

History of Kosovo from the First Balkan War to the End of World War II (1912–1945)

László Gulyás

*Institute of Economy and Rural Development, University of Szeged
Mars-tér 7, 6727 Szeged, Hungary
gulyas1@t-online.hu*

Gábor Csüllög

*Department of Environmental and Landscape Geography, Institute of Geography
and Earth Sciences, Faculty of Science, Eötvös Lóránd University, Budapest
Pázmány Péter sétány 1/C., 1117 Budapest, Hungary
gcsullög@ceasar.elte.hu*

Kosovo during the Balkan Wars and World War I, 1912–1918

In 1912, Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria and Greece allied against the Ottoman Empire. This alliance of four countries defeated the Turks in the First Balkan War (1912–1913).¹ In the London Peace Treaty, which concluded the war and was signed on May 30, 1913, the Ottoman Empire lost almost all of its European territories. The London Peace Treaty

¹ E. NIEDERHAUSER, A két Balkán-háború és előzményei, in: T. KRAUSZ (ed.), *A Balkán-háborúk és a nagyhatalmak Rigómezőtől Koszovóig*, Politikatörténeti Füzetek XIII, Budapest 1999, pp. 11–22.

dictated on the status of the regions liberated from Turkish rule. An important element of the territorial revision was that the Ottoman Empire conceded to the birth of independent Albania.² However, this brought up the question: What territories should the Albanian state consist of?

Albanian nationalists intended to create a Greater Albania that included all the regions where Albanians lived in majority. Due to the opposing intentions of Serbs, Montenegrins and Greeks, which were supported by the great powers as well, a much smaller Albania was created in 1913. The area of the sovereign Albanian state was 27,500 km², where 800 thousand Albanians lived. A large part of the Albanian nation, around 700–800 thousand people, lived within other states. The territorial arrangements had the following regions with Albanian majority belong to other states:³

1. The territory of Kosovo was annexed to the Kingdom of Serbia. This action was made in spite of the fact that the former vilayet of Kosovo definitely had Albanian majority at the time.⁴
2. Montenegro gained two Albanian strips of land (the region of Ulic, West of lake Shkodra, and the region of Plav, North-West of lake Shkodra)
3. South-Epirus (aka Chameria) was annexed to Greece.

When the Second Balkan War (June 1913 – July 1913), incited by Bulgaria, was ended by the peace of Bucharest (August 1913), the above territorial status quo was not changed. Thus Albanian-majority Kosovo remained within the borders of the Serbian state.

However, the political elite of the Kingdom of Serbia did not have time to integrate Kosovo, as World War I started in July 1914. By the end of 1915, the territory of the Serbian state had been occupied, on the one hand, by the army of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and by the

² Gy. RÉTI, *Albánia sorsfordulói*, Budapest 2000, pp. 39–41.

³ L. PÁNDI, *Köztes-Európa. Térképgyűjtemény*, Budapest 1995, pp. 228–229.

⁴ J. JUHÁSZ, *Volt egyszer egy Jugoszlávia*, Budapest 1999, p. 13.

Bulgarian army on the other hand. The Serbian government and the remnants of Serbian forces fled to the isle of Corfu. In the next three years, the Kingdom of Serbia, Kosovo included, was under Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian occupation. Consisting of mostly French and Serb troops, the British Balkan army liberated the territory of the Serbian state as late as the end of September, 1918.

During October and November in 1918, South Slavic politicians (Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Montenegrins) had multiple negotiations on the creation of a South Slavic state.⁵ These resulted in the proclamation of the formation of the so-called Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes on December 1, 1918, in Belgrade.

Albania's provisional government, in agreement with the Albanian politicians in Kosovo, adopted the view in 1918–1919 that Kosovo must belong to the Albanian state.⁶ But this Albanian demand was ignored by the Serbs (and the victorious Entente powers, of course), and Kosovo became part of the newly formed Kingdom of SCS.⁷

Within the Yugoslavian State

The relation between the Serb political elite leading the Yugoslavian state and the Albanians living in Kosovo was obviously hostile throughout the whole existence of the first Yugoslavian state. Albanians did not want to integrate into the Yugoslavian state. They believed that Kosovo should belong to Albania. They were perfectly aware that Kosovo had not been able to join Albania in 1913–1914 and 1918–1919 because the Serbs prevented it.

In parallel, Serbians regarded the Albanians of Kosovo as a foreign body within the Yugoslavian state. In their view, Albanians had

⁵ L. GULYÁS, Délszláv erőközpontok államszervezési koncepcióinak küzdelme 1914–1918, in: *Mediterrán és Balkán Fórum*, 4, 2008, pp. 12–21.

⁶ R. GYÉMÁNT – P. TIBOR, *A Koszovói Köztársaság Európa legfiatalabb állam. A Pólay Elemér Ala-pítóány Tansegédletei*, SZTE-ÁJTK, Szeged 2008, p. 52.

⁷ M. KITANICS, *Az albán történelem mérföldkövei – a kezdetektől a bipoláris világ szét-hullásáig*. Balkán Füzetek – Pécs 2011, p. 25.

settled in Kosovo, an ancient Serbian land, during the Turkish reign. In accordance with this stand-point, the Serbian political elite leading the Yugoslavian state took measures against the Albanians of Kosovo in every field of the political-economic life. Such activities of the Serbs can be described under the following categories:

1. the issue of regional administration
2. the topic of minority rights
3. the field of economics, especially agriculture.

Let us examine what happened in the above three fields in Kosovo between 1918 and 1941.

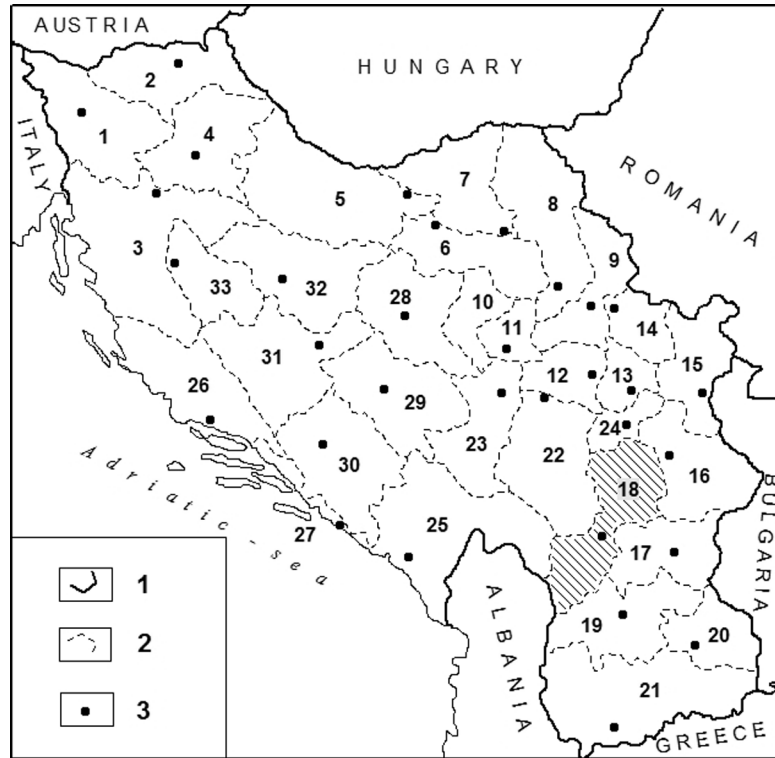
Regional Administration

With his decree of January 1919, King Alexander divided the country into eight provinces (Serbia, Montenegro, Vojvodina, Macedonia, Bosnia–Herzegovina, Dalmatia, Croatia and Slovenia). As it is seen in the list, Kosovo did not receive provincial status on its own.⁸ The reason is that Belgrade assigned the area, being a Serbian land of old, to the province of Serbia. Belgrade handled Kosovo together with Macedonia, usually referring to these regions as South Serbia.

On June 28, 1921, St Vitus' feast day, the Yugoslavian parliament voted the first constitution of the state, known as the Vidovdan constitution.⁹ With a centralistic move, it abolished the eight historical provinces and instead the law decree of April 26, 1922 created 33 districts (counties) (see Table 1 and Map 1).

⁸ L. GULYÁS, *Két régió – Felvidék és Vajdaság – sorsa az Osztrák–Magyar Monarchiától napjainkig*, Budapest 2005, pp. 82–83.

⁹ E. SAJTI (ed.), *Jugoszlávia 1918–1941. Dokumentumok*, Szeged 1989, pp. 122–140.



1 State border 2 Border of districts 3 Central of district

Map 1. The 33 districts (counties) 1922–1929

Source: The author's compilation

Provinces 1919–1921	Districts 1922–1929	
Serbia	12 districts	Drina-mellék, Valjevó, Sumadija, Morava, Požarevac, Timok, Niš, Vranje, <i>Koszovó</i> , Raška, Utice, Kruslevac
Montenegro	1 district	Zeta
Vojvodina	3 districts	Bácska, Belgrád, Dunamellék
Macedonia	3 districts	Skopje, Bregalnica, Bitola
Bosnia-Herzegovina	6 districts	Tuzla, Szarajevo, Mostar, Travnik, Vrbas, Bihac
Dalmatia	2 districts	Spilt, Dubrovnik
Croatia	4 districts	Primorska-Krajina, Zágráb, Eszék, Szerém
Slovenia	2 districts	Ljubjana, Maribor

Table 1. From provinces to districts

Source: The author's compilation

Through the abolishment of the historical provinces (Croatia was divided into four districts or counties, Dalmatia into two, Slovenia also into two), the Serb political elite wished to eliminate the possibility of federalism or regionalism. To achieve this goal, Belgrade went as far as dividing the province of Serbia into 12 districts.

As it can be seen from Table 1 and map 1, one of the 12 Serbian districts was the district of Kosovo. Thus the Albanians in Kosovo lived within the framework of a district from 1922 to 1929. The decree of 1922 gave municipal rights to districts, declaring that a county assembly must be elected in each district and this official body has jurisdiction in many local fields (healthcare, social issues, education). Theoretically, these events could have enabled the Albanians of Kosovo to have a sort of municipal self-governance within the Yugoslavian state.

However, the decree of April 26, 1922 also dictated that a “grand zupan”, commissioned by the king, is in charge of each of the districts, controlling district administration through state official bodies. This includes supervising the operation of the county assembly. The budget of the districts depended on the government in Belgrade, and county assembly could be done away with through royal decree.¹⁰

On the one hand, the decree of April 1922 gave municipality to the districts, but on the other hand, took it back for all practical purposes. The fact that Belgrade did not think district municipal rights seriously is well presented by that fact that the first county assembly elections took place as late as 1927, five years after issuing the decree. In other words, district municipalities could began their operation only in 1927. Considering that King Alexander abolished the districts/counties in 1929, it is clear that district municipalities worked for only two years. It is to be noted that the negative aspects of the April 1922 decree affected each district with a large number of “non-Serb” population. This means that districts with a significant Croat, Slovene, Bosnian and Hungarian population suffered from the Serbian centralist measures as much as Albanians did in the district of Kosovo.

¹⁰ L. BÍRÓ, *A jugoszláv állam*, História Könyvtár, Monográfiák, Budapest 2010, p. 126.

The Serb political elite succeeded in centralising the Yugoslavian state in the 1920s, but the other nations – “non-Serbs” – never accepted this. Croat-Serb opposition was especially strong, as Croats were striving toward the federalisation of the Yugoslavian state and the autonomy of the Croatian territories. This resulted in a permanent political crisis and instability within the parliament.¹¹

In order to retain the functionality of state in the situation, King Alexander declared dictatorship on January 6, 1929, the first move of which was to rescind the Vidovdan constitution. King Alexander also changed regional administration as well, forming nine so-called banates, with the capital Belgrade becoming a separate, tenth administrative unit (see Map 2).



Map 2. Banates at 1929

Source: The author's compilation

¹¹ R. LAMPE, *Yugoslavia as History. Twice there was a Country*, Cambridge 1996, pp. 126–159.

The borders of the banates were artificially created in order to have a Serb majority in the banate, or at least to maximize Serb proportion. Belgrade's effort was successful, six of the nine banates, (Vrbas, Danube, Drina, Zeta, Morava, Vardar) had Serb majority, two (Sava, Littoral) had Croat, and one (Drava) had Slovene majority.

The district of Kosovo that existed in 1922–1929 became part of Vardar banate. As no statistics were done on the ethnical composition of the banates, one can draw conclusions from the denominational proportions. According to these, the banate of Vardar featured the followings:

1. 64.4 % of the populace was Orthodox Christian, these being Serbs and Macedonians;
2. 37.1 % was Muslim. They were the Albanians, Bosnians and Turks.

The next reform in the regional administration of the Yugoslavian state took place on August 26, 1939. The Serb and Croat political elites reconciled and signed the so-called "Sporazum" (i. e. Agreement).¹² The Croats immediately started to establish the autonomous Croatian Banate.¹³

The birth of the Croatian Banate encouraged the "non-Serb" nations living within the borders of the Yugoslavian state. The Slovenes demanded autonomy similar to that of the Croats as early as August of 1939.¹⁴ On November 6, 1939, Muslims in Bosnia declared their demand to create the Banate of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Montenegrins and Macedonians had similar autonomy demands. The Albanians in Kosovo were not an exception.¹⁵

Belgrade was frustrated at these initiatives of autonomy, the farthest the Serb political elite was willing to go was trialism, in other words,

¹² L. GULYÁS, *A Sporazum, avagy föderalista kísérlet a királyi Jugoszláviában 1939–1941*, in: *Közép-Európai Közlemények*, 4–5, 2009, pp. 80–86.

¹³ D. SOKCSEVITS, *Horvátország története a 7. századtól*, Budapest 2011, pp. 510–514.

¹⁴ D. SOKCSEVITS et al., *Déli szomszédaink története*, Budapest 1994, p. 257.

¹⁵ N. MALCOM, *Kosovo. A Short History*, New York 1999, pp. 286–288.

their last acceptable compromise was a Serb-Croat-Slovene trialism.¹⁶ However, they turned down any autonomy demands in the cases of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia and Kosovo.

It is probable that the next years would have seen serious struggles about the Bosnian (Muslim), Macedonian and Albanian autonomy efforts between Belgrade and the involved nations. This never happened, though, as in April 1941, the Yugoslavian state had to enter World War II and was disintegrated within a few weeks.

The Issue of Minority Rights

Due to pressure from Entente powers, the Yugoslavian state joined the Versailles minority protection system on December 5, 1919, accepting that it must grant minority rights for the minorities living in its territory. However, Belgrade failed to fulfil this duty in the case of the Albanians living in Kosovo.

The Serbian attitude about the issue of mother-tongue education shows this quite clearly. Article 9 of the minority protection treaty declared the right to native language education in the case of elementary schools. But Belgrade did not grant these rights for the Albanians in Kosovo.¹⁷ The Serbian reasoning was that this right applied only for those inhabitants in minority who lived in territories that had become parts of the Serbian state after World War I. As Kosovo had been part of the Serbian state before World War I, thus the minority protection agreements did not apply.¹⁸

The minister of education of the Yugoslavian government banned the opening of new so-called Turkish schools (i. e. Islamic schools) in September 1919, and they prohibited the operation of non-state schools one year later. Meanwhile, new state schools were being built in Kosovo. According to our data, 487 new schools were opened until 1929. Belgrade's intention was obvious: to drive Albanian children into the

¹⁶ JUHÁSZ, pp. 67–68.

¹⁷ LAMPE, pp. 114–115.

¹⁸ BÍRÓ, p. 283.

state schools, with only Serbian-language education. The Albanian community, though, resisted the assimilation attempt. As the figures show:¹⁹

1. Only 7655 Albanian pupils attended state schools in the academic year of 1927–1928. These pupils were educated in Serbian language.
2. In the school year of 1930–1931, 7–8 % of the elementary school pupils had Albanian as mother tongue in Vardar banate, while the proportion of Albanians was 28 % in this age group.

The question arises: where did Albanian children learn to read and write? The Serbian state was not able to eliminate the so-called Turkish schools in the 1920s. Starting new schools could be banned, but they could not close the old ones. Such move could even have resulted in an Albanian armed rebellion. Thus Albanian parents registered their children into these schools. These schools, their exact name being sibiyan-mekhbet, were originally established for the religious education of 5–7 year old children. But between the two world wars, the situation in Kosovo was such that children could attend them up to their tenth year of age. Most of the imams teaching in the sibiyan-mekhbet did not speak Serbian, so the education was in Albanian. This is why in the 1920s, Belgrade considered the operation of these schools adverse.

However, this Belgrade standpoint changed in the early 1930s. This is well shown by the fact that the starting of 451 new mekhbet was granted permission between 1931 and 1934 in the region of Vardar banate.²⁰ The explanation is that Belgrade realised that if they permit the opening of new mekhbets (where Albanians can study in Albanian language), then this can be a justification for refusing the Albanian demand for Albanian-language education in the state schools. Belgrade told the Albanians that whoever wants to learn in Albanian language, they can attend the mekhbet, and whoever wants to attend

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ Ibidem.

state schools have to accept that the language of education is the state language, which is Serbian.

The consequence was that, between 1918 and 1941, the Yugoslavian state did not let the Albanians study in their native language in state schools. In addition, the religious schools were able to educate only a small fraction of the school-age population. As a result, 90 % of the Albanian population that lived within the borders of the Yugoslavian state was illiterate.²¹ This is a very high number, especially considering that the Yugoslavian average was 44.6 % in 1931.²²

The situation of Albanians was no better regarding the political rights of minorities, either. The Albanian land-owner elite organised their party Dzemijet (Association) in the early 1920s.²³ This party assumed a moderate standpoint, accepting that Kosovo is part of the Yugoslavian state, and they believed that the Albanian issue could be resolved through autonomy. But Belgrade was unwilling to grant autonomy to Kosovo, so the Džemijet was practically banned in 1925, as its leaders were compelled to join the Serbian Radical Party.²⁴

The move, however, only added fuel to the fire, the populace of Kosovo turned toward the Kachak (meaning refugee or smuggler in Albanian), a separatist movement waging perpetual guerrilla warfare against Belgrade. Members of the Kachak movement organised armed raiding parties and constantly harassed the military and officials of the Serbian state, who were regarded as in-vaders. It must be noted here that almost all official positions in the territory of Kosovo were held by Serbs.

²¹ L. BÍRÓ, Koszovó Jugoszláviában, in: *História*, 2, 2007, p. 18.

²² J. ROTSCCHILD, *Jugoszlávia története a két világháború között*, Studium Füzetek 4, Szeged 1996, p. 100.

²³ LAMPE, pp. 121–122.

²⁴ JUHÁSZ, p. 51.

Economic Aspects

The Yugoslavian state was created in 1918 from regions of differing economic development level. These regions had huge differences regarding economy. Kosovo was the least economically developed region of Yugoslavia.²⁵ The Yugoslavian state made no serious effort to bring Kosovo up to standard. Only two greater state investments were made between the two World Wars. In 1931, the railway line connecting Serbia and Kosovo was constructed, while the 81-km-long Kosovo Polje-Peć railway section, traversing Kosovo, was opened in 1936.

Agriculture must be addressed separately. After the proclamation of the Kingdom of SCS (December 1, 1918), land reforms had started almost immediately. Prince regent Alexander issued a manifesto on January 6, 1919, stating that most of the large estates would be confiscated and distributed among South Slavic peasants. As the land reform took place between 1920 and 1938, a total of 2,484,481 hectares of land was distributed among 637,328 persons.²⁶

In the distribution of lands, nationality was a markedly relevant factor. The vast majority of the confiscated land had been in the possession of “non-Serb” (German, Hungarian, Croatian, Turkish) landowners, while the families who received lands were explicitly South Slavs (primarily Serbs). In addition, Hungarian peasants in Vojvodina, just as Albanian peasants in Kosovo, were excluded from the land distribution from the start.²⁷

Belgrade closely connected the land reform with the so-called colonisation policy. The Yugoslavian state had two regions where Serbs (or South Slavs) did not have majority:

1. Vojvodina, where Hungarian and German minorities together did have majority above the Serbs and

²⁵ L. GULYÁS, Structural Problems Leading to the Dissolution of the First Yugoslav State, in: *Prague Papers on the History of International Relations*, 2, 2012, pp. 87–98.

²⁶ I. BODONYI, *Idők szorításában. A magyar kisebbség helyzete a szomszédos országokban 1920 és 1933 között*, Budapest 2002, p. 187.

²⁷ L. GULYÁS, A királyi Jugoszlávia agrárreformja, különös tekintettel a Vajdaságra, in: F. GYŐRI (ed.), *A tudás szolgálatában*, Szeged 2012, pp. 129–150.

2. Kosovo, with Albanian majority.

It was these two territories whose ethnical picture Belgrade intended to change through colonisation. This proceeded as follows: To those lands that were donated in the land reform, volunteers (*dobrovoljac*) of Serbian nationality were settled. The *dobrovoljac* were politically absolutely reliable Serb and Montenegrin veterans, having served in the Balkan wars and/or World War I and they were donated lands for their military service. According to our data, a total of 58–63 thousand South Slav families (approximately 290–330 thousand people) moved to a new location within the country. Of these, 17–20 thousand families (circa 80–90 thousand people) received land in Kosovo.²⁸

Due to the colonisation, and also taking the arriving Serb bureaucrats and their families into consideration, Kosovo's ethnical picture had somewhat changed by the early 1930s.²⁹ The proportion of Serbs increased, while that of Albanians decreased (see Table 2).

Belgrade used the *dobrovoljac* who had been moved to Kosovo to monitor and intimidate Albanians. The *dobrovoljac* complied willingly. As a result, Albanians in Kosovo were involved in constant conflict with not only Belgrade, but with the Serbs in Kosovo as well.

Year	Population	Albanian		Serb		Other	
		capital	%	capital	%	capital	%
1921	439,000	289,000	65.8	114,000	28.0	36,000	6.5
1931	552,000	337,272	61.0	178,848	32.4	35,880	6.5

Table 2. Kosovo's ethnical proportion 1921–1931

Source: The author's compilation

Disintegration of Yugoslavia and the Birth of Greater Albania

After Yugoslavia proved to be an unreliable ally to Germany in the spring of 1941, Hitler ordered its destruction. The campaign against

²⁸ BÍRÓ, *A jugoszláv állam*, p. 218.

²⁹ K. KOCSIS, *Egy felrobbant etnikai mozaik*, Budapest 1993, p. 18.

Yugoslavia started on April 6, 1941. It took the German army and its allies (Italians, Hungarians and Bulgarians) two weeks to destroy the Yugoslavian state.³⁰ Belgrade fell on April 12, 1941 and the Yugoslavian army capitulated on April 17. Meanwhile, on April 10, 1941, the Usthas proclaimed the Independent State of Croatia in Zagreb.³¹

The territorial changes brought by the military operations were confirmed at the German-Italian conference in Vienna on April 20–22, 1941.³² After some debate, Germany and Italy divided Yugoslavia's territory (see Map 3). The results of the Vienna conference can be summarised as follows:

- (a) Germany and Italy recognised the Independent State of Croatia (ISC).³³
- (b) Under German control (occupation), the Serbian puppet state was established.
- (c) Crna-Gora (Montenegro) was put under Italian supervision (occupation).
- (d) Slovenian territories were divided and annexed by Germany and Italy, with an approximate proportion of 2/3–1/3. Germany took over Northern Slovenia and Italy did so in Southern Slovenia.
- (e) The Northern part of Dalmatia and the region of the Bay of Kotor were annexed by Italy.
- (f) Bulgaria was given the larger part of Macedonia (Vardar–Macedonia) and the Eastern Serbia territories (Caribrod, Bosiljgrad and

³⁰ L. GULYÁS, Az első jugoszláv állam felbomlása. Államszerkezeti és etnikai következmények 1941–1944, in: *Mediterrán és Balkán Fórum*, 1, 2013, pp. 24–35.

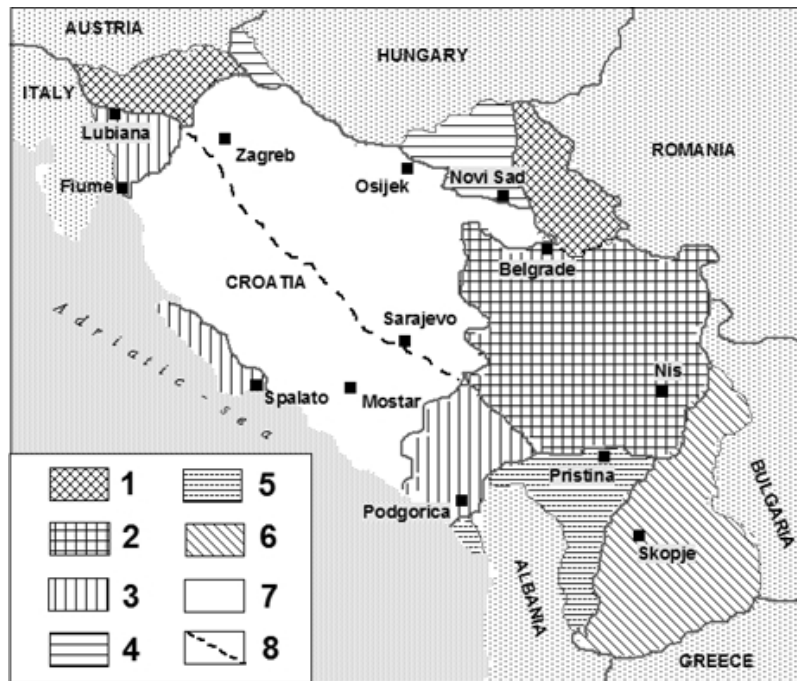
³¹ I. GOLDSTEIN, *Croatia. A History*, London 1999, pp. 131–134.

³² S. CORVAJA, *Hitler és Mussolini. A titkos találkozók*, Budapest 2001, pp. 235–236.

³³ E. L. BENCZE, A regionalitás kérdőjelei Jugoszláviában, in: *Politika – egyház – mindennapok*, Budapest 2009, pp. 299–321; E. L. BENCZE, Külső és belső határok a Nyugat-Balkán regionális térfelosztásában, in: *Közép-Európai Közlemények*, 3–4, 2011, pp. 262–276.

its vicinity) that had been taken from them in 1919 by the then forming South Slavic state.

- (g) Hungary was given back Muravidék, Muraköz and a part of Vojvodina (Bácska and Drávaszög aka Baranja).
- (h) Banat (Hungarian: Bánság) remained belonging to the Serbian puppet state theoretically, but in practice became under German military administration. The region was actually governed by the local German minority.
- (i) Circumstances led to the birth of Greater Albania.



1 Annexed to Germany (Slovenia and Banat) 2 Serbian puppet state under German control (occupation) 3 Montenegro and Dalmatia under Italian supervision (occupation) 4 Annexed to Hungary 5 Kosovo annexed to Italian occupied Albania 6 Annexed to Bulgaria 7 Independent State of Croatia 8 Declaration line between German and Italian zones.

Map 3. The partition of Yugoslavia at 1941
Source: The author's compilation

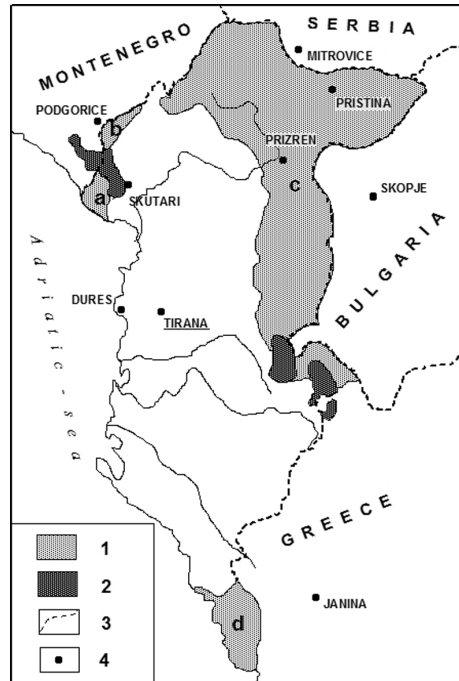
Due to the subject matter of this paper, the last entry of the above list, the formation of Greater Albania is what we have to present in detail. On April 7, 1939, the 40 thousand strong Italian army attacked Albania. The Albanian army showed no significant resistance, and Italian troops invaded the country in three days. Afterwards, on April 12, 1939, Mussolini's Albanian followers gathered to a constitutive assembly, which accepted the new constitution that had been written in Rome beforehand, and offered the crown of Albania to the Italian king. Of course, Victor Emmanuel III, king of Italy, accepted the Albanian crown.

This meant that, legally, Italy and Albania created a personal union, connected by the person of the shared king. Obviously, this was just the legal pretext, Italy practically colonised Albania. The real situation is shown in that Italy sent 100 thousand soldiers and 50 thousand functionaries to Albania between 1939 and 1941, to carry out the orders from the governor who was appointed by the king.³⁴

Meanwhile, the Duce intended to gain the support of the Albanian political elite with promises of realising Greater Albania. The possibility to deliver this promise came in April 1941, when Germany crushed Yugoslavia. As it was mentioned before, the arrangement of the former Yugoslavian territories took place in Vienna, at the German-Italian conference on April 20–22, 1941. The following regions were annexed to Albania (see Map 4).

- (a) Kosovo, along with certain West Macedonian regions with Albanian majority.
- (b) Two Albanian-inhabited strips of land from Montenegro. One was the parts from the Western banks of lake Shkodra up to the seacoast, with the other being a belt North from lake Shkodra.

³⁴ RÉTI, pp. 56–66.



1 Territorial growth of Albania: (a) and (b) lands from Montenegro, (c) Kosovo, (d) South-Chameria 2 Lake 3 State borders 4 Towns

Map 4. Greater Albania
Source: The author's compilation

Some days after the Vienna conference, Greece was also defeated by the German campaign on April 27, 1941. The Germans took South-Chameria, mainly inhabited by Albanians, from Greece and annexed it to Albania.

Due to these territorial changes, Greater Albania was practically realised, as the territories with Albanian denizens became united within one state. The figures were as follows:³⁵

1. In 1938, Albania's area had been 27,5 thousand km², and its population was one million and 64 thousand people.
2. The growth in 1941 was 14,9 thousand km² and 761 thousand persons.

³⁵ PÁNDI, pp. 460–461.

3. As to Greater Albania: its area was 42,4 thousand km², its population was 1, 825, 000.

Now belonging to Greater Albania, Albanians of Kosovo – and former Macedonia – experienced the 1941 territorial changes as national liberation. They tried to pay the Serbs back for the atrocities suffered between 1918 and 1941. In this spirit, large numbers of Serbs (especially the immigrant bureaucrats and the dobrovoljac who had arrived with the agrarian reform) were driven away from Kosovo.³⁶ According to Serbian historiography, around 100 thousand Serbs were exiled from Kosovo between 1941 and 1945. At the same time, 75 thousand Albanians migrated in.

Though it is the birth of Greater Albania discussed above, we have to point out that Albania had been under Italian rule since the April of 1939. This means that Greater Albania, created by the territorial additions in 1941, existed in practice as an Italian colony.

After Italy capitulated in September 8, 1943, the strategic points of Greater Albania were occupied by German troops. German-friendly Albanian politicians called a national assembly in October, 1943 and declared the termination of the personal union with Italy.³⁷

Though German forces did in fact occupied Albania, Germany formally recognised the independence of the Albanian state. Therefore, the Germans appointed certain administrative tasks to the Albanians and they tolerated, did not persecute the followers of the Great Albania idea. A major moment of the German–Albanian cooperation was that an SS-division of Albanian volunteers was set up. All this show that German-friendly Albanian politicians believed that Greater Albania is sustainable with German help.

This can explain the fact that while Tito's partisan movement was definitely strong in the larger part of the former Yugoslavia, it had very

³⁶ J. JUHÁSZ, *Az albánkérdés Jugoszláviában*, in: T. KRAUSZ (ed.), *A Balkán-háborúk és a nagyhatalmak Rigómezőtől Koszovóig. Politikatörténeti Füzetek. XIII*, Budapest 1999, pp. 91–98.

³⁷ RÉTI, p. 82.

poor support in Kosovo. What's more, the German-friendly Albanian politicians created the so-called Second League of Prizren to protect Greater Albania.³⁸ In the autumn of 1944, Yugoslavian partisans attempted to take over Kosovo. However, Albanians in Kosovo resisted and sparked the so-called Ballist rebellion. It took several months for Tito's army to defeat the Albanian armed groups. This is why Tito acquired control of Kosovo as late as the spring of 1945.

Abstract

After the First and Second Balkan Wars (1912–1913) the territory of Kosovo was annexed to the Kingdom of Serbia. This action was made in spite of the fact that the former vilayet of Kosovo definitely had Albanian majority at the time. However, the political elite of the Kingdom of Serbia did not have time to integrate Kosovo, as World War I started in July 1914. After the First World War (1914–1918) the territory of Kosovo was annexed to Yugoslavian state. Serbians regarded the Albanians of Kosovo as a foreign body within the Yugoslavian state. In accordance with this standpoint, the Serbian political elite leading the Yugoslavian state took measures against the Albanians of Kosovo in every field of the political-economic life. Such activities of the Serbs can be described under the following categories: 1. the issue of regional administration; 2. the topic of minority rights; 3. the field of economics. In the first part of our essay we examine what happened in the above mentioned three fields in Kosovo between 1918 and 1941. It was in April 1941 when, due to the attacks by Germany and its allies, the first Yugoslav state collapsed in two weeks. In the second part of our essay we investigate the consequences of this event. We survey the birth of Greater Albania.

Keywords

History of Kosovo; History of Balkan; History of Serbs; History of Albans

³⁸ KITANICS, p. 26.