

The Problems of Secularism in the Albanian School System in 1920 -1930's

Dr.Candidate. Lorena (Gjini) Dervishi
gjini Lorena@yahoo.com

Abstract: *After the First World War, the internal situation in Albania was very heavy. Education in Albania developed under the influence Italians, Austro – Hungarians and French in areas where they had control during war. By creating Lushnja government, education problems begin to be treated with priority by the Albanian State. Thus the period from 1920 to 1935, characterized by a long struggle for unification, nationality and secularism of the school system. In this period, three pedagogical congresses were formed (1920, 1922, 1924) as well as an educational reform that will be entered in the history of Albanian education as the "Ivanaj reform." As unification, nationalism and secularism served to aid the emancipation and development of education in Albania's school system and society; for this reason, it is important to research, understand, and acknowledge this period. Many studies have addressed the problems of secularism and nationalization within school unification and their efforts have been recognized; however, we think it would be helpful to make a new analytical overview of these problems which manifested the development of education in the aforementioned period based on previous studies and research.*

The most important moment regarding the first secular (laic) Albanian school occurred in 1887, with the opening of the first national school in Korce (7.03.1887). Unlike other schools, students and teachers who participated in the secular school were not held to one belief or one religion. This was a considerable progress in Albanian's educational development. Secular schools of this time can be characterized by the fact that there was no cultivation or teaching of religion or religious symbols.¹(*Gjurmime albanologjike* Pristina 1988, p.70-71) In the first years of independence, patriotic intellectuals facing difficult economic and financial conditions aspired for an educational Renaissance for the opening of Albanian schools all over the country. Unfortunately, Albanians did not enjoy independence for a long period. The Balkan war began, and since Balkan countries were the war initiators, Albania could not escape without turning into an arena of war. By the end of the war, Albania was ruled by Austro-Hungarians, French and Italians. However, it is worthy to mention that the invaders took note of education in Albania.

The Educational Congress of Lushnja

After the war, serious effort for the development of education relates to: The Educational Congress of Lushnja, which began work on August 15th, 1920. 13 distinguished experts in the field of education and Albanian schools (i.e. Aleksandër Xhuvani, Ahmet Gashi, Ilia DiloSheperi, Gasper Mikeli, Thoma Papaphano, Ismail Anamali, Aleko Kondili, Dhimitër Mborja etc). It's president was elected Alexander Xhuvani² (Alexander Xhuvani was born in 1880. He studied at the Philological University in Athena. He taught in the first national high school, NormalenElbasan (1909). He fought for a national secular school for continuous improvement. .A.Xhuvani worked his entire life with love and perseverance for the recovery and progress of national education, the release of the Albanian language and the Albanian culture. He died in 1961.). On August 25-28 congress was held, in the main hall of the Lushnja school.

The main programs' issues included the following:

- The need for publication of textbooks as the singing books, the grammar of numerator etc..
- The issue of a common language textbook
- Publication of an educational magazine
- Detailed documentation of the school (daily record for each class, the number of record etc.)
- Assignment of traveling teachers (itinerary) in each county to teach children in those villages where there was no school.

Assignment of key terminology for various disciplines (then called technical corners) indicates that in the center of outputs has been the fundamental idea for the unification in structure, content, and method.³(*Historia e arsimit dhe mendimit pedagogjik shqiptar*,vol.I,Tirana:ISP,print."Nënë Tereza" 2003, p.397)

Since the beginning, it was decided unanimously that the new education system would be unified- same and equal for all schools in Albania, whether state or private. They would function with the same curriculum, with the same education program, with the same texts set by the Ministry of Education.

Specifically, it was decided that the highest degree of public education would be the Ministry of Education, which should have the educational council "*consisting of two tribes of Albania*"⁴(H.Koliqi,*Historia e arsimit dhe e mendimit pedagogjik shqiptar*,Pristina:Libri Shkollor,2002, p.345).

This should be done as soon as possible, in order that more schools were governed by national and knowledgeable people. In town, the classes were four or five, while in the village had three classes. In cities, the schools would operate "*urban*" schools with three classes over the elementary.

The school year structure was determined also determined at the time. Another important task for patriotic intellectuals was to protect Albanian schools division from religion. They decided the school's yearly structure must be followed by all Albanian children regardless of religion.

The congress decided that all private schools and religious community school programs operated by state were under the control of the Ministry of Education. In the Educational Congress of Lushnja, the problem education extension was also addressed. It was expressed repeatedly the citizen's request for school. It was decided to open universities in the country's leading centers such as Korca, Berat, Tirana, Elbasan and Shkodra.

Also, members of Congress were focused on eliminating illiteracy. Time restraints proved to be one of the leading causes of illiteracy, since most illiterate people were working during the day, Congress recommended opening night courses.

For the first time in this Congress, the teachers were categorized into five different categories⁵(H.Koliqi,*Historia e arsimit dhe e mendimit pedagogjik shqiptar*,Pristina:Libri Shkollor,2002, p.346). Also, teachers were responsible for keeping school records including: diaries, record books, chronicles of school books, the minutes of meetings, and the minutes of official duties etc⁶.(*Kumtari arsimuer*,no.3-4,1921,p.34).

From this moment in Albanian history, takes the modest origins and development of the Albanian school system held today.

The Educational Congress of Lushnja's decisions defined a path for the development of Albanian schools and influenced its unification, but ultimately couldn't change the situation of education within the confines of these times.

The Educational Congress of Tirana (1922)

In late May 1922, the Ministry of Education announced the news that in July will be held a Congress, which would take necessary action to eliminate "*many defects*"⁷(*Revista Pedagogjike*,no.4,1922. p.156) of school in education and culture.

Second Congress of Education began work on July 22, 1922 in Tirana. The meeting was opened by the Minister of Education, Mr. RexhepMitrovica.

A technical committee was formed, at the first meeting, composed of 12 men, who were set to report in writing the work done according to the program points at the general meeting. The committee's conclusions will be presented and discussed at the general meeting. If they receive the majority of Congress's votes, the decisions will be granted.

The Congress approved these decisions:

1. New system of 6-year primary school and relevant program.
2. Primary education shall be obligatory. The Obligatory education starts at age 6.
3. The elementary schools would be a 4 year term in villages. In those villages where there were large populations, could be placed primary teaching on 6 year terms.
4. Urban schools were removed and replaced with vocational schools which lasted 3 years.
5. Discussion of the establishment of infantshelters.
6. Publication of a pedagogical magazine, which will be in charge of teacher center. ⁸(*Historia e arsimit dhe mendimit pedagogjik shqiptar*, vol.I, Tirana:ISP.print."Nënë Tereza" 2003,p.388)
7. It was decided the collection of linguistic treasury and compilation of an Albanian dictionary.
8. Accepted draft categorization of teachers. ⁹(*Fletorja zyrtare*, no.24 date.30.7.1922)

The Congress of Democrats and laics is described as "a holy Congress" ¹⁰ (*Besa*, date.18.7.1932), which became the decided unit and neutrality of Albanian school.

Education Congress in Tirana (1924)

After the arrival of Noli in power, on August 12, 1924 the Educational Congress gathered in Tirana. 33 representative delegates attended from all provinces. During the event, debates took place, and often things were contradictory. Noli knew his continuity was in danger, yet he continued the work and passed a series of important decisions.

Such as:

1. Raising the educational system "in the national democratic basis"
2. Establishing schools "common all over the country and every point of view"
3. For the professional preparation of teachers to build "a provisional school"
4. To improve the existent situation before schools opening, before new schools were open.
5. Most state scholarships are awarded to those "student which needs to pursue educational branch"
6. Education is obligatory for boys and for girls aged 7-years
7. Where possible the establishment of infant centers for children aged 5-7 years.
8. Establishment of a female school and educational assistance for women's culture.
9. Stabilization of the situation in dormitories.
10. Establish a dictionary of the Albanian language.
11. Opening of half Gymnasiums (high schools) in Berat, Durres and Elbasan.¹¹(AQSh,F.MA,ds 23, no doc 7,date.21.8.1924)

During the Zog government (1925-1932) there was little successes in the development of education .Primary education was declared obligatory for both sexes from 6 to 13 years; changes were made in the primary and secondary education, creation of education changes in professional and educational programs, and the opening of schools in all female big urban centers was imposed.

When Hile Mosi controlled Albanian education in 1930, its programs created a complete to escalate the national efforts for a uniformed national school and laic.

The greater education development took place in 1933 when Mirash Ivanaj came at the head of the Ministry of Education. During this time got life the education "reform, which according to him was vital to education in Albania.

He was dedicated to his work for the implementation of "reform", but the impact of opposing circles and not supported by Zog ended "Ivanaj Reform", which basically had the purpose of education development, nationalization, unification, national and secularization of the school.

Ivanaj Reforms

Mirash Ivanaj, a name almost unknown to the today's generations, ranks among the Pleiades of intellectuals who contributed to the '20s - '30 for the emancipation of the Albanian opinion. Mirash Ivanaj was born on March 12, 1891 in the village BenkajTrepshit zone. In 1913, he began studies at the Royal University of Rome.

His father died when he was two years old, and the Ivanaj began facing economic problems, so he started doing various jobs to live and continue his studies.

In Italy he lived for 10 years (1913-1923). During this time he had finished two faculties of literature and law, being decorated with praise.

On January 12, 1933, Pandeli Evangjeli, presented to the king the list of members of government, where the post of Minister of Education was handed to Mirash Ivanaj.

For some time Ivanaj had been thinking of reforming the Albanian education and taking the promise that no one will interfere in his work, Ivanaj studied the issue of better-known state schools. After prolonged studying of the topic, he presented to the king the need of a mandatory nationalization of private schools. He advocated for Private schools to be accepted by the state and must be an associate of the state in new education.¹²(I.Gogaj, *Mirash Ivanaj, Personalitet i shquar i Universitetit Shqiptar*, Tirana: Erik-Botime, 2004, p.92)

According to new law reform, religious education was removed from the school curriculum and was free to develop in other premises. Ivanaj did allow the teaching of morality, which in turn was part of the lesson of life¹³(AQSh, p.295, doc.date.3.7.1935 no.439).

Ivanaj paid attention toward discipline in the school as a primary condition in its development. Even the problem of textbooks, in which he tried hard to reprint some important educational texts. He paid attention to literacy courses, asking teachers to teach volunteers, 4 times a week for two hours a day.

The Educational reform of 1933 was unique in its kind, with a pronounced nationalist spirit. Further, this reform aimed at increasing the scientific base of the Albanian pedagogical schools¹⁴(.Fatmira Rama, *Dukuri arsimore gjatë Luftës së Dytë Botrore*, Tirana: Argeta-L.MG 2005, p.18)

The closure of private schools brought disappointment to the leaders of these schools, especially within minority areas. March 11-12, 1935 held court on the issue of closing the Greek private schools. The Court came to a decision which presented consultative Council of the League of Nations, where the majority spoke in favor of opening the Greek private schools in Shqipëri.¹⁵(*Besa*, date.15.4.1935) Underground Albanian government to the International Court's decision and the Greek private schools were reopened. Therefore Ivanaj, who had declared he would not accept any interference in his work, once he had filled two and a half years on August 16, 1935 work gave dorëheqjen.¹⁶(*Historia e arsimit dhe mendimit pedagogjik shqiptar*, vol.I, Tirana: ISP, print. "Nënë Tereza" 2003, p.340)

And with his departure from Ministerial office closes and a significant chapter in the history of education.

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