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A DIFFICULT NEGOTIATION: THE LACK OF TURKISH-VATICAN CONCORDAT  
AND THE POLICY OF WIEN\*

In a complex political context marked by the Eastern crisis, which in April 1875 affected the Balkans and involved Russia two years later in a new conflict against the Ottoman Empire, there was a growing concern in the Vatican over the situation of the Catholics living in the Ottoman Empire. These people were in danger of being included in Orthodox states with a strong Russian influence<sup>1</sup>. The Austrian Government pressured the Holy See to intervene through the Congregation of Propaganda Fide, thus intimating and suggesting to the Franciscans and to the Bosnian Catholics the need to approve of their opposition to the Serbian movement and of their loyalty to Ottoman authorities. Notwithstanding this pressure, the Holy See had considered it appropriate to proceed very cautiously, also because of the uncertain results of the ongoing events.

The new Balkan structure, the Sultan's authoritarian turn during the crisis, and the ensuing suspension of the Constitution recently granted, aroused the Vatican's concern about the consequences the situation might have had for the fate of the Latin-Rite and Greek Rite Catholic community and also for the communities still under Ottoman rule and the ones that were present in the other Balkan States. The problem to deal with was the restructuring of the dioceses in a way that the new borders established in Berlin were respected. At the same time new projects were elaborated, paving thus the way for the institution of national catholic hierarchies and for the initiation of contacts with the aim of future agreements, considered to be a fundamental moment as far as the reunion of separated brethren was concerned.

From February 20, 1878, a new Pope sat on St. Peter's Chair: Leo XIII, Gioacchino Pecci, under whose guidance the groundwork for an Eastern policy of the Church of Rome would have been laid; a policy characterized by a renewed interest in the Ottoman Empire, which was considered at that time to be the only way for restraining Russian Pan-slavism.

The maintaining of the integrity of the Sultan's dominions, characterized by an ethnic and religious pluralism, represented a way for guaranteeing the survival of the Latin and Greek Rite Catholic minorities that lived there. Moreover, the general concern for the fate of Catholic minorities would become one of the major concerns for the Church of Rome during the contemporary age, also due to the formation of new States characterized by ethno-religious nationalisms.

On the other hand, the new geopolitics of the Balkans and the spread of Russian influence forced the Sultan to see the subjected Catholic communities as subjects concerned with the maintaining of the integrity of the Ottoman Empire and no longer as political tools of the Western powers concerned to impose their influence through religious protectorates.

Under the guidance of Pope Leone XIII the Holy See became an interesting interlocutor offering to the Sultan the chance to end the international isolation in which the defeat of 1878 had relegated him and to regulate religious affairs without intervention of France and Austria-Hungary. All this was in full correspondence with the will of Rome to act in a more autonomous way, having, as a primary objective the ensuring of the East Catholics interests.

At the end of the conflict, the worries of the Curia were confirmed by the Treaty of San Stefano (Yeşilköy). The Peace Treaty of San Stefano ratified Serbia, Montenegro and Romania's independence and the creation of Great Bulgaria wanted by the Czar, spreading from the Black Sea to the Aegean Sea, from the Danube to Macedonia, which would have guaranteed the Russian supremacy over the Balkans and the Straits. The disposal to

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\*The initial results of this research were published in Rita Tolomeo, *La Santa Sede e il mondo danubiano-balcanico. Problemi nazionali e religiosi (1875-1921)*, Roma 1996.

Montenegro of territories where Albanian Catholic communities were present was also provided for by the Treaty, a decision confirmed further on in Berlin. Actually, the Albanian, Muslim and Catholic resistance, all reunited in the League of Prizren, has delayed the decision for a few years.

Among the Balkan Catholics, the Albanians have also distinguished themselves for the perfect union with Rome and for their devotion to the Pontiff. The Islamising which has advanced with no major difficulties in central Albania, was now encountering a tireless resistance within the tribes living in the mountains. They found in the Catholic faith an important identity factor which contributed to reinforce their opposition to any kind of assimilation, either Muslim or Greek Slavic Orthodox.

The Albanians feared that the undeniable weakening of the Ottoman Empire would allow a division of the Albanian territories among the surrounding countries. This fear was confirmed by the fact that in many areas committees appeared that were asking for a revision of the Treaty of San Stefano.

The protests against the disposal of territories to Montenegro could have become a dangerous factor of instability, and the Ottoman Empire wanted to avoid that at any cost.

The Holy See, who initially had supported at an international level the Albanian Catholics' claims, considering them completely legitimate, had to take note of the decisions taken by the European Governments together with the Ottoman Empire.

The Holy See initially put pressure on the protecting powers so that they intervened and stopped the disposal of Albanian territories. Subsequently, the Holy See accepted the decision of the European Governments and of the Ottoman Empire that guaranteed, among others, freedom of religion. The Holy See aimed particularly at the formation of an autochthon clergy in order to establish a National Albanian Hierarchy<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, the project of creating a local ecclesiastic hierarchy encountered difficulties in its accomplishment, at least at the beginning<sup>3</sup>.

At the same time, cautious negotiations started to be undertaken between the Holy See and the Ottoman Empire, aiming at cementing relationships and ratifying an agreement that could improve the condition of the Catholics within a territory where they were a minority.

These contacts were initiated at the suggestion of the Armenian Patriarch of Cilicia, Monsignor Azarian, who, in 1886, in a letter addressed to the Gran Vizier, emphasized the necessity and the importance of reconsolidating the relationships between the Ottoman Empire and the Holy See. What better occasion could there be than the Pontiff's Sacerdotal Jubilee?

The Sultan could have offered a present to the Pope and could have honoured the most trustworthy collaborators of the Pontiff - cardinals and prelates - with the highest imperial distinctions. The proposal was favourably welcomed. The news had positive effects on the Eastern Catholicism and was favourably commented by the Western governments. As far as the French were concerned, there was some concern that all this was meant to eliminate the French Protectorate in the East<sup>4</sup>.

Before leaving for Rome to bring the Sultan's gift, Azarian was assigned by the Ottoman Minister of Justice and Religion, Gevad Pasha, to investigate the intentions of the Vatican and understand if the Vatican was willing to sign an agreement similar to the one reached in 1886 with Montenegro<sup>5</sup>, an agreement which had represented a great success for the Holy See. Due to this agreement, the reorganization and reinforcement of the Catholic ecclesiastic hierarchy was possible within an Orthodox nation. The agreement with Montenegro would have represented a step forward towards a possible rapprochement with the Greek-Orthodox Church, in a perspective of a reunion of the Churches.

The Ottoman Minister thought that it was the Russian Government that had suggested the agreement to the Montenegro Prince, in order to make the most of the annexation of the Catholic district of Antivari.

In fact, due to the Treaty of Berlin, Montenegro had extended its Southern borders to the detriment of the Albanian territory. Albania was left without Antivari, Adriatic harbour of Scutari the greatest Albanian commercial market<sup>6</sup>. Pope Leon XIII had separated the episcopate of Antivari from the diocese of Scutari and elected the former to the dignity and office of an archbishopric, having ecclesiastic jurisdiction over the Catholics belonging to the Montenegro Crown<sup>7</sup>. Due to the changes in the conditions of Catholics from Montenegro, the Ottoman Empire feared that the archbishopric of Antivari, mostly inhabited by a population of Albanian native speakers, could become a centre of attraction for the Catholics in Albania. The efforts undertaken by Istanbul were therefore meant to ward off the possibility that Nicholas I, might pursue his hegemonic goals in Scutari by taking advantage of the already structured Catholic ecclesiastic organization in Montenegro, which was more efficient than the Albanian one.

Gevad Pasha had already been Governor of those provinces several times and he knew very well the Albanian situation and local organization. He therefore was aware of the dangers the Ottoman Empire would have encountered if no measures had been taken. Once Azarian had informed the State Secretary, Iacobini, and the Propaganda Prefect, Simeoni, of the Turkish Project, these latter emphasized the necessity of consulting the Austrian Government before taking a decision.

Azarian had to go to the Habsburgic capital to confer the Episcopal consecration to the General Abbot of the Viennese Mekhitarist Fathers. In Wien, Azarian encountered the Austrian Foreign Minister, Kalnoky, who expressed a favourable opinion on the draft agreement at issue.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 1887, once back in Istanbul, the Armenian Patriarch wrote up a detailed report which he handed to the Habsburgic Ambassador. In this report he emphasized the importance of an agreement between the Ottoman Government and the Holy See, agreement aimed at strengthening the Albanian Catholic Church and at balancing the effects of the arrangement with Montenegro, which had become an important centre of attraction for the Albanian Catholicism. The clergy and the Latin archbishopric of Albania, almost entirely foreign, were in a difficult situation due to the not granting of the imperial acknowledgement, *berāt*. I The Sultan's *berāt* would have guaranteed to the Ministers of non Muslim faith and to their believers jurisdictional and administrative autonomy.

The granting depended on a precise condition: religious leaders had to take Ottoman nationality.

If they had been granted the imperial *berāt*, the Albanian bishops, representatives of the Catholic communities, would have been entitled to attend regional administrative councils and they and their believers would have been protected from possible abuses.

If an agreement between the Holy See and the Ottoman Empire had been attained, this would have implicitly entailed the Viennese Government giving up its trusteeship over the Albanian Catholics. Once conceded the imperial *berāt*, the only person who could exercise an exclusive right over the Albanian community and its hierarchy would have been the Sultan. Besides, the Austrian religious protection in Albania had become purely nominal, as the Ottoman Empire's tendency was to exclude from its provinces any external intervention.

If Wien had tried to reaffirm its leadership over the Albanian Catholicism, the Sultan would have seen this Austrian attempt as a political interference in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire, aimed at having access to the Aegean Sea.

According to Azarian, Wien should have accepted the agreement concerning Albania that foresaw an Austrian intervention in case of Ottoman's Empire non-fulfilment of the clauses. In this way, Austria would have proved that it did not want to interfere in the issues concerning the Ottoman Empire's provinces. Therefore, in case the Ottoman Empire had violated the agreements, Wien's protection over the Catholics would have carried more weight.

It was obvious that the Sultan's will was to create favourable conditions to start negotiating with the Vatican. On the basis of the information cardinal Ledochowski, Propaganda Prefect, received from Azarian, the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastic Affairs started to re-examine on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 1892<sup>8</sup> the agreement draft concerning Albania.

A month earlier, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 1892 Azarian sent a detailed report on his encounter with the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, Count Kálnoky. Kálnoky advised to submit the agreement project straight to Emperor Franz Joseph's attention. The encounter with the Emperor took place on the 10<sup>th</sup> of April 1892 and the emperor looked favourably upon an agreement between the Holy See and the Ottoman Empire<sup>9</sup>.

On the contrary, the conservative elements of the Ottoman Empire strongly objected to the project. The negotiations were cut off, waiting to be revived to the Council's attention later. It was then that Gevad Pasha was appointed Gran Vizier. He expressed his will to restart the interrupted negotiations, but on one condition: that this should be done without France and Austro-Hungary's knowing.

The Holy See favourably welcomed the restart of negotiations provided that the Sultan acknowledged the Pontiff's supreme spiritual jurisdiction over all the Catholics living in the Ottoman Empire, and provided that the Austro-Hungarian and French Governments<sup>10</sup> were informed of the result of the negotiations. The Vatican, nonetheless, had some doubts whether the Montenegro agreement should be adopted as a model for the present agreement and pointed out that the former one had been ratified with a Christian prince, though not Catholic, while in that case, the agreement had to be signed with an "infidel". According to the Propaganda Prefect, the agreement would have been hence disregarded by the Sultan.

The Grand Vizier informed Monsignor Bonetti of his intentions of concluding the agreement, as the Sultan's aim was to gradually reduce the religious trusteeship that France and Austro-Hungary had been exerting since the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century over the Eastern Catholics. The Ottoman Government had already tried to start an emancipation process that could liberate the Ottoman Empire from the European Powers. The Ottoman Empire had launched an ambitious program of reforms aimed at progressively eliminating any foreign interference, both religious and political, on its own territory. In this perspective, the Ottoman Empire had promulgated in 1839 the so-called *hatt-i-sherif* of Gülhanée and in 1856 the so-called *hatt-i-humayun*, which did not achieve the expected results. The Great Powers present at the Paris Conference had recognized the importance of *hatt-i-humayun* in the Empire's modernisation and decided to deliberately exclude the other countries' right to intervene in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire. Such an engagement, which would have implied revising the capitulation system, had not been adopted either by France or Austria, neither of them willing to lose the centuries-old right to exercise religious control. Article 32 of the Treaty of Paris emphasized the validity of all the agreements in force before the Crimean war, implicitly stating that no change would have been applied to the capitulation systems without the concerned powers' agreement. The Peace Treaty of Paris (1856) and the following Treaty of Berlin (1878) also confirmed, to the European diplomatic and consular representatives, the trusteeship over institutes, religious communities, workhouses, and over foreign Christians living in the Ottoman Empire. This way, the regime of capitulations was confirmed by an International agreement and the capitulations had lost their original character of "concessions" made by the Sultan and had turned into freely negotiated bilateral agreements.

The Ottoman Empire attempted to take over the role of guarantor of rights for the Catholic communities living in the Empire, the Holy See being left with the spiritual jurisdiction over them.

During the negotiations, there were some rumours, nourished by Bonetti, that Monsignor Azarian had been removed from his assignment of mediator with the Ottoman Empire. Probably the Cilician Patriarch was, according to the Ottoman Empire, too much

linked to the diplomatic environments of Quai d'Orsay to be able to keep a secret from the French Government. Nonetheless, Istanbul never officially excluded Azarian and the negotiations with the Holy See continued on two separate camps: Azarian's and Bonetti's.

In April 1892 Azarian prepared a provisional version of the agreement to be presented to the Grand Vizier in view of the inevitable changes that would be suggested by the Ottoman Empire<sup>11</sup>. At the same time, Azarian wanted to meet the French Ambassador of Istanbul, Cambon, to reassure him that the agreement concerning Albania would not damage in any way the French religious protectorate in the East.

Cambon, nevertheless, despite the different nature of the two religious protectorates in the Ottoman territories, was afraid that Austro-Hungary's renunciation to the Protectorate over the Albanian Catholics could induce the Ottoman Empire to consider France's Protectorate over Eastern Christians as failed too.

Moreover, due to the Treaty of Belgrade (1739), the Ottoman Empire had extended the religious protection right already exercised by Austria, to the Latin clergy, subjects of the Ottoman Government. Therefore, altogether with Wien's renunciation, the Sultan would have been reinstated in his right to protect, in line with the Islamic tradition, the Christian subjects of his Empire.

As far as the capitulations granted to France were concerned, the Ottoman Empire allowed the Christian kings to exercise the religious trusteeship exclusively over the foreigners of Christian religion living within Islamic territories. The Sultan by no means could have deprived France of its exclusive right to protect its co-nationals or the foreigners living within the Ottoman Empire, whether simple subjects or Catholic missionaries.

Cambon had substantial reservations concerning the agreement. His reservations showed the importance Paris gave to the maintenance of the religious protection right in the East. The day after the Berlin Congress, Paris tried to reaffirm, in competition with Wien, its role of protector of the Catholic cause in the Ottoman Empire. This also because, due to the politics led by the Republican Ministers (Leon Gambetta and Jules Ferry), aimed at supporting the activity of Latin believers, namely French, committed in charitable and apostolate activities in the Eastern countries, the religious protectorate of France in the East got consolidated, together with France's moral prestige and its religious primate. Let's consider how between 1875 and 1881, due to the economical aids received from the French Government, the Jesuits founded colleges in Beirut, Cairo and Alexandria of Egypt. In 1881 it rose at Pera the Eastern Seminar of Saint Louis, entrusted to the French Capuchin Friars, while in 1882, on Cardinal Lavignerie's initiative, the White Friars settled in the churches and in the monastery of Saint Anna in Jerusalem. The Priests of the French Congregation of Our Lady of Sion with the intent of converting the Jewish, founded an Institute in Jerusalem, while the Brothers of the Christian Schools of Saint John Baptist de la Salle opened colleges in Smirne, Egypt and Palestine. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the French religious protection of the East got extended to the Christian communities subjected to the Ottoman Empire, particularly the Greek-Catholic churches turned to the French diplomatic consular representatives' protection, who intervened unofficially as mediators between the Latin Patriarchs and the Ottoman Government.

The French diplomacy feared that Wien's abdicating the right of religious protection over Albania was a strategy aimed at damaging the Italian bishops' and missionaries' present in great numbers in Albania<sup>12</sup>. If the agreement had been signed, the immediate consequence would have been a considerable reduction in the number of foreign priests in Albania and, at the same time, a consistent increase in the number of autochthonous priests. During the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the relationship between Wien and Rome, despite the attempts to safeguard the commitments stipulated with the Triple Alliance, was affected by the rivalry in the South-Western Balkans. The defeat at the battle of Sadowa in 1866 meant for Austro-Hungary the expulsion from the German Confederacy and also the loss of Veneto; it also

determined a shift in the interests of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, which strengthened its interest in the Balkan Peninsula. The Treaty of Berlin assigned Bosnia-Herzegovina, as far as the administration was concerned, to the Austrian Government. This implicitly consolidated the Habsburgic presence within the South-Western area, creating competition with Italy.

The attempts to involve Albania in Austro-Hungary's politics had a double aim. On the one hand, once held the commercial harbour of Trieste and the military one of Pula, the Monarchy had the possibility to actively operate in the Adriatic Sea where its ships were far more important than the Italian ones. On the other side, holding the control of the Albanian seashore allowed full access to Thessaloniki and the Aegean Sea. Not to mention that, due to its strategic position, Albania would have been an important security factor, a natural border against Balkan states' expansionist attempts.

After the Treaty of Berlin, Italy too was interested in extending its political and commercial influence in the Balkan area where the Italian irredentism in Istria and Dalmatia, was pursuing its anti-habsburgic battle. Also from a strategic point of view, Albania was important to Italy: Vlore harbour, only a few kilometres away from the Italian shores, was a vital point for the safety of the territory. Both ways, neither Wien nor Rome opted for radical solutions such as annexation or occupation, although Austria was trying to increase its influence over the Albanian society by means of the clergy present in Albania.

The Viennese politics in Albania was meant to financially support the Jesuits of the Pontifical College of Scutari and more generally speaking, all the religious institutes and the Catholic Schools. The aim was to reduce the number of the Italian or Filo-Italian clergy, by preventing, as much as possible, the use of the Italian language in the Albanian cultural circles and confessional schools. In fact, the Habsburgic influence in Albania was very strong, especially among the Catholic populations in the Northern part. In this area, Wien's strategy was supported by the ecclesiastic hierarchy and by the missionaries of the Congregation the Propaganda Fide<sup>13</sup>, lead by financial and political motivations. Actually, the Latin Church of Albania totally depended on Wien which regularly granted generous allowances to the Church. Moreover the most important exponents of the Congregation de Propaganda Fide preferred to support the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, rather than a laic, liberal and anti-clerical State such as Italy.

Italy's influence in the Albanian society was very strong, in spite of the lack of support from the Vatican. The Italo-Albanian communities who maintained direct contacts with their original nucleus, strengthened therefore Italy's penetration in Albania. The clergy involved in apostolate activities in the Albanian missions: Stimatin nuns, Basilian fathers missionaries, Franciscans, Salesians and Jesuits, was mostly Italian; while the autochthonous Albanian clergy had received a cultural and spiritual training in the Italian seminars as well. Moreover, the ecclesiastic College of Saint Adrian and of Saint Demetrio in Calabria had the mission to prepare priests destined to the dioceses of Scutari, Alessio and Skopje.

In order to put the agreement into effect, the Sultan imposed some necessary conditions such as: the bishops and parish priests had to be chosen preferably among the Ottoman subjects (except the ones already in charge, who were going to be invited, but not forced to change nationality); the bishops had to take the loyalty oath to the Sultan as established in the Montenegro agreement. The Holy See reserved the liberty to appoint the Albanian bishops, accepting nonetheless to submit candidate list to the Ottoman Empire's approval. The Ottoman Government had to officially recognize Rome's ecclesiastic jurisdiction over all the Catholics in the Ottoman Empire. In line with article 1 of the Montenegro agreement, it had to ensure the free exercising of the Catholic apostolic and roman religion in Albania, and to ensure the ecclesiastic jurisdiction of bishops, vicars and parish priests by granting them the imperial *berat*. Last, it had to grant the Albanian clergy an appropriate allowance, supervised by the administrative control of the local bishops<sup>14</sup>.

The Vatican diplomacy suggested Azarian to be very careful not to hurt the feelings of the French and Austrian Governments, and advised him to organize an appointment with the Austrian ambassador in Istanbul, to reassure Wien that the agreement would have respected the Treaty of Belgrade and it would not have limited the Austrian protectorate over the Albanian Catholics.

At the same time, to conclude the agreement, other negotiations took place. Fide Propaganda commissioned the apostolic representative Monsignor Bonetti to convey to the Grand Vizier the extreme pleasure that the Holy See experienced when hearing the proposal<sup>15</sup>. It also mentioned cardinal Ledochowsky's wish that the negotiations were undertaken by Monseignor Azarian.

The representative of the Austro-Hungarian Government expressed his concern about the Ottoman Empire's acknowledgement of the Holy See's supreme jurisdictional authority over the Oriental Catholics of any rite. If this eventuality were to arise, it could imply the extension of the French Protectorate over all the Catholics of the Empire, including Armenians, Syrians, Chaldeans and Melkites<sup>16</sup>. His concern was in fact justified. The Holy See prodded the Latin missionaries and ecclesiasts into seeking the support of the French diplomatic and consular representatives. In doing so, France's highest spiritual authority in the Catholic world was even more emphasized. The extension of the Pontiff's spiritual jurisdiction to the Armenian, Syrian, Chaldean and Melkite Catholics of Eastern rite, implied that a more and more believers living in the ottoman territories had to invoke France's exclusive protection. Moreover, it was necessary to reassure Austro-Hungary concerning the moral benefits that the monarchy would drawn from the agreement, namely the Pontiff would have charged the Emperor with monitoring the correct application of the agreement's provisions.

Having noticed the Austro-Hungarian diplomacy's reservations and distrust, Azarian advised the Propaganda to entrust the nuncio in Wien with contacting the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count Kálnoky. Azarian's suggestion was based on the conviction that both French and Austrian Governments' resistance derived from the fear that the agreement could be instrumentally exploited. That is to say, they feared that the agreement entailed the overall re-examination of the Eastern religious protectorate issue, re-examination wanted by the Ottoman Empire and aimed at depriving both European Powers of their right of religious protection over the Eastern Christians.

From 1892 on, Monsignor Galimberti, nuncio in Wien, joined in the negotiations. Galimberti points out to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alexandre Ribot, that the hypothesized project concerned Albania only and did not concern the territories under French protectorate<sup>17</sup>. Ribot reassured the Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs in the same way. As a result, the two ministers became more inclined to accept the agreement.

As a matter of fact, the two ministers' reservations were nourished by the possible opening of an Apostolic Nunciature in Constantinople<sup>18</sup>, that would have entailed the activation of direct diplomatic relationships between the Vatican and the Ottoman Empire. In doing so, the intermediate countries were to be deprived of their right to intervene and settle the issues of the Catholics living in the Ottoman Empire. Actually, the State Secretary and the Ottoman Empire had already activated, long time ago, negotiations aimed at establishing an apostolic nunciature in Istanbul, as a result of the changes started with the Tânzimat reforms.

On the other hand, the Sultan was still interested in maintaining a state of tension among the diverse confessions in Albania. If it had been necessary, he could have obtained the support of Muslim populations against the Catholics.

On July 1892 a project draft is presented to the Vatican, which examines it. The draft devised by Azarian contained the following main points: freedom of religion, appointment by the Pontiff of the ecclesiastic hierarchy chosen among Ottoman subjects and its acknowledgement by the Sultan; taking Ottoman nationality as an essential condition for

becoming a bishop; direct dependence of the Albanian Catholic hierarchy of the Holy See; the loyalty oath towards the Sultan taken by the bishopric and by the Abbot resident in Oroshi.

While the draft agreement was examined and while the negotiations between Azarian and Gevad Pasha continued, the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador in Rome, Count Revertera-Salandra, uttered his complaints during a private hearing and accused the State Secretary of prejudicial and disloyal conduct towards the Government of Wien, who was informed of the negotiations by the Ottoman Empire.

Revertera's reaction was preceded by a campaign of denigration against the Vatican politics, campaign initiated by the Austrian press. The newspaper "Wiener Tahblatt", together with the prestigious "Framdenblatt" had accused the Holy See of wanting to destroy, in agreement with the Ottoman Government, the Austro-Hungarian Protectorate within the Sultan's territories. The Vatican immediately replied and Cardinal Rampolla complained to the nuncio in Wien expressing his great regret for the continuous deterioration in the relationships between the Roman Curia and the Ballplatz, also pointing out that the Monarchy had assumed a hostile attitude towards the Vatican and adopted anti-clerical and anti-Catholic policies long time ago.

The following hypothesis was put forward: it was the politics of Leon XIII towards Republican France that determined the Austrian Government's hostility towards the agreement. According to the Vatican's State Secretary, it was Vatican's last acts addressed to France that had caused Wien's jealousy<sup>19</sup>.

From 1889 on, the third Republic conducted a moderated politics, also due to the fear that Socialism, which already got a foothold in the European area, could evolve itself and undermine consolidated interests. For this reason, the Catholic Right Wing started to adopt more conservative positions.

On 16<sup>th</sup> of February 1892, Leon XIII urged the French Catholics to support the Republican regime and continue the fight against laicism and anti-clericalism<sup>20</sup>. It was precisely the rapprochement between the Holy See and Republican France which provoked the cooling down of the relationships between the Vatican and the Habsburgic Monarchy, which did not agree with Vatican's filo-French politics.

Count Kálnoky imposed the conditions of the Austro-Hungarian Government for reaching an agreement concerning the Catholics, namely: Wien insisted on the fact that the Austrian Protectorate over the Albanian Catholicism should be guaranteed and demanded that the Ottoman Empire allowed the Catholic Churches from all over the Empire a treatment similar to the one granted by the Latin Church of Albania<sup>21</sup>. Minister Kálnoky stressed the fact that France and Austro-Hungary were not willing to tolerate a reduction in their protectorate right, moreover considering the fact that they had not participated in the new agreement.

The Vatican blamed Austro-Hungary for its desire of excessively extending its protectorate in such a way that the Pope's spiritual and moral authority will soon be vanished<sup>22</sup>.

It's obvious that the Austro-Hungarian and French ambassadors caused numerous difficulties in the continuation of the negotiations between the Ottoman Government and the Apostolic Commission of Constantinople<sup>23</sup>. The Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, although stressing his deep respect for the spiritual authority of the Pontiff, had reaffirmed the resolute opposition of his Government to the agreement<sup>24</sup>. Ballplatz considered that the articles contained in the project draft were totally unacceptable, especially article number IV concerning Albanian clergy's obligation to take Ottoman nationality; article number VI concerning the hierarchical direct dependence of the bishops in Albania on the Holy See; article XV, abolition of the Austria's Consular intervention in support of the Latin bishopric.

The Vatican diplomacy, both Cardinal Rampolla and Monsignor Azarian did their best to settle the difficulties which prevented the conclusion of the agreement<sup>25</sup>.



As we saw, there were considerable reservations, distrust and wariness which would have nullified the attempts to change the previous consolidated relationships. In particular there was deep incomprehension at the basis of the relationship between Wien and the Holy See. Consequently, after more than a year of contrasts, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 1893 the Emperor personally intervened by sending a letter to Leon XIII where he reassured the Pontiff of his own devotion and defined this event as a “deplorable misunderstanding”.

The unfortunate misunderstanding, claimed the Emperor, would have been sorted out if the Holy See had showed availability and trust towards the Austro-Hungarian Government<sup>26</sup>. Actually, Austro-Hungary strongly defended its position because of the fact that beneath the formal aspect of the religious protectorate over the Catholics living in Ottoman territories, Austria would have had the possibility to carry out not only a religious control and tutorship, but also to pursue a political plan in a territorial and cultural context belonging to the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, while the Holy See was willing to trust the Ottoman Government and to believe in its good intentions of religious tolerance, on the contrary, the Viennese Government was not at all willing to trust the Ottoman Empire, whose suzerainty, according to Wien, had to be limited by the tutorship of the European Powers.

Actually Austria defended its position firmly, because behind the formal aspect of religious protectorate over Catholics in the Ottoman territories, it not only had the ability to control and perform a mentoring from the religious point of view, but it ended up with having a political plan in a territorial and cultural context which belonged to the Ottoman Empire.

If reached, the agreement was to be the first convention between the Holy See and an Islamic country thus assuming an undeniable diplomatic importance. What is more, the formation of an Albanian Catholic hierarchy would have been the first piece of larger project cherished by the Church of Rome in those years: to insert oneself in different local contexts through the education and through the establishment of indigenous cleri – thus overcoming the traditional function of the religious orders – with the aim of strengthening the ties between East and West in an ever-evolving political framework, where the desire to extend one’s own political influence in the territories of an empire undergoing a crisis (as was the case with the Ottoman empire) fed tensions and foreshadowed major changes.

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<sup>1</sup> Léon Poliakov, *Moscou Troisième Rome. Les intermittences de la mémoire historique*, Poitiers 1989 ; Wolf Giusti, *Il panslavismo*, with a preface by di Domenico Caccamo, Rome 1993 ; Andrea Riccardi, *Il Vaticano e Mosca*, Rome-Bari 1993.

<sup>2</sup>K. Muller, *La S. Congregazione ed il clero autoctono*, in *Compendio di storia della Sacra Congregazione per l'evangelizzazione dei popoli o De Propaganda Fide. 1622-1972. 350 anni al servizio delle missioni*, Rome, Pontifical Urbaniana University, p. 47. The Institute of the stigmata Sisters in Scutari and the Institute of the daughters of charity of St. Vincent De Paul in Uskub (od. Skopje) and Prizren were founded on the initiative of the Congregation of Propaganda for the upbringing and education of young girls.

<sup>3</sup> Vatican, Archivio Sacra Congregazione Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, Austria-Ungheria, fasc. 258, pos. 571, aa. 1887-1888, f. 26 r-v *Stato delle missioni albanesi e sulle provvidenze da prendersi a vantaggio delle medesime, relazione del cardinale Serafino Vannutelli alla Sacra Congregazione di Propaganda Fide*, July 1888.

<sup>4</sup> An important text on France's protectorate in the East at the time of Leo XIII is René Grousset's *L'Empire du Levant. Histoire de la question d'Orient*, Paris 1949; Joseph Hajjar, *Le Vatican, la France et le catholicisme oriental (1878-1914) : diplomatie et histoire de l'Église*, Paris 1979 J. Thobie, *Interets et imperialisme francais dans l'empire ottoman (1895 - 1914)*, Paris 1977, p 21.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, ff. 4r-8v, Azarian to baron of Calice, Istanbul 3 may 1887 (copy). The Montenegrin Concordat, to which Gevad pasha referred to, was signed in August 18, 1886 by the cardinal Iacobini, who was the Vatican's Secretary of State and by Ivan Sundečić, who was the private Secretary of Nicholas I.

See Angelo Tamborra, *Chiesa cattolica e Ortodossia russa. Due secoli di Confronto e dialogo. Dalla Santa Alleanza ai nostri giorni*, Cinisello Balsamo (Milan) 1992. Among the most recent studies on this topic see Francesco Caccamo, *Politika Svete Stolice prema Istoku i konkordat sa Crnom Gorom iz 1886. godine*, «Matica», 2005 (VI/21), pp. 221-254 (Italian edition) *La politica orientale della Santa Sede e il concordato con il Montenegro del 1886*, in «Ubi neque erugo

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neque tinea demolitur». *Studi offerti a Luigi Pellegrini per i suoi settant'anni*, Naples 2006, ed. by Maria Grazia del Fuoco, pp. 55-83.

<sup>6</sup> With the apostolic letters *In Sublimi* 8 October 1886 e *Quae catholico nomini* 24 April 1887. See Ugo Bellocchi, *Tutte le encicliche e i principali documenti emanati dal 1740*, V, *Leone XIII. Parte prima*, Vatican 1996.

<sup>7</sup> Vatican, Archivio Sacra Congregazione Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, Austria-Ungheria, fasc 290, pos, 655, Ponzona a stampa, Turchia, Sessione 704, f. 61 r., Azarian to Ledochowski, Istanbul 5 May 1892.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, Fasc 290, pos. 655 f. 61 r. Ponzona n. 704, 5 May 1892.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 3 v., Azarian to Ledochowski, Istanbul 10 February 1892.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 28 v. Ledochowski to Azarian, 21 March 1892.

<sup>11</sup> AAEESS, Austria-Ungheria, fasc. 290 pos. 655, f. 45 r. Azarian to Rampolla, Istanbul 12 April 1892.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, fasc. 290, pos. 655, f. 49 r. Azarian to Rampolla, Istanbul 21 April 1892, 5 May 1892.

<sup>13</sup> G.A. Di Cesarò, *L' Albania e la politica estera italiana*, in "Rassegna Contemporanea", a VII (1914), fasc. 11, p. 1; E. Maserati, *Momenti della questione adriatica (1596 - 1914) Albania e Montenegro tra Austria e Italia*, Udine 1981, p. 45.

<sup>14</sup> Vaticano, Archivio Sacra Congregazione Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, Austria-Ungheria fasc. 290, pos. 655, ff.81 r, 84 v. Ledochowski to Azarian, Rome 10 May 1892.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, ff. 83 r- 84 v., Ledochowski to Bonetti, Roma 11 May 1892.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 92 r. Azarian to Rampolla, Istanbul 21 May 1892.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, f.107 r. Galimberti to Rampolla, Vienna 23 June 1892.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem* f. 118 r. Azarian to Rampolla, Istanbul 23 June 1892.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, fasc. 291, pos.655, f. 85r, Rampolla to Galimberti, Rome 18 August 1892.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 89r, Rampolla to Galimberti, Rome 18 August 1892.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, f.178r., Galimberti to Rampolla, Vienna 17 August 1892; *Ibidem*, f. 96r-v., Note of the Foreign minister Kalnoky to Galimberti, Vienna 15 August 1892.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, fasc. 292, pos. 655, ff.6 r.-7v., Rampolla to Galimberti, Rome 22 August 1892.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, f.2 r., Bonetti to Rampolla, Istanbul 13 August 1892.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, f.15 v. Galimberti to Rampolla, Vienna 5 September 1892.

<sup>25</sup> The 12<sup>th</sup> November 1892, monsignor Azarian, in compliance with the directives given by Cardinal Rampolla, sent to the Secretary of the State his comments on the count Kalnoky's memorandum. In these comments he refuted the idea that the mission accomplished by him in Vienna in 1887 was merely an unofficial one. As he had previously explained to Earl Kolnoky, he was officially appointed by the Secretary of the State to inform the Austrian Government on the ongoing negotiations between the Holy See and the Porte aimed at the signing of an agreement regarding the Latin Church of Albania. The Austrian Government had objected to this agreement only in August-September 1892, even though it was aware "of all substantial points of the project" since 1887. If such objections had been made before, neither the Grand Vizier nor the Sultan would have been led to hope for a "prosperous outcome of the ongoing negotiations". Between July and August 1892, the Austrian Government had changed its position. It had placed as a "sine qua non" condition for the approval of the agreement that the Porte should grant to Catholic churches throughout the Ottoman Empire a treatment similar to the one granted to the Latin Church of Albania. According to Azarian, the intent had been to thwart the ongoing negotiations between the Holy See and the Sublime Porte because the imposed condition would imply the French's renouncing of the religious protectorate concerning catholic foreigners residing in the territory of the Crescent. The Latin Church of Albania possessed peculiar traits that distinguished it from the other Latin Churches in the Ottoman Empire. The catholic populations subject to the Sublime Porte were administered and governed in accordance with the millet system by Ministers of Ottoman nationality. The schipetarian Catholic community, in contrast, was subject to the jurisdiction of the Bishops of foreign nationality. This is why the Sublime Porte insisted that the Catholic population of Albania should have as Hierarchical Leaders Ottoman subjects, as was the case of Armenians, Greeks, Syrians, Chaldeans and Roman Catholics. Vienna also based the legitimacy of its religious protectorate in Albania on art. 13 of the Treaty of Belgrade (1739). However, according to that article, the Sultan had acknowledged to the Habsburg Emperor the right to protect Albania's Latin clergy without extending the religious protection to other catholic schipetarian communities subject to the Porte. Therefore, according to the Patriarch of Cilicia, Austria's claim to exercise the right to protect Albania's Catholic populations was devoid of legitimacy. Msgr. Azarian concluded by stating that it had not been a "project de monsignor Azarian" as defined by count Kalnoky, but an assignment entrusted to him by the Ottoman Minister of Justice in order to discuss with the Holy See and "examine the possibility of elaborating a project leading to an agreement similar to that stipulated with Montenegro.

The negotiations had been suspended in April 1887 due to the obstructionism exercised by the conservative side of the Ottoman Government. They were resumed in February 1892 thanks to Gevad's initiative. In June 1893, taking into account the comments mons. Azarian had sent to card. Rampolla, the Congregation of Propaganda Fide drew up a project so as to reply to count Kalnoky's memorandum. *Ibidem*, fasc. 293, pos. 655, f. 1 r. Rampolla to Azarian, 25 October 189; *Ibidem*, ff. 30 r.- 5v. Azarian to Rampolla, Istanbul 12 November 1892.

<sup>26</sup> Franz Joseph deeply regretted the fact that the negotiations between the Vatican and the Sublime Porte were made unbeknown to the "protective power" and that the Austrian Government gained knowledge of those negotiations by chance. Even more so, the Emperor regretted the fact that Austria had been accused of desiring to protect – by

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renouncing to sign the agreement – its political interests in the small Balkan state, without any consideration for the elevated interests of the Church. His agency on the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, aimed at making the latter refuse monsignor Azarian's proposal, was motivated by the firm belief that the instructions contained in the agreement would lead to a worsening of the conditions, if not to the ruin of the catholic church in Albania. As a matter of fact, the Emperor had taken it upon himself to assiduously act in the interest of it. The Austrian Emperor, after having expressed his sincere willingness to support – within the bounds of possibility – the aspirations of the pontiff of the Albanian Church, concluded by ensuring his availability to re-establish a friendly relationship as far as the abovementioned question was concerned, as long as the following element was taken into account: during the negotiations, the opinion and the wishes of the Latin bishops of Albania had to be contemplated, since they had manifested their dissatisfaction with an agreement whose application would have implied the acceptance of an Ottoman nationality. *Ibidem*, fasc.294, pos.655, f.63r., Francesco Giuseppe to Leone XIII, Vienna 1 June 1893.