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Renegotiating the Empire, Forging the Nation-State: The Albanian Case through the Political Economic Thought of Ismail Qemali, Fan Noli, and Luigj Gurakuqi, c. 1890–1920s

Adrian Brisku* 

Department of Russian and East European Studies, Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic

*Corresponding author. Email: adrian.brisku@fsv.cuni.cz

Abstract

This article examines historical positions regarding the question of the small nation-(state) of Albania remaining “in” the larger Ottoman supranational entity and “out” as independent nation-state during the late 19th and early 20th century. It does so mainly, but not only, through the language of political economy (wealth creation and redistribution) as articulated in the thoughts and deeds of three founding intellectual and political figures of the Albanian nation-(state): Ismail Qemali, Fan Noli, and Luigj Gurakuqi. While lacking a clear political-economic perspective for this emerging nation in the late Ottoman period, all the three figures maintained that as an independent, small nation-state, Albania could survive and perhaps thrive if its wealth and national economic development remained anchored within a larger political and economic space. More than Qemali, Gurakuqi, and Noli envisaged a greater state role in the country’s “national economy-building” process. But while Gurakuqi was more of a “nationalist” on wealth creation, Noli sought to pursue a more “radical,” redistributive path to national development.

Keywords: Albanian nation-state; national economy-building; small versus large states; Qemali; Gurakuqi; Noli

This article reconstructs political-economic discourses, which can be understood as a set of economic ideas, beliefs, and frameworks of action (Maier 1987, 2–5) concerning questions of wealth creation, redistribution, and the state’s role in these (Brisku 2016), of the late 19th- and early 20th-century Albanian history in the thoughts and deeds of three prominent political activists/statesmen. They are Ottoman-Albanian bureaucrat and Albanian statesman Ismail Qemali (1844–1919), who declared the country’s independence in November 1912 and briefly headed its provisional government until January 1914; Albanian-American émigré, founder of the Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, and the country’s prime minister in 1924 Fan Noli¹ (1882–1965); and poet, politician, and co-signer of independence’s declaration Luigj Gurakuqi (1879–1925), who was also Education Minister in Qemali’s government and that of Finance in Noli’s. Similarly, they were active during the National Awakening Period (*Rilindja Kombëtare*, 1870–1912) and that of Independence (*Periudha e Pavarësisë*, 1912–1939)—periods that, respectively, correspond to nation-building and state-building processes in Albania. In addition, they played significant roles in the country’s “national economy-building” process; this is understood as political economic perspectives and programs for constructing a viable national economy.

Despite their active roles, the three figures occupy different places in the Albanian historiography. Qemali is evoked as “the Elder of Vlora,” “the Great Patriot,” the “Wise Elder,” and “a statesman and diplomat rather than an ideologue or intellectual of the National Movement” (Artan Puto 2009, 188–191; Xoxi 1983). Gurakuqi is considered a “major political figure in the Rilindja

Movement” (Elsie 2010, 178). Meanwhile, Noli is seen as “the first of the best orators [and] the founder of the modern Albanian oratory” (Jorgaçi 2002, 6), as well as a “rather incomplete statesman and politician [for reasons that might become apparent below]” (Arben Puto 2010, 7). Of the three, Qemali has a permanent visibility in contemporary Albania thanks to government’s use of his portrait in public offices.² Historical sources do not indicate that Noli and Qemali ever met. The only link between the two, in the context of this article, is Gurakuqi, who worked with and for both of them. In fact, Qemali is a generation older than Gurakuqi and Noli—a difference that in the early 1920s played out as a politico-economic contention between the Ottoman-Albanian “great families,” of which Qemali’s is an example (Çela 2008, 196) and the new “national democratic” forces, whereby the latter two could be enlisted (Arben Puto 2010, 10).

In focusing on the political and politico-economic thought of these three men, this article offers a new perspective, not only on them but significantly on the two historical periods of late Ottoman and early independent Albania.³ Certainly, none of them was a systematic political-economic thinker who left behind politico-economic treatises on economic aspects on empires, nations, and nation-states. Qemali, in fact, began his career as an Ottoman lawyer climbing up the imperial bureaucracy thanks to his juridical/administrative skills, political connections, and patronage. Meanwhile, Gurakuqi’s and Noli’s early intellectual activities were in the field of humanities (poetry, literature, history, literary arts) that were imbued by a growing ethos of Albanian romantic and cultural nationalism (Elsie 2010, 179). But as they embraced political activism and national politics, they generated a trail of reflections, positions, ideas, and political deeds, or “speech acts” (Skinner 1968): Qemali’s “national industry” and Gurakuqi and Noli’s “national economy” that allow for reconstructing such a perspective, which, in turn, can be more than the existing dominant and descriptive narrative of Albania’s “economic backwardness” (Artan Puto 2009; Brisku 2013).

Crucially, also, in recovering slivers of their visions and alternatives on the nation’s economic development within and without the Ottoman Empire, including political and geopolitical implications surrounding it, this article addresses the main question, which has been posed in other scholarship on modern economy and small nation(-states) (Brisku 2016, 2017b), namely whether they, having had political experience in both periods, considered that a small Albania was better off economically, staying within a larger supranational political and economic space and renegotiating its political sovereignty, or outside of it as a politically independent entity. Equally insightful is examining whether this political move by “patriots” fighting for the “oppressed” nation against the “ruling nation” was a sharp and antagonistic process—accounted in nationalism scholarship on small nations’ revival within multi-ethnic empires (Hroch [1985] 2000, 12–13)—or an ongoing process of renegotiation and even cooperation between “patriots” and “ruling nation” representatives (Kappeler 2006, 2–3). Albanian historiography traditionally narrates this through the antagonistic binary of “occupier versus occupied.” Yet, Qemali’s figure—more than Noli’s and Gurakuqi’s—as loyal to the empire and founder of the Albanian state (Çela 2008, 194), as well as emerging research reconstructing Albanian elites’ privileged position within the empire (Milo 2013, 27), have come to challenge the political side of this narrative.

Analytically, to reconstruct the relevant contexts and discourses, this article, with regard to the first period, uses a three-level taxonomy of “political orders/spaces.” The first level is the *inter-state order*, which is composed of large/imperial states largely defined by war, competing values, and international trade. The second level is the *intra-state order*, which captured relations between the imperial center and a national community and the nature of their interactions in legal/administrative, economic, and language matters. The third level is the *national order*, which is defined by regional, ethnic, and economic relations. For the second period, however, a two-level taxonomy is needed, as the *inter-state* and *intra-state order* merge (an independent Albania part of the international system conducts its relations with its former empire and other states based on the principles of this system) and *national order*.

Part I: Renegotiating the Nation within the Empire

The Realism of “World” and “Special” Policies: The Ottoman Empire’s Survival in the European Inter-State Order

Of the three, Ismail Qemali (Kemal) is better positioned to offer a perspective on the empire that places it within the late-19th- and early-20th-century, European, inter-state order, and that it was relevant to an emerging Albanian national interest. The latter, that is, national interest, crystallized first as a necessity to defend a fragmented national territorial space threatened by surrounding Balkan states’ nationalist projects. As such, the question as to whether the empire could compete in this order and serve as a geopolitical shield for an emerging political Albania came to be tested.

Qemali is better placed because, unlike Gurakuqi and Noli, he was an “insider” in Ottoman politics. He saw himself both as Ottoman and Albanian (Çela 2008; Artan Puto 2009; Taglia 2016). Indeed, described as an “Ottoman Statesman of the old school,” “man of genuine liberalism,” and a “penetrating political thinker” (in Kemal 1920, xii–xvi), Qemali, as he reflected in his *The Memoirs of Ismail Kemal bey* (1920), acknowledged the “great influence” of his family on “the affairs and destiny of Albania” and its complex historical relation, occasionally marred by violence, with the empire. As he put it, his family for more “than four centuries enjoyed great consideration from the Ottoman Empire” despite the occasional “capricious tyranny of the Ottoman overlords” (Kemal 1920, 4), while he, rather smoothly, thanks to political connections, such as with reformist Grand Vizier Ali Pasha (1815–1871), moved up from being a law student in 1859 in Istanbul to provincial governor and member of the Ottoman National Council (Kemal 1920, 44). Qemali also enjoyed the friendship of the most prominent constitutionalist Grand Vizier, Midhat Pasha (1822–1883) and “the ear” of Sultan Abdulhamid II (r. 1876–1909). Particularly, his relationship with and affection for Midhat Pasha would put him at odds with the Sultan when the latter suspended the 1876 Constitution and Parliament, asserted his authoritarian rule, and pushed opposition figures into exile to Paris; from the mid-1880s, these figures were known as the Young Turks. When Qemali wrote the two memoranda (in 1892 and 1897) to the Sultan—while he was Governor of Tripoli, earlier having governed Varna, Galipoli, and Beirut (Artan Puto 2009, 189–90)—the Sultan had dismantled Midhat’s (who had perished in an imperial prison in 1883) legacy of Ottomanism, entrenched authoritarianism and pan-Islamism, and reoriented (isolated) the empire away from Europe (Brisku 2017). By 1900, Qemali’s relation with the Sultan had gone completely sour.

Despite this, in his 1892 memo to the Sultan, Qemali believed, as did many Young Turks (Taglia 2016), that the empire could be saved if the Sultan seriously realized its vital geostrategic and political-economic role in the European inter-state order. Qemali urged him, in turn, to embrace a “realistic” approach based on “interests not sentiments that guide political action” and to change his isolationist course (Kemal 1920, 215). Acknowledging the recent historical context, following the outcomes from the 1878 Berlin Congress whereby *de-jure* Serbia, Romania, and Montenegro, and *de-facto*, Bulgaria to Russia (1878), Tunisia to France (1881), and Egypt to Britain (1882) were lost, Qemali nonetheless reminded the Sultan that the blame for these was to be found within rather than with the Great Powers. If the latter were responsible, he asked, how could one explain British and French sacrifices—losing blood and coin—in the Crimean War (1853–1856) in siding with them against Russia, and after “recognised the Empire’s territorial integrity as pivotal to European equilibrium” at the Paris Treaty of 1856 (Kemal 1920, 211)? Instead of carrying on with European-inspired internal reforms, he continued, the empire fell into complacency, whereas its foreign policy lost interest in balance-of-power dynamics of the continent. To him, these had led to the diminishing and fragmentation of the imperial domains, most notably Egypt’s loss, which geopolitically weakened empire’s “position in the world and her right to Caliphate” and geoeconomically deprived it of its control of the commercial maritime route of Suez, “the most important in the world” (Kemal 1920, 209). But all of this, he believed, could be reversed by embarking on a his “realistic” approach, entailing an active rather isolationist role (militarily and

economically), through what he called a “world policy” for the Great Powers (Russia and Britain) and a “special policy” for the newly independent Balkan states (Kemal 1920, 213).

Conceptualizing, thus, the empire’s interests as active engagement and cooperation in Europe, Qemali’s “world policy” meant that the Sultan recognized Russia’s and Britain’s interests vis-à-vis the Ottoman empire—which nonetheless did not make the latter less dependent—and acted upon them. Identifying Russia’s interests as a desire to build a military presence (occupy/fortify a point) in the Bosphorus straits—one the most contested 19th-century geopolitical points in the British–Russian rivalry on the empire (Brisku 2017), he urged the Sultan to acknowledge this. Pre-empting an argument that this would further weaken it vis-à-vis Russia, he asserted that the Sultan could rely on the usual Great Powers’ rivalry, as he was convinced that Britain and France would not permit Russia to “drive Turkey out of the Straits she considers to be the door to her house” (Kemal 1920, 215). In return, the empire would get a less aggressive and more cooperative Russia. As for Britain, this “world policy” would implement traditional British policy of having friends and guardians—for it did not want to spend money and weapons on this—along its lines of communication and trading routes to India. Qemali did not think that Britain was after Ottoman territory, as he read recent British control of Egypt and Cyprus—to him still renegotiable in the empire’s the interest—as a symptom of its erroneous policy. Both states had to return to their common interests, meaning safeguarding Ottoman territorial integrity, but for this the Ottoman Empire had to come out of its isolationism (Kemal 1920, 215–216).

While with this “world policy” Qemali sought to provide a realistic course of action for overcoming imperial weaknesses vis-à-vis Russia and Britain, with the “special policy” he urged the Sultan to be more active geopolitically and geo-economically vis-à-vis its former Balkan provinces, now independent Serbia, Montenegro, Greece, and Romania. Such confidence derived from Qemali’s assumptions that it was possible to revive earlier links with them and that these small nation-states—important in his thinking about small Albania later on—though independent, were militarily and economically nonviable because the Balkan states depended on military and economic backing from Austro-Hungary and Russia. Conceiving this dependency as politically submissive and economically exploitative, whereby Russia undermined their political independence and Austro-Hungary scared “them with its capacity to absorb their economic resources,” Qemali thought the empire, provided that it transformed itself into a “Great Oriental State,” had a policy opportunity with these small states. An imperialistic policy, nonetheless, Qemali urged the Sultan to offer them something in-between: a “defensive alliance” and “economic accord,” and to become a space whereby “the people of these states [could] settle anywhere in the empire, to be considered as belonging to it, freedom to undertake any enterprise.” Optimistically he asserted that “the unity of the people for their mutual defence, and their resources could be devoted to the economic development of the Empire” (Kemal 1920, 217). Whereas the Balkans states’ reaction to this memo can only be guessed at, the Sultan’s was a deafening silence. This lack of response led Qemali to write the second memo (on February 24, 1897), in which he reminding the Sultan of his earlier warnings and urged him to embark on a “conciliation policy,” i.e., remaining engaged with Europe (Kemal 1920, 388) and its volatile politics (since Imperial Germany’s predominance after 1871). Otherwise, he cautioned, European powers were bound to either intervene through stronger diplomacy—pressuring the Sultan to improve its imperial administration—(he welcomed it), or militarily, dismembering it altogether (Kemal 1920, 393).

To Qemali’s chagrin, his appeals and continued sympathies for Midhat’s legacy led to his being sidelined from imperial politics and to his self-exile in 1900 to the Western European capitals of Brussels, Paris, and London. From there, he became involved in both issues of the Ottoman opposition (the Young Turks) and Albanian national causes (Artan Puto 2009, 189–190), namely, political and language rights for all Albanians. Gurakuqi, having returned to Albania from Italy, following the Young Turk Revolution in 1908, embraced the same national causes; so did Noli, who beginning in 1906 became active with the Albanian-American diaspora based in Boston. But again, unlike Qemali, they were “outsiders” to the Ottoman political system, and the latter mattered to

their national cause not as a goal of genuinely supporting its presence in the Balkans but as a realistic acknowledgment of its geopolitical role for the Albanian-inhabited lands. In other words, Qemali was more invested, emotionally, with the existence of the empire, than Gurakuqi and Noli.

Indeed, what they initially subscribed to with this national cause was self-rule and language rights for Albanians within a constitutional empire. The first issue of the Albanian-American Diaspora newspaper, *Vatra's (Hearth)*—with Noli as its editor-in-chief—which published on February 15, 1909, under the slogan “Albania for Albanians,” demanded self-rule for Albania with the Sultan as the “governor of Albania” as long as the empire survived in Europe (Duka 2009, 46–47). Similarly, following the Northern Albanian military uprising of 1911 against the Young Turk administration’s failure to fulfil the 1908 expectations for self-rule and language rights, which Gurakuqi led (Elsie 2010, 179) and Qemali joined, both reiterated such demands in a 12-point memorandum from June 23, 1911 referred to as “The Red Book.” They also demanded the unification of the four predominantly Albanian-inhabited provinces of Shkoder, Kosovo, Ioannina, and Monastir into one *vilayet* (province). This demand, discarded by the Sultan, was first raised by Albanian *beys* and intellectuals who established the League of Prizren in 1877 prior to the Congress of Berlin (1878) (Brisku 2013, 31–32). “The Red Book,” thus, sought a political nation under the supervision of a general inspector, representing the Sultan (Duka 2009, 415).

The three figures however were realistic that despite existential geopolitical pressures—from the Great Powers (Italy attacked it in 1911) and the Balkan states in the late 1912—the empire barely but still exerted power over Ottoman-Albanian provinces. But Qemali was more invested in having a continued imperial future for the nation, provided that the empire reformed along federal and national lines—more than Midhat Pasha envisaged (more on this below)—because he doubted the political and economic viability/independence of small nation-states within the existing late 19th- and early 20th-century European inter-state order.

Developing an Imperial/National Industry within a Federalized Empire: The Intra-State Imperial Order

Nineteenth-century, European-inspired Ottoman reforms, or the *Tanzimat*, were about establishing new and centralizing institutions, introducing legal norms based on the notion of equality for all imperial subjects before the law, liberalizing the economic space, and contingently also putting the imperial order within a constitutional framework. This was basis of the imperial ideology of Ottomanism (Brisku 2017) that the Sultan discarded in the late 1870s. Qemali’s imperial service/political activism began around the first Ottoman Constitutional order’s dramatic birth in the mid-1870s and culminated with its restoration, following the 1908 Revolution, and with Albania’s declaration of independence in 1912. Within this timeframe—certainly more than Gurakuqi and Noli—Qemali believed that national rights and self-rule could be achieved and renegotiated within a new intra-state imperial order. This was also because he subscribed to political and economic change through reform.

Indeed, Qemali was one of imperial reforms’ most ardent yet critical supporters. As he retrospectively reflected in his *Memoirs*, early *Tanzimat* was reform’s “golden age”; externally, it placed the empire “into the rank of civilized Powers,” while internally, it brought order to an existing disorder (Kemal 1920, 2). Having served loyally to Midhat Pasha—an architect of the *Vilayet* Law (1864), governor of the Danube province in the mid-1860s (Qemali was editor-in-chief of province’s newspaper *Tuna*) (Brisku 2017, 152), and the “father” of the Ottoman Constitution—Qemali nonetheless was also critical of Ottomanism; particularly of its tendency to over-centralize (having been based on French reform models) political, economic, and administrative powers. The problem, as he saw it, was that the “theoretical and logical clearness” of these French models had been “absolutely negative in its practical results” (Kemal 1920, 2–3); in the Albanian lands, for instance, the 1830s French-style centralization measures were resisted by the “old feudal military class” (Instituti i Historisë 2002, 75). Qemali’s alternative was decentralization—applying organic

laws suitable for particular provinces and *ethnies* (Artan Puto 2009, 200–202). Decentralization, he reminded the Sultan in the first memo, would lead to more national wealth and give “a new life and fresh impulse to prosperity” (Kemal 1920, 208). And this could be achieved, as he urged the Sultan in his second memo, by “put[ting] into operation the constitution which was announced and approved at the beginning of your reign” (Kemal 1920, 395). Ottoman subjects, then, would identify with imperial institutions and show loyalty to the Ottoman “fatherland” (Artan Puto 2009, 209). If not, as he rightly predicted, “the flame of revolution will rise in all quarters of the empire and nothing will be able to extinguish it” (Kemal 1920, 395). For Qemali, though, renegotiating a decentralized empire, through reform, was a constitutional, political, political economic, and later a national matter, too.

Political-economically, Qemali came to realize that the empire had to catch up not only with European but also with Balkan states—that “yesterday an integral part of the Empire, have succeeded in a short while in developing themselves in an exemplary manner” (Kemal 1920, 209), though contradictorily, he considered them as economically nonviable. A self-professed liberal—since British and French liberal economic thought on free trade and state nonintervention had influenced Ottoman thinking during the 1830s—Qemali knew well about the Ottoman backlash against such economic policy due to the ballooning imperial debt, mid-1870s economic crisis, and the controversial capitulations that favored European and Ottoman Christian entrepreneurs as opposed to the rest of the Ottoman populace (Brisku 2017, 82–96). Politically, this backlash translated into a call for a greater role for the imperial state in pulling its subjects together and “united behind a single plan of comprehensive development” (Adanir 2002, 57). Qemali had witnessed Midhat Pasha’s use of a Friedrich List-like national system of protecting and developing local industries, while encouraging provincial entrepreneurial initiatives in the new Danube province (Brisku 2017, 156). Nevertheless, Qemali did not seek a great, protectionist role for the government in economy, except for a *physiocratic* strategy in “the development of ... national industry,” meaning agriculture as “the principal source of the wealth of the country” (Kemal 1920, 217). More of a “Smithian” [Adam Smith] on this, he considered government’s key role to be that of providing infrastructure (railway system), “which assure[d] the farmers the sale of their products at good prices rather than on pecuniary advances or credits” (Kemal 1920, 217–218); poor infrastructure and fragmented market being the pressing issues for late 19th-century Ottoman-Albanian lands (Instituti i Historisë 2002, 34–74).

The issue of the government’s role in the economy, Qemali reflected in his *Memoirs*, was that it was more prone to administrative (illogical delays) and imperial abuse (with state concessions) and geopolitical calculations rather than genuine imperial and “national” ambition for economic development (Kemal 1920, 187). He recalled when his appeal to the Sultan about connecting his hometown of Vlora to the project of Monastir-Salonica railway (he saw this as “patriotic duty” to develop his native region) was thwarted by Austro-Hungary and Imperial Germany and the Sultan himself. Seemingly, the former two sought to avoid competition from the Adriatic Sea, whereas the latter, the “owner of a considerable property in Salonica as well as of the port itself, was not in favour of a line that was likely to compete with Salonica” (Kemal 1920, 188).

His political marginalization by the Sultan, who discarded progressive reform (Taglia 2016, 342) and improving relations with Europe, pushed him out of the empire into seeking potential venues for change both for the empire and an emerging Albanian nation. Participating at the Young Turks Congress of 1902 in Paris, the political alternatives debated there were a centralized state underpinned by a strong Turkish nationality or a federalized empire with equality for all nations (Hanioglu 1995, 199; Taglia 2016, 350). Qemali opted for the latter—the way to renegotiate a better position also for Albanians within the empire. His vision was to have a “national government” that represented all ethnic communities, continued with reforms, and received the backing of European powers (Kemal 1920, 306). The other related alternative was that of working directly on the national cause (Artan Puto 2009, 217)—seeking self-rule and language rights.

In his short-lived journal *Le Salut de l'Albanie*, which came after collaborating with Albanian intellectual Faik Konica in whose journal *Albania* he published, Qemali pursued this national cause intellectually and politically. By 1903, he presented himself to the foreign press as an “Albanian patriot” (Clayer 2007, 381). But for him—more than Gurakuqi and Noli—these national rights were to be renegotiated within a federalized empire (Skendi 1967, 337; Taglia 2016, 343). In fact, for a brief moment, the 1908 Revolution—led by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP)—raised Qemali and Gurakuqi’s expectations for a federal/constitutional intra-state order. Qemali left exile to lead the opposition Liberal Party *Ahrar* (mostly composed of Albanian MPs; Duka 2009, 416) in a restored Ottoman Parliament, whereas Gurakuqi, as mentioned earlier, returned to Shkodra to promote language rights and strengthen education. These expectations, though, would be dashed by the CUP government’s centralizing policies, particularly its refusal to recognize Albanian self-rule. For Qemali, CUP’s position made it difficult to renegotiate relations between Albanians and their government, whereas CUP concluded that Qemali’s Albanian “national sentiments” no longer were about reform but separatism (Artan Puto 2009, 222).

In Search of a Common Past and a Unified National Political and Economic Space: Ordering the Nation

But for Qemali, “national sentiments” did not necessarily mean seeking Albanian statehood—a perspective that when juxtaposed to the Albanian “perennialist” historiographical narrative challenges the latter’s consequentialist interpretation of the *Rilindja Kombëtare* period (1830 to 1912) as a logical move from cultural to political nationalism (Brisku 2013, 15).⁴ For Qemali, as for Gurakuqi and Noli, the shift from cultural and romantic to political nationalism was contingent upon internal and external pressures on the empire, which, in the emerging national context, were experienced as territorial threats by the four Balkan states: Bulgaria, Greece, Montenegro, and Serbia. Even though an independent political nation was far from certain, the attributes that they assigned to it were ethno-cultural. Of the three, Noli would be the only one to offer a sliver of a vision of what its national economy could look like.

What is interesting regarding Albanian ethno-cultural elements/myths of a common past (the nation’s autochthonous common origins, “race,” its Indo-European linguistic and pre-Hellenic existence (Pellagian thesis), virtuous (heroism, honor) qualities) is that Qemali, Noli, and Gurakuqi (each a representative of the three most influential Diasporic Albanian communities, respectively, Albanians in Istanbul, Italy, and the USA) shared this discourse (Malcom 2002, 76). As a student of one of the most important figures of *Rilindja*, *Arberësh* (Albanian-Italian) writer Girolamo de Rada (1814–1903) in the late 1890s in Italy, Gurakuqi, for instance, would later comment on Rada’s poem “Songs of Milosao” (1836)—on romantic love of a young Shkodra ruler to a peasant girl—as being the instigator of the spirit of romanticism of national culture (Gurakuqi 1979, 107–113). Discussing the military uprising in Northern Albania against the imperial army with Faik Konica in 1910, Noli—who, since his arrival in 1906 to the US worked at the first Albanian-American newspaper *Kombi* (The Nation)—described Albanians as a “new united race, solid like a rock that repulsed the attacks of the Asiatic hurricane” (quoted in Duka 2009, 55). Qemali also, in a chapter in his *Memoirs* titled “Albania and Albanians,” wrote of the nation in these terms, additionally discussing Albanian cultural existence in terms of values of honor and family (Kemal 1920, 357).

Additionally, aside from these primordial and romantic understandings, they also shared a modern perspective of the Albanian language as a means of social communication that Konica promoted in his journal *Albania*—having all contributed in it—as to help “Albanian nationality grow” by making Albanian (Artan Puto 2009, 259) the language of culture, education, and literature (Institute of History 2002, 352). Particularly on the education front, Gurakuqi was impactful. He was key in reaching a nation-wide agreement for a unified national script (based on Latin, as opposed to Greek or Arabic) at the Monastir Congress in 1908 (Doçi 1998, 67–73) and became the first principal of *The Normal School* (1909), the first teacher training school in Albanian (Elsie 2000, 178).

Yet aside from this, Qemali wrote about a political understanding of nation. As he put it in “Albania and Albanians,” “When I say different nations I mean such as have or have had political existence and might still be capable of fulfilling their historical rights and duties” (Kemal 1920, 252). But he viewed the Ottomans, rather than Albanians, as being that “nation” with a political existence and a multi-ethnic society (Albanians included). Certainly, Qemali saw no contradiction in having two loyalties simultaneously: to the state and the community (Artan Puto 2009, 212–213). In this account of “Albania and Albanians,” Qemali was, however, inconsistent: acknowledging that there was not a contemporary political Albania—after accusations for high treason by Sultan’s court in Istanbul of giving the throne of Albania to an Egyptian Prince (of Albanian extract) (Taglia 2016, 344)—but a community that was geographically fragmented into upper and lower Albania, without a political center (Kemal 1920, 356–357). Then, he recalled a past political Albania—an “ancient government” (likely but not clearly referring to Skanderbeg’s 15th century Ottoman resistance), “which it had to give up” and “submit” to the empire because was it “necessary for her preservation” (Kemal 1920, 360). The reasons why there was no political Albania in the 19th century, as he explained the introduction to his *Memoirs*, were the same as those that had led to the imperial reforms that he critically defended, namely the “great men” of reforms implemented a “new Albanian policy” in the 1830s that deprived Albanians of a state, unlike the Greeks in 1831, by destroying the early powerful Ottoman-Albanian principalities—particularly Ali Pasha Tepelena’s (r. 1788–1822)—and supporting political fragmentation through dealing with the “great families,” such as his own Vlora family (Kemal 1920, 1–4).

In his 1900 piece titled “Little Albania,” Qemali still described the Albanian community as fragmented and part of the Ottoman state—the “great motherland of all nations living there” (Qemali 1900, 1). But what he and Gurakuqi demanded in 1911, in the “Red Book,” was the undoing of this fragmentation within a reformed empire; Noli did the same in his 1909 “platform of national Albanians who demand self-rule for Albania.” Noli would add an economic dimension to it, envisaging a national economy led by merchants who developed nation’s trade and industry, and integrated its regions (Duka 2009, 47).

While seeking a national common past and unified political and economic space would become a rather “universal” political demand by the early 1910s, the path to leaving the empire only became available when a transformed imperial center not only dismissed such demands (Glenny 2001, 227; Logoreci 1978, 47) but, crucially, no longer provided protection to the Albanian-inhabited lands, especially after the first Balkan League (Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bulgaria) in late 1912, from these states. Hence, Albania’s independence, on November 28, 1912, which Qemali saw as a reaction to the existential threat to the nation and hence a call to action (Kemal 1920, 369), came about also because of political and diplomatic mobilization—led by Qemali—of Albanians within and without the empire and the backing of larger states of Italy and Austro-Hungary. For their part, the latter two, with their secret plan of 1901, “the Albanian Accord,” envisaged a unified and independent Albania, both sharing their influence in it, if Ottomans left the Balkans and had been on a look-out for Albanian “interlocutors” to this plan (Sadiku 2014, 52). Qemali, Gurakuqi, and many others, in pursuit of the national interest, became those interlocutors. But Qemali’s ambiguity in leaving the empire was clearly explained in his *Memoirs*. Albanians, he wrote, virtuously kept their “fidelity to their word of honor,” while the empire was “the first to violate her oath of fidelity to her suzerain” leaving them with no option but to profit “from the opportunity to recover what [Albania] had lost” (Kemal 1920, 360).

Part II: Forging the Independent Nation-State

A First Attempt at Statehood: Fragmented Under the Political and Economic Clout of the Great Powers

On November 28, 1912, from the balcony of his house in Vlore, Qemali together with Gurakuqi and many others declared Albania’s independence from the empire. Qemali remarked that hoisting the flag, “the standard of the last national Sovereign [*Skanderbeg*] of Albania,” was an “unforgettable

moment” of hope and pride (Kemal 1920, 372). But their enthusiasm in declaring Albania a new political entity within the European inter-state/international order was swiftly met by the difficult tasks of getting recognized by the Great Powers and showing to them that it could become politically and economically viable. Indeed, the test became whether Albania could navigate its future with or without the Great Powers’ support. The realization quickly sank in that it could not.

As the newly elected head of Albania’s provisional government (Gurakuqi became Education Minister), Qemali recalled the initial days—how he was consumed by “one dominant thought”: how “to organize the small extent of the country” (his government authority extended not much beyond Vlore) and to show Europe that Albania was self-governing, hence deserved its confidence (Kemal 1920, 373). Also, imbued by a sense of idealism, Qemali retorted defiantly to the Sublime Porte’s cynicism—the latter seeing Qemali’s act of independence as the “enterprise of a political adventurer” for “Little Turkey [Albania] in the Balkans” (in Milo 2013, 61), and foreseeing Austro-Hungary and Italy as its new patrons—by replying that “Albania will be relying neither on Austria nor Italy, but on the rights of the Albanians to exist and to have their own state and nation-state” (in Milo 2013, 62). Noli, too, put his national idealism to practice. Having left the US for London and Paris in late 1912 to assist the provisional government’s delegation there for British and French recognition, he wrote a piece on December 12, 1912 in the British *The Daily Graphic* calling for this recognition not to be based on Albania’s presumed (he thought this was Balkan states’ propaganda) economic nonviability, but its right to exist as a nation. Furthermore, he sarcastically dismissed the economic viability and self-reliance argument of these states, noting that Greece “is under foreign financial control. What can be said about the economic achievements of Montenegro and Serbia?” (in Bihiku 2002, 10).

What became apparent for the three of them was, in the eventful London Conference of Ambassadors in July 1913, which recognized Albania’s independence, that while recognizing it, Europe, in delineating its borders (without Ioannina and Kosovo provinces), undermined this new country’s economic viability. By leaving out “fertile plains,” Qemali commented with this Conference underway, “the Powers did not really want to build a stable Albania” (in Milo 2013, 89). When it concluded, he deplored that “the most flourishing towns and most productive parts of the country having been taken away ... [the] future of ... our reborn country [was] darkened ... [and] sacrificed to the general interests of Europe” (Kemal 1920, 377).

The Great Powers’ imposition of its will on Albania was to be felt not only on the drawing of the latter’s borders, but also in its initial state-building stages. Qemali’s government clashed with the International Commission of Control (ICC)—set up by the Great Powers to control Albania’s civil administration and finances (the latter to be composed of six foreigners and one Albanian) (Milo 2013, 110)—when Qemali sought to have Gurakuqi for the Albanian position in the ICC Commission on Finance, but the ICC’s choice went through. Strikingly, the ICC also stripped his government of the right to give concessions; Qemali had awarded one to Austrian and Italian banks to establish the Albanian National Bank (Milo 2013, 152). Thus, except for pursuing a policy of economic concessions (Gurakuqi discussed this in the parliamentary debates in the early 1920s as based on the principle of awarding concessions to countries with no territorial ambitions on Albania), Qemali was unable to formulate a clear and viable vision for Albania’s national economy.

On political ordering of the state, however, in a speech delivered in Vlore a year after the declaration of independence, he envisaged forging a national political identity (similar to his idea for a federalized, reformed empire) based on a cantonal system. This entailed constructing a two-level government: the local administration of the cantons representing the local identity and customs of each province and the central government epitomizing the national interest (Qeveria e Përkohshme e Vlorës 1963, 238–239), and headed by a constitutional monarch. Yet, he felt that Austro-Hungary and Italy’s pressures on his government were “turning us into slaves of their politics” (in Milo 2013, 144), proving the Sublime Porte’s assertion that Albania had no other choice but to depend on a bigger patron. Thus, the ICC’s encroaching role in administering the territory, and other issues, proved too much for him to handle, and by January 1914 the ICC “took over the

country,” his government was dissolved, and the Great Powers brought in a European prince, Prince Wied (March–September 1914), as the head of Albania. Retrospectively, Qemali was not bitter about this and saluted Wied’s arrival, seeing it as Europe’s confirmation of the country’s existence. In fact, Qemali felt for Wied, who briefly reigned but had to leave Albania due to the onset of the Great War, as they saw each other as both isolated, without authority in the country, without sovereignty, and without European financial support (Kemal 1920, 380–381).

Unlike Qemali, Noli, who visited Albania for the first time in 1913, had a vision for national economy-building. In a 1914 “Program of Nationalists,” similar to his 1908 perspective, he envisioned establishing a national economy by consolidating national capital (pooling together the country’s financial resources) and by restricting the penetration of foreign capital into the country. Seeing Austro-Hungary and Italy’s political pressure, he thought that their economic capital represented a kind of slavery for the country—a position that could have put him at odds with Qemali politically and economically, while politically they both saw their protectorate as dangerous for Albania and the Balkans (Jorgaqi 2005, 298). Noli’s fears about Italy’s goals for Albania, as the Great War advanced, were confirmed with the London Secret Treaty of 1915, between Britain and Italy, which allowed the latter to take Albanian territory. Noli commented on this, in an article in *Boston Traveler* in 1915, as a “betrayal to this little country” by the Great Powers (Noli 2002a, 29), and he sought to amass American support instead of European. Indeed, back in the US, between 1915 and 1918, Noli saw it not only as a key supporter in recovering the state from international threats but also as a democratic model to emulate (Austin 2010, 4) and a power that could help “Albanians build an efficient state in which every loyal Albanian will feel satisfied” (Silajxhic 1999, 90). For Qemali, however, as the Great War was drawing to a close, the recovery of the state remained within the victorious Great Powers’ purview. He just hoped that they, in their “reconstruction of the Balkanic *bloc* [sic]” as a consolidated space, considered also “the consolidation of Albania which forms its fourth [the other three being Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria] supporting column” (Kemal 1920, 386).

A Second Chance for the Small Nation: In Search of International Support Abroad and Stable and Democratic Order at Home

The Great Powers’ conduct as guarantors and saboteurs of Albania’s national existence was reflected in the emerging national discourse during the War as well as in the early 1920s. Ultimately, the victorious Great Powers (Britain and France) gave Albania a second chance at statehood. The vying internal political forces, as well, finally agreed to centralize political power, with the Congress of Lushnje in January 1920, whereby a common defensive agreement was made to fight the Italian army, which occupied Vlore’s surrounding areas (a vestige of the 1915 London Secret Treaty), and, crucially, the establishment of the country’s political institutions: the High Council or Regency (functioning as a presidency) and the National Council (Parliament), with Tirana as the country’s political capitol, was agreed upon. Albanian historiography views the year 1920 as the moment when Albania received its “international credibility” (Arben Puto 2009, 313), and the period between 1920 and 1924 as the time when its state “recovered” itself (Fishta and Toçi 1983). The League of Nations (also instrumental in restoring Albania’s 1913 borders between 1920 and 1925; Austin 2012, 21) noticed with optimism, in its first opinion on the country, that, difficult current conditions aside, “the necessary elements for a developed Albania exist and that this little state has all the conditions to become an independent state economically and politically” (in Arben Puto 2009, 313).

Political voices in the newly molding national elite seemed cautiously optimistic about country’s political and economic independence and reality of the need of support from outside powers and international structures. The first Speaker of the Parliament read Parliament’s opening session on March 26, 1920, as a sign of “higher progress and civilization” for Albania (Bisedimet 1920, 9), while simultaneously underscoring the need for Europe’s support, especially France’s and England’s,

which had recognized Italy's "special interests over the country" (Vickers 1997, 98–100) and as "defenders of the freedom of the small nations," while also calling on Italy to respect the country's territorial integrity (Bisedimet 1920, 10). Noli, who had returned to Tirana and entered politics in November 1920, as MP for the People's Party, thought that only the US and the League of Nations, which were committed to the idea of national self-determination, could guarantee Albania's existence. In his speech as country's representative at the League, on the occasion of its admission there, Noli lauded it "as an ideal representing the noblest aspirations of mankind, in defiance of grotesque military glory" (in Austin 2012, 20). Gurakuqi, a member of the Progressive Party⁵ who was seen as an Italophile (Arben Puto 2010, 37), also saw the League as a useful international structure through which voices could be raised against the maltreatment of Kosovan Albanians by the Serbian (Yugoslav) state, with the latter having no reason "to consider it as meddling in its internal affairs" (Bisedimet 1921b, 205). In addition, the League came to signify an organization that could help Albania financially with a much-needed credit loan (Austin 2010, 4).

Yet, aside from seeking to anchor the state within a favorable inter-state/international order, both Noli and Gurakuqi—as well as most of the new political elite—had to demonstrate that Albania was capable of self-governing, as Qemali had to earlier, as well as of becoming a democratic state with functioning state institutions, central administration, rule of law, and keen to reform. But the period between 1920 and 1924, described as "Albania's experiment with democracy" (Austin 2012), was as much constitutive as volatile in the country's statehood, largely thanks to the pressures that came from centralizing the political power in a geographically and politically fragmented country. The interests of small, but powerful, land-owning Muslim Albanian aristocracy—"the great families" as articulated through two main political parties, the People's and Progressive Party—came into clash with those of smaller religious, regional, irredentist parties and civic organizations such as Bashkimi (Gurakuqi was a member) and Vatra (of the Albanian-American Diaspora, supporting Noli) (Austin 2012, 26). The volatility showed in the frequency with which governments changed (Vickers 1997, 100) and the uncompromising political rivalries, especially between Noli and Ahmet Zogu (1895–1961), who was highly influential in the early 1920s, and central to national politics as the country's President (from 1925 to 1928) and as King of Albania (from 1928 to 1939). Volatility nonetheless, the Parliament, especially in its first two years, checked on government's and Regency's work. Both Noli, a staunch republican (Austin 2012, 58), and Gurakuqi, a constitutional monarchist (Bisedimet 1922b, 480), were instrumental in increasing Parliament's powers vis-à-vis the government's and the Regency's (Arben Puto 2009, 319) and establishing the rule of law. In the parliamentary session, Gurakuqi urged the government to not exceed its powers outside the law (Bisedimet 1922a, 19), whereas Noli called for checks and balances between the country's judicial and executive powers (Noli 2002, 157).

As far as nation-building was concerned, many intellectuals and politicians came to realize that political and civic (as Qemali had contemplated in the late 1913) rather than ethnic-symbolic (as in the pre-independence period) and religious-based nationalism was the future (Ypi 2012, 304). To Gurakuqi, this could be forged by overcoming benign yet existing religious divisions between Muslims, Orthodox Christians, and Catholics (Gurakuqi 2003, 78; Ypi 2012, 319) and by infusing a democratic spirit into the national public discourse, particularly that of accepting opposing and competing ideas (Gurakuqi 1961, 97–99). For Noli this meant overcoming a series of divisions: religious, moral, social, patriotic, ideological, and, crucially, political-economic ones, what he called "landlordism"—those few controlling the country's economic resources (Austin 2012, 6). But this required a different way of thinking regarding the state's role in the national economy.

"National Economy-Building": National Protectionism versus Redistribution

While no systematic thinking on the nation's economic dimension in the late Ottoman period existed, except for Noli's 1908 and 1914 fragmented views, the state-building process in the early 1920s necessitated considerations about "national economy-building," not the least because the

country had been devastated and bankrupt by a decade-long war (Vickers 1997, 98–100). Such considerations led Noli and Gurakuqi to articulate similar as well as opposing views.

Indeed, both supported an interventionist state regarding the economy—more than Qemali imagined—but they did so for different purposes. Gurakuqi's view, echoing a Listian approach, needed the state's power to defend national interests (national wealth creation) and interestingly labor as well. Noli was for free market and free trade, yet he was keen to embark on a redistributive approach (land redistribution). Both, though, as Qemali earlier, were convinced that that smaller states, such as Albania, could develop better if support was given by larger states. Noli, however, sensitive to the latter's economic imperialism, sought that support from the League of Nations.

That no real national economic project existed prior to the establishment of the nation-state did not mean that Albanian politicians were unfamiliar with the concepts of political economy and national economy. In parliamentary discussions and debates on economic issues, such as the debate of October 29, 1921 on a moratorium regarding paying the country's past debts, which were incurred in several currencies, they understood political economy as a "science" that could solve such questions rationally (Bisedimet 1921g, 575–576). National economy, however, was a contested notion, understood not only as a bundle of rational thought but also a platform for different models of development. The Speaker of the Parliament, opening a marathon, multi-session debate on legislating the establishment of the first concession in the agricultural sector, an Albanian-British Tobacco Anonymous Society (TAS), seen as the future model for concessions (Bisedimet 1921a, 133), conceived of a "well-thought (rational) economic development of national economy" as the basis for "securing the country's independence" (Bisedimet 1921a, 131). In another session, the government's representatives discussed helping the agricultural sector "by establishing agricultural banks that will help farmers" (Bisedimet 1921d, 241), whereas in another in early 1921, a shared consensus for free trade was expressed when potential Italian tariffs on agricultural exports (horses and processed bulrush) were debated. For the MPs, free trade meant that "the farmer gets some profits, the worker a wage, the merchant's interest on lending, and in general the national wealth improved," and they sought guarantees from government that were not imposed (Bisedimet 1921c, 228); they were not.⁶

Returning to the several sessions about the TAS, Gurakuqi, a member of the Parliamentary Commission on Finance, spoke of a national economy in need of many protective measures. At its first session on this issue, on June 29, 1921, he argued that concessions to foreign capital from "states like Greece, Serbia, and Italy that have political ambitions" had to be discouraged, as Ismail Qemali did (Bisedimet 1921a, 132–140; Bisedimet 1921e, 257). Additionally, concessionary companies had to have sufficient capital to "honor the interest of the nation" (Bisedimet 1921b, 212–214) and allow the state to make a profit and ensure that "our labor is not exploited" (Bisedimet 1921c, 224). Government could intervene by placing an inspector in this company to control its financial activity and have a "voice in determining salaries, general expenses and the selling price of tobacco" so that it did not manipulate the prices (Bisedimet 1921c, 231). Acknowledging that such intervention disrupted free trade (Bisedimet 1921d, 241) and that concessions' legislation was of a monopolistic nature, Gurakuqi saw it as necessary for national economic development because "people and state finances expect great benefits" (Bisedimet 1921c, 232). Ultimately, he considered himself as a politician who "protected and put nation and homeland's interests above personal ones" (Bisedimet 1921c, 234). For Noli, though, who was intervening in a 1922 parliamentary session regarding the government's plans to give monopolistic rights to a company specializing in collecting hides, such monopolistic concessionaries discouraged free trade, competition, and ultimately economic development (Noli 2002, 148). Government, Noli asserted, could intervene to implement redistributive policies through progressive taxation and land reform. On the first policy, regarding TAS's rate of taxation on profit, they both concurred: Gurakuqi demanded a 50 percent rate (Bisedimet 1921c, 231) because "the rich would profit more from the fixing of the roads" than the poor, whereas Noli sought an 80 percent rate, which he viewed as more "honourable" (Bisedimet 1921d, 241). On the

second policy of land reform, as discussed below, Noli would attempt it in mid-1924, while Gurakuqi reluctantly followed.

“Shall We or Shall We Not Build a State?”: Radical Reform Internally and Credit from Abroad

Hopes and misgivings about the path of state-building by way of a viable national economy-building were articulated from the very outset. Two years into statehood, in January 1922, the Finance Minister asked MPs rhetorically “shall we or shall we not build a state?” For himself, he responded positively because state law no longer allowed discrimination of Albanians vis-à-vis Western merchants, as capitulations did. Accordingly, having one’s nation-state proved beneficial for Albanians (Bisedimet 1922c, 120).

Gurakuqi and Noli were all about the legal state. But they were not impressed by the many governments’ performances regarding fundamental political-economic issues. Gurakuqi’s critique though, unlike Noli’s, was more constructive than radical. Criticizing, for instance, in Smithian terms, governments’ mercantilist policy, that holding gold and silver damaged trade, and the accumulation of national wealth (Smith 2008 [1776], 326), he urged it instead to act “like the other states,” allowing free circulation and to also “rein in speculation and monopolization of this trade” (Bisedimet 1922c, 120). Meanwhile, Noli was totally dismissive of their performances, particularly in a parliamentary speech on September 14, 1922, titled “The Government of Zeros,” on a confidence vote for Xhafer Ypi’s government, seeing it as incompetent regarding finances, without a national economic vision, and unable to secure a foreign loan (Noli 2002, 149).

But for Noli, this and other successor governments (Zogu would be prime minister between December 1922 and February 1924, and would be replaced by the country’s richest landowner Shevqet Verlaci in Spring 1924 after Zogu was wounded in the Parliament) could not yield a viable national economy as long as they were controlled by the extremely rich landlords. Amid exacerbated political and economic crises in these years, such as rebellions, outbreaks of famine, and political antagonism (Vickers 1997, 108), Noli came to think about more radical economic policies and social change (Austin 2012, 5). The League of Nations’ fact-finding mission in mid-1923 also concluded that while in state-building aspects, such as controlling territory, recruiting soldiers, and collecting taxes, the government had succeeded; however, in “national economy-building” terms, it could not control spending and desperately needed a foreign loan of \$20 million. In addition, a League expert pointed to government corruption, unfair tax burden share on the peasantry, and the need to redistribute the lands of seven major landowners to the peasants (Arben Puto 2009, 331). Acknowledging and criticizing Zogu’s government of plundering public finances, corruption, and massive budget deficits (Austin 2012, 55), Gurakuqi sought to work within the system, for the country was in “a desperate need for calm, especially because the financial and economic situation was critical” (Austin 2012, 41). He joined the Verlaci government (March–May 1924) as Finance Minister, and asked, in a session on April 17, 1924, the Parliament, in which Noli was present, to allocate funds to “keep the state running” (Bisedimet 1924, 484).

While this request was granted, with Noli refusing because the new government reneged on a promise of political amnesty for those who wounded Zogu (Bisedimet 1924, 486), this government was short-lived. By mid-June following the so-called “June Revolution,” which was triggered by the political assassination of the leader of Bashkimi, Avni Rustemi, and was blamed on Zogu, Noli became Prime Minister (by lot) and Gurakuqi became Finance Minister (Austin 2012, 55–56). This seemed to be Noli’s opportunity to implement an economic vision for Albania with a radical redistributive approach.

True to his ideology, Noli produced a 20-point reform agenda for his coalition government, whereby, aside from affirming his vision for a democratic republic based on the rule of law, he offered the first-ever governmental program for a national economy entailing land redistribution to peasants “to improve conditions of the farmers and their economic independence,” progressive taxation, allowance of foreign capital, and protection and organization of the country’s economic

independence (Austin 2012, 60). Yet Noli's proposed political means to implement it, particularly land redistribution, through dictatorship, with military tribunals set up to sentence political opponents (Verlaci was the first to have his property taken; Jacques 1995, 380) and the postponement of election, did not bode well for him internally and externally. Gurakuqi and many other figures were jittery about land expropriation. Nevertheless, they agreed that foreign credit/loan from abroad was key to the country's economic prosperity. Failing to secure a deal with the Italian attaché in Tirana in early July 1924 (Arben Puto 2010, 84), the government backed the decision that Noli and Gurakuqi sought at the League (this was done between September and October; Austin 2012, 70). But Noli failed to convince the League of his vision, and lost his calm with its General Secretary when he demanded an explanation: "Why do you refuse to give Albania a loan that would make it stand on its own?" (in Arben Puto 2010, 221).

Conclusion

Before returning empty-handed to Tirana from their League of Nations trip, via Italy, Noli and Gurakuqi had a two-hour meeting in Rome on October 11, 1924 with Mussolini. Having failed to secure the loan at the League, they hoped that they would do so with Mussolini. But the latter let it be understood that such a loan could be given only if it was tied to a military alliance between the two countries (Arben Puto 2010, 84; Milo 2013, 655)—a deal that Zogu (who had no economic vision for the country), as Albania's president, would sign with Mussolini in two pacts. Zogu came to power in late December 1924, pushing Noli's government out of power and Noli and Gurakuqi into exile, and conceded to the Italian state to establish the National Bank of Albania in September 1925. With the pacts of 1926 and 1927, Zogu effectively signed Albania's political, military, and economic handover to Mussolini's new empire. The 1926 Pact of Friendship rendered Italy the "guarantor" of Albania, stripping it of its foreign policy, and the 1927 Pact put Mussolini in control of the national army, state institutions, petroleum concessions, and finances, and enabled unrestricted access of Italian goods to the Albanian market (Roselli 2006, xii; Trattati 1938).

The above acts became the prelude to Albania's full incorporation into the Italian Kingdom, which was finalized with the former's occupation in April 1939. The pacts with Italy would have been possible but far-fetched outcomes to what Qemali, Gurakuqi, and Noli began to think—following the country's declaration of independence—of the prospects for their small nation-state's political and economic development.

To a great extent, Qemali, Gurakuqi, and Noli believed that their late 19th- and early 20th-century small and fragmented nation could renegotiate a political existence (self-rule and language rights) within a reformed Ottoman Empire, as did most Bohemians in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, or Georgians in the Russian Empire in their own contexts (see Brisku 2016, 2017). But the political dilemma of staying in or out of the Ottoman Empire was not predicated directly upon political-economic terms of being better off in either scenario, but rather on the ground that this imperial state could not protect it from its neighboring states' nationalist projects, while venues for political reform were closed. Had Qemali considered national development in political-economic terms, he would have argued for it to stay in.

Noli and Gurakuqi, however, could have gone either way. As the independent Albania emerged, they realized its dependency on the political and economic power of the larger states and the League. At the same time, having found a sense of political agency (Noli returned to the US to pursue nonpolitical interests, and died in Florida in 1965; Gurakuqi was assassinated by Zogu's agents in Italy in 1925), they also envisioned a national economy that, while connected to larger political and economic spaces, could also develop into either a more "national protectionist" or a "national liberal" and a redistributive path.

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Notes

- 1 On Noli see, Noli (1968); Qosja (1969); Pipa (1984); and Fischer (1988).
- 2 Qendra e Botimeve Zyrtare (2012); Institucioni i Presidentit (2012).
- 3 Scholarship on Albania's economic history covers rather sufficiently the post-communist period; on economic transition, see Pashko (1993); Korovilas (1999); Muço (2000); and Lemel (2000). On the communist period's socialist political (planned) economy, see Bardhoshi (1965); Banja (1967); Prifti (1978); Sjöberg (1991); and Fishta and Ziu (2004). On the independence period, focusing on causes and consequences of country's economic backwardness, see Fisha and Toçi (1983). On Fascist Italian imperialist political economy regarding Albania in 1939, see Rosseli (2006).
- 4 For critical perspectives on Albanian identities, see Schwandner-Sievers and Fischer (2002).
- 5 "Raporti i Mehmet Konicës drejtuar Sulejman Delvinës," June 19, 1924, Arkivi Qëndror i Shtetit, Tirana, Font 251, Doss 136.
- 6 Albania and Fascist Italy signed the 1926 Pact of Friendship, whereby the former lost its foreign policy to the latter; and the 1927 Pact, in which the latter exercised control over Albania's army and market; see Trattati e Convenzioni fra il Regno d'Italia e gli altri Stati (1938).

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