

An overview of trade aspects between Albania and Western Countries at the end of the 17th Century-early 18th Century: A historical economic study

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Abstract:

Trade is the flowing of goods and services across countries without barriers of any type. Its aim is to provide quality and affordable goods and services to the markets of the countries that participate in free trade, which has an impact on the level of competitiveness between local and international businesses. If the quality of products imported is higher, the domestic firms would have to raise their standard and quality of production. This would benefit the consumer with better quality products and so on.

This paper is focused on giving an overview of trade in Albania and external trade during the 17th Century and the 18th Century, sharing some historical aspects of its development and the main characteristics.

Key words: Trade, Albania, Western countries, 17th-18th Centuries.

Introduction

During the last decade Albania made great efforts toward trade liberalization, by opening up the national borders. It signed its first free trade agreement in 1998. Walking on the footsteps of other countries, Albania is trying to open its market to the world but so far the effect of trade liberalization is not being the

one the country hoped they would be. This is due to the fact that economy is one of the cornerstones of any country. But, the economic situation and trade is not the same during the centuries or decades. It depends on various reasons; historical, cultural, economical and political ones. The crisis during the first half of the 15th Century made the trade entrance into a process of recession, but the gradual expansion of the finance and market as well, and was one of the levers that spurred the economy and society. The 16th Century was a period of commercial arteries recovery, not only in the Adriatic region.

1. Socio-economic conditions in late 17th century-early 18th century

The crisis which happened during the first half of the 15th Century that exploded as a social and economic crisis (crisis of hunger, war, epidemics, social unrest) made first of all the trade entrance into a process of recession, but the gradual expansion of the finance and market as well, and was one of the levers that spurred the economy and society. Revitalization of shopping centers and shopping streets weakened in the late XV century, appeared in the Adriatic with an increased flow of goods and in first place in the marketing of food products at relatively low cost¹.

Improving access to transportation and maritime exchanges brought the expansion of commercial grade, eager for wealth and power. The 16th Century was characterized by the existence of for medieval Western groups of big merchants. It was a period of commercial arteries recovery, not only in the Adriatic region where they reached a high intensity, but also in Germany, the Netherlands, Russia and worldwide. The echo of this growth was affected by European trade in the Lower

¹ Coba, A; Prela, Z. Albanica (1965) Tirana Albania, page 51.

Adriatic territory, which until then was less associated with freight traffic and international trade network of the time.

In the last bow of XVII-XVIII centuries there were noted in specific areas of Adriatic an increase in the agricultural production, which had increased for goods of all kinds. Therefore, as a result of expanding commercial exchanges, the Adriatic port cities promoted the initiative productive village².

In the production and circulation of goods, in that period were observed two trends. One was oriented towards the free movement of goods to be transported across the Adriatic and other tendencies, had intended, creating an autarkic economy in order to meet market needs. For a long time Albanian merchants saw their future oriented to maritime traffic, due to the Albanian territory, infrastructure, mentioning here the primitiveness roads and transport only with horse³.

At the end of the seventeenth century-early eighteenth century as a result of changes in economic structures, there was an increase of population in the Albanian territory. Also, increase of perks trade relations' productions were observed in some cities but these changes were shown firstly in Durres, because of the fact that his port provided a strategic role in exchanges and maritime traffic in Adriatic and so wider. The area adjacent markets products were such: eggs, firewood, vegetables and seasonal fruits, milk and some modest craft products. Albanian economy provided goods such as cereals and wine wool fabrics, silk etc., which were particularly preferred in international traffic⁴.

The business of Durres developed because of the activity in the city of artisans and farmers of the village, the exchange of agricultural products and craft local items.

² Documents on Albania of 18th Century (1975) (the Venetian consuls Letters of Durres), Volume I (1696-1707), translated and prepared for publication by Zija Shkodra, Tirana, Albania, page 11.

³ Shkodra , Z (1973 Esnafet Shqiptare, Tirana, Albania, page 67.

⁴ Shkodra , Z (1973 Esnafet Shqiptare, Tirana, Albania, page 280.

In the trade of that period, there had a high value items such as wheat, salt, wine, wool, wood, etc., whose transportation cost was able to cover the costs of trade through shipping⁵.

At the international level, there was an increase of reports, relations with the outside, in the first instance, between the Adriatic ports, but also beyond, to those of the Mediterranean, through which there were imported metals, agricultural products and European fabrics luxury items such as silk precious stones and spices (used in cooking, in dying and in perfumes), but also sugar, cotton or alum (used in dyeing of fabrics⁶.

Italian trade circles considered the Albanian coast as a priority scope of international trade. Venetians were interested in Durres port, as a starting point in relations between other centers in Lower Adriatic and beyond in the central Balkans as the second market in importance after Thessaloniki⁷. Venetians, in addition to offering many luxury goods, they were holders for other materials, especially of raw materials. Venetian merchants were interested directly to export products of strategic value for Durres, such as leather, wax, corn, tobacco, etc⁸.

A particular focus was on long-distance trade as North Africa, Asia Front, whose implementation required substantial expenditures for safe boat of armed sailors that could afford big risks and attacks by pirates, storms difficulties etc.

⁵ Relac, I. (1963). Relations on the situation of the Middle Northern Albania, Tirana, Albania, page 58.

⁶ Documents on Albania of 18th Century (1975) (the Venetian consuls Letters of Durres), Volume I (1696-1707), translated and prepared for publication by Zija Shkodra, Tirana, Albania, page 18.

⁷ Documents of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the history of Albania, Volume II, (1593-1602), translated by Injaz Zamputi, 1990. Tirana, Albania, page 170.

⁸ Documents on Albania of 18th Century (1975) (the Venetian consuls Letters of Durres), Volume I (1696-1707), translated and prepared for publication by Zija Shkodra, Tirana, Albania, page 8.

In this context, local traders were interested to find rare luxury products to satisfy the taste and meet the need of the local aristocracy. Exotic items were considered an important part of the trade of the 18th century offered from the Orient Front⁹.

2. Situation in the Albanian coast scaffolding

Durres, at the end of the 17th Century was considered a key center point of the European market, as an important port on the western coast of Balkanic Turkey. In the race for the conquest of large Turkish market was previously interested France, as its major power in the Western Balkans¹⁰.

In 1686, France had established a consular office in Thessaloniki depending on which, after four years included the vice consul of Durres (since 1699). Besides Durres, the French raised after 1700, new consulate in Saranda, Vlora and elsewhere in the Ionian ports. Towards the middle of the eighteenth century French Consulate arose in Ragusa (1740) and in Sarajevo as well (since 1750)¹¹.

Due to the expansion of the French capital towards the Ottoman Empire in the Western Balkans, also Venice, Ragusa, England, the Netherlands and Austria began to create their consular agencies. Since the beginning of 17th Century, exchanges in Durres, the development of trade linkages with interior areas, but also links to French traders, Italian and particularly with those of Venice, had introduced an intensive process¹².

⁹ Documents on Albania of 18th Century (1975) (the Venetian consuls Letters of Durres), Volume I (1696-1707), translated and prepared for publication by Zija Shkodra, Tirana, Albania, page 10.

¹⁰ Documents on Albania of 18th Century (1975) (the Venetian consuls Letters of Durres), Volume I (1696-1707), translated and prepared for publication by Zija Shkodra, Tirana, Albania, page 16.

¹¹ Shkodra , Z (1973) *Esnafet Shqiptare*, Tirana, Albania, page 278.

¹² Cessi , R. (1943) *La Repubblica di Venezia e il problema Adriatico*, Padua, Italy, page 286.

In these circumstances, the Albanian land market, after more than two centuries, revived previous ties with the West by entering more and more under the influence of Europe. In this context, there was a competition between the economic interests of some European countries. There was a hegemonic tendency of Venice to other competitors: France, Holland, England and to some Italian cities the western Adriatic¹³. The restoration of the Venetian consul, Xhiorxhio Kumano, gave a special impetus to the process in April 1700, which worked out a new policy for trade in the Albanian coast¹⁴.

3. Aspects of the economic development of the Lower Adriatic region

Development of agricultural economy and monetary but also the weakening of the feudal regime during the 18th century brought the strengthening of property landowner in the Albanian coastal plains. Near major assets land owners had markets where the main products sold were of the estate. Since the second half of the 17th Century and onwards, with the rapid spread of large landowner property was strengthened guilds of craftsmen and merchants that were the basis of the economic life of the country¹⁵.

At the beginning of Century, Durres, by a powerful city of the great humanist of Roderdamit Erazem, described as "Constantinople II" was transformed and damaged by the Turks. It was reduced to a third of the former dimensions of urban space. The city had about 200 houses, and some warehouses of export-import cargo. Economic base for the city were the salt flats of Karpen that produced large quantities of

¹³ Shkodra , Z (1973 Esnafet Shqiptare, Tirana, Albania, page 279.

¹⁴ Documents on Albania of 18th Century (1975) (the Venetian consuls Letters of Durres), Volume I (1696-1707), translated and prepared for publication by Zija Shkodra, Tirana, Albania, page 12.

¹⁵ Shkodra , Z (1973 Esnafet Shqiptare, Tirana, Albania, page 11.

exported salt destined for the Dalmatian ports (Ragusa, Fiume and elsewhere)¹⁶. Through 10 caravans there were realized exchanges of goods between interior provinces of Albania (Elbasan, Ohrid, Skopje, etc.) and wider, in those of Rumelia. A commercial artery was also the other convoy road linking Durres-Shkodra, the country's main port with the center of northern Albania. Shkodra traders had taken in the eighteenth century a part of Rumelia markets for some items.¹⁷

In Albanian cities operated a large number of craft artisan who produced: tanned skin, fabrics of cotton, wool and silk and various commodities for the domestic market and external one. Before the arrival of the Venetian consul, Kumano, indigenous ship flotilla Ulcinj, foreign and French, English, Dutch regularly loaded and unloaded goods in the scaffoldings of Durres. According to the French consul Baltazar Comte (1699), in Durres were brought goods by around 100 traders from Shkodra, Elbasan, Voskopoja, who collected wool, wax, leather, thick fabrics and other goods from various regions of Albania and the Balkans sent to Venice, Ancona and the Adriatic scaffolds¹⁸.

The arrival of the Venetian consul Xhiorxhio Kumano (since 1700) would undermine other competitors report. To revive trade with Venice at the expense of Ragusa and Ancona this policy was designed to facilitate consul taxes on the goods shipped by Venetian fleet. Kumano pursued policies to make for themselves the Albanian traders by distancing them from other

¹⁶ Documents on Albania of 18th Century (1975) (the Venetian consuls Letters of Durres), Volume I (1696-1707), translated and prepared for publication by Zija Shkodra, Tirana, Albania, page 9.

¹⁷ Shkodra , Z (1973 Esnafet Shqiptare, Tirana, Albania, page 4.

¹⁸ Documents on Albania of 18th Century (1975) (the Venetian consuls Letters of Durres), Volume I (1696-1707), translated and prepared for publication by Zija Shkodra, Tirana, Albania, page 3.

foreigners and encouraging them to transporting their goods by boat to Venice¹⁹.

Ulcinj Trading Fleet, during 10 years of the eighteenth century grew in 250-300 ships (100 of these vessels were of a tonnage 1000-2000 Star). With a crew of sailors 4000-5000 it would afford a highly relevant Albanian commercial transport throughout the country skeleton²⁰. From an overview of Albanian merchant who had the direct relations with the external world and especially in Venice during the years 1741-1800 show that only from Shkodra there were 804 traders and 200 were from Ulcinj. Venetian consul intervened and established connections with other small scaffolding of our coast²¹.

4. Main import-export articles.

Ancona, ships laden with soft animal skin or wild, (leather bear, fox, etc.), Waxes (for lighting), thick fabric of wool and cotton, grain, olive oil, silk., bulls, horses, etc. The list of export items also included olive oil, tobacco, resin sheet etc. Based on loads and summary lists of the time it turns out that these items were sold in Venice, Ragusa, Ancona, and more grains purchased by the French²². Among import items coming in Durres were costly stofrat (cohra) of France, Holland, Venice, silk fabrics of any kind, various dry goods, scrap metal, etc²³. These goods came mainly from the scaffolding of Ancona,

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Shkodra , Z (1973 Esnafet Shqiptare, Tirana, Albania, page 288.

²¹ Shkodra , Z (1973 Esnafet Shqiptare, Tirana, Albania, page 290.

²²Documents on Albania of 18th Century (1975) (the Venetian consuls Letters of Durres), Volume I (1696-1707), translated and prepared for publication by Zija Shkodra, Tirana, Albania, page 14.

²³ Ibid, page 15

Venice and Ragusa, distributed the Albanian markets and partly Balkan domestic markets²⁴.

Supported by first names and last names of merchants who came to document such as: Gege dishes, Ali Beard, Mehmet Kavaja, Karabushi Mustafa Ibrahim Biçaku, Mehmet Priska, Haji Mustafa Tiranliu, they were mainly from Tirana, Kavaja, Elbasan and Berat. In 18th Century, Voskopoja with its guild was also considered a major center of trade in the areas of Albania²⁵.

Conclusions

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rade is one of the key tools to achieve higher welfare levels of the societies. This was the main in the 17th-18th Centuries and still remains to be an important principle nowadays.

In the 17th and 18th Century, trade in Albania has its development, according to the period in which it was developed. The fleet and Durres' port had a basic importance in trade, relating Albania with other traders worldwide. The trade was developed according to the historical and economic situation.

Behind the 1956, agreement in Italy was the beginning of the formation of the nowadays European Union. Free trade was seen as the means by which the European countries devastated by war, would rise up again. It was also seen as a means of peace, because countries with strong trade ties had less motives of conflict with each other. Free trade agreements were born out of the desire to increase people's welfare.

²⁴ Shkodra , Z (1973) *Esnafet Shqiptare*, Tirana, Albania. page 305.

²⁵ *Ibid*, page 6.

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