
28 November 1912-2012: The Day After the Albanian Independence, Open Lecture

On December 11th, 2012 in the premises of the Faculty of Political Sciences “Roberto Ruffilli” Forlì, IECOB-Istituto per l'Europa Centro-Orientale e Balcanica, Juvenilja Association and F.A.R.E – Forum Associazioni Albanesi in Emilia-Romagna, organised a scientific conference in occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Albanian independence. The conference speakers were: Stefano Bianchini (University of Bologna), Fatos Lubonja (Perpjekja), Paolo Rago (Marin Barleti University), Patrick Leech (Councillor for International Relations, Municipality of Forlì), Endri Xhaferaj (Juvenilja/F.A.RE). The conference was attended by more than 70 persons, amongst which “M.I.R.E.E.S – Interdisciplinary master in East-European Research and Studies” students and numerous Juvenilja and F.A.R.E associates.

The conference started with the welcome speech of Stefano Bianchini who mentioned the double-tie of the event organisation: the collaboration between IECOB and Juvenilja and the involvement of former M.I.R.E.E.S students. In this sense, he stressed the fundamental importance of the development of both junior and senior networks.



Patrick Leech, Councillor for International Relations of the Municipality of Forlì mentioned that organising such an event in Forlì is significant also because of the intention of the local administration to internationalize the city, particularly because we are moving towards an increasingly multicultural society. He added that every nation has its own myths, even England, being himself an Englishman with dual citizenship. Myths are usually related to dates, and in the English case the date is 1066. Moreover, he introduced two notions of nation. The first one is related to the definition of Ernest Renan, who defines the Nation as “a daily plebiscite”, so being part of the nation is related to doing similar things which other people are doing. Secondly, there is a more recent definition of Benedict Anderson's Nation as “an imagined community”.

Endri Xhaferaj continued with emphasising the role of Juvenilja and F.A.R.E in this anniversary, which is not only related to celebrating, but also to be able to contribute to the construction of a community life and community representation. He also emphasized the importance MIREES has in exchanging knowledge and experiences between students coming from all over Europe, especially from the Balkans.

Paolo Rago, author of the book “Tradizione, nazionalismo e comunismo nell'Albania contemporanea” concentrated on the historical, political, social and anthropological factors which brought to the declaration of the Albanian independence on 1912. He focused on the specificity of the Albanian nationalism stemming from a context of cohabitation of different religions in the country. In this sense Albanianism was different from other Balkan nationalisms because it was

more ethnically-bound than religiously-tied. Thus, it can be considered that Vaso Pasha's "Shqiptaria" is a *sui generis* form of nationalism holding many peculiar characteristics such as: self-defined and exclusively inside-projected, persistence of a clan spirit, preservation of intimate family values and old sediment notions. He closed with stressing that Scanderbeg was the only one able to unite Albanians and that Rilindja movement formed and elite-driven national consciousness, largely influenced from the *Arberesh*, who in turn were influenced by the Italian Risorgimento.

Fatos Lubonja initially focused on the difference of the terms "Albanianism" and "Albanity" when trying to explain the famous verse of Vaso Pasha's poetry "Don't look at churches and mosques because the religion of Albanians is ..". According to him, the difference has to do very much with two approaches of identity: a) essentialist approach of identity, "always already have been Albanians"; b) constructivist approach of identity, "always changing", in terms of Zygmunt Bauman's liquid identities. According to Lubonja, Vasa Pasha's attempt was to construct identity, thus the right interpretation of "Shqiptaria" is to be intended in these terms. He also added that Albanianism was not a single, but different movements: Orthodox arberesh movement, Muslim Albanian elite in Istanbul, Catholic Albanian elite in Shkoder. In this sense, the Scanderbeg myth which was originally a religious one, was replaced by a national one. Moving forward, the Communist ideology enforced the figure of Scanderbeg, by using a functional ideology, somehow in contradiction with the Marxist motto "The working class has no nation". Albanian national communism, as it was the case of the other countries on the right of the "Iron Curtain", was functional to building an ideology of power. This was the case of Stalin's 'Patriotic War' and Hoxha's 'National Liberation War'. Lubonja stated that there is a syncretism between Rilindja movement and national-communist ideology: glorious past, history as a continuum process waiting for the leader to go further to the 'promised land' and dark historical processes seen as an 'historical accident'. The culmination of this syncretism can be noticed when Enver Hoxha took *ad litteram* Vaso Pasha's words in 1967. Coming to nowadays Albania, Lubonja thinks that communist ideology is replaced with the ideology of National Europeanism. Hence, Europe is mystified, not seen in its complexities and crises, and it is perceived rather static than dynamic. The European rhetoric is used by the political elite as if they are 'the followers of the communist ideology of bringing the people to the promised land'. Official celebrations of the 100th anniversary were done with this kind of spirit. He concluded that what Albania needs today is the 'rule of law' and not the 'rule through law' and nationalist declarations.

At the end the participants asked very interesting and scientific questions to the invited panel which had to do with the relations between Albania and Kosovo, the Albanians between tradition and modernity, and the recent nationalist declarations of the Albanian government.

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