

The fall of the Albanian - Chinese relations 1971-1978

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Abstract

The Albanian - Chinese relations in the years of the Cold War were thrilling as much as dramatic. The age of their flourish in the '60-ies, unfortunately did not last for long. The Albanian sponsorship that China be admitted in the UN with full rights was a test that Enver Hoxha should exploit for the good of the Albanian people. It was a historic and unrepeated opportunity for little Albania to escape the political and economic impasse since the breakup of relations with the Soviet Union in 1961. The incompetence of the Albanian leadership to understand the trends of the age would mark the following political failure of Albania and would influent in the total isolation of the country. It's not difficult to understand that Albania had historic opportunities to join the Western side but chose to align with the Eastern bloc. The beginnings are with sensational approach with Tito's Yugoslavia. After that the Albanian political leadership kept Albania under the umbrella of the Soviet Union and at the end with China. After the end of the relations with China in 1978, Albania paved the way of the total isolation. The secret visit of the President Nixon's national security adviser Dr. Kissinger to China in July 1971 was interpreted by the Albanian communist leader as a betrayal of the Marxist ideology. Enver Hoxha responded with a harsh and rude letter on August 6th 1971 urging China to not

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accept the visit of President Nixon the following year. This was the first major break in the relations between the two countries. Since then, the help from China for the weak Albanian economy would decline till the unavoidable break of July 1978. The methodology used in this paper is strictly comparative history analyzing the way diplomacy and politics should work to achieve the set aim.

Key Words: Enver Hoxha, Mao Tse Tung, Chou En Lai, Albania, China, USA, diplomacy, ideology

1. Introduction

The secret visit of Henry Kissinger to China on July 9th 1971¹ was a major success in the American foreign policy. Kissinger spent two days in China until July 11th discussing with the Chinese premier Chou En Lai the country's future in the world. When President Nixon made the famous announcement on July 15th 1971², four days after the secret visit, the shock in all the world and particularly in Tirana was with apocalyptic dimensions. How would the Albanian official policy react towards this great "betrayal" of Marxism-Leninism? The Albanian ambassador in Beijing was called in audience on July 17th 1971 by the Chinese premier Chou En Lai to be informed about the Kissinger's visit³. The Chinese premier made a short expose' of all the chronology events that brought to the secret visit of Kissinger, but said no word about why this was kept secret from Albania. Chou said to the ambassador that the aim of Kissinger's visit was to open the way for the visit of President Nixon in China⁴. The Chinese premier was careful to give to the Albanian ambassador the best essence of the visit according to the Chinese interest.

For Taiwan, the Chinese stand was clear⁵. China would never accept the normalization of relations with USA until its full recognition as the only legitimate government. Taiwan was simply a part of China and the external intrusions would never be allowed⁶. The problem of "two Chinas" or "one

¹ Kissinger H., (1979), "White House Years". London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson. p. 739.

² Ibid. p. 760.

³ Albanian Central National Archive (1971), F. 14./AP-MPKK, File No. 3, p. 1.

⁴ Ibid. p. 12.

⁵ Ibid. p. 14.

⁶ Ibid. p. 15.

China and one Taiwan⁷ was totally unacceptable for the Chinese government⁷. Kissinger had not directly accepted that Taiwan was part of China but has not denied it either⁸. China would be accepted in the UN, but not on American conditions (not firing Taiwan from UN)⁹. Chou En Lai asked the Albanian ambassador to thank on his behalf the Albanian authorities for the elaborated project to make China part of the United Nations¹⁰. But what was the Albanian project?

2. Albania and China; the impossible alliance

The Albanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nesti Nase had informed Chou En Lai on June 15th 1971 about the steps Albania would undertake to make possible the recognition of China in the UN. Albania has prepared a resolution and the Albanian mission in New York was instructed to contact the representatives of Algeria, Cuba and Zambia for this issue in order to be prepared for the definitive instructions¹¹. On July 23rd 1971, the Albanian diplomat in New York, Sokrat Plaka, came to Tirana to coordinate the strategy that would be used by Albania in the General Assembly of the United Nations. The ambassador had the idea that *"the Chinese part should be informed over the presentation of the request in the UN secretariat for the establishment of the China's rights in the day order of the General Assembly. After putting in evidence the role of our country [Albania] as the promoter of this issue, the Albanian ambassador informed the Chinese counselor of the Chinese embassy in Tirana, Siap Siu Fen, over the preparatory work done with the advisers and gave him two copies (in French and English) of the documents handled in the secretariat of the UN. On the first meeting the Chinese counselor was informed for three issues: (a) the discussion within the July 21st 1971 the right of China to join the UN in the order of the day, (b) the handling of every document (letters, explanatory memories and resolutions) and (c) the appointment of Albania's and Algeria delegations to prepare the documents. On the second meeting, was approved to make some changes in the secretariat on July 15th to change the text of*

⁷ Ibid. p. 15.

⁸ Ibid. p. 16.

⁹ Ibid. p. 17.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 17.

¹¹ Albanian Archive of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1971), File No. 150, p. 16.

resolution and to add the number of co-authors from 15 to 17 and the Pakistan which was added as co-author"¹².

It was unavoidable the fact that China would be accepted with full rights in the UN, but before this extraordinary step could be achieved, Albania or better say, its undisputed leader Enver Hoxha would make the next mistake. His senseless megalomania for the rest of world was something usual, but this time the Albanian leader overreacted. He should have been tenfold more careful because on the relations with China depended the Albanian economic survival. Enver Hoxha sent a long letter of 19 pages to Mao Tse Tung on August 6th 1971 saying that...

*"...we make known to you that we don't approve your decision to welcome Nixon in Beijing"*¹³.

The long letter by the Albanian leader was full of political demagoguery, senseless and a big step back in the relations with China. The Albanian dictator had a big chance to play an important role in fastening the ties between China and USA. But his senseless demagoguery and rude Stalinism obstructed him to think straight and to catch this golden opportunity to use his country as bridge for China and America. But he was against every diplomatic consensus with the US. This big mistake was to cause Albania a hard self-isolation in the years to come till the collapse of communism.

The visit of Henry Kissinger "erased" Albania from the map of China's interests. Enver Hoxha was aware of it even by the fact that no reply came from China to his letter. But to soften the relations with China, Albanian Resolution of October 25th 1971 won and China was accepted with full rights in the UN. According to this historic day the New York Times wrote:

*"The Tanzanians, who were among the floor managers for Peking, jumped from their seats in the front row and did a little victory dance. The Algerians, fellow cosponsors, embraced one another. The Albanians sedately shook hands. Others stood up, applauded, cheered. Rhythmic clapping beat against the walls. The vote on the Albanian resolution 90 minutes later was anticlimactic. The result was 76-35, with 17 abstentions (and without a single NATO ally on the American side)"*¹⁴.

¹² Ibid. p. 25-26.

¹³ Ibid. p. 51.

¹⁴ Kissinger H., (1979), "White House Years". London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson. p. 784.

3. The first tension in the Sino-Albanian relations

Albania gave a big contribution for the acceptance of China in the UN, having in mind the size and shape of the Balkan country. The approval of the Albanian resolution was the peak of the Albanian-Chinese relations in the beginning of the '70-ies. Not very often the small countries in international relations take big proportions. But the Enver Hoxha letter of August 6th had ruined everything. Aware of what has done, the Albanian communist leader tried to fix it but it was too late. He sent a second letter on September 1st 1971 which was an invitation for a Chinese delegation from the Central Committee to participate in the VI Congress of the Labour Party of Albania¹⁵. The response from China came after a month and a half on October 14th 1971, and was handled to Ramiz Alia with the regret that by decision of the IX Congress of Chinese Communist Party no delegations will be sent to other Communist party sisters¹⁶. This official response was like a "bomb" for the Albanian leadership. At the same moment Ramiz Alia after receiving these news, tried to get an explanation from the Chinese Ambassador in Tirana. The talking was not so much cordial and the official of the Albanian Central Committee told the ambassador:

"According to your communication I will transmit it to the Party Central Committee. But I want to express my opinion what you communicated to me. Of course, the decision to not send a delegation is a matter of your Party. But the arguments that you stated do not stand, they convince nobody. You say that among new Marxism-Leninism parties exists different views, or in one country exist two or three of them. But the Communist Party of China has not been invited in an international meeting. She has been invited in the Congress of the Labour Party of Albania. So, what is the point for the other Marxist-Leninist parties of other countries? According to what you said, that the Chinese comrades are busy and cannot travel abroad, I can't say anything, because it is an internal matter of your Party. But I will transmit to the Central Committee your communication"¹⁷.

Indeed the break had happened and this is proved even by the official declaration of ATSH (Albanian Telegraphic Agency) of October 26th 1971

¹⁵ Albanian Central National Archive (1971), F. 14./AP-MPKK, File no. 10, p. 1.

¹⁶ Ibid, File no. 9, p. 1.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 1.

where was read a simple statement wishing all the best to China for being accepted in UN¹⁸. From China came tepid radiograms about what was said about the Albanian resolution in the highest circles of Chinese politics¹⁹. The VI Congress of the Party of Labor of Albania was held on November 1971 where was spoken a lot about the country's successes and nothing about the absence of the Chinese delegation. Enver Hoxha was careful because wouldn't like to further aggravate the relations with China. In his secret diary he "strikes" hardly on China for the change of course from Marxism towards United States of America. The success of Albania for the acceptance of China in UN he has described as *"a victory of a small but invincible country against the most powerful imperialist one"*²⁰.

4. The break off of Sino-Albanian relations

The news that China wouldn't send a delegation to the Albanian Communist Party congress was widely spread. On November 10th 1971, from Warsaw came the radiogram that the politics there was thinking that the real cause of not sending a delegation to the congress was because the Nixon visit in Beijing²¹. In fact, the real reason was the offensive letter of Enver Hoxha and this was the first major break in the relations between two countries. The year 1972 would further testify the aggravation of relations between China and Albania. The visit of President Nixon in February 1972, influenced a lot in the change of Albania's politics towards China. The Albanian politics and personally Enver Hoxha, showed themselves very weak and not at all pragmatic to understand the great changes in the international diplomacy. Economically, Albania continued to be very dependent from China. The break of relations with the Soviet Union in 1961 had related the small Balkan country with the country of Mao Tse Tung. In his diary on China, Enver Hoxha was "careful" not to speak rudely for the country on which depended the economic survival of Albania. But, according to Hoxha, China was fighting to take the hegemony from the hands of the Soviet Union²². After the Sino-American joint statement, Hoxha wouldn't hesitate to write:

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 82.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 94.

²⁰ Hoxha, Enver (1979), "Shënime për Kinën", Vol. I. Tirana: 8 Nëntori. p. 582.

²¹ Albanian Archive of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1971), File No. 152, p. 123.

²² Hoxha, Enver (1979), "Shënime për Kinën", Vol. I. Tirana: 8 Nëntori. p. 646.

*"The Chinese have deflected as Khrushchev"*²³.

Beyond any doubt, the visit of President Nixon in China was like a hammer hit on the head of Enver Hoxha. His shock was enormous, but he couldn't verbally attack China as he has done with Yugoslavia and Soviet Union. This for a simple reason. Nobody would care about his power and country if he broke up with China. Now all the socialist countries were revisionist, and the only Marxist country in doctrine has remained Albania. The country now was standing alone and the "betrayal" of China was difficult to swallow for Enver Hoxha. The dices have fallen and was expected who would made the first step to definitively break the relations.

The year 1972 was tepid in the relations among the two countries. Of course there was exchange of delegations as for example the visit of deputy defense minister Qiao Kuan Hua who refused to give any kind of interview to the press²⁴. Indeed, his visit was to gather information if any change existed in the Albanian policy towards China and what impact had in the country the fall of Lin Biao²⁵.

On November 9th 1972, a delegation of the National Bank of China came to discuss the credits for Albanian agriculture²⁶. This time, the Chinese delegation was not inclined to fulfill the Albanian requests. This was proved in the diary of Enver Hoxha when he writes that *"The Chinese are not willing to fulfill our economic requests"*²⁷.

After the acceptance of China in the UN, Enver Hoxha began to think that the far Asian country would have been a temporary ally of his country. Albania would enter a phase where with many difficulties would survive even without China. The mistakes of Albanian politics would inflict the country a severe damage in the economy and daily life. Beyond its strengths, Albania entered a phase to fortify the country to be protected from the foreign "attacks". Indeed, this was a simple move to cover the internal failures and to find "hostile groups". Instead of taking advantage from international détente, Enver Hoxha and his clique plunged the country in a higher tension of class struggle.

²³ Ibid. p. 651.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 722.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 723.

²⁶ Albanian Archive of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1972), File No. 136, p. 9.

²⁷ Hoxha, Enver (1979), "Shënime për Kinën", Vol. I. Tirana: 8 Nëntori. p. 731.

The Sino-Albanian relations had helped in a sort of liberalization within some fields in Albania. At the end of the '60-ies and the beginning of the '70-ies the arts, the music, the theatre and cinema were taking high-toned dimensions. But this was very short. In 1973, began the first strikes on art with the Plenum of June 1973 when for the first time Enver Hoxha claimed that the ideological aggression precedes the military and economic one²⁸. In 1974 was to come an earthquake on the Albanian military. Beqir Balluku, Minister of Defense was to be called a putschist and traitor and was executed that same year²⁹.

Since the beginning of 1974 (25.01.1974), the Prime Minister Mehmet Shehu had sent to Enver Hoxha a detailed information about the Sino-Albanian relations³⁰. It is very clearly written that China and USA would tie very closely together in economic terms and America would supply China with modern satellites to observe the Red Army moves on the frontier³¹. In this information is to stress the courage of Mehmet Shehu who offers advice to the supreme leader to urge the détente between Sino-Soviet relations but China should not yield if the Soviet Union does not accept all the wrongs on China³².

Meanwhile, the economic situation was worsening. On January 17th 1974, the Minister of Commerce, Kiço Ngjela informed Enver Hoxha that the prices of trade with China for 1974 would raise and Albania would find itself in big difficulties. The re-exportation would raise from 2.3 billion rubles to 3.4 billion³³. Kiço Ngjela was reasoning that with the raise of prices, Albania was very weak to afford it and suggested to accept the proposal of the Chinese part that the difference of prices should be covered only with the raise of oil price and this only for the 1974. For the years to come the Chinese wouldn't accept this kind of payment³⁴.

The year 1975 was very important for the European and world politics. In July 1975 was signed the Helsinki Charter by every European country except Albania. More and more the country was sinking into an unprecedented self-isolation. The relations with China were reaching the

²⁸ Historia e popullit shqiptar (2009), Vol. IV. Tirana: Toena. p. 297.

²⁹ Ibid. p. 299.

³⁰ Albanian Central National Archive (1974), F. 14./ AP-MPKK, File No. 2, p. 1.

³¹ Ibid. p. 1.

³² Ibid. p. 1.

³³ Ibid. p. 5.

³⁴ Ibid. p. 5.

lowest point ever. In the international relations, Albania continued to support China. By Albanian request, China was welcomed as a member of World Olympic Organization³⁵. This movement was highly acclaimed by Albania but didn't help to improve the relations with China. A stronger move was required. In January 1975, from the Albanian embassy in Paris came the news that in the diplomatic circles of the country [France], was whispered for a possible visit of Enver Hoxha in China³⁶. Even in Beijing during a diplomatic dinner, the Soviet ambassador had asked the Chinese guest if it was true that Enver Hoxha was coming to China. According to the radiograms sent by the Albanian ambassador Behar Shtylla, the Chinese diplomat answered that for this issue is to be asked Enver Hoxha himself³⁷. Even from Belgrade came news about the visit of a higher Albanian delegation to China, chaired by Enver Hoxha³⁸.

From all the Albanian diplomats around the world the news about a possible visit of Enver Hoxha to China, was categorically denied. In his diary on China, the Albanian leader does not confirm such a thing. But Albania needed fresh economic aids from China. After long conversations by the Albanian ambassador, it was agreed that a high delegation from Albania, chaired by deputy prime-minister Adil Çarçani was to be welcomed in China on June 14th 1975. The aim was to make a fresh request for a new credit for the sixth quinquennial 1976-1980³⁹.

Enver Hoxha sentenced this meeting in his diary as very tense and as the beginning of economic pressure from the side of China⁴⁰. Adil Çarçani was sending daily detailed reports to the supreme leader about his visit. The information was very discouraging. China has agreed giving Albania a new loan of 500 million Yuen (225 million rubles) instead of 823 million rubles required by Albania⁴¹. In his report, Adil Çarçani said that the Chinese counterpart showed a very negative attitude and the allocation of such a small loan according to him, was not logical and without argument because previously the Chinese had declared that the power of China has

³⁵ Albanian Archive of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1975), File No 129, p. 14

³⁶ Ibid. File No. 131, p. 1.

³⁷ Ibid. p. 3-4.

³⁸ Ibid. p. 5.

³⁹ Albanian Central National Archive (1975), F. 14./AP-MPKK, File No. 6, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Hoxha, Enver (1979), "Shënime për Kinën", Vol. I. Tirana: 8 Nëntori. p. 107.

⁴¹ Albanian Central National Archive (1975), F. 14./AP-MPKK, File No. 6, p. 3.

arisen and the aid toward Albania was to be increased⁴². The Albanian delegation asked for the building of 20 new works but the Chinese have agreed only for 10⁴³.

During the negotiations, the Chinese part raised some problems about the unpaid loans and the problems of stock transport from China to Albania⁴⁴. The true drama was to happen in the meeting of June 24th 1975 between Li Hsien Nien and Adil Çarçani. The Albanian official tried to relocate the conversation into the Marxist dogma of mutual help. But the requests for China were unacceptable. Li Hsien Nien reminded Adil Çarçani that to comply the requests of Albania, China had to buy cereals from Canada and Australia, meanwhile Albania was situated just in front of Italy⁴⁵. Adil Çarçani was embarrassed and told to his Chinese counterpart that "the problem of loans postponement was seen as a temporary solution not as a way out"⁴⁶.

In a last attempt Adil Çarçani tried to gain more from China and asked Li Hsien Nien:

"Adil Çarçani: Once again to clarify our concrete proposals that the new loan from China for the sixth quinquennial 1976-1980 would be less than 1 billion and 200 million Yuen and if this is impossible at least we require 1 billion Yuen now, and the other 200 million in a further negotiation. Should we consider this definitive or should we wait another answer from comrade Mao Tse Tung?

*Li Hsien Nien: There is not going to be another answer. Our response as we said in our last meeting and in this one, is definitive"*⁴⁷.

On July 11th 1975 after the return from China, Adil Çarçani gave the following proposal:

*"In order to face the current situation we should call a general mobilization to exploit all our opportunities and reserves from our people's economy, relying only on our own forces"*⁴⁸.

⁴² Ibid. p. 4.

⁴³ Ibid. p. 4.

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 6.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 62.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 66.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 70.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 70

This would have been the devise of the Albanian politics till the fall of Berlin Wall: we build socialism with our own forces! The collapse of Albanian economy was unavoidable. The agreement signed in Beijing on July 3rd 1975 would force Albania to pay the loan in ten years starting from January 1st 1991 till December 31st 2000⁴⁹.

In December 1977, the Chinese declined to send their specialists in the works built with Chinese technology with the pretext that the conditions of their function were lacking⁵⁰. The other blow came as "gift" for the New Year, on December 28th 1977 when the Deputy Director the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries Shiang Tu, informed the Albanian diplomat in China Musin Kroi that the "New Albania" magazine wouldn't be published anymore in China⁵¹. The reason of this interruption was because the Albanian leadership had begun a defamatory propaganda against the leadership of the People's Republic of China and this was unacceptable⁵². The Albanian diplomat denied any allegation and responded that it was a Chinese internal affair if they wanted to publish the magazine or not⁵³.

But the real "torpedo" came from the Chinese note of July 7th 1978, containing eight pages. It notified about the total interruption of any help, economic and military, and the recall of every Chinese specialist working in Albania⁵⁴. Another justification for this attitude was the refusal of Albania to pay 25 bills of 10 million Yuen each, for the works built between December 1977 and April 1978⁵⁵.

To the Chinese attitude, the Albanian leadership responded after three weeks with a 29 pages long letter which was sent to Beijing on July 30th 1978⁵⁶. In the letter was stressed that China had acted with the position of a big power against a small country with the savage methods of Tito, Khrushchev and Brezhnev which, some time ago China herself has condemned⁵⁷.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 76.

⁵⁰ *Historia e popullit shqiptar* (2009), Vol. IV. Tirana: Toena. p. 305.

⁵¹ Albanian Archive of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1977), File No. 245, p. 7.

⁵² Ibid. p. 7.

⁵³ Ibid. p. 7.

⁵⁴ Albanian Archive of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1978), File No. 283, p. 2.

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 35.

⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 73.

⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 74.

5. Conclusions

In this process, Albania was interested simply in the ideological relations, not the essence of them. In China, after the detachment from the Soviet orbit and its acceptance in the UN, the interest dimension preceded the ideological one.

For the specifics of the communist regime that both countries applied, the ideological relations were institutionalized through the cooperation between the communist parties of both countries. China and Albania were geo-strategically very much opposed. China and the Chinese people were great contributors for the Asian culture, meanwhile Albania and Albanians were contributors in the Balkan region. Also, the weight of both countries was very different. Albania with only 28748 km² and nearly 2 million and a half of population, in the '70-ies was turned into a pettifogging country since it left the Warsaw Treaty in 1968. Albania and Albanians could have been an important factor in the Balkans, but nowhere else.

China was a world power even though not a member of the UN until 1971. With a surface of nine million and a half km² and nearly 800 million inhabitants and with sixteen countries around her borders, was impossible to relate itself to one single country. These are the reasons to analyze the Sino-Albanian relations and why they failed. Albania couldn't compare with China and China couldn't stand with Albania in its road, in conquering the right place in the world politics.

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