

THE ROLE OF THE MIXED COMMISSION ON CHAM POPULATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper will discuss the role of the Mixed Commission on the fate of the Chams during the official exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey after the Convention signed in Lausanne in January 30, 1923. Chams were Albanians. Their implication into this situation came as a consequence of their Muslim religion and the various "voluntarily" misperceptions that the most important decision makers of that time had. Greece and Turkey were respectively interested in constructing ethnically homogenous countries; therefore the Convention on the Exchange of Populations (1923) was a useful mean for them in order to achieve this political aim. The Mixed Commission was mandated by the League of Nations for the process of population exchange. Officially, all the parties recognized the full authority of this structure to decide on the population that was supposed to be exchanged, but many interventions by the groups of interests prohibited this Commission to take the just decisions. Furthermore, it did not have a clear vision on the platform that should have been followed, while exchanges were taking place on the ground, and subjects who were not supposed to be exchanged, were actually involved in the process, like it occurred to the Albanians. While its members were scrutinizing the Albanians' presence on the ground, there was not an Albanian representative in its structure for several years, and this fact aggravated as a consequence the fate of Chams, too. The circumstances contributed further to the negative results of the Commission, since the examined inhabitants of the region of Chameria were often intimidated in order to avoid declaring themselves as Albanians.

Keywords: Mixed Commission, Cham Issue, League of Nations.

INTRODUCTION

The League of Nations mandated the Mixed Commission as the principal independent institution who would have surveyed the process of exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey. However, this process was utilized by these countries as a mean for the homogenization of the respective territories. Chams were Albanians who inhabited the Chameria region for centuries. Greece aimed to ethnically cleanse this territory since its annexation in 1913, which occurred after the Conference of London's (1913), with the Protocol of Florence (1913).

The Albanian population of Chameria was predominantly Muslim. This fact contributed to the additional aggravation of their situation. As Muslims they were easily considered as Turks. A part from the Greek State's intentions, the International Law was considerably weak to protect the Fundamental Rights and Freedoms of this minority, and the basic rights of these individuals.

The Mixed Commission encountered a series of difficulties during its workings. Its main duty was to distinguish between the exchangeable and the non-exchangeable, which was not an easy task to be achieved in the existing background where the turmoil of international and national conflicts prevailed. Each Cham should have been asked individually; while there

was not any other appropriate criteria that would have helped the Commission's members to retrieve original data from the ground, despite the several Reports and meetings of its representatives.

The members of the Commission escaped several times from their duty to examine the population on the ground, due to several factors, and mainly because of the turmoil that existed on the ground. Albanians were exchanged officially up to March 1926. However, the uncertainty accompanied its work, even though the League of Nations, and the interested political actors maintained diplomatic relations while appreciating each other's attitude during the ongoing of the process, despite the fact that Chams came up destructed from this event, with irreversible conditions, since its population despite the impoverishment, was also notably reduced. This facts were a result of the weakness of the International Law on the general background, which was highly represented in the workings of the Mixed Commission, also.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This work is based on primary and secondary sources. The League of Nations offers several documents from which there can be seen the way how Albanians were treated during the exchange of populations (1923). Dendramis, the Greek representative shows clearly the fact that the Mixed Commission had weak positions (League of Nations, C.641.1924.VII.), while in another document the League of Nations' representatives clearly convey Greece' aims towards Chameria by stating that initially this state was interested in including Chams on the exchange, therefore it sent a large number of refugees in the region, in order to start the implementation of the exchange. (League of Nations, C.308.M.117.1926.II.)

Kretsi argues in her article the weakness of this commission. Isufi represents in his works, testimonies from Chams who were under pressure from the Greek authorities and bands on one side, and on the other side, the decisions of the commissioners were not helpful for this population.

METHODOLOGY

This paper will have a deductive approach through the documentary analysis of the historical sources. The method that will be applied in this study is the case study method, the analytical method. The first aims to analyze the case of Chams, and the influence that the Mixed Commission had on their fate during the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey. While, the analytical method will aim to make a linguistic, legal, and political analysis on the terms that were used on the official documents.

THE WORK OF THE MIXED COMMISSION IN CHAMERIA

The Mixed Commission extended its work in the timeframe of October 7, 1923 up to October 19, 1934. Its members had to implement the Convention of Exchange of Populations between Greece and Turkey (January 30, 1923), i.e. the subject of this convention should have been only the Greek and Turkish subjects, but Albanians were considerably involved in this process, as well. On March 1926, the exchange of this population was officially ended, which means that previously they were subject of the process of population exchange despite the existing Convention (30 January 1923), and the respective declarations of Greek government representatives who clearly stated and assured the Albanians for their exclusion from this process despite their Muslim religion.

The Mixed Commission did not follow a well-established platform. On March 14 1924, during its plenary session its members decided the exclusion of the Albanian population from the exchange, which helped theoretically also the Chams' situation. On practice, many Albanians, as Chams as well. The author Georgia Kretsi considers the work of this commission as "doubtful and unsuccessful", since its members continuously changed the criteria that should have been followed. (Kretsi, 2005: 60)

On May 1924, the sub-commission went to Preveza and Janina in order to scrutinize on the ground the exchangeability of the population. The conclusions of this work stated that 95% of the population decided to immigrate to Turkey. (Naska, 1999: 288-290) However, the influential factor who brought these results was the Muslim clergy, who declared to the international representatives that the Cham inhabitants had a Turkish origin. (Naska, 1999: 288-290) After this initiative, Ekstrand, the neutral member of the Commission, declared to Mithat Frasheri, the Albanian charge d' affaires in Athens, that only 3-5% of the population was Albanian because when they were asked about their nationality, most of them declared to be Turkish. (Malltezi & Delvina, 2013: 142-144, doc. no. 58) In the same meeting, Frashëri explained to Ekstrand that Chams did not declare themselves as Turkish in voluntary basis, but they were constrained to come up to this statements due to the violence that they had to suffer as a consequence of the Greek authorities treatment upon them, and the propaganda that they would have found a better life if they would have chosen to immigrate to Turkey. (Malltezi & Delvina, 2013: 142-144, doc. no. 58) Later on, Jasin Sadiku, one of the most prominent personalities of Chameria, declared to Ekstrand, that he had declared his approval of being exchanged to Turkey previously, in order to escape from the mistreatment of Greek authorities, and the Greek bands as well, however later on he decided to stay, after being a testimony of all the exploitation that was exercised by them on the innocent population. (Isufi, 2006: 344, 345; Isufi, 2012: 95¹)

According to the proceedings of the general report of the Mixed Commission on June 2, 1924, the surveyed population was not constrained to declare themselves as Turkish. However, the members of the commission admitted that they had not yet established a "general and stable" criterion which would have helped them to proceed with their work, and each case was examined by them separately, by thoroughly examining the origin, language, uses and costumes. The origin would have been considered valid only if the "interested" party would have conveyed before the sub-commission all the facts to confirm it. The uses, costumes, and the language were considered as elements of "less" importance, since they were not clear among the various minorities.²

On the other side, Albanian archives offer a series of sources on a timeframe of many years, where the Albanian population in Greece, and the Chams as well, denounced the mistreatment that they received from the Greek authorities, and the bands as well, which contributed in their decision to leave their secular properties and immigrate for a better life. Nonetheless, in the proceedings of this report (June 2, 1924), its members admitted that "a huge" work was in front of them, and a mean of alleviating the implementation of their platform was the use of the "etablis"³ certificates.

¹ Declaration of Jasin Sadiku. (1925). Annex 11. *League of Nations Official Journal*. February 1926. Vol. 7, 320.

² Mixed Commission. (June 2, 1924). *General Report*. Fund 251 (File no. 85, p. 13-17). Central State Archive: Tirana.

³ Etablis from French- established. This certificate was given to those inhabitants after the Commission's decision of their non-exchangeability.

On June 17, 1924, in the next meeting the Commission required the sub-commissions to base their work on the criteria of origin, language, and the national consciousness.⁴

On August 3, 1925, the members of the Mixed Commission considered that the exchangeable persons should have been included in the process only after clearly establishing the non-exchangeable ones. In order to achieve this, they firstly aimed at making a clear distinction between the Albanian Muslims of Greece with the other Muslims.⁵

The Albanian representatives informed the delegates of the Mixed Commission about the Albanian villages, including the Chameria region as well, where the population was clearly non-exchangeable due to the fact that they did not have Turkish nationality. The commission did not take into consideration the Albanians efforts. (Albanian Legation in Athens, April 9 1924; Malltezi & Delvina, 2013: 148-150, doc. no. 64)

On June 7, 1924, Ali Dino, one of the most prominent personalities of Chameria and a former member of the Greek Parliament elected with "the vote of Chams", despite the fact that he was on the opposition side of that legislature, sent a letter to the Chief of Mixed Commission in Athens, Widding. In this letter, Dino aimed to suggest to this Commission the most appropriate criteria for the distinction of the Albanian population from the rest of the minorities. In this letter, he mentioned various arguments in support to the Albanian population, which was turned into a minority after the annexation of territories by Greece.⁶ Neither these recommendations were taken into consideration.

Furthermore, this Commission was analyzing "a foreign" element, without having in its structure a representative from this group of interest. Dendramis, the Greek representative at the League of Nations considered the presence of an Albanian representative in this commission as negligible, since the issue lied between Greece, Turkey, and the League of Nations. (League of Nations, C.81.1935.I.) According to him, the Turkish member presence' was more important in establishing the fate of the Albanians, than the Albanian representative itself. He stated that: "if they are Albanians, the Turkish delegate will not permit them to declare themselves as Turkish". (League of Nations, C.81.1935.I.)

The "freezing" of the Fundamental Rights and Freedoms of the Albanian Individuals of Muslim religion in Greece, as it occurred for Chams on the background of this exchange of populations, was an accepted phenomenon from the League of Nations. The Mixed Commission continued to decide on the fate of Chams on unclear platform. The Albanian issue was raised at the League's Council several times. Therefore, its members remained uncertain about the methodology of work that they needed to apply on Albanians. On the response that Drummond, the General Secretary send to the Mandatories on August 24, 1925, he declared that after the establishment of the Albanian nationality, and their exclusion from the exchange, they should not ask the Mixed Commission if their rights remained denied, but

⁴ Mixed Commission. (June 17, 1924). *No title*. [Indications for the sub-commissions for the Exclusion of from the Exchange for Muslim Greek Citizens of Albanian origins]. League of Nations (File 11, Subfile 3, Total subfile no. 1, Section 1). Archives of Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Athens.

⁵ Mixed Commission. (1925). Annex 8. *League of Nations Official Journal*. February 1926, Vol. 7, 318.

⁶ Dino, A. (June 7, 1924). *Suggested Criteria to Follow for the Establishment of the Albanian Nationality*. Fund 251 (File no. 79, p. 273-280). Central State Archive: Tirana.

they should have made petitions at the League of Nations instead.⁷ On the same time, it was the League of Nations who implemented the Treaty of Minorities and advocated the protection of minorities' rights (1920). In this background, the Mixed Commission could not act differently, therefore it took part in the denial of the basic human rights of the Cham populations, as it was for the entire Albanian population that lived within the official territory of the Greek state (after 1913 annexation).

The Greek government was very interested in displacing Chams outside the Greek territory. They used several means to achieve this aim. On November 17, 1925, Drummond told the Albanian Minister of Foreign Affairs that there was not an agreement between Greece and Turkey for the inclusion of 5,000 Chams in the exchange process. (Naska, 1999: 459, 460) However, a secret agreement between the above mentioned countries was made, even though Turkey had firstly rejected it. (Michalopoulos, 1986: 308-309)

At the end of 1924, the Greek government officially but unintentionally admitted the inclusion of the Albanian population, therefore the violation of all the International Conventions and Declarations that were made with the aim to exclude the Albanians from this process. (League of Nations, C.641.1924.VII.) In the same time, it received the support of the League of Nations. The population was exchanged after the official decision of the Mixed Commission; because even the Greek government admitted several times that it recognized the full powers of the Commission to decide on the exchange of populations' issues, therefore all the legal responsibility remained on this Commission and its sub-structures. While the Council stopped the Commission's work for several times in order to further investigate on the Albanian minority of Greece' issues, this affected directly the pre-established population (for exchange).

On October 1924, Dendramis, sent a telegram of the Greek Government to the League of Nations. In this telegram, his government was asking the permission to exchange the Albanian population who was waiting at the port to be exchanged. (League of Nations, C.641.1924.VII.) Dendramis argued that his government's request was as a necessity to prevent any possible humanitarian crises of "these refugees". (League of Nations, C.641.1924.VII.) On this telegram, there is not a specific information if Cham Albanians were included or not, but the probability is high because there are other sources of the League of Nations which inform about the Greece' interest on the exchange of the entire Muslim population of Chameria.⁸ In the report of October 28, 1924, the Spanish representative at the League of Nations' Council declared that the Greek Government's request for the exchange was accepted. The Council appreciated the human attitude of the Greek government. (Elsie & Destani, 2013: 163) This argument was correct, but the question that rises in this background is: "Why were Albanians included in the exchange?!", and "Why did the League of Nations accept this fact?". If they were not Albanians, the Greek government would not have called them Albanians. (League of Nations, C.641.1924.VII.) In the document of the League of Nations there is clearly written that it was the sub-commission to have decided for the

⁷ Eric Drummond. (August 24, 1925). Reply from the Secretary General to the Letter from the Mandatories of the Council of the League of Nations for the Protection of the Moslem Minority of Albanian Origin in Greece. *League of Nations Official Journal*. November 1925, Vol. 6, 1683.

⁸ In the 10th trimester report of the Autonomous Office for the Settlement of the Refugees, in 1924, there was an information stating that the Greek Government had sent a large number of refugees in this region because it thought to exchange 22,000 Muslim Chams with Greek refugees from Turkey, even though later this population was considered not exchangeable as they were Albanians. See: League of Nations C.308.M.117.1926.II.

exchange of these people, which the Greek government considered as Albanians. (League of Nations, C.641.1924.VII) Therefore, here conveys the weak and unclear position of the Mixed Commission which took several unjust decisions toward the Albanian population.

A part from these facts, on December 1925, Dendramis corrected himself by calling the above mentioned population as Muslims, and not Albanians. (League of Nations, C.813.1924.VII.)

The Mixed Commission work on the ground was not fully and correctly achieved due to the fact that the members of the sub-commission for Chameria did not inspect the entire territory; neither did they ask all the interested parties on the issue. One of the obstacles put in front of the Albanian population was the curfew established in Chameria where the persons who declared themselves as Turkish were left free, while the contrary happened for the Albanians, who declared their Albanian origin. (Naska, 1999: 363) The Albanian Legation in Athens denounced that the Commission surveyed the supporters of the exchange, while being in this way selective; at the same time, after almost two years of the start of its work there was not an Albanian representative, at least in the position of the translator.⁹ Another issue regarded the anti-Albanian propaganda. The Mixed Commission was accompanied by military authorities, and many territories were left unvisited since there "was the risk to be killed by Albanians". (Naska, 1999: 367, dok. 195)

Bratli, the member of the fourteenth sub-commission declared in the summer of 1924, that the exchanged Chams who were displaced "involuntarily" to Turkey, should be turned back to Albania and the Albanian government could have made an agreement with the Turkish government regarding the compensation of this population with the equivalent value of their properties in Greece.¹⁰

However, the Commission did not decide and neither protect the basic rights of the Cham population during all the process of its work.

CONCLUSIONS

The Mixed Commission had a weak position on the fate of the Chams. It influenced negatively for the future of this population which was at the same time under continuous pressure from the Greek government. The Mixed Commission had officially full power to decide on the exchangeability of the population which was taken under examination. However, on the Chameria case it faced several difficulties. Its platform was continuously changing, and its members were not clear on the criteria that would have helped them to take proper decisions.

It was the Commissioners' choice to avoid an Albanian representative on its structure for a certain time. They, initially, did neither admit a translator, when scrutinizing the Albanians. Furthermore, its members showed a tendency of rejection towards Albanians' requirements and efforts aiming at informing them about the Albanian presence and the consequent avoidance of inclusion in the exchange. All these factors contributed on the unjust results of

⁹ Albanian Legation in Athens. (August 12, 1924). *Objections on the Report of the Mixed Commission for the Exchange of the Populations*. Fund 251 (File no. 84, p. 94-98). Central State Archive: Tirana.

¹⁰ Bratli, K. (August 27, 1924). *Guidance for the Chameria Case send to the Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. Fund 251 (File no. 80, p. 155-157). Central State Archive: Tirana..

this independent structure of League of Nations who negatively affected the future of the Cham population.

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