

**Pëllumb XHUFİ**

**SCANDERBEG AND VENICE, A HISTORY  
OF WAR AND PEACE<sup>1</sup>**

The project of Gjergj Kastrioti Scanderbeg about the establishment of a centralized Albanian state,<sup>2</sup> collided with the Republic of Venice, an important factor of international relations, since the beginning. Scanderbeg and Venice split on one essential question, the attitude towards the Ottomans. While Scanderbeg followed the policy of uncompromised war against them, the Republic of Venice until 1463 followed the policy of peace and dirty bargains with them. From the other side, in the case when the Hero returned to his homeland, on 1443, Venice had occupied the most vital centres of the Albanian coast, without which the centralized state dreamed by Scanderbeg was only incomplete. Differently from Balshaj, who until 1370, in the chaos that subsequently followed the fall of the Serbian Empire, became rulers of the important cities of the Albanian area such as Shkodra, Drisht, Ulqin, Tivar, Budva, Prizren, Peja, Novobërda, Vlora, Berat, and Durrës from 1384,<sup>3</sup> Scanderbeg except some cities in the inner Albania, couldn't possess none of the important coastal centres. When he returned to Albania, they had been under the rule of the Republic of Venice for decades. Cities such as Durrës, Shkodra, Lezha, Vlora, Berat, Ulqin, Tivar were the centre of economic life and trade and the spot where the connections with abroad were made, and the exit in the small harbour of Shufada, accomplished since the time of his father, Gjon Kastrioti, couldn't help the fulfilment of his major project for a

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<sup>1</sup> This presentation is part of the discourse segments.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant (1204-1571)*, vol. II: The Fifteenth Century, Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1978 (reprinted 1997), p. 195.

<sup>3</sup> A. Ducellier, *La façade maritime de l'Albanie au Moyen Âge. Durazzo et Valona du XI<sup>e</sup> au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Tessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1981, p. 490.

functional state unity.<sup>4</sup> He decided to avoid this anomaly by trying the inclusion of those cities under the cadre of his state. However, this meant unavoidable war with the Republic of Venice. The first signs were manifested after the killing of Lekë Zaharia, Danja's lord, by Lekë Dukagjini, who pretended his castle for himself.<sup>5</sup> Danja was a very important military, economic and customary base located in the road which connected Prizren with Shkodra and other Albanian coastal cities in the Adriatic. Barleti says that Scanderbeg and Lekë Zaharia were close friends and there was an agreement between them. According to this agreement in case that one of them died without heirs the other would inherit his possessions.<sup>6</sup> The murder of Lekë Zaharia and the question of Danja possession were the sources of crack in the relations between Scanderbeg and the Dukagjini family. Meanwhile, it was the Republic of Venice who achieved to put into her hands the stronghold of Danja, causing Scanderbeg's anger, which promptly decided to wage war against the Republic. The year 1448 started with a wide range attacks of Scanderbeg against Venice's possessions. His troops besieged the strongholds of Danja, Balec and Drisht, while he marched against Shkodra. On February 18 1448, it was reported in the Senate of Venice that "all that country has been devastated by the enemy." In a frontal battle by the Drini River, the Albanian forces achieved a great victory on Venetians and their allies.<sup>7</sup> The situation seemed hopeless moreover because a large number of the farmers and small lords of the villages were joining Scanderbeg's army.<sup>8</sup> Also in the Albanian cities under the Venetian rule the sympathy on Gjergj Kastrioti was raising. Also with Scanderbeg joined at the time Gjergj

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<sup>4</sup> A. Ducellier, "La façade maritime de la principauté des Kastriote de la fin du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle à la mort de Skanderbeg", in: *Deuxième Conférence des Etudes Albanologiques*, Tirana, 12-18 janvier 1968, vol I, Tirana: Université de Tirana, 1969, p. 143-195.

<sup>5</sup> M. Barleti, *Historia e Skënderbeut*, translated in Albania Stefan I. Prifti, Tiranë 1967, p. 143.

<sup>6</sup> M. Barleti, *Historia e Skënderbeut*, p. 144, 149; K. Frashëri, *Skënderbeu. Jeta dhe vepra*, Tiranë: Toena, 2002, p. 148.

<sup>7</sup> M. Barleti, *Historia e Skënderbeut*, p. 152-154; G. Biemmi, *Istoria di Giorgio Castriotodetto Scander-Begh*, Brescia: Giammaria Rizzardi, 1756, p. 111-120.

<sup>8</sup> G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tomus 20, München: Rudolf Trofenik, 1974, nr. 5365, p. 24: 7 June 1448.

Pelini, abbey of the famous monastery of Saint Mary of Rotec, near Tivar, possessions of which were levied from Tivar's Venetian governor, meanwhile the abbey was ordered to leave the Venetian territory.<sup>9</sup> The situation was becoming harder for the Venetians and the Senate decided to hire a killer to eliminate the Albanian hero.<sup>10</sup> Also this attempt failed, and in May 1448, Scanderbeg extended his operation towards Durrës that was risking to fall into his hands.<sup>11</sup> The Venetian authorities of Durrës, demanded on that occasion to the Senate the permission to appease with Scanderbeg, by paying him a tribute of 400 ducats and bestowing him two costumes per year. However, the Senate replied that "it was not good for Scanderbeg to be appeased in this way with Durrës, at a time when he is fund in the state of war with the other Venetian cities." Nevertheless, the governors of Durrës were calmed down by having the news that "very soon we will make some moves that would bring tranquillity in the the province." It is clear that with these "movements", the Senate of Venice undermined the negotiations that had started with the Turks to attack Scanderbeg. Indeed, some time ago, was sent to the Sultan an ambassador which "would seek the punishment of Scanderbeg."<sup>12</sup> At the same time, there

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<sup>9</sup> G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tomus 20, nr. 5358, p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> S. Ljubić, *Listine o odnosajih izmezdju južnoga slavenstva i mletačke republike*, vol. IX, Zagreb, 1890, p. 268; G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, p. III, t. 20, nr. 5357, p. 15.

<sup>11</sup> "Ad id autem quod petunt posse facere concordium cum dicto Scandarbego pro ducatis IIII C. et duabus vestibus in anno. Respondeatur eis, quod non videtur nobis esse bonum, quod dictus Scandarbego haberet securitatem et pacem cum una nostrarum civitatum, et cum aliis guerram, et quod presto fient tales provisiones in illis partibus, quod omnis illa provincia in pace conservabitur", G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tomus 20, nr. 5347, 6-7: 22 shkurt 1448.

<sup>12</sup> The Venetian ambassador had to make himself look as if he didn't know that Scanderbeg had detached himself from the Sultan and was in war with him, therefore had to ask the Turks to punish the Albanian leader and to pay the damages caused by him "because Scanderbeg is Turk and we with the Turk are in peace" (*et insuper quia Scandarbego est Turchus, et nos cum Turcho habemus bonam pacem vigore cuius talia attentare dictus Scandarbego non poterat nec debebat misimus ad dictum dominium Turchorum nostrum nuncium ad petendum punitionem Scandarbego predicti, et emendationem dannorum per ipsum datorum*), shih: G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 20, nr. 5361, p. 17-19.

were established contacts with the Dukagjinis and other Albanian lords, members of the League of Lezha, to detach them from Kastrioti.

Indeed, in the beginning of the summer, an Ottoman army under the command of Mustafa pasha tried to break through the Lower Dibra in the territories of Scanderbeg. After trusted his nephew Hamza the siege of Danja and Drishti, Kastrioti with the main part of the army sped up to face the Turks. In the field of Oranik, the Ottomans suffered a severe defeat from the Albanian forces.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, stronghold of Balec, and for some time seems that even stronghold of Danja fell in the hands of Kastrioti.<sup>14</sup> But thanks to Hamza mistakes, the Venetians achieved to retake them.<sup>15</sup> Then Scanderbeg decided to place the scenario of military operation against the Venetians more on the north. In July 1448, Giacomo Dolfín, the Venetian governor of Tivar, informed the Senate, that Scanderbeg with a big army made up of 10 thousand men has attacked the city of Tivar. The highlanders (*uniti a quelli della Montagna*) have joined him. Nevertheless, according to him, Scanderbeg's army was defeated in battle. He had 1600 soldiers killed and many others being taken prisoners. The Venetian governor attributes this victory of Venetians to the fact that he has succeeded to win over the Markoe tribe living in the villages of Tivar lowlands, meanwhile the other villages at the back of the city have joined Scanderbeg. Also, he himself has played an important role, because thanks to his intrigues achieved to antagonize Scanderbeg and his brother-in-law, Stefan Gjurash (Cernojevic), member of the League of Lezha, "by encouraging them to clash and kill each other."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> M. Barleti, *Historia e Skënderbeut*, p. 170-172; G. Biemmi, *Istoria di Giorgio Castrioto*, p. 134-138.

<sup>14</sup> A Venetian document of June 27 1448, informs that at that time, Scanderbeg has taken Danja (*sed tenente dicto Scandarbego Dagnum, sicut dicitur, quod tenet*), S. Ljubić, *Listine*, vol. 9, p. 269-273: 27 Junii 1448: J. Radonić, *Djurag Kastriot Skenderbeg i Arbanija u XV veku*, Srpska Kraljevska Akademija. Spomenik XCV, Beograd: Mlada Srbija, 1942, p. 10

<sup>15</sup> M. Barleti, *Historia e Skënderbeut*, p. 165-172; G. Biemmi, *Istoria di Giorgio Castrioto*, p. 138-140.

<sup>16</sup> "1448, luglio, scrive Jacomo Delfin da Antivari, che Scanderbeg con 10.000 uomini, uniti a quelli della Montagna, calò sopra Antivari, ma che fù rotto con morte de 1600 uomini e molti prigionieri; che questa vittoria s'ebbe per il buon portamento di quelli Marcovich, che è una vallata su quel de Antivari, e che gli altri contadini sono ribelli. Jacomo Dolfin, podestà d'Antivari, non sapendo come vincere i nemici,

The hostilities and the conflicts between Scanderbeg and his allies, was one of the principal direction of Venice's policy, and one of the factors that mostly aimed to undermine the cohesion and the force of Scanderbeg's state. The Republic's hegemony on the Albanian coastal cities couldn't be preserved, if in their hinterland would rule alone and powerful an Albanian prince.<sup>17</sup> On May 1448, the Senate of Venice ordered to send two envoys, one at the Serb despot Gjurg Branković and the other on the Dukagjinis, to encourage them to rise against Scanderbeg.<sup>18</sup> The Venetians hoped more on Dukagjinis exit from the League of Lezha. They were certain that "without the Dukagjinis, Scanderbeg would become harmless to them."<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the Senate bespoken, "*with the Dukagjinis we should come into terms, in a way that they would detach themselves from Scanderbeg*" (*ita ut ab illo Scandarbego separentur*).<sup>20</sup> However, the efforts made to divide were unsuccessful. At the end of July 1448, the Senate ordered that Scanderbeg, the Dukagjinis and other Albanian lords to be treated as enemies.<sup>21</sup> The actions coordinated with the Ottoman Turks to fight against them.<sup>22</sup>

In this direction, the Venetian envoys talked with the lords of the villages of the lowest rank as they did with Progon Begani, the lord of Balldre, who for a certain period had raised against the Seignory and was united with Scanderbeg (*rebellavit nostro dominio, et adhesit Scandarbego*). The Venetians tried to entice him to detach from Scanderbeg, by promising his pardon and the returning of his

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*pose sospetto tra Steffano Cernovich e Schanderbeg, detto l'Ottomano, con mezzo di lettere, per cui costoro tra loro s'azzuffarono e distrussero*". J. Radonić, *Đjurag Kastriot Skenderbeg*, p. 14.

<sup>17</sup> A. Ducellier, *La façade*, p. 649.

<sup>18</sup> G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 20, nr. 5361, p. 19.

<sup>19</sup> "*sumus enim informati, quodsine Duchainis, ipse Scandarbegus nobis longe impotentior erit*", G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, p. III, t. 20, nr. 5398, p. 58-61: 10 October 1448.

<sup>20</sup> "*quod mittatur ad despotum unus Ambaxiator, ad faciendum cum illo concordium, antequam faciat expensam gentium suarum, et veniat in Zentam, et similiter mittatur unus alius ambaxator vel nuntius ad partes Albanie, ad practicandum cum Duchainis, qui coniuncti sunt cum Scandarbego et ad faciendum cum illis concordium*", G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 20, nr. 5361, p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> J. Radonić, *Đjurag Kastriot Skenderbeg*, p. 14.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

possessions.<sup>23</sup> However, some months later, the situation of the Venetian possessions in Albania was more critical, and in June 1448 the Senate sent there an ambassador with a triple mission. First, he had to meet and convince the Ottoman Turks, even by granting them every demand, to go as soon as possible to Albania to definitively crush Scanderbeg, “in such a way that he disappear not only from Albania, but also from the face of the earth.”<sup>24</sup> If the Turks would delay the attack, the ambassador should go to Scanderbeg aiming to prolong the negotiations with him “to gain time and to quench his anger” (*ritardare et frigescere animum dicti Scandarbeghi*). It shad to flatter him by remembering the earlier friendship that the Republic had with Gjoni, his father. Also, it had also to send him a secret threat, by inviting him to give up the attacks and to have good neighborly relationship with the Republic. The Venetian envoy should warn Scanderbeg “to take into consideration the future, because the situations would not remain still, but change.”<sup>25</sup> The reference for the expected Turkish attack was clear.

After this message of peace and threat at the same time, the Venetian envoy was instructed to enter negotiations on Scanderbeg's claims towards Venice. He had hear his demands, without promising anything, “and had to prolong the negotiations as much as possible, until he gets informed that the Turkish army has approached Albanian borders, and then with different words and pretexts, should leave for Shkodra.” However, if the Ottoman army was not presented, the Venetian ambassador had change attitude “to sign peace at any price, because of the situation” (*quia propter conditionem presentis temporis volumus omnino, pacem facias*). If Scanderbeg still refuses every

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<sup>23</sup> G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 20, nr. 5365, p. 24: 7 June 1448:

<sup>24</sup> “*ut dicte gentes Teucri cito conducantur in paisium Albanie ad ruinam illius Scandarbeghi perfidi, et dari faciendo...illis gentibus Teucri omnes favores possibiles, quibus mediantibus dictus Scandarbeggo non modo de Albania, sed de mundo ejiciatur*”, G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, p. III, t. 20, nr. 5375, p. 33. It can remembered that the Senate has also similarly acted with Balsha, “their enemy”, when on 17 August 1417 ordered to be offered to the Turks 5 thousand gold ducats, to come with an army and to hit Balsha. To give to the Turks, “*qui venirent ad damna Balse inimici nostri*”.

<sup>25</sup> “*considerare tempus futurum, quia res non semper in eodem statu permanent*”. Ibid.

arrangement, the Venetian envoy should leave and secure a secret meeting with Dukagjini brothers, Pal and Nikolla. By promising as gifts villages and money, he should try once again to detach them from Scanderbeg and make them be by Seignory's side, "who would take care of them, for their children and the children of their children more than Scanderbeg." To the split between Scanderbeg and the Dukagjins, Venice gave a great importance: "without the Dukagjinis, Scanderbeg would remain totally powerless against us and so we can easily destroy him (*sine Duchainis ipse Scandarbegus erit valde impotentior nobis, et faciliter poterit destrui*). Finally, the ambassador was instructed to meet also Gjurg Branković, the Serbian despot to convince him to join the Republic in the efforts to destroy and annihilate Scanderbeg.<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, on July the Senate received the news that the Ottoman armies have entered Albania to attack Scanderbeg, and this "was forced to lift the siege of the Venetian cities and to take care to protect *his state*."<sup>27</sup> The news was joyfully welcomed by the Senate, when learnt that Scanderbeg brother-in-law, Muzak Topia, was trying to escape the Ottoman fury by seeking shelter in the Venetian Durrës, ordered the governors in Albania "that to Scanderbeg, Dukagjins, Muzak Topia and all the lords and strongholds commanders that have raised the weapons against the Seignory, not be granted the shelter in the Venetian cities, but to be left on their fate to be totally annihilated."<sup>28</sup>

The stormy events of 1448 mark the peak point of Scanderbeg conflict with the Republic of Venice. Different scholars are surprised

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<sup>26</sup> S. Ljubić, *Listine*, vol. IX, p. 269-273: 27 Junii 1448: J. Radonić, *Đjurag Kastriot Skenderbeg*, p. 10.

<sup>27</sup> "*gentes Teucris descenderunt ad damna Scanderbeghi, ita quod derelictis locis nostris, ad defendendum statum suum accessit*", G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 20, nr. 5383, p. 45; J. Radonić, *Đjurag Kastriot Skenderbeg*, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> "*quod pariter cum Comite et Capitaneo Scutari procuretis ruinam Scanderbeghi predicti, et Duchainorum, et a latere vestro attendetis illorum destructionem, et hoc ipsum dicimus de Tobia cognato suo, et de aliis dominis et castellanis, qui rebelles fuerunt nostro dominio, ut nullo modo in terras vel loca nostra suscipiantur, sed destruantur radicitus*", G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 20, nr. 5383, p. 45: 29 July 1448; J. Radonić, *Đjurag Kastriot Skenderbeg*, p. 13.

from this hostile stand of Seignory against the Albanian hero, meantime was wise to consider him her natural ally.<sup>29</sup>

The Republic of Venice had the same the behaviour with the Balsha, years before Scanderbeg. Also against them, the Venetians had not hesitated to call on the Ottomans Turks.<sup>30</sup> However, the Venetian records show hated Scanderbeg with a wild hatred, which was also emphasized by the epithets attached o him such as the "Ottoman."<sup>31</sup> Even at the end of the Hero's life, on 1467, the Republic of Venice preserved the same distrustful and hostile feelings towards him. An orator from Milan reported in Rome in 1467: "*The Venetians say everything bad on Scanderbeg, e.g., they say he is more Turk than the Turks, and some of these Venetians that are situated in Pope's court have wanted to spread the word that Scanderbeg has come here as Turk's informer and agent.*"<sup>32</sup>

This situation of the relations between Venice and Scanderbeg reached its peak on 1448, year of the fiercest clash between Scanderbeg and the Venetian Republic. However, the position of Venetians in

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<sup>29</sup> "Come condottiero e come uomo di Stato il Castriota sapeva bene che Venezia stava peggio dell'Albania, e di conseguenza non riusciva a comprendere quella politica incerta di fronte alla situazione balcanica che precipitava di giorno in giorno, mentre la Rep. Veneta avrebbe dovuto essere il più naturale alleato dell'Albania", A. Serra, "Relazioni del Castriota con il Papato nella lotta contro i Turchi (1444-1468)", *Archivio Storico Italiano* CXV/1 (1957) 33.

<sup>30</sup> Thus, on August 17 1419, the Senate decided to bestow to the Ottoman Turks 5 thousand ducats to seduce them to attack Balsha, "our enemy" (*de mittendo ad partes Scutari ducatos quinquemille pro dando Teucris, qui venirent ad damna Balse inimici nostri*), S. Ljubić, *Listine o odnošajih izmezdju južnoga slaventstva i mletačke Republike*, vol. VIII (1420-1424), Zagreb: Jugoslovenska Akademija Znanosti i Umjetnosti, 1886, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> J. Radonić, *Djurag Kastriot Skenderbeg*, p. 14. This epithet the Venetians continuously attributed to Scanderbeg, especially in the year of the fiercest conflict between them, 1448: "*quia Scandarbeggo est Turchus*", "*Scandarbegho, Turchum et perfidum hominem*", G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 20, nr. 5361, p. 17-19: 25 May 1448; S. Ljubić, *Listine*, vol. IX, p. 269-273: 27 Junii 1448; J. Radonić, *Djurag Kastriot Skenderbeg*, p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> "*Intendemo versa vice che Venetiani dicono ogni male de dicto Scandarbecho, videlicet che l'è più Turco che li Turchi; et alcuni de quisti Venitiani che sono qua in corte hanno ancora voluto murmurare che l'è venuto qua per uno esploratore et spione del Turcho*", A. Plasari, *Skënderbeu. Një histori politike*, Tiranë: Gjergj Fishta, 2009, p. 704.



Albania was weakened a lot after the serious defeat of their army in the battle of Drini on July 23,<sup>33</sup> further after the annihilation of the Ottoman army called by the Venetians in the battle of Oranik, on August 14 of the same year,<sup>34</sup> and also after the loss of some localities under Danja's jurisdiction which were conquered by Pal Dukagjini.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, the Senate decided to seek peace with the Albanian lord. Venice sped up to end the fighting with Scanderbeg, because in a wider context the collaboration with Ottoman Turks, had considerably compromised her position in the relations with the papacy and the Christian world.<sup>36</sup> From the other side, its possessions in Albania and Dalmatia had become more objects of attacks from the Ottomans. The territories of Scanderbeg and other members of the League of Lezha were situated between the Ottoman bases in Macedonia and the Venetian possessions in the Adriatic coast. To reach the Venetian coastal cities, the Ottoman incursions had to penetrate through the possessions of the Albanian lords. So, their stand was of primary importance for the future of the Venetian possessions in Albania. As a result, years later also the Republic came into conflict with the Ottomans, the Senate of Venice instructed its governors in Albania, to have good relations with Scanderbeg, who "was useful and contributed a lot for the preservation of our possessions in those areas."<sup>37</sup>

Also, in the hand of Scanderbeg and his allies was the opening or the closing of trade roads leading to these cities markets, where food products and the precious salt could be bought along with other refined Venetian products.<sup>38</sup> Trade activity was very profitable for the

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<sup>33</sup> G. Biemmi, *Istoria di Giorgio Castrioto detto Scander-Begh*, p. 110-122.

<sup>34</sup> The date has been sharply extracted from: F. Noli, *Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu (1405-1468)* in: Noli. Vepra 4, Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave, 1989, p. 275, note 234.

<sup>35</sup> J. Radonić, *Djurag Kastriot Skenderbeg*, nr. 22, p. 16.

<sup>36</sup> R. Cessi, *Storia della Repubblica di Venezia*, vol. I, Milano: Principato, 1968, p. 403; P. Xhufi, *Arbërit e Jonit: Vlora, Delvina e Janina në shek. XV-XVII*, Tiranë: Onufri, 2017, p. 798-805.

<sup>37</sup> "eumque contentum tenere per ea que in illis partibus de Theucris sonant, cum Scanderbeghus ipse utilis et ad conservationem status nostri ipsarum partium plurimum conferat", G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 24, nr. 6903, p. 156.

<sup>38</sup> "che esso Scanderbago insieme cum quelli altri signoreti siano tenuti, cum ogni suo zente ala defension del paexe, et a tener le strade aperte da ogni violentia, si che

Venetians even in this war scenario. This is why, on September 1458, the Senate praised and rewarded with privileges the abbey of the monastery of Saint Mary of Rotec (Tivar), Gjergj Pelini, who as Scanderbeg's ambassador, has achieved to convince his master to give up the decision to keep closed all the passages to Durrës and Lezha.<sup>39</sup> We would like recall here, that a predecessor of the mentioned abbey, served as special envoy of Balsha brothers, making possible their admission as citizens of Ragusa on 1361.<sup>40</sup> Thus, while it was afraid of Scanderbeg's empowerment, paradoxically the Seignory was interested even in his survival. However, she would never tolerate his excessive empowerment, to become the only ruler in Albania.

The agreement that should end the war between Scanderbeg and the Republic of Venice was signed on October 4 1448. In fact, it was a real peace treaty. Some of its chapters treated the wounds that the recent war between the Seignory and the League headed by Scanderbeg has left behind. Thus, the Republic of Venice pledged to consider "as true and loving neighbours Scanderbeg, Lekë Dukagjini and all other Albania's lords, forgiving them for the attacks and the damages caused to Seignory." Further, as Seignory and also Scanderbeg declared that granted amnesty to all their nationals who during the war have waged war against them and were allied with the opposite part. They could return their homes without fearing of being punished. But now on, all those Venetians who will commit crimes against the Republic, couldn't be sheltered anymore in the Kastrioti's possessions and the Scanderbeg's nationals who for a guilt or another, will ask for shelter in the Republic's possessions. From their side, Scanderbeg and Nikollë Dukagjini pledged to convince Pal Dukagjini, to give the villages and

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*le charavane si del loro paexe, chome de ogni altro liberamente possini vegnir ale terre e luogi nostri cum loro mercadantie, e a tuor el sal da le camere nostre", G. valentini, Acta Albaniae Veneta, pars III, tom 20, nr. 5347, p. 6-7.*

<sup>39</sup> "*Cognovimus cum quanta fide et integritate, suam propriam facultatem exbursando procuraverit et sollicitaverit remove errors et inconvenientia habita cum Magn. domino Scanderbei qui omnes passus terre Durachii et Alexii clauserat*", G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 23, nr. 6687, p. 354: 6 September 1458.

<sup>40</sup> L. Thalloczy-C. Jireček-M. Šufflay, *Acta et Diplomata res Albaniae mediae aetatis illustrantia* (hereinafter: *Acta Albaniae*), vol. II, Vindobonae, 1918, nr. 161.

the strongholds near Danja conquered a few time ago back to Venice. If Pal does not accept, Scanderbeg and Nikollë promised that would not intervene in the clashes that might happen between him and Seignory.

In the agreement could not lack the chapters treating economic and trade affairs. To Scanderbeg was recognized the right to buy every year in storehouses of Durrësi 200 horses with salt tax-free. While, Gjergj Arianiti could also buy in Durrës different draperies for personal and his family use tax-free. Scanderbeg would take as a gift from the Senate two expensive costumes per year, meanwhile he should gift to Seignory "as a sign of honour" (*dar de honoranza*) two hounds and two falcons. An important point of the agreement was the obligation of Seignory to annually give Scanderbeg an amount of 1400 ducats, which should be delivered starting from the October 26 of that year, in the occasion of the celebrations of Shën Dhimitri (Saint Demetrius) day.<sup>41</sup> But, as it's said in this mentioned chapter, Scanderbeg that year was hurrying to get the amount of 1400 ducats prior to 26 October. It is expressively written that "the Seignory should grant out of turn to Signor Scanderbeg, within 15 days, 1400 ducats that would be counted in his provision, because Albania's chairmen council had decided that Scanderbeg himself should personally go with an army to join Jan (Hunyadi, P. Xh)."<sup>42</sup> So, was asked to be an exception for that year and the Venetian provision to be granted to Scanderbeg a week prior the deadline signed in the agreement, which was October 26, the day of Shën Dhimitër, in a way that might be used in the anti-Ottoman campaign of Jan Hunyadi of Hungary, where Scanderbeg and the League of Lezha had decided to participate.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> J. Radonić, *Đjurag Kastriot Skenderbeg*, nr. 22, p. 15.

<sup>42</sup> "Item perche fato el consiglio fra lor suprascripti i Signori de l'Albania, ha determinado, chel suprascripto Signor Scanderbego vadi personalmente cum quel più exercito el pora ad unirse cum el Signor Janus, che la prefata Signoria de Venexia debia far dar et consignar al prefato Signor Scanderbego sopra la sua provision, da mo fin a zorni XV, ducati mille quatrocento, da esser diffalcadi in la sua provision", J. Radonić, *Đjurag Kastriot Skenderbeg*, nr. 22, p. 15; ASV, pars III, tom 20, nr. 5396, p. 55-57.

<sup>43</sup> On Scanderbeg's plan to join Hunyadi's campaign against the Turks, speaks another decision of the Senate of Ragusa of 20 October 1448, where is learned that Scanderbeg had required for this purpose a loan, which was denied from the

The peace agreement of October 4 1448 between Venice and Scanderbeg, came out to be a coercive movement for the Republic to exit the difficult situation after the failure of her plan to annihilate him with the help of the Turks and isolate other members of the League of Lezha. However, the Venetians never gave up the policy of distrust and conflict with Scanderbeg, by openly violating the taken commitments of the treaty of 1448. Indeed, Scanderbeg would continuously complain about the non-fulfilment of the clauses by the part of the Republic, especially of the chapter concerning the payment of the annual provision of 1400 ducats.<sup>44</sup> The issue of non-paying the annual provision from Venice, concerned Alfonso V, the king of Naples and the closest ally of Scanderbeg.<sup>45</sup> On March 5 1453, the king wrote to the doge of Venice, Francesco Foscari, and reminded him that the 1400 ducats have not been delivered to Scanderbeg for many years. However, King Alfonso went further, by denouncing another violation that the Venetians made to the signed agreement of 1448 with Scanderbeg. “You”, he wrote full of stigma, “*help and shelter in your cities the renegades and other enemies of his, whom he fights on behalf of religion.*”<sup>46</sup>

Venice from her side, used to shirk the proper obligations, hurried to make responsible exactly Scanderbeg for not applying the different points of the agreement. Thus, about the delivering of 1400 ducats provision, the Senate justified itself on 1455, that the provision for Scanderbeg should be fulfilled by the revenues coming from the salt sale for his nationals and from the deviance of the trade caravans towards the Venetian markets. Nonetheless, according to Seignory,

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mentioned Senate. See: Gj. Berisha, *Gjergj Kastrioti-Skënderbeu në fondet e Arkivit Shtetëror të Dubrovnikut*, Prishtinë: Instituti i Historisë, 2018, nr. 100, p. 201.

<sup>44</sup> J. Radonić, *Đjurag Kastriot Skenderbeg*, p. 84-86; ASV, pars III, tom 24, nr. 6903, p. 156.

<sup>45</sup> P. Xhufi, “Ein gelobter Vasall: Skanderbeg und Alphons von Neapel”, në: M. Genesin, J. Matzinger, G. Vallone (eds.), *The living Skanderbeg. The Albanian Hero between Myth and History*, Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač, 2010, p. 245-258.

<sup>46</sup> “*a superiore vero anno citra et de dictis 1400 ducatis ei solutum non fuisse et lucagenos ceterosque eius hostes, quibus cum propter fidei caritatem continenter bellum gerit, opidis vestris receptos et omni re juvatos extitisse*”, J. Radonić, *Đjurag Kastriot Skenderbeg*, p. 39.

Scanderbeg has not sufficiently favoured the trade with the Venetian cities.<sup>47</sup>

Beyond the problem of 1400 ducats payment, the agreement of 1448 showed its limitations even in the most of the sharp problems, those that had to do with war and peace. There is no doubt that Scanderbeg considered the achievement of that agreement also as the beginning of an alliance with the Republic in the anti-Ottoman Turks stand. In this view, on February 1454, he invited the Senate “to instruct all the Venetian governors in Albania to collaborate with him to face together the Turks fury.”<sup>48</sup> “*Everybody understands*”, Scanderbeg wrote, “*that there is not better and safer way to preserve Seignory's possessions in Albania, rather than to order all the Venetian governors to agree with Scanderbeg, in order that all the people and forces of Albania join as one in front of the Turks.*”<sup>49</sup>

Indeed, the situation during that spring eve was very critical. From a special letter of Scanderbeg, but also from the reports of the Venetians governors in Albania, the Senate was informed that the Turks were preparing to attack that summer aiming “to get rid of Scanderbeg and at the same time occupy all the Venetian possessions in Albania” (*ad destructionem dicti Scamdarbegi et ad accipiendum omnes terras et loca nostra Albanie*).<sup>50</sup> This is the first time when the Venetians bound the destiny of their possessions in Albania with that of Scanderbeg. The latter, with his strategic and political sharpness, had rightly thought, when asked the Senate an essential change in the

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<sup>47</sup> “*sua Magnificentia erga nos etiam debet velle servare videlicet in providendo et ordinando quod caravane et homines illarum partium veniant ad accipiendum de sale nostro et ad conducendum de rebus et mercationibus suis ad terras et loca nostra, ex quibus sicut scit, suam provisionem habere debet*”, G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 23, nr. 6295, p. 13-14: 13 March 1455.

<sup>48</sup> “*et ipse Scamdarbegus requirat, velimus mandare omnibus Rectoribus nostris partium illarum, quod cum sua Magnificentia subito taliter se intelligant...et coadunatis apud se omnibus viribus nostris, suis et aliorum dominorum Albaniae, possit auctore Deo, resistere impetui dicti Teucris*”, J. J. Radonić, *Đjurag Kastriot Skenderbeg*, p. 43.

<sup>49</sup> “*Et sicut omnes intelligunt conservationi status nostri in Albania, nulla alia securior, neque melior provisio fieri possit, quam ordinare, quod nostri rectores talem intelligentiam capiant cum dicto Scamderbego. Quod omnes gentes et vires Albanie colligantur in unum ad appositum dicti Teucris*”, *ibidem*.

<sup>50</sup> J. Radonić, *Đjurag Kastriot Skenderbeg*, p. 43.

relations between them. The case seemed appropriate to start a military alliance with the Seignory. Indeed, in a first moment the Senate positively considered this and instructed its governors in Albania to welcome Scanderbeg's invitation and to meet him in the place he would define, except the city of Shkodra (*excepta civitate Scutari*). The exclusion of Shkodra itself, the Venetian hub in Albania, as meeting place between the two delegations, clearly speaks that the Venetians continued to preserve the distrust towards the Albanian prince. In any case, the Venetian representatives were mandated "to negotiate and to establish on the means and ways that should be used to resist the Turks and save the lands and the inhabitants of that area." The Venetians were also authorized, to make a deal with Scanderbeg and with other Albanian lords in the way proposed by the Albanian head lord, "to unite all the forces of that country against the Turks."<sup>51</sup>

However, only some months later, on December 31 1454, the Senate sent an instruction to its governors in Albania, which was the opposite of the collaboration asked by Scanderbeg and in principle accepted by Seignory. It is expressively said "*To be written to the Count of Shkodra...to preserve the peace we have with the Turk and in the fighting that would occur between the Turks and Scanderbeg, he should behave in such a way, that never the mentioned peace may be harmed.*"<sup>52</sup> So, instead of the alliance with Scanderbeg and the coalition of the Christian countries, Venice once again preferred to achieve a new peace with the Turks. One of the chapters of this treaty of peace was directly headed against Scanderbeg, because it defined the Venice's engagement to not allow the enemies of the Sultan to enter

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<sup>51</sup> "*et ex nunc sit captum quod mandetur omnibus nostris Rectoribus Albanie, quod his habitis, omnes convenire debeant in illo loco, qui comodior sit Scanderbego, excepta civitate Scutari, et cum sua Magnificentia conferre et deliberare de remediis et modis, cum quibus resistere possit dicto Teucro et salvare terras et animas illius provincie, capiendo talem intelligentiam cum dicto Scanderbego, et aliis dominis Albanie, quod omnes potentie illarum partium sint unite ad oppositum dicti Teucris*", *Ibidem*.

<sup>52</sup> "*Et ex nunc sit captum quod scribatur Comiti Scutari... quod servare debeat pacem quam habemus cum Teucro, et in novitatibus que sequerentur inter Teucros et Scandarbegum se habere debeant per modum, quod non contraveniant aliquantulum paci quam cum Teucro habemus*", G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 23, nr. 6282, p. 341-2: 31 December 1454.

her territories.<sup>53</sup> The Senate took great care of keeping this clause secret from Scanderbeg during the contacts with him after 1454. Thus, on April 26 1456, the Senate instructed his envoy to Scanderbeg to make the utmost to avoid any talk about peace, especially the chapter that obliged the Venetians towards the Sultan, to not offer shelter for Scanderbeg and his people. If Scanderbeg was aware of such a chapter, the Venetian envoy "had to find the right words and reasons for its justification."<sup>54</sup>

After this new Venetian infidelity, Scanderbeg had no other choice but to treat the Republic as an enemy power and her territories as enemy territory. Indeed, we are informed that in November 1456 Kastrioti with his army continuously treaded the Venetian territories in Albania, even menacing approaching to Durrës and Shkodra walls and gates. To the complaint of the Venetian authorities, Scanderbeg replied by that occasion that: "because of his military activity against the Turks, he had to pass through pathways and territories that belong to the Republic, even without her approval."<sup>55</sup>

In this ardent climate in the relations between Scanderbeg and the Republic of Venice, makes sense the letter that he, through his ambassador and at the same time Chief Secretary, the abbey Gjergj Pelini, sent to Venice's Senate before July 1457. The full text of the letter, divided according the chapters, is preserved in the Senate's reply of July 8 1457.<sup>56</sup> It is interesting that the first chapter letter begins with a special instruction of Scanderbeg for the abbey Pelini, where the tense climate of the relations with the Republic is also included: "*Signor protonotary, in a few moments you will travel to Venice. Godspeed. First, you will remind the Seignory of Venice the question of my provision: starting from the quantity and the way how they are giving it to me, better not give it at all. Nevertheless, ask Seignory to help me in the urgent cases by giving me 2 thousand ducats from my*

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<sup>53</sup> "circa receptum non dandum in terris nostris hostibus suis", J. Radonić, *Đjurag Kastriot Skenderbeg*, p. 64.

<sup>54</sup> "justificabis dictum capitulum cum convenientibus verbis et rationibus, sicut pro prudentia tua facere poteris et scies", J. Radonić, *Đjurag Kastrioti Skanderbeg*, p. 64.

<sup>55</sup> "perchè lui voleva guereggiare contra le cose pel Turcho che male lo pò fare se non passando per alchune valle e terreno di questa Signoria, mla quale non glie la vogliuto ne vuole comportare", J. Radonić, *Đjurag Kastriot Skenderbeg*, p. 72-73.

<sup>56</sup> J. Radonić, *Đjurag Kastriot Skenderbeg*, p. 84-86.

*provisions in arrears. Strongly demand for them.*” The stern tone of this letter's prelude continues further. Scanderbeg demands the provision to be granted to him in money, and not in quantity of salt, as Seignory insisted. This last way hadn't functioned, because the Venetians governors of Durrës, Shkodra and Lezha should liquidate the provision's value in salt, always found pretexts to avoid the obligation. “I”, burst Scanderbeg, *“cannot bare this situation anymore, because until now from such governors and administrators I have received only words and no work.”*<sup>57</sup> To this demand in the form of the ultimatum, the Senate replied with the permanent refrain: would be ordered the Venetian bajlos of Corfu to sent out of order a big quantity of salt in Shkodra and Lezha, with which would be liquidated the entire his provision (*quod integraliter tota provisio sua erit soluta*). Also the cold tone of the reply showed that even this time the promise would remain only in paper. Scanderbeg's second request had to do about Seignory's obligation, signed on 1448, to offer Scanderbeg a quantity of priceless drapery enough to sew two costumes in a year. Scanderbeg complained that him was being sent the same quantity that was sent to other lords, 16 fathom of drapery. As it seems, that was not enough for his body, that was above the normal, and the Senate decided that instead of 16 fathom scarlati to be bestowed 18 of the kind. The Senate also approved another Scanderbeg's request to free from the customary obligations the stocks bought by him in Venice's possessions, a privilege that was enjoyed even by his father, Gjon Kastrioti. The rude and the polemic tone of Scanderbeg is seen even in the chapter when he informs that has come to know that the Venetians were acting in contradiction with the agreement of 1448, by removing to Scanderbeg the right that in case of danger to be sheltered along with his family members and men in the Venetian possessions. Of course, with a smart tact of a skilful diplomat as he was, Scanderbeg blames the Venetians governors in Albania, not the Seignory. In front of such courtesy, the Senate couldn't act otherwise but to assure Scanderbeg that the agreement's chapter was still in force and he together with his men, could take shelter in any moment at Venice's possessions. However, the Seignory wouldn't defer in the next Scanderbeg's demand, that had to

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<sup>57</sup> “*perche mi non posso più durar a questo modo, perche mi ho abudo asay parole e pochi fati de questi rectori e dali proveditori*”, *ibid.*



do with his wish to pass in Montenegro and more, in the territories that have been of Balshaj and later to the despot Gjurg Branković and now were kept by the Turks. Again we have a stern Scanderbeg, that nonetheless requires Venice's permission to do this incursion, doesn't hesitate to say that preferred to pass in Montenegro with Seignory's approval, but even without it, he would know how to act, by openly letting know using violence if necessary (*se me voleti dar a passar con la vostra benedicion, io passerò, e se non me darete, io providerò meglio che porò*). To this difficult request, the Senate softly replied that "cannot permit your Lordship the passing in Montenegro, because would be given a pretext to the Turks to come with army against us and you."<sup>58</sup> Apparently, the Seignory had a certain reason why was frightened by Scanderbeg's passing through north of Shkodra. A year later, on 14 April 1458, the Venetian ambassador in Naples, informed on Scanderbeg's goals to occupy Drisht and Tivar. "With their capture", he stated, "Scanderbeg hoped that would be also easy to occupy Shkodra and all the Venetian possessions in Albania."<sup>59</sup>

Nevertheless, on August 1458, something had changed in Scanderbeg's relations with Venice, or at least with her representatives in Albania. Meanwhile, Lekë Dukagjini had despoiled Danja from Venetians and a little bit later even Shat with its stronghold.<sup>60</sup> This time the Venetians didn't prefer to ask the assistance of the Turks against Dukagjini. It was said that Lekë was related to the Turks, even why to the Venetians seemed impossible that he could find hope in their help or favours.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, they preferred to turn to Scanderbeg. His relations with the Dukagjinis were broken, also thanks to the intrigues from the Republic's side. It is learnt from the letter of the pope

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<sup>58</sup> "quod si Magnificentie sue concederemus transitum in Xentam, daremus materiam Turcho veniendi cum exercitu contra nos et ipsum", J. Radonić, *Đjurag Kastriot Skenderbeg*, p. 86.

<sup>59</sup> "de pessima intentione Scandarbeg contra dominium nostrum...et de intentione dicti Scandarbegi accipiendi Drivastum et Antibarum: quibus habitis, sperat facile posse obtinere Scutarum et omnia alia nostra Albanie", G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 23, nr. 6637, p. 312.

<sup>60</sup> G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 23, nr. 6677, p. 343; G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 24, nr. 6784, p. 33: 7 May 1459.

<sup>61</sup> "sicche cum verità da i Turchi el non havesse ni podesse haver soccorso, over favor alguno", G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 23, nr. 6677, p. 345.

Nicholas V to his Nuncios and orator in Albania, the bishop of Drisht dated in July 20 1452 that “a savage hate, becoming deeper and deeper, had erupted between our loving son and nobleman Gjergj Kastrioti Scanderbeg and Pal and Nikollë Dukagjini, lords in Albania.”<sup>62</sup> Lekë was the son of Pal Dukagjini. Scanderbeg called Lekë Dukagjini “enemy of Christ and mine” (*inimigo de christo et mio*), and this speaks a lot about his relations with the allies.<sup>63</sup> Meanwhile, Scanderbeg's profile in the international arena grew. In the response of 8 February 1458 that the pope Calixtus III sent to a previous one to king Alfonso of Naples, when the latter recommended Scanderbeg, the pope Calixtus III compared Kastrioti with an “impassable wall that has closed to the Turks every path to flow in the Christian world.”<sup>64</sup>

Venice couldn't ignore these praises coming from the head of the Catholic Church and continued its unprincipled hostility towards Scanderbeg and with the compromising friendship with the Ottoman Turks. Thus, after the agreement of 1448 that had to seal the peace between them, between Scanderbeg and the Venetian Count-Captain of Shkodra was reached another agreement on August 16 1458, which marked another step forward taken by yesterday enemies towards a military alliance. The text was presented to the Senate by Gjergj Pelini, the ambassador of Scanderbeg. From the Venetian point-of-view, the cause for reaching this new agreement was the clash with Lekë Dukagjini about the possession of Danja and its surroundings. Therefore, the Senate was not hiding to openly call it “agreement

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<sup>62</sup>“*gravia odia suscitata esse et in dies arcebiore fieri inter dilectum filium nobilem virum Georgium Castriot Scanderbech ac Paulum et Nicolaum Ducaginos in Albania dominos*”, J. Gill, “Pope Callistus III and Scanderbeg the Albanian”, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 33 (1967) 550.

<sup>63</sup> G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 24, nr. 6792, p. 38-9: June 41459.

<sup>64</sup>*Intelleximus, quanta affectione dilectum filium nobilem virum Scanderbech Albanie dominum nobis commendaris, quod nobis fuit jucundissimum; tametsi nostra propria voluntas illum pro suis virtutibus et ingentibus factis, quibus non solum de nobis, sed de universa Christianitaten optime meretur, arctiori, quam dici possit, charitate complectamur; videmus enim eum prope solum furori saevissimorum Turcorum quasi murum quemdam firmissimum esse oppositum, qui ipsorum aditum precludit, ne in Christianitatem irrumpant: nec nos latet, quot cladibus ipse cum suis subditis affectus fuerit*”, D. Farlati, *Illyricum Sacrum*, vol. VII, Venezia: Jacopo Coletti, 1817, p. 422.

against Lekë Dukagjini.” The Senate discussed for long time about the content of the content of the second chapter of the agreement reached between Scanderbeg and his representative, by bringing meaningful changes: “*We think, that to conclude this agreement with lord Scanderbeg, would be appropriate to say that when it comes to war, both parts should fight together and none of them should withdraw and leave the other side to continue alone the war. When the case is, both parts would participate in the peace negotiations, but the decision to sing peace would be taken only by our Seignory.*”<sup>65</sup> This correction of the principal text presented by Scanderbeg undermined that the Republic could decide to sign a peace treaty with a third part, respectively the Sultan, only in case that would be in her exclusive interest and benefit. In this last clause added by the Senate, is found a letter written a practice that the Republic had often applied, that of abandoning the allies and signing unilateral peace.<sup>66</sup> Nonetheless, Scanderbeg’s alliance with the Republic against Lekë Dukagjini worked for a while. It was still in force in June 1459, when is learned that Scanderbeg had evicted Lekë and has occupied “Shati Mountain” with some villages around, which were returned to the Venetians after the insistence of Seignory.<sup>67</sup>

However in the beginings of 1462, the relations with the Republic of Venice entered once again in crises. According to Venetians, Scanderbeg “has taken hostile stand, because he was claiming things

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<sup>65</sup> “*Dixemo che intrando nui in questa intelligentia cum el prefato Signor Scanderbego ne pare conveniente et raxonevole che la guerra se fazi per intrambe le parte comunamente, et una non se retraze et laltra proseguisca sola in essa guerra. Et quando loccorrera che comunemente se trati e pratici de la paxe, sia in libertà de la nostra Signoria sola venir in la dita paxe. Et in questo effecto sia reformato dicto capitulo*”. G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 23, nr. 6676, p. 342: August 16 1458.

<sup>66</sup> “*mà il detto Turco fando poi pace con Venetiani, quando li donaro Scutari, non me volsero comprendere in quella, com’hò detto, ansi promisero in lor mano venisse*”, G. Musachi, *Breve Memoria*, p. 276; P. Bartl, *Der Westbalkan zwischen spanischer Monarchie und osmanischem Reich*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1974, p. 218.

<sup>67</sup> G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 24, nr. 6792, p. 38-9: 4 June 1459.

that they didn't like at all."<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, the conditions had changed, has also changed the language of Seignory, who previously in moments of conflict with Scanderbeg, was not reserved to use against him a wild and challenging language. Thus, on April 4 1460, the Senate instructed that after the continuous complain of Albania's lord for the non correct liquidation of the provision of 1400 ducats, to be given a positive reply. The Senate also clarifies the reason of this change in the behaviour towards Scanderbeg. the Senate said on that occasion: "*We should please his requests because of the information on the Turks coming from those sides and because Scanderbeg is useful and serves a lot to the preservation of our possessions in that country.*"<sup>69</sup> Therefore, in the negotiations with him or his envoy we must pay attention to the things to not be cut with knife, but to lay the impression that we aim to calm and solve every problem we have with them."<sup>70</sup>

Indeed, throughout 1462, the distrust and the climate of war between the two neighbours continued. On September 17 1462, the Senate was informed that Scanderbeg has caused troubles in Shkodra region. Apparently, Albanian soldiers at Venice's service had shown signs of collaboration with the hero. Therefore, the governors in Danja, Lezha and in the other strongholds were ordered to replace the Albanian guards with Italian soldiers.<sup>71</sup>

However, the circumstanced had changed. Yet, Scanderbeg was not the Albanian prince fighting to take Venetians possessions in Albania, but the commander of the great anti-Ottoman crusade that the pope Pius II was preparing against Mehmet II, where at last also Venice seemed to participate.<sup>72</sup> The Republic's stand had now changed

<sup>68</sup> "*intelleximus animum suum erga res nostras illius provincie male dispositum esse. Et pretendit idem Scanderbegus aliquas causas qui multum displicent nobis*", G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 24, nr. 7132, p. 382-3: April 6 1462.

<sup>69</sup> G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 24, nr. 6903, p. 156: "*eumque contentum tenere per ea que in illis partibus de Theucris sonant, cum Scanderbeghus ipse utilis et ad conservationem status nostri ipsarum partium plurimum conferat*".

<sup>70</sup> G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 24, nr. 7132, p. 382-3: "*nullam penitus faciatis demonstrationem, sed prudenter dissimulando operam date ut res pacifice transeant, quoniam nos cum predicto oratore aut nuntio omnia componere et res ad quietem deducere procurabimus*".

<sup>71</sup> G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 24, nr. 7213, p. 459.

<sup>72</sup> F. S. Noli, *Gjergj Kastriot Skënderbeu*, p. 328.

because the Ottomans now threatened Venetian possessions. The Venetian Republic which once was an opened and hidden collaborator of the Ottomans, has now become a firm propagandist and member of the anti Ottoman crusade. On January 22 1462, the Senate of Venice encouraged Louis XI of France to give up the program of a simple French crusade from Italy to Albania, but to join the pan European crusade coordinated by the Pope. “*Otherwise*”, Seignory said, “*there is a possibility while Your Majesty prepares to pass with an army from Brindisi to Durrës, the Turks might be faster and pass with his troops from Vlora to Brindisi, as vauntingly declared to us.*”<sup>73</sup> Now, based on the strategic assessment of Venice, Albania of Scanderbeg was not an obstacle for the plans of the Republic anymore, but the frontline for the whole Christian world. With such an assessment, the Venetian Senate appeared to be in the role of protecting the Albanian cause in the front of Scanderbeg’s historic allies, the Pope of Rome and the King of Naples. “*It should be kept in mind, that the destruction and the end of Albania is also the destruction and the end of Italy and the entire Christian world*”, the Venetian envoy stated to the Pope on June 7 1466, while insisting to be sent to Scanderbeg without losing time the necessary aids.<sup>74</sup> At the same time, the Senate was raising the same concern to the King Ferrante of Naples, desperately stating that “the situation of the Great Scanderbeg and of Albania, and as consequence of the whole Christian world, shows that we are facing a great danger.”<sup>75</sup>.

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<sup>73</sup> “*quod si forte accideret, quod Deus advertat, quod data esset Turcho facilitas penetrandi in eam partem, quam vellet, in viscera christianorum, et ubi Serenitas Sua dicit de transeundo ex Brundisio Dirachium, forsitan Turchus ante transitum facere posset ex Avalona Brundisium, quem admodum jam sibi spondet et gloriatur se facere velle et sicuti etiam dici nobis fecit*”, J. Radonić, *Đjurag Kastriot Skenderbeg*, p. 129.

<sup>74</sup> “*certissimum teneri debet quod non solum concernunt ruinam et escidium Albanie, verum Italie et christianitatis nisi tanto furori validis et celerrimis provisionibus occurratur*”, O. J. Schmitt, “Actes inédits concernant Venise, ses possessions albanaises et ses relations avec Skanderbeg entre 1464 et 1468”, *Turcica* 31 (1999) 277.

<sup>75</sup> “*quod cum Magnificus Scandarbegus et res Albanie et per consequens christianitatis in maximo periculo constitute sint*”, O. J. Schmitt, “Actes inédits concernant Venise”, p. 279.

So, it was achieved the second big agreement after that of 1448, between Gjergj Kastrioti and the Republic of Venice. With his usual clairvoyance and all inclusive view, F. Noli has the idea that this agreement was hastily accepted by Venice because of the peace signed on April 27 1463 between Scanderbeg and the sultan Mehmet II. Likewise, according to him, this peace was by purpose signed from Scanderbeg to force Venice give up the hesitation and to join in firm war against the Ottoman.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, on August 20 1463, on Scanderbeg's behalf, the abbey Gjergj Pelini and Andrea Smaqi signed in Venice the chapters of the new agreement, that differently from that of 1448, was a military allegiance pact against the Ottoman Empire. The agreement project drafted by Scanderbeg which was called "an agreement to fight against the Turks in protection of Venice and Scanderbeg's possessions", contained 6 chapters. In the first chapter it was required from the Republic of Venice put at Scanderbeg's disposal a number of Italian soldiers and knights, as Seignory deemed appropriate. "But this has to happen very quickly, because of the expected events" (*el qual favor vol essere presto per i casi puol occorrer*). Second, Scanderbeg was asking that his problematic provision, from now on to be paid directly by Seignory, and not by her governors in Albania to avoid the conflict that has been in the past (*accio non nassa scandolo tra loro, come per el passato*). Third, every year, from April to June when the Turks as custom sent armies to destroy Republic and Scanderbeg's possessions, the Seignory had to send a small fleet in the Albanian coast, where in case of necessity should find shelter Scanderbeg and his men, and also Venetians officials. The fourth chapter of the agreement specified that, in case of Venice peace with the Turks, would also include in it Scanderbeg, his men and possessions. Five, the son of Scanderbeg who was by the time 8 years old, to be admitted into the fold of Venetian nobility. Seven, if Scanderbeg is banned from his country, he will be granted a land and a reasonable provision, that he may live "with the hope of returning in his state." Eight, during his stay as a refugee, he will be liquidated all his overdue provisions.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> F. S. Noli, *Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu*, p. 325-326.

<sup>77</sup> G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 24, nr. 7449, p. 186-7: 20 August 1463.

As its seen, the text also contains unfulfilled chapters from the agreement of 1448. All these demands were accepted and became part of the agreement. According to the first point, the most important, the Senate decided to send and to put under Scanderbeg orders 500 infantrymen and 500 cavalrymen. Scanderbeg's son would be bestowed the title of Captain of this body, while Scanderbeg that of governor.<sup>78</sup> About the point number seven of the agreement about Scanderbeg and his family being sheltered in the Venetian territory, outside Albania, R. Lopez ascertains that that point is often found in the agreement Venice with the different Balkan princes. However, he adds that "the fact such a point was asked to be included in the agreement by Scanderbeg himself, says a lot about how little he believed in the victory and how low was the morale even of the most invincible of the Christian princes."<sup>79</sup> Indeed, the careful reading of the text clarifies that Scanderbeg speaks there about a compulsory leave from an extreme situation and it would be only temporary. There, he asserts, he would live in a foreign land "with the hope of returning in his state" (*chel possi viver cum speranza de tornar in suo stado*).<sup>80</sup>

In appearance, the agreement fulfilled what Scanderbeg had proposed to the Republic in 1454, when he demanded the unity of the Albanian and Venetian forces against the Ottoman danger. Anyway, Venice tried to present the agreement with Scanderbeg as her victory. On September 9 1463, the Senate informed the Pope Pius II about the signing of the agreement and emphasized that hoped they might detach him from making peace with the Turk. Thus, "if Scanderbeg is given by the European countries the necessary aid, he will not only make the Ottoman armies seriously get engaged, but will succeed in evicting them from Europe."<sup>81</sup> Certainly, the Venetians knew well that

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<sup>78</sup> G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 24, nr. 7449, p. 186-7: 20 August 1463.

<sup>79</sup> R. Lopez, "Il principio della guerra Veneto-Turca nel 1463", in: *Archivio Veneto*. Real Deputazione di Storia Patria per le Venezie, vol. XV (1934) p. 77.

<sup>80</sup> "*expulso del suo paese li sia deputado qualche nostro luogo e terra cum la provision se convegna al Signor chel possi viver cum speranza de tornar in suo stado*", G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 24, nr. 7449, p. 186-7.

<sup>81</sup> "*se cum debiti soccorsi el serà sovegnudo e mantegnudo, el se potra operar non solo poder inferir degna guerra al inimico nostro et caçarlo de l'Europa*", G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 24, nr. 7475, p. 208: 9 September 1463.

Scanderbeg aimed not only to save Europe from the Ottoman invasion, but also to enlarge and empower his state. They had experienced this at their own expenses. Therefore, they had to emphasize that, if with the aids of the Christian countries he would triumph over the Ottomans, Scanderbeg at the same time would successfully realize the aim to enlarge his state.<sup>82</sup> But beyond the interest of both crusades and Scanderbeg, the Republic of Venice sought to fulfil her interests, which already saw them connected with those of the Albanian hero. On October 17 1463, Venice's doge, Cristiano Mauro, sent the administrator Gabriel Trevisan in front of Scanderbeg. He was instructed to assure his interlocutor about the Venetian support in favour "of preserving and enlarging his state...and of protection and preservation of our state."<sup>83</sup> An astute formulation, which excluded the possibility Scanderbeg's state enlargement might happen including Albanian cities under the Venetian rule.

As last test of Venice's stand towards Albania's lord, was the effort, until then unprecedented in her relations with Scanderbeg, to quench the disagreements between the Albanian lords and to unite them under Scanderbeg orders. Thus, on October 17 1463, the Senate instructed his envoy to reconcile chieftains such as Aleks Spani with the lord of Albania such. Aleks Spani was a friend of Seignory and even Lekë Dukagjini who was a sworn enemy of hers and Scanderbeg himself. "*The re-establishment of peace and friendship between them, would be extremely useful to the Christian crusade*", said on that occasion the Seignory.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 24, nr. 7489, p. 228: 18 September 1463: "*Et si prestabuntur sibi favores gentium ut valde necessarium est, tenemus quod magnanime faciet contra comunem hostem, sperandum que erit per operam suam et favorem predictorum multa bona confici posse quantumque maiores favores ei prestabuntur iudicio nostro, tanto melius tantoque utilius erit, quoniam cumulatim etiam viribus suis hostem poterit offendere et statum suum ampliare*".

<sup>83</sup> "*pro conservatione et autione status sui...et etiam pro defensione et conservatione nostri*", G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 24, nr. 7540, p. 272-3: 17 October 1463.

<sup>84</sup> "*quia illis partibus sunt nonnulli domini, partim nostro dominio commendati, partim qui erga statum nostrum bonam voluntatem habere videntur, sicuti literis Comitum et Capitanei Scutari de Alexio Spano, nuper certiores facti sumus....Et quoniam intelligimus Magnificum Lecham Duchaynum multum expeditioni christiane conferre posse si in amicitiam et pacem cum Magn. Scanderbego deduci posset,*



Nevertheless, if we judge from direct and indirect sources, the distrust and infidelity continued further to poison the relations of Venice with Scanderbeg. The Seignory was not completely sincere even now, while worldly stating her determination in the war against the Ottomans and the support for the Christian crusade. Even when she undertook the task of detaching Scanderbeg from the peace signed with the sultan Mehmet II on 1463. A little bit later, on 1466, Venice has started the negotiations to agree with the Ottomans. “*For a born inclination of ours, we are not in a situation to refuse the peace*”, had stated on this occasion the Senate of Venice (*ex naturali inclinatione nostra nesciremus recusare pacem*).<sup>85</sup> Exactly by this occasion, the Senate speaks for an intrusion by the part of Scanderbeg to convince Seignory to give up from the decision to make company with the Turks.<sup>86</sup>

It is possible that during those negotiations, Scanderbeg might have doubted that Venice had granted to the Turks one of her possessions in Albania, for example Shkodra (which, indeed was given to the Turks ten years latter). Such a thing marked the end of his state, therefore before July 28 1467, Kastrioti sent a letter to the Senate, reminding that “the defence of Kruja and Shkodra is decisive for the salvation of our two states.”<sup>87</sup> Of course, even in this case, the Seignory replied “politely”, that would keep it in mind.

Nevertheless, till the end of Kastrioti’s life, the Venetians never gave up proving their instability and their two-faced policy. This is why Scanderbeg doubted that Venice was trying to exploit the confused situation caused by the continuous presence of the Ottoman troops in Albania to grab his territories. During his stay in Rome, in the winter of 1466-1467, facing the refuse of the pope Paul II to help him,

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*volumus tibi que mandamus, ut cum tuo studio curare debeas eos in concordiam et pacem deducere*”, G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, pars III, tom 24, nr. 7540, p. 272-3: 17 October 1463.

<sup>85</sup>J. Radonić, *Đjurag Kastriot Skenderbeg*, p. 170: Venice, 3 July 1465.

<sup>86</sup>“*de quanto vui ne scriveti de la pratica de la pace cum el Turco, ve certificamo, che le astutie del Turcho a nui sono notissime... Ringratiemovi niente manco de lo avizo datoci e de la dechiarita vostra opinione, de la qual ne faciamo digna existimation*”, J. Radonić, *Đjurag Kastriot Skenderbeg*, p. 180.

<sup>87</sup>S. Ljubić, *Listine*, vol. X, p. 395-6; F. S. Noli, *Histori e Gjergj Kastriot Skënderbeut*, p. 439.

Scanderbeg blamed for this attitude of the head of church, the Venetian representative in the papal court. The latter convinced the pope Paul II, that was not necessary to spend money to help Kruja, because the Seignory has undertaken her defence, and for this has sent there infantrymen and other forces. And, according to Scanderbeg, this was the reason why the Pope was neglectful, meantime the Seignory aimed to appropriate that castle.<sup>88</sup>

It cannot be said with certainty that the voices about Scanderbeg, were mostly circulating in the diplomatic circles in Rome or Naples, Venice or Milan, reflected the truth or were a product of “war of misinformation” that was held in those environments. Indeed, differently from what pretended the Venetian emissaries, Venice’s help for the on field operations to defend the strongholds in Albania, who were those which Scanderbeg needed the most, was inconsequential.<sup>89</sup> Also, the contingent of a thousand soldiers that Venice promised to put at Scanderbeg’s disposal as based on the agreement dated in August 1463, was never entirely sent.<sup>90</sup> Always according to the reports of the foreign ambassadors, during his visit in Rome in the winter of 1466-1467, Scanderbeg complained at the Pope about this issue. He said him that “the Venetians has sent but seriatim, first 30 infantrymen, then 60 and later 50, and the same as with the knights. Thus, overall there were no more than 200 knights, as much as infantrymen. Such a thing, was done by the Venetians to harrow and enfeeble little by little, so that he could get worse and worse to be forced to surrender Kruja, wanted so much by them. But, as he says, he had understood so well such a game,

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<sup>88</sup> “*Scanderbecho ancora sta qui quasi desperato con poca speranza de haver soccorso dal papa per lo facto de Croya et de Albania, ni de dinari ni d'altro. Et li pare essere tenuto in tempo, maxime perche intende che uno d. Paulo Contarino venetiano, che se trova qui, ha dissuaso et dissuade la Santità antelata, digando ch'el non è necessario faccia altra spesa per lo soccorso de Croya, imperochè la Signoria de Venetia l'ha tolta in protectione et ben la farà guardare et dentro li sono soyfanti et altra gente. Et per questo non ne pare il papa curarse troppo. Et epso Scanderbecho chiaramente comprehende la intentione de quella Signoria tendere a sottomettersi quella terra, ma più presto dice la darà con tutto lo resto al Turcho*”, J. Radonić, *Djurag Kastriot Skenderbeg*, p. 213: 24 January 1467.

<sup>89</sup> F. Thiriet, “Quelques reflexions sur la politique vénitienne à l'égard de Georges Skanderberg”, in: *Deuxième Conférence des Etudes Albanologiques*, Tirana, 12-18 janvier 1968, vol I, Tirana: Université de Tirana, 1969, p. 75.

<sup>90</sup> G. Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta*, p. III, t. 25, nr. 7449, p. 186.

and therefore was one thousand times ready to burn everything and to give off the city to the Turks rather than to them.”<sup>91</sup>

The essence of Scanderbeg contradictory relations with the Republic of Venice comes out synthetically in the rude message that he sent to the Senate on July 8 1457, through the abbey Gjergj Pelini, his ambassador. Protesting against Venetians governors in Albania, which provoked by war entering with armies in his territories,<sup>92</sup> Scanderbeg makes clear to Seignory that for him such governors didn't pose any problem: he knew how to wage war better than them (*or meglio faria mi la guera che loro*). He had no intention to wage against the Republic because of some of her unworthy officials. What he could do, was the close the borders (*serar el mio paexe*). Scanderbeg was perfectly aware of the meaning of these words, that he seemed to caressless deliver. There was a serious threat hidden between them, which was seriously taken by the Venetians: closing the borders with Durrës, Shkodra and other cities in the possession of Venice, meant economic asphyxy for them. Indeed, those cities were held only by the trade developed with the inhabitants of the agricultural hinterland, citizens of Scanderbeg. After showing disdain towards the mediocre Venetian governors in Albania, and after issuing this hidden threat to seal the borders, as master of political discourse, Scanderbeg offers the Senate the peace assurance. “*Indeed, my country is poor and my house is small: but this was the will of God, so stay calm because I will not let anybody to*

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<sup>91</sup> “*Insuper se dole molto largamente epso Scanderbecho de Venetiani, et ne dice ogni male, perche non gli hanno atteso cosi gli havesseno promisso; nam dice gli dovevano mantenere cinquecento cavali et cinquecento fanti, con li quali se seria pure andato tegnando et temporezando in modo chel non se seria reducto a cosi mal termine como l'è, ma dice non gli hanno may mandato senon apoco, apoco, mo' XXX fanti, mo' LX, mo' L, et cosi de li cavali ancora; siche non ha mai habuto ducento cavali in tutto, ni altritanti fanti; et questo ha molto bene inteso, perche quella Sig.ia de Venetiani non lo faceva per altro, se non per farlo consumare et frustare apoco apoco, et redurlo a tale extremità, chel gli fusse forza dare ne le mane loro Croya, quale haveriano grande desiderio de havere... Verum dice havere molto bene inteso il tracto, et che più presto brusaria ogni cosa, et mille volte più tosto le daria al Turcho che a loro*”, A. Plasari, *Skënderbeu. Një histori politike*, p. 703.

<sup>92</sup> “*ma alcuni de li vostri rectori vol far guerra comesso mi, e levando hoste e vien soura per fina in mio paexe*”, J. Radonić, *Đjurag Kastriot Skenderbeg i Arbanija u XV veku*, p. 86.

*infringe your lands, because I have no intention to wage war on you.*"<sup>93</sup> He concluded through his reasoning: *"I do not wage war on you, because I don't want to say that he is fighting the Venetians, were others have waged war in his country."*<sup>94</sup> These few selected words reveal the essence of the Scanderbeg's relations with Venice. According to the Albania's lord, the war and peace between them couldn't be decided by interests or miserable men, as were in such a case the Venetian governors, but on an interest that went beyond the bilateral relations scheme and was the interest of the common war against the Ottoman invasion. These Scanderbeg's words were not an opportunistic statement in a given moment. They were the essence of his thought and action as exceptional politician and strategist.

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<sup>93</sup> *"è misero el mio païse e la mia casa piccola, quella me ha dado Dio, e non lassa andar negum in le vostre terre, altra guerra mi non fazo"*, J. Radonić, *Đjurag Kastriot Skenderbeg*, nr. 141, p. 86.

<sup>94</sup> *"ma non voio far, perche non voio che se diga, che ve fazo guerra, in fina tanto, che fa guerra altri in questo païse"*, J. Radonić, *Đjurag Kastriot Skenderbeg i Arbanija u XV veku*, p. 86.