

The end of the 'brotherly' relations between Albania and Yugoslavia (July 1947-November 1948)

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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to show the last months of the relations between Albania and Yugoslavia. It was a very close relationship, began in 1945 and continued through 1946 and 1947 with several treaties that foresaw the creation of a common market, a economic union, the coordination of economic plans etc., but at the end of 1947 something had began to go wrong, according to the Yugoslavs. In this paper I argue that the cause for the breaking of relations between two countries, should not be sought only in the relation between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, as has been mostly done until now, but the Albanians also always had doubts about the relation with Yugoslavia, so these two events coalesced to end the Albanian-Yugoslav relation. In this paper I will not touch the Soviet-Yugoslav split because it has been written a lot about it, so I will concentrate on the Albanian-Yugoslav relations in the months after the split between Stalin and Tito became public and until November 1948, when Albania definitely turned its back to Yugoslavia and chose the Soviet Union. I will concentrate on the practical measures the two countries, especially Albania, undertook in breaking up their relations. In writing this paper I have utilized mostly documents researched by the author in the Albanian archives, published documents from the archives in Albania and Ex-Yugoslavia and published books.

Key words: Albania, Yugoslavia, 1948, end, Soviet Union

I. Introduction

The first sign that something had cracked in the surface of the Albanian-Yugoslav relations was the increased Soviet influence in Albania, at least according to the Yugoslavs. The Yugoslavs were distressed by the Soviet influence in Albania, because that influence, even though small, had existed since the end of Second World War, but what mostly distressed the Yugoslavs was the fact that from the middle of 1947, that Soviet influence was going directly to Albania, bypassing the Yugoslavs. That was something new. The visit of the Albanian Leader Enver Hoxha, in Moscow, in July 1947, was the starting point for the increased Soviet influence in Albania. After that, according to the Yugoslavs, relations between Albania and Yugoslavia worsened. They were not much 'brotherly' anymore. Albania had not fulfilled its obligations according to the treaties signed in November 1946. More and more Soviet experts were coming in Albania, as was more and more economic help from the Soviet Union, equipment and products that the Yugoslavs had refused to give to Albania. More and more was talked about Stalin in the Albanian press and the Albanian cities, and less and less about Tito. Stalin's photos were shown around Albania as much as those of Tito and about the Soviet Union were talked as much as about Yugoslavia. All of this was the result of that Moscow visit of the Albanian Leader that had changed everything, according to the Yugoslavs.

II. The First Signs (July 1947)

The visit of the Albanian Leader, Enver Hoxha, in Moscow in July 1947, wasn't the beginning of the end of the Albanian-Yugoslav relations, but for Albania it was a good sign that if the relations with Yugoslavia went badly, Albania could rely on the Soviet help. Until that time, the Soviet Union had constructed its relationship with Albania through Yugoslavia, but the

economic problems with Yugoslavia had forced the Albanians to turn for help to the Soviet Union and the Soviets had given to the Albanians everything that the Yugoslavs had refused to give, mostly materials and equipment to help build the light industry in Albania. For the Yugoslavs, Hoxha's visit in Moscow seemed to confirm their worst fear: Albania was building a direct relationship with the Soviet Union. But this was not entirely the case. In the meeting with Stalin, the Soviet Leader said to Enver Hoxha that the Soviet help would continue to be given through Yugoslavia, because the Soviets feared the reaction of the Anglo-Americans if the Soviet Union directly interfered in Albania. This justification seems a little lame because the Soviet Union had been greatly interfering in all the countries of Eastern Europe including Albania, and that was not a secret to the Anglo-Americans.

Milovan Xhilas once said that Hoxha always was on the side of the Soviets, and he was not far from the truth. For the Albanian Leader, Moscow was the main objective, not Belgrade. After the end of the Second World War he had tried several times to go to Moscow, but was refused because for the Soviets, the Albanian Leader should first go to Belgrade. He was forced to accept Belgrade as a mediator in the relations between Albania and the Soviet Union, because the Soviet Union itself was not directly interested in Albania and the country was given by the Soviet Union as a protectorate to the Yugoslavs. Only later, when Tito and the Yugoslavs went beyond the limits set before them by Stalin, and started to greatly increase their influence beyond the frontiers of Yugoslavia, maybe aiming to become the second most important center for world communism after the Soviet Union, only then, did the Soviet Union started to take the place of Yugoslavia in Albania and the rest of the Balkans. But, in July 1947, that had not happened yet. 'It is very good that Albania has Yugoslavia as an ally in your frontiers', said Stalin to Hoxha, 'Albania is a small country and it needs a strong support. You cannot do it alone'.

In the months after Hoxha's visit in Moscow, the Soviet presence in Albania started to increase. For the Yugoslavs, from now on, Albania would have a direct relation with the Soviet Union and they were not capable to understand what would become of the treaties that Yugoslavia had signed with Albania in the last three years. Those treaties foresaw a very close relation between Albania and Yugoslavia, and now, in the middle of that close relation was the Soviet Union, which had no intention to go away. The Albanian officials had declared to the Yugoslavs that they could not fulfill all their obligations concerning the economic treaties with Yugoslavia, because the materials that were destined for shipment to Yugoslavia would go to the Soviet Union, as an exchange for the equipment that Albania needed for its light industry. This was a real turnaround in the relations between Albania and Yugoslavia, because the economic relations were the most important part of the close collaboration between the two countries in the years 1945-1948. It was in the name of economic collaboration that Albania and Yugoslavia had become so close, and it was in the name of economic problems that the close collaboration started to unravel. It was this crucial point that the Soviet Union choose to exploit with the intention of taking Albania off the hands of Yugoslavia, in the same way that at the end of the Second World War, the Soviet Union had put Albania in the hands of Yugoslavia.

During Enver Hoxha's stay in Moscow, the Yugoslav ambassador in the Soviet Union was not consulted, a thing which greatly infuriated the Yugoslavs, but Albania tried to reassure them that from the Soviet Union, Albania was demanding only materials and equipment which Yugoslavia had refused to give. After Yugoslavia's refusal, the Albanians went in Moscow not only to demand the needed equipment, but also to advise with Soviet officials about those problems which until than were discussed only with the Yugoslavs. Enver Hoxha in Moscow asked for help about the statute of the

Communist Party of Albania. He said to the Soviets that the statute of the Communist Party of Albania would be modeled on that of the Soviet Union. 'We have also seen the statute of the Bulgarian Labor party and specific thesis from the statute of the Communist Party of Romania'. He didn't mention Yugoslavia.

For Moscow Albania's need for equipment was a good opportunity to increase its direct influence in Tirana. Soviet influence in Albania was important even before the middle of 1947, but it was an influence filtered through Yugoslavia. After the middle of 1947, after the refusal of Yugoslavia to give equipment to Albania and after Enver Hoxha's visit in Moscow, the Soviet Union started to increase its direct influence. This was not easily accepted from the Yugoslavs and they openly expressed their distress. Some time after Hoxha's visit in Moscow, the Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito, in an conversation with the Soviet ambassador in Belgrade expressed his worries about the fact that after Enver Hoxha's visit in the Soviet Union, in Albania there had been declarations by high officials that Yugoslavia promised economic help and didn't give it, that Albania to Yugoslavia is important only because of its geographical position and that Yugoslavia wishes to negate Albania's independence. But Tito in the end expressed his conviction that Hoxha's visit in Moscow and the treaties signed there between the two countries, could not hamper the Yugoslav-Albanian relations. For the declarations mentioned above against Yugoslavia, Tito, as always, blamed several Albanian high officials who didn't wish to see Albania have a close relation with Yugoslavia.

The Soviet representative in Albania assured the Yugoslavs that after Hoxha's visit nothing would have changed in the relations between Albania and Yugoslavia and that the Soviet Union would continue to help Albania through Yugoslavia. But, all these assurances from the Soviet Union could not dissipate the Yugoslavs' suspicions. According to

them, Abdyl Këllezhi, Albania's Deputy Minister of Finance, had said that 'the Soviet experts were valuable, trustworthy, that finish in time their responsibilities...on the other hand the Yugoslavs don't work, they wait the end of the working time and in the midst of them there are even saboteurs'.

This attitude from the Albanians was not a coincidence. The Soviets too were not satisfied from Yugoslavia's actions in Albania. Maybe Albanians knew about this and tried to profit from it, or maybe the Soviet encouraged the Albanians because of their dissatisfaction and they knew the Albanians had expressed doubts about Yugoslavia months before. Before Enver Hoxha's visit in Moscow, the Soviet representative in Albania had sent a rapport concerning the Communist Party of Albania, in which he wrote about the chaotic situation inside the Party and the fact that the Yugoslavs that had the responsibility to advise the Albanians, had not done a good job. The Soviet ambassador, who was present during Enver Hoxha's meeting with Stalin, said that the Soviet Leader had also expressed his dissatisfaction with Yugoslavia's politics in Albania, that Albania was an independent country and that it should have relations with other countries, not just with Yugoslavia.

Enver Hoxha had expressed his dissatisfaction with Yugoslavia, especially about economic matters, since the spring of 1947 in the discussions with the Soviet representative in Albania. He repeated the same thing during his visit in Moscow in the meeting with Molotov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Enver Hoxha's complaints of Yugoslavia found a fertile soil in the Soviet Union to grow and became real problems in the relation between Albania and Yugoslavia. This happened because the Soviets too saw that Yugoslavia in her foreign affairs was going beyond the limits they had imposed. The Yugoslavs were trying to project themselves as the leaders in the Balkans by greatly interfering in the internal affairs of Albania and at the same time by trying

to create a common state with Bulgaria, which was something Stalin had forbidden. The interference in Albania was so great that practically the Yugoslavs were directing Albania's economy by deciding which products should be exported and which should be imported, what should be planted and what not.

III. The End

Even though there had been problems, especially concerning the economy, which were turned by the Yugoslavs into political problems, it is difficult to say if the Albanian-Yugoslav relationship would have ended as it did, if the Soviet Union hadn't interfered. The Albanians could have broken the relations with Yugoslavia only if they would have had the support of the Soviet Union. For the Soviet Union the problem was not specifically Yugoslavia's interference in Albania that had gone beyond what the Soviet Union had demanded, but the fact that the Yugoslavs were trying to increase their influence all over the Balkans. This could have created a second center inside the Communist block in the Eastern Europe after Moscow. Tito was not like the other leaders of the communist countries of the Eastern Europe. He didn't owe his power to Stalin, like the other did. The Red Army had liberated the other communist countries of Eastern Europe, except for Yugoslavia and Albania, and their leaders during the war were away in Moscow waiting their turn to take power in their respective countries. During the war Tito was in Yugoslavia fighting the Germans and because of his war effort, he had a considerable popularity inside the country.

It could be argued that the Stalin-Tito split was fundamental in the relations between Albania and Yugoslavia, but on the other hand its not that those relations had been perfect until the Stalin-Tito split. In the deteriorating Albania-Yugoslav relations, Stalin found a chance to attack Tito not only about those relations, but also for his whole foreign politics

in the Balkans, including that with Albania. Albania, for its part, in the Stalin-Tito split found the opportunity to go away from Yugoslavia. The Albanian leadership for several months had expressed its doubts about the sincerity of Yugoslavia towards Albania, but the Albanians were too weak and small to publicly doubt Yugoslavia. The Soviet Union could do it for them. This is not to say that the Stalin attacked Tito because the Albanians said him to do so, but the Albania's problems with Yugoslavia had an influence in it.

The events that brought the Stalin-Tito split have been analyzed at length in a lot of other books and articles and here will not be touched. The Communist Party of Albania was notified about the letters between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union in April of 1948 and there was a demand from the Soviet Union that Albania should determine with whom she will continue her relations: Yugoslavia or the Soviet Union. Without any doubts Albania sided with the Soviet Union. Until the Soviet Union's critique of Yugoslavia was made public, in Albania there was no discussion of breaking the relations with Yugoslavia, even though there were problems. In February-March of 1948 all the discussions inside the Politburo of the Communist Party of Albania were about the problems in the relations with Yugoslavia and how to solve those problems and ameliorate the relations with Yugoslavia. As always, the responsibility for the problems was bestowed upon certain individuals who had been against the relations with Yugoslavia. One of them was Nako Spiru, former Minister of Economy, who had killed himself in the end of November 1947 apparently because his Party comrades had accused him of being against the close relationship with Yugoslavia.

Inside the Communist Party of Albania there was no genuine effort to find the real causes of the problems with Yugoslavia, which mostly concerned the economy. The Albanians were following the same path as that of the Yugoslavs: the Yugoslavs transformed every economical and

technical problem in the relations between the two countries, into a political and ideological problem, and the Albanian leadership was doing the same thing in February-March 1948 when the relations between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia were deteriorating. The publication of Stalin's critique of Tito was totally unexpected inside the Communist Party of Albania, but when they were asked to take a side, they didn't hesitate in supporting the Soviet Union. Why did this happen? Why in a moment they were discussing how to improve the relations with Yugoslavia and in the next moment they were totally against Yugoslavia? Because, mostly, the Soviet critique against Yugoslavia was a reflection of problems the Albanians had talked about in the last months.

The beginning of the end of the 'brotherly' relations between Albania and Yugoslavia was April 1948. At the end of April Tito sent a letter to Enver Hoxha complaining about the state of relations between the two countries and emphasizing that the cause was the lack of trust by the Albanians towards Yugoslavia. 'With words you accept the material sacrifice that our country is doing with the best intentions in helping its ally, Albania', Tito wrote, 'but in practice it is being done the opposite thing'. Tito said that Yugoslavia could not do anymore this material sacrifice against the benefit of Yugoslavia and in the end not having a good relation with Albania. 'In the contrary', he wrote, 'the relations have worsened again and not about our fault'. Even though the split with the Soviet Union was already public and the relations with Albania had almost deteriorated, Tito asked for a reassessment of these relations and placing them in a better foundation.

At the end of May 1948, Enver Hoxha sent two letters to Tito, in which he expressed his and Albania's official position concerning the relations between the two countries and the split between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. He turned down any accusations from the Yugoslavs that the relations between the two countries had deteriorated because of the

Albanians. 'A such accusation without any argument and foundation, we cannot accept', wrote Hoxha to Tito, 'we think that everything proves the contrary of what we are being accused'. Enver Hoxha in his letter goes on mentioning the fact that the Communist Party of Albania accepted everything the Yugoslavs said about creating normal relations, that everything was accepted without any discussion and with the conviction that everything was for the best, something which Enver Hoxha says that was not very objective from the Albanians and against the line of Marxism-Leninism. This, according to Enver Hoxha, doesn't show Albania's suspicion towards Yugoslavia, but on the contrary, it shows their total faith in those relations.

He talks about how seriously the Albanian leadership had analyzed all the demands and propositions of the Yugoslavs, but accepts the fact that these relations with Yugoslavia had too much idealism because of the fact that in the both countries there were Communist parties in power and they couldn't deceive each other. Enver Hoxha turns down every accusation, but he doesn't accuse the Yugoslavs about anything concretely, saying that 'in any moment we have not forgotten and will not forget the historical responsibility we have in strengthening our close relations, more brotherly, sincere and communist, between our peoples and our parties'. He says that the relations with the 'sister' Yugoslav Party were sacred for the Albanians and about those relations they have fought and would go on fighting, to become stronger and more brotherly. These are hardy the words of a person who is breaking up the relations of his country with Yugoslavia. In these letters, Enver Hoxha doesn't express a final breakup between the two countries, but just turns down all the accusations.

Until the middle of June 1948, there has not been a final rupture from the Albanians. There existed still the possibility that the relations could improve. The Yugoslavs maintained this position also. It was the conference of the Communist

parties of Eastern Europe, in Bucharest, 19-23 June, which changed everything. After the conference, there was not any possibility for improvement. The rupture with Yugoslavia was definite, not just for Albania, but also for the Soviet Union and the other communist countries of Eastern Europe. The Conference approved a resolution in which it was emphasized the anti-Soviet and anti-Marxist politics of Yugoslavia. The resolution also emphasized the fact that Yugoslavia had turned on to the Imperialist camp by maintaining a nationalist attitude against other countries. On their part, the Yugoslavs said that the Soviet Union had not proved any of its accusations against Yugoslavia.

Albania was the first country that endorsed the resolution, at the end of June 1948. A few days later, the Albanian leadership accused the Yugoslavs of having a hostile and colonial attitude towards Albania, an accusation that will be repeated several times against Yugoslavia in the next decades. The Central Committee of the Albanian Communist Party unanimously approved the resolution labeling the Yugoslav Communist Party as national-bourgeois. The Central Committee condemned the treason of Yugoslavia's leadership which has betrayed the principles of Marxism-Leninism, have betrayed the socialist camp and are in an open conflict with the fatherland of communist: the Soviet Union. 'The leadership of the Yugoslav Communist Party, traitors, Trotskyists, has betrayed the sacred cause of the heroic and brotherly people of Yugoslavia'.

In a meeting with Molotov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, in June 1948, Enver Hoxha said to Molotov that the Soviet Union had saved Albania from a great danger and that Albania and the Albanians were seriously threatened by the actions of the Yugoslav leadership. After Molotov had approved Hoxha's words, the Albanian leader went on by saying that Albania had trusted completely the Communist Party of Yugoslavia because

they thought that Yugoslavs were acting according to the directions of the Soviet Union. These were genuine words from the Albanian leader, not just a way to show the Soviet that Albania had always been on their side. In January 1948, when Tito had officially asked Enver Hoxha to deploy two Yugoslav divisions in Albania, with the intention of protecting Albania against a supposed attack from Greece, the Albanians at that time had said to the Soviet that they thought that this Yugoslav action had the support of the Soviet Union. In fact, the Soviet Union was against it and knew nothing about it.

After the Bucharest conference, Albania undertook several practical steps with the intention of severing any connection with Yugoslavia, especially those concerning the economy. The first targets were the Yugoslav-Albanian companies. These were created by the treaties of November 1946 and since then had not functioned according to the treaties. There were a lot of complaints about them. At the end of June 1948, Albania decided to requisite all their materials and to expel the Yugoslavs. In a rapport from the Ministry of Finance, it is written that when the Albanians tried to take control of the petroleum company, the Yugoslavs objected because they had no order from their government, they didn't sign the procès-verbal of the handing over of the papers and materials of the company and they went away only after a judge was summoned. An Albanian, Pjerin Shllaku, saw Tito's photo hanging on the wall and he tore it off. The Yugoslavs didn't say a word.

At the Impex (import-export company), according to the rapport, were found great disorder. The Yugoslavs in Albania apparently were notified by their government about the possible actions of the Albanians and so they had taken with them several papers and documents. According to the rapport, the Yugoslavs, in general, were not prepared about these actions. This explains why in the majority of the cases there was no real objection, but only a lack of cooperation, because

the actions were only from the Albanian government, without the approval of the Yugoslavs. Maybe the Yugoslav government didn't think that the Albanians could go so far in their actions. Maybe they didn't think that the breakup of the relations between the two countries could be so abrupt and definitive.

In 29 June 1948, the Yugoslav-Albanian company of the railways was notified that it should halt any operations concerning the construction of the Shkodër-Border railway that was being constructed at that time in Northern Albania. The other railways that were in construction, the Shkodër-Tropojë and the Border-Kukës-Border, would have to be abandoned. In 30 June, the director of the oil company was notified that all oil shipments to Yugoslav must be halted, according to the order of the Ministry of Industry. At the same day, the mine company is notified about halting every shipment to Yugoslavia, even those materials which are ready for shipment in the harbors of Vlora and Durrës.

The Yugoslav government expressed her bewilderment about the last actions, in a letter of 2 July 1948. In the letter, the Yugoslavs said that they had given a considerable help to Albania in the last two years, but Albania had not given the same amount to Yugoslavia. It is understandable from this that Yugoslavia, according to the Yugoslav government had gained nothing from the relation with Albania. They hadn't taken back even their investments. But the Albanian government turned down every accusation by saying that the Yugoslavs wished to blame the Albanians about things, which had been totally in Yugoslavia's responsibility. The Yugoslav government, according to the Albanians, had always pursued certain objectives towards Albania and never fulfilled their engagements that resulted from the treaties the two countries had signed with each other. According to the Albanian government, the treaties, especially their economic aspect, had not been fulfilled because the Yugoslav maritime service had always been problematic, creating a lot of disorder that had

resulted in fewer than expected Albanian materials and products shipped to Yugoslavia. This was not the first time that these problems were mentioned, because several times before, the Yugoslav-Albanian company for import and export (Impex), had repeated the same things. According to the Albanian government, the Yugoslav ships and Yugoslav authorities had not brought the products in time, had not notified the Albanian authorities when the ships shipped from Yugoslavia and they had not contacted with Impex, but they had themselves specified the timetables without taking in consideration the capacity of the Albania's harbors.

Based on the above considerations, the Albanian government repeated that it was the Yugoslav government that had not fulfilled the treaties, that she not only had completely abstrusely violated the normal international engagements and cooperation, but also had tried to cover with lies this violation and to make the Albanian government responsible about it, an act which according to the Albanian government had severely damaged the Albanian economy. The Albanian government, at the same time, expressed its bewilderment concerning the Yugoslav accusations that Albania had given nothing the Yugoslav-Albanian economic relations.

As was mentioned above, these accusations from the Yugoslavs and the counter-accusations from the Albanians were not new. They had been repeated several times in the last year and a half, because the economic relations between the two countries had always been problematic, with accusations from one part to the other. But at the beginning of July 1948, these accusations looked more serious because of the recent relations between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union and the position Albania had taken on the side of the Soviet Union. In July 1948, these relations went a step further from verbal accusations.

Hysno Kapo, the Albanian representative in Belgrade, in July 1948, wrote to the Albanian government that the Yugoslav government had begun to physically abuse the Albanian citizens in Yugoslavia. These actions had been against 'students, workers, officers, etc.', according to Hysni Kapo. It is mentioned the arrest of an Albanian student, Sadik Kumbaro, and several other Albanian citizens in the Yugoslav hospitals had been expelled.

In a report compiled by the Albanian government and sent to the Albanian representative in Rome in 23 July 1948, it was written that since the last events in Yugoslavia, the relations between Albania and Yugoslavia had been braked off completely and that nothing had been sent from one country to the other. Since 29 June 1948, the Albanian government had order that Tito's photographs to be removed from all the offices, as Tito was deemed an anti-Marxist, anti-Soviet and anti-Albanian. The Albanian representative in Belgrade was advised to have only relations of courtesy with the Yugoslavs, relations that didn't involved any work between the two countries. The consultations should be done only with the Soviet Union. According to the report, the economic treaties with Yugoslavia had been colonial and anti-Albanian.

A month and a half later, in 26 August, the Yugoslav Ministry of Defense notifies the Albanian government that it has expelled the Albanian students from the Military Academy in Zagreb, Croatia, because 'of their hostile stance'. Until September 1948, almost every Albanian citizen in Yugoslavia had returned home. Most of them were students and military personnel. According to the Albanian government, the Albanian citizens in Yugoslavia not only were expelled, but they were also pursued by the Yugoslav secret service. After the Albanian citizens were expelled, the Yugoslav authorities refused to give them visas and they were forced to spend several days in the streets of Belgrade. 'Often they have been left without food', is

said in a radiogram from the Albanian representative in Belgrade, 'and they have been compelled to sleep in the streets'.

At the same time, several Albanian citizens that were being repatriated from Australia, had been mistreated from the Yugoslav authorities during their stay in Yugoslavia. One of them had died, because of the violence and his weak health.

The Yugoslavs too, expressed their concern about the recent actions of the Albanian government, about the removing of Tito's photographs, the closing of the Yugoslav library in Tirana, etc. But in their concerns, there were several ones that were ridiculous. For example, the Yugoslav government accused the Albanians that in the city of Shkodër, in Northern Albania, to a Yugoslav family was refused an aspirin. In another case, the Albanians, according to the Yugoslav government, had refused to let a Yugoslav expert to go to the toilet for several hours.

The XI Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Albania, held in November 1948, confirmed Albania's turn towards the Soviet Union. The relations with Yugoslavia were totally left behind, because of Yugoslavia's anti-Marxist, anti-Soviet and anti-Albanian stance. In a few months, the relations between the two countries had gone from the idea to create a united economy to sworn enemies of each other.

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