörg Hess, was convinced that Albanian media workers would not be allowed to travel to Switzerland.⁴⁵

Although the persecution of political opponents had already begun in the last year of the war and Hoxha had a surveillance apparatus set up immediately after his election as head of state, with the “Sigurimi” (the Albanian Secret Police) at its head, critical voices of Albanian intellectuals often did not penetrate as far as Switzerland.⁴⁶ This was to change at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s. Then, Swiss newspapers were writing about the treatment of dissenters in Albania, for example about the imprisonment of entire families, camps and repression. However, due to the consistent isolation of Hoxha at that time, such reports were still rare.



Source: La Suisse, 13 Dezember 1979, BAR, E2200.48#1994/167#21*.

Although the isolation of Albania declined in the last phase of the Cold War with regard to international relations, and the country already had contact with over a hundred countries, state critics were still treated with extreme severity. As early as 1979, Amnesty International estimated the number of forced labour camps to be around 31.⁴⁷ In 1984, another report by Amnesty International enlightened the Swiss people for the first time of the situation through facts and figures about the threats faced by Albanians who disagreed with Hoxha's government.⁴⁸

Foreign journalists immediately noticed that a two-tier society was a part of normal everyday life in Albania: In 1980, for example, reporters from the magazine Stern reported on separate beach sections in places such as Durrës, with one section designated for party officials and another one for the common people.⁴⁹



Source: Der öffentliche Strandabschnitt in Durrës, Stern, April 1980, BAR, E2200.48#1994/167#21*.

Despite this at times, difficult, starting point and the obvious absence of democratic values, Albania slowly opened up, particularly after Hoxha's death in 1985, and Swiss - Albanian relations were to be further intensified. For example, in the scientific fields, Tirana asked whether a total of six scientists could study hydrology, cereal crops and methods of diagnosing and treating livestock diseases in Switzerland for a period between several months to at least a full academic year. On the Swiss side, it was suggested that the president of the Albanian Academy of Sciences should be invited, together with a maximum of four other scientists, to show them around some of the prominent research institutions in Switzerland.⁵⁰

In 1984, economic talks were held explicitly to "promote the further development and prospects of economic relations between Switzerland and Albania". Switzerland's ambassadors, Benedikt von Tscharnner and J.-F. Riccard, and Albania's delegation, led by Pajtim Ajazi, Vice-Minister of the Department of Foreign Trade, took part. The head of the Swiss delegation also met the Foreign Trade Minister, Shane Korbeci, himself during these negotiations. With regard to bilateral economic relations between Switzerland and Albania, Ajazi expressed his government's wish that commercial bilateral exchange should be further intensified on the basis of mutual interests. Up to this point, and by that he meant in particular the period between 1981 and 1983, it was mainly Albania which made imports from Switzerland, while exports from Albania to Switzerland remained low. However, the balance sheet for the first half of 1984 appeared somewhat improved.

année	exportations albanaises (mio \$)	importations albanaises (mio \$)	solde
1981	5,3	25,0	- 19,7
1982	2,2	14,4	- 12,1
1983	2,1	14,9	- 12,8
1984 (6 premiers mois)	1,2	5,5	- 4,3

Source: "Pourparlers économiques en Albanie", 11 December 1984, BAR, E2200.48#1996/303#11*.

4 Years of Opening and European Integration, 1988 -2020

In contrast to other countries in Southeastern Europe, Albania emerged after the collapse of the socialist state without a bloody civil war. However, the conflicts between the former constituent republics and provinces of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which ran along ethno-religious lines, had burdensome effects on Albania. Unlike the former Yugoslavia, the years of Albania's opening, its transformation into a democracy and its path towards European integration were not due to ethnic-religious tensions, but rather a result of mismanagement and corruption of old and new elites and of sometimes, violent conflicts. Swiss and German newspapers supported this claim in their reports.⁵¹ The precarious living conditions in which a large part of the Albanian population found themselves in made it possible for many members of the former elite to settle abroad and destroy any files or reports which might incriminate them. However, despite these existing gaps in the archives, Albanian historians have been working since the beginning of the 1990s until today to critically examine the socialist past as well as the transition and make it accessible to the general public. An important example is the "House of Leaves" in Tirana, a museum with exhibitions on the Albanian secret police or Sigurimi.⁵²

4.1 Opening and the Social Crisis after the Fall of the Communist Regime

Since the end of the 1980's, Albania's foreign policy has opened up slowly, the first visible sign of this being its participation in the first

Balkan Conference in Belgrade in February 1988, and its willingness to establish relations with the European Community, known today as the European Union, has now been officially expressed. Nevertheless, people abroad, including those in Switzerland, were aware that the domestic political transition in particular would continue for a long time to come. Various formative institutions such as the Sigurimi, would not cease to exist only in a matter of days. Reports from Switzerland had estimated that in 1990 there were still between 20,000 and 40,000 political prisoners in Albania.⁵³ At the beginning of the 1990's, many Albanians left their country because of the precarious situation, and in spring of 1991, Switzerland offered its help to Italy as the first host country. In September, a Swiss delegation travelled to Albania in order to ascertain on the spot which aid was most urgently needed. It classified the food supply as insufficient and the medical care as critical. The opening of a Swiss embassy in Tirana was also an important signal. Up to now, the Swiss ambassador in Belgrade had also been deployed as ambassador to Tirana, which meant that there was no representative embassy building in the Albanian capital.⁵⁴

The fact that unrest broke out despite the largely peaceful transition was primarily due to economic and political reasons. The Albanian economy collapsed at the end of 1996 as a result of a hugely corrupt banking system, speculators who lured their customers in with pyramid schemes and then robbed them of their savings, and high inflation. There were mass protests, namely in Vlorë, but also in other Albanian cities.⁵⁵ People accused the government of violating its supervisory duties and profiting off of the schemes of speculators. The result was a devastating economic and social crisis. In 1997, a humanitarian emergency occurred - people in Albania were starving and 3,081 Albanians

subsequently asked for Swiss asylum. Due to the fact that Switzerland and Albania had already been exchanging information for more than 25 years at that time, that Albania was one of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation's (SDC) so-called partner countries, and that the SDC ran a coordination office in Tirana in the 1990s, made it possible for Switzerland to provide rapid emergency aid. In 1997, Switzerland's financial support for Albania in the technical cooperation sector amounted to 9% of the total funds deployed in Central, Southeast and Eastern Europe and 7% in Financial Cooperation. The former included expenditure in the political, state-building, economic, educational, scientific, cultural, health, social, agricultural, energy and environmental sectors. Financial cooperation (financial grants) included energy, environment, health, infrastructure and other sectors which are not further defined in the SDC's annual report.⁵⁶

4.2 Diplomatic Exchange Today

In an interview on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the opening of the Swiss Embassy in Tirana in 2017, Christoph Graf, then Swiss Ambassador to Tirana, said: "Since the 1990s, Switzerland has invested CHF 330 million in development funds in Albania. Due to the good results of the projects and the will to reform, the funds have been increased in recent years".⁵⁷ There are good reasons why around 20 million Swiss francs a year are spent in Albania: On the one hand, Albania is developing rapidly - so the money is well invested. On the other hand, Albania is still one of the poorest countries in Europe, with youth unemployment at almost 30%. Supporting Albania is also an act of European solidarity, Graf said in an interview. A European solidarity that is based on geographical

circumstances and is not bound to the European Union.

Switzerland and Albania are still engaged in political, social and economic exchanges today. A significant example is the recent Swiss participation with the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) project on an 870 km long natural gas pipeline. Although trade between the two countries is modest in volume, it has grown steadily over the past twenty years. Several large and a growing number of small and medium-sized Swiss companies have established themselves in Albania making the total number of Swiss companies to be around thirty.⁵⁸

Albania is also a priority country for the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO).⁵⁹ In this context, a comprehensive cooperation programme was set up, which also made it possible for Switzerland to provide rapid support for the victims of the November 2019 earthquake. Concerning relations between the two countries, great importance is attached to cooperation not only at the economic level but also at the social, educational and humanitarian levels. For example, the Swiss representation in Tirana, with SDC funds and the help of Norway and the UNDP have procured emergency respiratory equipment for Albania during the current COVID-19 crisis.

5 Conclusion

Fifty years is a significant amount of time, and in the past five decades, the world has undergone innumerable radical changes. From a Cold War that changed so many things to the existence of a new kind of Cold War in the modern age, Swiss-Albanian, or Albanian-Swiss relations, began in 1970 when Albania was one of the most isolated countries in Europe. It is especially due to the experienced diplomat Hans Keller that these relations did not stop at these beginnings, but rather that they developed and that there still exists a lively economic and social exchange today. Albania, with its linguistically talented inhabitants, its cosmopolitanism and the wonderful nature that the country has to offer, is quickly becoming a travel destination for more and more Swiss people. Cooperation between the two countries has also increased on the scientific level in recent years. With all this in mind: All the best to Switzerland - Albania / Albania - Switzerland, for another 50 years of successful diplomatic cooperation.

¹ Zef Ahmeti, "Der lange Weg zur Errichtung diplomatischer Beziehungen zwischen der Schweiz und Albanien" (St. Gallen: Albanisches Institut, 2012), p. 4.

² English translation: "...it is to be feared that the Italians have certain ambitions in Albania...". Le Ministre de Suisse à Paris, Ch. Lardy, au Président de la Confédération et Chef du Département des Affaires étrangères, A Deucher, 4 March 1897, in: Yves Collart et al. (Ed.) *Diplomatische Dokumente der Schweiz*, Vol. 4, (1890-1903), Bern 1994, Doc. 242, p. 543.

³ English translation: there is, as I have already written to you, a special understanding between Italy and Austria- Hungary on the question of Albania." Le Ministre de Suisse à Rome, G. Carlin, au Président de la Confédération et Chef du Département politique, E. Brenner, 12 June 1901, in: Yves Collart et al. (Ed.) *Diplomatische Dokumente der Schweiz*, Vol. 4, (1890-1903), Bern 1994, Doc. 365, p. 805.

⁴ Note from 29 November 1912, OeStA/HHStA PA XII 417, Türkei Liasse XLV/6b, Balkankrieg cc. See also on the nation-state movement in Albania: Nathalie Clayer, "Aux origines du nationalisme albanais. La naissance d'une nation majoritairement musulmane en Europe", Paris: Editions Karthala 2007, pp. 702-705.

⁵ Ahmeti, "Der lange Weg", p. 4

⁶ Miranda Vickers, *The Albanians: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), p. 66.

⁷ Robert Elsie, *A Biographical Dictionary of Albanian History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), p. 483.

⁸ Heinz Klarer, "Schweizerische Praxis der völkerrechtlichen Anerkennung", Vol. 24 (Zürich: Schulthess, 1981), p. 91. See also: Ahmeti, "Der lange Weg", p. 5.

⁹ Schweizer Legation in Wien, Hans de Segesser, 25 May 1914, BAR, E2001#1000/1503#18*.

¹⁰ Ahmeti, "Der lange Weg", p. 12.

¹¹ English Translation: "I am convinced that the Albanian Government, whose sole aim is the rapid development of the country, will make every effort to consolidate and develop good relations between Switzerland and Albania." Benedikt (Benôit) Blinishti, Vertreter Albanien beim Völkerbund an Bundesrat Giuseppe Motta, 14 March 1922, BAR, E2001B#1000/1503#18*. See here also: Klarer, *Schweizerische Praxis der völkerrechtlichen Anerkennung*, p. 92f.

¹² Bernhard Tönnies, *Sonderfall Albanien: Enver Hoxhas „eigener Weg“ und die historischen Ursprünge seiner Ideologie* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1980), p. 366. For more information on the development of the Albanian independence movement, see also: Nicola Guy, *Birth of Albania: Ethnic Nationalism, the Great Powers of World War I and the Emergence of Albanian Independence* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012).

¹³ Massimo Borgogni, *Tra Continuità e Incertezza. Italia e Albania (1914-1939). La strategia politico-militare dell'Italia in Albania fino all'Operazione "Oltre Mare Tirana"* (Mailand: Franco Angeli, 2007).

¹⁴ Hubert Neuwirth, *Widerstand und Kollaboration in Albanien 1939-1944* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008), p.24. See also, Tönnies, *Sonderfall Albanien*, p. 384.

¹⁵ Zogu was crowned king on 1 September 1928. See: Schmidt-Neke, *Verfassungen Albanien*, p. 34. For further details on the basic statute of the Albanian Kingdom from 1 December 1928, see *Ibid*, pp. 139-161.

- ¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 390-392. The "Balkan Entente" was a military alliance between the states of Greece, Yugoslavia, Turkey and Romania and is sometimes referred to as the first "Balkan Pact" with reference to the later, second "Balkan Pact" of 9 August 1954.
- ¹⁷ Franziska Zaugg, *Albanische Muslime in der Waffen-SS. Von "Grossalbanien" zur Division "Skanderbeg"* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2016), pp. 50-59.
- ¹⁸ Klarer, *Schweizerische Praxis der völkerrechtlichen Anerkennung*, p. 335.
- ¹⁹ On the establishment of a new puppet government, see also: Neubacher, *Sonderauftrag Südost*, p. 13f. and Zaugg, *Albanische Muslime*, pp. 88-95.
- ²⁰ Hubert Neuwirth, *Widerstand und Kollaboration* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008), p. 235.
- ²¹ On the non-alignment and the self-image of Switzerland, see: Thomas Bürgisser, *Wahlverwandtschaft zweier Sonderfälle im Kalten Krieg. Schweizerische Perspektiven auf das sozialistische Jugoslawien (1943-1991)* (Bern: DDS/Quaderni di Dodis, 2017), pp. 487-497.
- ²² Klarer, *Schweizerische Praxis der völkerrechtlichen Anerkennung*, p. 209.
- ²³ Schweizer Botschafter in Belgrad, Ganz an Generalsekretär des EPD, Minister Bruno Kohli, 7 March 1961, E2001E#1976/17#258*, dodis.ch/10659.
- ²⁴ See note on the recognition of the People's Democratic Regime in Albania by Switzerland, 26 June 1962, BAR, E2001E#1980/83#364*, dodis.ch/18981.
- ²⁵ Keller, Frage nach Aufnahme diplomatischer Beziehungen, 12 March 1969, BAR, E2001#1980/83#907*.
- ²⁶ Keller Bericht Albanienreise 1- 4 June 1969, 9 June 1969, BAR, E2001E#1980/83#907*, p. 1.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ Ahmeti, "Der lange Weg", p. 27.
- ²⁹ Sekretär des Chefs des Eidgenössischen Politischen Departements, Franz Blankart an Hans Keller, 8 August 1970, AfZ, Nachlass Hans Keller, Belgrad - Tirana, 6.5.1 Korrespondenzen 1969-1975.
- ³⁰ Keller an Bundesrat Pierre Graber zu seinem Antrittsbesuch in Albanien, 13 October 1970, BAR, E2001E#1980/83#907*, dodis.ch/34485.
- ³¹ Kellers Bericht über seinen Amtsantrittsbesuch in Tirana, 13 October 1970, BAR, E2001E#1980/83#907*, dodis.ch/34485.
- ³² Touristconsult an Botschafter Keller, 28 October 1970, BAR, E2200.48#1994/166#17*.
- ³³ Keller, Bericht seines Besuchs in Albanien vom 7-14 October 1971, 25 October 1971, BAR, E2001E#1980/83#907*, dodis.ch/34479.
- ³⁴ The last visit from Keller to Albania was in mid-March 1974. See: Bericht Keller an den Bundesrat hinsichtlich seines Abschiedsbesuchs in Albanien, 15 March 1974, AfZ, Nachlass Hans Keller, Belgrad - Tirana, 6.5.1 Korrespondenzen 1969-1975.
- ³⁵ "Trade and Exchange between Albania and Switzerland", BAR, E2200.48#1994/166#17*.
- ³⁶ Botschafter Hess, Aktennotiz «Über meinen Aufenthalt in Albanien 27 May to 3 June 1976» an EPD und EVD, BAR, E2200.48#1994/166#17*.
- ³⁷ See for example, article in NZZ, "Nach dem Bruch zwischen Peking und Tirana" from Verschlechterung der wirtschaftlichen Situation in Albanien, 21 July 1978, BAR, E2200.48#1994/167#21*.
- ³⁸ The estimates vary between 200-250,000 bunkers, see: Franziska Zaugg, "Wider den Feind, der nie kam - Bunkersysteme in Albanien" published on the website, Arbeitskreis Militärgeschichte (2013), <http://portal-militaergeschichte.de/node/975>.
- ³⁹ Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Kosovo. Kurze Geschichte einer zentralbalkanischen Landschaft*, (Wien: Böhlau, 2008), p. 297.
- ⁴⁰ On the effects of the 1981 unrest in Kosovo on Albania, see also: Ethem Çeku, *Kosovo and Diplomacy since World War II* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2016) pp. 157-175.
- ⁴¹ English Translation: Country without church, without cars, without tourists. AFP, "Pays sans églises, sans voitures, sans touristes. Et l'Albanie crée la femme", Tribune de Lausanne, 20 October 1980.
- ⁴² Zaugg, *Albanische Muslime*, p. 300-303.
- ⁴³ Tages-Anzeiger, "Werbung Leserinnen- und Leserreise", 7-14 October 1979, BAR, E2200.48#1994/167#21*.
- ⁴⁴ Fritz Kübler, "Barträger müssen wieder heim", Tages-Anzeiger, 13 September 1979, BAR, E2200.48#1994/167#21*.
- ⁴⁵ Botschafter Hess an Politische Abteilung I und II sowie an Information und Presse, "Albanien: Kulturelle Kontakte", 4 December 1979, BAR, E2200.48#1994/167#27*.

⁴⁶ See here personal reports in: Anita Niegenhell, Gabriele Ponisch, *Wir sind immer im Feuer: Berichte ehemaliger politischer Gefangener im kommunistischen Albanien*, Reihe: Albanologische Studien Bd. 2, (Wien: Böhlau, 2001).

⁴⁷ ATS, "L'opposition albanaise accuse", *La Suisse*, 13 December 1979, BAR, E2200.48#1994/167#21*.

⁴⁸ Vladimir Pilman, "Todesstrafe für Kindertaufen" in: *Die Ostschweiz*, 31 July 1984, BAR, E2200.48#1996/303#11*.

⁴⁹ Georg Karp und Axel Karp, "Der rote Unbekannte", *Stern*, April 1980, BAR, E2200.48#1994/167#21*, p. 98.

⁵⁰ P. Barraza an EDA, "Relations culturelles et scientifiques avec l'Albanie", 8 July 1980, BAR, E2200.48#1994/167#27*, p. 3.

⁵¹ Diverse Zeitungen, bspw. Christine von Kohl, "Aufbruch ins Chaos. Korruption, Gewalt, Lug und Trug – ist Albanien am Ende?", *Die Zeit*, 7 March 1997, BAR, Zeitungsartikelsammlung Albanien, J1.289 2001/16 859.

⁵² <https://kommunismusgeschichte.de/lernen/ausstellungen/article/detail/house-of-leaves-the-museum-ofsecret-surveillance-tirana-albanien/> (Accessed: 23 August 2020).

⁵³ Bericht p.B.58.2 – Albanien, 24 October 1990, p. 3f. Kopie zur Verfügung gestellt durch EDA.

⁵⁴ Briefing Marco Cameroni, Chef Presse- und Informationsdienst EDA über schweizerische Abklärungsmission in Albanien, 6 September 1991. Kopie zur Verfügung gestellt durch EDA.

⁵⁵ Elez Biberaj, *Albania in Transition: The Rocky Road to Democracy* (Boulder: Westview 1998), p. 322.

⁵⁶ Jahresbericht Direktion für Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit (DEZA), 1997.

⁵⁷ <https://www.luzernerzeitung.ch/international/diplomat-schweizer-botschafter-graf-albanien-lebtdiereligioese-toleranz-ld.80376> (Accessed: 23 June 2020).

⁵⁸ <https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/de/home/vertretungen-undreisehinweise/albanien/bilaterealebeziehungen-schweiz-albanien.html> (Accessed: 23 June 2020).

⁵⁹ See in detail: https://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/countries/countries-content/albania/en/2018-02-22-albania-coop-strategy_EN_reduced.pdf (Accessed: 2 August 2020).

Relations between Albania and Switzerland after Second World War

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In the aftermath of the Second World War, Albania and Switzerland, two small-scale European countries, stood on the margins of completely domestic and foreign approaches. Switzerland - whose armed neutrality had been guaranteed by international covenants ever since the 1815 Congress of Vienna - was among the few countries that remained truly democratic amidst the left and right-wing dictatorship tendencies that overwhelmed Europe back in the 30s. The tiny alpine country with few underground riches managed to ensure a sustainable prosperity by upholding the right to voting and not participating in the Second World War. Switzerland counted many Albanian settlements established mainly by Albanian political migrants or Kosovar workers.

The Second World War left Albania completely devastated with countless casualties and a new political force, i.e. the CPA, coming into power as liberator, but which nevertheless omitted to acknowledge the bilateral agreements or diplomatic relations established during the 20s and 30s. Given its unchallenged power and the specific circumstances deriving from the WWII, the CPA embarked on pushing Albania's foreign agenda towards the communist East. A mountainous economically depleted and weak country with many underground riches. Back in 1947, our diplomatic sources reported that Albania was home to only one Swiss citizen named Elena Badel, working as a teacher in Tirana.

The countries had no record of diplomatic relations, Switzerland recognized Albania as an independent state after WWI. Two Albanian consulates were opened first in Geneva and then in Berna in the 20s to closely monitor the activity of Albanian settlements. Our sources report six Albanian honorary consuls delegated

in Switzerland, namely in Zurich, Bern, Lausanne, Chiasso, Lucerne, and Basel in 1926.

Path towards establishing diplomatic relations

According to Albanian diplomatic sources, it was the Swiss left wing that showed interest in Albania for the very first time. The Communist Party of Switzerland sympathized in 1946 with the "Albanian people's dauntless fight under the leadership of the Communist Party of Albania during the WWII", thus echoing the newly-established economic and social order in the press. In 1947, the CPS participated in the elections and won a considerable number of seats in the Federal Assembly. Albania and Switzerland exchanged information only on the number and repatriation of Swiss citizens living in Albania, upon Switzerland's request. The Swiss Legation in Belgrade was the center of communication between the two countries.

In 1948, which marked a split between Albania and Yugoslavia and eventually led to the interruption of the Yugoslavian technical and financial assistance, the Swiss government had no intention to embark on establishing diplomatic relations with Albania since the country was of no strategic or diplomatic interest. However, economic priorities propelled Switzerland to propose to the Albanian Government through its Legate in Belgrade to enter into commercial relations for products interesting both countries, which was initially turned down by the Albanian government as unnecessary for as long as the countries had no record of diplomatic relations. During this period, the Swiss Government received several invitations from private companies on commercial exchanges, which were nevertheless left unaddressed or given a negative reply. Albania was officially and completely reliant upon the soviet assistance and

loans, and trapped by the Moscow dictatorship in terms of foreign policy.

Stalin death gave rise to Khrushchev thaw, which threw Hoxha's stalinist regime into turmoil. The country embarked on the quest for alternative resources to let the Albanian economy breathe no matter the course of events. Switzerland was perceived as a neutral country with great economic capacities that had openly shown its commercial interest towards Albania. The Albanian government started a diplomatic survey targeting Swiss representatives in Budapest, Roma and Belgrade on the Swiss approach towards establishing diplomatic relations with Albania. The reason behind the survey was that commercial relations of mutual interest shouldn't be hindered just because the two countries had no record of diplomatic relations. Swiss diplomats shared the same opinion, but nevertheless they stated that Switzerland was extremely attentive and conservative in terms of its foreign relations. And Albania was actually perceived as a member to the Eastern Bloc and Warsaw Treaty ever since May 1955. Although neutral, Switzerland was a Western country and a fierce protector of liberal democracy.

In the meantime, Swiss traders' interest for medicinal plants growing in Albania amplified. In 1956 a contract of \$ 800 000 was concluded. The Swiss Government proposed a commercial agreement to be signed between the countries given the large volume of commercial exchanges between the countries. The Albanian government would only become party to such agreement upon the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The enthusiasm of the Swiss Government was however offset by their reluctance to enter into diplomatic relations given that the matter takes up a lot of time and that they were pretty conservative with regard to foreign policies and international relations. The

said interest was quickly mirrored by the Swiss media with many reporters requesting Albania a visitor visa to establish contacts with their fellow colleagues and start writing stories on the country. Albania however was not that positive about these requests and left them unanswered. The spirit prevailed from second half of the '50s up to 1962.

Once the diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union came to an end, the observers predicted that Albania would be walking in the footsteps of Yugoslavia in 1948 and would approach the West. On the contrary, Hoxha entered into mutual support relations with the communist China, thus depriving the country of an outstanding opportunity to open up. Considering the friction between East and West at the time, West would have welcomed Albania in its bloc, by investing in its strengthening, detached from the communist bloc. Having this in mind, the Albanian Government decided to wait and see if the Swiss Government would change its approach. But Albania was still a member to the Warsaw Treaty, which impeded the diplomatic relations from being established with a neutral pro-western country like Switzerland having no particular political interests toward Albania. The Albanian Ambassador to France Dhimitër Lamani visited the Swiss Embassy on 12 November 1961. During the meeting with his Swiss fellow targeting the bilateral relations between the countries, Lamani proposed the establishment of diplomatic relations between the countries. This was actually the Albanian Government's first proposal to Switzerland. The Swiss Ambassador told his Albanian fellow that Switzerland, given its small-size and limited economic capacity, relied on two criteria when establishing diplomatic relations with another country: 1) presence of Swiss citizens and 2) commercial interest. The Albanian proposal would be subject to a review based on these two criteria.

The Swiss Ambassador, during his return visit in January 1962, stated that the Swiss Government was reviewing the Albanian proposal. He moreover suggested that the first step towards the establishment of relations should be commercial, because Switzerland needed to have its commercial interest towards Albania strengthened in order to move the establishment of diplomatic relations process. The Albanian Ambassador was skeptical about the point made by his Swiss fellow and clarified that Albania considered the establishment of diplomatic relations as a political action contributing to the development of relations in other areas, but given that the Swiss Government was quite conservative in this regard, he asked that the Swiss proposals be further elaborated on, in order to move forward with the commercial relations. The proposal was mainly driven by the country's interest in iron nickel and consisted of exchanging the ore with Swiss watches and machinery. The Albanian Government was positive about the proposal and requested it to be made official.

The Ministry of Commerce approved in March 1962 the commercial exchange of iron, chrome and oil sand with Switzerland. This was to advance the establishment of diplomatic relations. Switzerland made its first demand in May 1962. The Swiss firm Vatter sent a letter to the Albanian legate in Paris asking for data on the Albanian chrome quality because it was interested in purchasing 200 000 tons of the ore. In the same year, the Swiss Government requested the establishment of relations between the airlines of the two countries. Following the proposal of the Swiss PTT Administration in July, the Albanian Government authorized in September 1963 the Ministry of Communications to enter into agreement with the Swiss PTT Administration to establish the phone service between Albania and Switzerland.

The Albanian Government repeated its request to advance the establishment of diplomatic relations every year whenever possible, while the Swiss Government increased its demand for raw materials which were exchanged with processed products. The communication continued through respective representation bodies in Vienna. In May 1964, the Swiss Ambassador informed his fellow Albanian Ambassador in Vienna that his government had authorized the embassy to take charge of all communications and relations with Albania.

Albania leaving the Warsaw Treaty in 1968 in the aftermath of events in the Czech Republic was hailed by the Swiss representatives. In October 1969, the Swiss Ambassador in Vienna, following the communications exchanged with the Albanian representative stated "You are now independent; there's nothing standing in the way of our friendly relations".

In the light of the above, Albania was visited on 1-3 June 1969 by the new Swiss Ambassador to Belgrade Beograd Hans Keller, former Ambassador to Beijing. In January 1967, Hans Keller was transferred from Beijing to Belgrade and visited - on the occasion - the Albanian Ambassador to Belgrade Vasil Nathanaili. Keller expressed his desire to visit Albania as a tourist. Nathanaili pointed out the long-held issue of the two countries not having entered into diplomatic relations. Keller expressed his optimism for the future of these relations. Nathanaili described Keller as "very influential, likable and funny". He suggested the Albanian Embassy in Belgrade to be close with Keller for he had the impression that Keller had been charged with advancing the diplomatic relations between the two countries.

At the outset of his visit to Albania in June 1969, Keller stated that he had been charged by his own government with talking to the Albanian authorities on the relations between the two

countries. Given Albania's closeness with communist China and China's influence over the Albanian politics, Keller said the following in the meeting with the Minister of foreign Affairs Nesti Nase: "There's still too much to be done between the countries. We think that it's high time to communicate...We have already pointed out in Beijing the issue concerning the relations between our two countries. We are willing to establish diplomatic relations and we can discuss about the modalities. For the moment, we are not going to establish our own embassy in Tirana, but this may happen in the near future. The representatives of your country are more than welcome to Switzerland. If your government agrees, my government will accredit me as ambassador to Albania." Nase welcomed the decision of the Swiss Government. He proposed both parties to issue a press release on the most recent development in terms of relations between the two countries. The Ambassador welcomed the proposal, but stated that they should wait first for the National Assembly of Switzerland to approve the decision in order for it to become official. Keller proposed in the meantime that the commercial exchanges between the two countries should be further strengthened and Albania could now purchase from Switzerland all the goods it used to purchase in France or

First term of the Swiss Confedera- te Ambassador Hans Keller

The Ambassador Keller arrived in Albania on 28 September and stayed one week. Credentials were submitted on 2 October 1970. Besides Haxhi Lleshi, the President of the Presidium of the People's Assembly, Keller met the Prime Minister Mehmet Shehu, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Reis Malile, etc. The ambassador addressed no political issues during the visit. Keller was predominantly

interested in economic issues. He expressed his conviction that there was huge potential for both countries to develop commerce, technical and scientific cooperation, culture, sports and tourism. He pointed out that despite distinct social systems, the cooperation between the two countries should be further expanded and took as an example the relations between his country and China: "Our long-held principle is to keep good relations with as many countries all over the world as possible and develop commercial, cultural, tourist and sport relations".

He reiterated the statement in his meeting with Shehu. The latter acknowledged Keller's active role in establishing diplomatic relations with Albania and thanked him for that. However he added "Albania is a country that allows nobody to interfere with its domestic affairs and doesn't meddle with the domestic affairs others". The ambassador acknowledged that distinct social systems were not an impediment to the development of commercial and economic relations and that his duty in Albania was to explore new areas of cooperation in commerce, economy, culture and science, training of Albanian experts, electrification of the country and, given the common geographical features, training of engineers on designing HPPs, over which Switzerland was highly experienced given the lack of oil and natural gas, and farming due to the mountainous terrain of the two countries.

By dodging the heated topics mentioned during the conversation with Shehu, especially Albania's stance towards the USA, Keller highlighted the Swiss experience and success in HPP construction. Shehu pointed out that nothing could stand on the way of developing state relations between the two parties. He also asked for Albanian specialists to be sent to Switzerland to be trained on HPPs. Actually, they were sent in the first half of 1971.

Keller gave an impetus to commercial relations between the two countries. In March 1971 the Swiss Government asked to purchase corn from Albania which immediately responded positively. Cultural exchanges, training of farming specialists etc. were intensified. In October 1971, the Swiss Embassy requested the accreditation of a military attaché, but the request was left unanswered. A commercial attaché was accredited instead.

The Albanian Government proposed in 1973 to sign a commercial agreement based on the reciprocity principle, but the Swiss Government considered its implementation difficult since the Swiss commercial companies were not state-owned; commerce was rather a private activity, therefore no reciprocity principle could apply. According to the Swiss Government, lack of such an agreement was in no means an impediment to the development of commerce, because it was a private activity.

The Ministry of Foreign Trade proposed the expansion of commerce with Switzerland. Many arguments were deployed - the volume of commercial exchanges with Switzerland having reached \$ 4 million per year, thus indicating a growth potential, was one of them. On the other hand, with Italy and France, as TPE members in the future, Albania could not sign a commercial bilateral agreement because it had not recognized the TPE as a body yet. Based on these, once Keller left the office in 1974, the Albanian Government insisted to have its proposal on a commercial agreement between the two countries accepted. The text would be identical with the text employed in the agreement with Austria and Sweden. The Swiss Government would recommend its commercial companies the Albanian market to purchase and sell goods. The delegation of the Ministry of Foreign Trade arrived in Switzerland on 20 October 1974, and after 8 days of negotiations,

the commercial agreement between the two countries was signed on 28 October 1974. The Swiss Government requested the Article 2 to provide for that "Both governments agreed to give each other the treatment of the most favored nation".

Albtransport had concluded in 1974 with the Swiss airline Swissair an agreement on the sale of tickets for passengers and goods. In 1979, despite special planes for Albanian Statesmen, Swissair was negotiating for other planes to land in Tirana.

In the end of 1977 the first exhibition with art works, textiles and confections was opened for four days in Zürich by the Albanian enterprise Albimpeks. The exhibition was organized by the private Swiss company Oundijan located in Zürich.

In January 1978, the "Friends of Socialist Albania" Association was established in Switzerland, chaired by Roland Rimoz. The Steering Committee consisted of five members who had visited Albania as tourists through the friendship association in France. The association was founded on their own initiative. As denoted from the embassy correspondence, they consisted of tourists who had been in Albania, had aligned with the left wing and propagated the Albanian reality. The Embassy in Vienna tried to immediately contact them, get some additional information and send them propagandistic materials.

Political clashes - if we can name them such - between the representatives of both parties were mainly caused by the different approaches of these two small countries towards engagement in international conferences and organizations. Albania refusing the invitation to participate in the Helsinki Conference in the founding meeting of CSCE by reasoning that no benefit would arise

of it given the presence of great powers in the conference was considered as quite interesting from Switzerland and somehow justifiable for a small country like Albania or Switzerland. However, contrary to Albanian authorities, they considered participation as an opportunity to positively impact the conference proceedings and argued that one could actually be part of discussions and debates only by attending the conference. This opinion had been forwarded to Albanian authorities by Ambassador Keller and other diplomats.

Albania took on the same attitude towards Switzerland's invitation to participate in Colombo Conference in the framework of Non-aligned Movement. Albania refused to participate by reasoning that states with different regimes would be attending, and some of them had moreover entered into direct agreements with the great powers, therefore they could not counter their purposes. The Swiss Government had another approach, according to which small countries should interest peace in Europe and that this could be achieved on the table. Thus, they could openly express their opinion about the intentions of great powers. "Sitting on the same table doesn't mean caressing"-said the Swiss representatives to their Albanian counterparts. However, the Albanian Government distrusted such tables and upheld that, instead of talking, military measures should be adopted to be prepared in case of potential attack by the great powers. According to them, talking was of no use. Switzerland started to label Albania as an "isolated country" in its meetings with Albanian officials, which was actually denied by the Albanian party.

Split between Albania and China, July 1978

The straining of relations with China and the split between the two countries deprived Albania of the only and last source of foreign assistance, which threw the country in an extremely difficult position. The main concern distressing Switzerland and the West was whether Albania would further strengthen its relations with the USSR in its quest to get a source of economic assistance after the split with China. However, Hoxha refused to open the country up to the West or former soviet allies. The country became more and more closed off-external factors were regarded as potential risks threatening Hoxha's power. The principle of "relying on own forces" turned pretty soon into the headline of Albania's economic development. However, the Swiss Government considered that economic cooperation was actually the only weapon to keep Albania on the right side.

Keller remained a friend to Albania. He visited Albania even after his term expired, either as a friend or as a companion to groups of businessmen interested in cooperating with Albania. In late August 1978, talks were held in Albania between the group of Swiss commercial companies' representatives and the delegation of Albanian foreign trade enterprises and Chamber of Commerce. The meeting was attended by the former (now retired) ambassador Keller, who took on to initiate the commercial relations between the two countries given his ties with large Swiss companies and influence in the business sector in Switzerland. Talks in Tirana were shortly followed by other talks between the Albanian state commercial delegation of the LPA and the Swiss Confederation state commercial delegation on 5-8 December 1978. The talk between the two delegations concluded with the signing of the Meeting Minutes, in Tirana on 07.12.1978.

The Swiss Government showed its willingness to provide aid to those affected by the earthquake of 15 April 1979, which was cordially rejected by the Albanian government based on the principle of "relying on our own forces".

Albania attended an international fair in Basel that same year on 21.04.1979 - 01.05.1979, by displaying multiple products in a separate pavilion. The Swiss Government was very supportive and benevolent in order for the pavilion to make progress and promote the Albanian goods. In May 1984, the Commercial Expansion Office in Switzerland prepared and issued the first bulletin about Albania, briefly describing the country's history, political and economic situation, economic relations with Switzerland in particular, relations between the Swiss Commercial Development Office and Chamber of Commerce in Albania, the foreign trade regime, approximation to the Albanian market, and other necessary data to go on a trip in Albania.

In May 1984, a second agreement was signed between the Albanian Government and the Swiss Federal Council in the field of road freight transport.

From Hoxha's death up to the political changes in the country, 1985 - 1992.

Hoxha's death was just like a beam of light in the end of the tunnel with regards to the Albanian politics liberalization, but the West feared Albania could possibly revert to Moscow, since the split with USSR was mainly attributed to Hoxha. The Swiss Government shared the same concern. Switzerland supported Albania's foreign policy not aligned with any of the blocs, especially its anti-soviet attitude, which made it a sustainable element with regards to Moscow's efforts to penetrate the region, given the political crisis

that had overwhelmed Yugoslavia after Tito's death and Milošević coming into power.

In 1985, when the severe economic consequences started to emerge due to the political self-confinement, the Albanian Government requested the Swiss Government to enhance its presence in the Albanian economy. However, this was hindered by the stiff Albanian law on foreign relations and Albania's inability to seduce the Swiss business given its country and population size. The Albanian Government requested in January to establish its representation body in Zürich, which had been actually projected ever since 1979, but had been postponed due to financial reasons. This was actually against the Swiss practice, according to which the commercial representation body should be part of the diplomatic mission in Bern. The commercial representation alone would have no diplomatic immunity and would pay taxes just like the representation offices of companies. Swiss authorities proposed for a consulate to be opened in Zürich, with diplomatic immunity, which would perform commercial function as well, given its inability to open an embassy in Bern. The Albanian Government turned down the proposal.

Upon the Swiss Government request, the Swiss tourist company «Kuoni Travel» and the tourist agency «Travel Agency Hans Imholz» decided to cooperate with the enterprise Albturizmi in Albania to bring tourist groups in the country. Albanian authorities also approved the visit of the General Director of the Great Book "Index of Hotels and Travels" Mr. Charle Seiler, a Swiss national and citizen.

Upon the support of the Federal Foreign Affairs Department, Swissair representatives held talks with the Ministry of Communications and Albturizmi in August 1985 on the opening of a direct airline Tirana Zürich on 1 April 1986.

The need for both governments to enter into an agreement on air transport also emerged. Upon the persistence of the Swiss company and the support of the Federal Foreign Affairs Department, talks were held between the two delegations on 14 March 1986 and a third deal was signed: the agreement on the air transport between the two countries and the relevant protocols. Swissair airline was inaugurated in June 1986 in Tirana. The inauguration event was attended by the Director for Europe and North America in the Federal Foreign Affairs Department.

The Directorate of International Organizations had proposed the MoFA leaders to establish a representation body in Geneva- the greatest hub of international organizations in Europe - as early as May 1983. The representation body would also cover the bilateral political, economic and cultural relations with Switzerland. The argument employed to move the proposal was as follows:

“In the meantime, the relations between the two countries will develop smoothly. From the commercial perspective, Switzerland is one of the largest exporters of Albanian ores, which is fair and cordial about the Kosovo question and the relations between our country with Yugoslavia. The Swiss Government not only allowed Kosovars in its territory to celebrate, but turned down all Yugoslavian interventions and protests on the ban of such celebration. Even nowadays, there is a large number of Kosovars working in Switzerland, either permanently or by season.” The proposal was not objected in principle, but its implementation was hindered due to financial reasons. In September 1986, the Albanian Government opened its Permanent Mission nearby the UN Office and specialized institutions in Geneva - a decision made in January 1987. The Mission would be covering not

only relations with international organizations, but also Albania's relations with Switzerland in the field of commerce, communication, consular actions, thus resolving all issues concerning visa to go to Albania for all those individuals transiting from Vienna. The Swiss government refused that the Head of Mission was accredited as ambassador at the Swiss Confederation. The opposite was more likely to happen.

Once Milošević came in power, the relations between Yugoslavia and Switzerland were put on a strain. In 1986, six Yugoslavian diplomats in charge of insuring and checking the Yugoslavian workers in Switzerland were banned. The time coincided with Kosovars becoming subject to an unprecedented repressive politics. The Albanian Government took advantage of the moment to further strengthen its relations with Switzerland, by enhancing its presence in the RoA, enhancing its communication with Swiss diplomats, welcoming the proposals of Swiss authorities to visit Albania etc. Under this spirit, Switzerland proposed to mediate the establishment of diplomatic relations between Albania and Great Britain, but the Albanian Government was already directly communicating with Great Britain.

The period marks the first official visits from the political authorities of both countries. On 18-22 June 1987, an official delegation elected by the MoFA at the Deputy Minister level visited Bern for the first time. It was led by Sokrat Plaka. The delegation gave a message to Swiss authorities on behalf of Ramiz Alia in the capacity of the President of the Presidium of the People's Assembly targeting Mr. Pierre Aubert, President of the Swiss Confederation who welcomed the delegation. Alia expressed his deep desire to enhance the cooperation and the friendship between these two small countries, out of the political and military groups in front of

armed great powers. President Aubert stated among others in the meeting that "We have a special sympathy for Albania. We have multiple similarities. Irrespective of the difficulties encountered, both countries are independent. We have been successful in terms of relations between the two countries. We have many things to say to each other and we can mutually benefit from the experience of both countries. Your visit is just the beginning of the future dialog. We should meet more often...".

The establishment of diplomatic relations with FRG in 1987 and the participation in the 1st Balkan Conference of Foreign Ministers in February 1988 were indicative of Albania's efforts to open itself up to the West and multilateral relations. This made Switzerland grow more interested in Albania.

A Swiss parliamentary delegation visited Albania on 25-28 July 1988 upon the Albanian Government's invitation. The People's Assembly that returned the visit in 1989 was chaired by its Spokesperson Petro Dode.

The Albanian movie week was held in Switzerland and the Swiss movie week was held in Albania. The Swiss anthropology was published in Albanian in Tirana in 1990 and the Albanian anthropology was published in German and French in Switzerland. Artistic and cultural ensembles held shows in different Swiss cities every year.

Swissair continued to insist on the Albanian consulate being opened in Zürich because of the visa issue affecting travelers interested in visiting Albania. Moreover, they warned that Zürich-Tirana airline could be subject to a potential shut down as no passengers traveled the line. On 4 January 1990, the Department proposed to open the Albanian General Consulate in Switzerland with the same staff and same building as the

Albanian Mission at the UN offices. An advisor and a third secretary to the Mission would be appointed Consul General and Consul. The Mission would take on the responsibilities of the General Consulate. The draft decision was prepared but not turned into DCM. The underlying reason was avoiding the Yugoslavian claims that Albania was trying to oversee Kosovars living in Switzerland to establish ties with them. Consular issues were covered by the Albanian embassy in Vienna, while political bilateral issues were covered by the Mission in Geneva. Swissair agreed with the Swiss Government in March 1990 that visas for Albanian citizens were issued in Zürich airport. Swissair opened its office in Tirana on 7 April 1990.

In January 1990, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Malile forwarded through the Swiss Ambassador in Belgrade the request for the Swiss Minister of Foreign Affairs to visit Albania. In the meanwhile, the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the end of Cold War lead the West to lower its strategic interests. Ready to help Albania anyhow during the Cold War, Switzerland, just like other Western countries, refused to invest on a country holding tight onto the communist regime in denial of concrete facts that it was ready to renounce from the political power to the benefit of the country's democratization.

The State Secretary Federal at the Foreign Affairs Department of the Swiss Confederation Klaus Jacobi visited Albania on 1-5 November 1990, thus returning the visit to the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Plaka in 1987. The visit took place on the verge of Helsinki II Conference, with the member states to CSCE meeting in Paris. It was initially claimed that Albania would join the body. Jacobi gave clear messages for the Albanian authorities. He stated that relations with Eastern Europe on which a Swiss assistance program amounting to CHF 250 million had

been also established. Moreover, he pointed out that Switzerland was very committed to human rights, political pluralism and market economy. He asserted that Switzerland supported Albania's membership to CSBE as its 35th member, but decision-making at CSBE was consensus-based, which according to Jacobi put Albania in a difficult position. "You showcase the reforms you like to undertake not only through written acts, but also through specific actions. Thus, none will oppose you. Switzerland encourages and would like to help you to become a full member to CSCE. We have been closely monitoring your evolution. A positive answer from other members interests you. But keep in mind the political and democratic reforms, free and secret ballot, human rights". The Swiss Government pressure as part of the Western pressure to uphold an incompatible stance with the situation of human rights and political pluralism in the country were crucial elements that shook the communist regime in Albania.

In this visit, Jacobi in the quality of a former professor asked to deliver a lecture in the University of Tirana. The lecture enabled him to communicate with Albanian students, the elite of Albanian youngsters that could eventually engage in democratic changes in the country. During the conversation with students and other lecturers at the University of Tirana, Jacobi tackled the internal and foreign affairs of Switzerland, as well as its activity in the CSBE. He also addressed the Albanian case. He highly appreciated Albania's democratization processes and relations with Switzerland. He also made a strong statement on the political regime in Albania: "Albania left itself in the margin of the European history during these decades and entered into a long isolation". The information was forwarded to the Political Bureau for review, but it was not the time for a letter of protest.

In September 1991, after the first democratic elections of March 1991, the establishment of the first democratic government and Albania's membership to CSCE in June 1991, the Swiss Government started to look for a suitable facility for its representation in Tirana, which concluded in 1992. The new Albanian democratic government which came out of the elections of March 1992 decided to open the diplomatic representation in Bern. This was actually concluded in 1992 and the first ambassador was Gazmend Turdiu.

The event closed a multi-year period of evolution of state relations between the two countries, climaxing with the establishment of the diplomatic relations on 20 July 1970 and the establishment of diplomatic representation bodies in two capital cities in 1992. However, the period featured positive developments, friendship and respect despite the different political and economic systems, desire to enhance cooperation in fields of joint interest, especially economic and cultural. No issues were left unaddressed.

As soon as the Cold War came to an end and a new international order was established, both countries would act out in a completely new stage of relations and intentions with regard to the foreign politics.

Traces of Albanian-Swiss relations in the State Central Archive - Tirana

PhD. Nevila Nika

It is difficult to find the exact date when our countries or inhabitants had the opportunity to cooperate, but it is certain that mutual recognition dates back to earlier times. Nevertheless, it is the archives of our two countries that come to our aid in building the history of relations, or meeting points over the years.

It is trade, a human activity that has provided documents to us that prove that Albanian - Swiss relations date back to the 19th century. Such data on trade relations are provided by archive funds of large Albanian companies from Shkodra.¹

However, other documents found on the Central State Archive in Tirana provide another view on our countries relations.

Activists of the national Albanian question, living and working outside the country, traditionally had the support of welcoming countries, such as: Romania, Bulgaria, Egypt, Libya, Argentina, United States of America, and Canada among others, since the 19th century, where they had their lives, without ever forgetting about their homeland. They left the country on economic grounds, although many of them were forced to leave due to the persecution by Ottoman invaders, as a result of their involvement in patriotic activities to the support of national language and schools.

It is an established fact that efforts for Albanian language and schools were a long and continuous battle fought by Albanian people over the centuries. Since they were faced with an outrageous pressure from neighboring countries in the North and South, especially with the flat refusal of Ottoman invaders authorities to open Albanian language schools in Albanian vilayets, and to allow the use of the native language in religious ceremonies, thus patriots inside and

mainly outside the country, worked for a long time, so that Albanian language had its own alphabet, rather than Greek, Slavic or Arabic alphabets.

Upon multiple efforts and sacrifices, in 1908, the most renowned activists of this long battle successfully gathered in Manastir, a city that nowadays belongs to the Republic of Northern Macedonia, whose name was changed into Bitole. But, was this city the first option where the Albanian Alphabet Congress was to be held? According to a document, which fortunately survived the years and human kind activities, one year earlier, namely 1907, this historic gathering was to be held in Switzerland. The latter was most likely considered as a state where Albanian patriots, living in different countries, could safely gather, owing to the benevolent position of Swiss state authorities, to discuss and make decisions for the solution of the national question.

Thus, in a letter sent by Sotir Peci, published of "Kombi" newspaper from Boston to Lef Nosi, on 13 November 1907, he was notified among other things on the following "... I received a letter by Bajo (i.e. Topulli) from Naples that an Albanian conference will be held in Helvetia (i.e. Switzerland), where, among others, the question of will be solved. Bajo invites us to this conference and states that the question of the alphabet will be solved based on the Latin alphabet, rather than the Sofia one."²

It remains unknown whether this meeting or gathering was carried out, but what is important is that Switzerland was increasingly considered as a welcoming and supportive country, and a model for the organization of the Albanian state in the coming years.

A meaningful event proving the above-mentioned statement is a 1915 publication on "L'Albanie" newspaper, in Lausanne, by Sotir Kolea, Dr. Mihal Turtulli, Hilmi Këlcyra and Pandeli Cale.

However, it is during 1918-1920 that our patriots intensified their patriotic activities to the benefit of the national question. The Declaration of Independence on 28 November 1912 was a great event for all Albanians, yet it did not manage to unite all Albanian territories in one single state. The Balkan Wars and especially the First World War had struck a huge blow to the century-long Albanian dream. The end of war did not mark the end of the Albanian tragedy. The winning forces of the War held an international conference in Paris, where they decided on the fates of small and great people. One of the small countries was Albania and although it was not part of this destructive war, it suffered its consequences, perhaps even more than other countries that were part of it. For every Albanian, but especially for National Movement activists, it was very clear that it was up to the Great Powers to provide their legitimate support for stopping the fulfillment of chauvinist ambitions of their neighboring countries in the North and South, thus forbidding the fragmentation of autochthonous Albanian population lands.

During 1918-1920, a group of patriots from various parts of Albania worked hard in Switzerland. They formed a body called the "Lausanne Committee", consisting of Sotir Kolea, Dr. Mihal Turtulli, Pandeli Cale, Hilmi Këlcyra, etc., who carried out a risky activity during the months of the Paris Peace Conference.

The involvement of Sotir Kolea in the Swiss press of Lausanne is special. Sotir Kolea, a researcher of language, folklore and history, opposed the untruths of various correspondents, which were published on the Swiss press during those months about Albania and Albanians, problems

of the Balkan Peninsula, especially issues related to requests for gaining territory to the harm of Albania. Multiple authentic documents are preserved in the personal archive fund of Sotir Kolea, from which we managed to understand not only his patriotic activities, but also the freedom he enjoyed, although he was not a Swiss citizen, in debating on the local press with various journalists, who had addressed topics related to Albania and Albanians, as well as problems of the European political sphere following the First World War.

Starting from January 1918, several months following the end of the First World War, Sotir Kolea, according to his archive fund documents, was in contact with numerous bodies of the Swiss press.

In the letter to Mr. P.J. Jouve, the administration of "Nation" and "Feuille" newspapers on 14 January 1918, Kolea, using historical arguments, opposed pro-Greek writings by "forgetting" other people that were harmed and damaged by the War.³

Once again, from 1 to 2 May 1919, there was correspondence between Kolea and L. Stubbe in Lausanne-Montreux and a letter to J. Debruit, editor in chief of "Feuille" newspaper in Geneva on 16 April 1920, on false notices distributed by the officials of Athens regarding the political situation in Albania, as well as moves and stays of Esat Pasha Toptani, that had only caused damage to the national question.⁴

In this case I would like to mention the strict answer of Sotir Kolea to "Lausanne" newsroom on an article titled "Albania in the Peace Conference", published on 10 March 1919. Kolea titles his answer as "Correcting an Error about Albanians". In his answer, or better yet, his articles containing plausible arguments, he debunks all the untruths published by this newspaper on the Albanian question, especially

information about personalities, who were part of the Albanian delegation on the Conference at issue.⁵ As regards the activity of Sotir Kolea to the benefit of the national question during 1920, the archive fund of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs contains documents on his protests addressed to the press in Lausanne against the distortion of facts about Albania.⁶

Starting from 1920, with the Nationwide Congress in Lushnja, Albania, although halved as a territory and population, owing to the arbitrary decisions of the Paris Peace Conference, which instead of Peace actually sowed the seeds of the Second World War, started the journey of becoming a normal state. The government that emerged from this Congress settled in Tirana and immediately started working on the establishment of central and local institutions, without leaving aside international recognition.

In 1921, pursuant to a decision of the Council of Ministers, a representative office was opened in Geneva.⁷

The same year marks the arrival of some foreign Albanophiles in Albania, among whom was the Swiss prof. Eugène Pittard, an anthropologist, ethnologist and archaeologist, who was renowned and well-known in academic settings across Europe.⁸

Two years after the Congress of Lushnja, the Albanian state was de jure recognized by the Swiss Confederation.⁹ On the other hand, according to the documents of the fund of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs it turns out that in 1924, Albania had a General Consulate in Geneva.¹⁰

The arrival of visitors from Switzerland to Albania, mainly journalists and researchers, was viewed as an issue by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. So their admission, surveillance and treatment was the activity object of this institution's bodies.¹¹

Among the data concerning the relations between Albania and Switzerland is undoubtedly the notification of the Italian Legation in Tirana to the Prefecture of Bari of the measures, to be taken by the state authorities on the occasion of the pass of King Zog during his journey to Switzerland.¹²

Of interest is also the correspondence between the Albanian Royal Legation in Belgrade and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tirana on the news of the decision-making by Bern official authorities to establish a Consulate of the Swiss Confederation in Tirana.¹³

The Albanian Government entrusted the celebration of the 25th anniversary of Self-Government to an Ad Hoc Commission, which sent to all prefectures and diplomatic missions abroad biographical data on activists of the National Movement for Independence as well as foreign personalities, who had contributed to the Albanian question, in order to honor them with various medals. Among the answers received by this Commission is the answer of the Deputy of the Royal Albanian Consulate in Geneva, Th. Luarasi. The latter announced that he was sending the biography and photographs of Professor Eugène Pittard. "... I have the honor to let you know that.... Mr. Eugène Pittard, the sole foreigner in the jurisdiction of the Royal Mission that has greatly supported our Homeland..." - Th. Luarasi wrote. Some of the merits of Professor Pittard are as follows: Commissar of the League of Nations in Albania, founder of the Albanian Red Cross, and the discoverer of the Iron Age in Albania. But apparently Prof. Pittard had another merit. The archive fund of the Ministry of Education provides another interesting fact about this personality. Based on an article by Archbishop Fan Noli published in a newspaper in Geneva, in which he asked young people from Switzerland to be employed in Albania

as teachers, young Rene Rjeben from Geneva sent a letter to the Ministry of Education in Tirana, where he offered to work in the Albanian education system, the organization of which was the responsibility of Prof. Eugène Pittard.¹⁵

In the framework of these celebrations, the Consul of the Kingdom of Albania for Switzerland based in Bern and defender of trade relations between the two countries, Lieutenant Colonel Armin Aerni sent the biography and picture of the clergyman Lazër Shanto to the Commission of the 25th Anniversary of Self-Government. Attached he briefly provided his appreciation on the clergyman: "... he has been living in Switzerland since late 1927. He has been a chaplain in Schwandegg castle in the vicinity of Menzingen, and he has also been a German vicar in Biel for six months. He has been working as a vicar in La Motte in Jura of Bern. He work as an Albanian language interpreter for German clergymen. He propagandized and promoted Albania through articles in newspaper and radio broadcasts. Although he does not live in his Homeland, he is an ardent patriot."¹⁶

Of significance is a correspondence among the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Interior, the Royal Consulate General in Geneva in the first months of 1939, shortly before the invasion by fascist Italy, on political, economic and cultural problems between our two countries over the '20-'30s of the last century.¹⁷

Among the political problems, I would single out the censorship of the press and the control of items sent from Switzerland, as the latter was considered by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Kingdom of Albania, as "...a country where the center of the Bolsheviks is organized".

As regards trade relations of companies and individuals from Albania with their counterparts in Switzerland, it should be noted that during

the '20s until the end of 1944 they marked a significant increase. There are several archive funds, such as the Ministry of National Economy¹⁸, Ministry of Finance¹⁹, Ministry of Agriculture and Forests²⁰, Ministry of Industry and Trade²¹, Central Directorate of the National Bank²², etc., where data was found on the progress of bilateral relations in the area. On this occasion, I would mention the import of watches and jewelry from "Selfo" company, cement, gold coins, etc. However, the archive fund of the Ministry of Finance prior to 1944, which is kept at the Central State Archive, contains statements compiled by this Ministry on the import-export between our two countries.

Based on the documents kept in the Central State Archive, the arrival of the advisor of the Swiss Legation in Rome, in 1941, in Tirana, was announced. No details are known on the reason for this visit, but it is very likely that it may have intended to investigate or obtain data on Albanian citizens who immigrated to the US and American citizens residing in Albania.²³

The non-involvement of the Swiss Confederation in the conflict of the Second World War, i.e. the choice to be a neutral country, allowed the latter to take over the protection of the interests and rights of Albanian citizens in the USA and vice versa.²⁴

The end of the Second World War marks another phase of relations between our two countries, a fact that is reflected in the official documentation found today in the Central State Archive.

There are many archive funds where we can find data on the progress of relations between our two countries, both in the official state level and in the party and individual levels.

Naturally, the accession to power of a communist government, which categorically refused to recognize and accept the achievements of

previous governments at the international level, i.e. diplomatic relations with other states and agreements signed with them in all areas, including relations with the Swiss Confederation were virtually discontinued.

However, trade relations were the first to recover. After the war and also in the following years, Albania suffered difficulties in the provision of raw materials, industrial products, medical drugs, etc. Archive funds of the Council of Ministers²⁵, Presidium of the People's Assembly²⁶, Ministry of Economy²⁷, Ministry of Foreign Trade²⁸, Ministry of Industry and Mines²⁹, Ministry of Finance³⁰ General Bank Directorate³¹, Ministry of Education and Culture³², Ministry of Health³³, General Post Office and Telecommunication Directorate³⁴ are the main data source in connection to the above mentioned.

I believe that the General Directorate of AlbTourism archive fund is of special interest.³⁵ This state institution, established in 1955, aimed at organizing and inviting tourist groups from various countries to Albania. Groups were strictly controlled not only by this Directorate, but especially the Ministry of Interior. Contact with Albanian citizens was categorically forbidden. This institution's archive fund, which has stopped operating, contains the name list of visitors, a high number of whom were Swiss citizens, itineraries of trips across Albania, hotel accommodations, menus, and reports of Albanian guides about the behavior and positions of these tourist groups members. The most invaluable documents are related to impressions and letters they wrote before leaving Albania or after returning to their countries.

After 1922, the former Archive of the Albanian Labor Party was attached to the State Central Archive. This former Archive contains documents that are of interest to left wing researchers

in Europe and beyond. Among them I would mention documents concerning the relations of the Albanian Labor Party and Swiss Labor Party³⁶, the Center (Organization) of Communists of Switzerland / Marxist-Leninist³⁷, led by Gilbert Etienne and Swiss Communist Party, led by G. Bulliard³⁸. Contact with these left wing political groups was kept through the Albanian Embassy in Paris.

Nonetheless, among the letters sent to the Albanian leader, E.Hoxha³⁹ there is a letter, which was considered "hostile" by the Central Committee of the Party apparatus and naturally, Hoxha himself, sent from Switzerland in 1968. The author strongly condemns communism, Soviet military intervention to Czechoslovakia and values NATO.

In conclusion one can say that:

1. Based on Albanian archive documents, relations between the two countries improved in all aspects.
2. Switzerland has always been a safe country for the activities of many patriots to the benefit of the national question.
3. Based on the Albanian archive resource, mainly the correspondence among renowned Albanian personalities during the first decades of the last century, and opinions and ideas on the press at that time, that the Swiss state organization model was considered by various patriots as the best and most appropriate model to be followed by Albania. What makes it extremely clear what was happening in the intellectual circles of the 1930s in relation to the above, is a short article by one of the most prominent journalists of those years, Ismet Toto, "Switzerland or Afghanistan?" published in the newspaper "Arbënia" on 1 February 1936.

Some lines from the article are provided below:

“Time and again, the Albanian people and boys proved that they are ready to sacrifice themselves... for their country, for the beautiful dream of a European Albania, the Switzerland of the Balkans... The appointment of young boys, who studied in Europe, as state servants, did not play any role for some of them lacked experience and others had lower level tasks, thus they were obliged to work under the orders of old clerks, who directed work. This explains the fact the country government took undesirable forms... On 21 October (1935 when the Mehdi Frashëri government started operating), a new era of history for our country started with the use of the Latin alphabet. The central group of Levantine (Eastern) Clerks was dismissed and replaced by a group of young people, led by the brightest and most liberal personalities we have. Ever since, a fierce controversy continues between those who imagine Albania as Afghanistan and those who love it and attempt to turn it into Switzerland”.

Sources from Albanian Central State Archives:

- 1.F.143, d.1185, fl.1-2
- 2.F.32, d.55/2, fl.91-93; F.44, D.21, fl.94
- 3.F.54, D.68, fl.49
- 4.F.54, D.67/2, fl.158-159;D.68, fl.45-46,48
- 5.F.54, D.68, fl.55-56
- 6.F.151, v.1920, D.137
- 7.F.149, D.I-307
- 8.F.152, v.1921, D.166; F.273, v.21, D.48
- 9.F.151, v.22, D.209; F.152, v.22, D.1278; F.235, v.22, D.20
- 10.F.151, v.24, D.115, 302
- 11.F.152, v.24, D.422, 594; v.27, D.85; v.33, D.31
- 12.F.163, v.32, D.488; v.33, D.31
- 13.F.151, v.37, D.141
- 14.F.170, v.37, D.23
- 15.F.195, v.22
- 16.F.170, v.37, D.23
- 17.F.151, v.39, D.49
- 18.F.171
- 19.F.178
- 20.F.172
- 21.F.175
- 22.F.179
- 23.F.153, v.41, D.158
- 24.F.153, v.42, D.492; F.236, v.42, D.60; F.271, v.42, D.125; F.346, v.42, D.116; F.347, v.42, D.79
- 25.F.490
- 26.F.489
- 27.F.494
- 28.F.504
- 29.F.496
- 30.F.505
- 31.F.506
- 32.F.511
- 33.F.512
- 34, F.501
- 35.F.770
- 36.F.14/AP- MP, D.132
- 37.F.14/AP- MP D.133
- 38.F.14/AP- MP, D.134
- 39.F.10/AP

Tirana, September 2020

Albanian-Swiss Relations – A Story to Be Told!

(Media coverage, former diplomats' memories and human profiles)

By Armand PLAKA - Researcher

The following study has been drafted in light of the activities on the 50th anniversary of the establishment of Albanian-Swiss diplomatic relations and aims to empirically and analytically presents these 3 main aspects:

1. The presentation of Albania in the Swiss press and vice versa, particularly focusing on the moment of establishing diplomatic relations between the two countries in vitin 1970.
2. Introducing the testimonies of the protagonists of these relations by former Albanian ambassadors and diplomats, who have contributed to the better acquaintance of the two peoples, by focusing primarily on their experiences, assessments and memories.
3. Highlighting the profiles, opinions, memories and human aspects of Albanian personalities who currently live in Switzerland, and who with their work and contribution have attained the respect and gratitude of their community, by serving as the best example of integration and true bridges between the two peoples.

Part 1 – Albanian – Swiss relations through the lens of the press of the time

While rummaging through the Swiss press over the years, focusing especially on the Cold War period, in the variety of topics as well as languages it entails, conveying the flavor of the German, Frenach and Italian speaking cantons, long ago I noticed quite a disproportionate ratio, in an extreme and singular fashion, between

how the Helvetic press presented Albania and Albanians and how their Albanian counterparts in turn presented Switzerland and the Swiss.

I am convinced that the Swiss may be baffled, a subject to be truly noted, but I take it for granted on the other hand that to Albanians, especially field specialists, such findings is not at all surprising, since the place that Switzerland and other Western (and later Eastern revisionist) countries held or thought to hold in the Albanian press, throughout the communist period in our country was rather modest, rather negligible.

It is thus quite surprising that through its pages one would find not only news and announcements about the then actual situation of our country, but many detailed chronics and reports, political analyses and prognoses that attested not only to an emancipated and curious audience but also to an interested and well-educated one on the developments of this country and the region, of which on another level, one would think that there was no interest whatsoever.

They are distinguished by a serious, often favorable, understanding reporting, with accurate references, even though the reality they faced in a hermetically isolated country was completely contradictory and unconceivable according to the norms of human development, as known to the civilized world, especially Switzerland with its far emancipated model.

It is quite interesting to find in the Swiss press the key moments of our communist past, from the relations with the Yugoslavs, their breaking off, and as a consequence the Sino-Soviet relations saga, to the death of the dictator and the fall of the communist system. It mentions the suffering of the clergy and persecution of Albanians, and it does not shy away from talking about the

achievements and opening to the Western world.

More specifically, the following was written about Albanian reality as attested in this excerpt from a Swiss newspaper reportage in the late 1980s.¹

On a different planet?- The foreign visitor initially has the impression of being on a different planet. Albania does not have a civil airline company, whereas the International Airport of Rinas in Tirana seems to have been abandoned. One or two planes land daily from "distant" places, as well as Swiss Air which lands on Mondays and Thursdays One can stay in Albania only for two weeks and, upon leaving, the passport is stamped with two seals of the "People's Republic of Albania" as Albania is officially named, and described by Karl May as the 'Land of Skipetarve [Albanians]'. It is also the only country in the world to have officially renounced any religion affiliations.

However, many years ago, during the 1950s, one could encounter another interesting statement, which seemed precisely as a plea or putting one's finger on the wound that the West had left the land of the eagles to its own fate, as attested by the following quote:

*Anyone who has the opportunity to talk with an Albanian refugee eventually understands this sad statement: "Had the West aided us two years ago, Albania would have been able to split from the Eastern Bloc, just as Yugoslavia did". There is some truth to these statement.*²

Pretty realistically one sees the first signs of the opening, brought through a reportage, which does not hesitate from stressing that Albania is the poorest country of the continent while also turning into "The Beijing Bridge in Europe":

Albania often described as "The Beijing Bridge in Europe", is the poorest country in our continent. Its party leader proudly calls himself a Stalinist and turned his back on Moscow when it started its destalinization process. These past several months it has become yet possible for western tourists to travel to Hoxha's country, albeit only in small groups. Those who have travelled there before and draw comparisons with the current situation. They all can observe signs of change. Albania, as they believe, is seeking to free itself from the isolation that has been rooted for years³.

Likewise, the Swiss press would not hesitate from voicing reports pertaining to the religious persecution perpetrated by the Albanian government, as attested by the following excerpt from a French-Swiss newspaper, which echoed the messages of the Holy See for the Albanian people:

Radio Vatican denounces the persecution in Albania: yesterday Pope Paul VI called to prayer for the "Church of Silence". The Pope, addressing the 6,000 believers gathered at Saint Peter's Square on the Day of the Angel, alluded to, without mentioning its name, that it has been reported that the fate of believers in Albania has been quite dramatic recently ... On Saturday, Radio Vatican expressed its surprise by the silence of human rights advocates while religious freedom and even priests were forcibly removed in Albania. "No one has raised their voice to denounce these violations on the rights of consciousness [...] neither organization nor movements which are always willing to protest against the suppression and limitation of freedom in other countries" In 1967, religious beliefs were declared illegal and their practice was equal to committing a crime.⁴



Facsimile of an article in a French-Swiss newspaper reporting of religious persecution in Albania. "La Liberte", Switzerland - 2 April 1973, p. 1



Facsimile of an analysis on Albania printed on the first page of "Freiburger Nachrichten" on 8 September 1949

There is no lack of positive statements, which when viewed from today's optics constitute quite positive assessments that highlight not only Albanians' generosity and hospitality, but also their efforts to be professional and serious in their relations with foreigners, as affirmed by this quote:

Albania welcomes tourists with great care. The buses, available to tourists are comfortable, and most of them are equipped with air conditioning. The food, although not assorted, is good. There are no professional tour guides, however, those who serve as guides are all university graduates. It is important so that they may answer all the curious and delicate questions of tourists. Thus, oftentimes the guides are able to fluently speak several languages. ⁵



Facsimile of a reportage printed in 1966 in the Swiss press, titled "Albania is turning the page!" 28 March 1966, "die Tat", p. 5

As regards to the establishment of diplomatic relations in the Summer of 1970, the Swiss media would pay great attention, as the news on the decision made by Bern would be followed by complementary material featuring detailed information on Albania and the Albanians, the economic capacities of the small country on the Adriatic coast, and even analysis on the benefit of establishing direct diplomatic relations between the two countries. Alas, nothing similar was happening on the other side.

In Albania one could find only some dry news inserted within a box on the front page of "Zëri i Popullit" [People's Voice], the main press body of the time, or the "Bashkimi" [Union], where among others it emphasized:

Yesterday, at 13:00 hours, Haxhi Lleshi, the Assembly Presidium Chairman of the People's Republic of Albania, welcomed, in the Palace of Brigades, the extraordinary and plenipotentiary ambassador of the Confederation of Switzerland in the People's Republic of Albania, Hans Keller, who presented his credential letters. ⁶

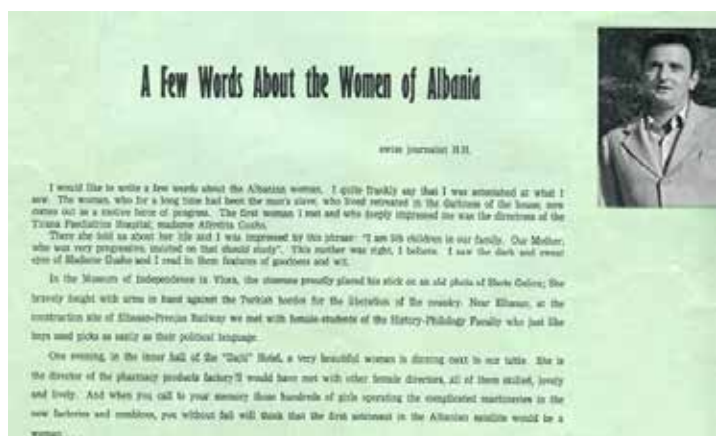
Such news was certainly echoed in the propagandistic foreign language publications of the time, as attested in a quite minimalist volume in the "Albania in the World" rubric in the inner pages of the illustrious journal "New Albania".

The government of the PR of Albania and the government of the Confederation of Switzerland agreed upon establishing diplomatic relations and exchanging diplomatic representatives at ambassadorial level.



Facsimile of the news published in "Zëri i Popullit", 3 October 1970

The same number of the same journal, and most probably, not at all coincidental, as if supplementing the lack of a thorough and well-deserved political, diplomatic or at least economic analysis on the benefit or the prospect of the two countries, would publish the praises of a Swiss (most likely a Marxist-Leninist) journalist with the initials H.H., pertaining to the achievements of Albania and the progress made by the Albanian women at the time. ⁸



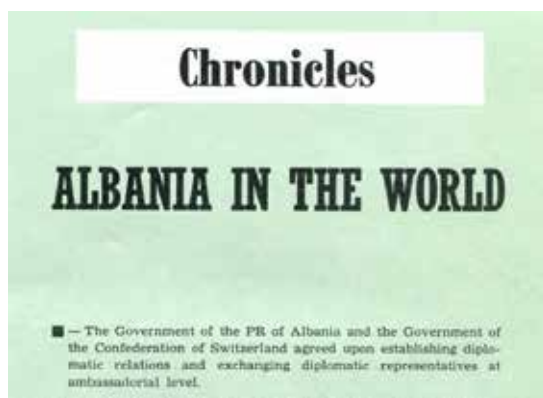
Facsimile of the Journal "New Albania", No. 4, 1970, p. 8, presenting the testimonial of a Swiss journalist with initials H.H. on the emancipation of women in the People's Republic of Albania.

On the other hand, there is a quite interesting brief news, extracted from the Italian-Swiss press in the Canton of Ticino, which besides the news from Bern, conveys the bafflement of the staff of the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Following is the complete news in Italian (with the English translation):

Berna ha deciso l'allacciamento delle relazioni diplomatiche con Tirana. La notizia ha fatto sensazione perchè fuori del dipartimento politico quasi nessuno sapeva che ancora non avevamo un ambasciatore in Albania. Sono cresciuti talmente di numero dopo la guerra, con il moltiplicarsi degli Stati indipendenti e il dividersi di Stati già uniti, che ad occuparsi dei diplomatici, almeno fintanto che non succede qualche guaio, è rimasto soltanto il dott. Tonino Janner, il nuovo gran capo della divisione amministrativa del politico.

(In English: Bern has decided to establish diplomatic relations with Tirana. The news caused a sensation since aside the political department, no one hardly knew that we did not have an ambassador in Albania.)



Facsimile of the Journal "New Albania", No. 4, 1970, p. 9 with the news of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.



Facsimile of the news in the Italo-Swiss journal of the canton of Ticino, "Illustrazione Ticinese", 7 October 1970, p. 51, "Pepe e sale" [Peper and salt] rubric

Whereas the newspapers of the German cantons covered very interesting information on Albania which accompanied the news of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries as attested by the following passage:

Obwohl die Schweiz Albanien als Staat bereits 1913 anerkannt hat und Albanien in Bern und Genf zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen Honorarkonsulate unterhalten hat, bestanden bisher zwischen beiden Ländern noch keine diplomatischen Beziehungen. Die Schweiz hatte noch nie eine Vertretung in Tirana. Allerdings hat Albanien im

Juni 1929 mit unserem Land ein Niederlassungs- und Wirtschaftsabkommen unterzeichnet, das nie aufgehoben worden ist. Albanien, das 1946 zur kommunistischen Volksrepublik proklamiert wurde und 1955 der UNO beigetreten ist, zählt kaum ein Dutzend Staatsangehörige in der Schweiz, und nicht viel grösser ist die schweizerische Kolonie in Albanien. Der Handelsverkehr zwischen beiden Ländern ist sehr bescheiden, jedoch im Zunehmen begriffen. Letztes Jahr hat Albanien für 1,3 (1968: 0,6, 1967: 1,1) Mio Franken Waren hauptsächlich Teppiche und Rohkupfer, Uhrenfournituren, Tabakpfeifen und Folkloreartikel an unser Land verkauft. Die Schweiz exportierte für 6,1 (1968: 2,6, 1967: 2,1) Mio Franken, vor allem verarbeiteten Tabak (Zigaretten) 1969: 2,5 Mio Franken Medikamente, Farbstoffe, Schädlingsbekämpfungsmittel, Watte, Motoren, Apparate und Webstühle nach Albanien.¹⁰

(In English: Even though Switzerland recognized Albania as a state since 1913 and Albania continued to keep open its honorary consulates in Bern and Geneva during the interwar period, diplomatic relations between the two countries have been inexistent. Switzerland has never had a representation in Tirana. However, in June 1929, Albanian signed an economic representation agreement with our country, which has never been repealed. Albania, which declared itself a communist People's Republic in 1946 and joined the UN in 1955, hardly counts a dozen Albanian citizens in Switzerland and the Swiss colony in Albania is not larger. Commerce between the two countries is fairly modest, albeit growing. Last year Albania exported to our country goods at a value of 1.3 (1968: 0.6, 1967: 1.1) million Swiss francs, mainly carpets and unprocessed copper, watch fittings, tobacco pipes and folklore items. Whereas Switzerland exported to Albania goods in the value of 6.1 (1968: 2.6, 1967: 2.1) million francs, mainly processed tobacco (cigarettes) in 1969: 2.5 million francs in medicine, paint, pesticides, wool and cotton products, motors, devices, and looms).

würtige Angelegenheiten. Dr. Rudolf Kirchschläger, den Vertrag zwischen der schweizerischen Eidgenossenschaft und der Republik Oesterreich über den Verlauf der gemeinsamen Staatsgrenze, das Abkommen zwischen der schweizerischen Eidgenossenschaft und der Republik Oesterreich über die Vermarkung der gemeinsamen Staatsgrenze und die Erhaltung der Grenzzeichen sowie das Protokoll zu diesem Abkommen unterzeichnet.

Diplomatische Beziehungen mit Albanien

Die Regierungen der Schweizerischen Eidgenossenschaft und der Volksrepublik Albanien sind übereingekommen, diplomatische Beziehungen aufzunehmen und Vertreter auf Botschafterebene auszutauschen. Zu diesem Zweck hat der Bundesrat Dr. Hans Keller, schweizerischer Botschafter in Jugoslawien, zum ausserordentlichen und bevollmächtigten Botschafter in Albanien ernannt. Botschafter Keller behält seinen Sitz in Belgrad bei. Obwohl die Schweiz Albanien als Staat bereits 1913 anerkannt hat und Albanien in Bern und Genf zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen Honorarkonsulate unterhalten hat, bestanden bisher zwischen beiden Ländern noch keine diplomatischen Beziehungen. Die Schweiz hatte noch nie eine Vertretung in Tirana. Allerdings hat Albanien im Juni 1929 mit unserem Land ein Niederlassungs- und Wirtschaftsabkommen unterzeichnet, das nie aufgehoben worden ist. Albanien, das 1946 zur kommunistischen Volksrepublik proklamiert wurde und 1955 der UNO beigetreten ist, zählt kaum ein Dutzend Staatsangehörige in der Schweiz, und nicht viel grösser ist die schweizerische Kolonie in Albanien.

Der Handelsverkehr zwischen beiden Ländern ist sehr bescheiden, jedoch im Zunehmen begriffen. Letztes Jahr hat Albanien für 1,3 (1968: 0,6, 1967: 1,1) Mio Franken Waren — hauptsächlich Teppiche und Rohkupfer, Uhrenfournituren, Tabakpfeifen und Folkloreartikel — an unser Land verkauft. Die Schweiz exportierte für 6,1 (1968: 2,6, 1967: 2,1) Mio Franken, vor allem verarbeiteten Tabak (Zigaretten) — 1969: 2,5 Mio Franken — Medikamente, Farbstoffe, Schädlingsbekämpfungsmittel, Watte, Motoren, Apparate und Webstühle nach Albanien. Wie am Montag im Bundeshaus zu erfahren war, hat der in Belgrad akkreditierte Schweizer Botschafter Dr. H. Keller bereits im Jahre 1969 mit der Regierung in Tirana Verbindung aufgenommen.

men. Der Bundesrat erachtete den Zeitpunkt für die Aufnahme diplomatischer Beziehungen für gekommen, nachdem er bereits im Frühjahr 1968 in den Regierungsrichtlinien festgestellt hatte: «Die Universalität unserer Beziehungen ist Ausdruck unserer Neutralitätspolitik.»

Gitterstäbe durchsägt

Mit einer Eissäge betreten sich am Montag zwei Strafgefangene des Zuchthauses Crèbelonne in Sitten. Sie durchsägten die Gitterstäbe vor dem Zellenfenster und flohen. Trotz einer alsbald eingeleiteten Grossfahndung fehlt von den «Ausrückern» jede Spur.

Strochfenfahrt mit tödlichem Ausgang

Wie die Appenzell-Ausserrhodische Polizei am Montag bekanntgab, entwendeten in der Nacht auf den Samstag mehrere Jugendliche in Trogen (AR) ein Motorrad, um eine Spritfahrt zu unternehmen. In der Nähe des Dorfes kollidierten sie infolge überhöhter Geschwindigkeit und mangelnder Fahrpraxis mit der Strassenabschränkung und wurden zu Boden geschleudert. Der 17-jährige Finne Hannu Kalevi Kassalainen aus dem Kinderdorf Pestalozzi in Trogen wurde dabei sofort getötet. Sein 16-jähriger Mitfahrer, der zuvor ebenfalls das Motorrad gesteuert hatte, kam mit einigen Prellungen und Schürftungen davon.

Vandalen am Werk

Rund 30 parkierte Autos und Motorräder wurden in der Nacht auf den Sonntag in Chur durch Vandalen beschädigt. Die noch unbekanntesten Täter rissen den Fahrzeugen insbesondere Radioscheinwerfer und Seitenspiegel weg.

In den Bergen tot aufgefunden

Der seit vier Tagen vermisste 57-jährige Hans Salzman aus Bern, der im Wallis seine Ferien verbrachte, ist am Montag am Fusse einer Felswand tot aufgefunden worden. Der Verunglückte ist oberhalb von der Station Leukerbad vermutlich nach einem Sturz den schweren Verletzungen erlegen.

Kleine Zeitung

Siegen die Reformer? Die Stadtväter von Jefferson (USA) werden sich mit einem Gesetz aus dem Jahre 1837 in Tufesson haben. Einmal St.

Facsimile of the article titled "Diplomatic relations with Albania", of "Thuner Tagblatt" newspaper, Vol. 94, No. 167, 21. July 1970, which provides relevant information on the level of commercial-business relations as well as a historical background of the diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Part 2 – Albania-Switzerland in former diplomats' memories

The first contacts are evidenced since 1431; later on, Switzerland became one of the first countries to recognize Albania in 1922, actually 2

years after becoming a member to the League of Nations, and in the same year as did the United States of America.

Switzerland was the model that Albanian patriots of the National Awakening envisioned for of the organization of the future Albanian state. It still remains to this day. Ismail Qemali quite often referred to it as an administration model and the Swiss cantons were continuously mentioned during the years preceding the establishment of the Albanian state.

Sami Frashëri, openly asserted "Let's make Albania a second Switzerland". During the late 19th century and especially in the 20th century, numerous Albanian intellectuals would graduate in Swiss universities or would find themselves in Switzerland. Elena Gjika Naim Frashëri, Sami Frashëri, Mid'hat Frashëri, Leonik Tomeo, Lazër Shanto, Pol Adhamidhi, Gjergj Kokali, Ajet Libohova, Ali Këlcyra, Ismail Qemali, Fan Noli, Luigj Gurakuqi, Faik Konica, Mustafa Kruja, Eqrem Bej Vlora, Visar Dodani, Aleksandër Moisiu, Mihal Turtulli, Bajram Curri, Avni Rustemi and many others would visit and stay there¹¹.

Andon Zako Cajupi would also study for a few years in Switzerland. And activist Dervish Hima would carry out his notable political endeavors.

By mid-1930s, a consulate would also open, however the representation level would remain quite modest. Beyond the diplomatic and interstate aspect, during the interwar period, Geneva and Switzerland would become the center of Albanian political emigrants, but also the place where Aleksandër Moisiu would perform and grow professionally.

Switzerland allowed the publication of numerous Albanian newspapers such as "*Shqipëria-l'Albanie*" (1903-1906), in Geneva; "*Shqipëria-Albanie*" (1915-1916), in Lausanne; "*Liria kombëtare-La liberté Nationale*" (1925-1935), in Geneva and "*Biblioteka*:"

Zëri i Shqipërisë - La Voix de l'Albanie 1935-1936". It is said that in 1556, the work of Marin Barleti, "*Rrethimi i Shkodrës*" [Siege of Shkodra] has been printed (reprinted) in Basel. Other works by Albanian authors have been published there, such as the books by Dora D'Istria - "*German Switzerland and the climb of Mönch*", Paris 1856,... the work of the patriot Mit'hat Frashëri (with the pseudonym Lumo Skëndo), "*Les Albanais chez eux et à l'étranger*", Lausanne 1919 and the renown Albanian author, Krist Maloki "*Leksikon der Frau*", in Zürich¹².

In 1946, even though a communist state, Tirana would send signal for the (re) establishment of relations, and a document from the Swiss diplomatic archives attests that at the time only a handful of Swiss people were living in Albania, and Albanian presence in Switzerland was about the same. It was only more than two decades later until both countries realized that they had lost quite some time, fearing the mentalities, balances and ideologies of the time, and that it was about time that they reinstate normal diplomatic relations.

Thus, in the hope of sticking to an illustrative chronology, I would like to mention a quite interesting testimony of the former Swiss chief diplomat in Beijing appraising our ambassador in China in the 1960s, which was unknown even to his son Mr. Petrit Nathanaili. In that document, his father and mother were praised for possessing a broad culture, and ambassador Vasil Nathanaili was valued among others as an open-minded person with a strong will for the establishment of the relations between the two countries, overstepping the official protocols of the time.

The following is an excerpt from the report:

Nathanaili and his wife speak several western languages, and despite being Southeastern European, they are quite flexible and open, unlike

most diplomats from other communist countries. During my farewell visit yesterday, Nathanaili repeated his amiable suggestions towards our country, political institutions, which he seems to know quite well.

Below the reader may find the full document in English (as well as the facsimile of the original document in German), obtained from the diplomatic archives of the Helvetic Confederation:

Embassy of Switzerland in CHINA

Beijing, on 13 December 1966

Ref. No. 332, 010.22.Alb. HK/mo

For the Department of Political Affairs of the Political Department of the Confederation

Bern, Relations with Albania

Mister Ambassador,

As the new Albanian Ambassador, Mr. **Vasil Nathanaili**, made an introductory visit a few months ago, I had the opportunity to return the visit by bidding him farewell.

Nathanaili has previously been Foreign Deputy Minister of his country; his predecessor holding his post, is currently in Tirana serving as Foreign Minister. Both representatives of Albania, who for known reasons, play a special role here, have always tried to have proper relations and when possible, amiable relations with the Swiss Embassy.

I am also aware that my homologue has recently expressed his gratefulness to the Chinese on how other Albanian diplomats and himself have been able to obtain without hindrances Swiss visas at any time, especially when participating in international summits in Geneva.

Nathanaili and his wife speak several western languages, and despite being Southeastern European, they are quite flexible and open, unlike most diplomats from other communist countries.

During my farewell visit yesterday, Nathanaili repeated his amiable suggestions towards our country, political institutions, which he seems to know quite well. During our conversation, he also mentioned the modest, albeit growing, commercial exchanges between our two countries; he expressed the possibility of international transport of goods and finally stated that he would be very pleased if I were to visit Albania from Belgrade.

Nathanaili has formerly been a diplomat in Belgrade and he also expressed his hope that the tense relations between his country and Yugoslavia, would improve in the near future.

At the end, Nathanaili raised the question whether it would be possible that our *de facto* relations with Albania will eventually become official?

Albania has often expressed its desire to have closer contacts with Switzerland as well, and whether we would consequently agree to establish consular or diplomatic relations.

I personally thanked my conversational partner, nonetheless, I emphasized that I was not authorized to speak on such matters. However, I did not wish to miss the opportunity to inform You on such matter.

I extend my highest consideration Mr. Ambassador.

Swiss Ambassador

Signature

AMBASSADE DE SUISSE
EN CHINE

Peking, den 13. Dezember 1966

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An die Abteilung für Politische Angelegenheiten
des Eidg. Politischen Departementes

Bern

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Beziehungen mit Albanien

Herr Botschafter,

Da der neue albanische Botschafter, Herr Vasil Nathanaili, mir vor einigen Monaten einen persönlichen Antrittsbesuch machte, habe ich ihm gestern einen persönlichen Abschiedsbesuch abgestattet.

Nathanaili war früher stellvertretender Aussenminister seines Landes; sein Vorgänger hier ist jetzt in Tirana Aussenminister. Beide Vertreter Albanien, die hier aus bekannten Gründen eine besondere Rolle spielen, haben sich immer bemüht, korrekte und nach Möglichkeit freundliche persönliche Beziehungen zur Schweizerischen Botschaft zu pflegen. Ich wies auch, dass mein Kollege sich kürzlich bei den Chinesen anerkennend über die Art und Weise geäußert hat, wie er und andere albanische Diplomaten jederzeit ohne weiteres schweizerische Visa erhielten, besonders zur Teilnahme an internationale Tagungen in Genf.

Nathanaili und seine Frau sprechen mehrere westliche Sprachen und sind als Sprechende nicht nur zugänglich, sondern auch sichtlich aufgeschlossen, im Gegensatz zu Diplomaten aus den meisten andern kommunistischen Ländern.

Bei meinem gestrigen Abschiedsbesuch wiederholte Nathanaili seine freundlichen Bemerkungen über unser Land, dessen politische Institutionen er sichtlich gut zu kennen scheint. Er kam auch auf den zwar bescheidenen, aber zunehmenden Warenaustausch mit uns zu sprechen, wies auf Möglichkeiten für den Fremdenverkehr hin und erklärte schliesslich, er würde sich freuen, wenn ich von Belgrad aus auch einmal Albanien besuchen würde. Nathanaili war früher in Belgrad als Diplomat tätig und sagte mir noch, er hoffe,



Former Ambassador Vasil Nathanaili (third from right) besides the former Chinese supreme leader, Mao Tse Dun and the members of the two delegations from Albania and China at the peak of their relations by the second half of 1960s. The Swiss Embassy in Beijing affirmed that during its meetings with Ambassador Nathanaili had received informal invitations on the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, as well as quite favorable assessments regarding their prospects.

Facsimile of the (declassified) diplomatic report, dated 13 December 1966, which favorably mentions the former ambassador Vasil Nathanaili

Furthermore, the testimony is supplemented by a confidential assessment that the son, Mr. Petrit Nathanaili, shares from decades-long memory when with regards to Switzerland his father stated:

"According to my father, Switzerland inspired sympathy due to its neutral policy towards the political blocs of the time", which by deduction clearly and succinctly attests to the opinion prevailing among the political and diplomatic circles of the time, both in the East and West, to which even communist Albania subscribed.

Surprisingly, as later attested by Ambassador Gazmend Turdiu, pertaining to this matter, beyond diplomacy, *"Considering Switzerland's neutrality and the fact that there was no "unsettled issue" or clash and dispute - as it was the case with other countries - between the regime in Albania and the Swiss government, it's still inexplicable to me how come that the diplomatic relations between our countries were established as late as 1970"*¹³.

Nonetheless the fact remains that (alas) we have inherited none or very little memories or testimonies in writing that would expose the feeling, the atmosphere or snippets of personal stories experienced at the time pertaining to Switzerland, for obvious reasons.

In the declassified diplomatic reports of the time, either in Switzerland or Albania, in the meetings with former possible protagonists and their heirs, as well as in the media reporting in both countries, apart from a very isolated case, one finds very few opinions expressed by communist leaders at the time in their confidential, often informal, meetings, even formal ones (following the establishment of diplomatic relations), whereby the neutrality aspect of Switzerland and the Wilhelm Tell story characterized what the Albanian regime thought of the Helvetic Confederation and the Swiss people¹⁴.

In one particular case, we have the testimony of a former delegate of the high communist nomenclature, who talks exclusively on the order he had to fulfill in Switzerland on account of the leader, Enver Hoxha, as well as on what he had done and experienced in Switzerland by the mid-1970s.

In February 1975, I went to Switzerland on the order of Enver Hoxha. I had passed in transit by train in November 1961, exchanging trains in Basel, although I had my 6-month old son and baggage. I later travelled through in 1965 with my wife and kids and this time we faced a problem as the train did not have hot water to prepare the milk for my 5-month old daughter Rozeta, ... From Paris to Geneva I flew by plane and this time my wife was accompanying me, as my friends were busy with the leaders who were there for medical treatment. In Geneva, I rented a car and headed to Lausanne, where after leaving the city on the right, I drove through the mountains and reached the company "Kudelski-Nagra Recorders", where I met Urs Gallman, export service supervisor, who helped me buy a cassette player and equipment for Enver Hoxha, who, as I later learned, was quite pleased. Urs was a Swiss engineer who had studied in USA, he thanked me for choosing to purchase from this company and had a positive attitude towards our country. I was well

received and I finished pretty quick. On my way to Geneva, I took some photographs by stopping in very beautiful places. These photos are the most beautiful that I have ever taken, as the weather was nice and the Swiss sights were amazing. When someone saw my photos he suggested that I could participate in artistic photographs competitions. I never did, even though I have photos from Moscow, Paris, Albania, etc. Before arriving in Geneva, we ate some fruit and without making a full stop, I approached a trash bin on the side of the road and tried to throw it in, but it fell outside the bin. Meanwhile, from the front building, an old woman yelled at me, and gestured: "in the bin, sir, in the bin!"¹⁵.

But as it may be surmised, in a very disproportionate ratio, we often have confidential reports by former Swiss diplomats, who reported on Albania while stationed in Belgrade, following visits that they were allowed to carry out before and after the establishment of relations.

In one of them, conducted on 1- 4 June 1969, thus, only one year prior to establishing relations (reported on 9 June at the relevant Department in Bern) submitted by the former Swiss ambassador in Belgrade, we encounter compelling and balanced assessments regarding not only our country but also characteristics of our former diplomats.

Thus, for example, somewhere in his 8-pages long report, he points out that together with his wife, had passed through Durrës on their way to Fier and Berat and had been invited (and as he emphasizes, very few foreigners were allowed such a thing) and they had observed a modern plastic production plant and the Textile Combine in Berat¹⁶.

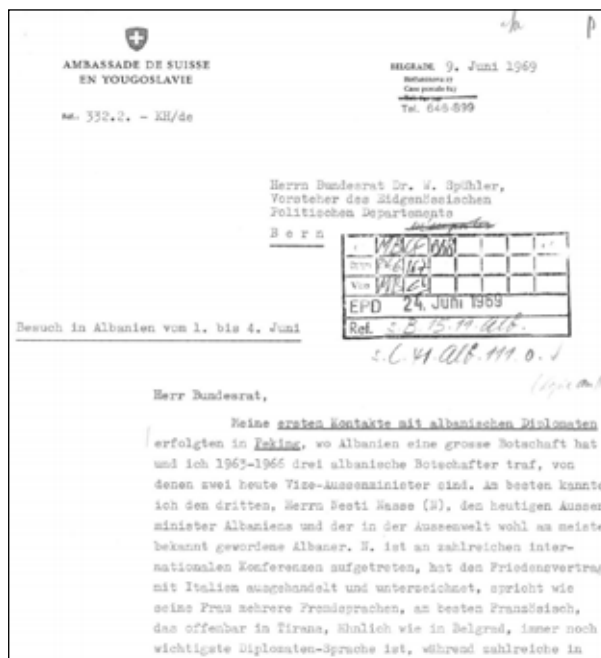
I knew best Nesti Nase, the current foreign Minister of Albania and the most well-known Albanian abroad. Nase has partaken in numerous international conferences, has negotiated and signed the Peace

Treaty with Italy, and like his wife, he speaks several foreign languages, French being his strong one, which seems that in Tirana, just as in Belgrade, remains the most important diplomatic language¹⁷.

In that same report, one finds a significant statement in order to understand that unlike as it may be surmised, it was the Swiss government that surprisingly insisted on the *status quo* and would not open the green light for the establishment of relations.

Nesti Nase, since 1965-1966 in his Beijing meetings, had submitted his proposal on establishing diplomatic relations between the two countries, an idea that was not supported by Bern¹⁸.

Sadly, this renown diplomat, about a decade later (in 1982) would suffer a total degradation and his memory would fall into oblivion, following the events of the "Mehmet Shehu" file.



Facsimile of the former Swiss ambassador's report, dated 9 June 1969, following the three-day visit he carried out in the People's Republic of Albania

The 1980s were quite an interesting period, when Albania and Switzerland connected on another level (one that already been established): i.e. Geneva being the headquarters of United Nations activities, where Albania strived to be very active and used it as a platform for its most respectable diplomatic representation in the conditions and circumstances of the time.

Hence, we have another protagonist, Prof. Ksenofon Krisafi, one of the most rounded representatives of the Albanian diplomatic corps over the years, distinguished not only by his diplomatic background, but also his legal background and passion for history.

In his related memories, he states:

My first visit to Switzerland took place in April 1980, when, together with the former Head of international organizations in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Murat Angoni, we would participate in the regular session proceedings of the Economic Commission for Europe, a body of the United Nations Economic and Social Council¹⁹.

Further, in the chapter "Switzerland and Albanians", Prof. Krisafi emphasizes:

Slowly I would uncover its strong and early connections with the Albanian world. Numerous compatriots had lived and worked there and in other Swiss cities. The earliest contacts go back as far as in the time of the Dardans²⁰.

Prof. Krisafi goes on to explain the entire history of the place named Dardagny and its surroundings, the toponym of which links to the Albanian language, even alluding to the name of Geneva itself. He also points out the contribution for the recognition and furthering of the Albanian question in former Yugoslavia, and the support of Swiss society.

But, things would start to change after the fall of the communist system and the restoration of a democratic one.

Consequently, the protagonist would become the heir of one of the most prominent intellectual families of the capital, persecuted by the old regime, a civil engineer and university professor, Gazmend Turdiu, who on the related occasion states:

My appointment to Bern was clearly political. Nevertheless, I accepted to trade in my profession as an engineer and lecturer for the ambassador. It was a service I had to temporarily deliver as an exchange of my political engagement. Truth is I became so fond of diplomacy that when returning from Bern in September 1997 I decided to have a career in diplomacy. I am deeply grateful to Switzerland, the country I was appointed to, for this decision²¹.

But, what stands out the most from the said interview, is the following observation:

I would use three adjectives in my effort to define the Swiss administration, institutions and society: punctual, predictable and reliable.²²

He also talks about the beginning of the first real communication bridges between the two countries and peoples in the new realities of the time:

The political processes in early 1990s made Switzerland grow more interested in our country. Swiss observers landed in the country to aid their Albanian fellows to monitor the elections of 31 and 22 march. Exchanges took place at different levels, thus contributing to the intensification of relations in all fields²³.

As he lists the many concrete contributions of the Swiss, which of course bear their relevant value, Ambassador Turdiu recalls bits of cooperation with Swiss personalities and activists, who as he

emphasizes, had become inseparable friends of his family and the Albanian people.

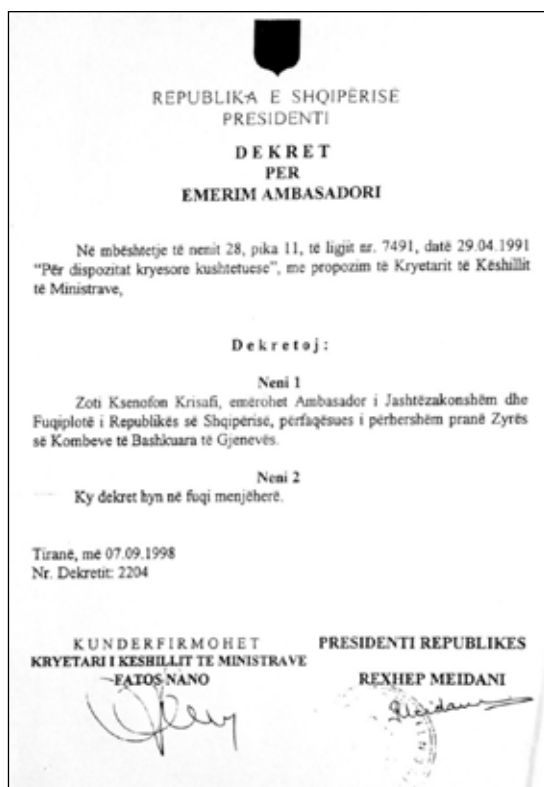
A bit further in time, as he recounts on the many things that link Albania and the Albanians to Switzerland, in his memoir, Prof. Krisafi offers details from the life and work in Geneva during the last years of the communist period, and expresses his pleasure of returning years later as the Head of the Albanian Mission in 1998.

The Albanian diplomatic representation to Geneva was reestablished nearly half a century later (it had been temporarily open in 1953), in September 1987. Its current name is the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Albania to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Geneva²⁴.

As he provides a brief background of the Mission, pointing out especially the earliest contribution of its founders like Fan Noli, Mehdi Frashërit etc., what stands out is the Albania's withdrawal from the mission upon the occupation of the country by Fascist Italy, by a decision signed from the then quisling Prime Minister, Shefqet Vërlaci.



The former Head of the Albanian Mission in Geneva, Amb. Krisafi in a meeting with Mrs. Ruth Dreifuss, President of the Swiss Confederation



Facsimile of the Decree on the appointment of Prof. Ksenofon Krisafi, as Ambassador in Geneva. Tirana 1998.

Whereas the former ambassador Genc Muçaj, currently an advisor to the President of the Republic in Tirana, has a pretty special experience pertaining to Switzerland and its commitment to Albania. For several years now, he runs the Albanian section of the "People to People" organization, which was established by former USA president Dwight Eisenhower in 1956 with the aim of bringing Americans closer to other people, believing that in this way world peace would be more attainable. One can sense in his statement the enthusiasm and pleasure of cooperating with Switzerland, thus, bringing the experience of an organization aiming to get closer to people in a more active way.

Beginning with the Kosovo crisis, more than 20 years ago up to the present, his organization has carried out a respectable amount of activities towards humanitarian aid, professional training and developmental aid for rural areas in Albania, of which he is very proud.

"It so happened that at continental level, the Swiss branch of "People to People" was one of the most well-organized organizations. In a way, Switzerland offered to become our patron, with wonderful leaders and individuals who have contributed in making Albania known not only to Switzerland but also to Europe and the rest of the world", affirms Ambassador Muçaj.

"The name of Albania started to be mentioned not simply through the TV chronicles, which to our misfortune were rarely positive, but by identifying it with those values that Albania and Albanians truly embody in themselves, in their homeland".

He does not forget to thank and recall the support of Swiss branch president, Mr. Ernst Honecker, calling him a dear and great friend of Albanians.



Amb. Genc Muçaj during an activity of the Organization "People to People" - ALBANIA, in Tirana



An aid activity carried out by the Organization "People To People" - ALBANIA, in rural areas of Albania

Part 3- Successful Albanians at the heart of the Alps – A story to be told

It is quite interesting that by mid-1960s the presence of Albanians from Kosovo and former Yugoslavia was ever-growing, whereas the emigration of Albanians from Albania to the Swiss Confederation was made possible only after the fall of the Iron Curtain in Europe, that brought about the installation of several contributions, whose presence nonetheless remains quite modest in numbers.

It is not at all difficult to find Albanian names from former Yugoslavia, who already constitute inspiring examples for the Swiss themselves, people who thanks to their tireless work and opportunities provided by the Helvetic land, are today success icons.

However, it is somewhat difficult to find those

from Albania. Nonetheless, they are not totally absent:

We can thus mention several names known beyond the Albanian community in Switzerland, such as the successful manager Florian Haçkaj, information expert, the "Pestalozzi" library director in Zürich, Suela Jorgaqi, the football coach Ilir Paço, the lecturer Lolita Poda Jorkievitz, or the talented pianist Ermira Zyrakja, the director of the cultural association "Swiss Albania Even", Aina Hoti, and Bledi Yzeiraj, currently senior finance specialist in the prominent holding group "Richemont".

Furthermore, we could point out the name of Dr. Enit Karafili Steiner, the lady from Albania who has been appointed lecturer in the English Department, University of Lausanne, with a rich American experience. She is one of the most prominent personalities of the Albanian Diaspora in Switzerland and involved with activities organized by the embassy for the promotion of Albania. Similarly, Zhaklina Dhimojani Blattler represents the role model of the Albanian dedicated not only to his/her country of origin, but also a worthy symbol of the Albanian well-integrated and respected in Swiss society. Robert Hoxha, assistant professor in the Research Center of Music in the Italian part of Switzerland, who is also quite a talented saxophone player highly valued by critics as well as the local public.

Gjon Guralumi, an Albanian of the Diaspora in Switzerland, who through his work, enjoys a high reputation in the artistic community of Switzerland and beyond.

We can further mention Mimoza Nazarko, a popular singer and activist artist, who has greatly contributed to the promotion of our country's artistic and cultural values in Switzerland. Alfred Papuçiu, one of the most well-known figures

of the Albanian Diaspora in Switzerland, with tangible contributions in the spreads of Albanian cultural and literary values.

They naturally join their compatriots who have long achieved success in their respective professions, like the artists: Elina Duni and Markelian Kapedani, as well as the writer, member of the Swiss Society of Authors, Elvira Dones.

While some of them divide they lives between Italy and Switzerland, or between Belgium, Switzerland and Albania, others have decided to live in the USA after two decades of living in Switzerland. But more interesting and quite inspiring is the case of the lecturer Lolita Poda Jorkiewitz, who following years of work and efforts in Switzerland, has finally decided to share her experiences with Albanians, while living in a small, albeit inspirational, town that is Saranda.

Success examples are not lacking even from later generations, while the real success is that of common people, of everyone of them who through their work contribute to conveying the best image of Albanians in the famous Alpine country as well as better understanding and greater exchange between the two countries.

Their personal stories, feelings and experiences have made them inevitable and deserved protagonists of what could be characterized without any hesitation as "A story to be told".

Although the figures provided by Swiss institutions should be taken slightly with reserves, one may still tell that the total number of Albanians from Albania currently living and working in Switzerland is around 1500, without taking into account those who possess another citizenship or passport, such as Greek or Italian (or rather EU citizenship).

If we were to calculate Albanians as nationality, thus including Albanians from Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Presevo Valley, then the figure is overwhelmingly larger, up to 250.000, which in turn makes the Albanian community in a country like Switzerland with 8.57 million people²⁵ a community with a certain influence and remarkable profile, which goes well beyond their real figure.

In a conversation with the successful manager and Diaspora activist, Florian Haçkaj, we learn that:

Officially, 258,415 individuals of Albanian origin are registered in Switzerland, but the unofficial figure may reach up to 350,000. Zürich has about 50,000, but in recent years, many Albanians have migrated from Italy and Greece, who have been registered with their new citizenships rather than as Albanians²⁶.

Whereas Albanian, is the third language spoken in Switzerland after the four official ones, or the seventh, after German, French, Italian, Romansh, English and Portuguese.²⁷

And even though in a foreign land, certain features make Albanians distinguishable not only among the Swiss but even among themselves. However, their integration to Swiss society is subject to the same logic. Thus, in a conversation with Suela Jorgaqi, who has studied in Tirana and Switzerland, and is currently the director of one of the most well-known libraries in Zürich, she states:

My fingers suffice to count the Albanians from Albania, and I know almost everyone of them here in Zürich. Integration is possible through work and the fact that I can hardly see them, as they are too busy working, means that they are well-integrated²⁸.

What they appreciate the most is Swiss punctuality, inclination to order, and multiculturalism. This is affirmed by many compatriots, just like Suela who emphasizes:

I think that one of the main things that I like in Zürich is multiculturalism. And then you notice that people are the same all over the world, it is the conditions, i.e. social circle, education, the opportunities they have that make them differ from one another²⁹.

Whereas, in confront with the alpine mentality, what an Albanian misses the most is, according to Florian Haçkaj, spontaneity:

We often miss the spontaneity of Albania, although I believe that order is an important factor which has enabled the progress of Switzerland³⁰.

When asked about similarities between Albanians and the Swiss, people immediately agree on several matters, as suggested by Florian Haçkaj:

Historically there are many similarities between the Albanian and the Swiss people. They, like us, have been poor subsiding on farming, herding and mercenarism in large armies, as they were known for being brave warriors³¹.

A distinct feature of this community, even though small in numbers, is its quality as compared to Albanian communities in other European countries or in the rest of the world. Summarily, we may gladly note that this community is the best ambassador of Albania and its people in the Helvetic state. Hence, the future appears more hopeful, when thinking of how this generation of Albanians has already overcome numerous barriers and prejudices, and it is further consolidating the columns of the bridges of cooperation and friendship both old and new between the two people.



Director of "Pestalozzi" Library in Zürich, Suela Jorgaqi



Florian Haçkaj, one of the most prominent young Albanians of the Albanian community in Switzerland.

Appendix:

Full exclusive interview with Ambassador Turdiu on the occasion of celebrating the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations established between the two countries, associated with the most symbolic footages he was able to retrieve when serving in Bern during 1992-1997.

Honorable Mr. Ambassador,

You have been appointed Albanian Ambassador to Switzerland at a time of system changes and democratic reformation of the country. Is there anything special that jogs in your memory in the personal and human plane, taking into account what your family and you represented to the former regime?

How did you receive the proposal?

Well, I was appointed Ambassador to Switzerland at a time when the Albanian people was actually confronting the communist regime. People were eager for change and freedom. They wanted to take their own lives into their hands and decide on simple things such as the course of their studies or their dwelling place. They were hoping for a better quality of life, a normal life, fair treatment, normal economic situation and - last but not least - a country aligned with the civilized part of the world. Those living in that era may easily recall how the hope to leave the past behind turned into a motif to try better, not only as professionals, but also as individuals, to speed up the torrent raging across the Albanian society. I also got caught up in the torrent. As a construction engineer and part time lecturer at the Faculty of Construction at the University of Tirana I did my best to give my very own humble

contribution to bring about the changes that followed from the mid 1990 up to mid 1992.

When serving in the foreign relations department of one of the parties who won seats in the elections of 22 March, I was told in May 1992 that I had to meet Mr. Maxhun Peka at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As soon as I entered his office, I was requested -to my surprise- to handwrite a brief resume of mine and have it submitted. The person addressing me such a bizarre requirement was actually the Human Resource Manager. The question why do you need my resume for was firmly answered "as long as I was asked to take care of your case, it means that you are about to appointed ambassador". I asked in astonishment whether the submission of the resume implied I was actually consenting. "Do you have any objection?"-he asked. "No, it's just... it never crossed my mind. It's a huge change in my life and I want to talk it over with my dearest, for they will also be impacted by this decision. I have a mother, a sister and a fiancé. I can't just walk in and say to them: It's all done and settled. Before consenting I want to know where I will be appointed to". Considering my cry, Mr. Peka took me to meet the minister Alfred Serreqi, who though well-minded as he was, answered sharply: "Certainly not to...". Two weeks later the President's Decree appointing me ambassador to Bern came out. I wasn't sure about trading in my profession (although I assumed it would be temporary) and I was fearful if I would be good at it. However, I felt very good.

My appointment to Bern was clearly political. Nevertheless, I accepted to trade in my profession as an engineer and lecturer for the ambassador. It was a service I had to temporary deliver as an exchange of my political engagement. Truth is I

became so fond of diplomacy that when returning from Bern in September 1997 I decided to have a career in diplomacy. I am deeply grateful to Switzerland, the country I was appointed to, for this decision. Cordiality, friendly reception and respect for a troubled country like Albania, the unsparing aid given to our country over the years through major projects made me realize the worth of this new profession in my life.

What did you know about Switzerland, its people, the political system and the standards it applied? Did your imagination match the reality you discovered upon arriving in the country as the Albanian ambassador?

Nothing more than any ordinary Albanian citizen who had never crossed the border and had no other source of information besides those permissible before the '90s. I believed it was a beautiful country. I had heard about some wonderful infrastructural and transport works such as Gotthard and Simplon tunnels that were regarded as major engineering works - I was a construction engineer after all. I had also heard that it was a prosperous country, running like a "Swiss Clock", but I had no other details.

Everything was actually beyond my expectation, at least during those five years I got to work there. From the professional perspective, I can certainly say that I have been given the warm shoulder and a positive affirmation by almost any office I've knocked at in my quest to cooperate and procure funding for projects that were critical for Albania back then. Swiss projects and public investments have always been a history of success, with very few exceptions (out state was to blame).

I would use three adjectives in my effort to define the Swiss administration, institutions and

society: punctual, predictable and reliable.

From my own personal perspective, I can say that I haven't had enough of its breathtaking scenery, nature and landscape which people treated and protected so attentively and carefully.

What is your current perception of the Swiss influence over Albania and vice versa in the light of the mission your fellow predecessor Albanian diplomats represented?

Considering Switzerland's neutrality and the fact that there was no "unsettled issue" or clash and dispute - as it was the case with other countries - between the regime in Albania and the Swiss government, it's still inexplicable to me how come that the diplomatic relations between our countries were established as late as 1970. I could easily infer why Albania had no diplomatic relations established with the USA, Soviet Union, Israel and Holy Seat - the logic and the ideology of the regime back then was a fine explanation to that. However, I couldn't explain why such relations were missing with Switzerland. The case perfectly illustrates the gist of the diplomacy in the past, as employed by the diplomats of the time. Isolation. Self-confinement. The duty we were charged with from 1992 was to "open up" and "cooperate".

The political processes in early 1990s made Switzerland grow more interested in our country. Swiss observers landed in the country to aid their Albanian fellows to monitor the elections of 31 and 22 march. Exchanges took place at different levels, thus contributing to the intensification of relations in all fields. The visit the Albanian parliamentary delegation led by the Spokesperson Mr. Kastriot Islami paid to Switzerland in the summer of 1991 on the

occasion of celebrating the 700th Anniversary of the Helvetic Confederation was actually the first high-level political exchange.

The intensification of relations in this period climaxed with the decision of both governments to open their embassies in the respective capital cities. The Swiss Government took the first step. Their Embassy in Tirana was opened early in the summer of 1992, while our embassy took six weeks more - it was opened in August of that same year.

Ever since, exchanges have been quite frequent and not only political in terms of content. The technical and financial assistance of some public carefully selected Swiss projects have positively imprinted on the Albanian economy and society.

Was Switzerland during your term ranked as one of the “avant-garde” countries in terms of support it provided to Albania to overcome its economic, social and human rights crisis? Can you provide us with a specific example or number?

Definitely yes. Switzerland was in the front line of the countries that gave Albania a helping hand.

Its economic support for the Albanian state started as early as 1992 with its emergency aid, which consisted of the partial funding of imports (critical to our country), mainly transformers and spare parts for the power grid distribution during winter 1992-1993.

From 1994, the Swiss economic assistance in Albania shifted its approach by giving priority to the funding of strategic projects such as telecommunications and energy (rehabilitation of Drini HPP). Despite these major projects, some multi-year financial and technical support projects were devised and implemented in sectors such as agriculture, health, education etc.

Albania was one of the four countries benefiting from the financial support program along with Bulgaria, Macedonia and Romania. The program placed Albania in a favorable position.

In tandem with the technical and financial support program, an immense work was carried out to lay the foundation of the joint legal framework that would actually guide the economic and commercial exchanges in the future. We started to work immediately on the:

- Agreement on Boosting and Protect Mutual Investments;
- Agreement on Economic and Commercial Cooperation.
- Agreement on Avoiding Double Taxes.

Which were the most important projects that were implemented in our country back then?

Under the auspices of the Federal Office for Cooperation with Central and Eastern Europe several important projects on health, professional vocation, agriculture, administration etc. were funded.

The package of projects funded by the office targeted first and foremost the health and social sector. I would like to point out in this regard the reconstruction of Tirana Pediatric Hospital, Tirana Maternity Hospital “The Queen Mother”; Berat, Elbasan and Kukës hospitals; disabled child home in Berat and Shkodër etc.

Some of these projects were funded and supervised by the same institution, while being implemented by third parties such as CARITAS, VESKA, GEHVAL, Rotary Club and medical hospitals and schools who managed to twin with counterpart institutions in Albania.

A very important and long-term project was the transformation of the Hygiene and Epidemiology

Institute in Tirana into Public Health Institute. The project concluded within four years with a cost of almost \$ 6 million.

In education it's worth mentioning the reconstruction of the vocational school in Durrës which with a cost of \$1 300 000.

In terms of financial assistance, the Development Cooperation Office at the Federal Public Economic Department funded over the years some projects crucial to the infrastructure such as telecommunication (\$12 million), reduction of non-technical losses in the power distribution grid and rehabilitation of Drini HPPs (\$15 million), technical support for the Albanian Power Cooperation (\$ 500 000), the rehabilitation of the power distribution and transmission grid (\$9 million), contribution of \$ 5 million for payment balance sheet etc.

All projects implemented by Switzerland have had a considerable impact on the improvement of services for citizens. From the above list, I would like to set apart the support provided for telecommunication (\$12 million): All those living back then can easily recall how difficult it was to make a call abroad in early 1990s. One had to spend minutes to be able to reach the line. The situation changed completely upon the establishment of the new telephone switchboard in Tirana and new line of the Albanian telecom for abroad calls, funded 100% by Switzerland.

Symbolically speaking, it was the Secretary of State at the Federal Public Economy Department, Mr. Franz Blankart, who made the first phone call on 23 October 1994. He had actually landed in Tirana to attend the new telephone switchboard inauguration event on 23 October 1994. From that day on, there was no need to dial a number more than once to reach the international line.

Who are the diplomas, statesmen, politicians or high-level Swiss representatives that you share the best of memories and who were those that knew or wanted to get to know Albania best, either by relying or not on the Albanian authorities help (including with the help of the Embassy)?

What were they mostly interested in?

I have good memories with all my acquaintances back then, be them officials or friends. I can mention the Secretary of State Blankart who was very inclined to simply official conversations for you. He was always willing to address the needs of the Albanian economy and to act in this regard whenever possible. The Chief of Political Division at the Federal Foreign Affairs Department Mr. Franz von Däniken was always open to communication. I've had excellent professional relations with the diplomat covering Albania Jean-Jacques Jorris, who eventually became my family friend, as encouraged by his superior. Same applies to Volker Schulte who used to cover health projects. The first Swiss Ambassador to Albania Thomas Feller is actually a very good friend of mine even nowadays.

A special collaborator of ours whom we've had excellent relations with and I would definitely call him "a dear friend to Albania" is the Chairman of Foreign Affairs Committee at the Swiss Parliament Mr. Victor Ruffly.

There are many other distinguished collaborators who were indeed very cordial. It's been a pleasure to have them as friends. I would like to mention the Ambassador Indermühle who helped talented Albanian students to get scholarships in the Gstaad Music Academy, the Charmian of the Bern Rotary Club supporting hospitals in the most remote areas in Albania,



20 October 1992: Ambassador Turdiu when submitting the Letter of Credential to the Swiss President, Dr. René Felber



the President of the foundation Karl Popper, who mediated the purchase of 4 search and rescue helicopters Alouette III (those red helicopters in Farka military base operating from 1995 that have saved the lives of so many people) etc. It's impossible for me to mention all of them, but I would nevertheless like to thank you for bringing such beautiful memories back to my mind.

Interviewer: Armand PLAKA – Journalist, Scholar

Footage of the apartment headquartering the Embassy of the Republic of Albania in the Helvetic Confederation, Bern, located in Eigerstrasse 46 3007. 1992. Retrieved from the Ambassador Turdiu's private collection.

Interview with

Mrs. Suela Jorgaqi – Director of “Pestalozzi” Library in Zürich,

7 September 2020

For years now you live in the Helvetic Confederation, where you have created your own family and work in a library in the city of Zürich, for which you finished the relevant specialization after graduating for German culture and literature in Tirana. What was

the reason or the cause that drove you to choose Switzerland, the most developed and interesting part of the German world?

It was simply a coincidence. After finishing my German language studies in Tirana, I got acquainted with a Swiss couple who wished to help someone to study abroad, the biggest wish of our generation back then. So, with luck and my desire I focused on Chur, Switzerland, where I studied “Informationswissenschaft”, i.e. information science while at the same time working in a library. But coming from a big city like Tirana, I really missed the vitality and bustle

of the city, so, after finishing my studies, I moved to Zürich, which I find a very fascinating albeit calm city. I still live here with my family.

What were some of your first impressions when you went there? Did your image of the place match with what you encountered, and on the other hand, what was their perceived impression of you and other Albanians, considering that a number of Albanians (those from Kosovo) had been living for quite some time in Switzerland thus leaving their own imprint.

The first week that I arrived in Switzerland I saw a dream as if I had left during the night!!! Everything seemed completely different. I think that when people are not complete, they hold on to security, they long for the known that is otherwise translated into HOMELAND. So I did the same, although all my contacts back then were Swiss. Even in university, I was the only non-Swiss student! I felt rather lonely. It is quite hard to come from a communist country, where teaching and learning were face to face, unlike here, and having to do all by yourself. Nonetheless, I was privileged, for however challenging the studies, they paved my path for the future. I cannot compare myself with the Albanians from Kosovo who emigrated here to work in factories. Everyone kept saying: you are different from the rest of the Albanians, and when I speak, they assume I am American based on how I spell the letter "rr". I did not consider it a compliment, as it was a positive stereotype. But, I haven't heard this comment for a long time now!

In reality, I did not have many preconceptions about Switzerland, I was simply curious to live in a new country whichever it may be. I had actually visited once, but it is quite something else to be there on vacation and to settle there permanently. I remember that I enjoyed the first months through discovery. But afterwards,

the emptiness sunk in, I missed my old acquaintances, and it took me quite some time to create new ones.

Could you elaborate a little on your career and everyday life?

Initially, I worked in a trade union which was a source of strength and where I better realized how Switzerland worked. So, not everything was perfect as thought, not everyone was rich, and there were many violations of the law, especially labor laws, which really took me by surprise. Getting to know its politics and judicial system, including the common people was a separate school for me. There I could be more myself, because my colleagues were Portuguese, Italian, Spanish, Swiss and any of them remain my friends to this day. As a friend of mine often says, the trade union is a lifestyle, not just work. It thus opened my eyes and my path to work in an intercultural field, which is my specialty.

For 7 years now I am the director of "Pestalozzi" Library, one of the 14 libraries in Zürich, and also responsible for the events of all 14 libraries, which occupy a big part of our everyday work. It is a fascinating job, as I get to know many people, I try to mediate and offer uniqueness and individuality in my library. Besides my intercultural staff, we carry out numerous activities from all over the world. I am open to cooperate with any institution, thus creating synergy and valuable projects. In many job applications that I receive, people often write: I would like to work in a library because I love to read. But this is not enough anymore. In order to work in a library these days, one should be outgoing, flexible and loving to work with people. For me the priority has always been the clientele, what they want, hence we try to keep up the pace, such as the digital offers.

My everyday life is the same there, as in any

other part of the world: I send my son to daycare, I take the tram to the library, I have appointments or guides, we never forget the morning coffee, which we have together as staff, when we also exchange the latest news. Then I carry out various tasks in the library, including administrative ones. When I have some free time during the lunch hours I practice yoga, or Zumba in the evening, and then I go home. I pick up my son if my husband hasn't already, and we have dinner, then read or play together. As an auteur cinema lover, I enjoy watching a movie in the evening, however, my son sets the priorities, so it depends. When I have some extra time, I enjoy going to the theater or opera, but I often tell myself that I need to take more advantage of the cultural diversity that Zürich has to offer.

How many Albanians live in your city and in Switzerland overall?

There are few Albanians from Albania, approximately 1500 in Switzerland overall. Whereas there are many more from Kosovo and North Macedonia, about 200,000. They are a source of my clientele, the children in particular often frequent the library.

Do Albanians there organize in order to preserve their traditions, and on the other hand, are Albanians a good example of integration in that society?

The integration issue is complicated. The more you integrate in another country the less you give importance to being with your compatriots, because you do not choose people according to their nationality, but to your liking. The same happened for me; my circle of friends is quite mixed, otherwise I would feel culturally poor if I surrounded myself only with Albanians or only with Swiss. I think that one of the main things that I like in Zürich is multiculturalism. And then you notice that people are the same all over

the world, it is the conditions, i.e. social circle, education, the opportunities they have that make them differ from one another.

The second generation, or "secondas" of Albanians from Kosovo and North Macedonia have integrated quite well, far better than their parents who had it more difficult and came here working the hardest jobs. You may find them in management, services, and increasingly even in leadership positions. Whereas, my fingers suffice to count the Albanians from Albania, and I know almost everyone of them here in Zürich. Integration is possible through work and the fact that I can hardly see them, as they are too busy working, means that they are well-integrated.

What could you point out regarding the similarities between Albanians and the Swiss? Is there an aspect, a line or event that is memorable to you?

My husband is Swiss. Every time that we argue, we go back to nationality, however, these are not intercultural disagreement, simply husband-wife disagreements, like in the rest of the world. He speaks fluently Albanian, although our son excels him now?! The mere fact that we live together means that we have much more in common rather than differences.

A memorable event: When I got the citizenship, they came in our home to check the whether our marriage was real. I was really surprised and told the girl, who was younger than me: I was under the impression that this happened only in movies (there is a famous Swiss movie, "Die Schweizermacher")!!! And offered something to drink: She replied: no, no, when we see that everything is in order, we leave quite soon! – and I thought to myself: well, maybe she expected an Albanian flag, or maybe a sofra table?!

Interviewer: Armand PLAKA – Journalist, Researcher

Conversation with Florian Haçkaj -

- 7 September 2020

Florian Haçkaj, is undoubtedly one of most prominent young Albanians of the Albanian community in Switzerland. Graduated in the University of Applied Sciences in Bielefeld, Germany and later in the University of Applied Science in Lucerne, Switzerland (Post-graduate studies in Tourism Management), completed with many more qualifications, Florian has over 10 years of experience in the international sales sector, business development as well as experience in aviation/tourism industry consulting, and in many complex environments for information management services.

He has achieved renowned and proven successes in sales and new client acquisitions at international level. In the last 4 years his work has focused on the cooperation with various UN agencies such as WHO, UNICEF, UNDP, UNHCR, ILO etc. and large NGOs like ICRC, IFRC etc.

Aside from being a highly achieving professional, Florian Haçkaj is also one of the most renown Albanian climbers who has climbed Mount Everest, Aconcagua, the highest peak of the Andes, and other worldly famous mountains.

You have been living in Switzerland for a long time now, but this appears to be only one of the stations of your private or professional life.

What was the reason or the cause that drove you to choose Switzerland, the most developed and interesting part of the German world?

Actually, after completing my university studies on international management in Germany and following several work experiences in Germany,

Austria and Belgium, I decided to return to Albania, but in September 2010, my wife moved to Zürich to follow her graduate studies in ETH Zürich for civil engineering and I decided to move from Albania to be closer to her.

What were some of your first impressions when you went there? Did your image of the place match with what you encountered, and on the other hand, what was their perceived impression of you and other Albanians, considering that a number of Albanians (those from Kosovo) had been living for quite some time in Switzerland thus leaving their own imprint.

Not only the Albanians from Kosovo, but also those from North Macedonia, Montenegro and the Presevo Valley, who had emigrated during the 1970-80s, had already established a large and respected community. In recent years, this culminated with the Albanian players in the Swiss National Football Team. However, being a foreigner in Switzerland, like in other countries of the world, aint' far from easy. I struggled for a long time to be where I am now, even though I possessed a German diploma, spoke 5 languages and had a vast international experience in management. Maybe due to the fact that I grew up in post-communist Albania, but also based on the manner of how I was raised by my family, i.e. to be grateful of what we have, both my wife and I enjoyed every moment in Switzerland, despite the challenges we faced. I am on very good terms with Albanians, either because of work, friendship, sports, and mainly simply being Albanian. I cannot say what imprints have I made, but I believe that given the promotion within my company, from assistant consultant to department head, I have made a fine impression of Albanian culture in general and the work culture of a dedicated Albanian in particular.

Could you elaborate a little on your career and everyday life?

Surprisingly, the day in Switzerland has the same hours as in Albania, but it seems shorter as the week passes by quickly. Home, work, home and in between some sport activity and family commitments. Weekends are reserved only to relaxation, or family activities, and it is actually funny, but in Switzerland you have to schedule meetings with family and friends quite in advance in order to set a date. We often miss the spontaneity of Albania, although I believe that order is an important factor which has enabled the progress of Switzerland. In 2014, if I recall correctly, the Swiss held a referendum on increasing the leave days from 5 weeks to 7 weeks per year, however, they decided against, by taking into account the long-term impact it would have on the country's economy. I will let you draw the parallel with Albania.

How many Albanians live in your city and in Switzerland overall?

Officially, 258,415 individuals of Albanian origin are registered in Switzerland, but the unofficial figure may reach up to 350,000. Zürich has about 50,000, but in recent years, many Albanians have migrated from Italy and Greece, who have been registered with their new citizenships rather than as Albanians.

Do Albanians there organize in order to preserve their traditions, and on the other hand, are Albanians a good example of integration in that society?

Albanians organize quite well and regularly in order to preserve their traditions. There are student organizations in the most prominent universities in Switzerland, cultural and sports associations, Albanian schools, football championships, dance courses, business networks, etc. there are countless examples of

successful Albanians from the National Football Team players like Xhaka, Shaqiri etc, to well-known businesspeople and politicians like Ylfete Fanaj who holds the post of President of Lucerne Cantonal Council, or Mrs. Qendresa Sadriu, president of local cantonal council here in Zürich, and numerous others like them.

What could you point out regarding the similarities between Albanians and the Swiss? Is there an aspect, a line or event that is memorable to you?

Historically there are many similarities between the Albanian and the Swiss people. They, like us, have been poor subsiding on farming, herding and mercenarism in large armies, as they were known for being brave warriors. The success of Switzerland as a confederation began exactly in 1516 by declaring neutrality, among which there is an event that very few Albanians and Swiss are aware of, and each time I tell the story they are taken aback.

Mercurio (Märkur) Bua (from the Gjin Bue Shpata family) was a famed *stratioti* (captain) of the time. His services, together with his 600 soldiers were often bought by the armies at the time and were regarded as a great victory factor in battles. Precisely in 1515, Mercurio was vested in glory when in the Battle Marignano, the Venetians and the French defeated the Swiss, mercenaries contracted by the Holy Roman Empire. Mercurio Bua and his horsemen saved the life of the French king, Francis I, and were a key factor in that battle. The Swiss (known as the Old Swiss Confederacy) suffered their heaviest losses ever and due to this great defeat, the Swiss signed a peace treaty with Francis in November 1516. It was during that period that the Swiss Confederacy decided on "perpetual peace", i.e. not engaging in any wars by remaining neutral, thus, ever since, it has achieved only successes and has become a safe place for the deposit of

vast amounts of money by other countries and rich people from all over the world. For example: Switzerland has not engaged in any of the world wars, despite being surrounded by the countries that fought one another.

In summary, a famed Albanian army commander had an impact on the course of history so that Switzerland would choose to avoid future wars, followed thus by an unprecedented economic growth.

Interviewer: Armand PLAKA – Journalist, Researcher

Memories of a former diplomat: My journeys and stay in Switzerland

(1980-2002)

By Ksenofon Krisafi*

My first visit to Switzerland took place in April of 1980, when, together with the former Head of International Organizations in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Murat Angoni, we would participate in the regular session proceedings of the Economic Commission for Europe, a body of the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

In Belgrade, with Sokrat Plaka and Murat Angoni on our way to Geneva

On the morning of April 15, we went to the Palace of Nations where the session proceedings took place. After the impressive entrance, on the square facing the main entrance we encountered a gigantic chair standing on three legs – one had been broken, as a symbol of the consequences of anti-personnel mines - followed by an “aisle” of flags of all UN member states placed on both sides in alphabetical order.

The Palace of Nations, a building of unusual dimensions, one of the international diplomacy temples of the period prior to and after World War II, left an indelible impression. It stood as a silent and stately witness of the drafting of the scenarios of significant events concerning

the fate of the World's people. It represented the virtual and immense arena of diplomatic conflicts, polemics, and the place where thousands of speeches, declarations, debates and compromises had occurred, where hundreds of international treaties and conventions had been discussed and signed.

In the following days, in addition to participating in the Commission's proceedings, we would also find time to visit and travel around the magical and beautiful city of Geneva, lying on the bay of Lake Geneva (Leman), the largest lake in Western Europe, at the foot of the Jura Mountain, at the Alps. This city, characterized by its beauty, charm, architecture and its numerous values, would be forever engraved in our memory as the city of the grand Rousseau, Voltaire, Calvin, Diderot, Isabelle Adjani, Alain Delon, Charles Aznavour, etc., as a multilingual city also renowned for cultural dialog. Albert Cohen referred to Geneva as the grand cosmopolitan theater of feelings, ambitions, vanity and projects, a city both Swiss and European, and of a universal nature.

I would visit the city again a year later, in August of 1981, due to the proceedings for the second part of the tenth session of the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (3-28 August).

Switzerland and Albanians

Slowly, I would uncover the deep and early connections of the country with the Albanian world. Many compatriots had lived and worked there and in other Swiss cities. Their first contacts dated since the Dardania times.

When I worked as an extraordinary and plenipotentiary ambassador, Head of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Albania to the United Nations Office and Other International Organizations in Geneva, an occasional event would make me discover an interesting and nearly implausible history, which, as I would later find out, was not entirely unknown. Around April or May of 2000, on a weekend, I was dining with friends at the restaurant "*Le Pavillon du Lac*", across Lake Geneva. It was a restaurant with good food and service. Its manager was a young man from Kosovo, named Sokol Agushi. What stood out to me among the many alcoholic drinks was the *Dardagny* wine. Its intriguing name prompted me to ask the owner about details. He explained that the wine was produced locally by a nearby winery in the village of *Dardagny*.

The conversation in "*Le Pavillon du Lac*" regarding the *Dardagny* wine's name seemed to have ended there. However, several weeks later, a completely random event reminded me of Geneva's *Dardagny*, and it later actually lead me there. On a casual day, while having coffee at the Mission's premises with Bujar Marika, who had been living in Geneva for a long time, I expressed my desire to visit nearby wineries that produced and stored quality wines. He had moved to Geneva years ago and, thus, I believed that he could help me. A few days later, Bujar notified me that he had found the name and address of one of the most famous wineries in the region, located precisely in *Dardagny* and owned by a man named Pierre Mermier. When I called Mr. Mermier on the phone and mentioned that I was part of the Albanian Mission to the

UN, he promptly interjected to ask me "How are you doing my brother?" Taken aback, and also wondering that I may have misheard or misunderstood him on the phone, I explained again who I was and expressed my wish to visit his winery. Once again, eagerly, he told me that he had understood me well and said, "I am glad to have this opportunity to talk to a fellow Albanian". He explained that he and the majority of inhabitants in the village of *Dardagny* were of ancient Illyrian origin from Dardania. Their ancestors had moved to the village and in several other settlements around Lake Geneva during the battles of Julius Caesar and at later times. Those areas were generally named toponymically, ending in "*gny*". Many of the inhabitants were brought up with the reminder of their Illyrian-Balkan origin, a reminder that, as Mermier explained, was passed down through generations. He agreed to tell me more about this when I would visit *Dardagny* and the Mermier winery.

This conversation with Mr. Mermier, whom I would recall often afterwards, seemed strange, far from reality, and almost unbelievable. All of a sudden, a new connection with Albania and Kosovo was emerging in my public life and activity, the village of *Dardagny* in Switzerland.

In the first week of July 2000, I visited the village of *Dardagny*, located approximately 8 kilometers west of Geneva, bordering France. It was surrounded by numerous vineyards, arranged in an exemplary manner. The Mermier winery was now under the ownership of Pierre's grandson, Bernard Vaugnat Mermier.

We saw several "generations" of containers made of wood, cement, glass, and plastic material and once again wood, as per the technological advancement. They gathered and processed grapes collected from highly esteemed wine-producing vineyards in the region of Geneva and nearby French regions. Part of them laid

down as museum ruins. While we were sat down and proceeding with wine degustation, Pierre continued telling me the detailed story of the Illyrian-Dardanian origin of the other towns, villages and settlements near Lake Geneva. Among others, he said that the first waves of ancestors who had settled around Lake Geneva had arrived somewhere during the middle of the century I B.C, when Julius Caesar conquered the area. To manage these regions, he appointed several Dardanians, who were Roman citizens from Dardania, that had been occupied by Rome almost a century before. The most renowned figure amongst them, *Dardanicum*, whose name was given to the village we were in, had brought with him relatives and friends from Dardania, who were put at his service. Thus, according to Pierre, Illyrian Dardanians had arrived and settled into these areas, and their descendants currently inhabited the villages of Cologny, Pregny, Chatingny, Satigny, Céligny, Chougny, Cartigny, Germagny, Juvigny, Martigny, etc. In "*Dictionnaire historique de la Suisse*" by Jacques Davierle, 22 August 2005 edition, it is stated that until 1093, Dardagny was called Dardanicum. It also mentions the battles of Julius Caesar in the second half of the first century before Christ. He also stated that other toponyms also remain, such as *Mies*, a small municipality in the district of Nyon in the canton of Vaud, the name of which is said to be derived from the Albanian word *mëngjes (mjes) (morning)*, *Copet* - from the Albanian word *kopë (herd)* and even the name of Geneva itself, which in the school books of the canton of Geneva is said to be derived from the Illyrian words "*gjer në gju ujë*" (which literally translates into "water level is up to the knees"). In one such book it is stated that "The name of Geneva undoubtedly derives from the Illyrian (Balkan people) words: *Genusus (river)* and *Genau, Genaua (knee, elbow)*. During Medieval times, there were three names for the city: *Genaua, Genava, Genua*. Often in writings

there was some confusion with the city of Genoa in Italy, which bore the same name, until it was decided that the latter would be called the Maritime Genava."

My Albanian language and literature professor, the poet and writer Agim Shehu, and the writer Sulejman Mato, said that Professor Eqrem Çabej had found that in the suburbs of Geneva, there were more than 50 toponyms that can only be explained and understood in Albanian. S. Mato further references the Italian Encyclopedia. He states that in the item *Switzerland*, page 54, it explicitly writes, "The south of Switzerland must have been the settlement of what seems to have been Illyrian people. It is believed that Illyrian people and other similar ones, such as *Rechts*, inhabited the area."

Pierre insisted that the Illyrian origin of the Swiss Dardagny was not simply a legend, but a historical fact also included in written documents. In order to demonstrate this, he showed us one of the Swiss Encyclopedia editions, wherein it was written, "Dardanicum derives from Dardania". I asked him to make a photocopy of that page and he obliged.

The first contacts of Albanians with Switzerland date back in 1431. One of the most significant bodies at the time was the Council of Basel, wherein debates regarding church matters were conducted. Invited to participate from Albania was Andreas von Krim, known also as Andrea Zamometisch, who had been living and working as a bishop in Granea, Albania.

Switzerland was the organization model that Albanian Renaissance figures dreamed of applying to the future Albanian state. Sami Frashëri openly stated, "Let us make Albania a second Switzerland." Later, particularly at the end of the century XIX and more so in the century XX, many Albanian intellectuals were laureated in Swiss universities and several settled and found jobs in Switzerland. This is what happened with

Helena Gjika (Dora d'Istria), Naim Frashëri, Sami Frashëri, Mid'hat Frashëri, Anton Zako Çajupi, Leonik Tomeo, Lazër Shanto, Pol Adhamidhi, Gjergj Kokali, Ajet Libohova, Ali Këlcyra, Ismail Qemali, Fan Noli, Luigj Gurakuqi, Faik Konica, Dervish Hima, Mustafa Kruja, Eqrem Bej Vlora, Visar Dodani, Aleksandër Moisiu, Mihal Turtulli, Bajram Curri, Avni Rustemi and many others.

Switzerland also allowed the publication of a number of Albanian newspapers, including "L'Albanie" (1903-1906), in Geneva; "L'Albanie" (1915-1916), in Lausanne; "La liberté Nationale" (1925-1935), in Geneva, and "La Voix de l'Albanie" (1935-1936). It is also said that in 1556, in Basel, was published (republished) the work of Marin Barleti "The Siege of Shkodra". Moreover, books by Albanian authors were also published at the time, such as the books of Dora D'Istria "La Suisse Allemande Et L'Ascension Du Moench" (German Switzerland and the rise of Munich), Paris 1856, in French, and the same book in German entitled "Die Deutsche Schweiz Und Die Besteigung Des Mönchs", Zürich 1858, "Switzerland the Pioneer of the Reformation or La Suisse Allemande", London 1858, "Die deutsche Schweiz: Land, Volk und Geschichte, Erster Band" (German Switzerland: The land, people and history), Zürich 1860 (3 volumes); "Une Rencontre de Voyage Souvenirs de la Suisse Italienne" (A recounting of travels - Memoirs from the Italian Switzerland), Paris 1861, etc.; the work of the patriot Mit'hat Frashëri (alias Lumo Skëndo), "Les Albanais chez eux et à l'étranger", Lausanne 1919, and the work of the renowned Albanian author Krist Maloki "Leksikon der Frau", in Zürich.

At the end of World War I, Albanian patriots who were making efforts to obtain international affirmation of Albania by ensuring its membership in the League of Nations found wide support in Geneva, Lausanne and other Swiss cities.

During the harsh Serbian-Yugoslav repression against the Albanians of Kosovo, Macedonia,

Montenegro and Preševo Valley, thousands of them migrated to Switzerland. In the early 2000s, the Albanian community in Switzerland comprised more than 270 000 people. After the fall of the communist regime in Albania, a modest number of Albanians migrated to Switzerland, where they currently live and work. Switzerland has now become their second homeland that they honor, cherish and respect. There are also a considerable number of post-university Albanian students in Switzerland, who feel at home there. In the Helvetic Confederation, the Albanian language is spoken by roughly 2.5% of the people, thus coming in fourth, after German, French and Italian. As evident, it is actually the first foreign language in the country, as the other three above are the official languages of Switzerland.

During the first visit to Switzerland, at the Palace of Nations, I had the opportunity to meet a young man from Kosovo, who had been working as part of the service and administration staff at the Palace for years. During the second trip, while on a night walk along Lake Lemman's shore, I came across a group of youngsters, wearing blood-red T-shirts, with the black two-headed eagle of the Albanian flag stamped on the front, while on the back was written "Kosovo Republic". We sat at a café nearby and they told us that they were part of a Movement aiming to change the status of Kosovo from an autonomous territory at the time, to a republic under the name of the *Albanian Socialist Republic in Yugoslavia - LRSZH*, with the same status as the other six republics comprising the Yugoslav Federation. They had found shelter and were accepted by the Swiss authorities and the traditionally welcoming Swiss people.

I met some of them again 17 years later, when I returned to the country as an Ambassador. By then, they had gotten married, mostly with women from Kosovo, had their own families and children and were finally settled in.

The commencement of my duty as an Ambassador and Head of the Albanian Mission to Geneva, in November of 1998, would take me to Switzerland a third time.

The Mission I was about to start and the time of my appointment did not solely increase my responsibilities, but also my emotions as well. This was due to the unfortunate situation in Albania at the end of 1998, when the country was undergoing numerous, unusual and painful events. At their core were the powerful political turbulences and tragic conflicts that transformed into a coup d'état. In the other half of the Albanian space, in Kosovo, shocking and dramatic events were taking place. The youth and the entire population were fighting against the repressive Serbian forces.

Following the submission of my letters of credence to the UN Deputy Secretary General, Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, on 4 December 1998, nearly a week after arriving in Geneva, I officially began my duty as the representative of my country in the international forums of Geneva. My duty commenced with the explanation of the aforementioned events in Albania and Kosovo and their consequences or the further developments, which run in parallel with the protection of Albania's and Albanian's interests on both sides of the border.

The building next to *Hotel Bernina*, in *Place Cornavin*, where one of its compartments became the Albanian Ambassador's residence after 1999

While in Switzerland, maintaining contact with leading authorities, from those at the highest confederation level in Bern to those at the canton and the Republic of Geneva level, was also part of our work.

Cosmopolitan Geneva

In Geneva are located the headquarters of tens of international organizations, where leaders,

officials, employees and representatives of member states operate, reflect, propose, exchange opinions, negotiate and agree on highlighting the values of international unity and solidarity against the challenges of the current globalization for the future of the planet in the areas of human rights, environment, global health, sustainable development, economy, employment, international trade, arms control, telecommunication, intellectual property, metrology, scientific research, international law etc.

Geneva is composed of numerous parks covered in grass carpets, full of colorful flowers planted in incredible patterns, filling every part of the city with their pleasant scent.

Located in a geographic region with a magnificent relief and view, it remains a key destination of the *Grand Tours* since the beginning of the century XX. The city is surrounded by evergreen centenarian forests and trees, characterized by a mountainous landscape dominated by *Mont Blanc*, located several tens of kilometers away. It is divided nearly in half by Lake Lemman. At the end part of the harbor, opposite the *Les Eaux Vives* park, approximately three to four hundred meters before it meets the Rhône river, is located the renowned architectonic and hydro-technical work of art, the special decorative fountain called by the locals *Jet d'Eau* that was constructed in 1891. Currently, its jetting height reaches up to 140 m. Along with the old city, where urban, social, commercial and religious buildings mainly of a classical style have been preserved, it represents an architectural urban wonder, visited by thousands of people each day from all over the globe, comprising what the Genevans refer to as the "tourist" population. This population also includes delegation members participating in the numerous daily meetings of international organizations, which Geneva hosts generously, as well as entrepreneurs, businessmen, bankers, sheiks and other wealthy people who stay in the

hotels and the super lavish villas of Coligny, and dine at the luxurious restaurants along Lake Lemman.

In this "national treasure" of Switzerland was established the headquarters of the League of Nations, pursuant to the decision of the Grand Council of Geneva. It was also agreed that the rapid and careful transition towards the requirements of a century, which was dominated by rationalism and sound business at the benefit of the citizens of Geneva and all of Switzerland, was imperative. In May of 1919, the Grand Council of Geneva President asked the members to welcome the League of Nations because, as he stated, "though its perspectives are bright, they come with lots of responsibility."

In Geneva, the transition process from secret diplomacy to open (public) multilateral diplomacy took place in an institutionalized and permanent manner. The leaders of "large nations" and small countries began to implement the ideals of peace, international security, and trust in global cooperation, also known as the *Geneva Spirit*. The League of Nations operated universally, by making efforts to avoid conflicts and wars, to encourage peace and cooperation and to handle the economic expansion and the escalation of protectionism and nationalism.

In August of 1920, the League of Nations Secretariat was established at *Hotel National*, one of the largest hotels in the city, located a few meters from the lakeshore. It is currently known as *Palais Wilson*, in honor of the U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's contribution for the founding of the League. Later, the headquarters were moved further from the lakeshore, nearby a beautiful valley called *Ariana*, a public property of the city of Geneva, where the international, practical and functional Geneva would be designed and established. The construction of the building currently called *Palais des Nations* (*Palace of Nations*) and its premises, took into

consideration the rightful concern of the inhabitants that it links the future to the past, for tomorrow to be linked to yesterday. After the League of Nations era ended, the Palace of Nations and all of its premises, surroundings, equipment, archives, library and all that it comprised, were transferred to the UN pursuant to the relevant agreement. In this Palace are the UN European branch headquarters, as well as the headquarters of several other international organizations.

The relation of Albania to multilateralism and the peaceful regulation of conflicts commenced with the League of Nations and continues to this day with the United Nations and other international organizations it is a member of.

The Albanian Mission to Geneva

The Albanian Mission to Geneva was first established in December of 1920. In the first weeks, the Albanian delegation, which became a mission upon membership on 17 December 1920, would continuously move in different hotels, such as the "Metropole", "Excelsior" etc. In 1921, it obtained the status of an actual permanent representation, and continued until 1925 when it ended and the representation was thereafter conducted from Tirana. The first permanent representative of Albania was Fan Noli, a polyedric personality, and great activist of the Albanian cause, as well as a statist, politician, diplomat, writer, researcher, translator etc. As the leader of the Albanian Delegation to the League of Nations, at the end of 1920, he provided a significant contribution for the international affirmation of the Albanian cause and Albania's membership in the recently established organization on 17 December 1920.

During 1926-1929 and after 1935, the position was held by Mehdi Frashëri, a renowned politician, lawyer and intellectual. The Mission

started operating again in 1930 after the organic law of MoFA was approved in 1929. Due to economic reasons, its leader, the Permanent Representative to the League of Nations, had to remain in Tirana and travel to Geneva as necessary. Over time, the law was amended to adapt to the developments and foreign policy of the country better. One of the amendments was the inclusion of the provision concerning the establishment of a permanent representation to the League of Nations in Geneva, instead of specific delegations. This would ensure a permanent contact between the Kingdom and the international political circles, as well as provide a better economic solution. In 1936, in Geneva, the first Albanian Consulate was established, directed by Vasfi Xhomo, who also performed the duty of Secretary of the Permanent Representation to the League of Nations. In 1935, Albania had established a consulate in Bern.

In January of 1936, the Directorate for the League of Nations was included in the structure of MoFA, which was considered the most important organization for the protection of the international rights of Albanians. This Directorate would also address the issues of the Albanian Diaspora and process and manage statistics on their numbers and condition. Hamdi Karazi was appointed as Director. Its activity took place until April of 1939, when Albania was invaded by fascist Italy. Several weeks later, the Albanian Mission to the League of Nations would cease its activity and be officially terminated upon formal request by Shefqet Vërlaci, the "quisling" Prime Minister at the time. At the service of the fascist invaders, he delivered to Geneva the notice that Albania had decided to leave the League of Nations, thus undoing and dismantling the significant efforts, dedication and patriotic idealism of the Albanian delegation during 1920 to make Albania a member of said organization. With his anti-national action, he executed one of the aims

of fascist Italy to undermine the independence and sovereignty of Albania and transform it into an Italian region, a *quinta sponta* in the Adriatic and Ionian Sea.

After World War II, in 1953, in Geneva, a new Albanian diplomatic mission was established, accredited by the Economic Commission for Europe, a body of the UN Economic and Social Council. The mission's status was that of an observer delegation, because Albania was not a UN member yet.

However, the Mission did not operate for long. Following Albania's membership in the UN in December of 1955, efforts were made to also establish a mission in Geneva in addition to that in New York. As a matter of fact, the Permanent Delegation of the People's Republic of Albania to the Economic Commission for Europe was still functional, but now it was located in the Albanian legation in Paris. Albanian Embassy diplomats there had also been accredited by the UN European Office in Geneva as a Permanent Delegation of the People's Republic of Albania to the Economic Commission for Europe (!).

The Albanian Diplomatic Representation to Geneva was reestablished nearly half a century later, in September of 1987. Its current name is the *Permanent Mission of the Republic of Albania to the United Nations Office and Other International Organizations in Geneva*.

***(Exclusive for the 50th anniversary of establishing the Albanian -Swiss diplomatic relations. Interviewer: Armand Plaka, journalist, researcher)**

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- 12 See: Ibid.
- 13 See: Appendix to this research/ The complete interview of Ambassador Gazmend Turdiu, taken exclusively for the 50th anniversary of the establishment of Albanian-Swiss relations. By Armand PLAKA, September 2020
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- 21 See: Appendix / Full interview with Ambassador Gazmend Turdiu, taken exclusively for the 50th anniversary of establishing Albanian-Swiss relations. By Armand PLAKA, September 2020
- 22 See: Ibid.
- 23 See: Ibid.
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**years of diplomatic relations
1970 - 2020**