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ALBANIA AND LIBYA: A DISTANT COLD WAR RELATIONSHIP

INTRODUCTION

Albania's foreign relations during the Cold War were shaped by different international and ideological circumstances. Firstly, its geographical position – Albania was at the fringes of the socialist world, and bordered the beleaguered capitalist Greece. Within the framework of the Tito-Stalin split, such a position became even more awkward, producing a sort of isolated pro-Soviet island on the western edges of the Balkans. After the sixties, Albania sided with schismatic China during the ideological Sino-Soviet dispute, which led to a further reduction of options and possibilities in foreign relations, inducing the country to face a double challenge of outward and self-imposed isolation. As a result, Albania had to look beyond its immediate region for partners with which to establish feasible relations, seeking friends and possible economic and political links as well. Within the Mediterranean area, Albania sought to establish friendly relations with North African countries, especially with those that had undergone decolonization and whose regimes were inspired by the principles of self-reliance, nationalism, and socialism. Ideology provided a further context in which to interact with national liberation movements or nationalist regimes who sought and developed a front of conflict in the Middle East, in the centre of which was the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While for other Soviet-led countries within the communist block, foreign relations, especially as regards recently decolonized Africa and Asia, were directed or at least under the influence of the Soviet Union, Albania did not have, or at least not completely, the chance to proceed in this way. Apart from minor policy coordination with China, especially during the sixties and seventies, Albania adopted a policy which did not carry the burden of coordinating with the Soviet Union but sought alternative ways to deal with countries in the North African shores of the Mediterranean. Despite its limited options, including its small size and policy expectations, communist Albania established friendly relations with Algeria, Egypt and Libya.

Albania's foreign relations with the Middle East and North Africa rarely have been subject to thorough studies. While studies on Albania's relations with Western¹ countries concentrate mostly on bilateral relations and diplomatic relations, those which concentrate on the position of the country within the wider socialist world tend to focus on several areas such as economic and military aid, and on cultural or ideological orientation.² In recent years, several scholars, mostly of Albanian origin, have tried to shed light on the nature and relation of the Albanian communist regime with the outer world. Elidor Mëhilli,³ for example, has studied the transnational relations of Albania with European socialist countries. He maintains that such relations equipped the Albanian communist regime with a certain imagination of the world, which later influenced its foreign relation with Third World countries. Another important text in understanding Albania's foreign policy is Helga Turku's *Isolationist States in an Interdependent World*. Turku believes that one of the basic features of Albania's foreign policy, especially after the detachment of China and Albania from the socialist camp in the sixties, was isolationism. The term, when referred to Albania, implied non-engagement and non-entanglement in specific or multilateral relations. According to Turku, the Enver Hoxha-led regime had three goals: maintaining autocratic rule, observing a pure or rigid interpretation of Marxism-Leninism, and exercising full sovereignty over Albanian territory.⁴ Ideology determined foreign relations and thus fed the idea of isolation. Another feature of Albania's communist regime was the idea of self-reliance⁵ in terms of economic development and an atypical socialist model when compared to other socialist countries. Turku's assumption, which is shared by Dorina Matraku Dervishi and Marianne Johnson, are valid but on the other hand Albania did try to build external relations, especially with Third World countries, particularly in the Mediterranean area. Mëhilli for example, alters the formula of isolation in explaining the role ideology had in equipping the Albanian regime with an understanding of foreign relations. He states that Stalinism⁶ became the very lens through which Albania could understand and translate international relations and aspiration. Albania had a specific place in the world, and it could serve as an example for countries trying to break the shackles of colonization, propelling themselves toward a certain type of modernization. This is also the precise reason Albania possessed the language and the means to engage in relations with distant, poor or semi-poor nations and why it abandoned, or limited to the minimum, relations with countries in its immediate vicinity. Another

¹ N. Dhoga, *L'Italia nella politica estera dell'Albania (1957-1985)* (Ph.D. dissertation), Roma, 2012; P. Rago, ed., *Una pace necessaria: I rapporti italiano-albanesi nella prima fase della Guerra fredda*, Bari, 2019.

² See E. Mëhilli, *From Stalin to Mao: Albania and the Socialist World*, Cornell University Press, 2018; L. Krisafi, *Shqipëria dhe Jugosllavia 1945-1948 - Mitet, faktet dhe dyshimet*, Naimi, 2017; on the Sino-Soviet and Albania split see E. Biberaj, *Albania and China: An unequal alliance*, Tirana, 2015 et al.

³ E. Mëhilli, *From Stalin to Mao...*, p. 9.

⁴ H. Turku, *Isolationist States in an Interdependent World*, Ashgate, 2009, p. 108.

⁵ D. Matraku Dervishi, M. Johnson, "Isolation in Albanian Economic Thought" [in:] *Research in the History of Economic Thought and Methodology: Including a Symposium on Economists and Authoritarian Regimes in the 20th Century*, ed. by L. Fiorito, S. Scheall, C.E. Suprinyak, Emerald Publishing Limited, 2020, p. 116.

⁶ E. Mëhilli, *From Stalin to Mao...*, p. 62.

interesting study has been provided by Dilaver Arikan Açar,⁷ who has tried in his PhD thesis to show patterns of change and continuity in Albania's foreign policy. He maintains that communist Albania's foreign relations during the Cold War oscillated between ideological and realistic assumptions. When the isolationist course, imposed by Hoxha, proved ineffective in the long run, Albania gradually opened and became more pragmatic. Açar's argument can also be applied to Libyan-Albanian relations, which oscillated from ideological assumptions to realism, taking into consideration the rapid global changes of the late eighties which effected the fall and demise of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe.

NORTH AFRICA, LIBYA AND THE ALBANIAN IMAGE OF INDEPENDENCE AND DEVELOPMENT

The establishment of a communist regime in post-World War II Albania enormously impacted its foreign relations. While severing or decreasing to almost non-existence its relations with Western countries, Albania invested heavily in relations with socialist countries and other third-world partners, nations that soon became communist, such as China and North Korea. Within the Mediterranean area and the near Middle East, Albania's foreign relations in the post-World War II era were almost non-existent due to the limited availability of independent states but also due to the control of foreign colonial powers. Despite this, Albania had extensive cultural links with North Africa and Middle East due to their common Ottoman past. In particular Egypt, and its royal family, of Albanian origin, facilitated Albanian-Egyptian connections in the interwar period. Prior to World War II, but also during the conflict, Albania had a good relationship with Egypt, run by a royal family who never hid its Albanian origin.⁸ After the Italian occupation, the dethroned Albanian royal family, with King Zog at its head, spent part of its exile in Cairo. With the end of World War II and the coming to power of the communists in Albania, the Hoxha regime considered the Egyptian government as a puppet regime controlled by the British.⁹

In the post-war period, till the early sixties, Albania's priority was to establish and consolidate relations with various socialist regimes in Europe but also with other countries which had begun to gain their independence. Clearly the communist regime in Tirana followed Soviet directives, lending political support and recognition to post-colonial regimes, where colonial powers like France or Great Britain were experiencing severe crises.

Albania's foreign policy in the area can be divided in three phases. From 1949 to 1960, 1961 to 1976 and from 1976 to 1990.¹⁰

⁷ D. Arikan Açar, *Small State Playing the Asymmetric Game: Continuity and Change in Albanian Foreign Policy*, Ankara, 2008, (PhD thesis, Middle East Technical University), p. 98.

⁸ W. Stadiem, *Too Rich: The High Life and Tragic Death of King Farouk*, New York, 1991, p. 297.

⁹ King Zog spent most of the World War II period in Cairo, on the invitation of the Egyptian royal family. His presence was considered a major hindrance to the resumption of normal relations between the two countries.

¹⁰ M.B. Bishku, "Albania and the Middle East", *Mediterranean Quarterly* 2013, 24 (2), pp. 81–103.

The first phase corresponds to the role of Albania within the Soviet-led block till 1960 when Tirana's regime followed, for the most part, Moscow's directives regarding foreign policy. Albania did not have the means to economically and militarily help the new regimes, but it could at least could recognize countries and regimes. Albania duly recognized Israel's independence in 1949,¹¹ in line with the stance of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. Despite such recognition, Albania never established diplomatic relation with Israel, avoiding every contact till the early nineties. Described as the lapdog or the gendarme of the Middle East, Israel featured in Albanian political discourse during communism as a rogue and terrorist state, an artificial creature established by the US, another mortal foe of Albania. Due to the protracted tensions and the wars in the Middle East, Albania formally supported post-colonial regimes in the area and established good relations with such, especially with Egypt. The Nasserite revolution was welcomed in Albania, and Egypt resumed its role as the most important country in the region for the communist regime in Tirana.

The Sino-Soviet split had an impact on the diplomatic activity of Albania in the region. Another country in North Africa which become an important partner of the communist regime was Algeria. The National Liberation Front (FLN) and its efforts to establish Algeria's independence was continuously praised by Tirana.¹² In 1962, Albania recognized the provisional government in Algiers, welcoming the new post-colonial regime. Albania recognized and supported Fatah and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)¹³ in their armed effort to establish a Palestinian state in the Middle East. Such help was nevertheless minuscule, despite being praised continuously by the PLO and Fatah, at least till the fall of the Albanian communist regime in 1991. The idea of independence and self-development heavily permeated not only Hoxha's views on the development of socialism, but also influenced the way post-colonial regimes were valued. In the case of North Africa and the Middle East, and especially after the Sino-Soviet split, Hoxha acted upon several considerations: firstly, the idea of coordination among Arab countries and secondly the avoidance of Soviet and American influence.¹⁴ Moreover in Albania's view Mediterranean countries, and thus those on the shores of Africa and Asia, should free themselves of US and Soviet bases, as Albania had done, liquidating the joint Soviet-Albanian base in Vlora, in the sixties. Albania's contacts with North Africa were always viewed in the light of anti-colonialism and liberation from foreign influence. Nonetheless Albania's relations with the Soviet Union and China clearly influenced its patterns of understanding and contacts with North African countries. In the case of Libya, the first contacts were made in the second half of the fifties.¹⁵ In 1959 Albanian authorities tried to establish diplomatic contacts with Libya, being

¹¹ Arkivi i Ministrisë së Punëve të Jashtme [Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs] (later: AMPJ), Viti [year] (later V.). 1949. Dos. [File] (later: Dos.) 84. Fl.11. Mbi njohjen e shtetit të Izraelit nga ana e jonë.

¹² Hoxha E., *Reflections on the Middle East*, Tirana, 1984, p. 12.

¹³ AMPJ, V.1970. Dos. B/I-1. Fl.4. Vendim i Këshillit të Ministrave për pranimin e çeljes së përfaqsisë së lëvizjes kombëtare për çlirimin e Palestinës, (Al-Fatah) dhe plani i masave për zbatimin e tij.

¹⁴ E. Hoxha, *Imperialism and Revolution*, Chicago, 1979, p. 380.

¹⁵ AMPJ, V.1968. Dos. 212 B/I-1 Fl. 5. Libia : Mbi çështjen e vendosjes së marrëdhënieve diplomatike.

formally an independent country,¹⁶ but without success. Albanian diplomats hinted that the Libyan government was uninterested in establishing relations with Albania due to the pressure and influence of the British. Libyan-Albanian contacts resumed a few years later, in 1966. Yet by this time, Albanian authorities were not interested in establishing relations due to the persistence of the monarchy in Libya and the influence of the colonial powers in the region. Only after the 1969 *coup d'état*¹⁷ did such contact resume. The establishment of Muammar Gaddafi's regime despite its strong religious influence was welcomed as a positive development in the area. Hoxha in his book, *Reflection on the Middle East*,¹⁸ described the event as progressive and anti-imperialist in its initial phase. Although a nationalist regime in Hoxha's view could be considered as a first phase toward socialism, he never fully accepted that such post-colonial nationalist regimes could be genuine in moving toward the direction of a socialist society. Hoxha reserved this same scepticism for Gaddafi's revolution. He considered the new regime in Tripoli as lacking in genuine intentions of lifting the Libyan society from poverty and propelling it to a socialist future and moreover, as earlier in Egypt, Libya was precipitously falling into the Soviet orbit.

Albania recognized the new Libyan republic and its government, stressing the "fraternal friendship with Arab nations, national independence, freedom, and progress".¹⁹ The recognition of the government and the new regime would open the way to the establishment of diplomatic relations. Nevertheless, Gaddafi's regime was viewed with deep suspicion, as one supported by the Soviet Union and other rogue revisionist socialist countries. Despite its strong anti-Soviet stance, many Arab countries viewed socialist Albania with admiration. For some of them, Albania was in the end a country with a considerable Muslim population, and could serve as some kind development model, suitable for other Muslim countries. It was Nikita Khrushchev who, during a visit in Albania in 1954, boasted that the country could serve as a model for the Arab world.²⁰ Albania neither aspired nor tried to be a model, as since the very beginning of its communist regime it tried to get rid of the Islamic traits of the society, as well as religion itself. Nevertheless, its pace of development and its propaganda boasted the uplifting of Albania from its pre-war underdevelopment into a nation building socialism. It was precisely this idea which served as a point of contact between Arab countries and Albania. The Libyan ambassador in Prague, Kadri Al Trashi, stressed that Albania was a "Muslim country that had achieved an enormous success in building socialism".²¹ This consideration was not new to some of the Arab nationalist regimes and organizations,

¹⁶ Albania tried to make diplomatic contacts with Tripoli a few years after Soviet Union established relations with Libya, in 1955. See F. J.F. Dakheel, *The impact of the collapse of the Soviet Union on Libya foreign policy during the period from 1991 to 2003.*, Nottingham, 2008 (PhD thesis, Nottingham Trent University, p. 142.

¹⁷ On the Libyan revolution see D. Vandewalle, *A History of Modern Libya*, Cambridge University Press, 2012; L.C. Harris, *Libya: Qadhafi's Revolution and the Modern State*, Routledge, 2022.

¹⁸ Hoxha, *Reflections...*, 305.

¹⁹ AMPJ, V.1969. Dos. 265 B/I-1. Fl. 8 Libia: Dokumenta mbi vendosjen e marrëdhënieve diplomatike.

²⁰ E. Mëhilli, *From Stalin to Mao...*, p. 134.

²¹ AMPJ, V.1970. Dos.336 B/I-8. Fl. 18 Informacione mbi marrëdhëniet me Libinë dhe opinione të diplomatëve libianë.

who sympathized with Albania's independent and equidistant position vis a vis the superpowers.²² In Albania's view, the power change in the Middle East and North Africa was a clear indication of crisis and of the clashes between the Soviet Union and the United States. Albania was the only socialist country that did not have relations with Israel. In the eyes of many Arab countries, this was a solid credential of the support for Palestinians. Such position was somehow important to Arab countries,²³ as was the vitriolic and continuous Albanian media attacks on Israel and its unchanging support of the Palestinian cause in the United Nations.

In 1976, the Libyan ambassador in Belgrade,²⁴ accredited also in Albania, wanted to visit Tirana bringing a message from Gaddafi for the Head of the Presidium of the People's Assembly, Haxhi Lleshi. The Foreign Ministry officials instructed the Albanian embassy official in Belgrade to avoid any visit by Libyan officials with the Albanian head of state. The refusal of the visit was connected with the international situation. Due to the Libyan position in the Middle East and its enmity with Egypt, Albanian officials wanted to avoid any connection with Libya which would jeopardize its relations with Egypt.²⁵ Nonetheless, the Libyan ambassador in Belgrade visited Tirana in June 1976, meeting with the foreign minister Reis Malile as well as low-level officials. The visit was kept on purpose at a low level, given the specific role and the volatile character of Gaddafi. A policy analysis paper produced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs²⁶ produced a clear picture of the state of relations between Libya and Albania. In the view of Albanian officials, relations with Libya were mostly formal and distant and the distance was due to the positioning of Gaddafi's regime in North Africa. His aggressiveness towards Egypt and rivalry for the leadership of the Arab world were considered as adventurous and harmful especially to the Palestinian cause. Moreover, there was a clear labelling of Libya as a Soviet pawn in the region, thus undermining in the eyes of Tirana Arab unity.²⁷ While vehemently attacking both superpowers and heavily criticizing Egypt, Albania paradoxically considered Egypt not only as a major power in the region but also more prone to resist and falling completely under the influence either of Soviet Union or United States.²⁸ Later Hoxha would consider Qaddafi's Libya as one of the promoters of the isolation of Egypt in the Middle East under the 'umbrella' of the Soviet Union and directly interested in the turmoil that followed the assassination of Anwar Sadat in 1981.²⁹

Another problematic issue which shaped Albania's view of Gaddafi, was the Libyan leader's support for international terrorism. Moreover, and especially in the early eight-

²² K. Këlliçi, "The PLO and Communist Albania: Cold War Relations", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 2021, vol. 50, issue 4, pp. 53–66.

²³ AMPJ. V.1974. Dos. 270. Libi: Mendime mbi vendin tonë.

²⁴ AMPJ, V.1976. Dos. 445 Fl. 30. Mbi ardhjen në vendin tonë të ambasadorit të Libisë në Beograd dhe mbi dorëzimin e mesazhit të Presidentit të Libisë për sh.Haxhi Lleshi.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

²⁶ Drejtoria e II: info ditor 43. 16.3. 1976.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

²⁸ AMPJ. V. 1977. Dos.657 Fl. 29 Libi : Opinione nga diplomat të ndryshëm për vendin tonë.

²⁹ E. Hoxha, *Reflections...*, p. 417.

ies, when international terrorism became a serious issue, Albania, albeit not engaging with Libya, informally maintained some low-level interaction with the Gaddafi regime, Hoxha and the communist regime, however, never accepted nor endorsed any organization, let alone any state, which fostered international terrorism.³⁰

Gaddafi's Libya was kept at a safe distance, taking in consideration two critical issues, first and the foremost, Gaddafi's relations Egypt and then Libyan links to international terrorism. Libya was also not considered a country which could serve as an important agent of unity among the various Arab countries. Moreover, Libya had assumed an important role as a Soviet agent within North Africa, and Albania saw the irrationalities of the Gaddafi regime as somehow the result of the Soviet Union's role in the region.

DIPLOMATIC AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS

Libyan-Albanian relations were confined to diplomatic exchanges, particularly in the early seventies and early eighties. Contacts were maintained mainly through Albanian embassies in Rome or Cairo and via the Libyan embassy in Belgrade. Despite its revolutionary fervour and moral-ideological support for the Libyan revolution, Albania kept Libyan diplomatic advances at bay. Albania, despite boasting a solid international position,³¹ had few means to open embassies abroad, and through them to support friendly movements or regimes. On the other hand, the country's authorities had a conservative approach to opening or accepting the opening of foreign embassies or representatives in Tirana.³² The same approach was followed with Libya. Albania never tried to open an official representative in Tripoli,³³ while Libyan authorities tried to approach Tirana, especially after 1975. A Libyan representative in Ankara,³⁴ Muhamed Arnauti, approached an Albanian representative bringing up the subject of the opening of respective embassies in Tirana and Tripoli. The Albanian foreign minister, Malile, instructed Albanian diplomats to refuse the request, on the ground that Tirana was not planning other embassies in the region other than maintaining the Albanian embassy in Cairo as its central institution for managing daily relations in the Middle East and the western part of North Africa.³⁵ As the confrontation between Libya and Egypt deepened, Libyan authorities tried to force Tirana to open an embassy in Tripoli, refusing, in 1976, the *agrément* relating to Ambassador Zeqi Agolli, who covered from Cairo the eastern part of North Africa. The Libyan authorities went even further, proposing a radical solution to diplomatic ties between the two countries. According to them, Albania

³⁰ For example, after the Munich Olympics massacre of the Israeli team by the Palestinian terrorist organization "Black September" in 1972, Albania ceased all military assistance for Fatah. See K. Këlliçi, "The PLO...", p. 57.

³¹ M.B. Bishku, "Albania and the Middle East", *Mediterranean Quarterly* 2013, 24 (2), pp. 81–103.

³² See the case of the PLO representative in Tirana. AMPJ, V.1974.Dos. 296. Fl.165. Mbi vizitën e delegacionit palestinez.

³³ Albania had only two embassies in the region: in Algiers and Cairo.

³⁴ AMPJ, V. 1975. Dos.355/ 1. Fl. 5 Propozim për hapjen e ambasadave respektive në dy kryeqytete.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

could close its embassy in Cairo and cover its relations with the Arab countries from Tripoli. Moreover, the Libyan state would cover all necessary expenses not only for the new Albanian embassy in Tripoli but also for the Libyan one, to be opened in Tirana in the near future. Such a proposal was considered provocative and megalomaniac, and also improper. The issue of opening embassies in both capitals was brought about in 1978,³⁶ during a meeting that took place in the United Nations, between the Albanian foreign minister Nesti Nase and the Libyan one, Ali Treki. This time, Albanian representatives were more interested in strengthening relations, including with friendly Arab countries, due to the peculiar situation caused by what is known as the Sino-Albanian split. Both Treki and Nase viewed relations between the two countries as one of small states resisting superpowers. In the late seventies, Albania's isolation was beginning to take a toll on the Albanian economy, thus, the strengthening of relations with third-world friendly countries was welcomed.

While the first part of the seventies did not produce any evolution in terms of relations between Libya and Albania, the Sino-Albanian split served partly as a trigger, at least on the Albanian side, to reach or re-purpose relations with third-world or non-engaged countries. Strange enough, the Albanian state operated in two directions, first via ideological considerations, which were present through propaganda and books that were widely distributed by the Labour Party, and, secondly, founded on interest-based relations. Before the split with China, Albania was able to maintain a certain uniformity in conducting its foreign policy, namely maintaining its Stalinist orthodoxy³⁷ both on the political and economic levels, while after the Sino-Albanian split, and thus after having lost its foremost ally, Albania was put in a difficult position in terms of the level of its economic Stalinist orthodoxy. Although Albania maintained its orthodox Stalinist stance it also tried to be more practical in terms of strengthening relations with other states, including with third-world countries. This second direction begun to emerge gradually from the late seventies onwards. This was the case of Libyan-Albanian relations. The meeting between both foreign ministers in New York resulted in a formal invitation by the Libyan foreign minister Treki to Nase for a visit to Tripoli. Despite the need to reinforce relations, the Albanian state did not take up the invitation to have Nase visit Tripoli, using as an excuse³⁸ the celebration of the 35th anniversary of the liberation of Albania. On the other hand, Albanian officials did agree to welcome a Libyan trade delegation, thus making understood the type of relations they wanted to entertain with Libya: commercial relations rather than deep political and ideological ones.

While political relations between Albania and Libya consisted of minor exchanges at the government level and criticism at the ideological level, economic relations became an important concern at least on the side of the Albania authorities. Due to the nationalisation of oil resources, Libya became an important trading partner

³⁶ AMPJ, V. 1978. Dos.762. Fl.12 Takim me MPJ të Libisë në Nju Jork të përfaqësuesit tonë.

³⁷ H. Turku, *Isolationist states.*, p. 87.

³⁸ AMPJ, V. 1978. Dos. 599. Ftohet ministri i jashtëm shqiptar për një vizitë në Libi.

for many socialist countries, such as Bulgaria, Poland, and Yugoslavia.³⁹ Many such countries sought in Libya a solid economic partner due to the wealth created by oil but also as a strategic outlet in the Mediterranean. During the early years of Libyan-Albanian relations, Albania used Egyptian or Italian intermediaries to reach the Libyan market.⁴⁰ If, at a political level, strong relations were unwanted and strictly avoided, trade relations, if they did not endanger the Albanian principle of self-dependence, could be established. However, such relations could develop provided they were not extended to a political level, meaning avoiding possible alliances or foreign policy coordination. Regarding Libya, and also in reference to other states, Albania was going to avoid at any cost high level visits, meaning at the level of heads of state. Relations had to be maintained only at the level of foreign ministers.⁴¹ Moreover, Albanian authorities would insist on avoiding opening an embassy in Tripoli, citing economic reasons, while denying the opening of a Libyan embassy in Tirana. In 1979, a Libyan trade delegation headed by Muftah al Sherif,⁴² a mid-level functionary of the Libyan Foreign Ministry, visited Tirana. In a meeting with Vice Minister Ksenofon Nushi, al Sherif emphasized the mutual history of both countries in the fight against Italian invaders and in gaining independence and an equidistant position from the super-powers.⁴³ Nushi's remarks identified what had become one of the key principles of Albanian foreign policy, namely, strengthening ties with Arab countries, but only in the fields of trade and culture;⁴⁴ political entanglements were to be avoided and the Albanian vice minister of trade, Marko Xega, stressed that the key to good relations was trade and the principle of non-interference in internal affairs. Although Albania's economic priorities influenced its foreign relations, as in the case of Libya, it still showed that a deep involvement was not desired. In fact the Albanian constitution of 1976 prohibited the acceptance of loans from foreign countries as well as foreign direct investments. As such, Albania maintained a rigid isolation and provided only small openings even to potentially friendly countries such as Libya.

Albania reciprocated with a visit to Tripoli in 1980.⁴⁵ A trade delegation visited Libya and met with several high-level authorities. The idea was to establish a trade treaty, to be renewed every three years, by which Albania would import from Libya industrial goods such as asbestos, lubricant oils, petroleum technologies and pesticides, while Tirana would sell to bitumen to Libya.

According to the trade project agreement, Albania would export to Libya, besides bitumen, also a handful of other industrial goods such as marble and cement. The

³⁹ M. Stankova, "Bulgaria's Relations with the Mediterranean Arab States in the 1970s and 1980s", *IRICE. Les cahiers Irice* 2013, 1 /10, pp. 107–121; P. Gasztold, "Strange bedfellows in the arms trade: Polish intelligence, Monzer al-Kassar and the Iran-Contra affair", *Intelligence and National Security* 2022, 37:5, pp. 627–650.

⁴⁰ AMPJ, V.1974. Dos.271. Fl.11 Mbi marrëdhëniet tregtare midis dy vendeve; AMPJ, V.1977. Dos.657 Fl.29 Libi : Opinione nga diplomat të ndryshëm për vendin tonë.

⁴¹ AMPJ, V.1978. Dos. 600. Fl 43. Mbi delegacionin politiko-tregëtar që erdhi në vendin tonë.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 9.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 21.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 22.

⁴⁵ AMPJ, V.1980. Dos.308. Fl. 31. Dokumenta mbi nënshkrimin e marrëveshjes tregëtare me Libinë.

trade agreement was to be signed later in May 1980, but apparently the Libyan side did not provide the necessary technical specifications which could have enabled practical commercial exchanges.⁴⁶ In the next four years, Libyan-Albanian contacts were minimal. It wasn't until December 1984, that a mid-level Libyan diplomatic delegation visited Tirana.⁴⁷ Apparently, the Libyans were trying to further strengthen relations with socialist countries⁴⁸ and Albania, though at a lesser level, was part of this strategy. Libyan overtures would nevertheless meet some resistance. An informative note produced by the Second Directorate of the Albanian Ministry of Finances noted that at a certain point the refusal of opening an embassy in Tripoli or stronger political ties were on the table of discussions.⁴⁹ During the discussion, both parties agreed that Libya and Albania shared a similar history and struggle for independence, and both countries fought against the presence of superpowers in the Mediterranean. While Agolli, the Albanian representative, stressed the absence of foreign bases in Albania, the Libyan representative, Khalifa Mohamed al Mahmudi, remarked that getting rid of foreign bases was one of the first acts of the new government of Libya after the coup.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, it was the Soviet naval presence in Libya and the influence the Soviet Union held in Libya that always prevented Hoxha and Albania from having strong ties with Gaddafi's regime. As it was, Albania drew a specific line on how Albanian-Libyan relations should look. Muhamet Kapllani,⁵¹ a functionary of the Ministry of Finances, stressed that Albania had always supported Libya and its resolutions in the UN, had always particularly condemned US activities in the country but relations between two countries had to develop along cultural and economic lines.

Despite the 1984 visit, Albanian-Libyan relations did not progress further. Hoxha's death in 1985 paralysed to a certain degree Albanian diplomatic and foreign relations activities. Nonetheless, Albania's foreign policy begun to slowly change after Hoxha passed away. In 1986,⁵² it was Albania that begun to slowly pull back the curtain of isolation and to further relations with a series of countries. Libya was among them. The functionaries of the Ministry of Finances began to work on possible economic, technical, and cultural exchange agreements with Libya, keeping in mind what were labelled as the principles of Albania's foreign policy, non-intervention, and avoidance of foreign investments and foreign credits.⁵³ This was not only an effort to link with specific countries of the Third World but above all an effort to reach Arab countries at large.

⁴⁶ AMPJ, V.1982. Dos. 348. Fl. 20. Opinione të diplomatëve libianë për vendin tonë.

⁴⁷ AMPJ, V.1984. Dos. 337. Fl.75. Mbi vizitën në vendin tonë të delegacionit libian të Ministrisë së Punëve të Jashtme.

⁴⁸ S. Van Genuten, *Libya in Western Foreign Policies, 1911–2011*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p. 107.

⁴⁹ AMPJ, V.1984. Dos. 337. Fl.75. Mbi vizitën në vendin tonë të delegacionit libian të Ministrisë së Punëve të Jashtme.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 47–48.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 49.

⁵² AMPJ, V.1986. Dos. 552. Fl. 69. Korrespondencë mbi mundësinë e kthimit të vizitës së delegacionit tonë të MPJ në Libi.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

A series of terrorist attacks struck Europe in 1985 – these attacks were caused by or were blamed on Gaddafi’s regime.⁵⁴ As it became clear that the US was going to retaliate, a delegation of the Ministry of Finances, headed by Vice Minister Nase, which was preparing to visit Tripoli, decided, contrary to earlier practices, to go ahead with the visit and to condemn the American intervention. The Albanian authorities decision to visit was based on several considerations. The US attack resulted in a widespread support from Arab countries so officials of the Ministry of Finances thought that not visiting Libya would have harmed⁵⁵ the general state of Albanian-Arab relations. Although Albania never supported international terrorism, at the same time it felt that the simple engagement of a country in terrorist activities, such in the case of Libya, should not serve as a pretext affecting foreign relations. With the death of Hoxha, Albania would enter a new course in its foreign relations, partly dropping the ideological orthodoxy, albeit this was only applicable to a certain category of countries, such as third-world ones. On the other hand, the US bombing of Tripoli caused widespread protests and as a result Albania felt obliged to adhere to this solidarity. Officials of the Ministry of Finances wrote a memo for minister Malile in which they pointed out that Albania’s pursuing the visit program, despite the bombing of Tripoli, would increase the stature of Albania in the eyes of the Arab world.⁵⁶ Despite Albanian overtures, the Albanian delegation did not visit Tripoli.

BREAKTHROUGH AND TWILIGHT OF COLD WAR LIBYAN-ALBANIAN RELATIONS

The question of terrorism, and Libya’s stature as a rogue state, prevented further Albanian-Libyan contacts. If the Libyans were interested mainly in support and a certain political recognition from Albania, Tirana was mostly interested in trade.⁵⁷ In the late eighties, Albania begun to face economic difficulties, and Hoxha’s successor, Ramiz Alia, had begun to slowly gloss over the Stalinist outlook of the regime. In the domain of foreign relations, Albania undertook a deeper regional engagement while trying to reach out also to several Western countries.⁵⁸ Alia abandoned the tradition of not paying or accepting high level visits from heads of states. Former impediments like ideology or the position of foreign countries in international alliances begun to count less and less for the Albanian communist regime. The reason was connected not simply with the death of Hoxha but mostly to the economic difficulties that Albania was facing in

⁵⁴ Van Genugten, *Libya*, 118.

⁵⁵ AMPJ, V. 1986. Dos. 552.Fl. 69 Korrespondencë mbi mundësinë e kthimit të vizitës së delegacionit tonë të MPJ në Libi.

⁵⁶ AMPJ, V. 1986. Dos. 552.Fl. 69 Korrespondencë mbi mundësinë e kthimit të vizitës së delegacionit tonë të MPJ në Libi. F 58 Informacion i Drejtorise se parë.

⁵⁷ AMPJ, V. 1987. Dos. 652. Fl.19 Udhëzime mbi paraqitjen e letrave kredenciale; AMPJ. V. 1988. Dos.663. Informacion mbi takimin me ambasadorin e Libisë në ministri.

⁵⁸ D. Arian Açar, *Small state...*, p. 92.

the late eighties.⁵⁹ This new course of Albanian foreign policy affected also Libyan-Albanian relations. Somehow the interest of the two countries reached an equilibrium point, political recognition vs economic relations.⁶⁰ This equilibrium was reached only in 1990, a crucial year, the twilight of the Cold War. As the communist regimes begun to fall, Albania found itself in the odd position of being the last 'castle of communism' in Europe. Somehow this influenced the Libyan side to increase contacts with Albania. The Libyan vice minister of foreign affairs, Husni Shaban, was invited to visit Albania, in July 1990, but the visit was postponed to December due to the embassy crises underway in Tirana.⁶¹ The last castle of communism had begun to crack, but despite that Albanian authorities tried to increase diplomatic activities to secure at least an easy or a soft exit from communism. In early December 1990, the Albanian communist regime faced protests by students and in a matter of days the last castle of communism had crumbled. Political pluralism was accepted and new elections were held in March 1991. Meanwhile the economic crisis deepened and Albania was risking collapse. The government nevertheless tried to reach out to its few allies, or supposed ones, that remained. On 25 December of 1990, Foreign Minister Malile asked for an urgent meeting with the Palestinian representative in Tirana,⁶² Ali Kurdi. Malile asked Kurdi if he could intervene with other Arab countries, in order to secure a loan for Albania, which was in serious financial difficulties. Kurdi suggested asking Libya and Gaddafi, provided that Albania permitted the visit of Muslim clerics and permitted religious activities. Through Palestinian inter-mediation, Albania asked Libya for a loan, which at least at first, Libya was willing to provide.⁶³

Formally the regime had ended, but Alia retained the reins of the government though purging most of the old members of the *politburo*. The Party of Labour of Albania relinquished the monopoly of power but not the reins of the government. It was the Labour Party that won the first multi-party elections in 1991. Alia was the only former communist leader to have been elected as head of state in newly democratic Eastern Europe. Yet he did not completely relinquish the legacy of the dictatorship, promising continuity rather than change. Western countries clearly favoured the opposition,⁶⁴ and the victory of the Labour Party was an oddity⁶⁵ in Eastern Europe. In the domain of international relations, Albania tried to establish strong ties with Libya, knowing

⁵⁹ E. Biberaj, *Shqipëria në tranzicion: Rruga e vështirë drejt demokracisë*, Tirana 2005.

⁶⁰ AMPJ, V.1988. Dos. 663. Takime me ambasadorin e Libisë në MPJ.

⁶¹ In July 1990, several thousand Albanian citizens stormed several embassies in Tirana. They sought political asylum. The event is considered as the prequel to the political changes of December 1990 that brought down communism in Albania. See A. Krasniqi, *Kriza e Ambasadave. Shqipëria në vitin 1990* Akademia e Studimeve Albanologjike. Instituti i Historisë, 2020.

⁶² AMPJ, V.1990. D.730. Informacion, radiograme mbi takimet e zhvilluara me ambasadorin e Palestinës Ali Kurdi.

⁶³ AMPJ, V.1990. D. 680. Radiograme mbi gadishmërinë e palës libaneze për të dhënë kredi.

⁶⁴ E. Biberaj, *Shqipëria në Tranzicion...*

⁶⁵ H. Kitschelt, "Constraints and Opportunities in the Strategic Conduct of Post-Communist Successor Parties Regime Legacies as Causal Argument" 14–40 [in:] *The Communist Successor Parties of Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. by A. Bozoki, J. Ishiyama J., Routledge, 2002.

precisely that asking Western dominated international institutions for economic aid would have undermined his political position at home. Libya was precisely the country with which Albania hard tried to forge relations in the immediate post-cold war period.

Tirana thus sought help especially among countries and friendly regimes from the Cold War period. It was the beginning of the end of the Cold War that speeded up relations between Albania and Libya. Gaddafi sent a personal invitation to Alia to assist in the inauguration of the Great Man-Made River in August 1991, nevertheless Alia cautiously declined, formally for reasons of the difficult situation in Albania. Informally, Albania had just established relations with Israel, and despite seeking Libyan aid, the new-old Albanian regime had still reservations about Libya.⁶⁶ The invitation was presented by Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohamed Shaban who visited Tirana in August 1991.⁶⁷ Shaban was received with the highest honours by the most important Albanian authorities and was also presented with a series of requests including for a loan of 100 million dollars. Foreign Minister Kapllani also asked Shaban to act as an intermediary between Libya and the OPEC countries for loans and credits. Kapllani also played with the idea of religion, in addressing the need of Albania for aid, since he knew that many considered it a Muslim country.⁶⁸ In short, Libya, at the end of the Cold War was seen as a potential link with Arab countries, and as a provider of economic aid without conditions, which could thus have some influence on the political stability of the government in Tirana. The promised aid was slow to appear and the early post-transitional regime in Albania was shaken by protests which brought down the Labour party government. In 1992 the opposition Democratic Party led by Sali Berisha decisively won the elections. Despite its pro-western orientation and an initial coldness over Arab countries, the new government still used old cold war connections, especially with Libya, when it became a full member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in 1992.

CONCLUSION

Albania's interest and involvement in the Mediterranean was minor and reflected the country's position in the Cold War. This emerges especially in the case of Libya. In the early fifties, and presumably under Soviet influence, Albania, being or being considered a Muslim country, sought to connect with progressive postcolonial Arab regimes, including with Libya. The coup and the arrival of Gaddafi to power opened potential venues of collaboration, but the regime was viewed suspiciously due to its self-declared brand of socialism and its collaboration with the Soviet Union. After the Sino-Soviet split, Albania sided with China. The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe countries were considered enemies of socialism. On the other hand, the post-colonial struggle offered new venues of

⁶⁶ Informacion: Drejtoria I, f. 7. AMPJ, V. 1991. D. 670. Informacione, nota mbi ftesën e bërë nga Kadafi për presidentin Ramiz Alia për të marrë pjesë në inaugurimin e një lumi artificial.

⁶⁷ AMPJ, V. 1991. D. 671. Program vizite, teza, njoftime për ardhjen e zv. Ministrisë të MJ të Libisë në Shqipëri.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, f. 49.

collaboration with third-world countries. Albania tried at least in the sixties to establish relations with post-colonial countries. Yet such relations were limited by several political considerations. First, Albania's exclusive relation with China offered little incentive, other than propagandist ones, to interact with third-world countries. Secondly, the communist regime in Tirana became increasingly concerned with its security, thus freedom movements or post-colonial regimes who engaged or supported terrorist activities were viewed with extreme suspicion. Libya certainly fell into this category. Thirdly, Albania could offer short to nothing in terms of development and aid, being a country, which was itself underdeveloped. Fourthly, a post-colonial regime like Libya had close relations and had begun to depend on military from the Soviet Union, which strongly influenced the perception and security concerns of Albania. The situation changed in the late eighties, when Albania began a gradual course of openness in foreign relations. In its later stages Albania sought economic aid from Libya, considering Gaddafi's regime a friendly country and a possible connector to the wider Arab world. This relationship intensified in the twilight of the Cold War and was maintained even after it. Albania managed to use its Cold War connections with Arab countries in the new context of the post-Cold War era.

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Albania and Libya: a Distant Cold War Relationship

In this paper I examine the relations between Albania with Libya, especially after the establishment of the Gaddafi's regime and its peculiar brand of socialism. In doing so this paper proceeds in two directions. First, I examine foreign relations among small countries, in this case Albania and Libya. Secondly, I examine the above-mentioned relations in terms of ideological constrictions, especially from the perspective of a country like Albania, which practised, from the mid-sixties to the mid-eighties, forms of self-isolation and insulation from the outer world in the name of its particular view of Marxism-Leninism and socialism.

KEYWORDS

Cold War, Arab world, socialism, Libya, Albania

Albania i Libia – odległe stosunki z czasów zimnej wojny

W niniejszym artykule chciałbym przeanalizować relacje Albanii z Libią, zwłaszcza po ustanowieniu reżimu Kaddafiego w jego szczególnej odmianie socjalizmu. W tym celu rozważania będą podążać w dwóch kierunkach. Najpierw chciałbym przedstawić stosunki zagraniczne między małymi państwami, w tym przypadku Albanii i Libią. Następnie zbadam te relacje pod kątem ograniczeń ideologicznych, zwłaszcza z perspektywy kraju takiego jak Albania, który od połowy lat sześćdziesiątych do połowy osiemdziesiątych w imię określonego spojrzenia na marksizm-leninizm i socjalizm praktykował formy samoizolacji i odjęcia od świata zewnętrznego.

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