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ITALIAN POLICY IN ALBANIA, 1894-1943

The Straits of Otranto which separate Albania and southern Italy by forty miles of Adriatic Sea have always served more as a bridge than a barrier, providing escape, a cultural span and a convenient invasion route. The proximity between the two areas facilitated numerous connections including classical contacts and the establishment of large Albanian colonies in southern Italy following the defeat of Skenderbeg, the 15th century Albanian national hero. During the last quarter of the 19th century more active Italian interest transformed these occasional encounters into increasingly significant involvement, eventually culminating in the invasion and annexation of Albania during the waning years of Mussolini's regime.

Italian interest in Albania during the 19th and 20th centuries was expressed in erratic terms fluctuating from neglect to furious, often ill-planned and badly executed activity. Despite the enigmatic nature of the connection, a pattern of policy emerges and with it a number of individuals who, if not completely responsible for the policy, certainly mirror its direction and intent. This policy can be roughly divided into three stages. The first stage consists of the cultural contribution of the Italo-Albanians best exemplified by the active involvement of Anselmo Lorrecchio, a lawyer and publicist who dedicated his boundless energies to the awakening of his co-nationals across the Adriatic.

Lorrecchio and the Italo-Albanians, activated primarily by Italian unification and the renewed European interest in linguistics, initiated a dynamic cultural movement based upon the revival of Albanian history, language and folklore. Lorrecchio hoped to encourage a similar cultural awakening among indigenous Albanians by establishing contacts with Albanian patriots. To facilitate this plan, Lorrecchio, with Shiro and DeRada, organized a series of linguistic congresses in 1895 and 1897 pledged to the establishment of a united alphabet, a dictionary, to the formation of an Albanian national society and the opening of large scale relations with Albanians in the homeland¹.

1. Stavro Skendi, "Albanian Political Thought and Revolutionary Activity, 1881-1912" *Südost-Forschungen* (vol. 13, 1954), p. 170.

In the newspaper, *La Nazione Albanese*, which Lorrecchio organized to complement the congress, he proclaimed that "we are in Italy 200,000 Albanians dispersed in the fertile land of Sicily and the southern provinces...in order to relate the happy memories of our greatness...it is necessary that we understand each other through writing"².

Lorrecchio also argued for Albanian unity on various different levels. First he called for unity among indigenous Albanians urging them to "...not believe all the false ministers of religion who have made use of the names of Christ and Mohammed in order to keep us divided. God and Allah, Mohammed and Christ point out to us only one road; to keep our fatherland united and respected"³. As a politically astute individual, the Italo-Albanian lawyer recognized the importance of cultural, religious and linguistic unity before any further step could be accomplished. Once the discussion of what direction that further step should take began to occupy the collective energy of the Italo-Albanians, rifts began to appear not only within the community in Italy, but also among the Italo-Albanians on one side and the indigenous Albanians on the other.

Although Lorrecchio's movement started strictly on the cultural plane, by 1897 politics had been added to the agenda. Two schools of thought quickly developed with the more radical under G. Shiro advocating immediate independence for Albania. Shiro postulated that since Turkey would not grant Albania its independence and since piecemeal concessions would never achieve the desired result, revolution remained the only alternative⁴. Towards this end the radicals raised money and recruits under the leadership of General G. Garibaldi.

Lorrecchio, like many indigenous Albanian leaders, pursued a more moderate course⁵. Aside from adhorring bloodshed he argued that "either the revolution will be victorious (and do you believe that the Albanians are in a condition to constitute an independent State?) and then the consequences are evident. Or the revolution will be suppressed and suffocated and in such a case it is still worse"⁶. More significantly, he feared that a revolution would most likely lead to European intervention and a possible division of Albanian

2. Stavro Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening 1878-1912* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 217.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*, p. 222.

5. Leften Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1958), pp. 507-508.

6. Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, p. 224.

lands in the process. On the strength of these arguments Lorrecchio opted instead to support a program of reform and autonomy⁷. His plan, which he expected the Italian government and the governments of other powers to fully support, included a call for internal regulation which would enable Albanians to establish contact with the civilized world. This contact was eventually to be extended into some sort of unity with the Italo-Albanians.

Many indigenous patriots who had warmly welcomed Italo-Albanian cultural achievements became suspicious as political activity increased. Faik Konitza, a leader in the national movement, questioned whether Garibaldi could see Albanian interests the way Albanians could see them. He pointed out that Garibaldi had also helped defend Greek claims to northern Albania and had announced his intention to fight for Macedonian interests which often conflicted with those of the Albanians. Konitza saved most of his eloquence for a sustained literary barrage against Lorrecchio and the *La Nazione Albanese*. He objected to Italo-Albanian political moves because their "blood had been mixed and their language corrupted", but more importantly because they were, first and foremost, Italian citizens and worked closely with the Italian government. Konitza was particularly contemptuous of Lorrecchio's planned unity which in Konitza's mind meant one of three things: "either the Albanians of Italy wanted to annex Calabria and Sicily to Albania, or they wanted to annex Albania to Calabria and Sicily or they wanted to rise and immigrate en masse to Albania"⁸.

Despite this increasing distrust near the end of the century, the contribution of Lorrecchio and the Italo-Albanians was very positive. Their activity had worked as a strong incentive for the national movement in Albania which might otherwise have been considerably delayed. Equally as important, the Italo-Albanians mobilized Italian public opinion against the efforts of powers hostile to the interest of Italy in Albania, thereby raising the Albanian question in Europe. Interest was aroused even at the highest levels. William II of Germany complained at one point that Albania had hypnotized Victor Emmanuel of Italy, that he knew all about every man, rifle and cartridge in the country and that he could quote the names of all the Albanian brigand chiefs⁹.

Political involvement on the part of the Italo-Albanians was coordinated with and quickly superseded by the rapid development of official Italian

7. Skendi, "Albanian Political Thought and Revolutionary Activity, 1881-1912", pp. 171-172.

8. Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, p. 279.

9. Christopher Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism 1870-1925* (London: Methuen and Co., 1967), pp. 336-337.

government interest in Albania. This second stage of Italian involvement became serious only with the advent of Francesco Crispi as prime minister in 1879. Before 1875 Italy was generally indifferent to foreign affairs and spent most of its energies dealing with the problems of unification and its aftermath. This attitude was best expressed by Prime Minister Agostino Depretis in 1875 who stated, "When I see an international question on the horizon, I open my umbrella till it has passed"¹⁰. This soon changed, however, with the advent of more internationally minded leaders and the Balkan crisis of 1875-1878, which emphasized the weakness of the Ottoman Empire.

The Italian government had an obvious strategic interest in Albania since its occupation would ensure any power complete control of the Adriatic. Italian naval specialists eyed Vlorë with more than a little interest since Venice and Brindisi were considered insufficient for Italy's purposes, leaving Italy with no suitable base for naval operations on its west coast¹¹. As long as this strategic position remained in the hands of the Ottoman Empire, Italy was satisfied. As soon as the future of the empire in Europe was seriously questioned, official Italy had to abandon its disinterest in foreign affairs for it could not afford to leave the future of Albania to chance or worse, to the Austrians.

Francesco Crispi, who possessed the same active aggressive temperament as Lorrecchio, was primarily responsible for the construction of what seemed to be a new active policy. He announced dramatically that "there are some who for 27 years were inclined to believe that Italy was forced to wait upon a word from Paris or Berlin. But the day came when the man arose who believed that Italy was the equal of all nations and who intended to make Italy's words heard and respected"¹². While Crispi supported his image of energy with his demagogic public utterances, his actual policy was often prudent and even hesitant. Although he boldly announced that the aim of Italian policy was the liberation of the suppressed nationalities, his actual policy strove for the political status-quo in Albania¹³.

His conspiratorial temper and the fact that Austria was moving on the cultural and economic plane, however, convinced him that efforts must be

10. Luigi Villari, *Italy* (London: E. Benn, 1929), p. 164.

11. Christo Dako, *Albania* (Boston: E. L. Crimes and Company, 1919), p. 104 and E. J. P. Dillion, "Albania" *Contemporary Review* (July 1914), p. 125.

12. Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism*, p. 132.

13. C. J. Lowe and F. Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy 1870-1940* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 53.

made to increase Italian prestige in Albania. What ensued became known as the *furor consularis*, a desperate attempt to outdo the Austrians in the cultural and economic fields. Crispi was fond of maintaining that "I do not understand modest policies", and the course which he initiated does justice to this statement¹⁴. At one point Lorrecchio was driven to proclaim that "the Italians with their mania to found schools, new consulates and new commercial agencies in Albania, regarded this land as an Italian province", and this resulted in Albanian distrust of Italo-Albanians and Italians in general¹⁵.

Rather than attract more support, the furious Italian activity turned away many Albanian patriots who had previously regarded Italy as the last hope. Ismail Kemal Bey, the most far sighted patriot during the period of independence and initially a supporter of Italy, told the Austrian ambassador in Paris shortly before independence that he had finally come to the conclusion that Austria-Hungary was the only real defender of Albanian interests¹⁶.

Anti-Italian feeling became even more widespread as Crispi's status-quo policy ceased to be practiced when European Turkey disintegrated shortly before World War I. With the coming of the war, Italian statesmen saw an opportunity to take Valona and Sesano, which they did in October 1914. Italy further pressed its military advantages by declaring a protectorate over all of Albania in June 1917, but received little support either in Paris or in Tirana. Italian foreign minister Baron Sonnino's rigid policy of maintaining an Italian protectorate over Albania with no compensation for its neighbors was completely unacceptable to the powers, who subsequently isolated the Italians. Meanwhile, Albanian patriots, including Ahmed Zogu, initiated military operations against the Italians. Because of this Albanian pressure and because of internal problems, the Italians withdrew from Albania, bringing their short occupation to an end. This retreat also brought the second phase of Italo-Albanian relations to an end.

Unlike the Italo-Albanian phase where positive results clearly outweigh the negative ones, the balance sheet for Crispi's phase is much less one-sided. Crispi, who often boasted that "Italy is on the march", made many major contributions to the nervous tension of Europe¹⁷. The Austrian minister of foreign affairs, Count Berchtold, noted in 1914 that Italian malpractices in Albania could fill a 500 page book¹⁸.

14. Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism*, p. 138.

15. Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, p. 279.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 438.

17. Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism*, p. 140.

18. Lowe and Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy*, p. 100.

Added to the general increase of international anxiety, Crispi's policy also produced some negative effects for Albania. Italy's status-quo politics did much to retard the efforts of Albanian patriots to change Albania's position within the Ottoman Empire. The division among patriots which the Italo-Albanians had precipitated was significantly widened by Italy's aggressive cultural and economic penetration. The Austro-Italian conflict further emphasized the religious and tribal differences among the Albanians, a devastating disservice to an already seriously divided people. Xenophobia, which had for so long prevented contact between Albania and the modern world, was reinforced to a certain extent as the Italians tried to do too much too soon.

The picture would be incomplete, however, if the positive aspects of Crispi's policies were not mentioned. The Italian government, through its efforts in shipping, trade and education, had exposed many Albanians to western ideas and western culture. Although Italy's presence and its quarrel with Austria divided some Albanians, it also made them more aware of their national interests and individuality. Crispi's policy of status-quo protected Albania from its rather covetous neighbors, and in the final analysis, while providing for her self-interest, Italy was at least partially responsible for the creation of the independent Albanian state.

Following World War I relations with Albania experienced a short lull because Italy was plagued by serious domestic problems. With the advent of fascism, however, Italy launched the third and by far the most active phase of its relations with Albania, characterized by an aggressive expansionistic foreign policy geared towards economic and political domination. This somewhat more complex phase can be broken down into two parts, one with Mussolini himself providing the direction for Italian policy.

In 1920 Mussolini had condemned Italy's abandonment of Albania as a "second Caporetto", complaining bitterly that "a few thousand Albanian rebels have thrown a Big Power like Italy overboard"¹⁹. He went on to assert that "when I heard of the evacuation of Valona I wept. And this is not just a rhetorical phrase"²⁰. Once he was well on his way towards power consolidation, Mussolini, always acutely aware of public relations, felt obligated to make good his earlier bellicose, Crispi-like statements.

Mussolini began with economic domination which proved to be a realitive-

19. Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism*, p. 678 and Reference Service on International Affairs of the American Library in Paris, *European Economic and Political Survey* (Paris: Vol. 4, No. 1, September 15, 1928), p. 4.

20. Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism*, pp. 678-679.

ly simple undertaking considering Albania's desperate economic situation. Ahmed Zogu, who dominated Albanian politics during the interwar period, made Italy's task all the more simple by soliciting aid. Rome was the logical choice for Zogu since Italy was the only country financially sound enough and with enough strategic interest to be willing to underwrite the chaotic Albanian economy. The first step came in January 1924 when Zogu initialed a secret shipping and trade pact in exchange for a large personal loan to help him with his domestic political problems²¹. This was followed by an agreement regulating the exchange of workers, Italian colonization in Albania as well as other business concerns²². The cornerstone of the growing economic relationship, however, and the virtual destruction of Albania's economic independence came with the offer of a substantial loan guaranteed by Albanian customs receipts²³.

The price for all of this was of course high and included a secret military agreement and two open pacts which restricted Albania's freedom of action in many fields. Apart from the traditional mutual protection clauses, the secret military agreement bound Albania in the event of an armed conflict to place its military under Italian command²⁴. With the Pact of Friendship and Security of 1926, the Italians guaranteed Zogu's regime directly but required that he conclude no military or political pacts with other powers. Finally, in the second Tirana pact of 1927, Zog was required to transform the small Albanian army into little more than a mercenary force in the pay of the Italians²⁵.

21. Great Britain, Public Record Office, Foreign Office 371/9639 (C3588/28/90) Tirana, 15 February 1924.

22. Lothar Loose, *Die völkerrechtlichen und politischen Beziehungen Albanien zu Italien* (jur. Dissertation, Leipzig, 1939) p. 142 and Herbert Monath, "Die politisch völkerrechtliche Entwicklung Albanien", *Zeitschrift für Völkerrecht*, pp. 305-306 and Giovanni Zamboni, *Mussolini's Expansionspolitik auf dem Balkan* (Hamburg: Helmut Buske Verlag, 1970), p. XVIII.

23. Vandeleur Robinson, *Albania's Road to Freedom* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1941), p. 72 and Joseph Swire, *Albania the Rise of a Kingdom* (London: Unwin Brothers Limited, 1929), p. 462 and George M. Self, *Foreign Relations of Albania* (Chicago: Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, 1943), p. 155, 168 and Giovanni Zamboni, *Mussolini's Expansionspolitik auf dem Balkan* p. LXVII and Eugene Stanley, "Italy's Financial Stake in Albania", *Foreign Affairs* (June 1932), p. 85 and Great Britain, Public Record Office, Foreign Office 371/12845 (C 7016/150/90): Durres.

24. I Documenti diplomatici italiani (Rome: Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, 1953-1967), Series VII, Vol. VI, p. 457.

25. Zamboni, *Mussolini's Expansionspolitik auf dem Balkan*, pp. 386, 393. For full text of the pact see: J. Swire, *Albania the Rise of a Kingdom*, pp. 509-512.

These last two agreements basically constructed a defacto Italian protectorate over Albania, mitigated only by Zogu's ability to hold the Italians at bay with his often masterful use of traditional oriental politics²⁶. The German minister in Tirana, Rudolf von Kardorff mentioned at the time; "nach orientalischer Denkweise hat er (Zogu) sich darauf verlassen, dass die Suppe nicht so heiss, wie sie gekocht, gegessen werde und sich Gelegenheiten finden würden, den Kopf aus der italienischen Schlinge zu ziehen"²⁷.

Zogu was able to live with these serious encroachments on Albania's sovereignty and independence as long as his own unstable position required direct outside military and political support. Once he had transformed Albania into a monarchy and proclaimed himself King Zog I in 1928, Italian guarantees to protect the political status-quo became not only superfluous but irksome. The continually increasing Italian presence in Albania had triggered the natural xenophobia which seems to be a significant characteristic in the Albanian national character. Anti-Italian feeling became evident among all segments of Albanian society including members of the lower classes, the peasants and the soldiers, members of the upper classes, the small intelligensia and the landowners and even among Zog's own political bureaucracy. While Zog's position was never directly threatened as a result of the general antipathy towards the Italians, he was clever enough to recognize that he could not indefinitely ignore the express wishes of the majority of the population. Everything pointed to the need for some sort of a stand against the Italians. Zog chose as his issue the question of renewing the first Pact of Tirana which was due to expire in November 1931. By so doing, the king initiated the Italo-Albanian conflict which was to dominate Albanian politics during the 1930's.

Zog chose to make his move against the Italians by resisting their demands for renewal, because the pact was the clearest representation of Albania's growing satellite status. When it was originally concluded, Albania was in a state of turmoil and Zog needed the security of an Italian guarantee for his own position. By 1931 however, the situation had changed considerably and Zog had been able to stabilize the regime and bring about a degree of tranquility. Under these new conditions, the provisions of the pact dealing with internal stability constituted little more than a humiliating admission of weakness.

For Mussolini the pact was equally important. By 1931 his failed Balkan policy had basically come down to Albania and even here Italian success

26. Zamboni, *Mussolini's Expansionspolitik auf dem Balkan*, p. 25.

27. Federal Republic of Germany, Auswärtiger Amt, Akten aus dem Archiv Abteilung I Ib Pol. 5, Albanien/Innere Politik, Bd. 1 February 1927.

had been limited. The renewal of the pact, and the political implications attached to it could have demonstrated to Mussolini's domestic critics that the millions of lire already invested in Albania were producing positive political results.

It is not surprising therefore that the Italians reacted immediately when after lengthy procrastination Zog finally officially announced that Italo-Albanian relations would henceforth be governed by the 1927 pact. Rome's obvious weapon was economic and Mussolini was not hesitant to use it. The first victim of the new period of hostility was an extremely generous loan, which Italy had extended to Albania in 1931 for the development of the Albanian army. To further indicate their displeasure, the Italians threatened to set in motion the recollection provisions of the original 1925 loan which would have removed Albania's only means of raising revenue, its customs receipts²⁸. The Italians recognized that Albania was still not economically viable and that with increased pressure, Zog would eventually be forced back into the Italian camp.

Zog's timing in light of the world-wide depression was clearly unfortunate. At the beginning of 1931 Albania was as bad off as it had ever been. Various forms of capital accumulation had dried up at once. Because of the depression, the market for Albanian agricultural products collapsed. Immigrant remittances, always a major factor in the Albanian economy, also came to an end. The accumulation of foreign gold and silver left in Albania during the war years had by 1931 almost entirely found its way abroad again. Finally, the income from the 1925 loan which had provided work for many Albanians had by this time been all but exhausted.

Although Zog introduced economies and alternative means of procuring financial aid, his inability to fully understand western economics helped to doom his efforts from the outset. He rapidly became aware that Albania would eventually be forced to compromise with Rome. Sensing that the Italians were more desperate than he, Zog dragged the negotiations out in the hopes of striking a hard bargain.

The protracted talks were not concluded until early 1936. The king's obstructiveness had its rewards, for Italian demands were chipped away to the minimum to save face. Zog actually succeeded in extracting money from the Italian without committing himself to engagements which seriously encroached on Albanian sovereignty. The agreement of 1936 included a compre-

28. Zamboni, *Mussolini's Expansionspolitik auf dem Balkan*, pp. 386, 393.

hensive plan for the normalization of relations. In exchange for bailing Albanian out of its economic morass, Italy asked for a fifteen year harbor concession at Durrës and the expansion of an Italian experimental farm. It was also rumored that a secret military provision accompanied the new agreements²⁹.

In general the new relationship was based on a more businesslike nature, with most of the loans carrying normal interest and geared towards the creation of a healthy economy, something which the Italians had always been unwilling to do. Zog emerged from the conflict as the clear winner.

No one was more acutely aware of Rome's failure than Count Galeazzo Ciano who took over the Italian foreign ministry in 1936 and initiated the second part of Italy's Albanian policy during the fascist era. While Ciano was only responsible for this second part, his attitude and actions more clearly typified the fascist approach than did even those of Mussolini. Ciano shared many of the qualities of Lorrecchio and Crispi, including a great deal of energy and an aggressive manner. The Count, however, was young, inexperienced and irresponsible and managed in his few short years as foreign minister to completely destroy the good reputation that Italian diplomacy once had. His lapses of taste and bad manners alienated even Hitler who referred to him as "that disgusting boy"³⁰.

Ciano instituted what he called the *tona fascista* in Italian foreign policy, hoping to demonstrate how forceful and aggressive the new order would be. He immediately stepped up pressure on Albania, already referred to by Mussolini as "an Italian province without a prefect"³¹. But Ciano's pressure proved as ineffective as Mussolini's had been. By early 1938 the Italian foreign minister had come to the conclusion that Zog could never be completely dominated and that a "radical solution" had become necessary³². To convince Mussolini Ciano drew up a highly exaggerated report claiming that Albania possessed vast mineral wealth, could take at least another two million inhabitants and only waited for Italian intelligence to make it flourish³³. The Duce was forced to accept Ciano's word concerning Albania's bright future since in the many years of Italian post-war involvement, no one had bothered to complete a geological survey.

29. *Ibid*, pp. 482 and footnote 53.

30. Denis Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire* (London and New York: Longman Group Limited, 1976), p. 141.

31. *Ibid*, p. 149.

32. Count Galeazzo Ciano, *Ciano's Hidden Diary 1937-1938* (London: Dutton, 1953), p. 124.

33. D. Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire*, p. 149.

Ciano's further plans included the assassination or at least the overthrow of Zog. The first plan was dropped shortly before the invasion and the second one simply failed³⁴. The Count hoped to keep all of these plans highly secret by ordering the dissemination of varied rumors to "like an octopus...darken the waters"³⁵. However, Ciano and his minions were notorious for their indiscretion and so the Germans were able to discover the plans even before the Italian military was told.

The invasion and occupation of Albania climaxed the third phase of Italian involvement in Albanian affairs. It was, without a doubt, the least useful, with regard to Albania's development. Although the potential for a positive effect was certainly there, considering the massive amount of money which the Italians expended, various factors destroyed any chance of benefit accruing from Italian expenditures. These factors include a series of personal shortcomings attributed to King Zog, such as his lack of knowledge regarding economics and more importantly, his inability to attract honest and capable advisers³⁶. Zog once lamented that he had the misfortune to be served either by traitors or fools and of the two he preferred the latter³⁷.

Italian motives, however, remain the most important consideration. Fascist Italy had no intention of helping Albania become a viable state because this would have ended Albania's need for Rome; therefore, Mussolini and Ciano made certain that Italian money was either squandered on such unproductive projects as ostentatious government buildings or used to assist Italian military needs as with the construction of roads to the Yugoslav frontier and the enlargement of Durrës Harbor³⁸. The Italians accomplished these ends by the propitious use of bribery, thereby helping to sustain the corrupt Turkish social structure which continued to serve as a severe obstacle to modernization. Italian involvement during the fascist period constituted a serious distraction requiring King Zog to expend his energies opposing Italian penetration rather than attending to the serious needs of Albania.

34. Great Britain, Public Record Office, Foreign Office 371/23713 (R 3059/1335/90) Tirana, 14 April 1939 and Ciano, *Ciano's Hidden Diary*, p. 30.

35. Count Galeazzo Ciano, *The Ciano Diaries 1939-1943* (New York: Doubleday, 1945), p. 30.

36. Great Britain, Public Record Office, Foreign Office 371/11209 (C 929/929/90) Tirana, 16 January 1926, and 371/7330 (C 17712/818/90) Tirana, 16 December 1922, and 371/12069 (C 1605/1605/90) Tirana, 21 February 1927, and 371/12847 (C 2210/2210/90) Tirana, 6 March 1928, and Auswärtiger Amt, Abteilung IIb Politik 7, Bd. 1, 7 May 1927.

37. Great Britain, Public Record Office, Foreign Office 371/11208 (C 4762/925/90) Tirana, 31 March 1926.

38. Zamboni, *Mussolini's Expansionspolitik auf dem Balkan*, p. LXXI.

The annexation of Albania offered the Italians an even clearer opportunity to demonstrate efficiency. The Italians were able to accomplish little or nothing. Ciano treated the country as a piece of personal property, naming a city after his wife, building himself hunting lodges and establishing private game reserves³⁹. Italian adventurers swarmed over Albania while the party hierarchy secured posts for their friends and concessions for themselves. Italian occupation eventually ended in disaster, due to corruption, lack of financial accountability and ultimately because Mussolini and Ciano could not resist another war in the Balkans⁴⁰.

Italian involvement in Albania during the 19th and 20th centuries became increasingly negative over the decades. Although it had begun on an altruistic basis, as the government became further involved, Italian moves rapidly became a threat to Albanian territorial integrity and political sovereignty. The most significant positive Italian legacy came about somewhat unintentionally. Under the onslaught of Italian penetration, Albanians were encouraged towards a more rapid development of a national consciousness in order to stand as a unit against Italian expansion.

39. D. Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire*, p. 157.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 158.