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<b>Autor:</b>	Blumi, Isa
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# Publishers, Hitmen, Diplomats, and Dreamers

*Switzerland's Ottoman-Albanian Diaspora, 1899–1920<sup>1</sup>*

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Isa Blumi

## **Abstract**

*This article explores Ottoman-Albanian immigration to Switzerland in order to address shortcomings in past scholarship on the role immigrants played in the formation of national communities. Albanian subjects of the Ottoman Empire interacted in Swiss cities during the period, participating in the political violence, the lobbying of European powers and the publication of opposition newspapers and books noted in Swiss police records. These activities, however, should not be assumed to have reflected a unified, proto-national sensibility. Using a few case studies of some of the more conspicuous Ottoman Albanians who resided in Swiss cities during the period, it will be demonstrated that the overriding ambitions of Albanians were varied and often contested. This resulted in some intriguing examples of how the complexities of late Ottoman political culture translated into divergent and often contradictory ambitions that did not always result in the expression of like-minded political agendas.*

## **Introduction**

Historians studying modern European history have become increasingly interested in the role émigré communities play in the development of nationalist sentiments within diaspora-based political parties and cultural organizations. While this scholarship generally focuses on the post World War II period, it should not be forgotten that Western Europe, and Switzerland in particular, had also been a destination for Eastern

<sup>1</sup> The author would like to thank the staffs at the Swiss National Archives in Bern, the Austrian Military Archives and the United States of America's National Archives at College Park, Maryland. Portions of this project were written while an SSRC IDRF and Mellon Fellow. Special thanks to Jens Hanssen and John Drabble for comments on earlier drafts and Bettina and Andrea Feller for their friendship during my stay in Bern.

Europe's and the Middle East's immigrants throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries. I wish to explore this forgotten period in respect to Albanian immigration to Switzerland since it serves as an important reminder to, in particular, theorists of nationalism that so-called national communities are far from unified in key periods of political and ideological "development". Specifically, I will draw a picture of how Albanian subjects of the Ottoman Empire interacted in Swiss cities during a period which saw a dramatic rise in political activism among a number of immigrant communities. As will be demonstrated below, this activism included the use of political violence, the lobbying of European powers and the publication of opposition newspapers and books. Lastly, as discussed with the case of Mid'hat Frashëri, this article will also demonstrate that Switzerland itself provides at the time of growing aspirations among the so-called "smaller" nations, a model for political and social cohesion between otherwise disparate communities. This, interestingly enough, is taking place when nationalism, as advocated by United States' President Woodrow Wilson's notion of self-determination, provides the ideological and diplomatic framework for the fragmentation of European powers along ethnic lines<sup>2</sup>. Serving as the ideal model for Mid'hat Frashëri's ambition to save what he conceived as Albania from extinction, may suggest that Switzerland's place in the larger social and political scheme of European political history after World War I deserves a second look.

### **Switzerland: The Era's Social and Political Melting Pot**

The first impression one gains from studying Switzerland at the turn-of-the-century is the plethora of ethnic groups that settled there. While Albanian concerns during this period diverged from the various Armenian, Arab, Slav or Turkish communities that were also active in Switzerland at the time, a great deal of informal interaction in Switzerland, nevertheless, took place between these ethnic groups. The single most important unifying goal of these groups was the reform of the Ottoman Empire and, among the majority living in Switzerland, the overthrow of the regime of Sultan Abdülhamid II<sup>3</sup>. While here is not the place to consider the significance of this interaction at length, I would suggest what

2 For more on Wilson's ideological intervention see Heater, Donald: *National Self-Determination: Woodrow Wilson and his Legacy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).

3 For an appreciation of the diversity found in Switzerland during the period, the Swiss National Archives in Bern (henceforth SNA) prove illuminating. See file 21/10557 for extensive reports on activities of the Young Turk activists resident in the country; 21/10563 on Zionists; and 21/10564 on foreign student groups operating in Switzerland.



**Figure 1.** The Albanian Babatahsı Visko, “l’homme à tout faire au consulat ottoman” (Edmond Lardy), in Geneva, on a photograph of the federal authority of about 1899 (BAr E21 14248).

happened in Switzerland among its Ottoman immigrant communities greatly affected how societies in the Balkans, the Caucasus and Eastern Europe were to create their post-imperial worlds.

In this context, it is important to consider the impact that emerging social principles circulating in Europe had on how Ottoman citizens in exile understood their world. While notions of equality, individual rights (for men) and parliamentary democracy found great support among these communities, it is clear that these principles often clashed with more parochial ambitions. In particular, a pronounced tension arose between the universal claims of European Liberalism as championed by those who would eventually take over the reign of the Ottoman Empire in 1908 and the advocacy of ethno-national rights. Such implicitly contradictory principles proved important in changing how the Ottoman Empire’s subjects would understand the limits of their political futures both before and after the First World War.

The story of these diaspora networks operating in Europe at the time has been illuminated by some of the scholarship on the Committee of

Union and Progress (CUP)<sup>4</sup>. While the literature is helpful in understanding the CUP in Europe, it does not seek to situate any of the distinctive diasporas' activities within the geographical regions from which they came. For Albanian-speakers, for example, especially those originating from Southern Tosk regions, political opposition to the Abdülhamid II regime was at once politically variable and geographically spread throughout the world<sup>5</sup>. Aside from the colonies of Southern Albanian would-be state makers in places as far afield as Boston, Cairo, and Bucharest, a number of individuals set up networks of self-promoting, often clashing social/political organizations in Switzerland<sup>6</sup>. It is important to stress that while these organizations and the individuals who created them were living far from Albania, they actively engaged in the political and economic events taking place in the Balkans as well. It is in this larger Albanian context that we may best appreciate the nature of political opposition to the Sultan in places like Switzerland in all its inherent complexity.

Along with these more general observations to be made, we can pinpoint a dramatic shift in political rhetoric among the Ottoman diaspora over the period in question with a few key events, beginning with Sultan Abdülhamid's nullification of the 1876 liberal constitution. Such a blatant move on the balance of executive power set off a chain of opposition movements that quickly found financial patronage among the Ottoman merchant families established abroad, among whom Albanian-speakers were most conspicuous<sup>7</sup>. Later, growing tensions within the empire manifested itself in myriad of political factions that adopted much of the ideological precepts circulating Europe at the turn-of-the-century. Many Armenians, Greeks and Bulgars pursued a double, seemingly contradictory set of goals for their respective homelands. Just as active in the diaspora were the Albanians in Switzerland who also sought to promote any number of political solutions to the "Albania problem" which emerged after the Russo-Ottoman war of 1877–1878. Despite the claims of nationalist historians of the twentieth century, Albanians did not necessarily adopt separatist positions when seeking to deal with the empire's crisis. Initially, most educated Southern Albanians, today iden-

4 Hanioğlu, M. Sükrü: *The Young Turks in Opposition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 71–74.

5 Blumi, Isa: "The Commodification of Otherness and the Ethnic Unit in the Balkans: How to Think About Albanians", in *East European Politics and Societies* XII (1998), p. 527–569.

6 SNA 21/13948 "Polizeiwesen, Überwachung des 'Comité Centrale Macedonien' in Genf und dessen Vorbereitungen zu einem mazedonischen Kongress in Genf, 1899".

7 See Faik Konitza: "Mémoire sur le mouvement national albanais", Brussels, January 1899, found in Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Politisches Archiv (henceforth: HHStA, PA) XIV, Karton 18, Albanien XII/2 p. 11–12.

tified in the historiography as ardent Albanian nationalists, were in fact actively operating within the networks of the CUP-movement. For our interests here, this translated into CUP-activism among Albanians in Switzerland that did not seek an independent Albania<sup>8</sup>.

The most visible of these Albanian/CUP activists, Dervish Hima, frequented Switzerland during the 1902–1904 period<sup>9</sup>. Hima, a consummate organizer, had developed an extensive network of correspondence with various nationalists and Ottoman reformists by the time he visited Switzerland for the first time in May of 1902<sup>10</sup>. What is important about Hima is that he, like so many of his fellow Albanians who promoted Albanian-language rights and administrative autonomy, did not advocate independence. Hima was a strong supporter of the CUP and its quest to reform the Empire, not promote its fragmentation. Again, Hima's seemingly contradictory ideological position found much support among key figures of the Albanian community in Switzerland. In their minds, the only way Albania could survive the expansionist ambitions of its neighbours was in union with a potentially great power.

Spending more than 15 months in Switzerland, mainly in Lausanne and Geneva, Hima engaged the activists residing there to help create a chain of closely linked opposition groups who were beginning to promote the CUP-agenda in Europe. Hima, by using the CUP-platform as his ideological foundation, also organized Albanians in an effort to lobby the great powers on issues that concerned Albanians<sup>11</sup>. These initial efforts to influence Western policies towards the joint CUP/Albanian cause produced interesting alliances between Albanians who passed through Switzerland at the time. Among the more intriguing individuals with whom Hima worked in Switzerland in the pre-1908 period was the Spanish-born diplomat and political adventurer Prince Alasandro Kastrioti, a frequently quoted activist who claimed to be a descendent of the fifteenth-century Albanian national hero, George Kastriati (Skenderbeg)<sup>12</sup>. While Kastrioti's overall historical importance

8 See for instance, SNA, 21/14248 “Jungtürkische Bewegung”, Bar 1, Le Conseiller d'état chargé du département de Justice et Police, Genève, le 23 novembre 1895.

9 Born Ibrahim Mehmet Naxhi in Ohrid in 1872, Hima became the chief liaison between fellow Albanian Ibrahim Temo, a leader of the CUP, and the larger Albanian community throughout Europe. Most of the material gathered on Hima's activities in Switzerland comes from Ibrahim Temo's file in the Albanian Central State Archives (henceforth AQSH) Fondi (F. 19).

10 For a complete police record on Hima in Switzerland, SNA E 21/E2001 A 80–83. Bern, 25. Juni 1902. “Die Schweizerische Bundesanwaltschaft an das Schweizerische Justiz- und Polizeidepartement: Dervich Hima, Direktor der Zeitung *Albania* und drei Diener”.

11 AQSH F. 19 D. 32/2 f. 235–236.

12 One meeting in Lausanne was meant to consolidate efforts to lobby European powers about Albanian claims in the region. AQSH F. 19 D. 32/2 f. 233–234.

is minimal, he did help initiate a number of informal diplomatic projects, most of which involved extensive meetings with representatives from Russia, England and Austria. The context for these meetings is important as it is often forgotten how much Great Power diplomacy relied on such informal meetings with members of the Ottoman diaspora.

What such informal meetings between activists and European diplomats accomplished was to permit a flow of information and ideas that was otherwise obstructed by the more rigid diplomatic mainstream. European powers at the time were particularly keen on finding a sustainable solution to the crisis in Macedonia, in which a plethora of Bulgarian, Serb and Greek factions attempted to wrest the region away from Istanbul<sup>13</sup>. The crisis in Macedonia may be said, therefore, to have been one of those unifying moments that enabled Hima to use his extensive influence on the Albanian community in Switzerland and thrust him (and the CUP) into a position of diplomatic relevance as far as European powers were concerned.

Part of Hima's efforts to influence European policy towards Macedonia and indoctrinate Albanians living in Europe, was the establishment of a newspaper in Geneva. In September of 1903, Hima launched the weekly *Albania*, published in the French, Albanian and Ottoman languages<sup>14</sup>. To finance the paper, Hima, used his close contacts with the Austrian consul in Manastir to secure funds from the Austrian Embassy in Bern<sup>15</sup>. Hima's efforts as per the establishment of *Albania* signal to us that conventional wisdom about the role in Balkan politics of European powers is misguided. It was an Albanian, and not the Austrian state, who was ultimately responsible for reaching out and securing the funds that translated into the publication of an Albanian-language anti-Hamidian journal<sup>16</sup>. This is a key point to which we must frequently return: There is a need to restore immediate political and ideological agency to these activists.

13 Because a large portion of the population in Macedonia were either Orthodox or Muslim Albanians, any negotiations on the issue had to include men like Dervish Hima, a native of the area. Hima conducted a number face-to-face meetings with representatives of Bulgarian separatist movements in the summer of 1903 in Geneva. AQSH F. 19 D. 32/2 f. 278, 283–286. Later in the summer, Hima wrote Ibrahim Temo that he also met with Bulgarian socialists, AQSH F. 19 D 32/2 f. 273–274.

14 For examples of this journal found in the National Library in Bern (with correspondent code number) see *Albania* 1903 Qq 512 1–17.

15 On Hima's relationship with the Austrian Consul in Manastir, Kral, see AQSH F. 19 D. 32/2 f. 244; and for a letter from Kral himself, encouraging Hima in his Geneva project, see AQSH F. 19 D. 32/2 f. 279. See also later evidence of Austrian money supplied by the Bern embassy for Albanian newspapers: HHStA XIV/17 Liasse 16, 136–137 No. XXXI. von Gagern to k.u.k. Ministerium des Aeussern, Bern 22. März 1913.

16 For details of some of these publications financed by Austrian funds see Kondo, Ahmet: *Çështja Kombëtare në Faqe të Shtypit të Rilindjes* (Tirana: 8 Nëntori, 1982).

The journal *Albania* itself lasted two years, providing an extensive readership in Switzerland and throughout Europe an editorial bent that complimented the CUP-message disseminated in other publications of the time<sup>17</sup>. In Hima's own words, the Young Turk organ *La Fédération Ottomane*, also published in Geneva, inspired his newspaper's format. After reading several issues of *Albania*, it is clear Hima's loyalty to the CUP often found its way into the editorials he wrote for the newspaper.

Not everyone shared Hima's ideas about what was in Albanians' best interests. While *Albania* clearly tried to promote "Albanian interests" it also actively sought to silence those within the diaspora who were demanding Albania's independence from the Ottoman Empire, a sentiment the Albanian leaders of the CUP rejected. As evidenced in his editorials, Hima would actively seek to counteract separatist sentiments with his strong CUP-leanings<sup>18</sup>. In Hima's mind, calls for Albania's separation was only meant to divide the Ottoman nation and aid Greek and Slav expansionists. Hima's unapologetic support for the CUP-platform, in the end, highlighted tensions among some important elements of the Albanian diaspora, in particular Faik Bey Konitza, the Belgium-based publisher<sup>19</sup>.

In addition to Hima's activities in the Swiss Confederation, Faik Bey Konitza is known to have weighed in on Albanian community politics in Switzerland. Konitza's activism instigated, in the process, a rivalry between Bucharest-based Ottoman reformists like Hima and Ibrahim Temo and those in Western Europe who became convinced that Albania's independence from the Ottoman Empire was the only solution. The acrimonious exchange of editorials in Hima and Konitza's papers resulted in counter-productive incidents in host countries such as Switzerland and Belgium. These tensions ultimately weakened the Albanian cause in face of the well-organized and sophisticated lobbying of European powers by Serbian, Montenegrin and Greek state agents<sup>20</sup>. The consequences of this infighting would manifest itself most clearly during the disastrous Balkan wars of 1912 and 1913 when Europe failed

17 SNA 21/14249 Band 3, File on the Young Turk journal *Osmanlı*.

18 In his diary-like letter to Ibrahim Temo, Hima recounts his numerous meetings with top CUP-figures in Geneva. In one particular meeting, Hima goes to great lengths to apologize for an attack by pro-Hamidian Albanians on the staff of the CUP-organ *Şura-yı Ümmet* based in Kosova. In the days that followed, Hima drafted an editorial condemning his fellow Albanians for the attack. AQSH F. 19 D 32/3 f. 494–495.

19 In Hima's correspondence with Ibrahim Temo, it is clear such a strategy created tensions within the Albanian-speaking community. AQSH F. 19 D. 32/3 f. 260–261.

20 According to one account, Mitar Martinović, a Belgrade spy, met with a Montenegrin delegation and their Russian counterparts in a Geneva restaurant on July 6, 1912 to organize the attack of Northern Albania the following month. Pavlović, Živojko: *Opsada Škadra* [The Siege of Shkodra] (Belgrade, 1926), p. 23–25.

to intervene to protect Albanian territories from these aggressive neighboring states.

While that side of the story needs far more space than available here, it should be stressed that the loyalties of Albanians cannot be assumed. There is a great deal of nuance to how individuals and the groups within which they participated operated along the margins of building nations. Ultimately, the politics of this new era in global affairs translated into a pronounced rise in the murder of rivals, arson and other forms of politically-motivated violence that soon alarmed the Swiss authorities.

Documents obtained from the Swiss National Archives in Bern reveal that Istanbul lobbied the Swiss government to crack down on anti-Hamidian activities, something the Swiss authorities were not immediately willing to do<sup>21</sup>. Unable to convince the Swiss State to crack down on its opponents, Istanbul apparently stepped up its own efforts to deal with the CUP and other anti-Hamidian groups by sending in spies and possibly even assassins. It becomes clear that Istanbul's infiltration of local opposition groups led to a rise in political violence, forcing a change in the attitude Swiss authorities had towards its previously welcome guests. Greater surveillance of Ottoman opposition figures and the Sultan's agents begin to emerge in police records<sup>22</sup>. Within these files one may find the case of Babatahsı Visko, a colorful example of how parochial Albanian issues and larger Ottoman politics intersected.

We first run into Visko through an informant to the Geneva municipal police, Rahmi Mustapha, who was being interrogated for his own possible involvement in a Hamidian plot to sabotage CUP-activities. Visko was identified as “un agent provocateur ... un Albanien qui ... d'après les renseignements que j'ai [Mustapha] sur lui, est excessivement dangereux, capable parfaitement d'un crime”<sup>23</sup>. Alarmed by these accusations, local authorities surveyed Visko's home located on 4, quai du Cheval Blanc in Geneva, in the hope of preventing Visko from committing an act of violence<sup>24</sup>.

21 SNA 21/14250 Jungtürkische Bewegung 1900. Enclosed in this file are a series of letters from the Ottoman consul in Geneva informing local authorities that he would intervene against the Young Turk press and wanted their assistance.

22 SNA 21/14248 Bar 132 reports of the activities of a number of “Anarchist” groups organizing the assignation of the Sultan. See Bars 148 and 149 for the list of those interrogated and the transcripts of those interrogations.

23 SNA 21/14248 “Jungtürkische Bewegung” Bar 127: 29 Septembre, 1899.

24 SNA 21/14249 Bar 150: A letter from the Hôtel de Ville dated Mercredi le 27 Septembre 1899 provides the initial information gathered on Babatahsı Visko which included news that he was seen speaking to staff members of the local Albanian newspaper. SNA 21/14249 Band 1 Jungtürk Bewegung – Bericht der Bundesanwaltschaft vom 30. 10. 1899 Bar 3: contains the order to “faire surveiller Babatahsı”.

In addition to following Visko on his daily activities in Geneva, Swiss authorities conducted a background check on him, working closely with their homologues in France and Belgium<sup>25</sup>. Upon learning of Visko's colorful criminal past in Belgium, Geneva police subsequently took him into custody for questioning on October 6, 1899<sup>26</sup>. In the records of the interrogation, Visko, self-described as an Ottoman subject and a journalist by trade, proved incapable of telling a straight story. The police repeatedly asked Visko, for example, about his relationship with the Ottoman consul in Geneva, Resoul [sic], with whom, it was already known by police, Visko met on a number of occasions. Visko insisted that he simply was attempting to obtain a passport, replacing the one that expired during his stay in the country. While he denied being an "agent" of the consul and continued to insist that his business at the consulate was only to obtain a passport, the police collected strong material evidence that proved otherwise.

This interrogation provides a fascinating window into the workings of local authorities as they tried to deal with an increasingly tense situation in the country. The authorities were quite thorough. For instance, the police cite a letter found in Visko's apartment in which Visko scribbled hastily "Je suis brûlé." Visko's attempt to deny any significance to the sentence – "Cette phrase était écrite pour faire partie d'une lettre d'amour et devrait signifier je suis brûlé d'amour" – did not assuage the suspicions of Geneva's police<sup>27</sup>. While the intended recipient of Visko's "love letter" is never identified, by the end of the interrogation authorities had had enough of Visko's lies and recommended that he be thrown out of the Confederation<sup>28</sup>.

This case suggests that Abdülhamid's security apparatus, on the grounds of intelligence gathered in Cairo (from where some of the material evidence found on Visko originated), organized through its Paris, Brussels and Geneva consulates the infiltration of the local opposition community in Geneva. The Visko case offers intriguing possibilities, one that can only be appreciated in the context of the many inter-Albanian rivalries previously noted. It needs to be stressed again, therefore, that not all Albanians were opposed to the Sultan. The case of Visko points to this perfectly. The same holds true to the fact that not all among the

25 SNA 21/14248 Bar 132: Some key information taken from the full report on Babatahsı reveals that he, among other things, was arrested in Brussels earlier in 1899 for one month on charges of "outrage aux mœurs".

26 The full transcript of this interrogation can be found in SNA 21/14248 Bar: 159. Please note that the police report is filed in SNA 21/14248 Bar 132.

27 SNA 21/14248 Bar 161.

28 SNA 21/14248 Bar 141. On October 14 authorities expelled Visko from Switzerland.

opposition necessarily agitated for an independent Albania. That this ideological diversity existed among Albanians leading up to the 1908 coup that put elements of the CUP into power in Istanbul complicates the various histories of the Ottoman opposition and the diaspora out of which the anti-Hamidian forces came. This deeper appreciation for these contradictory forces should help refocus our attention to previously presumed secondary issues.

### **Prominent Exiles: The Case of Mid'hat Frashëri**

Dervish Hima and to a lesser extent Babatahsı Visko operated in Europe during a highly contentious period that nevertheless offered them a number of options. Much of these political possibilities available to members of the Albanian diaspora were eliminated by the time of the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913. I introduce Mid'hat Frashëri to this study because his activities in Switzerland provide a fine overview of this late period of disintegration and uncertainty<sup>29</sup>. Once an Ottoman bureaucrat in Palestine and the nephew of prominent Albanian nationalists Samsad-din Sami (Sami Frashëri) and Naim Frashëri, Mid'hat Frashëri began his activist career in the years leading up to the CUP takeover of power. Through the publication in French of a number of articles under the pseudonym, Lumo Skëndo, Frashëri personified the dedication of Balkan intellectuals towards building their respective nations. That he abandoned the ideals of the Ottoman Empire after 1908, however, did not mean he gave up on integrationist models all together. Frashëri, for instance, was deeply impressed by Switzerland when he settled down in Lausanne in 1915. The country ultimately would become the political and legal model upon which Frashëri would base his ambitious program for a future, independent Albania.

As is well known, Switzerland at the time was the safe haven of most of Europe's intellectuals and would-be nation-builders. Abbas Hilmi, the exiled Egyptian Khedive, for example, met with prominent Albanians in Zurich and Geneva in 1915 in order to mobilize sympathy from about the only group left in the world willing to give it: his fellow Albanians<sup>30</sup>. In addition to those who schemed to defeat British intrigue in Egypt, other prominent Albanian activists, most notably the publisher

29 A new, authoritative study on Mid'hat Frashëri has been released in Albania which, nevertheless, fails to put him into the larger political context of the period. Butka, Uran: *Gjeniu i Kombit* (Tirana: Drier, 2001).

30 SNA 21/14254 Bar 20, reports on the Khedive of Egypt's visit in Geneva. In Bar 15, dated May 6 1915, Abbas Hilmi is reported to have met with Nomeddin Bey Vlora, a prominent Albanian who had many links in Egypt.

who wrote under the pseudonym Tourtoulis, operated out of Switzerland during the war. Tourtoulis, much like Frashëri, actively published in a number of European journals and newspapers and also lobbied European powers to protect neutral Albania<sup>31</sup>. What is particularly important about Tourtoulis is that he represents a departure from the tactics of his fellow countrymen. Tourtoulis was the only Albanian in Europe who appeared to actively engage the United States in attempts to protect Albanian interests. This foresight is key to appreciating the general impact President Wilson's ideas had on European peoples at the time and represents another significant fissure between Albanian activists<sup>32</sup>.

While in Switzerland, Frashëri began to actively publish political guidebooks for his fellow countrymen in the hope of shaping their still unrefined notions of what their country should look like when the war ended. Most conspicuous was his evocative publication, "Letter from a trip to Zurich" published in Sofia, 1916<sup>33</sup>. In this short text Frashëri took great pains to evoke the dramatic similarities between Switzerland and Albania, not only topographically but also socio-politically. According to Frashëri, Swiss stability and economic prosperity, despite its ethnic and linguistic diversity, served as the perfect model for a future Albania. Switzerland's success proved to Frashëri that Albania's own complexities and apparent "contradictions" (Albanians' confessional loyalties included the Orthodox and Catholic churches as well as myriad of Sufi orders and Sunni Islam) did not have to lead to the political chaos ravaging the region at the time. Elsewhere in his treatments on the Swiss model, Frashëri spent time emphasizing Switzerland's dedicated neutrality and yet formidable defense capabilities, a model particularly appealing for Albanians who at the time were being torn apart by the very system of alliances that Switzerland had successfully avoided.

In the end, Albanians such as Frashëri failed to win much sympathy from European diplomats whose interests in defeating the Germans meant Albania was but a bargaining piece for allied Balkan states like

31 SNA 21/14254 Bar 25 for interview of Tourtoulis in September 1915 issue of the *Journal Suisse*.

32 See United States National Archives at College Park, MD (Henceforth, USNA). USNA RG 59/M1211 Roll 1, 875700/6 To Wilson from le Comité Albanais, Lausanne, le 27 Février 1916. and USNA RG 59/M1211 Roll 1, 87500/10 an enclosed letter from Dr. M. Tourtoulis, representative in Switzerland of the Albanian Federation of the USA, dated 17 September 1917, Lausanne.

33 "Letra mbi një udhëtim në Zvicër" (Sofia: Kristo Luarasi, 1916). His fascination for the extensive educational system, the libraries and museums translated into an exalted admiration for Switzerland and how it could be a model for a future Albania. See Frashëri, *Mid'hat: Mbresa udhëtimesh* (Tiranë: Lumo Skëndo, 1999).

Serbia and Greece. Much like the significant differences of opinion between Konitza and Hima in 1903–1904, the realities facing Albanians during World War I led to a new approach to diplomacy noted above. The new tactic initiated by Tourtoulis to actively engage the United States proves that an interesting and perhaps telling break from past reliance on European powers had taken place among some of Europe's people<sup>34</sup>. That said, for the model as advocated by Frashëri, such particularistic agendas posed a serious threat to an Albanian “nation” that, much like Switzerland, had a number of contradictory loyalties that was vulnerable to outside manipulation. In the end, it appears Frashëri anticipated the political and economic chaos of the post World War I period in Albanian history, a period that saw the permanent separation of Kosova, the Malësore and Chameria from Albanian territories and the ultimate occupation of Albania itself by fascist Italy.

## Conclusion

What we learn from this brief overview of the Albanian diaspora in Switzerland at the turn-of-the-century is how much home politics interwove with the global theatre in which Switzerland was situated. Individual and group agendas often clashed in Switzerland. But as the dynamics of the Balkans spilled into the cafes and back streets of Swiss cities, so too did the serenity of the country provide the ideal arena in which new alliances could be made and guidelines for nations to be drawn. There is a general misunderstanding as to what role communities like those found in Switzerland played in the events that shaped the history of the Ottoman Empire and the Balkans in particular. It is clear from the preceding material that there is a great need to develop a more sensitive medium of analysis in order that we pick out the details of regional and personal factors which help shape the events under study here. By studying the Albanian diaspora in Switzerland not as a monolith but as an extension of a social and political matrix of contradictory interests and needs, we better appreciate the vibrancy of the turn-of-the-century Swiss cities, the contradictory forces influencing the political ambitions of men who lived in those cities, and ultimately the forces that shape the post-War world.

34 At the close of the war, suspicious of Europeans, local Albanians demanded that the US be granted a mandate to rule Albania in order to protect the country from Serbian and Greek forces. USNA RG 59/M1211 Roll 1, 87500/35 British Embassy, Washington DC to US Secretary of State, 6 November 1918.