

Uniate Movement in Elbasan during the Years 1928-1938

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Abstract

The paper aims to highlight aspects of the Uniate movement in Elbasan during its second phase. Uniatism represented the Byzantine Catholic Church with the rites of orthodoxy among its believers, dependent on the Vatican. The first phase of the movement in Albania coincides with the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. The second phase was marked during the years '20-'30 of the 20th century and the third phase was marked during the years 1939-1943. The movement in its beginnings was not a purely religious one but it had political and national significance supported by the Elbasan higher social classes (known as *Paria*) of different faiths. It also had the support of Austria-Hungary. The second phase of Uniatism in Elbasan encountered difficulties, as the movement took place secretly due to the fact that it was not allowed to exercise its activity even the only Uniat church in it was not allowed to open. There is a great correspondence between the Elbasan prefecture of that time and the Ministry of Internal Affairs on the secret activity of Uniatism and the efforts to spread the Uniat faith among the inhabitants of Elbasan. Government pressure, the influence of the Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, and the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, did not favour its movement and spread in the country. Therefore, the paper aims to identify the causes and people that influenced the reappearance of uniatism during these years and the situation created by the movement in Elbasan. The methodology in conducting this research is scientific, comparative and analytical research. The literature is based on the archival documents.

Keywords: Uniate Church, Uniate movement, rites, national conscience, Catholicism, Orthodoxy.

Introduction

Uniatism was the religious movement which represented the union of two churches: the Eastern Catholic Church or the Byzantine Catholic Church and the Christian rites of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Uniates, or Catholic-Orthodox, were Catholics by religion but Orthodox by the rites they worshipped in religious ceremonies. The Albanian Uniate movement had its center in the Vatican. This movement appeared and spread in the mountainous areas of Shpat (Elbasan) during the XIX century. The question naturally arises: Why was the Shpat area the appropriate place for the spread of uniatism in Elbasan? In order to give an answer to the above question we must refer to historical documentary sources. The period in which the Uniat faith was born coincided with the Ottoman rule in Albania, and as such the country was part of the enforcement of financial

obligations (taxes), compulsory military service and Ottoman legislation. The introduction of compulsory military service after 1846, as well as the taxation on the worship of a religion other than Islam forced many areas or provinces to find ways or forms to escape such obligations. An example of the reaction to such a policy in recent years was the province of Shpat in Elbasan, which consisted of 43 villages. Its population was known as pseudo-Muslim or crypto-Christian. (two faiths)

Regarding the beginnings of crypto-Christianity in this area, it is alluded approximately that this phenomenon intensified during this period. (Ottoman reform) Crypto-Christianity is not only a phenomenon of the Shpat area, but also of other mountainous areas in the country, known otherwise as Laramanism. Shpat crypto-Christians were known by two names, a Muslim name in public places registered

in the official institutions and a Christian name in the family environment. So, they were Muslims outside their homes and Christians inside. Crypto-Christians in the public environment frequented the objects of Islamic worship, followed Islamic rites while in the family environment they practiced Christian rites, celebrated the holy days of this faith, went to church at night to perform rites, baptized their children with Christian names, etc.

According to the Ottoman law, military service was performed only by men of the Islamic faith in the territories of this empire. Under the pressure of the Ottoman administration in Elbasan in 1897 the inhabitants of Shpati were faced with two alternatives: either to serve in the Ottoman army, mainly the sons of the Islamic faith, or those belonging to another faith had to pay the obligation prescribed by law (tax). During the second half of the 19th century, in the province of Shpati, the first attempts to intensify the Uniate religious movement began to be evidenced, not only in Elbasan but also in the country. The strengthening of the Austro-Hungarian position as well as the coordination of its efforts with the Patriarchate of Istanbul and the Vatican was done under the aim of protecting the Catholic Christians in the Balkans. Under the influence of the Austro-Hungarian protectionist policy towards the Catholic Christians in the Balkan countries, the Shpat area, utilizing the experience of the previous crypto-Christian faith, became the terrain in which Uniatism flourished and further spread. In this context and in these circumstances, the attitude of the people from Shpati through the demands presented was clear, fair, in their interest and not at all supportive of the alternatives presented by the Ottoman Empire. Under the status of "Cultus Protectorate" the Shpati inhabitants chose a new form of diversity, the Uniate faith.

1. The spread of Uniatism in the area of Shpat and in Elbasan during the first phase of this movement

The history of the Uniate movement in Elbasan and Albania took place in three phases over a period of 100 years. During these phases the movement was born, developed, stepped by various factors reappeared in short periods of time, with new goals and objectives. It was also attacked by policies of cooperation between the Albanian government and the Albanian Orthodox Autocephalous Church, until it reappeared again and concluded its activity during the years of Italian occupation in World

War II. The first phase of the Uniate movement in Albania and in the Shpat area coincides with the 19th century, especially in the second half of the 19th century until 1907; The second phase was marked during the years '20-'30 of the XX century and the third phase during the years 1939-1943.

1.1 The first phase of the Uniate movement in the Shpat area

The reforms undertaken by the Ottoman Empire during the 19th century brought the opposition of the inhabitants of the Shpat area in Elbasan to their implementation, especially in the second half of the 19th century. In support of the people of Shpati and as their official representative, in 1853 the head of Shpati (known as headmen) appeared before the Turkish authorities in Elbasan, who vividly declared that he was in defense of their religious affiliation as Orthodox Christians and not as Muslims. After this act, the Shpat area became an area monitored by the local Ottoman administration in Elbasan. The request of the apostates was considered courageous for the time. Even the local Ottoman administration on its part had no doubt that their demands had strong political backgrounds, from centers outside Albania, opponents of the Ottoman Empire during this period of time. The first phase of the Uniate movement had protective and clear goals, not only in the context of the family economic interest of the believers, but also in the interests of the national character for the people and the country. Referring to the goals and interests, the Uniate movement was supported not only by the Orthodox population in Shpat-Elbasan but also by a part of the Elbasan higher classes of the society, regardless of religion. At the end of the 19th century, the Shpati people known as inhabitants of the Uniat faith and supporters of Uniatism not only in the region but also influencing its wider spread in the country. The year 1879 marks the beginning of the spread of Uniatism in the Shpat area with the representation of a delegation of people living in Shpati, who on behalf of the people they represented, addressed the leadership of the mission of the Lazarist fathers in Manastir, asking them to cut the ties with the Patriarchate of Istanbul and union with the Vatican, as units. The founder and leader of the order of the unit sect in the country was Pope Jorgji Theohari or otherwise known by the religious designation Archimandrite Germanos Gjetani (Dervishi: 2007). The Uniate movement, at the end of the 19th century, had

crossed the borders of Shpati and Elbasan and had further spread to other areas in the country such as: Tirana, Durrës and Kavaja. The movement not only spread but also took shape with clear ideas and genuine national interest. The further progress of this movement, required from its supporters international support too, besides the efforts within the country. The leaders of the Uniate movement in Shpat, supported by patriotic personalities of the Elbasan region in August 1897, addressed an open appeal to the Great Powers, asking them to support Uniatism in Albania, the opening of Albanian schools and education in them. Their requests emphasized the necessity for the progress of education in Albanian schools and In support of this request, there was also emphasized that: "Being Albanians in the center of Albania, we do not understand Greek, Bulgarian or any other language and we can only be educated in Albanian" (Pollo: 1993). Their call was repeated in 1898 but this time it stimulated the interest of the Catholic clergy in Albania. (Skëndi: 2000) The patriotic personalities of the Elbasan region were the most ardent supporters of the Albanian National Revival, which was the movement with rifles and pens in protection of the motherland. The Muslim and Christian intellectuals from Elbasan, Bektashis and Unites at this point were all united. They strongly supported the idea that the Albanian language, the mother tongue, should not die. The Albanian language had to be written in the appropriate alphabet in the Albanian schools that would be opened in Albania, instead of the existing schools in Greek and Turkish. Albanians did not see the Albanian language and school as detached during the Renaissance period. (Gjini: 2012). All the efforts of Renaissance were in function of the issue of Albanian national independence. Elbasan personalities such as Aqif pasha Elbasani, Dervish Bicaku and Shefqet Vërlaci of the Bektashi and Muslim faiths, judged that one of the factors influencing national independence was religious independence. Many of the Albanian clergy during this period raised their voices in the organizations among them that the Albanian language should be the language of sermons in cult institutions. Their message was clear and quite significant: a church, a nation and a religion in the service of the national unity. (Raça: 1999) In 1899 in Shpat, thanks to the growth of national consciousness, efforts were made to provide support to their movement in

preserving the Albanian faith and language. The inhabitants of the Shpati region, for these purposes addressed the Holy Father highlighting their current interests: "... to receive us into his faith." (Skëndi: 2000) The development of this movement in the Shpat area and in the country brought the reaction of the policy driven by the Greek Patriarchate of Istanbul, and especially by Russian Orthodoxy. To get acquainted with the movement and to prevent its further spread, in Albania and in the area of Shpati with a clear mission came the Russian consul of Manastir (Dervishi: 2007) Rostovski. The arrival of a Russian deputy consul in Shpat in May 1900 is also attested by Edith Durham and was intended to persuade Pope George Theohar and his supporters to restore ties with the Patriarchate of Istanbul, and to leave Uniatism and the Vatican (Durham: 1991). In response to the demands of the head of the village (known as kryeplaku), the efforts of the Greeks and Turkish began to restrain the progress of schools in the Albanian language began. Representatives of the Orthodox religion came to Elbasan and established two schools in the Greek language, respectively in Valësh and Shelcan (Skëndi: 2000) while the Ottoman government ordered the opening of 17 schools in the Ottoman language. Religious affiliation and national identity at this time were very important for the Albanians. The efforts undertaken by this period of particular extremist circles outside Albania aimed at equating nationality with religion.

There were three religions in Albania and according to this idea the Muslim believers were Turkish, the Latin people were Catholics and the Greek ones were Orthodox, meanwhile the Albanians did not exist. Another fact that could not be ignored was that of the Albanians from the Shkumbin River to the south of Albania who were Orthodox, and this Orthodoxy, as described above, gave them Greek nationality. The development of the uniate movement severely damaged the interests of Greek and Russian Orthodoxy over the Orthodox Albanians who supported it. Such a move should therefore have been avoided, especially when the Vatican was in support of its. The rivalries between Eastern orthodoxy and Western Catholicism were known at this time. On March 28, 1900 Archimandrite Germanos and about 60 Orthodox Christians from Elbasan (Shpat) converted to the Uniate faith (Skëndi: 2000) in response to Rostovski's visit to Elbasan. The support the people of Shpat gave to the Uniate faith was both of personal and national

interest. According to them, if they relied on the orthodoxy of the Istanbul Patriarchate, the possibility of education in the Albanian language was impossible. The conversion of the people of Shpat into Muslim and Christian Orthodox faith to the Uniate faith took place not only because of the freedom to practice this faith but also because of the partial exemption from taxes and military taxation. (Skëndi: 2000) Thanks to the guarantee provided by them, funding and support would also be provided for the opening of Albanian language schools in their area. According to the Austro-Hungarian consul in Shkodra, Ippen not only promised to help build the Uniate church in Elbasan, but he also denied allegations that Albanians supported Uniatism under Austro-Hungarian interests. According to him, the interest of Albanians for this movement started from: "... the disgust that Albanian Orthodox Christians had towards the Hellenizing tendencies of the Ecumenical Patriarchate". (Skëndi: 2000) In 1900 the number of families that converted into the Uniate faith was about 55 and the number of uniate believers in Elbasan was about 80. (Skëndi: 2000) The attitude of the Ottoman Empire towards the Uniate movement by this time was peaceful by declaring that they recognized it as a Catholic movement, and that Catholics and Orthodox had already been converted into unions dependent on the Vatican. Efforts for the further spread of Uniatism in the Shpat area and beyond as well as their recognition continued during the first 10 years of the 20th century supported by the intensive activity of Archimandrite Germanos inside and outside Albania. It was the Catholic priest, leader of the Catholic Church of Durres Dom Nikolle Kaçori, encouraged by the Vatican who was sent to Elbasan as a lecturer of this faith. In Elbasan, Dom Nikolle Kaçori and Dom Toma stayed for a long time in the house of Jorgji Theohari (Archimandrite Germanos) supported and protected by the people of Elbasan during their mission which was the spread of Uniatism. The proposals of the representatives of Uniatism in Elbasan aimed at opening a school in which Albanian language would be taught freely by the people of Elbasan. Externally, the supporters of the Uniate movement in Elbasan had supporters, in addition to the Vatican, such as Austria-Hungary, which strongly supported the creation of a unique Albanian church, linked to the Vatican, against the interests of the Greek Orthodox or Slavo-Russian churches. Internally, Pope George Theohari and the Elbasan units had

strong supporters from the Albanian Catholic Archbishop of Durrës, Prek Bardhi, who after receiving the request from the Elbasan units, accepted to go to Elbasan in support of them. Pope George, Dervish Bey (Biçaku) and the Catholic Bishopric of Durres became the supporters and initiators of the Uniate movement on the Shpat area of Elbasan aiming the creation of a common Albanian church. The Uniate Church intended to be the only Albanian church in the country merging the Northern Catholic Church with the Southern Orthodox Church. Following these efforts and the goal of further support, three representatives of Uniatism visited Elbasan: Pope Jorgji Theohari, Dom Nikolle Kaçori and Dervish Biçaku. After meeting the Holy Father, the representatives of the Uniate movement were promised assistance in the establishment of an Albanian school, assistance in the construction of the Uniate church in Elbasan, as well as sending young people from Elbasan or Albania to be educated in educational religious schools of Vienna and Italy (Magazine "Malësia", No. 7: 2012). Out of the promises made by the Pope, there was realized only the provision of funds for the construction of the unit church, which years later would be built in the Kala (castle) of Elbasan, as the only unit church in Albania. A large number of Elbasan personalities supported the uniate movement since it supported the demands of national interest such as the opening of an Albanian school (AQSH, F. 270, D 48, 1928, p. 14) in Elbasan, which unfortunately could not be realized during these years. The Uniate movement, in addition to Shpat region, spread to other areas of Elbasan such as in Shelcan, Valshësh and Seltë. Pope George Theohari, with the support of Austria and with the help of Albanian patriotic personalities outside Albania, brought in Elbasan during these years books and newspapers in Albanian language, which were considered banned by the Ottoman Empire. The attitude of the Ottoman administration towards the Uniate movement in Elbasan as well as in Albania depended on the nature of its development and the demands presented by it. This attitude was peaceful when the Uniate movement did not harm the interests of the Ottoman Empire, but was mainly directed against the orthodoxy of the Greek Church. In cases when the movement harmed the Ottoman interests the reaction of the Ottoman Empire was immediate towards curbing and extinguishing it. The neutral attitude of the Ottoman local administration of Elbasan was evident in the case

when the mayor of the town, Reshid Pasha, did not take any action towards the representatives of the Greek ecumenical church in order to curb the spread of uniatism in Elbasan or in the area of Shpat. In 1907 the Uniate movement in Elbasan and Shpat was weakened, due to the pressure and barriers caused by the Patriarchate of Istanbul and Russia as the protector of the Eastern Orthodoxy. The role of Austria-Hungary in supporting the Uniate movement faded due to the Sultan's failure to issue a decree concerning the construction of the Uniate Church in Elbasan. (Skëndi: 2000) However, it should be noted that the unite movement in Elbasan and Albania during the first phase of its development encouraged the Albanian nationalist movement (Skëndi: 2000) and became a support in fulfilling its goals of national interest. In later periods of time the Uniate movement became the promoter of the interests of the Orthodox Albanians in their efforts to establish an autocephalous Albanian Orthodox Church. In addition to being a good clergyman, Jorgji Theohari became one of the supporters and participants of the patriotic manifestations that took place in Elbasan and Albania too. After the end of the first phase of Uniatism, thanks to his activity of national interest, in 1914 he was imprisoned by the rebels of the peasants' movement of Central Albania. In 1915 Esat Pasha exiled him to Italy where he remained until the end of the First World War (AQSH., F. 270, D. 48, 1928, p. 14). Theohari was a supporter of the three unities as an important condition for the future of Albania and its people: ecclesiastical unity - political unity - national unity. The idea of unity also served as the basic ideology of Uniatism in its first phase in Elbasan and Albania, under the motto: a church, a nation, a state.

2. The second phase of Uniatism in Elbasan during the years 1928-1938

Over a period of almost 20 years despite the attempts to neutralize and eliminate the Uniate movement, it only faded but then it reappeared and developed intensively during the second phase, more precisely during the years 1928-1929, 1930-1932 and 1936-1938. Given the historical circumstances, it is to be believed that the decline of the Uniate movement came as a result of the influences from outside Albania after the declaration of Independence and also

later in the '20s of the 20th century with the patriotic religious efforts concerning the establishment of the Albanian Orthodox Autocephalous Church (known as AOAC). The revival of this movement began at the time when the efforts for the organization of the Holy Synod (February 1929) started in Albania; a period when the Status of the religious organization of AOAC was approved (June 29, 1929). The second phase of Uniatism not only in Elbasan but also in other areas in Albania clearly proved the difficulties of this movement under the new conditions and circumstances. If during the first phase, the Uniate movement took place under the Ottoman rule conditions in Albania, during the second phase, it took place under the conditions of an independent Albanian state. During the years 1925-1928, the Italian influence in Albania had increased considerably as a result of agreements between the two countries that is Albania and Italy. During these years, Italy had penetrated in all areas of life, increasing in this way the economic dependence of Albania from Italy. The supportive power of the Vatican and Italian politics became one of the sources of reactivation of the Uniate movement in Albania at this stage. The Vatican and Italy's supportive intentions towards the Albanian Unions during the second phase, unlike the first phase, aimed at strengthening Catholicism against Orthodoxy, which was represented and led by AOAC, after its establishment in 1929. Relations between the two countries had their fluctuations and in this context the policy of the Albanian government changed its attitude towards the influences or privileges of Italy in Albania. In the early 1930s, Albanian politics was at an intermediate phase; it neither supported nor restrained Italian influence in Albania. Such a policy was evident during the '30s especially towards the attitudes versus the Uniate movement in Albania. By the beginning of this phase the state's position was. In a shadow; it first allowed the activity of the Uniate movement. Then under the pressure of the Greek Patriarchate of Istanbul and under the influence of AOAC, it tacitly supported it. Gradually there came the isolation of the Uniate movement until it was not allowed to exercise its activity leading to the deterioration of the relations between the two states. On July 16, 1929 a government decree was issued on the administration of religious communities in Albania, which sanctioned that they "... had no right to conduct political activities or have a jurisdiction of their own... this provision was related to a cantonal concept,

especially of the clergy" Catholic, which was considered contrary to national interests..." (Albanian Academy of Sciences: 2007) From what could be understood the state despite the freedom of religion, it had every possible right to control the activity of religious institutions or movements in Albania, especially when there were indications that they carried out activities not in conform with the national interests and were encouraged by foreign states for their purposes. Leaders of religious communities were approved by the King and controlled by the Ministry of Justice, in relation to their previous activity and their credibility. The monitoring phase of the Uniate exercise of faith began in 1929 and continued until 1938, when this movement was considered as legal by the Albanian state.

3. Development of the Uniate movement in Elbasan during second phase of Uniatism in Albania

During the second phase, under the conditions of an independent Albanian state, religion was separated from the state and the freedom of religion was respected in Albania. On the basis of the right of belief, the unitary belief among the people of Shpati and the citizens of Elbasan and Albania too, should be exercised freely. During these years in Elbasan, in the post of the clergyman who promoted the re-emergence of the uniate movement by serving as a priest in the church previously established by Pope Germanos, was the Catholic priest Pietro Scarpelli, who performed uniate religious rites in Greek. (Gazeta *Shqiptare*, Bari, No.193, August 14, 1929)

The services of the Priest from Calabria Scarpelli performed near the Uniate church, a place near which he had bought an apartment in Elbasan. (Dervishi: 2006) Nationwide, the only uniate church in which the religious services of the uniat faith were performed was in Elbasan. August 25, 1929, the Uniate Church (Moroco dela Roka: 1994) was inaugurated in Elbasan, as a cult object aimed at performing the rites of the Uniate Catholic believers in Elbasan. Referring to the press of the time (Gazeta *Shqiptare*, Bari, No. 193, 14 August 1929) it was emphasized that the building was renovated giving it a magnificent view with a capacity of 1000 seats, and it was considered a place that honored the town of Elbasan. The inauguration ceremony of the Uniate Church was attended by the most famous personalities of Elbasan. Albania as well

as foreign representatives in Albania such as the Second Secretary of the Italian Legation, the apostolic delegate John de la Pietra, Pater Gjenoviç. The consul of France as well as other political and religious authorities invited to the inauguration ceremony of the Uniate Church could not be present at it. (Gazeta *Shqiptare*, Bari, No. 212, Thursday, 5 September, 1929) What is to be emphasized is the fact that important personalities of Italy participated in its inauguration. The ceremony performed on this occasion was accompanied by a wafer that lasted 1 hour by the three parishioners of the Church Pope Pietro Scarpelli, Pope Naun Pecini and Pope Jovan Dhama. The three priests presented to the guests a brief history of the Uniate movement in Elbasan and the circumstances that conditioned and influenced the founding of the Uniate Church, while appreciating the role of its initiator and preacher in Elbasan (Shpat) Pope Jorgji Theohari. Inside the church on the left side of the entrance there was placed a stone slab carved into the wall, which was dedicated to the founder of the Uniate Church Pope Jorgji Theohari whose bones were placed inside the church. (Gazeta e *Gazeta e re*, Tirana, No. 140, April 19, 1929, p. 3)

Archimandrite Germanos or Jorgji Theohari was the grandson of the Orthodox Bishop Visarion Xhuvani who passed away on April 13, 1929. Archimandrite Germanos was considered by the press of the time as the pioneer clergyman of Uniatism and the founder of the Uniate Church in Elbasan. (Gazeta, *Gazeta e Re*, Tirana, No. 138, April 17, 1929, p. 3) The opening of the Uniate church was vividly opposed by Visarion Xhuvani, who during the ceremony organized in the Church of St. Mary in Kala in Elbasan said: "work of the devil... who tries to undermine the Albanian autocephaly". (Bido: 2016) Such an attitude of Visarion Xhuvani was implied by the influence and role that the Greek Patriarchate of Istanbul had in it, which within its interests exerted pressure both on the leaders of the Orthodox faith in Albania and on the Albanian Government. The neighborhoods of Elbasan in which the Uniate faith was widespread, supported and practiced as a ritual were: the neighborhood of Shën Koll and the neighborhood of Kala. During the second phase of Uniatism, this movement was joined by the Orthodox priests from Elbasan such as Father Naum Peçini and Father Jovan Toda. Their public appearance in support of the Uniat faith had its reasons such as: their dissatisfaction with the financial non-compensation by the Albanian Orthodox

Autocephalous Church (hereinafter AOAC) and the Albanian state. Not only representatives of AOAC but also the Orthodox community of Elbasan stood up to their act, due to the dissatisfaction caused by the action of the two priests. Both priests initially submitted their resignations, but later, under pressure from AOAC, returned to the priesthood of the Orthodox faith, especially Father Naum Peçini. During 1929, AOAC was shaken by a problematic situation created in Elbasan, driven by intervention from abroad using to some extent the situation in Albania. The situation was tense due to the request of the Vlash (aromun) community of Shën Koll neighborhood in Elbasan addressed to the AOAC to allow the wafer to be performed in the Orthodox faith in the mother tongue (Aromanian language). Concerning this request, they confirmed to have the support of Romania and Vatican, which provoked reaction and opposition of the Albanian state. As a sign of support of the Vlash community in this town in 1929, the Romanian Archimandrite Serbojani came to Elbasan. His arrival provoked the opposing reaction not only of AOAC but also of the Albanian state, whose intervention forced Serbojani to leave Albania. Visarion Xhuvani, the head of AOAC consulted with the Prime Minister Pandeli Evangjeli on the possibility of speaking in the Aromanian language of the Vlash community of Elbasan, but the government was neutralized by such an act, leaving all its responsibility to Visarion Xhuvani. The latter in order to avoid unnecessary tensions that might arise was in favour of tolerance towards this community in their right to exercise faith in their mother tongue. Tolerance in the exercise of the Orthodox faith in the mother tongue, by the leaders of Orthodoxy in Albania, was allowed to avoid the influence of the Vatican and to thwart the efforts to spread uniatism. (Bido: 2016) Xhuvani's attempts to influence the possibility of bilingualism were not supported. On the contrary they were vividly opposed by most of the inhabitants of the Orthodox faith in the neighborhood of Shën Koll in Elbasan. Since the 1920s, Fan Noli and the Albanian Orthodox had achieved success in terms of creating the Albanian Orthodox Autocephalous Church and its massification in the Albanian language. Even such an intervention affected especially the Albanian Orthodox believers. The tolerance practiced towards this community, could be an example to other communities too that existed in

Albania, who under the encouragement of this movement could come up with requests for measures in their languages in special institutions. Such requests were presented in other areas of Elbasan by the Vlash community of Grabova e Gramshit in 1931, demanding that the wafer in the church of Katund Grabovë could be done in the Aromanian language. Such a request was opposed by the Minister of Internal Affairs, ordering the local authorities of Elbasan to strictly prohibit the observance of Orthodox rites by this community in the Aromanian language, since this request was contrary to the status of AOAC. (AQSH, F. 271, D. 242, 1931, p. 17) From 1929 to 1930, there was noticed a great effort of Italy supporting and promoting the spread of Uniatism in Albania. The support of the Union priests was supported by Vatican and the state itself by providing financial funds and scholarships for Albanian youth to study in Italian schools. The difficult economic situation of Albanian families during the '30s was exploited by Italy, to influence the spread of Uniatism, which in turn lured them through grants and scholarships for the education of their children outside Albania. Due to this activity of the Uniate priests, the government ordered their monitoring and the closure of the only Uniate church in Elbasan. Referring to the rapid spread of the uniate movement in Elbasan, the Uniate priests were accused of enticing the believers to perform the rites of this faith through donations, scholarship offers and passports to Italy. The spread of Uniatism in Elbasan and Shpat was also evidenced by the prefect of Elbasan, Zyhdi Karagjozi in his correspondence with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which informed that: "Father Petroja (Pietro Scarpelli) paid 12 boys for the church choir and focused his activity in Shpat." (Bido: 2016) Government policy was in support of the Albanian Orthodox Autocephalous Church; September 18, 1929, the Secret Office of the Ministry of Internal Affairs ordered the Prefecture of Elbasan to stop the practice of unitary rites. (AQSH, F. 151, D. 119, 1929, p.11) In the 30s of the XX century there is a dense correspondence between the Secret Office in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the prefecture of Elbasan where the reason was the information received on the secret revival of the Uniate movement among the believers in this town. The information received from Elbasan to the Ministry of Internal Affairs emphasized that Father Pietro Scarpelli privately measured the unity trust among the inhabitants of Elbasan. The prefecture of Elbasan, after the investigations, reported that the Uniate

church in the Kala neighborhood of Elbasan remained closed and was never opened for the performance of wafers by the Uniat priest or the believers of this faith. The prefect also informed that the priest Scarpeli had been summoned to the prefecture and had been advised and warned about performing the Uniate rites. (AQSH., F. 152/13, D. 179, 1930, p. 1) The Albanian state declared that the Uniate priests in Elbasan, Father Pietro Skarpeli and Father Jovan Toda, would no longer be in the positions of priests, forbidding them from exercising their religious and priestly activity, both privately and publicly. Moreover, the Government ordered the Prefecture of Elbasan not to allow the reopening of the uniate church in this town. To monitor the secret activity of the priest Scarpelli in Elbasan, the commander of the Gendarmerie in this town had deployed gendarmes to guarantee his surveillance. Based on the information transmitted by him on April 18, 1930, it was informed that the priest had spotted and threatened the gendarme, then he left to Tirana. (Dervishi: 2007) Such information was often false, but it was forwarded from time to time to the Ministry. The latter requested from the Elbasan prefecture in-depth investigations regarding their veracity but also additional information on the activity of Father Pietro. The information gathered showed that Father Pietro Scarpelli in July 1930 had gathered young people from Elbasan to send them to school in Italy, in uniate schools. This information also disturbed Archbishop Visarion Xhuvani, whose reaction was sharp and strict, asking the Ministry of Internal Affairs to ban the activity of the Uniate priest in Elbasan. Of great concern to Juan was the opening in December 1930 of the Uniate Church, for the performance of Wafer at the Christmas ceremony by a Catholic priest sent there. (Dervishi: 2007) In addition to Juan's concern, the Ministry also addressed Father Pietro Scarpelli, expressing dissatisfaction with both the ban of Wafer in the Uniate rite and the non-opening of the Uniate Church on the occasion of this holiday. Father Pietro in his complaint on December 22, 1930 stated that this act was unprecedented as it was contrary to the laws of the Albanian state. Father Pietro addressed the main accusation to the Prefecture of Elbasan, which had influenced the creation of such an abnormal situation, denying the right of the Elbasan believers to exercise the Uniate faith. From the investigations carried out in the Prefecture he informed the state institutions that

in this town there was no believer unit, even the church which was opened during those days served for the performance of the wafer by the Catholic priest sent there. (Dervishi: 2007) During the second phase of Uniatism, the position of Visarion Xhuvani as the head of AOAC was categorically against him, but years later, when Christopher Kisi became the head of AOAC, which coincides with the third phase of Uniatism, Xhuvani spoke in defense of this movement. During 1931, the policy of the Albanian state aimed at curbing the unity movement and not allowing the rites of this faith to be celebrated in Albania. In support of this policy, the Ministry of Internal Affairs addressed the prefectures in Albania with the telegram known as "Secret" January 7, 1931, through which it informed that: "Since we are in agreement with the Catholic clergy until the end of these, the massing of Greek rites should be stopped." (AQSH, F. 152, D.191, 1931, p.4) So it was understood that giving priority to the practice of Catholic rites was dictated by the agreements between the Catholic clergy and the Albanian state, having a unique stance against Uniat Catholicism. Information during 1931 continued to be sent to the Ministry of Internal Affairs on the covert efforts in Elbasan in promoting the revival of the Uniat movement and the organization of secret wafers. To clarify the information, the ministry asked the Elbasan prefecture to further deepen the investigation into the information received from its secret service. In some cases there were clashes between the Elbasan prefecture and the Presidency of AOAC. The accusation that the Presidency of AOAC addressed to the prefecture was that on March 21, 1931, it had prevented the organization of the memorial ceremony for Kostandin Kristoforidhi by this Presidency. The President of AOAC Visarion Xhuvani accused the mayor of Elbasan that "...he behaved in a way that did not honor AOAC and was in favor of the missionary of the propaganda of Uniat..." stating further that on March 29, 1931, the Uniat priest according to the information from the Presidency had organized wafer in the church behind closed doors. So the prefecture was accused of following two standards in allowing the organization of religious ceremonies by the Orthodox faith and the Uniat. The prefecture in the information provided by it stated the opposite that the wafer was performed with open doors, with the participation of 20 people (AQSH, F. 152, D. 191, 1931, p. 20). Regarding this accusation, the Ministry of Internal Affairs demanded explanations from the Elbasan

prefecture, which in turn denied them, calling them untrue, inaccurate and fabricated by the AOAC Presidency. On July 3, 1931, the prefecture of Elbasan was assigned a task by the Ministry of Internal Affairs to verify the information on the secret activity of the Uniat Priest Father Pietro, who according to her "... was continuing the wafer in the Uniat Church of that region..." instructing further that: "Since this was forbidden by prior order, the Priest should be stopped from ordaining in that church." On the secret spread of Uniatism in Elbasan and among the teachers of the Normal School, the ministry requested investigations regarding professor Shuteriqi, who "... dealt with unit propaganda" (AQSH, F. 152, D. 191, 1931, p. 24). The professor had to be advised and ordered by the prefecture to give up the Uniate propaganda, which "... brought harm in terms of peace to our country... and are prohibited by Status and by law...". (AQSH, F. 152, D. 191, 1931, p. 24) In case of objection legal measures would be taken against him. The prefecture of Elbasan informed that from the regular monitoring of the Priest it was noticed that the door of the Uniat Church was never opened and no kind of uniat propaganda was conducted there. Pope Peter was massing privately in his apartment. If "... his private wafer is to be stopped, then it would be better to close the door through which his house communicates with the church, because as long as this door is open it is impossible to control..." Regarding professor Shuteriqi, the prefecture informed that "... it is not true that he deals with religious uniat propaganda, but he exercises his simple duty as a professor of Albanian literature in the Normal School." (AQSH, F. 152, D. 191, 1931, p. 27) On July 18, 1931, relating these concerns, the prefecture requested instructions from the ministry for the prohibition of secret entry into the church and further clarifications in allowing or not allowing the exercise of Uniate rites. (AQSH, F. 271, D. 244, 1931, p. 8) In case this way of performing the rites was forbidden then the communication between the priest's house and the uniat church should be closed. On August 13, 1931, the Ministry of Internal Affairs informed the prefecture of Elbasan again about the secret activity of Pope Pietro and the uniat religious propaganda that he carried out in the various families of Elbasan. According to this information, Father Pietro had started sending underage girls to Italy (by providing them scholarships) in order to learn the uniat doctrine.

The Ministry requested the verification of the data (AQSH, F. 271, D. 244, 1931, p. 10) from the prefecture, which on September 8, 1931 informed that two girls from Elbasan: the daughter of Jorgji Dashi and Papa Mihali in the neighborhood Kala, were preparing with the help of an American lady for religious lessons abroad (AQSH, F. 271, D.242, 1931, p. 4) and that the information about Father Pietro Scarpelli was not true. (AQSH, F. 271, D. 242, 1931, p. 6) The Ministry of Internal Affairs considered the situation created in Elbasan carefully regarding the uniate rites. Even the tension created by such information was evidenced by the numerous correspondences between the prefecture and the ministry during 1931. The explanations of the prefecture of Elbasan, made to the Secret Office of the Ministry of Internal Affairs on November 12, 1931 about the opening of the Uniat Church and the reasons that dictated it had to do with the arrival in Elbasan of the envoy of the apostolic delegate Patër Tuci, to perform Catholic rites in the Uniat Jesuit Church among the Catholic believers there. The wafer would be held on November 13, 1931. The prefecture further clarified that Pope Pietro and Pope Jovan, the two Uniat priests of Elbasan, were not in the town, the former was in Shkodra and the latter in Durrës.

Following the investigation, the prefecture kept seeking clarification on Catholic religious ceremonies on the fact whether "...only the Greek rites or even the Latin rites are forbidden. Please inform us until 6 o'clock in the morning on how we should act." (AQSH, F. 271, D.242, 1931, p. 9) Two days later, on November 14, 1931 the Elbasan Gendarmerie District Command informed the Prefecture that on November 13, at around 8.30 am, a patrol was sent to the Uniate Church according to the instructions given to prevent people from entering the Uniate Church during the Catholic rite performed by the Catholic Priest. The latter had previously been warned about the possibility of giving wafer outside the Uniate church, since wafer inside the church was forbidden. The group of the people gathered that day in front of the church after getting acquainted with the order not to organize wafer in the church, tried to enter by force, but was stopped by the intervention of the Gendarmerie patrol. The Catholic priest had sought information on the names of patrol gendarmes who had prevented people from entering the church in order to investigate. The situation was aggravated even more when one of the attendees named John Paul had asked to enter

the church by force, but he was stopped by the gendarmes and in the ongoing resistance he had threatened them, saying that "... you will see me who I am, and you will repent..." (AQSH, F. 271, D. 242, 1931, p. 10) On November 18, 1931, the Prefecture of Elbasan clarified the situation that it did not intend to prohibit wafer in the Catholic rite but it intended not to allow the performance of wafer in the Uniate church. The non-performance of the mass in this church was realized due to the fact that a decision was taken to close it as a religious institution, no longer thinking about the development of religious ceremonies in it. Elbasan district command disciplined the gendarmes who had told the Catholic priest the names of other members of the patrol guarding the door of the Uniate church that day. (AQSH, F. 152, D. 191, 1931, p. 37) On December 15, 1931, he was charged to preach Catholic rite in the Catholic Church of Elbasan (Uniate) on the occasion of Christmas Father Mark Harapi (AQSH, F. 152, D. 191, 1931, p. 38), for the Albanian and foreign Catholics in Elbasan. (AQSH, F. 271, D. 242, 1931, p. 25) The Ministry, in the letter addressed to the prefecture of Elbasan on December 28, 1931 informed that according to the available data, in the organized wafer, in addition to the legal Latin Mass, the Mass in the Greek rite (Uniat) was also prohibited by law. (AQSH, F. 152, D. 191, 1931, p. 41) The prefecture clarified to the ministry that the information was not true, as public masses were performed in the Latin rite, while the priest uniate performed personal masses "... behind closed doors as always." (AQSH, F. 152, D. 191, 1931, p. 43) So, from what could be seen only at the end of 1931 after a period of almost two years of suspension of ceremonies in the uniate church in Elbasan, the order was broken. The reason of such an action was the fact that on Christmas Eve, the Catholic priests had received permission to perform the Mass based on Latin rites, but contrary to their request they did not perform Byzantine rites during Mass. Father Pietro Scarpelli's secret activity as well as the coordination of his actions with other priests in Elbasan during 1931, surpassed the town limits, and spread to Durrës. Regarding the active secret activity of Father Pietro, Visarion Xhuvani conveyed the concern of AOAC to the Ministry of Justice which informed him that: "...we have written to you many times, on the propaganda of the Uniate Priest Pietro Scarpelli, who even now is continuing his propaganda actions in Durrës,

assisted by Mr. Sotir Toçi..., Mr. Sotir Toçi has been seen many times talking to the Uniate priest (Durrës-my note)...as well as the priest from the neighborhood Shën Koll of Elbasan, Father Jovan Toda that we had the honor to write many times to the Ministry of Justice. Thus, it is confirmed that the above-mentioned foreign priest continues the proselytizing propaganda (change of faith)." (AQSH, F. 152, D. 191, 1931, p. 17) The Ministry of Internal Affairs frequently addressed the AOAC with a request to ban the priest Pietro Scarpelli from exercising religious duties in Albania since he was not recognized by this ministry as a legal, active priest in conformity with the law on religious communities. We also require from the orthodox priest Father Jovan Toda to be instructed by the administrative authorities of Elbasan to obey the orders and advice of the Presidency of AOAC in order to give up the various religious propaganda, so as to prevent measures taken against him in accordance with the status of the Church and the law of Religious Communities." (AQSH, F. 152, D. 191, 1931, p. 18) In 1932 the data on the secret activity of Uniatism are less in quantity compared with the years 1930-1931. Among the data about this activity it is worth mentioning those of the Ministry of Justice, which based on the report of the Presidency of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church; this data reported to the Ministry of Internal Affairs that in Elbasan and Kavaja, the Catholic Clergy and Uniate made pro-proselytizing propaganda among the Orthodox clergy of the two circles. The Ministry of Internal Affairs declared that "It is true that according to our Basic Statute and according to the current laws, the faith is free, but that religious propaganda, which can cause confusion and events, are prohibited...". Therefore, according to it, measures were to be taken by the heads of the two prefectures. They also had to instruct the Archbishop of Shkodra and Enz Della Pietra Nuni Apostolic to order their clergy both Catholic and the uniate, "... not to propagate proselytism since any religious propaganda was prohibited by law, otherwise they would be forced to take occasional measures against those who would act against the law". (AQSH, F. 152, D. 191, 1931, p. 101) Based on the instructions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs on August 9, 1932, the prefecture of Elbasan informed the Ministry that few investigations were carried out." (AQSH, F. 152, D. 191, 1931, p. 103) Prefect Zef Prodani further clarified that Priest Pietro Scarpelli in 1929 was expelled from Elbasan and later his return had

been allowed. As there was no note in his relevant file on how he returned to the town and the time of his stay there, further information was required to be provided by the ministry on this return. Spontaneous activities of Uniate rite in the prefecture of Elbasan were observed during the years 1933-1934, but they were few and consisted of baptisms of children of believers who followed Uniate rites. In Elbasan there were also stopped the efforts made in the framework of erecting a shrine in a land that according to the Prefecture was a land that served as a cemetery for the Catholics. To this demand there was added the fact that the Catholic faith in these years was not widespread in Elbasan. With the efforts of the uniate believers, supported by Father Pietro Scarpelli, they were able to raise the foundations of a shrine or a small uniate church during this short period of time. Under the ultimatum of the Prefecture and with the intervention of the Gendarmerie of Elbasan, the foundation was immediately intervened and the erected foundations were demolished within 24 hours. (Bido: 2016) Such a situation continued in Elbasan even during 1935, but a serious obstacle and intolerable reaction force to curb the spread of this belief was the Albanian state itself, which at every step was guided by AOAC. The strengthening role of the Albanian Orthodox Autocephalous Church, as well as the efforts of Ahmet Zogu (King of the Albanians) for the westernization of the countries, conditioned the orientation of the state policy towards secession from the Orient. This is the period of efforts for social emancipation, when the initiators responsible for its realization were themselves leaders of religious communities in the country. During this process, the difficulties were great, but also the position of Albania was not stable. The global economic crisis had affected the economic situation in Albania, non-repayment of loans taken from Italy and the extension of new loans to overcome it. Albania's cold relations with Italy before and during the years of crisis, as well as the needs created in the country after it, required the melting of the ice and the resumption of a cooperative and interactive policy under Italian dictation. The economic dependence of Albania as well as the powerlessness of the state to break away from this dependence, dictated a political ordinance on the part of the Italians towards the Albanian government during these years. During 1934-1936 the uniate movement in Elbasan and in the

country continued in a state of open under development. During the years 1936-1938 in the country Uniatism reappeared and developed at a faster pace. The reactivation of the Uniate faith in Elbasan during these years was also informed by this Prefecture regarding the efforts of some Uniate priests to rent an apartment for the opening of the kindergarten school and for the activity of the nuns who would be sent there. The opening of the kindergarten school would enable the approach of the girls of the Kala neighborhood and the girls of the poor families of Elbasan by being taught handicrafts and other life lessons. The documents record the arrival in Elbasan of Father Pietro Scarpelli, who according to the information transmitted used financial funds in the service of Uniate religious activities and distributed aid to poor families in the town. It was the period of economic difficulty that had caused the crisis and its consequences too. Father Pietro's unexposed religious activity continued in secret even during 1935, and even the information provided proved that with his funding during this year, boys from Elbasan were sent to study in Italy. (Dervishi: 2007) The prefecture of Elbasan informed on March 6, 1936 that there was, a considerable number of young people from Elbasan sent for studies in Italy by the representatives of uniatism. Based on the data provided by the researcher Kastriot Dervishi, the students from Elbasan in Italy during the 30s were: Nasi Spiro Ndria, he started his studies in 1933 and in 1935 he was attending "Via faro, magno presso Veri 2 Pavia Italia" school; Josif Papamihali attended his studies for 6 years at "Greko Vio Babuino 149, Rome" college; Aferdita Stas Shahini, had been studying for 3 years "Sada metroje sinmonerko Greek Abbasen Liria Italia" school; Julia Papamihali had been studying for 3 years at "Sada metroje sinmonerko Greek Abbasen Liria Italia" school; Aleko Thanas Gega had been studying for 5 years at "Suniar Grota Ferata Roma Italia" school; Apostle Thanas Gega, on November 25, 1935 was sent to "Suniar Grota Ferata Roma Italia" school. The Gega brothers were directly provided scholarships from the Holy Seat to the Vatican. (Dervishi: 2007) So even during 1935, boys from Elbasan were sent to study in Italy. In 1936, contacts were established between Father Scarpelli and the Catholic Priest of Korça, Father Bruneti. There were even frequent movements of Father Pietro in the direction of Korça in order to reactivate the Uniate movement in Albania. Elbasan during the second phase served as a coordination center in

the country in the spread of Uniatism. Secret information testified that the two priests had performed masses in the Byzantine rite in this town in a private bar with the participation of 20 men, women and children. (Dervishi: 2007) Three days later, on March 21, the mayor of Korça again informed the Ministry of Internal Affairs that the uniate priest of Elbasan had contacted with its inhabitants, and had promised them money in case of support and conversion as a religious unit. According to this prefecture, the priest Father Pietro was not prevented from preaching in this town by order of the Secret Office at the Ministry of Internal Affairs. (Dervishi: 2007) The prefecture of Elbasan informed that it was the economic difficulties of Elbasan families that took advantage in bringing the inhabitants of Elbasan closer to Father Pietro Scarpelli. The prefect further informed that there was information on the secrecy of the exercise of the Uniate rites by Father Pietro but evidence of their veracity was lacking. Despite his secret activity based on the data of the time, it was evident that in the registration of families by faith, there was no family registered in the single faith. The information given during 1936 is a bit contradictory, since in some of them it is mentioned that the information concerning the massing in the Byzantine-Greek rite was not forbidden. Meanwhile, the massing of the Uniate rites in Elbasan was carried out in secret. The monitoring of Father Pietro by the Secret Office of the Ministry of Internal Affairs was intense, not only by observing and guarding him at every step he took but also by censoring his correspondence, which proved that Father Pietro was engaged in religious propaganda. (Dervishi: 2007) Such facts were evidenced in the letter sent from Rome in November 1936 to the address of the editor of "Leka" magazine. During the period from August to September 1936 there is a dense correspondence between Father Pietro and foreigners such as Archimandrite by Placido De Meester, Arciverso di Scinada as apostolic representative in Shkodra. State control over the Uniate movement during 1936 would continue until 1938. The activity of the parish of Elbasan continued to be active in 1938 in Vlora, openly propagating the Uniate faith, even highlighting its intensification to create the impression that this movement was supported by the Government. Father Scarpelli was ordered to return to Elbasan, after Vlora had become a center for the organization of Uniatism, led by a group of Italians who were living there. The

order given on May 17, was cancelled again on May 28, 1938. During this year it was difficult to identify the position of the Albanian state regarding the freedom to exercise Uniate faith, which was evidenced even in the ambiguity of the prefect of Elbasan Sadik Metra, who on August 5, 1938 asked the Secret Office to clarify whether or not to allow the free exercise of the uniate rite. The answer received on August 10, 1938 (AQSH, F. 559, D. 7, 1936-1938, p. 208, taken by Dervishi: 2006), proved that the Uniate movement was legalized, but the Albanian state had to monitor, supervise the activity of Catholic priests in Albania. It is not to be forgotten the fact that it was a period of strained relations between Italy and Albania and that a few months later Italy would land its military in Albania. The Uniate movement in its third phase continued to function from 1939 until 1943, the year after which the movement ceased to exist. During these years, the Italian influence in Albania in support of the Uniate movement through financing was strengthened and the Vatican's interest in it diminished. A part of AOAC, as a pro-Uniate trend within the Albanian Orthodoxy (V. Xhuvani, the bishop of Berat Agathangel Çamçe) (De la Roka: 1994) stood out when Christopher Kisi came at its head. The scholar Moroco de la Roca in his trial testified that Kisi was willing to convene the Holy Synod and to mediate the unification of the Albanian Orthodox Autocephalous Church with the Vatican. (De la Roka: 1994) The principles of the individual who accepted or embraced Uniatism were: "The orthodox who joined the Eastern Catholic Church did not change ecclesiastical customs, such as the tax of baptism, coronation, holy oil, burial, etc., but at wafer and in every service they would mention the Pope of Rome, the bishop of the diocese, who was the Uniate for all Albania, and the apostolic delegate (John)... they signed the declaration of faith which included communion in the church, oath and burial in the Catholic cemetery." (Dervishi: 2006)

Conclusion

As a religious movement-Uniatism initially went in harmony with state policies, without compromising them, since the Albanian state was secular and religious, beliefs were respected in the country along with the freedom of belief that was individual. The harmony between the Uniate faith and the state was broken at the moment when the balances between the faith and the believers affected the national interests. Based

on the Status of the Albanian Monarchy, religious beliefs were monitored by the state. Instead the Uniate movement ceased to exist in the years of World War II, after the capitulation of the fascist Italy. The situation in Albania after the liberation of the country did not provide conditions for the development of Uniatism. The establishment of communism in Albania and the attitudes of Albanian politics in later periods did not allow the exercise of beliefs in the country. Religion was considered the greatest ideological enemy of communism in the 1960s, and as such it had to break away from the spiritual worship of Albanians. The Uniate church of Elbasan, the only one of its kind in Albania after the liberation, was closed. Firstly, it went back to the warehouse and then to the weightlifting gym. Activists of uniatism in Elbasan, in the years after liberation were shot being considered as anti-communist.

Trials on Uniatism

In the judgment of many personalities, the Uniate movement was an innovation movement in Albania that created new opportunities, for Albania and Albanians, especially in its first phase. It was supported by Albanians. Uniatism in all three stages of its development in Elbasan and Albania, represented specific goals and developments. The birth and spread of the Uniate movement (first phase) and its reappearance in later phases (second and third phase) were dictated by new circumstances both at home and abroad. The circumstances within the country had to do with national interests, economic difficulties, the weakness of the Albanian Orthodoxy and the existence of currents within it and skeptics in its orientations between Uniatism and Orthodoxy as well as other interests. While external influence was conditioned by the efforts of Albanians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to provide support against the Ottoman rule in Albania and national interests (the role of Austria-Hungary); efforts of secession from the Greek Patriarchate of Istanbul and for the establishment of independent religious centers in the country were noticed during the establishment of AOAC. (De la Roka: 1994) In 1943 the uniate movement in Albania and Elbasan ceased to exist. The spread of the Uniate movement in the mountainous area of Shpat and in Elbasan is the clearest expression of the fact that this region with important traces in the Albanian National Movement and History and

with personalities who wrote and spoke clearly in Albanian for the national interest was the best ground for its cultivation and spread in the country.

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