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## **SCANDERBEG AND THE EUROPEAN CIVILIZATION\***

Every anniversary of events or of big national personalities is always a good impetus to further reflect and deepen more in their study, to extract new point-of views in their less illuminated sides.

The 550 anniversary of Gjergj Kastrioti's death is such a great motive. Scanderbeg's war against the Ottoman sultans is a remarkable epoch in the Albanian history that has been source of inspiration for the Albanian and foreign scholars involved in the field of history, literary and artistic creativity since the XVI century. It has been written so much about him that it would be very hard for every author to report new elements as a real contribution to this part of history. However, the efforts to show Scanderbeg and his age as a multidimensional radiance theme that always offers new possibilities of objective and neutral feelings when writing about. Therefore the present manuscript aims to re-dimension the European character of the Albanian resistance against the Ottoman invasion under the leadership of the national hero in the framework of the 550 anniversary of Scanderbeg's death.

Europe has felt the threats coming from the East for some centuries, but from the end of the XIV century those became more dangerous from the raising Asian power of the Ottoman Turks. They had already achieved to be partially established in the Balkans, at Europe's gates. With the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453, the path towards conquering Europe was completely open.

The European civilization of that time as a complex of cultural, intellectual, moral, material values and living way was in front of a big challenge.<sup>1</sup> Christianity was at the roots of this civilization and its

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<sup>1</sup> François Guizot. General History of Civilization in Europe. Edited, with critical and supplementary notes, by George Wells Knight, Ph.D. New York. D. Appleton and Company 1896, p. 17-18, 23; Fernand Braudel. Grammaire des Civilisations. (Translations in Albanian).

promoter at the same time. The European civilization soon became a mixture of the Greek-Roman traditions, the Hebrew-Christian ones and the so-called barbarian traditions.<sup>2</sup>

In the XV century, the European Christian civilization was found under the pressure of the Islamic empowerment and its more organized political version of the Ottoman Turks. The threat from them, was "a permanent universal danger," therefore also "the Christianity should protect itself against this civilization, i.e., its own existence."<sup>3</sup> This is the beginning of the geopolitical clash between of the two civilizations— the Eastern Moslem and the Western Christian. This view has been embraced by many European historians, philosophers and writers across the centuries, including the Albanian ones— from Marin Barleti in the XVI century to nowadays.

Albania, situated in the European geographical, political and cultural periphery became a clash arena of these two civilizations. The Albanians situated in the line of demarcation between the two empires, the Western Roman and Byzantium Empire in the East, embraced both Catholicism and Orthodoxy, the two major branches of Christianity, depending not only on the administrative relevance, but also on their influence power. Çabej says: "*This stand in-between West and East, and the preservation of their unique nature has forever incised Albania her special face.*"<sup>4</sup> Historians have agreed that "...the Albanian space in the Middle Age was an area with special cultural diversity, a cross-road of the cultural influences from the Byzantine and the Western world one, which has been sketched according to the Albanian environment."<sup>5</sup>

After the second half of the XIV century, Albania was a feudal mosaic possession in the hands of some noble families. Exception made some coastal cities in the Adriatic like Durrësi, Lezha, Shkodra, Ulqini, Tivari and Drishti that were under the rule of the Republic of Venice.

Shtëpia e Librit & Komunikimit, 2005, p. 39, 42-43; Oxford word power Dictionary. Edited by Sally Wehmeir. Oxford University Press 1993, p. 108.

<sup>2</sup> Historie de l'Europe. Sous la Direction de J.Carpentier et F. Lebrun. Editions du SEUIL 27, rue Jacob, Paris VI<sup>e</sup>. Octobre 1990, p. 180-18/2.

<sup>3</sup> Camille Paganel. Histoire de Scanderbeg ou turks et chrétiens au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle. Paris Didier, Libraire Editeur 35, Quai des Augustins 1855, p.b.

<sup>4</sup> Eqrem Çabej. Shqiptarët midis Perëndimit dhe Lindjes. M.Ç.M. Tiranë 1994, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> Oliver Jens Schmitt. Arbëria Venedike 1392-1479. K&B 2007, p. 14; A. K. Brackob. Scanderbeg. A history of George Castriota and the Albanian Resistance to Islamic Expansion in fifteenth Century Europe. Buffalo. Las Vegas. Palm Beach. 2018. p. 28.

Some Albanian nobles in rivalry to expand the territorial areas among them, sought and received the aid of the Ottoman Turks, and became at times dependency of them.

At the eve of the XV century, Albania faced the same political, economic, social and cultural development with the other Balkan-Adriatic countries. The medieval Albania achieved the peak level of its progress before the Ottoman attacks and invasions. Many foreign renown historians, e.g., Šufflay and Jireček have stated that "until the Ottoman occupation, Albania followed Europe's civilization development," and, "the Albanian lords were equal to the Italian high nobility" and the Albanians in the Middle Age "were old Christian people and more civilized" than the Slavs.<sup>6</sup> Agriculture and farming were two principal fields of the economic development, meantime that in the capitals of the Albanian princedoms, in the cities were exercised different crafts with a growing production rate. The cities, especially the coastal ones served as important trade hubs for the Balkan-Adriatic areas on grain, salt, fish, constructing materials etc.<sup>7</sup>

In the XV century, before the complete Ottoman occupation, Albania had a unique social structure. The timar system that was the essence of the Ottoman feudal-military order was established in the southern and coastal areas occupied from the Ottomans. According to this system, the peasants were legally free (were not serfs), but had political and economic obligations towards the Spahi as representative of the Ottoman caste in possession of which was granted the timar (a specific land area). The pre-Ottoman central and northern Albania was in the beginnings of the feudal order. In these regions serfdom was unknown. There ruled the local self-government customary law. The chieftains of these areas aimed to live in harmony with the free highlanders.<sup>8</sup>

The Albanians until the XV century had a state-building experience. The first feudal state in Albania was established in the end of the XII

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<sup>6</sup> Fan. S. Noli. Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu (1405- 1468) in: vepra 4. Shkrime historike. Tiranë 1989, p. 342; Aurel Plasari. Shqipëria dhe shqiptarët në Europën e Piut II. Botimet IDK. Tiranë, 2014, p. 191.

<sup>7</sup> Aleks Buda. Gjergj Kastrioti-Skënderbeu dhe epoka e tij. Shkrime Historike. Akademia e Shkencave. Instituti i Historisë. Tiranë, 1986, p. 271.

<sup>8</sup> Kristo Frashëri. Gjergj Kastrioti-Skënderbeu. Jeta dhe vepra (1405-1468). Botimet Toena Tiranë, 2002, p. 481.

century. However, the foreign rules (Byzantine, Angevins, Norman, Serb) who followed and replace each other, didn't allow this state-building process to be consolidated. Only after the end of the first half of the XIV century started the process of Albanian principalities establishment. The foreign invasions have obstructed the nationality's formation, the development of the urban life and of a social class with wide economic, merchant and cultural interests. Such an embryonic elite, mostly intellectual, religious and cultural existed in the coastal cities and in the Episcopal centers and monasteries.

Christianity in both its branches, Catholic and Orthodox, was preached in Latin and in the old Greek that were elite languages and incomprehensible for the Albanian masses. The Albanian language was not used in the Catholic and Greek-Byzantine liturgy. It wasn't a cultivated language, and reflected the shortcomings of Albania's general development and identity.

The identity weakness, the foreign invasions, the division and wars among the lords of Albanian principalities delayed the national process. The church and nobility local elites, throughout their existence did not become the holders and active leaders of emancipation and consciousness of the masses of the people with the awareness of the special Albanian common affiliation. This process required a powerful catalytic agent to unite the special identity elements that chaotically existed and acted in the Albanian life.

The Albanian society couldn't develop by being isolated. At a large extent, she was in contact with and under the influence of other stronger identities. In the first half of the XV century those Albanian principalities dependent in relationship with the Ottomans, were still free in their Christian faith. There existed a special situation. Religiously, culturally and from a trade point of view they were oriented towards the western countries, mainly to those situated beyond the Adriatic Sea, while being subdued to the timar system. The Albanian coastal cities that were under the rule of the Republic of Venice were also centers of a versatile European influence. It occurred that Albanian princes, slowly without understanding and often unconsciously absorbed the European identity.

The Albanian and the European identity intertwined based on spiritual, cultural, traditional and trade connections values. The first

steps towards political collaboration was made even before the Ottoman threat, as a menace to the common values. Not only, but this political component of Albania with the European countries, especially with the Italians, has existed before the Scanderbeg time, with alliances of individual Albanian nobles with the Papacy, Kingdom of Naples, Republic of Venice, Republic of Ragusa etc.

Gjergj Kastrioti Scanderbeg to this natural inclination and shy in the beginnings of the majority of the Albanian nobility gave a new form and made it an essential characteristic of the Albanian identity. Scanderbeg established a concentrated and functional state for the time's conditions and circumstances through which for the first time in the history of country gave to Albanians such an important role in the defense of the European civilization.

It neither the place, nor the time to mention the great Albanian battles against the Ottoman armies larger in numbers, or the unsuccessful sieges of Kruja and other Albanian strongholds by Murat II and Mehmet II. The Ottoman armies nearly a quarter a century committed the greatest barbarisms in the Albanian lands, but couldn't defeat Scanderbeg and his Albanians.

Scanderbeg as far he was alive turned into a legend, meantime the centuries established other glorious superstrata of his heroism. Beyond this phenomenon that is more a European contribution rather than Albanian, the genuine historical scientific analyzes have recognized to Scanderbeg and his Albanians an extraordinary role and contribution to the war against the Ottomans in defense of the European civilization.

Gjergj Kastrioti wasn't the "condottiere" as might have been considered by some historians (Iorga, Marinesko, Langer, etc.)<sup>9</sup> All his life and deeds proved that he was conscientious political and statesman leader of the time, also a perfect strategist and military strategist. Scanderbeg raised the flag of freedom and was deeply committed to supporting the feelings of the Albanian people, their will to be free in their mountains and fields, to defend the Christian religion and their traditions.

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<sup>9</sup> N. Iorga. *Brève histoire de l' Albanie et du peuple albanais* Bucarest, 1919, p. 47; C. Marinesco. *Alphonse V, roi d' Aragon et de Naples et l'Albanie de Scanderbeg*. In: *Mélanges de l'école Roumaine en France*. Paris 1923, p. 9, 75; Fan. S. Noli. *Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu (1405- 1468)* ... p. 229.

Scanderbeg was also aware that the greatest challenge, i.e., the war could not be faced without an Albanian alliance and the unification of all internal powers. For this reason, his first major political act was the League of Lezha, March 1444, in which the majority of the Albanian nobility participated. It was decided the unification of all powers to protect the country from the imminent Ottoman attacks and Scanderbeg was elected general captain of the united military forces.

Gjergj Kastrioti was very clear and didn't nourish any illusion about the Ottoman fury of Sultan Murat being faced for a long time in the name of the freedom and with the internal Albanian alliance only. He knew his powerful enemy very well, his potential and ambitions. Scanderbeg also knew that the European countries, first of all the Italian ones for years closely felt the Ottoman danger, and the efforts to create an anti-Turkish crusade had failed. The Albanian cause and interests met the European interests towards the danger coming from the East. So great was the Scanderbeg need for the European support that it could raise the name of the Albanian confrontation beyond the Adriatic to save Europe from the Ottoman menace. Both the relations and the cooperation were a mutual and useful process for both parts.

Albania as a country in Scanderbeg's time has exercised an organized foreign policy, mainly with other European countries. There had been chancellery and officials for this job, counselors, ambassadors, special envoys which according to the missions they had received different names. The archival documents of the time and other historic sources provide information about the Scanderbeg's diplomatic envoys to the Holy See in Rome, to the Republic of Venice Senate, to the royal courts of Naples and Hungary, to the duchies of Milan or Burgundy, to the city of Ragusa etc.

Scanderbeg was not simply an Albanian guerrilla leader or a powerful man of sword as ordinarily described in the special chronicles of the time, or in later book pages. He was a real statesman who sketched the European orientation of Albania, conscientiously forged alliances with the European countries. Scanderbeg "possessed a complete political control, and of course was able to define by himself the direction program of his action."<sup>10</sup> Strongly emphasizing this substantial feature of his policy is more than a justified the attention

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<sup>10</sup> Oliver Jens Schmitt. *Skënderbeu*. K&B.Tiranë, 2008, p. 460.

that one must pay to Gjergj Kastrioti's Europeanization in order to not modernize and misuse it. He has to be placed in the framework of his time and in the logic of the political alliance against a foreign civilization that was estranged to European civilization. So, from Gjergj Kastrioti, as the renown Albanologist father Giuseppe Valentini rightfully notes, we don't have to expect from Scanderbeg to have left us a treaty on Europeanization, or to have mentioned Europe in his speeches in front of the soldiers.<sup>11</sup>

There was a hierarchy of relations in the foreign policy and Scanderbeg's alliances with the European countries. The priorities were defined by a number of factors such as the importance these countries had and the role, they played against the Ottoman danger; their readiness toward Scanderbeg in his anti-Turkish resistance, their perception of this threat, their specific interests toward the non-confrontation with the Ottomans and the authority and influence that these countries had at European level. Based on these factors, the Scanderbeg relations with these countries have been characterized for 25 years by highs and lows, but never lost the fulcrum of the European orientation in the foreign policy.

A number of historians involved in this specific part of our history think that the Holy See in Rome has been the first and the principal ally of the Albanians in their anti-Ottoman resistance.<sup>12</sup> The arguments are that the high moral authority of the Catholic metropolis, the long history of efforts to lead a Christian crusade against the Ottomans, the financial aids and the high appreciations of the Popes for Scanderbeg as the defender of Christendom.

The authority of the Holy See in the XV century wasn't at its peak. The powerful European kings and princes in a Europe where the national specific particularities prevailed, didn't obey to the Christian universalism of the Popes of Rome. They more and more were in quarrel among them for power and for territorial enlargements. The Holy See has failed in organizing the anti-Ottoman crusade from 1439 to 1464, exactly because of the different interests, lack of readiness and

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<sup>11</sup> At Giuseppe Valentini. *Skënderbeu dhe Papati. 1442-1467. Studime dhe tekste historike*. Botimet PLEJAD, 2013, p. 64.

<sup>12</sup> Fan. S. Noli. *Gjergj Kastriot Skënderbeu...* p. 228-229; Athanas Gegaj. *L'Albanie et l'Invasion Turque au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Université de Louvain, Paris, 1937; Aurel Plasari. *Skënderbeu. Një histori politike*. Instituti i Studimeve "Gjergj Fishta". Tiranë, 2010, p. 10.

special states flirtations with the sultans. Not all the European countries perceived the Ottoman danger in the same way and intensity. The Papacy, the Italian and the central European states were in the frontline of the Ottoman threats.

Scanderbeg as the leader of the Albanians in the anti-Ottoman resistance, was not appreciated in the beginning. Only after his first victories against the Ottoman armies, the echo of his battles reached Rome and other Italian and European chancelleries. The defeat of the armies of Sultan Murat II and Mehmet II in front of Kruja walls and in other long battles in the Albanian lands renew the great expectations about the Europe's salvation. As the prominent Christian knights were few, the victories in the battles echoed in Rome.

The popes, contemporary of Gjergj Kastrioti gave him different epithets for nearly a quarter a century. They have spoken with the vocabulary of the Catholic faith, natural for the role and mission of the Holy See. The Pope Nicholas V (1447-1453) called him "a very strong warrior" of Christianity and champion in his defense against the Turks.<sup>13</sup> The Pope Calixtus III (1453-1458) considered him "the strong protector and true warrior of the Christian faith."<sup>14</sup> His successor, the Pope Pius II (Enea Silvio Piccolomini) (1458-1464) who glorified him more than any other pope, describes Scanderbeg as "Athleta Christi", "the most unrelenting defender of Christ", the man "who nearly spent all his life fighting in the name of Christ."<sup>15</sup> The Pope Paul II following the traces of his predecessors called Scanderbeg "the brave champion of Jesus Christ."<sup>16</sup> Such descriptions overpass the religious borders and take on another dimension... This glorious character of our history enters a wider and substantial dimension, because Christianity was

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<sup>13</sup> Fan. S. Noli. Gjergj Kastriot Skënderbeu...Shtojcë. Dok.Nr.7. p. 401; Aurel Plasari. Skënderbeu... p. 429.

<sup>14</sup> Ignatius Parrino. Acta Albaniae Vaticana. Res Albaniae Saeculorum XIV et XV Atque cruciatam spectantia. Tomus I. Acta ex libris brevium excerpta collingens. Città del Vaticano. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana 1971. Doc. Nr. 260; M. Sciambra. G. Valentini. I. Parrino. L'Albania e Scanderbeg nel piano generale di crociata di Callisto III (1455- 1458) Badia di Grottaferrata, 1967, p. 118-119; R. P. Duponcet.Histoire de Scanderbeg. Roy d'Albanie...p. 19-20; C. Marinesco.Alphonse V, roi d'Aragon et de Naples et l'Albanie de Scanderbeg... p. 126; J Radoniç. Djuradj Kastriot Scanderbeg i Albania u XV veku. Beograd, 1942.Dok. Nr. 140.

<sup>15</sup> Zef Mirdita. Krishtenizmi ndër shqiptarë. "Drita". Prizren&Misioni Katolik Shqiptar në Zagreb. Prizren-Zagreb 1998, p. 173; Fan. S. Noli. Gjergj Kastriot Skënderbeu...Shtojcë. Dok. Nr.23. p. 416; Aurel Plasari. Shqipëria dhe shqiptarët në Europën e Piut II... p. 89, 110.

<sup>16</sup> R. P. Duponcet. Histoire de Scanderbeg. Roy d'Albanie... p.562-563.

recognized and accepted as the philosophy and the basis of the European civilization.

At first sight, these appraisals create the image that the Albanians' war lead by Scanderbeg were simply of a religious character. Some historians have tried to nourish this impression, also basing on the letters Scanderbeg sent to the Popes where among others he writes them that the Ottomans are "our enemies and of the Christian faith", that "we want to be counted in the lines of Christ's believers," etc.<sup>17</sup>

No doubt that Christianity as ideology and religious faith was an encouraging and unifying factor among the Christian Albanians, but not the only one. Lamartine, the French historian of the XIX century says that Scanderbeg's cause was a national cause rather than a religious cause.<sup>18</sup> And also, the underestimating observation of the Christianity's role in the Albanian resistance and the conclusions that Scanderbeg was standing above the religions have been inaccurate.<sup>19</sup>

The Holy See was a state and, in its way, and with its tools it conducted a specific policy in accordance with its objectives. Therefore, the appraisal and opinions of the popes towards Scanderbeg should not be simply seen as courtesy and encouraging religious actions of the time, but actions with a political message. The popes could neither speak other language, nor be out of their mission. The protection of Christianity from "the infidels," from the Moslem Ottomans was at the heart of the crusade. The Pope Pius II appointed Scanderbeg general commander of the European ground forces during the preparations of the crusade of 1464. However, behind Christianity's protection and in its name, the crusades and special European countries as the Kingdom of Naples, the Republic of San Marco or some other countries aimed to expand in the eastern Mediterranean territories and beyond.

The popes have praised Scanderbeg in a superlative way by comparing him with other kings and princes who contributed to the defense of the European civilization. The Pope Calixtus III wrote to Scanderbeg on February 1458: "If only there existed one of your kind

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<sup>17</sup> Oliver Jens Schmitt. *Skënderbeu...* p. 335.

<sup>18</sup> Alphonse de Lamartine. *Histoire la Turquie*. Tome III. Paris. Librairie du Constitutionnel 10, Iu; De Valois. 10. 1854, p. 146.

<sup>19</sup> Aleks Buda. *Gjergj Kastrioti- Skënderbeu dhe epoka e tij...*, p. 284-285.

had among other Christian princes, we wouldn't have been worried or despaired about the defense of the religion."<sup>20</sup> Also the Pope Pius II expresses the same worry to the Albanian leader when he writes to him: "we are deeply sorry that we couldn't find among the Christian princes that dedication we hoped to find towards the religious affairs...."<sup>21</sup>

These high considerations for Scanderbeg and his role from the Holy See didn't always meet the help that the popes gave him. Historians have different opinions about this issue. Barleti, Noli, Gegaj, Plasari, etc. think that the Holy See deserves the first place among those countries who helped Scanderbeg.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, Foygt, Fallmerayer, etc. say that the help from the popes was too small, "only apostolic blessings and panegyric speeches".<sup>23</sup> Some evidences of the time prove these critics. When Scanderbeg went in Rome to seek help on December 1466, an ambassador informed his center that "he has come with few horses; as if he was a poor man."<sup>24</sup> The majority of his demands were turned down. One observer said: "*he took so little that couldn't be mentioned without a Christian blush...*".<sup>25</sup> The most shocking testimony has been left by Scanderbeg himself, always referring to the chronicles of the time, when in conclusion of his visit in Rome on 14 February 1467, ironically he stated that "from now on he had to fight the Church more than the Sultan."<sup>26</sup>

Scanderbeg deserved the support of the allies and alliances because of his mission in protecting the European civilization. By the time the front of the war against the Ottoman Turks was in the Danube and the Adriatic Sea area. Two were the strongholds of resistance against the Ottoman penetration in Europe: the Hungarian kingdom with its regent, the great captain János Hunyadi and Albania with her great captain, Scanderbeg. Edward Gibbon, but also other historians, place Hunyadi and Scanderbeg in the list of the heroes also for another reason. They

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<sup>20</sup> Ignatius Parrino. Acta Albaniae Vaticana. Dok. Nr. 306; M. Sciambra. G. Valentini. I. Parrino. L'Albania e Scanderbeg nel piano generale di crociata di Callisto III (1455- 1458) ... p. 118.

<sup>21</sup> Ignatius Parrino. Acta Albaniae Vaticana..., Dok. Nr. 495.

<sup>22</sup> Fan. S. Noli. Gjergj Kastriot Skënderbeu... p. 228; Aurel Plasari. Skënderbeu... p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> Fan. S. Noli. Gjergj Kastriot Skënderbeu... p. 227.

<sup>24</sup> J Radoniç. Djuradj Kastriot Scanderbeg... Dok. Nr.340.

<sup>25</sup> R. P. Duponcet. Histoire de Scanderbeg d'Albanie... p. 542; Aurel Plasari. Skënderbeu..., p. 700-701.

<sup>26</sup> Kristo Frashëri. Skënderbeu... p. 450.

"since the moment of their involvement against the Ottoman armies delayed the destruction of the Greek empire (Byzantine -PM)" as one of the important political formations and cultural hubs of the Middle Age".<sup>27</sup>

Scanderbeg and Hunyadi have never met each other because of the circumstances, regardless the efforts made. However, at a distance, in mutual respect to one another and through their representatives tried to forge an alliance. Although, this didn't happen in the form of a written document, it worked out on the battle fields against the common Ottoman enemy. Anyway, its known that the both great captains have sent to each other ambassadors or representatives to coordinate the help and the actions between them. These contacts began in 1448 and continued until 1456, when Hunyadi died, just after the Ottoman failure in besieging Belgrade which was protected by the Hungarian hero.<sup>28</sup> His death left Scanderbeg without an ally in the battlefield. He "remained the only active crusader in the Balkans" and took on the Hunyadi's role as the hero of Christianity.<sup>29</sup>

The Italian states were Albania's allies in the anti-Ottoman war, but they didn't engage genuine military formation, but some small contingents to protect the strongholds. They declared several times that were ready to join the crusades that the Holy See was trying to organize, but nothing more. They had their aims which didn't want to sacrifice in the name of the anti-Ottoman war. Not only, but these countries, especially the Kingdom of Naples and the Republic of Venice were in fierce rivalry and have flirted with the Ottoman sultans.

Their relations with Scanderbeg mainly worked in the anti-Ottoman plan, but also were defined by the type of relations he had with each of these countries. The Albanian leader has often found himself in delicate positions to maintain the balance of his stand towards them.

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<sup>27</sup> Edward Gibbon. The history of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. In eight vols. Vol.VIII. Paris Baudry's European Library 1840, p. 171; Francise Pall. Skënderbeu dhe Huniadi. Konferenca e Dytë e Studimeve Albanologjike (12-18 January 1968) I..., p. 76.

<sup>28</sup> Francise Pall. Skënderbeu dhe Huniadi.... p. 79-85; C. Marinesco. Alphonse V, roi d' Aragon et de Naples et l'Albanie de Scanderbeg..., p. 35.

<sup>29</sup> Franc Babinger. Mehmet pushtuesi. Botësulmuesi në kapërcyell kohe. Shtëpia Botuese "55". Vëllimi i parë. Tiranë 2005, p. 99; Donald M. Nicol. Byzantium and Venice. A study in diplomatic and cultural relations. Cambridge University Press 1988, p. 387.

Consequently, the Albanian resistance was characterized by different fluctuations and change of priorities throughout its existence.

Scanderbeg had one major priority: protecting of Albanian lands from the Ottoman invasion, which required political relations and alliances with the Italian states. Based on the interests about the Albanian resistance at different times, they responded to the demands of Scanderbeg by either supporting these demands or turning them down.

The ambassadors of Scanderbeg signed in March 1451 a treaty under his name with the representatives of the king Alfonso V of Naples in Gaeta, Italy. The treaty written in the spirit of the age and in difficult situations for Scanderbeg, secured him the necessary aids and guaranteed him the support to face the frequent Ottoman Turks attacks. However, the value of the Albanian resistance has been many times greater. Scanderbeg crossed the Adriatic Sea to Naples in 1461 to support the king Ferrante, successor of Alfonso V, whose throne he saved the from his rivals. All this was done as a sign of respect for the signed agreement with Alfonso V and the aids has received from him. Ferrante did not support Scanderbeg very much to give him the possibility of resistance to the end.<sup>30</sup>

However, this was not the main thing. The importance and the benefit of the great Albanian resistance for the European civilization, was beautifully emphasized by Scanderbeg in the well-known letter sent on October 31, 1460 to one of the rivals of king Ferrante, the prince of Taranto, Giovanni Antonio de Orsini: "...if I was defeated, Italy would have experienced the consequence for sure, and in that case, that possession which you acclaim yours, would belong to the Turks."<sup>31</sup> This truth was made quite clear by the English knight John of Newport, Scanderbeg's fellow warrior which in that time wrote that "the conquest of Europe is certain, *because there is no other power that can do this resistance if the castle falls.*"<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> David Abulafia. I regni del Mediterraneo occidentale dal 1200 al 1500; la lotta per il dominio, Roma-Bari. Laterza, 1999, p. 239-240; N. Iorga. Brève historie de l'Albanie e du peuple albanais... p. 46.

<sup>31</sup> J Radoniç. Djuradj Kastriot Scanderbeg... Dok. Nr. 200; C. Marinesco. Alphonse V, roi d'Aragon et de Naples et l'Albanie de Scanderbeg..., p.135.

<sup>32</sup> Aleks Buda. Gjergj Kastrioti- Skënderbeu dhe epoka e tij... p. 266; Kristo Frashëri.Skënderbeu..., p. 484.

Some European countries tended to adapt to the established conjectures, according to the interest of the moment and didn't want to see beyond. For them, the Ottoman danger was close or away depending on the Hungary's resistance in the Danube front and Adriatic front, Albania. The defense of Christianity in the name of which crusades were organized, didn't meet the priorities each European country had in the political and trade fields. The Venetians were said to "have put their kin above the religion; they were Venetians first, then Christians".<sup>33</sup> Venice was a powerful trade country in the Adriatic and Mediterranean area. This country had a great merchant and military fleet and many fortified strongholds in all this maritime space. The Republic sometimes approached to the European Christian alliance against the Ottomans and sometimes left this alliance when it came to concrete actions, based on her interests. The Seignory had signed in 1430 a peace treaty with the Sultan Murat II and was trying benefit therefrom.

This traditional pragmatism of the Republic of San Marco was fully manifested also in the relations with Scanderbeg, which were complex and complicated, with highs and lows for almost a quarter of a century.

The Great Council of Republic did not pay any particular attention to explosion of the anti-Ottoman rebellion in Albania in November 1443. The interest increased only after the establishment of the League of Lezha in March 1444, when Scanderbeg unified the majority of the Albanian nobility and was recognized as *primus inter pares* and as leader of the League's joint forces. The information of the Venetian observers and governors in Albania about the first victories of Scanderbeg against the Ottoman armies, differently from one might think didn't cause so much pleasure in the Republic. The political events in Albania, the establishment of the League of Lezha, the growing authority of Gjergj Kastrioti didn't "meet the necessities of the international policy of Venice in 1444-1445."<sup>34</sup>

The Republic of San Marco didn't want the Sultan be misinformed that this Republic was behind Scanderbeg and openly encouraged his resistance only because of her coastal possessions in Albania. She was

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<sup>33</sup> Donald M. Nicol. Byzantium and Venice... p. 422.

<sup>34</sup> Freddy Thiriet. Disa mendime rreth politikës së Venedikut ndaj Gjergj Kastriotit-Skënderbeut in: Konferenca e Dytë e Studimeve Albanologjike (12-18 January 1968) ..., p. 62.

not interested in breaking the status-quo in the relations with the Ottomans established with the peace treaty in 1430. On other hand, the real and the growing threat of Ottomans crossing the Adriatic Sea to Italy was a very strong reason as proved by a chronicle of 1446 that the Venetians assisted time after time Scanderbeg "in such a way to not cause Turks envy, help that was insufficient...".<sup>35</sup> An assistance that as the Romanian historian N. Iorga says "*to make to the Turks a protective war without showing up*".<sup>36</sup> Noli calls this Venice behavior very strange, with the exception of some short interruptions continued to subsidize Scanderbeg, although it hated him head over heels!<sup>37</sup>

These dilemmas nourished another the doubt of Venice had towards the Albanian leader of the League of Lezha. The Assembly of the Albanian lords was rightly seen at that time, and certainly years later, as a beginning of Scanderbeg's project on a unified Albanian state. If such an effort would have succeeded, naturally at a more suitable time, part of it would have also would been all the Albanian territories occupied or possessed by foreigners, including here Venice's coastal possessions. This scope was against the Republic's interests, because her coastal bases in the Adriatic shore of great economic and strategic importance, connected with the merchant interest in Levant (Eastern Mediterranean).<sup>38</sup> This remains only a speculation, because until today no evidence about this scope has been proved.

The anti-Ottoman resistance and the tendency to create a united Albanian state were in parallel. No doubt that this state would be Christian and European. The Republic of San Marco of course didn't like such a perspective. The doubts gradually influenced the two-face policy of the Republic towards Scanderbeg, in accordance with the conjunctures and the interests. The period from 1446 was the beginning of the policies of conflicts. Scanderbeg was not interested in opening a new battle front and being between the two fires. But, his unification project and the feudal logic of the time gradually brought the conflict with Venice, in December 1447 about the city of Danja, north of Albania.

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<sup>35</sup> Kristo Frashëri. Skënderbeu... p. 145.

<sup>36</sup> N. Iorga. Brève historie de l'Albanie e du peuple albanais. Bucarest, 1919, p. 46.

<sup>37</sup> Fan. S. Noli. Gjergj Kastriot Skënderbeu (1405- 1468) ... p. 230.

<sup>38</sup> Peter Bartl. Relazioni fra Scanderbeg e Venezia. In: Albanica 30. Giorgio Castriota Scanderbeg e l'identità nazionale albanese. A cura di Matteo Mandalá. Palermo 2009, p. 35.

At the time of the conflict, The Great Council of the Republic showed two standards in the policy towards Scanderbeg. It ordered his men in Albania to invite the Turkish army and to help it defeat "the obnoxious Scanderbeg" and banish him "from Albania and possibly from the face of the earth". These people were instructed to encourage Albanian lords in the north of the country against Scanderbeg. From the other side, the Council required to stop him through evoking the past friendship and the promises for a good neighborhood, including an annual reward in money".<sup>39</sup> The conflict ended with a peace agreement in October 1448, but the mistrust on both sides and moments of tension among them continued.

The suspicious stand the Republic of Saint Marc had towards Scanderbeg had another reason. In 1451 the Albanian leader had signed an alliance treaty with the king Alfonso V of Naples who was the biggest rival of the Seignory among the Italian states, but also for expansion and trade in the Adriatic and eastern Mediterranean area. This climate of rivalry was also reflected in the relations between Scanderbeg and each of these two countries. After the death of king Alfonso in 1458, the kingdom of Naples was involved for some years in an internal war for the throne inheritance. Scanderbeg came in aid to his ally, king Ferrante, saved his throne, but the kingdom lost its previous power and influence.

Under these circumstances, Scanderbeg necessitated more help and support for the frequent attacks of the Ottoman armies. Very unlikely to face the Ottoman threat, he in April 1463 made peace with the Sultan Mehmet II. On the other hand, Venice didn't have any big trouble from the weakened traditional rival, the kingdom of Naples. The Republic was now more than ever menaced by the Ottoman danger, considering her possessions in the Albanian shore. This common interest marked a new phase in the Albanian-Venetian relations. Here the Pope Pius II was personally engaged in the organization of the anti-Ottoman crusade.

The Albanian-Venetian approach was crowned with signing of an alliance on August 20, 1463. The agreement had 6 points and was favorable to Scanderbeg. The Republic promised to put under

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<sup>39</sup> J. Radonić. Djuradj Kastriot Scanderbeg. i Arbania u XV veku... Dok. Nr.18; Donald M. Nicol. Byzantium and Venice..., p. 387.

Scanderbeg's command her forces situated in the Venetians possessions in Albania in case of war against the Ottomans, would secure the Albanian and the Dalmatian shores with her ships in time of war, offer Scanderbeg financial support and some privileges, and would never separately sign a peace agreement with the sultan without a preliminary consultation with him.<sup>40</sup> Few days after this agreement, Venice proclaimed war to Turkey.

Marin Barleti, Dhimitër Frangu, etc., Scanderbeg's earlier biographers, have exalted this agreement and in general his relations with Venice. The truth is that in 1463 because of the common sensitivity from the Ottoman threat and the involvement in the anti-Ottoman crusade, the relations had a new development. However, the Republic of San Marco remained loyal to her traditional conjunctural policy. It didn't wholly respect the agreement, withdrew or was engaged depending on the development of the battle front in Albania.

The documents of the time prove that ambassadors of Scanderbeg and his son from 1463-1467 often knocked at the doors of the Great Council, but the assistance was modest. Also, when the information about the Albanian resistance were pessimistic as those of 1466, the high Venetians decision makers, in face of the demands for help, as a document of October 1466 shows, "would better throw the money into the cesspools rather than spending there."<sup>41</sup>

Typical of the Venetian policy, a year later, considering that the situation in Albania was "very bad and dangerous," the Great Council tried to sensitize Rome. It demanded help to the Pope to take the necessary measures warning that "once the Albanian seashore falls (God defend it!) to the enemy, has nothing left but to cross to Italy and whenever it wishes to destroy Christianity from its foundations."<sup>42</sup> Scanderbeg himself warned the popes, Venice and Naples "that couldn't stand to the rampant greed and the blind courage of the barbarians (the Turks-P.M) if all Europe's powers wouldn't agree."<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, Venice and other Italian states even when saw the danger at the door-step gave a little to assistance to Scanderbeg.

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<sup>40</sup> Burime të zgjedhura për historinë e Shqipërisë. Vëllimi II. Shek. VIII – XV. Tiranë, 1962, p. 333 – 336.

<sup>41</sup> J Radoniç. Djuradj Kastriot Scanderbeg. i Arbania u XV veku... Dok. Nr. 336.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. Dok. Nr. 364.

<sup>43</sup> Virgijil Kule. Gjergj Kastriot Skënderbeu. Kryqtari i fundit. OBRA GVG. 2011, p. 474.

Among the Albanians neighbors, only the Republic of Ragusa nourished sympathy and solidarity without interest for their war. Being formally under the sovereignty of the king of Hungary, but in reality, a neutral state, Ragusa helped Scanderbeg made useful services within the possibilities that the small state had. The city had a community of Albanian citizens, from whom had come out distinguished families and with influence, but also high clerics. Here we can mention the Gazulli family who became Scanderbeg's supporting base.

Ragusa served Scanderbeg as a transit center during his movements and of his collaborators to Italy, but also the army who went to assist king Ferrante of Naples. The city very often undertook diplomatic and intermediary missions to the Hungarian kingdom, the Italian and Balkan states on behalf of the Albanian. Also, she raised the voice about the urgent need Scanderbeg had for support. In a letter sent to the Pope Pius II on June 1464, the Sovereign of Ragusa, the Hungarian king Matthias Corvinus expressed his concern: "nobody puts in doubt that he (the Turk-P.M) does not only wish the Epirotes mountains, but will use them as a bridge to crush the whole Christianity."<sup>44</sup>

Albania and Ragusa had economic and trade relations between them. The Albanian merchants exported in Ragusa cereals, salt, meat, wine, leather etc., while imported from that country processed materials and especially textiles.<sup>45</sup> The Ragusans were also good and reliable bankers. Scanderbeg trusted them his money and the aids coming from Italy.

The anti-Ottoman European Christian alliance in national degree should have given to Scanderbeg a greater support and assistance. Not only the fate of Albania, but also that of the European civilization was at stake. There was established a European front in miniature in Albania and in Scanderbeg battle fields. Marin Barleti and other chroniclers of the time noted that in Scanderbeg's army existed "a greater diversity of the nations," Italians, French, Spaniards, Germans, English, Serbs, Dalmatians, etc.<sup>46</sup> The observers had seen in the roads of Albania tens of French knights going to align as crusaders warriors

<sup>44</sup> J. Radoniç. Djuradj Kastriot Scanderbeg. i Arbania u XV veku.... Dok.Nr.271.

<sup>45</sup> Jahja Draçolli. Marrëdhëniet e Gjergj Kastriot Skënderbeut me Republikën e Raguzës in: Skënderbeu dhe Evropa (Papers' summary). Tiranë, 2006, p. 111.

<sup>46</sup> R. P. Duponcet. Histoire de Scanderbeg. Roy d' Albanie. Paris, 1708. M. DCCIX, p. 239, 253; Alphonse de Lamartine. Histoire la Turquie. Tome III. Paris. Librairie du Constitutionnel. 1854, p. 145;

in Scanderbeg's army.<sup>47</sup> Gibbon writes that "the most courageous adventurers of France and Germany were tempted by his fame and put themselves at his service."<sup>48</sup> Evidences show that the German volunteers were the most distinguished soldiers in protection of Kruja, the Scanderbeg's capital, during the first siege from Sultan Murat II in 1450.<sup>49</sup> John of Newport was the most distinguished British soldier. He was also engaged in diplomatic missions. The panoramic view of the European symbolic alliance among the lines of Scanderbeg army becomes more complete when counting that hundreds and thousands of people sent by the kingdom of Naples, Republic of Venice etc., in Albania. All the foreign warriors and also Europe "*saw him as the leader in the holy war for protection of Christianity from the attack of the Islamic invaders.*"<sup>50</sup>

The overwhelming majority of the historians, philosophers, poets and writers who wrote about Scanderbeg during the centuries, agree on one thing: warrior and guardian of the European civilization. There is a long list to be mentioned of epithets given to Scanderbeg, even excluding the Albanian ones. Scanderbeg it's not only the national hero of Albanians, but also an asset to the European civilization and its pride.

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<sup>47</sup> C. Marinesco. Alphonse V, roi d'Aragon et de Naples et l'Albanie de Scanderbeg... p. 107, 130; Francisc Pall. Skënderbeu dhe Huniadi... p. 86; Aurel Plasari. Arbëria e Skënderbeut dhe Burgundi i Filip – të mirit; in: Skënderbeu dhe Evropa (Papers' summary) ... p. 137; Virgjil Kule. Gjergj Kastriot Skënderbeu. Kryqtari i fundit... p. 224.

<sup>48</sup> Edward Gibbon. The history of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire... Vol.VIII, p. 173.

<sup>49</sup> Johannes Irmscher. Skënderbeu dhe Gjermania, in: Konferenca e Dytë e Studimeve Albanologjike (12-18 January 1968) ..., p. 552.

<sup>50</sup> A. K. Brackob. Scanderbeg. A. History of George Castriota and the Albanian Resistance to Islamic Expansion in fifteenth Century Europe..., p. 187.