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## **The 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Albanian Independence and the Hungarians (1937)**

The years following 1918 were of crucial importance for Albania. The leading political groups had been strengthening since 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 has no international protector. 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.

Italy had been placing pressure on the Albanian political leadership since 1922/1923 (as the Italian counsellors soon returned to Albania!). 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 the Italian aspirations with hostility or at least with suspicion. This group, including former adherents, confidants and supported fellows of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, had represented a traditional wing of the national policy since the Rilindja, and did not regard Rome as their point of orientation.

Between 1920 and 1924 the Albanian political leaders attempted to seduce into the Ministries of Tirana as many foreign experts as they could, so that these experts could help them Europeanise Albania. The army and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of War had employed Italian military advisors from the beginning, who actively served in the Italian army. These experts not only inspected the Albanian army, but also had their say in the state policy in connection with the armed forces. To put it differently: practically these advisors directly controlled the army, the most important tool and symbol of the country's independence.

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, although, 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.

The first autonomous Hungarian Muslim congregation was formed on August 2, 1931. The new church assumed the name of Gül Baba Islamic Congregation. The members of the congregation were of mixed ethnic and denominational origin: Muslim Bosnians, Albanians and Turks from Budapest. They were Hungarian citizens, who received asylum from the country after the First World War. At the ceremonious assembly there were also present certain racial protectionist and turanist groups and a number of Budapest officials. As Gül Baba's türbe (tomb) carried "immense" religious significance according to the founding fathers, therefore 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 the fact that he had been the last military high imam of the joint Austro-Hungarian army.

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

In the spring of 1932 I. Zogu (1895–1961) invited Hussein Hilmi Durić to a weeks-long round trip in Albania. According of the Hungarian journal *Budai Napló*, the High Mufti and the Hungarian delegation of the Gül Baba Cultural Committee took the Vienna-Trieste-Durrës route. The High Mufti of the Hungarian Islamic community first negotiated with the Albanian government in Tirana, and then was received by King Zogu as well. The Hungarian delegation's visit and demonstrative manifestations of sympathy surprised Zogu. He was surprised all the more, as Italy had been isolating him from the international political scene and had been trying to undermine his power in Albania. The king of all Albanians understood Durić's visit as a supporting gesture of the Hungarian state, because he regarded Hungary as the representative of the late Danubian Monarchy.

Following the Royal reception, the king made a banquet to honour his guests, where he and Durić both made appearance in the colonel uniform of the joint Austro-Hungarian army. 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. To put it differently: Zogu used Durić's trip as a demonstration of foreign political relations against Rome. The Hungarian delegation took the Bari–Vienna–Budapest route home and was escorted by First Lieutenant Sakir Hajrullah, foreign state secretary; Major General Ali Bey Erebara and Ihsan Bey Libohova editor-in-chief. Officially, the Albanians travelled to Hungary with the aim of participating in the "spring equestrian games" and "endurance riding". These activities were obviously disguises, but unfortunately, there is no knowing with whom they had met and what they had discussed. All we know is that the famous Hungarian turanist, General Tivadar Galánthay-Glock especially danced attendance on them. All in all, after this visit, Zogu understood that only certain Hungarian political groups took interest in Albania. Domestically speaking, Durić and the Cultural Committee proved useful, because they allowed Zogu to make political gestures to the Albanian Bektashi. In the international scene, on the other hand, they could demonstrate the friendly relations between Albania and Hungary.

The crucial moment for foreign political power demonstrations arrived in 1937, when Albania marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the proclamation of independence with a series of grand, celebratory events. By 1937 the Monarchy had long ceased to exist, and Italy regarded Albania as its own eastern colony. By that time Zogu's power had significantly weakened: in the shadow of the geopolitical changes in Europe, his little kingdom hardly seemed to have a future. Zogu had less and less symbolic tools or persons at his disposal that he could have used at the commemorative events. And, in Albanian lands, the representation of prestige and authority equals the honour of a man: both are considered as the sources of a man's power. Another reason why Zogu had limited running room in foreign policy was that in 1937 Austria was not in a position any longer regarding its foreign policy to participate in symbolic representative events as the successor state of the Monarchy. The king, however, firmly believed that on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary he had to communicate to Italy clearly that Albania was an independent country and to this end he needed something or somebody that could almost physically embody the Monarchy at the events. This "something" later turned out to be nothing else but the first Hungarian Islamic Congregation and the Gülbaba 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. 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 all spent a conspicuous amount of time with the Hungarian guests. The Hungarians also understood the importance of representation and the delegation from Budapest really put out the red carpet this time. Photos and newspaper articles testify that every member of the delegation

assembled for imposing group photos, processed before the cheering crowd, and posed in the company of European diplomats who were clad in military uniforms or tuxedos. They gave speeches and recollect the glorious relations of the past. For them, the 25<sup>th</sup> 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 the Hungarian ceremonial dress, the *díszmagyar*, which was a present from the Hungarian guests. 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 that was decorated with Hungarian and Arabic inscriptions and was handed over to him by Hussein Hilmi Durić.

The Albanian king awarded his Hungarian guests with several insignia and decorations. Hussein Hilmi Durić received the Officer's Cross of the Albanian Royal Skanderbeg 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.

To conclude, 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. The participation of the first Hungarian autonomous Islamic congregation and the Gülbaba Cultural Committee in the 1937 Albanian commemorative events carries special significance, because it proves that the Albanian-Hungarian relations were not completely severed after 1918. The story discussed in the present study has until now remained unknown to Hungarian historiographers as well.