

**“These were hard times for Skanderbeg,
but he had an ally,
the Hungarian Hunyadi”**

Episodes in Albanian–Hungarian Historical Contacts



Edited by
Krisztián Csaplár-Degovics



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Hungarian Academy of Sciences
Research Centre for the Humanities

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Research Centre for the Humanities,
Hungarian Academy of Sciences

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Portraits of John Hunyadi and Skanderbeg in the Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, Prizren (© Photo made by Jeton Jagxhiu)

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The 25th Anniversary of Albanian Independence and the Hungarians (1937)



Krisztián Csaplár-Degovics

Prologue

On November 28, 1912, a handful of patriots led by Ismail Qemali declared the independence of Albania in Vlora. On July 29, 1913, the great powers also recognized the sovereignty of the new Balkan state. Although half of the ethnic Albanians still lived outside the national borders, the international recognition of the country was a huge success, as the participants of the London Conference made the decision against the will of the Balkan Alliance. Besides the Ukrainian issue,¹ the birth of Albania was the last major foreign political achievement of Austria–Hungary, whose full impact would only be felt a hundred years later.

The birth of Albania was the joint success of the Ballhausplatz and the Albania-lobby operating in Vienna that had such prominent Hungarian scientists and officials among its members as Baron Ferenc Nopcsa or Lajos Thallóczy. The Joint Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the lobbyists had been cooperating from 1896 to train and prepare such figures of the Albanian national movement who sympathized with the Monarchy's Bosnian Muslim policy to establish and operate an independent nation state. Lajos Thallóczy was one of the most active lobbyists and he became a leading theoretician of the Albanian nation-building process.²

1 Snyder, Timothy. *A vörös herceg*. Budapest: Park, 2015.

2 Gostentschnigg, Kurt. *Zwischen Wissenschaft und Politik. Die österreichisch-ungarische Albanologie 1867–1918*. Diss. Graz 1996. 182–185; Gostentschnigg, Kurt. 'Die Verflechtung von Wissenschaft und Politik am Beispiel der österreichisch-ungarischen Albanologie.' *Südost-Forschungen* 58 (1999): 221–245; Csaplár-Degovics, Krisztián. 'Österreichisch-ungarische Interessendurchsetzung im Kaza von Tirana.' *Südost-Forschungen* 71 (2012): 129–182; Gostentschnigg, Kurt. 'Die albanischen Parteigänger

In 1918, following the collapse of the Monarchy, the future of Albania once again became problematic. By then, most of the Albanian patriots and officials had been working for twenty-two years, together with the representatives of Austro-Hungarian Albanology, on building the Albanian nation. They had also amassed six years of experience in state-building, which was a considerable achievement, all the more so because the great rival's influence on the Albanian nation-building process had fully escaped Italy's attention. When Italy finally responded and attempted to take similar steps, it was already too late. By 1927 the first period of Albanian nation-building was complete, and the initial difficulties of the state-building process had been dealt with.³ All in all, and despite its collapse in 1918, it was the Monarchy that won the contest between Austria-Hungary and Italy for the Albanian territories. The Albanian nation- and state-building process continued as planned by the Austro-Hungarian Albanologists until the 1960s.⁴

The years following 1918 were of crucial importance for Albania. The leading political groups had been gaining strength from the turn of the century, and the experience of nation-building and the world war prompted them to fight for and create a state that was not reliant on an international protector. They wished to lay down the foundations of the new state and then operate that state on their own. Their efforts were crowned with success: at the treaties of the Paris Peace Conference it was decided that the frontiers of Albania should be the same as they had been in 1913. What is more, the country was later admitted to the League of Nations. In 1920, the participants at the Congress of Lushnja clarified the most important aspects of the establishment. In the new system, changes of government happened quite often, but the new state, albeit with the assistance of the great powers, proved capable of driving out the invading armies of Italy, Greece and Serbia and of eliminating the internal separatist uprisings.⁵

Österreich-Ungarns. Ein Versuch der Rekonstruktion des Brückenkopf-Feldes an der Peripherie des habsburgischen Zentrums.' *Shëjzat* (1) Janar-Qershor nr. 1-2 (2016): 119-170; Gostentschnigg, Kurt. *Wissenschaft im Spannungsfeld von Politik und Militär. Die österreichisch-ungarische Albanologie 1867-1918*. Wiesbaden: Springer, 2018; Gostentschnigg, Kurt. 'August Ritter von Kral. Aktori qendror i Austro-Hungarisë në territoret shqiptare.' *Studime Historike* 53, no. 3-4 (2016): 49-71.

³ Basciani, Alberto. 'Preparando l'annessione. La politica culturale italiana in Albania negli anni di Zog (1924-1939).' In *Monarkia shqiptare 1928-1939*. Përmbledhje studimesh, edited by Marenglen Verli, 227-250, 234-236. Tiranë: Toena, 2011.

⁴ Csaplár-Degovics, Krisztián. 'Lajos Thallóczy und die Historiographie Albaniens.' *Südost-Forschungen* 68 (2010): 205-246.

⁵ Schmidt-Neke, Michael. *Entstehung und Ausbau der Königsdiktatur in Albanien (1912-1939). Regierungsbildungen, Herrschaftsweise und Machteliten in einem jungen Balkanstaat*. München: Oldenbourg, 1987. 49, 54, 56-63, 83-87; Bartl, Peter. *Albanien*. München: Pustet, 1995. 197-201; Zejnati, Novruz. *Abmet Zogu, politikan apo ushtarak?* Tiranë: Reklama, 2011. 173-177.

The period between 1920 and 1924 was rather intriguing in the history of Albania. The period, as Michael Schmidt-Neke puts it, was nothing but “the fight of parliamentary democracy against feudalism.”⁶ According to Peter Bartl, the first parliamentary groups very well reflected the main directions of political thought before the world war. At the 1921 elections, the *Partia Popullore* (Popular Party; Fan Noli, Zogu) wanted to modernise the country and at the same time retain some of its traditions (later Noli’s Democratic Party seceded from the party). The second major faction was the *Partia Përparimtare* (Progressive Party), politically rooted in the Ottoman era, more specifically in the moderate wing of the Young Turks. The third force, the *Vllaznia* (Brotherhood) led by Avni Rustemi, was primarily an informal umbrella organization of local national associations and clubs.⁷

Two important elements, however, are missing from the above model, and without those, Albanian political thought between the two world wars may not be precisely interpreted. The first one is the Principality of Albania with Wilhelm von Wied as sovereign. The second and more important is the former Italian–Austro-Hungarian rivalry. In my opinion, it would be hard to refute that it was the events of November 28, 1912, and the Principality of Wied that formed the foundations of Albania’s self-legitimation between the two world wars. What further supports this thesis is the fact that the Collective High Council (*Këshilli i Naltë*) set up at the Congress of Lushnja was to operate only until the (new) sovereign occupied the throne.⁸ The other element stemmed from the different Albanian policies of the Adriatic powers. Although Austria–Hungary collapsed, the rivalry between Rome and Vienna did not disappear without a trace. In fact, albeit in a different manner, it continued to exist.

Italy had been placing pressure on the Albanian political leadership from 1922/1923 (the Italian counsellors and observers soon returned to Albania!).⁹ The former Young Turks, the intellectuals returning from the diasporas and the local national leaders had no chance to counter the Italian influence. There was a fourth group, however. It formally was not a political party or an association, but traditionally regarded Italian aspirations with hostility or at least with suspicion. This group, including former adherents, confidants and beneficiaries of the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy, had represented a traditional wing of the national policy from the times of the *Rilindja*, and did not regard Rome as their point of orientation.

6 Schmidt-Neke, *Entstehung und Ausbau der Königsdiktatur in Albanien*, 49.

7 Bartl, Peter. *Albanien*, 196–197.

8 Swire, Joseph. *King Zog’s Albania*. New York: Liveright Publ. Corp., 1937. 162; Schmidt-Neke, *Entstehung und Ausbau der Königsdiktatur in Albanien*, 53.

9 Lee, Stephen J. *European Dictatorships 1918–1945*. 3rd Edition. London–New York: Routledge, 2008. 320–321.

Although the great protector had ceased to exist by then, and the followers of the Monarchy never formed a united political party, they still frequently visited Vienna for arms and military experts and in order to receive financial counselling and political support. When in need of healthcare developments, agricultural support and education, those loyal to the Monarchy sought help in Budapest.¹⁰

Between 1920 and 1924, and particularly between 1925 and 1928, the adherents of the Monarchy were the only counterbalance in Albania to Italy and the pro-Italian politicians. Moreover, they actively shaped and formed the new state, all the more so because that was the very thing that the Monarchy had been preparing them to do from 1896 on.

From 1920 to 1924 four politicians need to be highlighted among the previous adherents of the Monarchy. Bey Abdi Toptani and Luigi Bumçi were the members of the Collective High Council of four in 1920–1921, representing the Sunnite and the Catholic population of the country in accordance with the principles accepted at Congress of Lushnja.¹¹ But Bumçi was a Catholic priest and later became the bishop of Lezha, meaning that he pursued his career within the (political) framework of the Austro–Hungarian Catholic religious protectorate.¹² Bey Toptani had been considered one of the most active and loyal adherents of the Monarchy in Central Albania from 1900.¹³ (That is, half of the Collective High Council was made up of the former adherents of Austria–Hungary.) Stefan Curani, a close associate of Lajos Thallóczy and a well-known agent of the Monarchy (between 1923–1928 he was the honorary Austrian consul in Albania), also actively participated in the Congress of Lushnja and, in December 1920, he became the Minister of Finance in the Iljaz Vrioni government.¹⁴ The fourth member of the Council was Ahmet Zogu himself, chief of the Albanian military in the Delvina and Evangjeli governments and the seventh Prime Minister of Albania from December 1922. It is rather telling that until the pacts of Tirana, Zogu's dress uniform followed the pattern of the (Austro–) Hungarian hussars' uniform.¹⁵

10 Schmitt, Oliver Jens. "Balkan–Wien" – Versuch einer Verflechtungsgeschichte der politischen Emigration aus den Balkanländern im Wien der Zwischenkriegszeit (1918–1934). *Südost-Forschungen* 73 (2014): 268–305; Selenica, T. *Shqipëria e ilustruar më 1927*. Tiranë 1927. 195.

11 Schmidt-Neke, *Entstehung und Ausbau der Königsdiktatur in Albanien*, 53–55.

12 Deusch, Engelbert. *Das k.(u.)k. Kultusprotectorat im albanischen Siedlungsgebiet*. Wien et al.: Böhlau, 2009. 434–436, 463, 533, 899.

13 Csaplár-Degovics, 'Österreichisch-ungarische Interessendurchsetzung im Kaza von Tirana.' 129–182.

14 Asllani, Ulan. *Studentët shqiptarë në Austri. Roli i tyre në pavarësinë, konsolidimin e zhvillimin e shtetit shqiptar*. Tiranë: Ilar, 1992–1998. 152–153; Schmidt-Neke, *Entstehung und Ausbau der Königsdiktatur in Albanien*, 72.

15 Tomes, Jason. *King Zog self-made monarch of Albania*. Chalford: Sutton, 2007. A photo of Zogu (without page number).

Between 1920 and 1924 the Albanian political leaders attempted to attract to the government ministries in Tirana as many foreign experts as they could, so that these experts could help them Europeanise Albania. In 1923, almost every ministry had its own foreign expert advisor. The main task of such advisors was to help abolish the establishment of the Ottoman era and build a new, modern state in the spirit of European principles.¹⁶

The armed forces were organised in a similar fashion. The organizational and leadership tasks connected with the nascent army, police and gendarmerie were temporarily given to officers of Albanian nationality who had formerly served in one of the Ottoman armed forces or had won merit as world war veterans.¹⁷

The army and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of War had, from the outset, employed Italian military advisors who were actively serving in the Italian army. These experts not only inspected the Albanian army, but also had their say in state policy relating to the armed forces (purchase of weapons, structural reorganization, training, officer training, name list of officers). In other words, in a very practical sense these advisors directly controlled the army, the most important element and symbol of the country's independence.¹⁸

In order to decrease the influence of the Italians, several Albanian politicians attempted to invite Austrian military advisors into the country. For instance, a prestigious member of parliament, Bey Mehdi Frashëri went to Vienna in October 1921 and organised a meeting with albanophile Austrian military officers. Although Frashëri successfully requested several officers to become instructors in Albania, an escalating governmental crisis in Albania prompted the majority of these officers to stay at home.¹⁹

Zogu needed the assistance of the Austrian officers primarily in order to organise and train the gendarmerie, which he wanted to transform into a well-trained and well-equipped armed force that belonged to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and thus came under his direct control. With this step he wished to balance the badly trained and poorly equipped army controlled and influenced by the Italians. Due to the several government crises and the Italian influence he had yet to succeed.²⁰

Between 1925 and 1928 Zogu made efforts to free the army from the Italian influence. Firstly, he disbanded most military units under the pretext of their being

16 Schmidt-Neke, *Entstehung und Ausbau der Königsdiktatur in Albanien*, 108.

17 Frashëri, Mehdi. *Kujtime (vitet 1913–1933)*. Tirana: Omsca, 2005. 90, 92.

18 Zejnati, Novruz. *Ahmet Zogu – mbreti dhe komandanti i ushtrisë shqiptare*. Tiranë: Globus 2005. 28, 64–84.

19 Frashëri, *Kujtime*, 98–99, 128.

20 Zejnati, *Ahmet Zogu – mbreti dhe komandanti*, 83.

unreliable. The new units were then filled with new conscripts. Zogu also started to reorganise the armed forces after the Austrian fashion in 1927.²¹

Italy, however, proved to be unstoppable. Despite the reorganisation efforts, the Italian instructors led by General Alberto Pariani took all the organisational units of the Albanian army under their control. In June 1928 another 70 officers arrived from Italy. They were entitled to intervene in the administration and the training of officers. Their activity fundamentally transformed the Albanian army, which, from the early 1930s, operated as a colonial enforcement body of Italy rather than as the main armed forces of independent Albania.²²

Ahmet Zogu could not stand in the way of Mussolini's power aspirations, either as the President (1925) or as the King (1928) of Albania. Still, as a cunning politician, he did everything possible to counter the influence of the Italian advisors. Between 1925 and 1928 he endeavoured to fill political positions with those adherents of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy that posed no threat to his domestic power. It was then that the political career of Bey Eqrem Vlora, who had received his education at the Theresianum in Vienna, took a leap: he became a senator in 1925, and was soon appointed envoy of Albania in London and from 1929 in Athens. In 1925 Stefan Curani became the leading counsellor of the committee supervising the Albanian National Bank.²³ Experts and advisors arrived from Austria and Hungary (for instance Antal Waisbecker from Budapest²⁴). The main pillar of his power, however, was the system of Inspector-Generals that Zogu himself organised and implemented.

Zogu needed able and loyal officials, who reported to and obeyed only him. "In his room reeking with tobacco smoke" he appointed four officers of foreign origin and gave them almost full authority to directly supervise certain state functions. Gustav von Mürdacz, Walter Francis Stirling, Sir Jocelyn Percy and Leopold Ghilardi had no precisely determined tasks or scope of authority; they were partly the wingmen of Zogu and partly his personal representatives. Their position became genuinely strong when Italy was seeking to exert its power. Indeed, they were Zogu's "checks and balances" against Italian influence; nobody could remove these people from their positions and Italians were not allowed to perform their tasks. After 1928, King Zog exercised his autocratic power mostly through these four men.²⁵

Two of the four generals had been born in the late Monarchy. Gustav von Mürdacz was of Austro-German origin, while Leopold Ghilardi was Croatian – that is, he

21 Ibid., 99.

22 Pearson, Owen. *Albania and King Zog. Independence, Republic and Monarchy 1908–1939*. Vol. 1. London: I. B. Tauris, 2004. 280–282, 289.

23 Asllani, *Studentët shqiptarë në Austri*, 152–153.

24 Selenica, *Shqipëria e ilustruar më 1927*, 195.

25 Tomes, *King Zog self-made monarch of Albania*, 127–133, 132.

had been a citizen of Saint Stephen's Hungary. (Between 1913 and 1918, Leopold Ghilardi had fought against the Serbian, Greek and Italian forces in Southern, Central and Northern Albania. His loyalty to Ismail Qemali and to Wilhelm Wied, and his commitment to the Albanian state are indisputable. Thanks to his virtues he was the first foreigner of non-Albanian origin to become a citizen of Albania.²⁶)

The first autonomous Hungarian Muslim congregation was formed on August 2, 1931. The new religious grouping assumed the name of Gül Baba Islamic Congregation. (Gül Baba is a Bektashi saint whose tomb can be found in Buda, Hungary.) The members of the congregation were of mixed ethnic and denominational origin: Muslim Bosnians, Albanians and Turks from Budapest. They were Hungarian citizens who, after 1918, got stranded in Hungary or received asylum from the country after the First World War. These Muslims obtained Hungarian citizenship between 1924 and 1927, because in 1921 they had participated in battles in Western Hungary (in today's Burgenland, Austria) and risked their lives for their new home. The ceremonious inaugural assembly was also attended by several racial protectionist²⁷ and Turanist²⁸ groups and a number of Budapest officials.

The Islamic Congregation was constituted in accordance with the 1916 Law of Reception. The rules governing a religious community were stipulated in Article 20 of Law LIII of 1868 and Article 21 of Law XLIII of 1895. The head of the Congregation was the mufti helped by three authorities: the congregation (jemma), the council (Council of Elders: mejlis) and the asset management body (waqf). In accordance with the relevant laws, the congregation were free to choose their officials (imam, qadi, notary, arbiter, and a contact person to the state authorities). The only post that required the approval of the Minister of Religion and Education was that of the spiritual leader. The Gül Baba Islamic Congregation contacted several individuals of high social status and requested them to be the congregation's patrons.²⁹

26 Csaplár-Degovics, Krisztián. 'Komandanti i Djelmënis Shqiptare.' In *Për Adrian Klosin, gjermanin nga Shqipëria*, edited by Oliver Jens Schmitt. 147. Tirana: Fjala, 2016.

27 Racial protectors: counter-revolutionary political groups formed during the 1919 leftist revolutions. They considered the protection of ethnic groups to be of utmost importance. It was a far-right movement, but not yet Fascist (ethno-national protection). Gyurgyák, János. *Ezzé lett magyar hazátok. A magyar nemzeteszmé és nacionalizmus története*. Budapest: Osiris, 2007. 217.

28 Turanism: according to this movement, Hungarians form part of the Turanid race; therefore, they need to seek out, and closely cooperate with other Turanid peoples. Turanists believe that the peoples of Asia, unless Semitic, Indo-European or Chinese, are to be considered Turanid (and thus related to Hungarians). Farkas, Ildikó. 'A magyar és a török-tatár népek turanizmusa.' *Világtörténet* 28 ősz-tél (2006): 52.

29 Medriczky, Andor. 'A budapesti magyar mohamedán egyházköztség megalakulásának jogi előzményei.' *Városi Szemle* 20, no. 1 (1934): 120–123.



Hussein Hilmi Durić (the third from the left) in Baghdad on December 5, 1935 (Budapest City Archives)

As Gül Baba's türbe (tomb) carried "immense" religious significance according to the founding fathers, they elected Hussein Hilmi Durić (1887–1940) as High Mufti to be their spiritual leader. The reason for their choice was that the Bosnian Durić had obtained his qualifications as imam in Egypt and had been the last military high imam of the joint Austro–Hungarian army. Ismail Mehmedagić became Durić's deputy in the rank of mufti. Mehmed Resulović was appointed notary and secretary. Atif Džinić became the muezzin. Mustafa Topčagić, Hajdar Hajdić, Avdo Ozmanbašić and Abid Čatić received minor posts. The academic Zoltán László was entrusted with the management of the finances and of the board of the waqf.³⁰ (Zoltán László was the scholar who prepared the first modern Hungarian–Albanian dictionary.³¹)

30 Léderer, György. 'A magyarországi iszlám újabb kori történetéhez (II. rész):' *Keletkutatás* 4, tavasz (1989): 354–356.

31 László, Zoltán. *Az albán nyelv szótára (észak-albán, maljiszór tájszólás)*. Budapest: Lampel, 1913.

The representatives of other Muslim nations also participated in the first assembly which further increased the significance of the event. Among the attendants were Bey Jusuf Nazim, an Arab from “Hejaz” (the Arabian Peninsula), and Bey Abdallah Sitki on behalf of the Albanians. Although the circumstances were quite different from what Lajos Thallóczy had conceived in 1912, the first autonomous Hungarian Muslim group was finally established.³²

As the state refused to recognise the first autonomous congregation of Muslims of Hungarian citizenship, the Hungarians supporting the congregation founded the Gül Baba Cultural Committee in 1932. The most important task of the Committee was to perform the supervision and inspection of the congregation in lieu of the state and until official recognition was granted, at which point the state was to take over such supervisory tasks.³³

Who were the members of the Committee? Based on a reconstructed list of names, the first group included Hungarians who, before 1914, had served in Bosnia-Herzegovina as officials at the joint Ministry of Finance or at the Provincial Governorate. The second group contained the direct associates of the Imperial and Royal War Press Quarters in Vienna during the First World War (*Kriegspressequartier*). The third group consisted of Hungarian Turanists. The fourth was constituted of Lajos Thallóczy’s former friends, while the fifth of the leading officials of Budapest.³⁴ The secretary of the Committee was Gyula Germanus, the internationally renowned orientalist.³⁵

Zogu and relations with the Hungarian Islamic congregation

In the spring of 1932, King Zog invited Hussein Hilmi Durić to a weeks-long round trip in Albania. There is no information available on the antecedents of the journey. However, it seems certain that the High Mufti of Budapest travelled first to Rome, where, in January 1932, he negotiated with emigrant Muslim political and religious groups. The Albanian trip is also likely to have been prepared in Rome, after Zogu’s representatives contacted the High Mufti.

Durić’s most important objective was to have the Muslim religious leaders of Southeast Europe recognise his status as the High Mufti of Budapest. It was very important for him, because until the end of the 17th century and according to the last regulations in effect at that time, which had been issued by the Ottoman sultan-

32 Medriczky, ‘A budapesti magyar mohamedán egyházközség’, 101, 123; Ágoston, Gábor and Sudár, Balázs. *Gül Baba és a magyarországi bektasi dervisek*. Budapest: Terebess, 2002. 79, 81.

33 Ágoston and Sudár, *Gül Baba és a magyarországi bektasi dervisek*, 79–80.

34 László, Zoltán. ‘Lex mihi Mars!’ In *Breviarium Viennense II* (manuscript by Zoltán László). 29; Léderer, ‘A magyarországi iszlám újabb kori történetéhez (II. rész)’, 55.

35 Ágoston and Sudár, *Gül Baba és a magyarországi bektasi dervisek*, 81.

kalifs, the High Mufti of Buda was to be regarded as the regional denominational principal of the European Muslims. These regulations had never been withdrawn, so Durić set out to unite the Albanian and other Balkan Muslim communities under his jurisdiction. Durić had in mind touristic considerations as well: as the centre of the Bektashi Order was in Tirana, it seemed quite possible that the leaders of the order would agree to help spread the cult of Gül Baba. Durić also requested the leaders to recommend that the faithful go on a pilgrimage to Gül Baba's tomb in Budapest.³⁶ The Hungarian delegation included members of the congregation and representatives of the Gül Baba Cultural Committee.

The only information we have of Durić's two-week trip to Albania can be found in the journal *Budai Napló*.³⁷ According to the journal, the High Mufti took the Vienna–Trieste–Durrës route, and in the port city he was welcomed by the “Minister of Commerce” and the religious leaders of Albania. At the time Prime Minister Pandeli Vangjeli's (1859–1949) third government ruled Albania, and it had no minister of commerce. It is to be assumed, therefore, that the Hungarian delegation was welcomed by the well-known politician of the *Rilindja*, Hil Mossi, Minister of Public Works and a former supporter of the Monarchy. From Durrës the delegation went on to Tirana where Durić was received with grandeur by General Leopold Ghilardi, Zogu's confidant. During the two-week trip the general accompanied Durić and the delegation as their escort.

The High Mufti of the Hungarian Islamic community first negotiated with the Albanian government in Tirana and was then received by King Zog. (Zogu, like Durić, had served in the joint Austro–Hungarian army and both had attained the rank of colonel.) According to the *Budai Napló*, the Hungarian delegation's visit and demonstrative manifestations of support surprised Zogu. He was surprised particularly because Italy had been isolating him from the international political scene and had been trying to undermine his authority in Albania. The king of all Albanians understood Durić's visit as a supporting gesture of the Hungarian state, which to him meant genuine foreign political support: Zogu regarded Hungary as the representative of the former Danubian Monarchy.

The king was rather pleased to hear the High Mufti's account of the foundation of the Hungarian Islamic community. He examined the legal and denominational documentation of Durić's appointment and carefully listened to the grand designs and aspirations of the Hungarian Muslims. At a public audience Zogu accepted the lavish gifts sent to him by the Hungarian corporations (the Hungarian Railway Company MÁV, for example). Following the reception, the king held a banquet in

36 ‘Az izlám Budán.’ *Budai Napló*, January 1, 1932. 1.

37 ‘A budai főimám az albán királynál.’ *Budai Napló*, March 24, 1932. 3; ‘Zogu király ajándéka Budának.’ *Budai Napló*, April 3, 1932. 1.

honour of his guests, where he and Durić both appeared in the colonel uniform of the joint Austro–Hungarian army and took seats next to each other. It was an obvious message for the attending representatives of Italy. During the dinner, Zogu, who had apparently struck up a friendship with Durić, accepted the role of protectorate of the Hungarian Muslims and promised to personally visit the tomb of Gül Baba. The following day Durić set out on a round trip in the king’s automobile to hold lectures in various cities in the country. Wherever he went, the banner of the Hungarian state was raised. Evidently, Zogu used Durić’s propaganda trip as a demonstration of foreign political relations against Rome. The Albanian press (primarily the newspapers *Bessa* and *Ora*) gave continuous coverage of the High Mufti’s visit.³⁸

When the delegation finally departed on April 3, 1932, the farewell party at the Grand Hotel Tirana was just as ceremonious. In attendance were Zogu, the entire government, denominational leaders, dozens of members of the Parliament, General Leopold Ghilardi, Ahmet Vajpi (the waqf manager), Jashar Erebara (head of the press centre),³⁹ Colonel Ali Riza Kosolovi, Bey Javer Ruzhdi (editor-in-chief of *Bessa*), and Bey Abdurrahman Krosi, former educator of the king. At the reception it was announced that Zogu supported the idea of each of the two countries setting up a consulate in the other country and that the king was ready to send 50 students to Budapest at the expense of the Albanian state.⁴⁰

The Hungarian delegation took the Bari–Vienna–Budapest route home and was escorted by First Lieutenant Sakir Hajrullah (foreign state secretary), Major General Ali Erebara and Bey Ihsan Libohova.⁴¹ Officially, the Albanians travelled to Hungary with a view to surveying the state stud in Mezöhegyes and with the aim of participating in the “spring equestrian games” and “endurance riding”. These activities were obviously pretexts, as the Albanians spent a few days short of two months in Budapest. Unfortunately, there is no knowing with whom they met and what they discussed. All we know is that the famous Hungarian Turanist, General Tivadar Galánthay-Glock, especially danced attendance on them and that on May 30, 1932, the Albanians were the guests of a Budapest political group, the Hollós Mátyás Association. The banquet was hosted at the imposing Hotel Gellért. According to the journal *Budai Napló*, the dinner was opened with speeches by Bey

38 ‘A budai főimám az albán királynál.’ *Budai Napló*, March 24, 1932. 3.

39 Jashar Erebara (1873–1953): Albanian patriot, after 1918 a member of the Parliament. Founder and member of the *Komiteti Kombëtar për Mbrojtjen e Kosovës* and political opponent of King Zog.

40 ‘Zogu király ajándéka Budának.’ *Budai Napló*, April 3, 1932. 1.

41 Ihsan Libohova (1901–1950): having been educated in Istanbul and Corfu, he attended the Sorbonne University. Editor of the journal *Tirana* and official of the Albanian ministry of home affairs.

Ali Erebara, Galánthay-Glock and a certain Kassim Bajram. Kassim Bajram was an Albanian university student studying in Budapest.⁴²

Zogu first believed that the visit of Durić and the Hungarian Gül Baba Cultural Committee indicated a desire on the part of the Hungarian government to contact him. Later, however, he understood that this was not the case and that only certain Hungarian political groups took an interest in Albania. Even so, the king realised that he could still utilise the Hungarian Muslims and Turanists for the purposes of domestic and foreign political demonstrations. Domestically speaking, Durić and the Cultural Committee proved useful, because they allowed Zogu to make political gestures to the Albanian Bektashi. Meanwhile, in the international arena, they could be used to demonstrate Albania's good relations with Hungary. As Durić's wife later recalled, her husband visited Albania on at least ten occasions at Zogu's invitation.⁴³

The 25th anniversary of Albanian independence (1937)

A crucial moment for foreign political power demonstrations arrived in 1937 when Albania marked the 25th anniversary of the proclamation of independence with a series of grand celebratory events. Ahmet Zogu, who had been a young man in the memorable year of 1912, could well remember that for the creation of the independent state and for the Albanians to exist as a nation it had been indispensable to obtain the foreign political support of the then Adriatic powers: Austria–Hungary and Italy. Although the rivalry between the two great powers for influence over the Albanian lands along the Adriatic had been on the rise, in 1912 they had still been able to cooperate for a common cause. Due to this very cooperation, Rome and Vienna had ensured that Albania, as the first successor state of the Ottoman Empire with a Muslim majority on the Balkan Peninsula, could become independent and enjoy international guarantees of its autonomy.

By 1937, however, the Monarchy had long ceased to exist, and Italy regarded Albania as its own eastern colony. Further, Zogu's power had significantly weakened: indeed, in the shadow of the geopolitical changes in Europe, his little kingdom hardly seemed to have a future. Domestic support for the king had also declined. His system of Inspector-Generals, which had been established to contain the influence of Italy, had collapsed. General Ghilardi had been murdered, Mürdacz had been squeezed out from the high command of the army through the intrigue of the Italian counsellors, and Stirling had fallen into disgrace. By the anniversary, the number of

42 'A Kelet ünnepe.' *Budai Napló*, June 1, 1932. 2; 'Írányítsuk Buda felé a keleti idegenforgalmat.' *Budai Napló*, June 10, 1932. 1–2.

43 Budapest Főváros Levéltára (BFL) XIV/24/III, Dr. Medriczky Andor ir. szföv. tanácsjegyző 1925–1942, letter of Ida Hindy Szabó (wife of Hussein Hilmi Durić) to an unknown woman, Budapest, November 1941, 2.

former *Rilindja* activists had also dropped dramatically. Zogu had far fewer symbols and persons at his disposal, which he might have used at the commemorative events. And, in the Albanian lands, the symbols of prestige and authority represent the honour of a man: both are considered the sources of a man's power.

Another reason why Zogu had limited room for foreign policy action was that in 1937 Austria was no longer in a position to participate in symbolic representative events as the successor state of the Monarchy. The king, however, firmly believed that on the 25th anniversary he had to demonstrate to Italy that Albania was an independent country. To this end he needed something or somebody that could almost physically embody the Monarchy at the events. This "something" turned out to be the first Hungarian Islamic Congregation and the Gül Baba Cultural Committee; both organizations played a central role in the Albanian state celebrations.

The Hungarian delegation was led by the already mentioned General Tivadar Galánthay-Glock, who in 1937 was also a member of the Hungarian Parliament.⁴⁴ Therefore he could appear on behalf of the Hungarian Parliament as well. The Albanian royal family, the ministers, the members of the Tirana City Council and the denominational leaders spent much time with the Hungarian guests. At least, this is what the programme booklets, invitation cards and photos from the archives of the Gül Baba Committee seem to suggest.⁴⁵

The Hungarians also understood the importance of representation, and the delegation from Budapest did its utmost to meet Albanian expectations. Photographs and newspaper articles testify that every member of the delegation participated in the celebratory events in traditional ceremonial dress (*díszmagyar*), bejewelled and with ceremonious weaponry (not only in Tirana, but in other towns as well, for example in Elbasan). They came together for group photos, took part in processions before cheering crowds, and confidently posed in the company of European – mainly German and Italian – diplomats and counsellors, who were clad in military uniforms or formal attire. They readily gave speeches and recollected the glorious relations of the past. For them, the 25th anniversary was also a moment of recollection and representation.

During the events, Ahmet Zogu, king of all Albanians made an appearance before the public in an Italian peaked cap and in the Hungarian ceremonial dress, the *díszmagyar*, which was a present from his Hungarian guests. (The king also

44 'Durics Hussein Hilmi budai főmufti esketi Zogu királyt és Apponyi Geraldine grófnőt.' *Pesti Napló*, February 11, 1938. 5.

45 BFL XIV/24/III, Gül baba társaság és komité, Vegyes iratok, XXV. Vjetori Vet-qeverimit 1912–1937: Programi i Kremtimeve Kremtimi zyrtar 26–27–28 Nëntor, pp. 13; *ibid.* Photos and visiting cards.



*Abmet Zogu in the Hungarian ceremonial dress (díszmagyar)
and with the silver honorary sword on November 28, 1937
(Budapest City Archives)*

received a silver statuette of Gül Baba with a handful of Hungarian soil in its base.)⁴⁶ To match the ceremonial dress, István Bárczy, ex-mayor of Budapest and a close friend of Lajos Thallóczy, sent Zogu a silver honorary sword from the time of the Monarchy. During the ceremonies Zogu conspicuously wore the sword, which was decorated with Hungarian and Arabic inscriptions and was handed over to him by Hussein Hilmi Durić.⁴⁷

The Albanian king awarded his Hungarian guests several insignia and decorations. Hussein Hilmi Durić received the Officer's Cross of the Albanian Royal Skanderbeg Order. Possibly, it was on this occasion that the religious leader of the Bektashi admitted the Budapest High Mufti into the Bektashi Order. The Albanian press as well as the *Budai Napló* and other Budapest dailies informed the public of the celebratory events in detailed and enthusiastic articles. These publications, however, contain several pieces of information that are conceivable but, due to a lack of control sources, cannot be verified. One such unverifiable statement (published by

⁴⁶ 'Durics Hussein Hilmi budai főmufti esketi Zogu királyt és Apponyi Geraldine grófnőt.' *Pesti Napló*, February 11, 1938. 5.

⁴⁷ BFL XIV/24/III, Dr. Medriczky Andor ir. szföv. tanácsjegyző 1925–1942, export licence on the presents given to King Zog by Durić with a value of 450 Pengő, November 19, 1937.

Budai Napló, *Népszava*, *Pesti Napló*) was that Zogu accepted Durić as his Court Mufti as part of the celebrations.⁴⁸

The ceremonial events of 1937 and the role played by Hungarians in the celebrations may account for Zogu marrying a Hungarian woman. The announcement of marriage between Geraldine Apponyi (1915–2002) and Ahmet Zogu sparked enthusiasm among the Muslims of Budapest and the members of the Gül Baba Cultural Committee. Durić, who had grown very fond of the Albanian king, requested Zogu in a letter to allow him, as High Mufti of Budapest and Mufti of the Royal Court, to perform the nuptial ceremony in accordance with Islamic law. On February 10, 1938, the Royal Chancellery informed him that His Majesty had agreed to grant his wish. Although no archive sources have been found to confirm these reports, the contemporary dailies widely covered the sensation in their columns.⁴⁹

Be that as it may, the difficult denominational conditions and the possible foreign policy consequences in the end prompted the Sunnite Zogu to abandon the idea of marrying his Catholic fiancée according to the Islamic traditions. The rite was therefore performed according to the regulations of the local Civil Code. From Hungary, only members of the aristocracy and of the Gül Baba Committee received permission to attend. On the day of the wedding the Muslims of Buda celebrated their own ritual to invoke the blessing of Allah on the young couple.⁵⁰

Although Hungary officially showed no interest in Albanian matters after 1918, the above case illustrates that there were certain political groups in Hungary that remembered the Albanian policy of the late Austro–Hungarian Monarchy. They did not forget the Monarchy’s role in the Albanian nation- and state-building process or the Hungarians who actively participated in the formation of modern Albanology.

The participation of the first Hungarian autonomous Islamic congregation and the Gül Baba Cultural Committee in the 1937 Albanian commemorative events carries special significance, as it proves that Albanian–Hungarian relations were not completely severed after 1918. In fact, these relations had developed in various ways that have so far evaded the scrutiny of historians. The story discussed in the present study has until now remained unknown to Hungarian historians.

48 BFL XIV/24/III, Gül baba társaság és komité, snippets and visiting cards; Léderer, ‘A magyarországi iszlám újabb kori történetéhez (II. rész);’ 63; ‘A budai főmufti esketi az albán királyt és Apponyi Geraldine grófnőt.’ *Népszava*, February 11, 1938. 7; ‘Durics Hussein Hilmi budai főmufti esketi Zogu királyt és Apponyi Geraldine grófnőt.’ *Pesti Napló*, February 11, 1938. 5.

49 ‘A budai főmufti esketi az albán királyt és Apponyi Geraldine grófnőt.’ *Népszava*, February 11, 1938. 7; ‘Durics Hussein Hilmi budai főmufti esketi Zogu királyt és Apponyi Geraldine grófnőt.’ *Pesti Napló*, February 11, 1938. 5; ‘A budai főmufti adja össze mohamedán rítus szerint Zogu királyt és Apponyi Geraldina grófnőt.’ *Budai Napló*, February 10, 1938. 1; Léderer, ‘A magyarországi iszlám újabb kori történetéhez (II. rész);’ 63.

50 L[ászló.] Z[oltán]. ‘Az albán–magyar nász.’ *Budai Napló*, April 25, 1938. 5.

