

## AGRAR PROBLEM IN ALBANIA IN 1925-1939

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**Abstract:** The agrarian problem in Albania during 1925-1939 has been dealt with in two time periods: 1925-1928 and 1928-1939. In the first period, following the overthrow of the democratic-bourgeois revolution of June 1924 that coincided with the coming to power of Ahmet Zogu as President and Prime Minister of the Republic of Albania, the agrarian question remained unresolved and untreated internally. The ruling elite and supporters of the June 1924 Revolution had largely migrated out of Albania and into the countries where they had gone they had established against the Zogiste immigration organizations such as KONARE ((National Revolutionary Committee created in 1925) which is later named KCN (National Liberation Committee created in 1927) their main point was the implementation of agrarian reform aiming at implementing an agrarian reform in the interest of working populations, and resolving the agrarian question in Albania radically by confiscating land to the owners without giving them compensation to the peasantry. In the second period of 1928-1939, when Ahmet Zogu was in charge of the Albanian state as King of the Albanian Kingdom, he saw the urgent and necessary promise of undertaking an Agrarian Reform in the country with the aim: to revive the enthusiasm of peasants and change the image of this layer to the Monarchy and the Albanian monarch; the use of reform as a means of threatening his political opponents and rivals; pursuing an integration policy towards the West under the motto of "Opening the gates of civilization". The reform promised by Zogu consisted of taking the land to the owners and giving the land to the villagers for a reward. The intermediary links created to implement the agrarian reform in their composition had elements that came from the layers that dominated the Albanian politics, which found it difficult or impossible to adapt to the new legislation, the absorption of experience, methods and techniques. of the west in terms of implementing the occidental reforms in the country. The old feudal mentality and the fear of losing privileges was the main obstacle to non-implementation of agrarian reform and to the restriction of the country's transition from east. As the Italian diplomat Pietro Quaroni put it: "... we had not yet understood at that time that Zog was not thinking in fact, to undertake an agrarian reform, much less, a radical reform, left to do as he wanted without prompting. many, advising him to act cautiously... but the beavers whose agrarian reform was intrinsically concerned did not hear from that ear ...".

In drawing up the scientific paper I have relied on extensive literature consisting of archival sources, monographs, press of time, and memorialists' memoirs, and historiographical sources of foreign and Albanian authors related to the period in question.

**Keywords:** Agrarian Reform, confiscation, property, big owners, feudal mentality

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the years 1912-1924 the agrarian reform in Albania has been addressed through the political programs of governments and political entities without actually being implemented. The impossibility of implementing a radical agrarian reform in Albania was conditioned by political and social circumstances. The existence of the conservative wing as dominant in political life and institutional levels in the country inhibited such a process of undertaking this reform for many reasons: This would directly affect the prominent owners and owners of this social strata; For a country like Albania seeking to break away from feudalism and trying to enter the path of capitalism, the implementation of agrarian reform was a necessity, which was the main violation of the vital factor for the feudo-conservatives and directly affected the socio-economic interest of them. The political force that had supported pluralism, parliamentarism and democracy in Albania was the liberal-democrat wing was divided over the issue of reform; helpless and insufficient in number in Parliament and in the support it could have in the country as the conservative elite had power, wealth, property and did not leave room and did not tolerate in this regard. Albania's political life in 1920-1924, as is well known, was characterized by efforts to establish liberal democracy, but this process faced major obstacles, especially in the dominant position of the conservative circles in the parliamentary majority, where the elemental party was the main obstacle that would not allow the economic, political and social reform of the country's transition to the West and its introduction into the path of capitalist development and the elimination of the garbage of feudalism. (Mita, R., 2018, International journal of multidisciplinary thought", 7,(3): 165-174)

## 2. THE AGRARIAN QUESTION DURING THE PERIOD OF THE ALBANIAN REPUBLIC 1925-1928

The period of the Albanian Republic 1925-1928 was characterized by the efforts of the government and President Ahmet Zogu (who had concentrated in his hands the post of President and Prime Minister) in the intense struggle against democratic forces and organizations and against the spread of liberal ideas,<sup>46</sup> or any other opinion in the country that ran counter to the political orientation of the new regime. It was the beginning of the new governing period following the overthrow of the June 1924 Democratic-bourgeois Revolution. During 1925, a series of political and military trials were held; operations were carried out with purposive intentions purportedly under the pretense of collecting weapons in the north and northeast areas of Albania; the long process of physical elimination of the leading and active leaders<sup>47</sup> in the events of June-December 1924, the period of the Revolution, began. The conditions and measures the President took against progressive and democratic elements in the situation of the country, did not allow them to be active and to exercise their activity in Albania. For this reason, after the failure of the June 1924 Revolution, many leaders and participants in the revolution were forced to emigrate outside Albania, settling in various parts of Europe.<sup>48</sup> A part of them in Austria, the country in which in March 1925 they established in Vienna the National Revolutionary Committee (KONARE), whose work aimed at fulfilling tasks not fulfilled by the June Revolution. In the program of 5<sup>th</sup> May, 1925 of this committee, an important point was the radical implementation of the Agrarian Reform<sup>49</sup> in the interest of working populations. (Archive of Central Committee of R.P.Sh., (1933), F.1, D.2, Doc.15) In 1927 KONARE underwent a radicalization and changed its name to what is now called the National Liberation Committee (KCN), which in its call, "How to save the peasants", addressed the peasants (farmers) by submitting one of the highlights of his agrarian solving problem program, the strategy used and the way forward for its realization. The strategy that must be followed for the realization and finalization of such an endeavor included: conquering the local possessors with some Turkish titles like: *Bejlerë, Agallarë, Afendikonj*, who possessed forests, pastures, meadows, waters, olive trees, vineyards, etc. and giving them to the villagers (farmers). The way to accomplish this would consist of the KCN's efforts to raise all the smallholdings of villages and towns in order to overthrow the existing government. The villagers would be oriented towards the capture of the foxes, and once they had taken possession of them, they would protect with the force of arms. The aim was to take over the state, establish a "small government" and, as a form of government, a republican regime.

The government that came out of the people would seize the property of the lords of the Jews on behalf of the people's wealth. The divisions would be divided among the farmers, peasants and highlanders "... who have little or no land, as well as the scarecrows and whites who want to deal with agriculture ..." One of the responsibilities of the People's government would be to take care of the division between the beneficiaries of this agrarian reform of seed, plows, oxen, cars and of money with a low interests...". (Ibid, (1927), Doc.3) In the KCN's (Ibid, (1933) Doc.16) Program the agrarian problem and the solution of the ownership problem for the peasantry would become a reality following the Soviet path of implementing this reform, This was also observed during the reforms undertaken by the government resulting from the Revolution of June 1924. In this regard, in the newspaper "National Freedom" in the article "About the law of agrarian reform", it was stated that: "...We, the consistent revolutionaries, when we take the power in our hands, we will not go on making long law...we will shortly expect it: 1)We will expropriate (expropriate and take over) all the lands of possessors and them of the Italian proprietors (owners) would be expropriated proprietors (owners) without any reward; also the olives of the rich persons and them of the religious

<sup>46</sup> Professor Aleks Buda has quoted that: "... the liberal-democrats felt and understood that... an important task in Albania remained the democratic development of the country by securing the interests of the people working, opinges, of the poor population...", quoted by Mita, R., Academician Aleks Buda, for the democratic movement of years 1920-1924 in Albania, taken by University Aleksander Xhuvani, Center for Albanological and Balkan Studies, (2016), May, 20, p.175

<sup>47</sup> Under this politic on March 2, 1925, Luigj Gurakuqi was killed in Bari, Italy. Inside the country he went after Bajram Curri, who was in the mountains of Tropoja, which was killed on March 29, 1925. These serious killings had a great echo both inside and abroad, revealing clearly that Zog's regime tended to be dictatorial governance

<sup>48</sup> The National Union, organization carried out an active anti-zogist` polici on immigration during the years of Ahmet Zogut`s rule. They represented right andwere incompatible with the left. Taken by Kota, H., (2017), *Koço Kota- For an occidental Albania*, p.p. 390-391, Tirane: Morava

<sup>49</sup> The full points of KONARE's program were: Rescuing Albania from the Tyranny of Ahmet Bey Zogolli and his feudal companions, tools of foreigners; Establishing a truly Republican regime; Agrarian agricultural reform in the interest of working populations;Restoring Albania's ethnic borders. The Albanian people are convinced that in the difficult wars for their political, economic and social liberty, they will also have the sympathy of the civilized world. (Ibid, (1933), Doc. 16)

institutions. 2) At the same time, we will divide the lands and these olive trees to farmers and villagers who have no land or have little to do with the amount of spirit of their families, without any reward. 3) The committees that will be formed in villages and poor villagers will be in charge...". (Journal "National Freedom", 1930, October 10, Geneva, 130) In all of KCN's activity, as stated in its Program, the agrarian question in Albania had to be radically resolved "...For the confiscation of the lands of possessors like merchants, etc., and in helping her without reward to the peasantry...". (Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Albania, Institute of History, Koka, V., (1985), p. 204) The backlash was immediate in the Albanian press of the time, while its incompatibility was expressed by the words: "agrarian reform in our state is not done with Bolshevik principles but with patriotic principles and must be based on the law as much as possible." ("The newspaper Korça", 1930, April 9) The agrarian problem focused mainly on peasant efforts in the war against the Jewish owners whose actions had created a difficult situation for the survival of this layer. The robbery of state-owned land by Jewish owners and the increase in liabilities, which in the event of non-payment until confiscation of property, caused the peasantry to revolt. Plenty of landowner evicted the villagers from their properties because of falling agricultural prices, turning these properties into pastures by renting them to livestock. Numerous protests were also made by the government against the actions of another group of chefs who had seized state property by expelling the farmers. (Academy of Sciences of Albania, 2007 (III), p. 276) A sharp problem was the lack of grain in the country, which in most cases was associated with the appearance of famine. The economic power of the state and the efforts made by the government did not provide the proper solution to the difficult economic situation created in the country during the years of the Albanian Republic.

So, as can be seen in the period 1925-1928 the agrarian problem did not find a solution, for a variety of motives and reasons. The fact that the country did not treat itself as an issue and did not take concrete initiatives was not made because of a hopeful and bitter experience for the country. Zogu did not want to open the plague of peasantry caused by promises and withholding by the government that emerged from the June 1924 Revolution, which also brought her incompatibility and reliance on this layer at the times she needed it. Another factor was that in the early moments of Zog's return to power he needed the support of the conservative layer, which consisted of large landowners with economic power, political positions and support from their own people, which conditioned the impossibility in undertaking and to a lesser extent implementing such a reform. The conditionality of the West and the pressure exerted by them in support of Albania in the way of capitalism and the empowerment of the Albanian bourgeoisie (especially the bourgeoisie in the countryside), could constitute the right premise for launching such a process in the country. Zog first needed to strengthen his position (which he did during the years of Republican governance), and then gracefully and politely define policies and take concrete steps in favor of resolving this major problem in economic life of Albanians. (efforts that will start during the years of the Albanian Monarchy)

### **3. THE AGRARIAN ISSUE IN THE ALBANIAN MONARCHY (1928–1939) AND THE PROMISE-THREAT REFORM**

During the years of Ahmet Zogu's reign as King of the Albanians, he was praised and even considered an urgent problem to implement an agrarian reform. In January 1929, on the occasion of the vote of confidence in the cabinet, Zog sent a letter to the newly elected Prime Minister, Pandeli Evangjeli, with the motto "Opening the Gates of Civilization". In its agrarian context it was stated that: "The Albanian people are farmers... it is a sin for us, having these rich lands, to buy food from abroad; This is the underlying cause, which inevitably pushes us to fix and end the agrarian problem." (Lushaj, R., 1995, p.109) Zogu felt that reform should be undertaken swiftly despite the obstacles of the time, aiming at raising the level of agriculture in the country, regardless of the persons who would remain dissatisfied with the implementation of agrarian reform, the primary interest of the Nation would be for him. In the government program it was pointed out that agrarian reform as a stand-alone goal would have the interests of the farmer reconciled with those of the owner. (Puto, A., 2009, p. 478) This reform had already become a national problem of great importance to Albanian society, as 80% of the Albanian population engaged in agriculture and land in general was in the hands of large owners. According to De La Rocca "This class of landowners, more or less identified with the feudal lords of Albania for centuries, did not invest money in the countryside, where capitalist development actually did not exist at all." (Moroco dela Roka, R., 1994, pp. 124-125) Zog had to face agrarian reform as with the layer of large landowners on the one hand and with the population whose dream was land and the acquisition of property rights on the other. Ahmet Zogu as an intuitive politician, through the promise of agrarian reform, aimed not only at living the enthusiasm of the peasantry to change the image of this stratum against him and his new government, attributing their salvation to the Monarchy and the Albanian monarch. It also aimed to use agrarian reform as a means of threatening its political opponents and rivals and to increase the chances of Western support. The declaration of agrarian reform was a sensitizing spark for Albanian public opinion. In the heat of discussions and debates over this bill, different opinions emerged on how to implement an agrarian reform in a country like Albania. In the diversity of these discussions and ideas came the ideas for resolving this issue on the

basis of the political alternatives emerged in 1920-1924 consisting of the demands for expropriated land expropriation by expropriated owners, to demands representing the peasantry's interests in unpaid expropriation and the division of land "without money and without any remuneration". The reward that the state would have in this case, as the "Korça" Newspaper wrote on January 29<sup>th</sup> 1929, was that "the Albanian farmer, who today is totally a slave, will become the owner tomorrow." (Tirana State University, Institute of History and Linguistics, 1965, (II), p. 600) Zogu in his political ideology did not really intend to touch or infringe on the interests of the landowner. It left enough time and space for this layer to maneuver its lands in various ways only to be undermined by reform. The methods used consisted of the sequestration of property, with the right to forgive the return of the nearest people, to turn them into pastures of actions according to which the law of agrarian reform could not operate. Frequent interventions with the government promoted the idea of conditioning this reform only in the context of a formal reform.

#### 4. AGRARIAN REFORM LAW OF MAY 3, 1930 AND ITS CONTENTS

Zog decreed on May 3, 1930 the law of Agrarian Reform.<sup>50</sup> The drafting was in principle assigned by the University of Florence professor Lorenzoni, a specialist in the field of agriculture, who presented both a research project and a practical one but remained simply out of paper. Under the Agrarian Reform law<sup>51</sup> in principle large landowners received less than a third (1/3) of the land using the compensation. The total amount the large owner had to own was 40 hectares, and as a limit was the family composition of 5 persons, and more than 5 persons were added and 5 hectares each.<sup>52</sup> Farmers' families received 0.5 h of land per capita from the agrarian reform and the total amount of land could not exceed 5 h. If the families of the farmers had not received land up to the limit of 5 ha they would be compensated by the Agrarian Office (Fischer, B. J. 1996, p. 188) specifically set up for this purpose. The owners of the expropriated lands would be compensated in the form of shares from the Agricultural Bank created for this purpose in August 1937. The reform affected 8109.5 ha of land, both public and private. The reform was partially implemented and benefited from it exactly 1888 families of Kosovar immigrants<sup>53</sup> residing in Albania. According to De la Rocca: "The practical result was the almost complete preservation of large estates, because it was generally accepted by large owners as to their ability to manage economically." (Moroco dela Rocca, R., 1994, p. 125) In the case of Zog's counter-reaction to the archives there was always an agrarian reform readily available, more or less extensive under political circumstances and when it had to be trumpeted." (Ibid, p.125) Implementation of agrarian reform did not occur with the same intensity in the years of the Monarchy. It hardly feels at all in the 1932-1934 timeframe, as it began to run from April 1, 1934, but without much productivity. Implementation of the reform is easily revived in 1937 by a law of May 1937 "... authorizing the Directorate of Agrarian Reform to sell to farmers surpluses of state-owned lands in Luz, Derven and Gurz "at promotional prices: 1dynam 15 francs Gold, but the quantity of land sold should not exceed 40 hectares." (Puto, A. 2009, pp. 479-480)

The agrarian reform failed because the big landowners, as we have mentioned above, managed to find ways or means to alienate their property only to be excluded from the agrarian reform. They went so far as to convert their arable lands into pastures by evicted the villagers of them. The alienation of agricultural land in the pasture did not lead to the property being affected by the agrarian reform. One such example is the actions of a Bey from Elbasan who, upon learning that "... pasture lands were exempt from expropriation, expelled the peasants immediately, burned their homes and turned all the land they previously worked on". (Puto, A., 2009, p. 480 taken by L.S.Stavrianos, 1942, p. 724) Implementation of the agrarian reform was seen by the Albanian Government as not a very important issue as the revenues for its implementation and the fees of the bodies responsible for its implementation such as the General Directorate of Agrarian Reform were missing. This directorate was abolished in 1937. Implementation of agrarian reform in state law was banned by law in June 1938. By 1935, 12,000 families of Kosovar immigrants and local farmers had benefited from Agrarian Reform, who had generally benefited from it state properties. According to the press in Albania there were 16,050 families of proletarian farmers (Newspaper "Besa", 1935, June 7th.) about 1905 families, along with 6375 ha of land, benefited with the Kosovar emigrants.

<sup>50</sup> From the period of the Agrarian Reform from 3<sup>th</sup> Maj 1930 to 1937 it failed

<sup>51</sup> The law did not allow the expropriation of specially zones or spaces like olive trees, vineyards etc., (Newspaper "Ora", 1930, 19 April)

<sup>52</sup> The land divided in three pieces: 2/3 owned by the owner in a period around 15 years with the only condition to use the farmers and to modernize them or must sold to villagers with the same conditionals, and, 1/3 began to farmer who named owner but with th conditional that this land must be payed amust be worked by him. Its price was 20 frang gold/h. (Fischer, B. J. 1996, p. 188)

<sup>53</sup> Only in the Prefecture of Elbasan (Albania) until 1935 there were 75 families of Kosovar immigrants. Taken by Mita.R. & Gjini.R., Elbasani in 1925-1940, (summary of documents), 2015, p.455, Tirane: Maluka

(Belegu, M., 1987, p. 24) Implementation of agrarian reform failed without good application in the country, often taking the features of a promise-threat reform when King Zog's moment and interest demanded it. All intermediary links created to implement agrarian reform such as the Agricultural Bank, the Directorate of Agrarian Reform, and the Type Contract were composed of representative staff coming from the layers that dominated Albanian politics. Consequently, they found it difficult or impossible to adapt to the new legislation, absorbing the experience, methods and techniques of the West in the implementation of the occidental reforms in the country, conditioned also by the interest of the layer they came from. The old feudal mentality and the fear of losing privileges was the main obstacle and the dangerous of moving the country from east to west. Fan Noli in 1929 on the feasibility of implementing the agrarian reform undertaken by Ahmet Zogu in the years of the Albanian Monarchy, stated that: "it is not possible for the (landowners) to make reforms for the villagers, because they do not believe in being altruistic enough to kill themselves for the benefit of the farmers...". (Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Albania, Institute of History, Koka, V. 1985, p. 198)

##### 5. DIPLOMAT PIETRO QUARONI'S OPINION ON AGRARIAN REFORM

Italian diplomat Pietro Quaroni was sent to Albania in 1928. During his mission, he had to meet well-known Albanian economically wealthy and politically powerful personalities. At the meeting with Shefqet Vërlaci<sup>54</sup> (one of them), considered by Italy as the potential contender with the political potential but also the key to Zog's replacement in Albania. In the conversation, Brotherhood asked a question to the Italian diplomat: What did Italy think of the agrarian reform in Albania? The diplomat's opinion was skeptical, judging that Zog had in his mind and figure the same thoughts as the layer from which he even came "...He (Zogu) clearly saw the inability to establish his regime by relying essentially on the reactionary right...He knew that beavers, inclined to treat him as equals, were not willing to recognize him as a superior authority." (Quaroni, P., 1993, p. 132) On the other hand, Zog knew well that even among the conservatives there were individuals who could not support him and his positions. For Zog, agrarian reform was a major act which he had solemnly proclaimed in the government program; had effectively distributed to the peasants a portion of public lands, many of them as in the old Ottoman emperor. " (Ibid, 1993, p. 132) Concerning the resizing of the properties of the big owners, the agrarian reform required objective studies and solutions for this layer as this constituted the main supporting force of Ahmet Zog's power. The diplomat emphasized to Vërlaci that he knew very well the efforts of both the conservative and Ahmet Zog's tactics in times of difficulty, according to him. his; or when the progressive elements started to move then the agrarian reform came out of the files..." (Ibid, 1993, p. 132) The agrarian reform as a tool of pressure Zog needed to use during his path of political empowerment. Pietro Quaron's real opinion centered on the idea that Zog could not be the effective implementer of a radical agrarian reform, while the beavers whose agrarian reform was fundamentally concerned did not hear from "that ear". (Ibid, 1993, p.132) Concerned partisans of the opposition initially opposed the implementation of agrarian reform, but later clarified in Parliament that it was likely to be implemented.

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<sup>54</sup> Great owner of land and factories, possessor of a large fortune since Ottoman rule. Taken by Daja, Xh., (2014), *Elbasani in the years 1892-1908, according to the Ottoman registers*, p.187, Tirane: Morava

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