

= Autonomous Albanian Republic of Korçë =

The Autonomous Albanian Republic of Korçë (Albanian : Republika Autonome Shqipëtare e Korçës) was an autonomous state established in 1916 , by the local French forces , after the city of Korçë fell under their control , during World War I and lasted till 1920 .

Due to developments in the Macedonian Front of World War I the city of Korçë came under French control (1916 ? 20) . During this time 14 representatives of Korçë and French Colonel Descoins signed a protocol that proclaimed the Autonomous Albanian Republic of Korçë under the military protection of the French army and with Themistokli Gërmenji as Prefect of Police .

The new authorities introduced Albanian as the official language and replaced Greek schools with Albanian ones , which were forbidden during the Greek administration of the city . There was also a French school in Korçë and one of its many students was Enver Hoxha , who was apprentice (1927 ? 1930) and then teacher (1937 ? 1939) . He would later become the First Secretary of the Albanian Party of Labour , serving from 1941 until his death in 1985 .

= = Background = =

The Republic of Korçë was established in 1916 during World War I. The Austro @-@ Hungarian army invaded northern Albania in the spring of 1916 , the Kingdom of Bulgaria 's army occupied the eastern parts of Albania , including the city of Elbasan (which was later handed over to Austria @-@ Hungary) . The French army occupied Korçë and its surrounding areas on November 29 , 1916 . Italy occupied the port of Vlorë and the region of south Principality of Albania on December 1914 and in the autumn 1916 .

= = = Northern Epirus = = =

Korçë belongs to the region regarded as Northern Epirus , a region with substantial Albanian , Aromanian and Greek populations . The Greek national view was to classify all Aromanians and Orthodox Albanians as part of the Greek minority . The Great Powers signed the Protocol of Florence and awarded the region to the newly founded Principality of Albania on December 17 , 1913 . Gradual withdrawal of the Greek army would enable the Albanian forces to take control of the region . Consequently , to avert this possibility , pro @-@ Greek Epirotes decided to declare their own separate political identity and self @-@ governance .

= = = = Autonomous Republic of Northern Epirus = = = =

On February 28 , 1914 , the Autonomous Republic of Northern Epirus was declared in Gjirokastrë and the provisional Government was formed to support the state 's objectives . The Protocol of Corfu was signed on May 17 , 1914 and the Albanian Government officially recognized the area of Northern Epirus as an autonomous region within the Albanian state . Soon after the outbreak of World War I (July 1914) , the situation in Albania became unstable and political chaos ensued . As the country split into a number of regional governments , Prince William departed the country in September 1914 .

= = = = Greek military and civil administration = = = =

On October 27 , 1914 , after approval from the Great Powers , the Greek army re @-@ entered the area . During the Greek administration , and while the First World War continued , it had been agreed between Greece , Italy and the Great Powers that the final settlement of the Northern Epirote issue should be left to the future , after the war ended . After Venizelos ' resignation in December however , the succeeding royalist governments were determined to exploit the situation and pre @-@ determine the region 's future by incorporating it formally within the Greek state . In the first months of 1916 , Northern Epirus participated in the Greek elections and elected 16

representatives for the Greek Parliament . In March , the region 's union with Greece was officially declared , and the area was divided into the prefectures of Argyrokastro and Korytsa .

= = = = Bulgarian occupation of Korçë = = = =

After the beginning of Bulgaria 's engagement in First World War on the side of the Central Powers in autumn 1915 , many ethnic Albanians joined the Bulgarians who gave them weapons . The Kingdom of Bulgaria used its army to occupy the eastern part of Albania at the beginning of the occupation of Albania .

After the occupation of the eastern parts of Albania , inclusive of the city of Elbasan , on August 18 , 1916 the Bulgarian army , probably attempting to join Austrian forces in Albania and in a combined attack on the Italian army , occupied Korçë and ejected the Greek garrison from the city . Bulgaria 's objective was to persuade the Albanian leaders to elect Prince Kiril , second son of Ferdinand I of Bulgaria , as their king (Albanian : mbret) . An additional reason for the Bulgarian occupation of Korçë was that Bulgarian positions in Bitolj would be seriously threatened if the Allies gained control of Korçë .

= = = = French occupation of Korçë = = = =

French troops entered Korçë on November 29 , 1916 during a military operation that aimed to connect the Allied front in Thessaloníki in the Macedonian front to the region in south Albania , which was held by the Italian troops . French troops in Korçë were under General Maurice Sarrail , and under direct command of Colonel Descoins . There were two groups of rebels active in the region of Korçë , one was led by Themistokli Gërmenji and another by Sali Butka . In the meantime , Albanian irregular bands , headed by Butka and cooperating with the Austrian forces , completely ravaged Moscopole , and threatened that if Korçë would suffer the same fate if it did not raise the Albanian flag and surrender to Albanian authorities .

= = Establishment of the Autonomous Albanian Republic of Korçë = =

Colonel Descoins made arrangements with the leading Albanian nationalists from Korçë . French officers had a meeting with Themistokli Gërmenji on November 24 , 1916 . Themistokli Gërmenji came to Korçë from Pogradec , which was occupied by the armies of Austria @-@ Hungary and Bulgaria . The French officers appointed a commission led by Gërmenji . The commission had fourteen members , seven Christians and seven Muslims . The members of this commission were : Rafail Adhami , Kostandin Nocka , Nikolla Vangjeli , Vasil Singjeli , Vasil Kondi , Llambro Mborja , Thimi Cale , Shaqir Shabani , Tefik Rushiti , Hysen Dishnica , Emin Rakipi , Qani Dishnica , Sali Babani and Haki Shemshedini .

The commission held a meeting on December 10 at 9 am in the Saint George 's School and Gërmenji held a speech to the gathered men and after the meeting led the commission to the prefecture . In the prefecture they met with Colonel Descoins and with the other French officers . Haki Shemshedini approached to Colonel Descoins on behalf of the commission . Colonel Descoins informed the commission that they should sign a protocol . On December 10 , 1916 Colonel Descoins and the commission signed a protocol , according to which an autonomous province would be established on the territories of Korçë , Bilishti , Kolonja , Opar and Gora . It was also agreed that the 14 members of the commission would make up the administrative council , responsible for maintaining order .

= = = Protocol = = =

The text of the protocol , which stated that it was made according to the wishes of the Albanian delegates of kaza of Korçë , had 9 points that are summarized below :

the autonomous province of Korçë is established by this protocol , and refers to the territory of

Korçë , Bilishti , Kolonja , Opar and Gora

the kaza Korçë will be governed by the Administrative Council with 14 members , half Christian and half Muslim

appointments to the positions in the kaza will be made by French military authorities , based on the proposal of the administrative council

for maintaining order in the kaza , the prefect of police will be responsible , using newly established gendarmerie and police

there shall be established a special unit of " Albanian gendarmerie mobile " which would be responsible for safeguarding the territory 's independence and freedom of its people

for the same purpose there can be established a regular battalion of volunteers

Police , gendarmerie and volunteer troops would be under superior authority of the French officer

the official language is Albanian

the flag of the kaza Korçë will be traditional Skanderbeg flag with tricolor French flag

The new authorities in Korçë organized the police force and gendarmerie , a post office system and issued postage stamps .

= = = Statute = = =

On September 27 , 1917 General Maurice Sarrail proclaimed a new statute which repealed constitutional protocol . The Administration was entrusted to the commander of the army group Malik . The Administrative Council was replaced with an Advisory Council which was reduced to 12 members (still half Muslims and half Christians) . Territory under French administration was divided on two parts , north (Pogradec) and south (Republic of Korçë) of Devolli .

= = = Administration = = =

On December 10 , 1916 , Henry Descoins , the commander of the French garrison of Korçë , with the approval of Maurice Sarrail , declared the Autonomous Albanian Republic of Korçë , and appointed Themistokli Gërmenji as prefect . In the following period the Greeks of the city were persecuted by the Albanian nationalist elements that aimed at acquiring control over Korçë . As a result , the local Greeks asked the French authorities to prolong their occupation until the end of World War I.

In the period of March 1917 ? February 1918 , Qani Dishnica was appointed as the Chairman of the Albanian Administrative Council . On the French side , the delegated governors of the Republic of Korçë were Henri Descoins (December 10 , 1916 ? May 11 , 1917) , Salle (1917 ? 1919) and Reynard Lespinnasse (June 1919 ? May 26 , 1920) .

The French delegated governors appointed an officer to be their delegate to the Council . The first officer appointed was reserve Lieutenant Bargeton , who was replaced in the middle of January 1917 by a Lieutenant Siegfried .

= = = Education = = =

France intended to help in establishing 200 elementary schools on Albanian language , as part of the strategy of Albanian national affirmation . On the other hand , all the Greek schools were forced to close down , while the Greek element of the city was persecuted . The Albanian National Lyceum (French : Le lycée de Korça , Albanian : Liceu Kombëtar i Korçës) high school in Korçë was established in 1917 . French authorities claim that they banned opening of the high school because they did not want to offend their Greek allies led by Eleftherios Venizelos ' Movement of National Defence , who claimed rights over the area . Some sources find this claim inappropriate , considering that the French Lycée in Thessaloníki sent professor Vital Gerson to lead a small team of three Albanian professors to join a French officer , who gave some notions of French culture , on the opening ceremony of the school . The French National Lyceum was the first Albanian high school that was open to the students of all faiths .

== Currency ==

The frange (Albanian) or franc (French) was the currency of the Autonomous Albanian Republic of Korçë (also written " Koritza " on the currency) between 1917 and 1921 . It was subdivided into 100 centimes . The currency was introduced during the period of French occupation . It was only issued in paper money form , with notes issued in denominations of 50 centimes , 1 and 5 frange . Both paper money and post stamps were engraved by the soldier Davier (a student of Louis @-@ Oscar Roty) .

== Pogradec ==

In September 1917 , General Maurice Sarrail undertook an action against the armies of Austria @-@ Hungary and Bulgaria in Albania , and on September 9 French troops captured Pogradec . Together with the armies of Bulgaria and Austria @-@ Hungary , there were Albanians , led by Hysejn Nikolica , fighting against the French troops . Themistokli Gërmenji was awarded the Croix de guerre in November 1917 , for his participation in the French capture of Pogradec with the battalion from Korçë . Although the French government considered appointing Essad Pasha Toptani to govern the Pogradec region it remained under French administration .

== Disestablishment of the Autonomous Albanian Republic of Korçë ==

In November 1917 , General Salle reported that the attempt at cooperation between Christians and Muslims had resulted in frequent difficulties . At the end of 1917 Gërmenji was accused of collaboration with the Central Powers and executed in Thesaloniki after being sentenced to death by the French military court .

General Salle removed the already limited autonomy of the Council on February 16 , 1918 . After the armistices and capitulations at the end of First World War , it was agreed that France and Italy should continue to govern the territories they occupied , and that France , Italy and the British Empire together should govern Shkodër . As a result , the French army moved from Korçë on June 15 , 1920 . After the French army left Korçë , the fate of the territory that it administered was decided by the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 .

== Aftermath ==

On December 12 , 1916 , Italy demanded explanations from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs , through its ambassador , stating that the establishment of the Autonomous Albanian Republic of Korçë violated the Treaty of London . Austria @-@ Hungary used the French precedent in Korçë to justify the proclamation of the independence of Albania under its protectorate on January 3 , 1917 in Shkodër . The Kingdom of Italy followed suit when proclaiming the independence of Albania under its protectorate on June 23 , 1917 in Gjirokastra .

Because General Maurice Sarrail had demonstrated a tendency to interfere in politics , Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau relieved him of his command in December 1917 . There was a strong French influence in Korçë even after the Autonomous Republic ceased to exist . The Albanian National Lyceum remained active until 1939 ; a French Military Cemetery was built and can still be seen in the city .