

SURRENDER OF SHKODRA**History**

Keywords: Surrender of Shkodra, Esat Pasha Toptani, Hasan Riza Pasha, Surrender of Shkodra, Conference of Ambassadors in London, Foreign Press.

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Abstract

In this paper we will tackle the position Shkodra in the time frame 20 October 1912 - 13 May 1913, the war for defending Shkodra, 1912-1913, is among the most difficult wars for the Albanian people to defend the territorial integrity, as well as a stage of the glorious history of Albania, which in terms of duration in a six-month Serbian-Montenegrin siege, constitutes the most unique case of the heroic resistance of Albanians in the First Balkan War, defending Shkodra, was being held by Hasan Riza Pasha and Esat Pasha Toptani, but Esat Pasha in an agreement with the Montenegrins surrendered the city of Shkodra to the hands of the Montenegrins. The Shkodra capitulation agreement was implemented on the night of 22-23 April 1913, when the first lines of Montenegrin troops entered the city. However, the occupation of Shkodra by Montenegro did not affect the decision of the Conference of Ambassadors, as it had at that time opened talks on Shkodra, where it was widely debated for the city, and due to the stubbornness of King Nikolla (Krajl Nikolla) did not intend to reject their consensus reached on the border issue. As a result, the city of Shkodra was emptied, thus passing to the Powers represented by the commanders of the international naval forces, under the command of the vice admiral of the fleet, Sesil Bèrni, as a representative of the Conference of Ambassadors. He stated that the flags of the five Great Powers (Austria, England, France, Germany and Italy) would be flown over the castle until an autonomous government was established in Albania.

1. Surrender of Shkodra by Esat Pasha Toptani

For the Albanian people, as for all other peoples of the Balkans, the nineteenth century marked a new era in its history, that of the National Renaissance. During this century numerous national movements were organized which inevitably led to the liberation of the peoples from the rule of the Ottoman Empire and to the creation of independent states. Albania (which stretched over four Vilayets) was the last place on the Balkan Peninsula to secede from the five-century-old Ottoman yoke, which eventually erupted after the war against the Young Turks with the organization of the 1912 General Uprising. It is well known that the decision for the General Uprising was taken by a group of Albanian personalities at a meeting held in Istanbul. The meeting was held in the middle of January 1912 under the chairmanship of Ismail Qemali, in the house of Syrja Vlora in the Taksim neighbourhood of Istanbul. Besides Ismail Qemali, the meeting was attended by: Hasan Prishtina, Syrja Vlora, Myfit Libohova, Esat Toptani, Aziz Vrioni, Bedri Pejani, Mustafa Kruja and others¹.

After much discussion about all the organizational aspects of the armed battle in the entire Albanian ethnic group, it was decided that the general uprising should start in the north-eastern part of Albania (in the Vilayet of Kosovo) and then spread to all other areas. Hasan Prishtina had taken over the organization of the uprising. Esat Pasha Toptani had promised to organize the uprising in Central Albania and Miredita, Myfit Libohova, Aziz Vrioni and Syrja Vlora with an

¹ Demiri, G. (Ratkoceri). The Albanian Uprising of 1912. Tirana 1997, p.11.

uprising in southern Albania while Ismail Qemali had undertaken to provide material assistance from the Albanian colonies in exile and diplomatic support from European states.²

From the Taksim meeting, not all participants had fulfilled their commitments, excluding Hasan Prishtina and Ismail Qemal, some others with their actions had severely damaged the armed liberation uprising. Esat Pasha Toptani did the most damage to them in the Albanian uprising. Despite the negative connotation that accompanies this personality, it is the duty and obligation of Albanian historiography to pay more attention to Esat Pasha Toptan because in this way we would gain the most complete picture of Shkodra's resistance in the Balkan War.³

When the Balkan War broke out, Shkodra was the largest Albanian city with a population of 36,000 and was an important political, military, commercial and cultural centre of the Balkans,⁴ and was the only bastion of the Ottoman Empire that had remained undefeated.⁵ Meanwhile, Montenegro was the first Balkan country to declare war on the Ottoman Empire, and the main goal of the war was to take Shkodra and Peja. However, long before the start of the First Balkan War, Serbia and Montenegro had expressed their annexationist intentions to the territories of Albanian lands, and even the Montenegrin king had submitted the issue of annexation of northern Albania to the Austro-Hungarian ambassador, where it had proposed that it would make his army available against all, with the exception of Serbia and Russia, demanding that when Turkey be liquidated, that Montenegro be given northern Albania, even if it were under the Austro-Hungarian protectorate.

As a result of this territorial greed, the project presented by the Montenegrin government included Shkodra, Durres and an independent state would be created, which according to the Austro-Hungarian model, would enter into a real union with Montenegro.⁶ Thus, on 11 October, Montenegro launched a military offensive in the direction of Shkodra and kept it under siege until April 1913.⁷ During this time, Shkodra was surrendered to the Montenegrins by Esat Pasha Toptani.

The beginning of the Balkan war finds Esat Pasha in southern Albania, which later formed his "private army".⁸ For a short time, Esat was an assistant or deputy to General Hasan Riza Pasha, who was the governing and governor of the Shkodra Vilayet, also known as the "heroic defender" of Shkodra from the siege and attacks of Montenegro, which until 30 January 1913 was the

² Ibid. p.11

³ Bulletin of the Faculty of Philosophy XXIV / 1994: Dr. Gazmend Rizaj "Hasan Riza Pasha and the defense of Shkodra 1912-1913" p.140

⁴ Gashi, I. (2012). Independence of Albania and the Consequences of the First Balkan War 1912-1913. Prishtina, p. 116.

⁵ Gurakuqi, R. (2012). Albania 1911-1914. Tirana: UET Press, p.556

⁶ HHStA, PA, A, in AIH, follows. 22-1-165; Zambaur for Berchtold, Shkodra, 28 October 1912.

⁷ HHStA, PA, A, in AIH, follows. 22-1-165; Zambaur for Berchtold, Shkodra, 28 October 1912.

⁸ Zenelaj, E. (2010). The Albanian Question from the Perspective of Diplomacy and Geopolitics of Austria-Hungary (1699-1918). Prishtina 2010, p.408.

commander of the defence of Shkodra.⁹ He already knew that this territory would no longer belong to the Ottoman Empire, as its fate in the western part of the Balkans was closing once and for all, but he struggled not to give up in the face of Balkan forces and at the same time sought to emerge armed and without his army being touched,¹⁰ yet thanks to him the city continued to stand.¹¹ Riza Pasha was not fortunate enough to endure this battle to the end because in the night of 30 January 1913, he was assassinated. For the heroism of the Turkish general in the defence of Shkodra, the Arbëresh officer Eugenio Vaina, at that time, would write: “to this Turkish general, one day independent Albania should to make a monument honouring him”.¹²

After his assassination, Esat Pasha Toptani was appointed commander and governor of Shkodra. Many authors say that under the command of Esat Pasha Toptan, the bloodiest battles for the defence of Shkodra took place, where about 4500 Turkish soldiers and 20000 Albanian reservists (redif), 4000 of whom from Dibra, resisted 60,000 Montenegrin and Serbian soldiers. and defended the civilian population of the city, their resistance that forced the Great Powers, in the meeting of 22 March 1913 to include Shkodra within the borders of the Albanian state,¹³ where the whole discussion of the Shkodra problem at the Conference took place in circumstances when this the city was surrounded by an iron door by Montenegrin and Serbian troops.

1.2 Shkodra at the Conference of Ambassadors in London

The controversial issues related to Shkodra at the Conference of Ambassadors in London had to do with: first, whether Shkodra should remain in the new Albanian state or should it be given to Montenegro; secondly, if Shkodra were to be remain with Albania, Austria's desire to make this city the capital of the new state had to be avoided; third, if this city were to be given to Montenegro, would this small state be able to manage such a large¹⁴ and purely ethnic Albanian city of the two main religious denominations different from the Montenegrins; fourth, in the case

⁹ The commander of the Shkodra forces was Colonel Hasan Riza Bey (formerly named Hasan Riza Pasha), considered intelligent and impartial, and realizing that the Albanians (upset by the Turkish regime) would help the Montenegrins, he designed the project to raise the Albanian flag at the Shkodra Castle in order to group the Albanians and make them to march against the Slavic aggressor or at least to ensure their neutrality. In fact, the independence of Albania was declared in Vlora (28 November 1912) and it was a matter of convincing the highlanders (highlanders of the Shkodra suburbs) that the issue of this city was their issue. At the moment when Hasan Riza was going to implement this project and that he was ready to deal with the highlanders, he was killed in the evening in front of Esat Toptan's house, where he had just been for dinner. The killer was Osman Bali, a servant and loyal man of Esat. (Frashëri, Mit'hat, Albanian Quisling Esat Pasha Toptani. (Quoted according to Xhafer Shatri. See at: <https://xhafershatri.info/kuislingu-shqiptar-esat-pashe-toptani>

¹⁰ Puto, A. (1978). *Albanian Independence and the Diplomacy of the Great Powers (1912-1914)*. Tirana: 8 November, p.207.

¹¹ Gurakuqi, R. (2012). *Albania 1911-1914*. Tirana: UET Press, p.556

¹² Vaina, E. (1917). *La Nazione Albanese*, Catania 1917, p.89

¹³ For more see the authors' publications: Hortense von Zambaur; Father Justin Rrota, Gino Berri, “Assedio di Scutari”, Milan 1913; “L’agonia e la fine di Scutari”; Vico Montegazza, “Questione di Politica Estera, (La guerra balcanica)”, Milan 1914; P. Domenico Facin O.F.M. “I Frati Minor e Le Suore Stimatine durante L’Assedio di Scutari”, Florence 1913; Hamdi Ertuna, “The Defense of Shkodra and Hasan Riza Pasha”, Tirana 2006.

¹⁴ Gurakuqi, R. *The Shkodra issue at the Conference of Ambassadors 1912-1913 until the moment of it surrender to Montenegro (according to British diplomatic documents)*, p.2

of a separate compromise on Shkodra, what connection would there be between the city itself, Shkodra Lowland, Malësia, Tarabosh and the hydrological flow of Lake Buna and Drini.¹⁵

As a result of these talks, on 20 December 1912, the six powers agreed to create an autonomous (virtually independent) Albania and to guarantee Serbia access to the Adriatic.¹⁶ This confused the plans of Austria-Hungary, whose main goal was to end the siege of Shkodra by the Montenegrins, so that Vienna could turn this city with a large Catholic population into an advanced strategic post of the Habsburg power in the southern Balkans.¹⁷

At the insistence of the Austro-Hungarians, the discussion of the Shkodra issue took place on 22 January 1913.¹⁸ With the resumption of talks, the Shkodra problem at the Conference was closely linked to the treatment of Albania's eastern border. For months until the final settlement, a real diplomatic war will be waged between Austria-Hungary and Russia, with judges ready to make any compromises with Britain and Germany, and Russia's reserve players under versatile pressure, France and Italy. The Shkodra problem has been one of the most complex issues to emerge, that is, two phenomena within the political-military alliances before World War I: first in the Tripartite Alliance, where Italy was a sure partner for the basic Austro-German axis, and secondly within the Entente there was a power which, although bound by contractual political obligations within the Entente and with Russia, would not always be guided by them but would also take into account the democratic criteria and norms of the historical-cultural rights of the peoples in question, this state was the United Kingdom of Great Britain.¹⁹ Russia at the conference brought as an argument the siege of Shkodra from Montenegro "Nikolla delicate position, who was in danger of losing his throne if this request was not accepted."²⁰ Meanwhile, the Austro-Hungarian government opposed this request, saying that: Shkodra is an essentially Albanian city.²¹ However, during the ongoing talks, Russia began to soften its stance, and now it was up to Montenegro to release Shkodra for good, but this was in the background that after the surrender of the city, Russia calculated that it would benefit from a territorial consensus for Montenegro as compensation for the release of Shkodra.²²

During March, the commission's desire to end the settlement of the Shkodra issue as soon as possible was increased, there were controversial discussions on this issue, and finally it was agreed that Belgrade and Cetina should be notified that Shkodra belongs to Albania. Of course, this omission was conditioned by several points: Guarantee given by other Powers that the northern and north-eastern border of Albania will be established in accordance with our line (including our views on Buna and Lake Shkodra), that the immediate occupation of hostilities and

¹⁵ Ibid. p.2

¹⁶ Glenny, M. (2000). *History of the Balkans 1804-1999, Nationalism, Wars and Great Powers*. Tirana, 2000), p. 242.

¹⁷ Ibid. p.242.

¹⁸ Puto, A. *Albanian independence...*, p.176.

¹⁹ Gurakuqi, R. *op.cit.* p.2.

²⁰ Puto, A. *Albanian independence...*, p.176

²¹ *British Documents on the Albanian Issue, 1912-1913...*, p.234, Sir G. Edward Gray for Sir F. Cartwright, Foreign Office, 22 January 1912.

²² Puto, A. (1978). *Albanian Independence and the Diplomacy of the Great Powers, 1912-1914*. Tirana, 1978, p.139.

the rapid evacuation by Serbia and Montenegro of certain territories of Albania to be sought and secured by the representatives of the six Powers in Belgrade and Cetina.²³ After very long negotiations, the Great Powers on 22 March 1913 ordered the Montenegrin army to withdraw from Shkodra.

While the Great Powers were wondering about military intervention to force Cetina (the capital of Montenegro) to submit to their will, Austria-Hungary was convinced that Esat Pasha had made a secret connection with Montenegro to surrender Shkodra and that he had kept his promise to them.²⁴ Also, according to the researcher Sh.Berisha, Esat Pasha had already handed over the keys of the city of Shkodra to Montenegro.²⁵

This suspicion that Austria-Hungary had did not take long and became known. On 23 April, Esat Pasha, the commander of the Turkish garrison defending the city, handed over the keys of Shkodra to the King Nikolla in a miserable ceremony at 'Neptune', a shipwreck on Lake Shkodra. The general opinion, but never conclusively proven, is that Esat pocketed a good amount of money from the Montenegrins,²⁶ and even Toptan's condition for the surrender of Shkodra was the withdrawal of all military troops (Ottoman and Albanian) as well as the weapons and ammunition available from the city of Shkodra,²⁷ also he had been promised by Montenegro and Serbia that if he surrendered the city of Shkodra he would have their support to become the prince of Central Albania despite the decisions of the Powers.²⁸

Karl Gurakuqi also writes about the surrender of Shkodra, which was made to Montenegro by Esat, as a witness of the time, in his memoirs: "After many talks that lasted several good weeks, between Esat and Dabil's envoys, which took place at the Buna Bridge, Shkodra was handed over to the Montenegrins on 23 April 1913 under the following conditions: Montenegro paid Esat and counted 2,000,000 (two million) gold coins in his hand. Esat's principedom over Central Albania was recognized from the Mat River to the Vjosa, Esat was given the right to leave Shkodra with the whole army, taking with him all the weapons and ammunition, Montenegro's right to occupy Shkodra was recognized²⁹. The hopes of the compatriots to see the flag of the Scanderbeg in the fortress of Shkodra were dashed to wait for better times. The foot of skja (Serbian) stepped on arbnore (Albanian) land!³⁰

The Shkodra capitulation agreement was implemented on the night of 22-23 April 1913, when the first line of Montenegrin troops entered the city. Esat Pasha withdrew to Central Albania

²³ British documents on the Albanian issue..., p.358, Sir Eduar Grey for Sir G.Buchanan, Foreign Office, 22 March 1913

²⁴ Zenelaj, E. (2010). The Albanian issue from the point of view of diplomacy and geopolitics of Austria-Hungary (1699-1918), Practical exercise of the cult protectorate in Albania (1916-1918). Prishtina, p.413.

²⁵ Berisha, Sh. (2014). Esat Pasha Toptani's anti-national activity 1912-1920. Prishtina, p.7.

²⁶ Jasques, E. op.cit.p.242

²⁷ Rizaj, G. (2011). Upper Albania 1800-1913, Prishtina: Albanological Institute, 2011, p.411.

²⁸ ibidem.

²⁹ Gurakuqi, K. Not to be forgotten (manuscript). The author describes the efforts of the compatriots in collaboration with Hasan Riza to hand over Shkodra to the Provisional Government of Vlora through Austria.

³⁰ op.cit. Karl Gurakuqi.

in Tirana with the garrison forces composed of Turks and Albanians,³¹ although this situation was contrary to the decision of the Great Powers, yet they were insistent on the annexation of the city of Shkodra and never was subject to the decision of the Powers.³²

However, the occupation of Shkodra by Montenegro did not affect the decision of the Conference of Ambassadors, they had long debated about Shkodra and due to the stubbornness of Krajl (King) Nikolla did not intend to throw away the consensus reached on the border issue. As a result, the city of Shkodra was emptied, thus passing to the Powers represented by the commanders of the international naval forces, under the command of the vice admiral of the fleet, Sesil Bërni, as a representative of the Conference of Ambassadors. He stated that the flags of the five Great Powers (Austria, England, France, Germany and Italy) would be flown over the castle until an autonomous government would be established in Albania.³³ After pressure from Austria-Hungary, and even threatened militarily³⁴, Cetina was forced to give up Shkodra and began withdrawing its troops on 13 May 1913. With the end of the Shkodra crisis, the proceedings of the Conference on the border issue pretty much ended. Thus, the internal developments of the Balkan Alliance for the Albanian territories, on which would get more land, were shaken even though “on 26 March Krajl (King) Nikolla called the princes and generals to a meeting and from there announced that Montenegro would lead the war to the end”.³⁵ However, no one can say for sure why Shkodra surrendered. The surrender of Shkodra seems to ruin all the calculations of the great powers for a peaceful solution of the Albanian issue.

1.3 Surrender of Shkodra According to the Press

The fight for the protection of Shkodra occupies a special place in the Albanian and foreign historiography, also many articles have been written in the newspapers of the time and diaries by the witnesses of this event. Since Shkodra and its environs were populated by Catholic and Muslim Albanians, most of the Albanian Muslim population, and not only that of Shkodra and its environs, joined in defending Shkodra. Shkodra resident Hil Mosi, who acted as a freedom fighter³⁶ against the Ottoman army in 1911, disagreed with his former comrades-in-arms who were linked with Montenegro, as a result of which he did not take an active part in the fighting about Shkodra. When defending Shkodra, Hil Mosi stayed in Cetine. There, on 3 November 1912, he wrote a poem which he later published in a collection of his poems. At the end of the page of that

³¹ Vllamasi, S. (1995). *Political confrontations in Albania (1897-1942)*, prepared for publication by Marenglen Verli, Tirana, p.58.

³² *History of the Albanian People*, Vol.III..., p.36.

³³ Jasques, E. *op.cit.*p.378.

³⁴ Shatri, M. *British Documents on the Albanian Issue at the Conference of Ambassadors in London 1912-1913*, Center for Albanological Studies, Institute of History - Tirana, p. 474.

³⁵ *History of the Albanian People*, Vol.III..., p.36.

³⁶ The rebellious mountaineer and fought for the freedom of the homeland and for social justice against oppressors and exploiters. Freedom-fighters squad. Doli komit.

poem, he gives the following testimony: “When I wrote this poem, some of us, caught up in the lying promises of Montenegro, went and helped them.”³⁷

Hil Mosi did not change his position until the end of the war and therefore a few months later, while he was in Trieste on 27 March 1913, he dedicated a poem to Shkodra, which was defended from the invasion of the Serbs, with the following content:

*Glory be to you, O Shkodra of our arbnore,
You are the new honour and fame of all Albania!
[...] Although Serbians (Skja) attacked you heavily
On all four sides hitting you with cannons and rifles,
You did not want to know what weakness was.*³⁸

Gjergj Fishta in his work “The Highland Lute” does not mention the history of the siege of Shkodra during the Balkan War. Fishta changes this omission when he publishes the verses about Esat Pasha and his "heroism" in another of his summaries that can be found below:

*Don't 'allow' Toptan, with your sword obey,
A good century on that Tarabosh peak!
Return the sword sharp, and lead the people again
Sitting in the ingle is not accepted, not even procurer
Gather toske and Lape, and today for Albania
Stand, like you stood once with bravery.*³⁹

In the newspaper “Përlindja e Shqipërisë”, a body of the Provisional Government of Vlora, Mihal Grameno wrote: “...You fought with dragons' you honoured Albania and you honoured the name of Scanderbeg! To give a reward for a warrior could not be done and it has never been done! It is true that Albania could not crown with the golden crown, because it was invaded by the enemies, but it kept that crown and when that joyful day arrives it would crown them as it should be done by telling the whole of Albania who Esat Pasha Toptani is!...”.⁴⁰

Also, the international press played a special role in this historic event for Albanians, where it is worth mentioning the newspaper ‘Times’, with the reports it made about the defence and the agreement for Shkodra, caused a stir in the West. However, 28 April 1913 was the date when almost all international newspapers reported on the agreement, as follows:

The ‘Evening Post’ wrote: Esat Pasha had made a big reception in Alessio che Adadar, there were many shooters at the festivity, it was reported in Belgrade that Serbia was one of the parties in implementing Esat Pasha's plan to hand over Shkodra to Montenegrins. King Nikolla had already

³⁷ Mosi, H. (1913). *Homeland Voice, Trieste Freedom-fighters*. P.62.

³⁸ *ibidem*, p.85.

³⁹ Fishta, Gj. (1941). *Lyrics: The pride of the fairies and Dance of Paris (Vallja e Parrizit)*, Shkodra.

⁴⁰ “The Birth of Albania”, 2 first autumn 1913; Mihal Grameno's open letter to Esat Toptan.

transported heavy weapons to the mountains of Shkodra overlooking the Austrian border.⁴¹ ‘The Argus’ newspaper also writes that, according to the agreement between Esat Pasha and King Nikolla, it has been reported that Montenegro will keep Tarabosh in which the main forts of Shkodra are located, and the Bojana⁴² river valley where the city of Shkodra becomes Albanian. The fact that Esat Pasha has had success in the Albanian tribes has thus ensured his proclamation as king.⁴³

Newspapers gave importance to telegrams coming from Vienna, as Austria-Hungary was directly involved, telegrams which were inspired by Count Von Berchtold, the Foreign Minister who threatened that if the Conference of Ambassadors in London did not recommend the rapid tightening of the evacuation of Montenegrins from Shkodra, then Austria-Hungary will at any time take independent measures.⁴⁴ The newspaper "*The Lokal Anzeiger's Vienna*" reported that a warning note was sent to the Great Powers of the purposes of Austria. He reports that he met with a high-ranking Austrian official who said: In four days we will be in Tivar.⁴⁵

‘The Vossische Zeitung’s Trieste’ in Berlin wrote that the navy had sailed with 10,000 troops to capture Tivar and Ulcinj.

‘Evening Post’ reported that official bodies declare that a European mandate is unnecessary. Austria is acting as a reluctant and loyal executor of Europe’s will. Diplomats are convinced that Austria will be left alone to move, none of the other Powers will favour it.⁴⁶

Also, last messages still show an official optimism about the vitality of the European Concert. Russia is verbally friendly and has advised Austria to refrain from actions, as it remains convinced that King Nikolla will respect Europe's desires for the issue of occupation of Shkodra. Emperor Francis Joseph has shown political ability by playing a major role in maintaining a certain policy. Representatives of the Cetinje Powers, including the Russian minister, have submitted a request for Shkodra's assessment, the London newspaper reported on 28 April:⁴⁷

⁴¹ Evening Post, Volume LXXXV, Issue 100, date. 29 April 1913, p.8.

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/neēpapers/EP19130429.2.63>, last seen, 10 October 2014.

⁴² Newspaper “The Argus”, date. 29 April 1913

<https://www.google.com/search?q=Articles+on+%EF%BB%BFESad+pasha++site:news.google.com/newspapers>, last seen, 1 October 2014.

⁴³ Ibidem.

⁴⁴ Newspaper “The Vossische Zeitung's Trieste”, date 28 April 1913.

<https://www.google.com/search?q=Articles+on+%EF%BB%BFESat+Toptani+site:news.google.com/newspapers> last seen, 5 October 2014.

⁴⁵ Ibidem.

⁴⁶ Evening Post, Volume LXXXV, Issue 100, date. 29 April 1913, p.8.

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/EP19130429.2.63>.

⁴⁷ Newspaper “The Lewiston Daily Sun”, date. 28 April 1913.

<https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=t7kgAAAIBAJ&sjid=mWkFAAAAIBAJ&pg=1563%2C6523679>

‘The Lewiston Daily Sun’ reported: In a telegram written by Sir F. Cartwright to Sir Edward Grey,⁴⁸ among other things was written, he explains that he talked to the Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs about the intervention of the Austrian state in Shkodra: “I asked him if Austria would act alone and would continue to occupy Shkodra, would it raise the Austrian flag in that city while the Albanian government was being formed, or would it invite the Powers to send wards to temporarily hold the city and wave its flags. He said he had not considered the matter but understood that it was something to think about.”⁴⁹

The British also wrote about the situation in Shkodra after the end of the fighting. Colonel Sir Rankin, who was a war correspondent, wrote: “Shkodra at that time was probably not a suitable place to live. When the Montenegrins entered, they found all the inhabitants exhausted. Most of the lower class had died of starvation, the hospital was in cruel conditions while the temporary hospital in the bombed area was filled with unburied corpses. Esat had not dared to take to the streets for several days as he was followed by hungry crowds begging him for bread or capitulation”.⁵⁰

Regarding the fight for Shkodra, many local and foreign historians have been involved. Thanks to them, we have a wider picture of the political, economic and social situation during this period.

Conclusion

During the First Balkan War in 1912-1913, Shkodra was Montenegro's main target. Shkodra remained under siege for six months by Montenegrin forces. After the assassination of Hasan Riza Pasha, it was not long before Esat Pasha, in an agreement with the Montenegrins, handed over the city of Shkodra to the Montenegrins. It can be concluded that Esat Pasha himself benefited from this murder and after that murder he took the wheel in his hand to protect Shkodra. Some authors argue that Esat had surrendered the city because there were people dying every day as a lack of food, but Austro-Hungarian diplomacy testifies that Esat had agreed to surrender the city and in exchange leave with his soldiers, weapons and a large sum of money. However, it can be suggested that the reasons that lead Esat to the surrender of Shkodra were personal in nature because then he intended to become the god of Central Albania and rightly so Edith Durham says: “that the lands of southern Albania and the northern ones were not in his interest because he was interested in Central Albania”.

⁴⁸ Grey, E. (25 April 1862-7 September 1933), better known as Sir Edward Gray, was a British statesman. He served as the Foreign Secretary of State from 1905-1916. He was ambassador to the United States between 1919 and 1920 and leader of the Liberal Party in the House of Lords between 1923 and 1924.

⁴⁹ Newspaper “The Lewiston Daily Sun”, date. 28 April 1913.

<https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=IbQgAAAAIABAJ&sjid=bWkFAAAAIAIAJ&pg=1102%2C1012590>

⁵⁰ Rankin, S. (2007). *The inner history of Balkan Wars* London 1914, [Translated from English by the author: Frymëzim Dauti]. Tirana, p.227.

On 22 January 1913, the issue of Shkodra was raised for discussion. Russia brought as an argument the siege of Shkodra by Montenegro, the delicate position of Nikolla, who was in danger of losing the throne if this request was not accepted, but Austria-Hungary argued that Shkodra was an essentially Albanian city. Montenegro, however, insisted on the annexation of the city of Shkodra. On 26 March 1912, Nikolla summoned the princes and generals to a meeting and informed them that Montenegro would lead the war to the end. But the London Conference on 22 March 1913, had decided on the border line between Serbia and Montenegro and Albania and had determined that Shkodra would belong to Albania.

The occupation of Shkodra by Montenegro did not affect the decision of the Conference of Ambassadors, they had long debated about Shkodra and due to the stubbornness of Krajl (King) Nikolla did not intend to throw away the consensus reached on the border issue. As a result, the city of Shkodra was emptied, thus passing to the Powers represented by the commanders of the international naval forces, under the command of the vice admiral of the fleet, Sesil Bërni, as a representative of the Conference of Ambassadors. He stated that the flags of the five Great Powers (Austria, England, France, Germany and Italy) would be flown over the castle until an autonomous government was established in Albania.

This heroic defence of Shkodra had a great echo in the press and the chancelleries of the great European powers, the battle would become one of the most famous of the time, the news on the siege took place in all major Western newspapers, while Hasan Riza Pasha Esat Pasha Toptani became well-known figures, while diplomats announced that the surrender was based on a bargain between Esat Pasha and the Montenegrins.

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