

THE ROMANIAN ATTEMPT TO INCLUDE ALBANIA IN THE WARSAW PACT MEETINGS AGENDA OF 1965

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Abstract: *Albania's inclusion in the Warsaw Treaty was a key moment in Albania's international relations after the Second World War. Joining this treaty "cemented" Albania's ties to the communist bloc and its Eastward orientation. During the Cold War, this membership reflected the Albanian communist government's particular political, military, and social orientation. Albania's relations with the Warsaw Pact should be seen as satellite relations conducted through the Soviet Union.*

This study investigates an event that has already been studied by several Cold War researchers, exposing the dissenting ambitions within this coalition, particularly focusing on Romania's efforts to build bridges of cooperation with Albania in 1965 with the assistance of communist China and in opposition to Moscow. The subject is not new to Romanian studies of the Warsaw Pact. The examination of documents from Albania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive on how the Albanian communist leadership saw this event at the time, on the other hand, is innovative. The comparative approach, which paired data from the archives of former Warsaw Pact members, revealed that attempts to create fluid alliances amongst them were in embryo but did not threaten their vassalage to Moscow. Likewise, contrary to the perception of communist regimes, Cold War scholars have recently classified Albania and Romania as allies without any strategic weight within the Pact, debunking the myths of communist historiography with nationalist undertones in both countries.

Keywords: *Romania, Albania, Warsaw Pact, Cold War, embryo dissidence, Soviet Union, satellite relations, China.*

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reprezentat un moment cheie în relațiile internaționale ale Albaniei de după cel de-al Doilea Război Mondial. Alinierea Albaniei la acest pact a „cimentat” legăturile sale cu blocul comunist și orientarea sa spre Est, apartenența la această alianță politico-militară fiind o expresie a tipologiei politice, militare și sociale care a caracterizat guvernul comunist albanez în timpul Războiului Rece. Evident, relațiile Albaniei cu Pactul de la Varșovia trebuie privite ca relațiile unui satelit (Albania), purtate prin intermediul Uniunii Sovietice.

Studiul urmărește să examineze o perioadă analizată de diverși cercetători ai Războiului Rece, evidențiind eforturile disidenților în cadrul acestei organizații, concentrându-se pe eforturile României de a construi punți de cooperare cu Albania în 1965, cu asistența Chinei comuniste și în opoziție față de Moscova. Subiectul articolului este prezent în studiile autorilor români asupra Pactului de la Varșovia, dar noutatea constă în examinarea acestui moment pe baza documentelor Arhivei Ministerului Afacerilor Externe din Albania, analizându-se modul în care inițiativa României a fost privită de conducerea de atunci a comuniștilor albanezi. Abordarea comparativă, prin juxtapunerea informațiilor din arhivele fostelor membre ale Pactului de la Varșovia, conduce la concluzia că încercările de a crea alianțe fluide între ele erau deja în stare embrionară, însă acestea nu au subminat vasalitatea lor față de Moscova. De asemenea, contrar percepției avute de regimurile comuniste, specialiștii în Războiul Rece au clasificat recent Albania și România ca fiind aliate fără nici o pondere strategică în cadrul Pactului, dezmințind miturile istoriografiei comuniste, cu accente naționaliste, din cele două țări.

INTRODUCTION

Albania, the poorest country in the Balkans, where the communist regime was imposed immediately after the end of the Second World War, became a member of the Warsaw Treaty on May 14, 1955. This treaty was the first international political and military organization that Albania adhered to, following a decade of isolation in international relations. It is worth mentioning at the beginning of this study that Albania, unlike Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Poland, and East Germany, was the only member country of the treaty that never had an agreement of Friendship and Mutual Assistance with the Soviet Union, neither during the Stalinist era nor after its death.

At the time of accession to the Warsaw Treaty, Albania had an agreement of Friendship and Mutual Assistance with Bulgaria, signed in 1947, following Enver Hoxha's visit to Moscow.¹ This treaty received the approval of Stalin, who during the first years adopted a rigid attitude towards Albania, whose interests,

¹ Valentina Duka, *Historia e Shqipërisë 1912- 2000* [History of Albania 1912- 2000], Tiranë, SHBLU, 2007, p. 237.

according to him, could be represented by Belgrade. Enver Hoxha adopted a similar stance, claiming that Albania's road to Moscow went through Belgrade.² At the end of the war, Yugoslavia managed to come out with a preferential status concerning Moscow, which allowed it to become a key factor in the region. In this regard, Yugoslavia propagated the idea of a confederation that would also include Bulgaria and Albania to establish a solid Soviet stronghold from the Adriatic to the Black Sea.³

According to the analysis of some of the most renowned international and national Cold War authors, keeping Albania away from Moscow and from signing an agreement of friendship and mutual assistance originated at the Yalta conference.⁴ Yugoslavia and Albania were considered countries outside blocs, and any attempt to include Albania in the socialist camp would have been seen as a reason to escalate hostilities with the West.⁵

The estrangement between Stalin and Tito in 1948 was a favourable time for the Albanian Stalinist leadership to gain ground in the socialist camp, which was facilitated by the support of Stalin's successors. Khrushchev granted a new status to communist Albania, making it part of the Warsaw Treaty on May 14, a very important alliance at the time, antagonistic to the West and NATO. In this context, researcher Ana Lalaj has rightly remarked, "Albania's participation in the Warsaw Treaty was a matter of status and prestige".⁶

The establishment of the naval base in Vlora at the initiative of the Soviets

² Nina Smirnova, *Historia e Shqipërisë përgjatë shekullit XX* [The history of Albania throughout the 20th century] Tiranë, Ideart, 2004, p. 322; See Hamit Kaba, Ethem Çeku, *Shqipëria dhe Kosova në arkivar ruse* [Albania and Kosovo in the Russian archives], Prishtinë, Brezi 81, 2011, p. 24-25.

³ Petrit Nathanaili, *Ideologjia dhe orientimi i politikës së jashtme të Shqipërisë*, in *Shqipëria mes Lindjes dhe Perëndimit. Aktet e Konferencës Ndërkombëtare* [The ideology and the orientation of Albania's foreign policy, in Albania between East and West. The Proceedings of the International Conference], Tiranë, 2013, p. 261.

⁴ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, Tiranë, "Fan Noli", 2019, p. 413; See Martin Gilbert, *Churchill: A life*, London, Minerva, 1992, p. 797; See Hamit Kaba, *Shqipëria dhe të mëdhenjtë; nga Lufta e Dytë Botërore te Lufta e Ftohtë* [Albania and the Great Powers: from the Second World War to the Cold War], Tiranë, Klean, 2015, p. 79; See Lisen Bashkurti, *Diplomacia shqiptare në fillimet e Luftës së Ftohtë* [Albanian diplomacy at the beginning of the Cold War], Tiranë, Geer, 2003, p. 148-49.

⁵ Islam Lauka, Eshref Ymeri, *Shqipëria në dokumentet e arkivave ruse* [Albania in Russian archive documents], Tiranë, Toena, 2006, p. 99-100.

⁶ Ana Lalaj, *Shqipëria nga Traktati i Varshavës në NATO* [Albania from the Warsaw Treaty to NATO], in "Sudime Historike" [Historical Studies], 2008, no. 3-4, p. 176.

led to a flourishing of relations between Albania and the USSR for almost two years, culminating with Nikita Khrushchev's visit to Albania. The mutual aspiration to transform Albania into a castle on the shores of the Adriatic, where the construction of this base would establish the "maritime boundary of the socialist camp"⁷, was short-lived. The Albanian leaders, dissatisfied with the Soviet leaders' views about the West, suspicious of their demands for rapprochement with the Yugoslavs, and disappointed by Khrushchev's disparagement of Stalin's leadership, started to look for a new ideological partner.⁸

China's direct support for Albania, provided at the height of the Soviet-Chinese conflict, provoked a crisis between Albania and the USSR with many repercussions. The USSR used the Warsaw Treaty as a military, economic and political instrument to punish Albania for its ungrateful behaviour. The fiercest battle between the Albanian and the Soviet government occurred at the Vlora Base, which became an apple of discord.

Because of this conflict, Albania was *de facto* outside of the Warsaw Treaty in 1961. This was a collective decision-making of all member countries. The USSR chose the strategy of collegiality to exclude Albania from the most important political and military organisation of the communist bloc, thus formally avoiding personal responsibility. However, although this accountability was avoided through a group decision, the USSR and Khrushchev were always held responsible for the deed.⁹ The communist government opposed the verdict of the Warsaw Pact member countries to close down the Vlora Base and deliberately leave Albania out of the treaty. However, Albanian leaders found an acceptable compromise in a *de jure* participation in the pact and a *de facto* exclusion from it. This would protect them against the domestic Soviet-aided risk of conspiracy. In addition, the communist regime exploited the existing state of affairs to play the victim in the international arena.¹⁰

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁸ Bernd J. Fischer, Oliver Schmitt, *Një histori e përmbledhur e Shqipërisë*, [A Concise History of Albania], Prishtinë, 2022, p. 221; See Valentina Duka, *Historia e Shqipërisë 1912-2000 ...*, p. 267-268.

⁹ Enver Hoxha, *Ditar për çështjet ndërkombëtare* [Diary of International Affairs], Tiranë, Instituti i Studimeve Marksiste Leniniste, të Komitetit Qendror të Partisë së Punës së Shqipërisë, 1982, p. 63; See Valentina Duka, *Historia e Shqipërisë 1912-2000, ...*, p. 273; See Etleva Smaçi, *Shqipëria dhe Traktati i Varshavës* [Albania and Warsaw Treaty], Doctoral Thesis, Tiranë, Institute of History, 2017, p. 139 http://asa.edu.al/site/?page_id=3908.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

On December 3, 1961, the Soviet government officially announced the breakup of diplomatic relations between the two countries. In this context, at the beginning of 1962, on January 9, Beqir Balluku sent a letter to the Warsaw Pact commander, Marshal Grechko, declaring the representatives of the Unified Command and his collaborators *persona non grata* and requesting them to leave Albania immediately.¹¹

From January 30 to February 1, 1962, when the successive meetings of Defence Ministers of the Pact member states were held in Prague, Albania did not receive an invitation, nor did it participate in the meetings of the Political Consultative Committee, or other organisms. The Albanian government did not take any initiative to change the situation except for some formal notes of protest.¹² This conjuncture lasted until November 1964, when another member of the Pact, Romania, began to exhibit signs of wanting to break free from the Soviet Union-dictated decision-making and seek allies. Having the main focus on Albania, and aided by the Chinese, Romania tried to convince Albania to attend the next meeting in Warsaw.

TELEGRAM FROM BUCHAREST FROM NOVEMBER 30, 1964

The next meeting of the Political Consultative Committee was held in Warsaw on January 19-20, 1965. The Albanian government learned about the meeting through a telegram dated November 30, 1964, sent by the Albanian representative in Bucharest.¹³ The telegram reported that the Soviets had decided to bring the European revisionist leaders together, to discuss the formation of the NATO General Force. According to the telegram, Moscow planned to use the meeting to bring "other revisionists under the dictate". This meeting was preceded by that of December 10, 1964, with the participation of deputy defence ministers from Pact member countries.¹⁴

Albania did not receive an official invitation, as had happened in other similar meetings. According to the announcement of the Albanian embassy in Bucharest, the purpose of this meeting was to prepare the next assembly, which

¹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive (hereinafter: **MFAA**), Year 1962, file 577 (B/VI-3) *Information on the relations between our country and the member countries of the Warsaw Treaty.*

¹² MFAA, Year 1962, file 575 (B/VI-3), *Note of protest addressed to Marshal Grecko.*

¹³ MFAA, Year 1964, file 588, *Material connected to the Warsaw Treaty*, Telegram No. 945. Dated 17.12.1964, from Bucharest, p. 12.

¹⁴ MFAA, Year 1964, file 588..., p. 13.

would include the first secretaries and heads of government of member states. The issue of Albania's participation in the Warsaw Treaty meetings was mentioned again in this telegram, for the first time since the meeting on August 3, 1961.

The Romanian representative had requested that Albania be included in the next meeting.¹⁵ According to him, Albania, along with nations having observer status, should join the pact as an effective member. The Polish representative opposed the Romanian proposal, claiming that even if invited, the Albanians would not attend and therefore, they should not be invited. In the meeting of deputy defence ministers, Romania failed to convince the member countries to extend an invitation to the Albanian government. The telegram sent by the Bucharest representation highlighted the reasons why Romania, after almost four years of Albania's *de facto* departure, requested its return to the negotiating table. According to the telegram, the Romanians were attempting to challenge the Soviet method of running the organization and did not want to do it on their own.¹⁶

International Cold War researchers believe that the Romanian opposition to Soviet hegemony within The Warsaw Pact was influenced by the presence of Soviet missiles in Cuba because of a secret decision made by the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Soviet Union Communist Party without consulting its member countries.¹⁷ When the crisis took the proportions of a nuclear threat, the Soviet Union justified the action claiming to have acted on behalf of the alliance to increase the capability of the Warsaw Pact Unified Forces. Various Cold War researchers have remarked that the Bucharest government, although part of the treaty, managed to clarify its position on the Cuban crisis confidentially to Washington. "If the Cuban crisis were to turn into an open war, Romania would maintain neutrality, while the United States should not attack Romania".¹⁸

This would have led to a one-sided breach of the Warsaw Pact, which did not actually happen. Romania's position on the treaty was no longer that of an unconditional supporter of Moscow's policy. The Declaration of April 1964, also

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Dennis Deletant, Mihail Ionescu, *Romania and Warsaw Pact: 1955-1989*, Cold War International History Project, Working Paper No. 43, 2004, p. 64.

¹⁸ Raymond L. Garthoff, *When and why Romania Distanced itself from Warsaw Pact*, in "The Cold War International History Project Bulletin", Spring 1995, No. 5, p. 111; See Vojtech Mastny, 'We Are in a Bind': Polish and Czechoslovak Attempts at Reforming the Warsaw Pact, 1956-1969, in "The Cold War International History Project Bulletin", 1998, No. 11, p. 232.

called the Declaration of “independence”, marks another turning point for historians dealing with the Warsaw Pact.¹⁹ Following this, the Romanians began to be labelled as “rebellious allies” within the Eastern organization. The statement made by Maurer in May 1964 on the violation of Article Three of the Warsaw Pact, concerning the placement of Soviet missiles in Cuba, clearly showed that the situation within the organization was tense. Therefore, on December 10, 1964, the request of the Romanian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Pompiliu Macovei that Albania participate in the meetings of the Political Consultative Committee was legitimate and pragmatic. Romania was seeking a coalition of opponents within the pact, and Albania had proved to be the one. Romania dared to take this step despite a lack of enthusiasm.²⁰

The movement in Bucharest regarding Albania’s participation in the January meeting was intense. The Romanians also requested the support of the Chinese ambassador to Bucharest, to inform the Albanians and encourage them to accept the invitation. The telegram of January 4 conveys information about the meeting of Emil Bodnaras with the Chinese ambassador.²¹ The Chinese ambassador declared to the Albanian representative in Romania, Rrapi Gjermeni that Bodnaras had persistently asked for the presence of Albania in the meeting. Being familiar with the previous position of the Albanian leadership, Bodnaras asked the Chinese ambassador to be persuasive enough, so that Albania would not decline the invitation. “It would be advantageous for Albania to accept it, but without an active participation”.²²

According to the Albanian archival documentation, the surprise of this meeting is attributed to Bodnaras’ statement that Khrushchev had excluded Albania from the Warsaw Treaty.²³ This was not new to the Albanians, who were aware that decisions in the Political Consultative Committee were reached under

¹⁹ Dennis Deletant, Mihail Ionescu, *Romania and Warsaw Pact...*, p. 69; Petre Opreș, *România în organizația Tratatului de la Varșovia (1955-1991)* [Romania in the organization of the Warsaw Treaty (1955-1991)], Bucharest, Military Publishing House, 2008, p. 108; Larry L. Watts, *Ferește-mă, Doamne, de prieteni. Războiul clandestin al Blocului Sovietic cu România* [Save me, God, from friends. The Soviet Bloc’s clandestine war with Romania], translated from English by Camelia Diaconescu, Bucharest, RAO Publishing House, 2011, p. 247-251.

²⁰ Laurien Crump, *The Warsaw Pact Reconsidered International Relations in Eastern Europe, 1955-1969*, New York, Routledge, 2015, p. 85.

²¹ MFAA, Year 1965, file B/VI-3. Warsaw Treaty, p. 1.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²³ MFAA, Year 1965, file B/VI-3. Warsaw Treaty, p. 3.

the pressure and directives of Moscow. Yet, the proud Albanian communist leaders exploited this declaration as a confirmation of their accusations against Moscow for unfair exclusion. Although Bodnaras did not ask the Chinese ambassador to communicate this conversation to the Albanian side, it is clear that he was looking for a common Romania - Albania - China front for the next meeting. According to this document, he felt that participating in the subsequent meeting alongside China and Albania would forge an opposing front that would call for the treaty's modification.²⁴

The Albanian government most probably felt flattered that someone was finally standing up for it and defending it within the very treaty it was expelled from unanimously at the request of the Soviets. However, Albania's *de jure* stance on the treaty did by no means involve a possible return. It served as a security measure, in the event of an intervention, particularly from the neighbours. The treaty, a legally binding agreement, prevented them from achieving their ambitions. Behar Shtylla, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, recommended that the Albanian embassy in Bucharest exercise caution while responding to the Romanians and "not offend the Romanians."²⁵

Their proposal was to be evaluated but no announcement was to be made. At the same meeting on January 5, 1965, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs received a telegram from the Albanian representative in Poland inviting Albania to participate in the sessions of the Political Consultative Committee on January 19-20.²⁶ The note from the Polish government informed the Albanian government of the purpose of the meeting: consultations at the initiative of the German Democratic Republic to examine the NATO initiative for the creation of the Joint Nuclear Forces, as well as the risk of militarization of West Germany with nuclear weapons. The invitation was sent by the Polish side as the host country.²⁷

The Albanian leadership experienced considerable difficulty. For almost three successive years, they had raised their voice in protest at their unfair exclusion from the Warsaw Treaty meetings and decision-making. The position became all the more difficult, as the meeting required the representation at the rank of first secretary and chairman of the Council of Ministers of treaty member countries, with participation from the Ministers of Defence and Foreign Affairs. The Albanian side was also informed that the commander of the treaty's Unified

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ MFAA, Year 1965, file B/VI-3. Warsaw Treaty, p. 12.

²⁶ MFAA, Year 1965, file B/VI-3. Telegram no. 10, dated 05.01.1965, p. 8.

²⁷ MFAA, Year 1965, file B/VI-3, Note of the Polish government, No. GMO- 22/1/65, p. 9-11.

Forces would present some information at that session. After receiving the official announcement, Behar Shtylla addressed Enver Hoxha and Mehmet Shehu – the most powerful leaders – with a letter dated January 5.²⁸

Foreign Minister Shtylla refused to attend the meeting, citing several reasons. First, he regarded Romania as “the forger of a false unity within the camp”, hence nothing more than a means to enable the Soviet leadership to normalize relations without criticising and reforming itself. The demand for a public apology from the Soviet Union was unfeasible at the time, suggesting an indirect rejection of the invitation. Second, the Romanian-Chinese cooperation was viewed with suspicion. Behar Shtylla assumed that the Romanian proposal was the result of an agreement between Moscow and Bucharest, maybe even with the Chinese. For all the above-mentioned reasons, he proposed that the invitation should come, but then declined.²⁹

The Foreign Minister requested that the right conditions be created for Albania to accept the invitation and participate, but he did not specify them in the letter. The Albanian ambassador to Romania, Rrapi Germeni, was summoned to offer a response to the Romanians.³⁰ On the other hand, the Polish government took its political and diplomatic initiative seriously as the host country of the meeting. According to the Warsaw Treaty's custom, the official communiqué calling for the Political Consultative Committee's sessions on January 19–20 was to be released before the sessions began. On May 15, Poland's chargé d'affaires in Albania showed up at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to negotiate an agreement with the Albanian side. The Albanian party requested that the name of Albania be omitted from the communiqué.³¹ The decision must not have “surprised” the Polish chargé d'affaires because the Albanians had informed the Romanians of the refusal a month before the Romanians insisted on releasing an invitation to the Albanian government.

THE ALBANIAN COMMUNIST REGIME'S DIPLOMATIC RESPONSE TO THE ROMANIAN INITIATIVE

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs acted rapidly by notifying the Albanian representatives abroad, in particular the delegates in Poland, that if they were to

²⁸ MFAA, Year 1965, file B/VI-3. Warsaw Treaty, p. 12.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

be asked, “*Will Albania participate?*” the answer had to be “*We do not know anything yet*”. The Albanian representative in Poland was instructed explicitly not to commit to anything. On January 15, 1965, the Polish chargé d’affaires to Albania delivered an official letter to the Polish embassy in Albania addressed to the Political Consultative Committee. At the request of the Albanian side, the letter had to be read and examined during the sessions that would be held by the Political Consultative Committee in Warsaw.³²

The letter echoed the opinion of the communist leaders of Albania who sought justification for what had happened in the past. Albania’s *de facto* exclusion from the Warsaw Treaty in 1961 was viewed by the Albanian leadership as an imposed decision of the Soviet government led by Khrushchev [and he was somewhat right here]. However, in terms of why Albania was excluded, Hoxha felt proud about remaining loyal to Marxism-Leninism, which was exactly why he was punished. This was not a very convincing justification, since the Albanian leadership was motivated primarily by personal benefits, rather than principles. They adopted, as researcher Smirnova has remarked, a pragmatic approach exclusively aiming at preserving power.³³

The Romanian attempt to invite the Albanian government to participate was exploited by the latter to render public all the fury accumulated over the years, due to the sheer disregard and neglect manifested by the most important military and political organization of the socialist camp. In its letter, Albania blamed the Soviet government for the deadlock created between it and the organization, without excluding the other member countries, which, according to the Albanian leadership, had supported the Soviet Union in the initiative to expel Albania. This assumption was reasonable since none of the socialist countries had objected to the Soviet Union’s discriminatory attitude towards Albania.³⁴ These accusations, although not directly targeted at Romania, actually contained the seed of mistrust, since the communist leadership of Romania had been among the most severe critics of the Albanian communist leadership during the two meetings of the Warsaw Treaty in 1961.³⁵

The Albanian government justified the harsh diplomatic conduct of January 1965, which was reflected in the least diplomatic tone of the letter, by claiming

³² *Ibid*, p. 56.

³³ Nina Smirnova, *Historia e Shqipërisë përgjatë shekullit XX* [The history of Albania throughout the 20th century], p. 379.

³⁴ MFAA, Year 1965, file B/VI-3. Warsaw Treaty, p. 56.

³⁵ Laurien Crump, *The Warsaw Pact Reconsidered...*, p. 70.

that the Albanian authorities possessed seriously compromising documents for groups of people leading a powerful socialist state, a Warsaw Pact member [a direct accusation against Moscow]. According to these documents, as stated in the letter, this state collaborated with Tito's renegades and Greek fascist monarchists, as well as the Sixth American Fleet and Albanian secret services to overthrow the people's power by an armed attack.³⁶

The accusatory tone of the letter was reinforced by imperative tones, in the form of ultimatums. This attitude, manifested in communications with the Warsaw Treaty's highest political body, reflected the Albanian government's unwillingness to keep cooperating with this organisation. The Albanian government also objected, through the letter, to how they were invited, after a long period of nonparticipation in the treaty's meetings. According to Albania, such a decision reached by the other member countries without first consulting it, and even disregarding the agenda and the rank of the participants, was seen as another manifestation of the organisation's indifference towards the Albanian government and was in violation of article three of the treaty, which required consultations between the parties.³⁷ The invitation had been sent to Albania ignoring previous incidents and such an attempt to reconcile the difficult past was unacceptable to the Albanians, justifying their reluctance to attend the next meeting.

In reality, the rejection was more than just a matter of pride. The communist regime was already aware that ratifying the Warsaw Treaty could bring complications, either for the regime's sustainability or in relations with the neighbours, for whom the wind of détente was already beginning to blow. Likewise, the fact that the West had welcomed the withdrawal from the treaty and no longer interfered in the internal affairs of the communist regime, as it had done in the period 1949-53 to overthrow it,³⁸ may have played a role in preventing the Albanian leadership from opening a new front. Of course, the transformations within the organization convinced the communist regime that they would not receive the benefits they expected when they accepted membership in 1955.

THE ALBANIAN LETTER DEBATE

As for the long letter from the Albanian leadership, according to the information coming from diplomatic missions in Eastern European countries, it

³⁶ MFAA, Year 1965, file B/VI-3. Warsaw Treaty, p. 69.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

³⁸ John P. Dunbabin, *The Cold War: The Great Powers and their allies*, Routledge, 2014, p. 164.

was not read in the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee, on January 19-20, 1965.³⁹ The organisers simply handed out a copy of the letter to each delegation, which raised individual awareness of the letter's contents, but no discussion took place. The reasons for not reading it were most likely not simply a disregard for the Albanian government's accusations against the Soviet Union and the Pact member states but it would have undoubtedly generated an unnecessary dispute among the organization's members. The situation in the highest political body of the treaty, the Political Consultative Committee, was no longer that of March 1961, when member countries unanimously voted for Moscow's decisions. Romania had openly become rebellious. The Political Consultative Committee decided to respond formally to the Albanian government's letter. The Albanian ambassador to Warsaw announced, "It turns out that there was a fierce fight between the delegations in the meeting", referring to the dispute between Gomulka and Dej on the Albanian issue.⁴⁰

The Romanians, who initiated the return of the Albanian delegation to the negotiating table, maintained until the very end that the exclusion of Albania from the Warsaw Treaty was illegal and thus had to be reconsidered,⁴¹ inciting strong reactions in other member countries. Thus, Gomulka proposed that the meeting secretariat respond to the Albanian letter sharply. According to the information from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dej had taken a different stance, requesting that the Political Consultative Committee provide the response and that the tone be kept moderate.⁴² The telegrams from the Albanian embassy in Bucharest also provided information on the Dej-Gomulka debate over Albania. The Albanian government was greatly pleased by Dej's response to Gomulka. He offered the same justifications for Albania's absence that communist officials in Albania had used against Moscow and its satellites.

According to Dej, Albania could not participate because of its unfavourable or non-existent relations with some of the member countries of the Warsaw Pact. The accusation that most closely matched Tirana's standpoint, though, was that Romanians had supported military activities at the Vlora Base. Almost four years after the Naval Base's closure, Dej said, "The ships, property of the Albanian state were robbed." Only one country closed the Vlora Base without the approval of the

³⁹ MFFA, Year 1965, file B/VI-3, Information on the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee 19-20 January, p. 107.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Dennis Deletant, Mihail Ionescu, *Romania and Warsaw Pact...*, p. 74.

⁴² MFFA, Year 1965, file B/VI-3, p. 107.

Political Consultative Committee!⁴³ The statement made about the withdrawal of Soviet troops without the Political Consultative Committee's approval is an argument that needs further study. The documents on the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of January 19-20, 1965, released so far from various archives of member countries, including Albanian ones, indicate a unanimous vote, except for Albania, which voted against it.⁴⁴

According to the report prepared with materials from the meetings of the Romanian People's Party during the month of February, after the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee, among the issues raised by these members was the Albanian Labour Party's position on the Warsaw Treaty.⁴⁵ In fact, according to the telegram of the Albanian representation in Bucharest, it only involved reading the letter and the note that the Albanian Labour Party sent to the Political Consultative Committee, announcing that no comments had been made on them. According to the very telegram, in his report, Dej, focusing on the Albanian problem, had stated that adopting unfair attitudes in the future would be detrimental to the Warsaw Treaty, as it would cause other countries to follow Albania's course of action. Albania had responded appropriately in those circumstances, according to Dej.⁴⁶ All these stances were considered as support by the Romanian government.

Even the Romanian ambassador to Budapest had commented on the letter [that the Albanian Labour Party had sent to the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee on January 19] during a meeting with the Albanian representative in Hungary. According to him, the demands of the Albanian side were completely fair, and very well formulated, but some of them could not be met because the Soviet Union was firm and did not accept responsibility for its actions against the Albanian Labour Party.⁴⁷ The information prepared by a person named Llazar Muço differs from the text of the coded telegram sent from Budapest. The data contained in the telegram is as follows: "The communiqué drawn up at the end of the session was said to have been the result of a long discussion and the compromise that was finally reached among the participants. I spoke to him about

⁴³ MFAA, Year 1965, file D.B/VI-3, Telegram No. 135 of Rrapi Gjermeni, representative of Albania in Romania, p. 235.

⁴⁴ MFAA, Year 1961, file 42/V, BI-8-3, Informacion mbi mbledhjen e Komitetit Politik Konsultativ, 28-29 Mars [Information on the meeting of Political Consultative Committee (PCC) on March 28-29], p. 31.

⁴⁵ MFAA, Year 1965, file D.B/VI-3, Warsaw Treaty, p. 260.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Telegram No. 139, p. 258.

⁴⁷ MFAA, Year 1965, file D.B/VI-3, Warsaw Treaty, p. 110.

the main issues raised in our letter directed to the meeting. He told me that the measures you proposed were unacceptable to the participants.”⁴⁸

It is difficult to say what prompted the person who prepared the report to distort the telegram data in this manner. However, the truth is that at the end of the meeting, on January 19-20, the Political Consultative Committee decided to respond to the Albanian Labour Party’s long letter very briefly. The reply stated that after examining the letter from the People’s Republic of Albania’s Council of Ministers dated 15 January 1965, the Political Consultative Committee stated that the People’s Republic of Albania refused to participate in the sessions of the Warsaw Treaty. Under these circumstances, Albania’s participation in the Warsaw Treaty depends on the decision of its government.⁴⁹

Foreign Minister Behar Shtylla immediately forwarded the response to Enver Hoxha. During this time, information from various sources was collected as to what was really happening with the Albanian issue. Except for Romanians, the Soviet Union and other countries under its tutelage maintained an indifferent approach. A close examination of the press of the Warsaw Treaty member states revealed that they had not printed the letter from the Albanian government.⁵⁰ The letter in question had found a distinct echo in the Western press, following its publication in the official and widely circulated Albanian newspaper “Zëri i Popullit” (Voice of the People) on February 2. On the other hand, the few declarations that were made by representatives of the Pact member countries were in line with the official declaration of the Political Consultative Committee. Thus, János Kádár had declared in the Hungarian parliament that it was up to the Albanian side when its government would participate in the sessions of the Warsaw Treaty bodies.⁵¹

This was the last failed attempt by Hoxha’s communist regime, which probably hoped that it could force the Soviet Union to rectify the mistakes of the past. Moscow undertook no such action; on the contrary, it continued to show that Albania was no longer part of its spheres of interest. Enver Hoxha must have understood this very clearly the moment he became acquainted with the Political Consultative Committee’s response to the Albanian government’s letter. The very epithet “contemptuous” he uttered for the reply received was an expression of

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Telegram no. 322, p. 265.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Political Consultative Committee’s Decision on participation of Albania in the meetings of the Warsaw Treaty, 1965, p. 127.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Warsaw Treaty, p. 111.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

anger, since once again the Soviet Union was not paying even the slightest attention to the demands of the Albanian government. Undiplomatically translated, the reaction was "Let them do whatever they want". In the handwritten draft letter prepared by Behar Shtylla, Hoxha wrote "I propose that we respond to their contemptuous response more contemptuously", literally suggesting the following text: "To the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Treaty, Your indifferent attitude to the letter from Albanian government, a legal member of the Warsaw Treaty, burdens you with great responsibility. The Government of the People's Republic of Albania remains steadfast in its legal claims and rights based on the articles of the Treaty."⁵²

Romania repeated its efforts to invite the Albanian government to the meetings of the Warsaw Treaty even after the meeting of January 19-20, 1965. This was proved by the telegram of June 4, 1966, received by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from the Albanian representation in Budapest.⁵³ The telegram stated that Romania had proposed some changes in the organization of the Warsaw Pact Unified Command. The essence of the proposal was that the commander of the Unified Command should not be chosen by a single Treaty country. This request opposed the appointment of the commander of the Warsaw Pact's Unified Command solely by the Soviet Armed Forces and brought it closer to the NATO model, where this position alternated among the member countries. The telegram also noted that Romanians had requested during the meeting of the Deputy Ministers of Defence in Moscow that Albania be invited to the Political Consultative Committee's meeting, which was scheduled to take place in Bucharest in July.

Despite the Romanian effort, Albania did not receive an invitation to the meeting of July 4-5, 1966. A note of protest from the Albanian government accompanied this position of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Treaty member states. On July 19, the note from the Albanian government was delivered to the chargé d'affaires of Czechoslovakia and other member countries. The note considered the Political Consultative Committee's meeting illegal. Similarly, the Political Consultative Committee's act was regarded as discriminatory and in violation of the legal rights of the People's Republic of Albania by the

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁵³ MFAA, Year 1966, file B/VII-3, Telegram from representation in Budapest, 4 June, p. 29-30.

Albanian government. The note even labelled the meeting a “great conspiracy”.⁵⁴ This was the last note of protest before Albania’s final act of denunciation of the treaty on September 12, 1968, after the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact troops.

CONCLUSIONS

According to the Albanian archives, the communist leadership in Albania sought to portray itself as both inside and outside the Warsaw Pact before and after the January 1965 meeting. It continued to play the “victim”, submitting protest notes for not having been invited to subsequent sessions. The Albanian government refused to cooperate with the initiatives undertaken by the treaty, stating that the Central Committee of the Albanian Labour Party had nothing to do with the revisionist leaders of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Albania required that representatives of the Warsaw Treaty submit these proposals directly to the People’s Republic of Albania. Romania’s efforts to transition from the role of a satellite to that of a small ally, at the beginning of the 1960s, were the first steps towards emancipation within the treaty, which the Albanian government disregarded.⁵⁵ Such movements were viewed as diversions that would overthrow the government and open up Albania to the West by the most repressive Stalinist regime in the Balkans, thus applying the label “revisionist” to the Romanian government, as well. While the Albanian communists’ perception of both the communist bloc and the West remained distorted, the case of Albania served as an experiment for Romania to test its power in an effort to avoid the Soviet dictate.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ MFAA, Year 1966, file B/ VI-3, Note of protest no. 519, 19 July, p. 61.

⁵⁵ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc Unity and Conflict*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1967, p. 433.

⁵⁶ Laurien Crump, *The Warsaw Pact Reconsidered...*, p. 85.

ANNEXES

Annexe no. 1

Të rikthehet në organia e shifrës jo më vonë se 5 minuta ndalohet me nxjerrë kopje

DESHIFRIM

Nr. 12656 Nga BUKURESHTI

TEPËR SEKRET
Nr. Fletës 141

Nr: 35529 14

PËR SHËNIME

Mora njoftim

sta

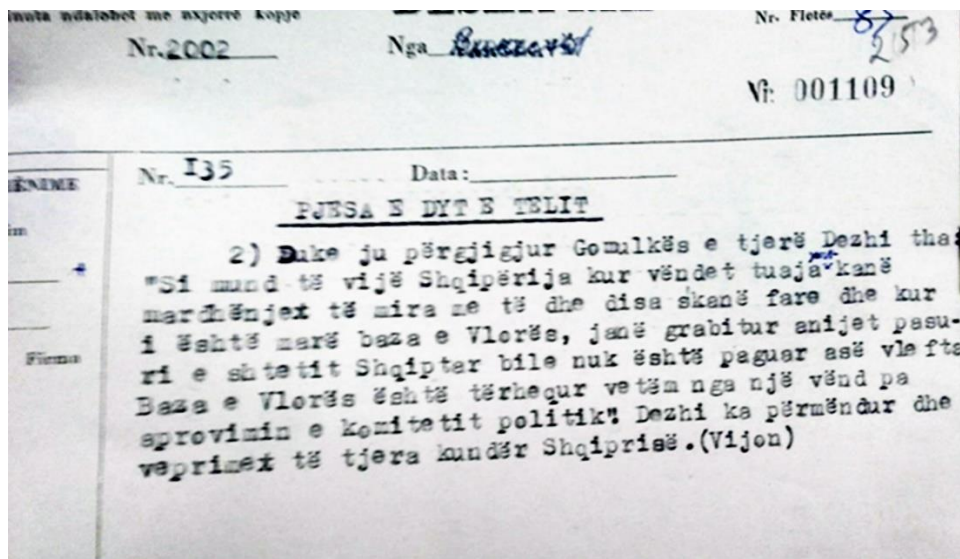
Firma

Nr. 945 Data: _____

M B A R O J

Perfaqesusi rumun nuk ka qene dakord me Zerinin dhe ka propezuar qe te thiret edhe Shqiperija ne mbledhjen e janarit se eshte antare efektive, te theriten dhe vezhgusit. Polaku qe ishte kryetar i mbledhjes i ka thene rumunit se po te shikosh qendrimin e shqiptareve e kupton se dhe ti ftosh ata nuk vijne per dhe nuk duhen ftuar. Dhe mbledhja nuk pranoj propezimin e rumuneve. Thuhet se rumunet do ta ndjejne vehten ngushte ne mbledhjen e ardheshme pran doj duan qe te shkoj atje dhe Shqiperija.

Document No. 1 (Top Secret) is the final page of Telegram No. 945, dated December 17, 1964, sent by Rrapi Gjermeni, the Albanian representative in Bucharest. According to the telegram, Romania's invitation to the Albanians was met with hostility by Poland, which held the presidency of the assembly. The Albanian representative analyses the repeated efforts made by the Romanian representative to have Albania included in the upcoming Warsaw Treaty meeting, suggesting that Romania was facing challenges within the treaty framework.



Document No. 2 (Top Secret) is a telegram from the Albanian representative in Bucharest, Rrapi Gjermeni. The photograph constitutes the second part of Telegram No. 135 and sheds light on one of the most debated theories concerning Albania's admission to the Warsaw Treaty during the Cold War. The elimination of Vlorë's naval base, without consultation with the Political Consultative Committee, is attributed solely to the Soviet Union. This document asserts that in his dispute with Gomulka at the Warsaw Treaty meeting on January 19, 1965, when Albania was absent, Dezhnev (i.e., Romanian leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej) maintained the Albanian communist leadership's strongly supported position.

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