

National Movement in the District of Gjilani and the Destruction of Komiti's Squad of Pasjan in 1907



History

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Abstract

Serbian Political Program "Načertania" of 1844, which foresaw, among other things, the penetration of the Serbian state towards the south, namely the territorial extent in the administrative area of the Ottoman Empire inhabited by Albanians, did not exclude the possibility of organizing armed groups to carry out concrete actions in the implementation of this platform. Serbian armed groups, entering these areas, were aimed at destabilizing order and tranquility, to give way to the Serbian state policy to intervene in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire, with the justification of the "protection" of the Serbian element from the so-called Albanians' "wrongdoings". Pasjani Serbian squad, is a concrete illustration of Serbian political claims in Albanian lands.

At the end of the third phase of the Renaissance, Albanian National Movement, apart from some achieved successes in raising the awareness for the national emancipation, was also facing great difficulties in the political sphere, starting with the fragile situation within the Ottoman Empire, the expansionist goals of neighboring Balkan states at the expense of Albanian territories and the polarization of the political and military blocks of the Great Powers. In the vortex of this situation was also the National Movement in Gjilan and its surroundings.¹²⁴

After the coup in Belgrade in May 1903 and ascending the throne of the Karadjordjevic dynasty,¹²⁵ the foreign policy of the Kingdom of Serbia underwent radical changes, especially towards the Albanian lands with a special emphasis on Kosova Vilayet, which called it "Old Serbia",¹²⁶ labeled as a result of fabrication by infamous expansionist the so-called "The Project" of Ilia Garashanin in 1844.

Allegedly due to "wrongdoings" which were being inflicted on the Serbian minority, here and there, in Vilayet of Kosovo, the Kingdom of Serbia, encouraged and supported by the Russian Empire, pressured the Ottoman government in Istanbul to disarm Albanians and to extinguish their

¹²⁴ Academy of Sciences of Albania & Institute of History, *History of the Albanian People II (The Albanian National Renaissance – the 30s of the XIXth century – 1912)*, TOENA, Tirana, 2002, pp. 298-336; Norman Rich, *Diplomacy of the Great Powers (1814-1914)*, Toena, Tirana, 2006, pp. 405-415; Brestovci, Sadullah, *The National Movement in District of Gjilani – Islam Pira (1861-1931)*, Albanological Institute of Prishtina, 2008, p. 26.

¹²⁵ The ten-year government of Alexander Obrenović (1893-1903) did not show any concrete progress, a thing that encouraged a general dissatisfaction towards it, and which began to spread among the Serbian army and radicalise. What irritated the Serbian people was the marriage of Alexander with Draga Mashin, she was notorious for bad, which also reflected in the loss of credibility to the royal throne. For these reasons, a group of military officers comprised of 120 conspirators, organized a coup in May 1903, that for the final balance was the killing of the king, queen, prime minister and some other figures. Thus, the Obrenović's dynasty was overthrown and on the Serbian throne came Petar Karagjorgji (1903-1921). See more in details: Abaz Mullai, *History of the Balkans (century XIX-1918)*, SHBLU, Tirana, 2008, pp. 190-191.

¹²⁶ Zekeria Cana, *Serbia's policy towards the Albanian issue (1903-1913)*, Albanological Institute of Prishtina, Prishtina, 2006, p. 11.

national movement. For allegedly "Albanian misdeeds" against the Serbian minority at this time the Serbian consulate itself in Prishtina had also become misled.

However, from the findings of a special Ottoman investigation commission, it was proved that the "evidences" of the Serbian government were as blown and invented, because under the facade of the demand and its pressure to establish order and tranquility through the destruction of Albanian villages and the complete disarmament of the Albanian squads, was hidden the interest of the Kingdom of Serbia to organize the (terrorist) Komiti squads of Serbs, which would operate within the Albanian territories.¹²⁷ According to this evil political course, the purpose of the Kingdom of Serbia was that through these well-organized channels to disrupt peace and order in Albanian territories, to assist its intelligence services and propaganda, to verify the opponents of Serbian expansionist plans to Albanian lands, manipulate and instrumentalize people for its interests, to dissipate the Albanians, to bring weapons to the Serb minority, to organize actions for the burning of houses of Albanians, etc.¹²⁸ Therefore, the Kingdom of Serbia, as one of the most dangerous neighbors of the Albanian people, used speculations of alleged assaults, robberies and such crimes to serve its interests in front of the international factor and to present Albanians as a savage and indigent people, who do not deserve national education and freedom.¹²⁹ With the rationale to improve the situation of the Serb population that was under the Ottoman rule and preserving their national identity, from the Kingdom of Serbia actions were taken that they intended "Protection" of the Serbian element by "discrimination and assimilation".¹³⁰

Thus, in the summer of 1907, in almost all those parts where Serbian minority was living in Sanxhak of Prishtina, including here the the Kaza of Gjlani*, Serbian secret terrorist squads were acting. However, to maintain the border with the Kingdom of Serbia and despite the Ottoman authorities, the Albanians had made a covenant to form their own volunteer squads which were tasked with observing and discovering the Serbian terrorists squads and destroy them. Such Albanian squads, except other areas in Vilayet of Kosovo and beyond, were also organized in the area of Gjlani.¹³¹ Ten days ago, the Serbian consul from Prishtina suggested government authorities in Belgrade not to approve decisions for sending Serbian squads to the district of

¹²⁷ Zekeria Cana, *Historical Disclosures*, Second part, School Book, Prishtina, 1998, pp. 83-86; Bujar Dugolli, *Albanian-Serbian relations (1878-1912)*, University of Prishtina, Prishtina, 2011, p. 236.

¹²⁸ Aliriza Selmani, *Documentary evidence of the time about the liquidation of the Pasjani Komiti's squad in 1907*, "Vjetar", nr. XXXIII-XXXIV, Kosova's Archive, Prishtina, 2005, p. 329.

¹²⁹ University of Tirana (Institute of History and Linguistics), *Political and Social Opinion of the Albanian National Renaissance (Summary of press articles)*, Volume I (1879-1908), Tirana, 1971, pp. 432-433.

¹³⁰ Vesna Zarkoviq, The extermination of Serbian squad in Pasjani in 1907, "Bashtina", Prishtina-Leposaviq, CB. 26, 2009, p. 196 (the text in question is translated into Albanian language by Enver Sadiku).

*Sanxhak of Prishtina was constituted by: district of Prishtina, district of Gjlani, district of Presheva, district of Vushtrria, district of Mitrovica and district of Pazari i ri. District of Gjlani included the territories of today's cities of Gjilan, Kamenica, Vitia, some parts of Prishtina, Ferizaj, Kaçanik and Bujanoc, in the composition of which there were more than 190 villages. See more: Limon Rushiti, *Territorial Division and Administrative Regulation of Kosovo 1878-1941*, Institute of History - Prishtina, Prishtina, 2004, pp. 14-43.

¹³¹ B. Dugolli, *quoted book.*, pp. 256-257.

Gjilan, because the situation was calm and such an activity would undermine the interests of the Serbian minority living in these parts and likely produce serious consequences for it.¹³² Despite such recommendation, the Belgrade government insisted that its plans be brought to the end of their realization, although they were practically unsuccessful.

Among these groups such as Serbian Komiti, which were sent by the Belgrade government to the eastern part of Vilayet of Kosovo, in July 1907, for the third time in these parts,¹³³ was also the "Pasjani squad", which got this label by location. This squad had about 40¹³⁴ komita who were well armed and trained in Vranje. It had four officers, such as: Rade Radivojeviq, Dragolub Nikoliq from Belgrade, who was also the leader of the squad and the sub-lieutenant Mihajlo Boskovic and Zhivan Milosavljevic.

In order not to be discovered, all these Komitis were dressed in Albanian national clothing.¹³⁵ It is important to emphasize that the entry of this squad into Albanian territory (then Ottoman) has been done illegally, but if the Ottoman authorities "were aware" of this case, they have accepted the spread of their activity only in the south of Kaçanik against the Bulgarian squads and not in its north, otherwise there is no logic to say that there was an "agreement" for the operation of this squad in the south of Kaçanik, on the contrary the Ottoman local government would not act forcefully for its destruction.

Thus, from Vranje, via Gjergjevci, Ranillug, Bukovik, Capar, Malisheva and Uglar and through the Morava River, this squad, after a few days arrived in the village of Pasjani and was placed in the church of this village. After three days of staying in the Pasjani church, drunken by alcohol, Serbian Komiti were discovered by Albanians who were passing by. Immediately it was given the call for war among the National Movement in the area of Gjilan, which was also assisted by some local Ottoman government officers. Thus, on July 15, 1907, the whole church was surrounded and the armed clashes began where many were killed and wounded by both sides, but rather by the Serb Komiti. During the war, the committees had managed to break the siege and scattered around the surrounding villages to save their head. However, the next day, after some

¹³² Shukri Rahimi, *Political Combinations around Kosovo during 1902-1908 and the attitude of Albanians*, "Kosova", nr. 3, Kosova's Institution of History, Prishtina, 1974, p. 151.

¹³³ The historian Sadulla Brestovci (State Archives Agency of Kosovo, fund: newspapers and magazines, Sadullah Brestovci, *Idriz Seferi – Karadak's knights*, fejton, "Rilindja", Prishtinë, 18.1.1970, p. 13.) underlines that "in July 1907 the third squad of Serb bourgeois government arrived in Macedonia," which leaves a gap for the previous squads. While the historian Zekeria Cana (See: Zekeria Cana, *Serbia's policy towards the Albanian cause (1903-1913)*, Albanological Institute of Prishtina, Prishtina, 2006, p. 21.) finds that the Serbian Komiti squad that entered the Gjilani district, led by Duke Dušan after two days of fighting in the vicinity of the village of Pasjan, was liquidated in its entirety (beginning of July 1905). However, what is important to note is the fact that the activity of the Serbian terrorists in Albanian territories had started since the political changes on the Serbian throne in May 1903.

¹³⁴ There are rumors that this squad numbered 30-32 (ASHAK, S. Brestovci, *cited work.*, 18.1.1970, p. 13.) or 50 (Sh. Rahimi, *Combinations...*, p. 152.) armed Komiti. Meanwhile, according to Vesna Zarkovic (in *The defeat of the Serb squad in Pasjane in 1907*, "Bashtina", Prishtina-Leposaviq, CB. 26, 2009, p.199), the squad was made up of 15 Chetniks, while their number increased to 29, because there were also joined natives from Pasjani.

¹³⁵ A. Selmani, *cited work.*, p. 330; V. Zarkovic, *cited work.*, p. 199.

new reinforcements, the Albanians, together with the local authorities, began to pursue the dispersed Komiti in Lipovica and Gjelekare villages. In the place called Çebica, near Gjelekar, 15 Serbian Komiti were killed, while the Ottoman-Albanian side had 2 killed and 7 injured. Six of the fleeing Komiti in Presheve were killed, while among the Albanians were left two killed and one wounded.¹³⁶

This armed clash lasted two days, in which 38 were killed¹³⁷ Serb Komiti, among them the leader of the squad Dragoljub Nikolic, while from the Albanian side, including here the local Ottoman forces, 6 were killed and 13 injured. All killed Komiti were brought and buried in Gjilan, at the end of place called the Martyrs' Hill (former Popovica).¹³⁸

The destruction of the Serbian Komiti squad of Pasjan echoed both inside and outside the Albanian lands. Seeing that such a discrediting practice by the Belgrade government was failing, it was required by the consulate of Prishtina and the Russian embassy in Istanbul to stop such actions in these areas, which had been done earlier. However, these claims did not have any impact on the Serbian government circles.¹³⁹ Therefore, the Serbian diplomatic representatives in Vilajet of Kosovo had created the impression of failure and annihilation of these “well-intentioned” methods, as a result of a good organization of the Albanian National Movement¹⁴⁰ in Gjilan and its surroundings.

¹³⁶ A. Selmani, *cited work.*, pp. 331-332; Sadulla Brestovci, *The National Movement in the district of Gjilani – Islam Pira 1866-1931*, Prishtina: Albanological Institute of Prishtina, 2008, p.166.

¹³⁷ Shukri Rahimi, based on Joco Jovanoviqit 136/3 in the newspaper article “Kosovo” of July 11 (24) 1907, finds that 32 chetniks were killed (Sh. Rahimi, *cited work.*, p. 152.).

¹³⁸ A. Selmani, *cited work.*, p. 332.

¹³⁹ Z. Cana, *Displays...*, p. 87.

¹⁴⁰ B. Dugolli, *cited work.*, p. 241.