

# *Doing politics in Albania during the Second World War*

## **The case of Mustafa Merlika Kruja's fascist collaboration**

ENRIKETA PAPA-PANDELEJMONI\*

### ABSTRACT

The paper analyzes the political activity of Mustafa Merlika Kruja, who ruled Albania during Second World War, from December 1942 until January 1943, when Albania was attached to Fascist Italy. During his ministry Kruja occupied himself mostly with the "national issue" and with the communist movement in the country. By analyzing his political agenda on anticommunism and nationalism, I explain the reasons for his fascist collaboration with the Axis powers.

### KEY WORDS

Albania, Second World War, collaboration, nationalism, fascism, communism, ethnic unity

### IZVLEČEK

Članek analizira politično aktivnost Mustafe Merlike Kruja, ki je bil na oblasti v času druge svetovne vojne, od decembra 1941 do januarja 1943, ko je bila Albanija priključena fašistični Italiji. V času svojega ministrovanja se je Kruja v večji meri ukvarjal z »nacionalnim interesom« in komunističnim gibanjem v državi. Z analizo njegovih političnih načrtov glede antikomunizma in nacionalizma bo avtorica skušala pojasniti razloge za njegovo sodelovanje s fašizmom in silami osi.

### KLJUČNE BESEDE

Albanija, druga svetovna vojna, nacionalizem, fašizem, etnična enotnost

## **Introduction**

This paper examines the political activity of the Albanian politician Mustafa Merlika Kruja, who was the prime minister of Albania from 1941 to 1943, when the country was occupied by Italy during the Second World War. The main questions introduced in this paper are the following: Why did

---

\* Enriketa Papa-Pandelejmoni, University of Tirana, Faculty of History, Department of History, e-mail: enriketa.papa@unitir.edu.al

I would like to thank Nataša Gregorič Bon for the invitation to present my paper at the Historical Seminar in 2011 and for the collaboration with her during our bilateral project and my time spent in Ljubljana.

Kruja collaborate with fascist Italy during the Second World War? How did the national issue affect his decision to collaborate with the fascists? How did his anticommunist feelings cause him to be targeted as a quisling?

In Albanian textbooks until the 1990s, Kruja was called the Albanian quisling, and everything linked to him (even his own family) was equated with treason. In several publications after the 1990s, Kruja is still seen as the black sheep of Albanian political history.<sup>1</sup> Only in a few publications is he viewed objectively. Anticommunism and nationalism were the main political ideas that Kruja used to gain support for his collaboration with fascist Italy and with Albanian nationalists for the unification of Albania with Kosovo and for the fight against communist guerrillas and their leaders. Anticommunism was central to his political agenda. On several occasions he stressed the need to fight communism with ferocity because the communists were against their own country. To him, communism was synonymous with brutality and anti-nationalist feelings. In several speeches he proclaimed the need for Albania to fight communism because this ideology would bring the country to ruin.

This paper is mostly based on primary historical literature and archival sources, and it begins with a biographical note on Kruja up to his appointment as Albanian prime minister. The paper then analyses the country's situation during the Second World War and Kruja's contribution in defending and balancing the national issue with the fascist policy in the country. The last part deals with Kruja's anticommunist feeling and his attempts to oppose the left-wing resistance groups operating in the country. The other Albanian nationalist exponents that refused to collaborate with the fascists during the Second World War are not the focus of this study.<sup>2</sup> My intention is to concentrate only on Kruja's collaboration in order to understand his attitude toward fascist Italian policy in Albania during the Second World War because he was one of the most disputed figures among Albanian politicians during the interwar period.

---

<sup>1</sup> Mention should be made of the most recent publications by Arben Puto: *Lufta Italo-Greke: Diktatorë dhe Kuislingë* (The Italian-Greek War: Dictators and Quislings) and *Shqipëria Politike* (Political Albania). In both of his publications, Puto very critically viewed the role that Mustafa Kruja played during the Second World War. According to Puto, Mustafa Kruja was one of the most active pro-Italian politicians, whose policy during the war endangered the country's international status and its interests.

<sup>2</sup> By other Albanian nationalists, here I mean the group of Abaz Kupi and other Albanians, such as Mithat Frashëri and Fiqri Dine. Apart from Dine, who collaborated with the Nazis and became prime minister during the Nazi occupation of the country after 1943, the first ones engaged themselves mostly in waging war with the Italian troops and Nazi troops, and organizing the anti-fascist resistance movement and propaganda within the country. For further information, see my paper *Një histori e rishkruar*.

### Biographical notes<sup>3</sup>

Mustafa Merlika Kruja was born in 1887 in Kruja. His father was Mehmed Merlika and his mother was Hanke Corka. Despite his modest background, he was given the opportunity to study thanks to a wealthy benefactor, Esad Paşa.<sup>4</sup> He studied at the local secondary school (*rüştiye*), at the school in Ioannina, and at the high school (*Mekteb-i Mülkiye*) in Istanbul. After finishing high school in Istanbul in 1910, he returned to Albania after being appointed a teacher at the secondary school (*idadi*) of Durrës and later director of public education for the administrative division (*sancak*) of Elbasan.<sup>5</sup> He was active in the Albanian uprising of 1912 against the Ottomans, and in Vlora, as a representative of his town of Kruja, he was among those that signed the declaration of independence. He was also a member of the senate formed at that time. Later he was appointed counselor for public instruction in the new administration under Prince von Wied and was one of his supporters.<sup>6</sup> In 1918 he was present at the Albanian Congress of Durrës. He was appointed minister of post and telegraphs in the new pro-Italian government.<sup>7</sup> He himself favored an Italian protectorate (“l’Indipendenza della più grande Albania sotto l’egida d’Italia”).<sup>8</sup> To him, Italy alone would preserve and allow the building of an Albanian national government through free elections; Italy was also among those states that favored an independent Albania after the First World War.<sup>9</sup> In the 1920s, as a deputy he belonged to the progressive movement that opposed Ahmed Zogu<sup>10</sup> and was close to the Kosovars. For this reason he was obliged to flee abroad for an extended period. In 1922, he fled to Yugoslavia after an attempted coup with northeastern Albanians. He participated in the June Revolution of 1924 and was appointed prefect of Shkodër. After Fan Noli’s<sup>11</sup> fall he again went into exile in Zadar, Switzerland, and Italy.<sup>12</sup> In exile he was a member of the National Revolutionary Committee (KONARE), a left-wing political Albanian diaspora organization. In this political organization

---

<sup>3</sup> This paper briefly summarizes Kruja’s political life. A detailed biography and further information on his entire political activity from 1909, when he returned to Albania after his graduation in Istanbul, until 1944, when he went into exile abroad, can be found in my longer article mentioned above.

<sup>4</sup> Kruja, *Kujtime vogjlje e rinije*, pp. 36 and 41.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Schmidt-Neke, *Entstehung und Ausbau der Königsdiktatur in Albanien*, p. 342; Bartl, *Albanien*, p. 285; Koliqi, *Shtatëdhjetëvjetori i lindjes së Mustafa Krujës*, pp. 331–334.

<sup>7</sup> Kacza, *Zwischen Feudalismus und Stalinismus*, p. 68.

<sup>8</sup> That is, “the independence of most of Albania under the auspices of Italy.”

<sup>9</sup> AQSH, *Fondi 37, Dosja 4, Viti 1918, Fl. 1.*

<sup>10</sup> The future king of Albania (1928–1939).

<sup>11</sup> Fan Noli was an Orthodox bishop and founder of the Albanian Orthodox Autocephalous Church. He was also a politician (a member of parliament), and from June to December 1924 he was the country’s prime minister through a coup d’état.

<sup>12</sup> Cianfarra, p. 158; Ruches, *Albania’s captives*, p. 24.

Mustafa Kruja represented the right wing. After some clashes with the left-wing of this organization over the deal that KONARE made with the Soviet Union and also over the Anti-Imperialist Manifesto of 1927, signed on behalf of this organization by former Prime Minister Bishop Fan Noli and both criticized by Kruja,<sup>13</sup> together with some friends and with the financial support of the Italian government he founded the Zara Group, a pro-Italian and nationalist political group.<sup>14</sup> From this time until 1939 he remained in exile and was involved in the political activities of the Zara Group against Zogu<sup>15</sup> and continued with his intellectual studies and essays about the Albanians, their language, and their ancient history, some of which he published in periodicals. After his return to Albania in 1939, he became a senator and the president of the Italian-Albanian Institute of Albanian Studies.<sup>16</sup> In 1941, he was appointed prime minister and minister of the interior. He resigned in 1943 and lived the rest of his life in exile in Austria, Italy, Egypt, and the United States. He died in the city of Niagara Falls, New York in December 1958.

### Albania and Italy during the Second World War

After winning its independence in 1912, Albania experienced a period of political instability that lasted until 1925, when Ahmed Zogu seized power. In 1928 he proclaimed Albania a monarchy and ruled as King Zog I until 7 April 1939, when Italy invaded and occupied Albania. Following the Italian invasion, Zog I fled the country. Zog's departure and the failure of the Second World War Allies to recognize his regime in exile set the stage for the power struggle between the wartime communist and noncommunist resistance forces.<sup>17</sup> The occupiers immediately started to set up a puppet regime. On 12 April 1939, a National Constituent Assembly was convoked, which decided 1) to proclaim the abrogation of the political regime theretofore in force, as well as the abrogation of the constitution of 1 December 1928; 2) to create a government vested with full powers; and 3) to express the desire for the creation of a union between Italy and Albania, and to offer the crown of Albania to the King of Italy and to his successors in the form of a personal union.<sup>18</sup> By the royal decree of 18 April 1939, an Undersecretariat for Albanian Affairs was established in the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. By a treaty signed in Rome on 3 June 1939, Italy assumed management of the

---

<sup>13</sup> Nuri, *Opozita politike dhe strategjitë diplomatike*, p. 142.

<sup>14</sup> Kruja and Margjokaj, *Letërkëmbim*, p. 240; Dogo, *Kosovo*, p. 173.

<sup>15</sup> Zamboni, *Mussolinis Expansionspolitik auf dem Balkan*, pp. 310–311.

<sup>16</sup> AQSH, Fondi 149, Dosja I/368, Viti 1942, Fl. 92–93; Kollegger, *Albaniens Wiedergeburt*, pp. 84–86.

<sup>17</sup> Pano, *Albania*, p. 214.

<sup>18</sup> Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, p. 99.

foreign affairs of Albania and the representation of the country abroad. In addition, the union between the two states was carried out mainly through the creation of the office of Viceroy of Albania (Luogotenente Generale), through the Albanian Fascist Party, and through the assignment of permanent Italian counselors in Albanian ministries. The viceroy represented the absent king in Albania and exercised the right of sovereignty in his name. Control over the Albanian government was carried out by the exercise of appointive power on the part of Italy, but the Albanian government was also controlled from within by the permanent Italian counselors, who were active in every ministry.<sup>19</sup> The first puppet Albanian government was headed by Shefqet Bej Vërlaci, representing the traditional feudal aristocracy, he himself being one of richest landlords in the country.<sup>20</sup>

During the summer of 1941, the Italian Viceroy Jacomoni suggested to Mussolini and Ciano that there was a need for change in Albania because the Vërlaci government was incapable of controlling the interior of the country, especially in newly occupied provinces such as Kosovo.<sup>21</sup> He proposed Senator Mustafa Merlika Kruja as the new prime minister. Jacomoni suggested Kruja because he was of humble origin, but he would represent the intellectual elite of the country. Ciano agreed to Kruja's appointment as prime minister in December 1941, considering his cabinet a gesture towards the Albanian nationalist extremists.<sup>22</sup> Mustafa Kruja, a highly ambitious, pro-fascist politician that enjoyed the Italians' confidence, was allowed a little more freedom of action than was his predecessor. He was authorized to make some concessions towards Albanian autonomy by including new elements in the government from the intellectual groups and from the people rather than from the tribal leaders (beys), and to raise an independent Albanian army that was to operate alongside the Italian armed forces.<sup>23</sup> He was even permitted to liberate a large number of antifascists from prison or internment, and he adopted a policy of trying to split the antifascist nationalists from the communists, while posing as a champion of Albanian irredentism.<sup>24</sup> During the first stage of his government, the Italians viewed Kruja critically. It was feared that he would be an extremist; later, however, according to Ciano, he proved himself to be moderate. "Now that he is in power, he too realized that 'la critique est aisée, mais l'art est difficile.'" <sup>25</sup> He did not ask Ciano for

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 100–101.

<sup>20</sup> Fischer, *Shqipëria gjatë Luftës*, p. 66.

<sup>21</sup> Caccamo, *L'occupazione italiana della Jugoslavia*, p. 163.

<sup>22</sup> Ciano, *Diario*, p. 592.

<sup>23</sup> Logoreci, *The Albanians*, pp. 67 and 70; Pearson, *Albania in Occupation and War*, pp. 206 and 167.

<sup>24</sup> *Modern Europe after Fascism*, p. 867; Pearson, *Albania in Occupation and War*, p. 167.

<sup>25</sup> That is, "Criticism is easy, but art is difficult." Pearson, *Albania in Occupation and War*, p. 172.

anything unexpected, except for some small rectifications to the border with Montenegro and some changes to the flag. According to Ciano's diary, "they do not want the eagle imprisoned between the lictors' fasces and the knots of the House of Savoy."<sup>26</sup>

After a meeting in Rome with Mussolini in February 1942, Prime Minister Kruja talked about the situation, sounding an optimistic note. Mussolini emphasized his desire to grant the Albanians an increasingly liberal and autonomous local regime. This was the only policy that would bear good fruit. Otherwise, Albania too would be a breeding place for revolt and intrigue like the other occupied countries.<sup>27</sup>

Kruja's cabinet was in power only thirteen months, from 4 December 1941 until 19 January 1943, when he resigned because of difficulties faced in the country's administration. It was Jacomoni that proposed the replacement of Kruja with a ruler from the old aristocracy, stressing to Ciano that "Kruja é un uomo che nel nostro interesse dovevamo consumare" ("Kruja is a man whom we had to consume in our interest").<sup>28</sup>

### **A mixture of nationalism and anticommunism**

To the Italians, Mustafa Merlika Kruja was the perfect man at the perfect moment. Because antifascist resistance was at its first stages in the country, the old traditional Vërlaci would be synonymous with incapability. The Italian Viceroy Jacomoni considered Kruja a fervent nationalist.<sup>29</sup> Kruja would serve the Italians by showing the Albanian people that at the top of their government was an anticommunist, an intellectual, and of course a nationalist.<sup>30</sup> This last attribute, which Kruja embodied perfectly during his entire life, would secure the Italians' position in the country, especially after the proclamation of Greater Albania upon the unification of most of Kosovo's territory with Albania in 1941. After this unification the Albanian national question would resolve itself<sup>31</sup> because the Italians felt that the Albanian people would want to have a nationalist as their prime minister and thus would not oppose him.<sup>32</sup> They would not offer any resistance to the Italianization of the country nor would

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ciano, *Diario*, p. 677.

<sup>29</sup> Jacomoni, *Gjysma ime shqiptare*, p. 276.

<sup>30</sup> Neuwirth, *Qëndresë dhe bashkëpunim në Shqipëri*, p. 21.

<sup>31</sup> In April 1941, an accord was reached in Vienna between Italian Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano and his German counterpart, Joachim von Ribbentrop, on the creation of a larger Albanian state based on ethnicity. This Greater Albania was to include Kosovo and other mainly Albanian-inhabited areas in Yugoslavia, as well as the Çamëria (Chameria) region of northern Greece. Kola, *The search for Greater Albania*, pp. 22–23.

<sup>32</sup> Pacor, *Italia e Balcani dal Risorgimento alla Resistenza*, p. 243.

they join the antifascist movement. According to Pearson, Mustafa Kruja was installed to endeavor to rally the Albanians to adhere to fascist policy by playing upon their nationalist sentiments through shrewd demagogic propaganda, at the same time ruthlessly crushing every attempt at resistance.<sup>33</sup>

The Kruja government was proclaimed as the first national cabinet of Greater Albania, and Kruja's nationalist feelings were shown openly when he protested the declarations on Albania by Eden, Hull, and Molotov in December 1942. For a long time during the war, the Allies had been silent with respect to Albania. It was the United States, which had never recognized the annexation of Albania by the Italian Crown, which broke the silence.<sup>34</sup> On 10 December 1942, Secretary of State Cordell Hull declared that on the basis of the Atlantic Charter the United States of America wished to see a free Albania, self-governed and with sovereign rights. This declaration was followed by a similar one by British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden, but with the reservation that the frontier of the Albanian state after the war would have to be considered at the conference negotiations if direct agreement between Albania and her neighbors should fail. At this time, Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov expressed the sympathy of the Soviet government with the struggle of Albanian patriots against Italian forces and its wish to see Albania restored to independence.<sup>35</sup>

Prime Minister Kruja's reaction was immediate. In a public speech he criticized each of these declarations with a nationalist argument. National ethnic unity (*tansia kombtare*), threatened by the Allies' declarations, needed protection.<sup>36</sup> According to Kruja, all three declarations failed to acknowledge the changes that had occurred in Albania after 1939. The British declaration on Albanian frontiers was the most striking to Kruja because it would open border issues with Greece and Yugoslavia after the war. The danger of this, according to Kruja, was shown by the Greek government's approval of Eden's declaration. To Kruja, Eden's declaration was proof that after the war the British would support the goals of Albania's neighbors to reduce the unified Albanian nation to a small state by reducing the territory of Albania. The national unity of Greater Albania finally attained under the fascist government would be lost.<sup>37</sup> The Allies promised the Albanian people freedom and independence, but according to Kruja the Albanians wanted more. What about their borders? To the Albanian nationalists, such declarations about

---

<sup>33</sup> Pearson, *Albania in Occupation and War*, p. 167.

<sup>34</sup> Papa-Pandelejmoni, *Një histori e rishkruar*, p. 87.

<sup>35</sup> Kersten, *Communist Takeover and Occupation of Albania*, p. 11.

<sup>36</sup> Prime Minister Kruja gave a speech at the Great Corporative Fascist Council on 23 December 1942, strongly criticizing the Allies' declarations. See also: Fjalimi i Kryeministrit në Këshillin e Lartë Fashist Korporativ më 23 Dhjetor 1942 mbi gjendjen e vendit dhe politikën e fuqive të mëdha ndaj tij, in AQSH, Fondi 149, Dosja VI-97, Viti 1942, Fleta 2-4.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

freedom and independence after the war were vague. The imminent danger for the Albanian people was not the politics of the axis, but the communist danger within the country.<sup>38</sup> Kruja's nationalist zeal led to his fervent affirmation that, "if the Albanian government were forced to choose between winning Kosovo and losing independence, it would select to lose independence because united with Kosovo we (Albanians) will one day regain our independence."<sup>39</sup>

Kruja did not show enough effectiveness in accomplishing his nationalistic desires. Proof of this lies in his political program, which resembled a communal program more than it did a government program.<sup>40</sup> The program's simplicity shows Kruja's political dependence on the Italians; he was limited in his decision-making because all decisions were to be approved by the Italian viceroy. The successes of Kruja's government actually were few. Although he tried to maintain contact with other nationalists that opposed him, such as the resistance groups,<sup>41</sup> he did not succeed in maintaining his hard position against the left-wing nationalists. On 8 November 1942, a month before he was appointed prime minister, the Albanian Communist Party (ACP) was formed in Tirana under the auspices of both Yugoslav emissaries, Popović and Mugoša. After its creation the ACP issued several proclamations and constituted its cells. It strove to prepare the people both politically and military, through demonstrations, strikes, and sabotage, for an armed insurrection.<sup>42</sup> To the communists the nationalist organizations like the National Front Party (Balli Kombëtar) or the monarchists were rivals that had to be destroyed. Thus, the communists began making use of every kind of possible propaganda to undermine the nationalists' position. During the civil war (1943–1944) the object of the ACP was to remove all obstacles to its political power. The nationalists and patriots opposed to the ACP had to be eliminated. Thus, the war against Fascism and Nazism in Albania was turned into a civil war between communists and nationalists, in which the former were favored by the Allies, whose radio broadcasts aired their propaganda.<sup>43</sup>

In this overly loaded political situation, Kruja was not effective at taking measures against antifascist resistance groups, especially against the communists. The relative stability of the first stage of Italian annexation did not last very long because of the Italians' inefficiency, the failure of their war

---

<sup>38</sup> *Anthologji*, p. 323.

<sup>39</sup> *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, p. 53.

<sup>40</sup> During my archive work in the Albanian State Archive I did find a file containing Kruja's Government Program. The 11-page program is written in both Albanian and Italian and was made public in March 1942. See also the archival source, AQSH, Fondi 149, Dosja I/361, Viti 1942, Fleta 5.

<sup>41</sup> Prime Minister Kruja met with Abas Kupi, a fervent nationalist and antifascist. Amery, *Bijtë e Shqipërisë*, pp. 67–68.

<sup>42</sup> Kersten, *Communist Takeover and Occupation of Albania*, p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

against Greece, the increasingly difficult economic situation, and the growth of the antifascist resistance.<sup>44</sup> One of his small successes could also be considered the salvation from imprisonment and deportation to Nazi concentration camps of about 300 Kosovo Jews, to whom he issued Albanian passports, in some cases under fake names.<sup>45</sup>

In January 1943 Kruja wished to resign and retire from active political life. The Germans, under their occupation policy, preferred to avoid the involvement of the traditional Albanian political elite, and Kruja was not engaged in any kind of collaboration with the Germans. Nevertheless, Kruja participated in several meetings held by the nationalist and monarchist forces in the country. He was a faithful anticommunist and still enjoyed some influence among nationalists. In the framework of the civil war waged in Albania, he tried several times to organize and to convince the nationalist groups to unite against any kind of communist movement in Albania.<sup>46</sup> At one meeting in July 1944, Kruja, together with the German-supported soon-to-be prime minister Fiqiri Dine and Mirdita's captain, Mark Gjonmarkaj, met with the monarchist and antifascist Abaz Kupi. The communist danger and the communist progress toward the north made these men set aside old hostilities to unite against the common enemy.<sup>47</sup> The Germans supported such anticommunist efforts and after this meeting they appointed Fiqiri Dine as the new prime minister. The nationalist group of Abaz Kupi, supported by Kruja and the Dine government with money and munitions, was free to move in the capital and to wage war against partisans.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to this political activity, Kruja occupied himself with writing about the danger that communism would pose for the country in the case of an ACP victory. As late as July 1944 he published a call to his compatriots, in which he explained in sensational terms what would happen if the communists won the civil war. He declared to his people that "the communist danger is knocking on your doors and all men are in danger of being killed, children of being orphaned, and women of being raped by the communist beasts."<sup>49</sup>

In any case, the communist and partisan progress towards Tirana, where several puppet cabinets had succeeded one another, was unstoppable. In September 1944 Kruja traveled alone for family reasons to Vienna, where one

---

<sup>44</sup> Fischer, *Shqipëria gjatë Luftës*, pp. 164–165.

<sup>45</sup> Ndreca, Mustafa Merlika Kruja: figure e ndritun e shkencës shqiptare, p. 149.

<sup>46</sup> Amery, *Bijtë e Shqipërisë*, p. 257.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>49</sup> "Rreziku i zjarrmit e i flakës, rreziku i dhunimit të votraves qi ka rrenue e shburnue deri sod vetëm Tosknin, due me thanë rreziku komunist, na u avit edhe neve, na mërrini ke dera e shtëpis. Ç'na duhet jeta kur të shofim kalamajt t'anë në diell e femnat t'ona të dhunueme prej bishave komuniste?" See also the entire argument in the archival source: AQSH, Fondi 37, Dosja 18, Viti 1940–1944, Fleta 21.

of his sons died in November 1944, some days before the Germans left the country. He remained in exile until his death in 1958, leaving his own family, his wife and his surviving sons, back in Albania.

### Fascism versus communism

Kruja's fascist collaboration during the Second World War could be explained by two main factors. First, Kruja admitted that he was a nationalist, one that would make a pact with the Axis powers in the name of the nationalist cause. The Italian fascists considered Kruja a representative of the extremist nationalist stream, yet one that could serve Italian interests by suppressing the antifascist resistance.<sup>50</sup> Italy's policy toward Albania offered the best explanation for why he considered this state as the only country with which collaboration was possible. Among the Axis powers, Italy was considered a very important supporter of Albanian national aspiration, which would guarantee Albanian independence and national integrity.<sup>51</sup> Hubert Neuwirth adduces Kruja's animosity with King Zog I, among other arguments, for Kruja's collaboration.<sup>52</sup> Thus, after 1939 (King Zog I had gone into exile), he returned to Albania. He accepted the Italian proposal for him to become prime minister after Italy promised to concede some autonomous rights to him and to free the Albanian flag from the fasces and the knots of the House of Savoy,<sup>53</sup> which had caused open resentment among Albanians.<sup>54</sup> The accession of most parts of Kosovo to Albania and later the creation of Greater Albania was warmly greeted by Kruja. His nationalist feelings made him express his criticism and skepticism toward the Allies' declarations in December 1942. According to him, these declarations would harm the national status of Albania and would favor Greek and Yugoslav territorial claims to Albanian national territory. Thus, he defended hard-won national unification and would do everything possible to protect such an achievement. The nationalist project affected his way of doing politics. In the name of nationalism and the national cause, he declared that he would continue to collaborate with the Axis powers, which at that time were active in supporting Albanian national interests.

Second, Kruja was also a fervent anticommunist. During his life in exile

---

<sup>50</sup> Neuwirth, *Qëndresë dhe bashkëpunim në Shqipëri*, p. 21.

<sup>51</sup> AQSH, Fondi 149, Dosja 1/477, Viti 1943, Fleta 1. Decision of a group of political refugees (Mustafa Kruja, Qazim Koculi, and Ali Këlcyra) that demanded that a prince of the blood of the House of Savoy come to Albania to become Albania's king.

<sup>52</sup> Neuwirth, *Qëndresë dhe bashkëpunim në Shqipëri*, p. 144.

<sup>53</sup> The crowned version of the flag of the Albanian kingdom under Italy with the fasces and knots of the House of Savoy (1939–1943) can be seen on the *Wikipedia* website Flag of Albania (1939 crowned).

<sup>54</sup> Lampe, *Balkans into Southeastern Europe*, p. 155.

he wrote that one of his reasons for accepting responsibility as prime minister and for his collaboration with fascist Italy was opposition to communism. According to him, communism was dangerous for the country and would impede Albania's freedom.<sup>55</sup> Kruja explained that after the political activism of the left-wing resistance and the establishment of the ACP by Yugoslav commissars, he accepted the viceroy's proposal to become, as he himself declared, "Albania's quisling prime minister."<sup>56</sup> According to Julian Amery, Kruja continued fighting the communists not only during his ministry but also afterwards. His meeting with other nationalist resistance elements during the summer of 1944 was an attempt to stop the communists' progress toward Tirana and the north of the country. Amery stressed the fact that the British were preoccupied with Abaz Kupa's dealings with collaborators. However, he continued, in a country like Albania was during that period, waging a private war with the help of the "enemy's friends" was an objective collaboration. Western European political morality was replaced with compromise deals. In Albania the ideologies of liberalism, fascism, and anticommunism were not deeply known or felt because Albania was still a country where one would take a political position based on personal profit or other advantage rather than for an ideological cause.<sup>57</sup>

## **Conclusion**

According to his writings published in recent years by his family in Albania, Kruja considered himself a nationalist and stressed that all his political actions were guided through one principle: "to protect and to serve the Albanian national interest."<sup>58</sup>

As already mentioned, Kruja's collaboration with the fascist regime could be explained by two factors: namely, his nationalist and anticommunist feelings. As a nationalist, he was ready to undertake any kind of political action to serve the national cause of the Albanian people, which was the cause of unification of most parts of Kosovo and Çamëria (Chameria) with Albania during the fascist period. This is why he served the Italians and the Axis powers, and opposed the Allies' declarations in December 1942, which according to him would endanger the national interest of the Albanian people after the war and undo what Albania had gained with the help of the Axis powers. The second factor that influenced him during the war in Albania was his anticommunist stance, a central idea in opposing the left-wing resistance

---

<sup>55</sup> *Anthologji*, p. 316.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Amery, *Bijtë e Shqipërisë*, pp. 258–259.

<sup>58</sup> Kruja and Margjokaj, *Letërkëmbim*, p. 240.

groups operating in the country. To him, a possible communist victory after the war would mean ruin for the country because it would accomplish the Yugoslav and Greek goals of reducing Albania to its 1913 official borders and thus leaving out half of its rightful territory. Anticomunist convictions even drove him to collaborate with his greatest enemy, King Zog I. The king invited Kruja to collaborate with him in Alexandria, Egypt, toward uniting all of the Albanian political diaspora against the communist government in Albania. Both King Zog I and Kruja met several times in Alexandria and discussed what operations they ought to undertake against the communist regime in Albania. According to Kruja, communist Albania would be just a small province of the Slavic-communist empire, spanning from the Sea of Japan to the Adriatic.<sup>59</sup> After the war he considered King Zog I to be the only one that could unite all political Albanian émigré groups, and the only one that had influence over Albanians within the country. King Zog I had the power to support, both financially and spiritually, political action against the communist regime both outside and within Albania. Only after the fall of the communists would it be possible for the Albanians, through a national plebiscite, to decide upon their form of constitutional regime, be it a monarchy or a democratic republic. Apart from these theoretical discussions, Kruja did not take any kind of action against the communist danger and did not involve himself in any kind of Albanian political organization in exile. He was close to the Albanian Independent Bloc of Ernest Koliqi, resident in Italy; he participated in the bloc's gatherings in Egypt and Italy, but was not involved directly in the bloc's decisions.<sup>60</sup>

He received political asylum from the U.S. government. Until his death in the city of Niagara Falls, New York in December 1958 he was mostly involved in scholarly work.

## Archival Sources

Arkivi Qendror i Shtetit (*Albanian Central State Archive*) – cited below as AQSH

AQSH, Fondi 37 (Mustafa Kruja), Dosja 4, Viti 1918.

AQSH, Fondi 37 (Mustafa Kruja), Dosja 18, Viti 1940–1944.

AQSH, Fondi 149 (Kryeministria), Dosja VI–97, Viti 1942.

AQSH, Fondi 149 (Kryeministria), Dosja I/361, Viti 1942.

AQSH, Fondi 149 (Kryeministria), Dosja I/368, Viti 1942.

AQSH, Fondi 149 (Kryeministria – Struktura Politike-Juridike), Dosja I/477, Viti 1943.

---

<sup>59</sup> *Anthologji*, p. 320.

<sup>60</sup> Surroi and Misha, *Dosja sekrete e UDB-së*, pp. 75, 232 and 238.

## Literature

- Amery, Julian: *Bijtë e Shqipës*. Tirana: Shtëpia Botuese “Lumo Skendo,” 2002.
- Anthologji historike: Shkrime e përkthime* (ed. Mustafa Kruja). Elbasan: Sejko, 2001.
- Bartl, Peter: *Albanien: Vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*. Regensburg: Pustet, 1995.
- Caccamo, Francesco: *L'occupazione italiana della Jugoslavia, 1941–1943*. Florence: Le lettere, 2008.
- Cianfarra, Camille Maximilian: *The Vatican and the War, Vol. 3*. New York: Literary Classics, 1944.
- Ciano, Galeazzo: *Diario 1937–1943*. Milan: Biblioteca Universitaria Rizzoli, 2006.
- Dogo, Marco: *Kosovo: Albanesi, Serbi: Le radice del conflitto*. Lungro: Marco, 1992.
- Fischer, Bernd J.: *Shqipëria gjatë Luftës, 1939–1945*. Tirana: Çabej, 2004.
- Flag of Albania (1939 crowned). *Wikipedia*, <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Flag\\_of\\_Albania\\_\(1939\\_crowned\).svg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_Albania_(1939_crowned).svg)>, (September 6, 2012).
- Historia e Popullit Shqiptar IV: Shqiptarët gjatë Luftës së Dytë Botërore dhe pas saj 1939–1990* (ed. Akademia e Shkencave të Shqipërisë). Tirana: Botimet “Toena,” 2008.
- Jacomoni, Francesco: *Gjysma ime shqiptare*. Tirana: Botimet Ora, 2005.
- Kacza, Thomas: *Zwischen Feudalismus und Stalinismus: albanische Geschichte des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*. Berlin: Trafo, 2007.
- Kersten, Charles J.: *Communist Takeover and Occupation of Albania*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1954.
- Kola, Paulin: *The Search for Greater Albania*. London: C. Hurst & Co., 2003.
- Koliqi, Ernest. Shtatëdhjetëvjetori i lindjes së Mustafa Krujës. *Anthologji historike: Shkrime e përkthime* (ed. Mustafa Kruja). Elbasan: Sejko, 2001, pp. 331–334.
- Kollegger, Willibald: *Albaniens Wiedergeburt*. Vienna: Wiener Verlagsgesellschaft, 1942.
- Kruja, Mustafa Merlika: *Kujtime vogjljije e rinije*. Tirana: Shtëpia Botuese “55,” 2007.
- Kruja, Mustafa, and Paulin P. Margjokaj: *Letërkëmbim (1947–1958)*. Shkodër, Çamaj-Pipa, 2006.
- Lampe, John: *Balkans into Southeastern Europe: A Century of War and Transition*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Lemkin, Raphaël: *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress*. Clark, NJ: Lawbook Exchange, 2005.

- Logoreci, Anton: *The Albanians: Europe's Forgotten Survivors*. London: Gollancz, 1977.
- Modern Europe after Fascism: 1943–1980s, Vol. 1* (ed. Stein Ugelvik Larsen and Bernt Hagtvet). Social Science Monographs. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.
- Ndreca, Ardian: Mustafa Merlika Kruja: figure e ndritun e shkencës shqiptare. *Rishkrimi i historisë dhe figura e Mustafa Krujës (1887–1958)*. Shkodër: Botime Françeskane, 2011, pp. 22–26.
- Neuwirth, Hubert: *Qëndresë dhe bashkëpunim në Shqipëri (1939–1944): Një analizë historike e gjedhes kulturore të mikut dhe armikut*. Tirana: Instituti i Dialogut dhe Komunikimit, 2006.
- Nuri, Hildebrand: Opozita politike dhe strategjitë diplomatike të emigracionit politik shqiptar në vitet 1924–1939. *Hylli i Dritës*, 4, 2008, pp. 137–155.
- Pacor, Mario: *Italia e Balcani dal Risorgimento alla Resistenza*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1968.
- Pano, Nicholas C.: Albania. *Communism in Eastern Europe* (ed. Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone). Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984, pp. 213–237.
- Papa-Pandelejmoni, Enriketa: Një histori e rishkruar: Sfidimi i subjektivizimit historik mbi mendimin politik të Mustafa Merlika Krujës 1910–1944. *Rishkrimi i historisë dhe figura e Mustafa Krujës (1887–1958)*. Shkodër: Botime Françeskane, 2011, pp. 55–92.
- Pearson, Owen: *Albania in Occupation and War: From Fascism to Communism 1940–1945*. London: I.B. Tauris and The Center for Albanian Studies, 2006.
- Puto, Arben: *Lufta Italo-Greke: Diktatorë e Kuislingë*. Tirana: Botimet Toena, 2011.
- Puto, Arben: *Shqipëria Politike 1912–1939*. Tirana: Botimet Toena, 2011.
- Ruches, Pyrrhus J.: *Albania's Captives*. Chicago: Argonaut Publishers, 1965.
- Schmidt-Neke, Michael: *Entstehung und Ausbau der Königsdiktatur in Albanien (1912–1939): Regierungsbildungen, Herrschaftsweise und Machteliten in einem jungen Balkanstaat*. Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 1987.
- Surroi, Veton and Pirro Misha: *Dosja sekrete e UDB-së: Emigracioni Shqiptar 1944–1953*. Pristina: Koha, 2004.
- Zamboni, Giovanni: *Mussolinis Expansionspolitik auf dem Balkan: Italiens Albanienpolitik vom I. bis zum II. Tiranapakt im Rahmen des italienisch-jugoslawischen Interessenkonflikts und der italienischen "imperialen" Bestrebungen in Südosteuropa*. Hamburger historische Studien 2. Hamburg: Helmut Buske, 1970.

## **Ustvarjanje politike v Albaniji med drugo svetovno vojno: Primer sodelovanja Mustafa Merlika Kruja s fašisti**

### Povzetek

Članek skuša osvetliti, zakaj je albanski predsednik vlade Mustafa Merlika Kruja v času druge svetovne vojne sodeloval s silami osi in kot politično agendo uporabljal »nacionalne razloge« in antikomunizem. Vsebina članka temelji na pregledu zgodovinske literature in arhivskih virov, začne se s krajšo biografijo Merlike Kruja in nadaljuje z opisom in analizo njegovega imenovanja za albanskega predsednika vlade. Analizira situacijo v Albaniji med drugo svetovno vojno in pojasni, kako je Merlika Kruja branil nacionalni interes in ga usklajeval s fašistično politiko v državi. Zadnji del članka se ukvarja z antikomunističnimi občutji Kruje in njegovimi nesoglasji z levičarskimi odporiškimimi gibanji.

Nacionalizem je Kruji pomenil sinonim za ponovno združitev Albanije s Kosovom in Čamerijo, medtem ko mu je antikomunizem predstavljal nasprotovanje tedaj aktivnim levičarskim odporiškim gibanjem. Nacionalizem in antikomunizem sta vplivala na njegovo politično aktivnost v državi, albanski nacionalisti so podprli njegova prizadevanja za združitev Albanije s Kosovom in za boj proti komunistični gverili ter njihovim vodjem, ki naj bi državo vodili v propad. Z omenjenimi stališči je nasprotoval Deklaraciji zavezniških sil o vprašanju albanskih meja iz decembra 1942. Merlika Kruja je menil, da bi Deklaracija ogrozila nacionalne interese Albancev (potem ko je bila večina kosovskega ozemlja že združena z Albanijo), saj je bilo glede na stališče zaveznikov »vprašanje albanskih državnih meja del mirovnih dogovorov po koncu vojne«. Bojevanje proti komunistični gverili je bilo legitimno, saj bi internacionalizem v njihovi ideologiji ob možni zmagi komunistov po vojni lahko pomenil, da se bodo uresničile jugoslovanske in grške težnje po upoštevanju albanskih meja iz leta 1912, kar bi pripeljalo do občutnega zmanjšanja državnega ozemlja.

*Translation / Prevod: Nataša Gregorič Bon*