



**League of
Lezhë (1444)**

Letters from your League of Lezhë Dais

Hello! My name is Nathaniel Unger, and I will be your chair for the League of Lezhë this year at StuyMUNC 2019! I am a current senior at Stuyvesant High School, and I've been doing Model UN for six years. You really don't get an experience anywhere else that fuses geopolitics with acting like you do in MUN—I've always found it thrilling to put on the very large shoes of some important historical figure and rewrite history. My favorite types of committees take place deep in history, and I've participated in committees anywhere from the empire of Alexander the Great to the Revolutionary War—it's so interesting to me to see how things could have happened differently, and what the consequences of that would have been for the future, or an alternate present day. Outside of MUN, I am involved in theater, graphic design, and debate.

But enough about me! Let's talk about you. This committee may seem a little daunting, as information online is scarce. However, this background guide is our attempt at a compilation of all the fundamentals you'll need to know for this committee. I advise you to read through all of it first before launching into your own independent research. Be prepared to come into committee with ideas about how to proceed in this union on the brink of Ottoman assimilation. This is a very open-ended committee, and I am excited to see what you bring to the table. Remember: when going into committee, you take on the role of whoever you are there to represent. That's what I love about MUN: the ability to thoroughly explore any perspective on any topic and get to see things in a way that you may never have expected. The bottom line is, you are there to learn and have fun, and it is the goal of me and the rest of the dais to make sure that you have as fulfilling a time as possible. Email me if you have any questions!

See you soon,

Nathaniel Unger

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Hello delegates! I am Evelyn Cao and I will be your director for League of Lezhë committee. I am currently a junior at Stuyvesant High School and have been part of the Model UN team since my sophomore year. When I joined the team, I didn't expect myself to become a committed member. However, there was this one turning point in life when I decided I dedicate myself into Model UN.

Aside from being part of Model UN, I participate in many other extracurricular activities. I'm a member of Stuyvesant Key Club as an active volunteer as well as its sub-committee for fundraising purposes. I'm on the girls varsity table tennis team as an exhibition player who travels around New York City and compete with other schools. I'm also the international relations director of Stuyvesant's chapter of I-Help Liberia in charge of speaking with Liberians and offering information on how we can improve Liberian education. In addition, I do theatrical work as I've been part of our school's past two SING! Competitions as a member of lights and sound committee. There are many other extracurriculars which I'm committed to which I will not include in here because the letter will become too long.

The topic of League of Lezhë is quite unique as it dates back 600 years to the 15th century. It is quite difficult to research this topic due to the lack of resources and information regarding this time period. This background guide should serve as a basis of your research and contain mostly every aspect of information regarding your position's biography. With the information compacted into this background guide, I hope you find all of this useful as basically the only research you will have to do for the committee. Without further ado, let the bloodshed begin.

Best,

Evelyn Cao

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Committee Overview

Dear My Devoutly Loyal Vassals,

Greetings. I am your ruler and chair, King Alfonso V of Aragon, and trusted representative for the glorious Republic of Venice. Bow before me. I shall be supervising the League of Lezhë on March the Second, Anno Domini 1444. Delegates, I have brought you together under Venetian patronage to deal with the growing Ottoman threat trying to tear apart my dear territory. It is up to you to put your work together—via butting heads or budding solutions, I must have my integrity maintained.

This is a specialized committee, meaning it has elements of both general assembly and crisis committees, leaning slightly more towards the crisis end of the spectrum. Procedure will function generally in the form of moderated caucuses and unmoderated caucuses, resorting back to the speakers' list when no motions are proposed. All of my vassals are encouraged to use secret, personal directives to accelerate their respective agendas—because I am *sure* they are all faithful to me and my court, so supervision is unnecessary. However, my goal for the end of committee is a single joint directive that is passed with the conditions of a final conclusion towards a new age of Albanian history—whether that is independence, fealty, or devastation is up to you.

This background guide is split between a brief historical section of recent years and a longer section consisting of position biographies. As information is scarce, each section is an equally important part of the whole guide for understanding the interactions between characters in committee, and they serve as launchpads for your own research. There is also a small Albanian pronunciation guide at the very end.

Please remember to bring your one-page position papers to committee, and to kiss my royal feet as you enter.*

Your King,
Alfonso V

(* Only the position papers are encouraged, necessary, and sanitary—don't worry.)

History



Albania has been part of the Byzantine Empire since its formation in 375. Gradually over time, the Byzantine Empire lost influence over the region. In 1272, King Charles of Anjou was declared King of Albania under the support of the Albanian elites and the local Catholic Clergy. The declaration of a king was seen as challenging to Byzantine Empire as the empire was losing its influence on the Albanian region. Over the next hundred year, Albania would deteriorate from a series of foreign military invasions, including attacks from the Byzantine Empire. As Albania weakened in the 13th and 14th century, several Serbian tribes captured Albanian territories from the Byzantine Empire. The captured territories were put under the rule of Serbian emperor Stefan Dušan. The territories that weren't captured stayed under the rule of the Byzantine Empire.

After the death of Serbian emperor Stefan Dušan, Serbian influence began to diminish. Nobles in the Albania started establishing their own dominance over the region. Major principalities were Balsha, Kastrioti, Thopia, and Shpata. These principalities were often engaged in vicious conflicts among themselves. It was a loosely unified region prone to attacks from the rapidly rising Ottoman Empire.

At the same time that the Byzantine Empire was falling, the Ottoman Empire was rising. The rise of the Ottoman Empire became a threat to the Byzantine Empire as both

empires frequently clashed on the battlefields. The Ottomans entered the Balkans in the late 14th century. With consistent fightings between the Albanian principalities, the principalities became vulnerable to Ottoman invasions.



Ottoman occupancy of Albania began in 1385 with the Battle of Savra (also known as Battle of the Vjosë). The Ottomans were invited into Albania by Karl Thopia, a prince of one of the Albanian principalities ruled by the Thopia family. Karl Thopia was a rival of Balša Balšić (Balša II) who belonged to the Balšić family. Ottoman forces fought against Zetan forces under the rule of the Balšić family. During the battle, the small Zetan force suffered defeat and Balša II was killed. As the victor of the battle, Ottoman forces captured Krujë, Berat, Ulcinj, and Kastoria. Karl Thopia captured Durrës from Balša II's territories.

After an Ottoman victory during the Battle of Savra, the Ottomans established the Sanjak of Albania, a second-level administrative unit covering the conquered parts of Albania, with Gjirokastër as the administrative capital. The Ottomans sought to replace the local nobles with Ottoman land owners, establish central governance, and set up a taxation system. This ignited a revolt from the Albanian nobility against the Ottoman Empire, led by Gjergj Arianiti.

In the early stages of the revolt, many land holders were killed or expelled. Later, many nobles whose land had been annexed by the Ottomans returned to Albania to join the revolt. Leaders of the revolt were successful in defeating the Ottoman forces but failed to capture important towns in the Sanjak. The rebels also attempted to capture

Gjirokaštër—However, the city was well protected and Ottoman forces were able to reassemble their army with reinforcements during the siege. The reassembled army began to suppress the rebel forces and eventually defeated the rebels by 1436. After the victory, Ottoman forces conducted a number of celebratory massacres in Albania.



In 1423, George Kastrioti (a.k.a. Skanderbeg) joined the Ottoman army as a janissary and rose through the ranks. During the numerous battles between the Ottoman Empire and Albanian principalities, Skanderbeg was serving in the Ottoman army as an Albanian. Skanderbeg was already appointed governor of the the Sanjak of Dibra in 1440. However in 1443 during the Battle of Niš, Skanderbeg deserted the Ottoman army along with 300 other Albanians. Skanderbeg led the men to Krujë, became governor of Krujë, and took control of other principalities. Skanderbeg began to serve under the Republic of Venice after desertion of the Ottomans.

In 1443, Gjergj Arianiti again led a revolt against the Ottoman forces. But this time, he had the support of Skanderbeg. In March 1444, under Venetian patronage, Skanderbeg summoned Albanian nobles to the Venice controlled town of Lezhë to discuss about the formation of a military alliance to fight against the Ottomans. This military alliance would come to be known as League of Lezhë.

Character Biographies

George Kastrioti Skanderbeg

Skanderbeg was born as a member of the noble Kastrioti family. As a young child, he was enlisted into the Ottoman janissary, growing in influence as a military commander. In the army, Skanderbeg would have to wage wars against his homeland, Albania. This spurred a tense relationship between him and his father, John Kastrioti, who served the Republic of Venice. During the Albanian rebellion against the Ottoman Empire from 1432 to 1436, Skanderbeg was invited back home by Gjergj Arianiti and Andrew Thopia to join in their efforts, but Skanderbeg remained loyal and did not participate in the revolt.

Over 1437 and 1438, Skanderbeg was appointed governor of Krujë and a large *vilayet* (province) in Albania, which composed of territory previously belonging to his father. Skanderbeg was awarded the title by Sultan Murad II for the display of military merit. In 1437, after John Kastrioti's death, Skanderbeg and his surviving brother Stanisha maintained the relations their father had with the Republic of Ragusa and the Republic of Venice, thereby sustaining John's privilege with those states. As the *vali*, Skanderbeg kept close connections with the population of his father's former properties and with other Albanian noble families. In 1440, Skanderbeg was appointed Sanjak of Dibra.

In 1443, during an Ottoman campaign in the Battle of Niš, Skanderbeg abandoned the Ottoman army with 300 other Albanian soldiers. He and his group of men arrived in Krujë and gained control of the city. Skanderbeg claimed the right to the land of the Balšić family, converted back to Christianity, and ordered his Muslim fellows to convert as well, pledging loyalty to Albania from now on in an act of defiance. Afterwards, Skanderbeg captured several surrounding forts.

Skanderbeg would later assemble a small court of broadly different ethnicities represented, with connections spanning in every direction.

Lekë Zaharia

Lekë Zaharia was an Albanian nobleman from the Zaharia family. He was the only son of his family which consisted of the father, Koja Zaharia, the mother, Boša, and the sister, Bolja. There was a sister with an unknown name who married Đurašević, who was part of the Crnojević family that controlled parts of Zeta. Bolja married Balša III, who was part of the Balšić family that had control over Zeta.

Lekë Zaharia had a long history of rivalry with Lekë Dukagjini over the pursuit of Irene Dushmani, the heir of the Dushmani family. While Irene approved more of Zaharia, Dukagjini did not accept of her approval. In 1445 during the wedding of Skanderbeg's sister Mamica Kastrioti, a skirmish occurred which wounded Dukagjini. Two years later in 1447, Zaharia was killed in an ambush and Dukagjini was accused as the murderer. The actual murderer of Zaharia remained unknown but the Venetian chronicler Stefano Magno claimed that it may have been Zaharia's own vassal, Nicholas Dukagjin, who killed Zaharia during the skirmish. Zaharia expressed wishes to donate all his property to the Republic of Venetia after his death.

Pal Dukagjini

Pal Dukagjini was a member of the Dukagjini family. He was a vassal under Lekë Zaharia along with Nicholas Dukagjini until 1444 when Zaharia died. As vassals under Zaharia, the Dukagjinis had control over Buba, Salita, Gurichuchi, and Baschina. After Zaharia's death, the Republic of Venice allowed Pal and Nicholas to retain control of these territories because they agreed to become Venetian vassals.

Nicholas Dukagjini

Nicholas Dukagjini was a member of the Dukagjini family. He was a landlord of two villages near Lezhë and commanded a 140 men troop. Nicholas participated in the Albanian revolt of Ottoman Empire from 1432 to 1436. During the revolt, Nicholas successfully captured territories that his family previously held before the Ottoman

invasion. Nicholas also succeeded in capturing Dagnum from the Ottomans and yielded the town to Venice. Venice, fearful of the Ottoman anger, returned Dagnum to Ottoman control in 1435.

Nicholas was suspected of killing Lekë Zaharia to whom he served as a vassal prior to his death. After Zaharia died, the Venetian Republic took control of Zaharia's former territories which provoked conflicts between Venice and Nicholas. Nicholas fought against Venetian authority and managed to capture several villages including Sati. Later, he reached a peace agreement with Venice and became a Venetian vassal, gaining access to his former territories.

Pjetër Spani

Pjetër Spani was a member of the Spani family who had their origins from Greece. He was also a Venetian Pronoia who was granted income by Venetia. The Spani family had control over several villages near Shkodër (Scutari) and Drisht (Dristavo). Pjetër Spani ruled over Shala, Shosh, Nikaj-Mërtur (Lekbibaj), and Pult. Pjetër Spani had no son as his heir to his possessions, thus his nephew, Marin Spani, was designated by him as his inheritor. His other brother, Stefan Span, was lord of the village Podgora.

Lekë Dushmani

Lekë Dushmani was an Albanian nobleman who was part of the Dushmani family. He was lord of Zadrima of the Shkodër district & Pult along with Damian, his relative. Skanderbeg was Dushmani's maternal uncle and was invited to join League of Lezhë.

John Balšić

John Balšić (Ivan Strez Balšić) was the lord of Misia, a coastal area near the Adriatic Sea, along with his brothers George Strez and Gojko Balšić. John was part of the Serbian noble Balšić family that had previously held Zeta. Skanderbeg was John Balšić's

maternal uncle and was invited to join League of Lezhë. He was viewed as one of the potential successors to Skanderbeg.

George Strez Balšić

George Strez Balšić was the lord of Misia, a coastal area near the Adriatic Sea, along with his brothers John Balšić and Gojko Balšić. George Strez was part of the Serbian noble Balšić family that had previously held Zeta. Skanderbeg was George Strez's maternal uncle and was invited to join the League of Lezhë. However rumor had it that he did not have a good relationship with Skanderbeg and his loyalty to him was questionable.

Gojko Balšić

Gojko Balšić was the lord of Misia, a coastal area near the Adriatic Sea, along with his brothers John Balšić and Gojko Balšić. Gojko was part of the Serbian noble Balšić family that had previously held Zeta. Skanderbeg was Gojko Balšić's maternal uncle and was invited to join League of Lezhë. Gojko had a close relationship with Skanderbeg and was a strong supporter of his efforts.

Irene Dushmani

Irene (Jerina) Dushmani was an Albanian princess, daughter of Lekë Dushmani. She was known for her beauty and often compared to Helen of Troy. Similar to Helen, Irene also caused conflicts between two powerful Albanian princes, Lekë Dukagjini and Lekë Zaharia. Irene preferred Zaharia but Dukagjini was jealous of her preference. During a skirmish between Zaharia and Dukagjini, Zaharia was killed with Dukagjini as the suspected murderer. After Zaharia's death, Dukagjini proposed marriage to Irene. Irene rejected Dukagjini due to her loyalty to her love for Zaharia. Irene later chose to live her life as nun on Sardinia, Italy rather than getting married to someone else. She expressed her wish to be buried alongside Zaharia after her death.

Andrea Thopia

Andrea (Andrew) Thopia was a nobleman from the family of Thopia. His domain included territories from Scuria. Andrea was one of the first revolters during the 1432-1436 revolt. In 1432, Andrea revolted against Ottoman rule and defeated a small Ottoman military unit in Central Albania. His victory inspired other nobles, especially Gjergj Arianiti, to rebel against the Ottomans. Tanush Thopia was Andrea's nephew. Both of them participated in the founding of the League of Lezhë.

Stefan Crnojević

Stefan Crnojević was the son of Đurađ Đurašević Crnojević. His mother was from the Zaharia family. At adulthood, Stefan became one of the several governors of Zeta within the Serbian Despotate. However Stefan disagreed with the other governors and wanted to pursue his own goals. The Ottomans temporarily captured Zeta in 1441. Following the capture, Stefan allied with Stefan Vukčić Kosača and recaptured upper Zeta by September of 1441. Stefan, who represented the whole Crnojević family, was awarded five villages in Zeta in which he kept two (Goričane and Kruse) and gave the rest to his brothers.

Stefan married Mamica Kastrioti, sister of Skanderbeg, creating a family link between the Crnojević and Kastrioti family. When Skanderbeg rebelled against the Ottomans in 1443, Stefan sent soldiers under the command of Božidar to assist Skanderbeg's rebellion. However, Lekë Dukagjini and members of the Zaharia family sent forces to ambush Stefan's forces and killed them. In 1444, Stefan became a vassal of the Venetian Republic by seeking protection from Venetia.

Moisi Golemi

Moisi Golemi, also known as Moisi of Dibra, was an Albanian nobleman who was part of the Arianiti family. Gjergj Arianiti, the leader of the rebellion against Ottoman, was Moisi's brother. In 1443-1444, Moisi captured all Ottoman territories in the Debar

area and attained control over Debar. When Skanderbeg arrived in Albania after his desertion, Moisi quickly allied with him and became commander of the border guard. Rumor has it that he was envious of Skanderbeg's achievements and was not very loyal to him. His dedication to fighting for Albania was also questionable.

Lekë Dukagjini

Lekë (III) Dukagjini was an Albanian nobleman whose father was Pal Dukagjini. Dukagjini was a pronoiar of Koja Zaharia until 1444. He was known for a set of law code known as the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini. The Kanun contained the customary laws of the Albanian highlands in the north. Although Dukagjini was a contemporary of Skanderbeg, he was never militarily successful in the fights against the Ottomans.

Dukagjini was also known for his love for Irene Dushmani and rivalry with Lekë Zaharia. During the wedding of Mamica Kastrioti, Skanderbeg's sister, Dukagjini started a fight with Zaharia over who should marry Irene. Many princes got involved in the fight and it wasn't until several deaths that the fight was ceased. Although Dukagjini and Zaharia didn't suffer any physical damages, Dukagjini felt humiliated and sought revenge by potentially killing Zaharia two years later.

Tanush Thopia

Tanush Thopia was an Albanian nobleman from the Thopia family and a close collaborator of Skanderbeg. Tanush was invited to join League of Lezhë along with his uncle, Andrea Thopia. He was a skillful military commander who was very loyal to Skanderbeg. His abilities in military commanding would serve as an important ability in the fights against the Ottomans. Skanderbeg's trust in Tanush would allow Tanush to hold critical positions in the league.

Hamza Kastrioti

Hamza Kastrioti was an Albanian nobleman and the nephew of Skanderbeg. After the death of Hamza's father, Skanderbeg adopted him and raised him up. Later, Hamza

accompanied Skanderbeg in his military expeditions. After the Battle of Niš, Hamza deserted the Ottoman army along with Skanderbeg. Just like Skanderbeg, he converted to Christianity and changed his name to Branilo. Hamza supported his uncle's uprising and during Skanderbeg's campaign to capture Krujë, Hamza was the vice captain of Skanderbeg's troops. When Hamza went with Skanderbeg on expeditions, Skanderbeg was unmarried and did not have a son to inherit his principality. Hamza had hope that he would be Skanderbeg's inheritor unless he bore a son.

Gjergj Arianiti

A nobleman of the Arianiti family and proud leader of the revolt against the Ottomans over 1433 to 1435, Gjergj Arianiti called himself a close ally of Skanderbeg—but as a competing military leader, his side of choice was sometimes uncertain. Arianiti was the eldest of the three sons of Komnen Arianiti, thus inheriting a chunk of territory near Durrës, on the west coast of Albania. When Gjergj Arianiti married into the Muzaka family in the 1410s, his domain expanded towards Debar further to the east.

After a short stint as a hostage in the Ottoman court from 1423 to 1427, Arianiti returned to Albania perturbed and stung, feeling more nationalistic than ever. The majority of his power had been stripped away from him, yet he was still obligatorily a vassal of the Sultan. This was frustrating to him and his fellow Albanian leaders—including Andrea Thopia and Nicholas Dukagjini—who banded together to lead their revolt in 1432. Arianiti also led the anti-Ottoman revolt of 1443, and was one of the founding members of the League of Lezhë.

Rajko Moneta

Rajko Moneta was heir to his family land between the Bojana and Drin rivers. He dominated the salt trade in the Grbalj valley by owning four salt ponds, under the supervision of Venice. After being a successful military leader in the Second Scutari War, Venetians prohibited the selling of salt from any other location. Venetian nobles

also gave Moneta tax exemptions to get him to help build up of the fledgling town of St. Vraza.

Theodor Corona Musachi

Theodor Corona Musachi (also known as Theodhor Koronë Muzaka) was one of the original members of the League of Lezhë. Hailing from the Muzaka family, he once decisively defeated the forces of the Thopia family in 1411 in a bout, creating lasting tension between the families. Musachi led a small, unsuccessful revolt in 1437 against the Ottomans. Though this was after Gjergj Arianiti's own successful revolt in 1432, Arianiti's revolt succeeded only in freeing up Arianiti territory—thus, the Ottomans still had their thumb on the land at this time.

Simon Zenevisi

Simon Zenevisi's claim to fame was the construction of the fortress at the castle of Strovilo, commissioned by Venice. At the foundation of the League of Lezhë, he was only just settling into his new life as ruler of a new domain north of Vagenetia, a part of Epirus in southern Albania.

Stefan Jonima

Stefan Jonima arrived at the League to represent his family, seeing the union as an opportunity to gain his reputation back to what it once was. A former outlaw against the Venetian empire, Jonima had allies in the Zaharia and Dushmani families, and was frustrated with the Kastrioti family, whose members took control of an old Jonima marketplace, Šufadaj (near Lezhë), in 1428.

Pavle Dušman

Pavle Dušman was a religious official, coming from a long familial line of bishops. Himself serving as the bishop of Svač, Montenegro in 1443, and previously, as a pastor

in the Venetian city of Treviso, Dušman was a trusted associate of Pope Eugene IV. However, his loyalties to the papacy were unsteady, as he considered gaining more power in the growing Orthodox church rather than the Roman church, a move which, if executed, would be considered heresy.

Stefan Maramonte

Stefan Maramonte (also known as Stefan Balšić) was the offspring of a union between the Balšić and Thopia families. In 1402, after the death of Konstantin Balšić, he began to be raised by a Maramonte step-father—thus, his last name was an adopted one. Maramonte was a vassal of Lord Balša III—they fought together against the Republic of Venice before Balša's death in 1421. Though Maramonte expected to be appointed as successor, Balša gave his land to his uncle. This ruler, Stefan Lazarević, would be an opposing force against Venice in the Second Scutari War in 1426, leading Maramonte to seek to take back the land that he thought he deserved. He met with Sultan Murad II in 1727 to ask for support, and encountered the imprisoned Skanderbeg during his time at the Ottoman court. Maramonte would later marry Skanderbeg's sister, Vljaka.

By the time the League of Lezhë was founded, Maramonte was serving as a military officer for Venice.

Questions To Consider

1. How will the league attempt to ease tensions with Ottoman Empire? With the Venetian Empire?
2. What are the roles of each noble in the league, both military and political?
3. What families have positive histories with each other, and which have conflict?
4. How can the committee ultimately reach a peaceful solution with outside forces?
5. What are the strategic territories in Albania necessary to ward off both outside and inside threats?
6. Is Albania the greatest civilization in the world? Or are there just as many lies as allies?

Rudimentary Albanian Pronunciation Guide

Vowels

- a — *a* as in “water”
- e — *e* as in “bet”
- ë — *e* as in “term”; equivalent to a schwa (ə)
- i — *i* as in “sardine”
- o — *o* as in “spoke”
- u — *u* as in “put”

Consonants

- c — *c* as in “center”
- ç — *c* as in “cello”
- dh — hard *th* as in “that” (strong form)
- g — *g* as in “go”
- gj — similar to *dg* as in “hedge”
- j — *y* as in “yes”
- l — *l* as in “lord”
- ll — *ll* as in “kill”
- nj — *ny* as in “canyon”
- q — *ch* as in “choose”
- r — untrilled *r* as in “run”
- rr — trilled *r* as in the Spanish “burro”
- sh — *sh* as in “shaggy”
- th — soft *th* as in “thing”
- x — *zz* as in “pizza”
- xh — *dg* as in “ridge”
- y — similar to *u* as in “cure”
- zh — *z* as in “azure”

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