

Italy, Turkey, and Their Public Diplomacy in Albania

Albania is a small country in western Balkans with a population of around three million. It is only 70 kilometers far from Italy through seaways, and around 1000 kilometers far from Turkey via land route, with Greece in between. Due to its geographical location, Albania has always been a target since the times of ancient empires to the WWII. It was invaded by Roman Empire around second century BCE and after the separation of the empire, Albanian territories became part of Eastern Roman Empire, aka Byzantine. No matter the fact that it was part of Byzantine Empire, Serbian and Bulgarian princes would wreak havoc on these territories and often invade them from the North and East. All this came to an end around the beginning of 15th century when Ottoman Empire conquers these territories. Later on, Scanderbeg would declare autonomy for 25 years and collaborate with Papal state, State of Ragusa and Venice. Upon his death, Albanian territories, as well as the whole Balkans, would be conquered by Ottomans.

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It was just before WWI when Albanians declared their independence in 1912 and with the help of Italy and Austro-Hungary, it was officially recognized in 1913 by the Great Powers after the definition of borders by leaving out half of the territories inhabited by Albanians. This help for independence was not something that they were doing for free or because they were hoping to get something in return. Austro-Hungary was interested in stopping a Great Serbia from being created. Ottoman rule in Albania was weak and Serbian forces often attacked Albanian villages and towns in Kosovo, Western Macedonia, and North-Eastern Albania. Even the port of Durres, the second biggest city was under their control. With an independent Albanian state and their role as a guarantor, they were hoping to stop Serbian expansion (Albanians were known to be great skilled fighters whom they could use in their army as Ottomans had done for years centuries) and even a Russian exit in the Adriatic Sea. Whereas Italians were involved in Northern Africa's Tripolitania region against Ottomans, they eyed Albania too. An Albania part of Ottoman Empire, if attacked meant an attack against the Empire and probably against all Muslims. As Muslims and non-Muslims lived peacefully in Ottoman Albania they couldn't use religious conflicts as a reason, so the only card in their hands was independence. After the independence, Albania was a weak state and an easy prey to be conquered. Actually, this is what happened during WWI and WWII when Albania was invaded by Italy.

Here we have the creation of the Albanian national identity as distinct from that of Ottomans that sees them as invaders and its intentions to find a place among European civilized countries, first pro-western alignment. Just to be conquered by Italy during WWI and then to be set free from military occupation, but Italian presence is felt everywhere in economy, roads construction, Central Bank, police etc. All this translated in a fast occupation in 5 days from April 7, 1939, to April 12, 1939 (the time it took Italian army to settle) facing little or no resistance. Here Italians are fast at declaring the Great Albania (that included some parts of Southern and South-Eastern Montenegro, Kosovo, some parts of Southern Serbia, half of Macedonia and Chameria region aka Epirus) in order to get support and legitimacy among Albanian. Later on, with the invasion of Italy by allied forces in 1943 this dream ends. (1) Germans come in and leave within one year. After these communists rose to power and declare a full breach of relations with almost all countries except USSR and China and later on with them too. With Turkey, diplomatic relations are restored in 1958 with a Legation and upgraded to ambassadorial levels in 1966. (2)

Italy has always sought to control Adriatic and access Balkans through Albania. So once Albania was re-opened to the world at the beginning of the 1990s, diplomatic relations were immediately restored at high levels and collaboration increased with dozens of agreements reached between Albania and Italy. Whereas Turkey did improve relations after the openness in the 1990s, they did not achieve a higher level compared to Italy. Despite a common past, Turkey seems not to have been ready to get involved in deep relations at the state level with Albania. This is due to the passive Turkish foreign policy. Later on, Albanian openness will coincide with the expanding diplomatic relations and interests of Turkey and their active foreign policy which mostly belongs to AKP era.

Attraction for Immigrants

At the beginning of the 1990s, Albanians who were under difficult economic conditions and free to move

chose to go abroad as immigrants in any way possible. Most of them chose the simplest and easiest ways: the land route to Greece and sea routes to Italy. Images of ships packed full with immigrants are still alive. This dangerous journey, that often cost lives of many people, was undertaken for several reasons as:

“For Albanians, Italy combines the attractions of a culturally preferred and geographically accessible country. To many Albanians living under the country's communist regime, Italy was a symbol of freedom and the West, and Italian radio and TV broadcasts were the most important way in which Albanians were exposed to the West. Italian is the most-used foreign language in Albania, and Italian arts and culture hold a clear attraction. All of these factors help explain why Italy has been sought out by Albanian migrants.” (3)

One can hypothesize that Albanians have more in common with Turkey than Italy or Greece, so there should have been a mass migration to Turkey rather than to the other countries. Considering here the religious brotherhood (Albanians consisting of about 70% Muslims) and the big presence of the Albanian community in Turkey, they should have been attracted more by Turkey. But, Albanians despite being majority Muslims, they were not actually that much devoted to religion. Those who migrated would be from among the youth, basically individuals who were born under the communist regime. They were raised with an atheist propaganda and the famous Marxist claim “religion as opium for the masses”. Also the religion had been under attack of state structures since the King Zog era until 1967 when it was completely prohibited, every practice. Religious activities restarted to be practiced in November 1990 but except the emotions of being free again, there was not much practical religious knowledge. Also the Albanians in Turkey were either belong to those who had gone there in the pre-WWII era or Albanians from Yugoslavia (Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia, and Montenegro) and the familiar contacts with them were lost since 1945. These is the theoretical frame, whereas there were practical reasons also. First, Turkey was geographically far away. They would have to go on land routes, passing through Greece first and then to Turkey, all this in an illegal way. Practically very difficult. Whereas one could simply pass the border to Greece and find a job there. Secondly, Turkey was not known to have a good economy and income in the 1990s for Turks themselves. So for Albanian immigrants, it was not profitable enough to go there and work, considering that the emigration was mostly due to economic reasons.

Impact of TV in Reaching the Public

The Albanians were very familiar with Italy even during the period of communism, mostly its last years. People could have access to Italy via black and white TVs. “In communist times, Albanian television sets could only and purposely receive VHF waves, which enabled people to follow only the Albanian national channel and the (often jammed) RAI 1 signal from Italy. Other foreign public and private television networks broadcasting on UHF waves could only be seen with the help of a special aerial, which had to be kept indoors during the day and stretched out in the open at night, and of a kanoçe (tin, in Albanian), an electronic device made secretly and illegally out of a couple of transistors, a condenser and a tin (hence the name). Although this equipment could run to the cost of a brand new TV set, illegal foreign television-watching became an extremely common practice for Albanians. Interviews carried out with the first Albanian migrants arriving on the Italian shore on the occasion of the March 1991 migratory flow revealed that 97 percent of them watched Italian television regularly. About 89 percent of those interviewed reported having learned Italian by watching Italian television (Dorfles 1991, 14).” (4)

Interestingly enough, there was no direct Italian state propaganda addressed to Albanians during communism or after it via TV. Basically, it would be the Italian TV stations themselves that would address Albanian public without a prior agenda or them being the main target. Actually Italian TVs public was the Italian one, whereas Albanians were a side effect of it. Later on, Italian series makers would sell the right of broadcasting for many movies such as “Il Carabiniere” (The Carabiniere), “Commisario Montalbano” (Chief Montalbano), “Il Octapodo” (The Octopus), “100 Vitrine” (100 Vitrines) etc. These would make entertaining more special, desirable and enjoyable. Whereas Turkey does not seem to enter Albanian market for a considerable period. They have started with serials in 2010, most famous of them Kurtlar Vadisi (Wolves Valley), Suleiman the Magnificent and Dirilis/Ertugrul. These series often depict state behaviors and state stances in various episodes. Many people see them as the extension of neo-Ottoman ideas. Being full of intrigues and action, these series are followed by all Albanians, whether Muslim or Christian. What makes it even more interesting is that in many scenes there are practices of Islam rituals and both Muslims and Christians mention them if it is something interesting otherwise they would just accept it and not discuss further. Many people nowadays are learning Turkish simply because of these series, by watching and listening them with Albanian subtitles.

Embassies as a Familiar Image

Embassies are the most familiar image that a state has in relation to another state and its public. How close are they to the public matters a lot as except for being representative bodies of the guest government they are also in close contact and touch with the public due to the services offered or not. Their geographical location, services they offer, the presence or not of the ambassador in local daily life, embassy's webpage; the information it provides and addresses to the public etc. do speak themselves regarding the level of public diplomacy conducted by the guest state.

Italian embassy is in a very good position as per geolocation. It is just 5 minutes on foot from the city center and is very accessible by means of transportation. Whereas Turkish embassy previously being situated in the so-called "Embassies' block" 10 minutes from the city center on foot, moved to another place to the suburbs of Tirana, a 40 minutes' walk, making it less accessible for those who might need to go there.

Turkish ambassador seems to be reluctant in actively participating in the daily lives of Albanian people or even organizing activities. Usually it takes other Turkish NGOs, Turkish state organizations, Albanian organizations or institutions related with Turkish world or researcher to organize activities, conferences, exhibitions and invite the ambassador to be seen in public. Whereas the Italian ambassador and embassy itself are more proactive in this aspect. They organize more activities themselves such as "Italian Culture Week", "Italian Language Week", "Italian Culinary Week" etc. and engage more in the daily life of Albanians.

Nowadays for embassies having an internet website is a very common thing. At a time of digitalization and internet, embassies' websites are a very effective way of bringing the respective country at the homes or hands of the people. Of course, this has been followed by both Italy and Turkey. But their websites differ in the information accessible. The Italian one is better designed and richer in the information it provides. (5) Whereas the Turkish one is different. There is an abundance of information. A lot of news about current affairs in Turkey, but very few no to say nothing that relates to Albanians except embassy issues. (6) As per the content, the Italian website provides a lot. First of all, no matter the fact that a big number of Albanians do know Italian, it is in both languages, Italian and Albanian. This removes the obscurities and informs the public in detail. Also, the information is up to date. Administrators keep posting news and other relevant announcements. But the Turkish's embassy webpage seems not that public-friendly. It is only in English and Turkish languages. Probably it comes from the idea that Albanians in Albania know Turkish, considering that Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia generally are very good at Turkish. This theory makes sense taking into account that the ambassador previously served in Macedonia as the First Counsellor. (7)

Nevertheless, this assumption is wrong as Albanians in Albania except having words in common don't know "en masse" Turkish. As for the English language, it is much of a compulsory second language in most the primary schools, high schools, and universities and serves mostly to the youth. But the lack of information in the Albanian language makes the work of the website ineffective. Coming to the content, what it has in is more or less news and updates from events in Turkey that would amount to propaganda, rather than actual events, news, announcements that would serve Turkish interests of affecting the people. Compared to outside links, other than the embassy, the Turkish one brings in fast connections with several other state institutions, whereas the Italian one does not do so. The Italian embassy gives detailed information regarding the level of collaboration between the two countries (Albania and Italy) by informing the public for various agreements reached and fields of collaboration. All these with the aim of making people benefit more from them, hence influence their choices and in many cases claim brain drain. (8) (9) (10)

All in all, the Italian embassy seems to be using virtual means of communication better than the Turkish one. There seems to be a lack of vision on the Turkish side. If Turkey wants to have an active public diplomacy, it is vital to restructure the webpage in order to make it more accessible to a standard Albanian citizen.

Scholarship Projects

With a weak economy, the minimum salary of 180 Euros and an average salary of 400 Euros, most of the Albanian students cannot afford studying abroad on their own expenses. (11) Due to the fact that the

education in these two countries is way better than in Albania, Albanian students are longing for getting an opportunity to study there. Turkey has its own program of scholarships all included, (Türkiye Bursları) under Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB), which itself is an organ under Prime Ministry. With this program they aim to have at least 50 Albanian students on Bachelor`s, Master`s or PhD studies. They first do a compulsory Turkish language course for a year and later on go with their studies either in English or Turkish. The intentions of Turkish side are that these students will not only learn Turkish language and Turkish culture, but they will furthermore interact with Turkish citizens and create connections and relations. They are seen as a future possible bridge between two countries that will serve Turkey as an inside contact. Whereas the Italian side does not have such opportunities. Italy does not offer scholarships for Albanian students under state institutions. The institutions that provide them are of course universities themselves. But they are not to be counted as means of public policy being that they operate independently from the Italian state organs and their agreements are with respective universities in Albania.

Cultural Institutions

As a form of public diplomacy that aims at creating cultural awareness in the host country, both Turkey and Italy have their own respective cultural associations. Italian Institute of Culture (Istituto Italiano di Cultura) is a cultural institution operating in Albania under Italian embassy, hence under Italian State service. Their mission is "to promote and spread Italian culture and language in Albania by organizing cultural activities to help exchange ideas, arts, and sciences". (12) They try to bring Italian culture to Albanians, to those that haven't had an opportunity to see it closely by going to Italy. Also, it is used as a bait for brain drain. They offer Italian culinary courses, Italian language courses, a rich library and other educational activities related to Italy and Albanians view of Italy. Also, they offer very rich information on how to study in Italy, the legal and procedural framework and a big list of universities to study at. This way Albanian citizens and especially students get more attracted to go to Italy. And those who go there get to be "Italianised" and in the future may serve as facilitators of Italy`s interests in Albania. Italian Institute of Culture has close collaboration with many Albanian institutions such as the University of Arts, Theatre of Opera and Ballet, National Art Gallery, National Theatre, National Library and National Historical Museum. (13) Whereas Turkish side does have more or less a similar institution. Yunus Emre cultural center was founded in 2007 and started to operate in 2009 in Turkey. Currently, there are two centers (branches) in Albania, one in Tirana (the capital) and one in Shkoder, north-west of Albania, an important center during Ottoman Empire period and currently the centre of Northern Albania. (14) Their mission statement is: "Promoting Turkey, its cultural heritage, Turkish language, culture and art; improving the friendship between Turkey and other countries and increasing the cultural exchange; making the related information and documents available in and outside the country for use in the world; providing services abroad to people who want to have education in the fields of Turkish language, culture and art." (15) These centers offer Turkish language courses at these centers, Turkish language summer courses in Turkey, calligraphy courses and ebru courses among others. At the same time, they organize competitions and cultural events that aim at reaching people and making these two centers familiar to people, hence spread the Turkish culture. Their influence can be seen in two ways: approaching those with a positive thinking towards Turkey and those with a negative thinking or prejudices. The first ones are reached with close activities and privileged status in activities. Whereas the second ones are intended to be reached with open to public activities such as cultural days, competitions and exhibitions. They are effective at reaching a limited number of individuals but with a better management of their resources and a re-structuring of activities and PR, they could do more. There are a lot of people who are willing to feel the "Turkish touch" but are not connected with these institutions so the scope of their effectiveness tends to be limited.

Aid

"...we might consider aid to be an extension of traditional diplomatic objectives towards the general public; underscore the advanced role of civil society in mediating between donors and recipients; and highlight the centrality of education, exchanges, and information in aid activities." (16)

As stated above aid sent from developed countries to those less developed is a way of not just simply aiding them but also influencing them. When it comes to aid Italy has been sending in Albania a lot of it these 27 years. One reason has been to ensure stability and development in Albania, hence stop massive illegal migrations and crime affecting Italy. Other reasons can be having a stable partner in trade and influencing it through this aid.

Italian Cooperation for Development in Albania present in Albania since 1991, with a financial commitment

of more than 750 million Euro. Current projects for development reach the amount of 240 million Euro that makes Italy one of the biggest international donors in Albania. (17)

What is special about this aid is that it does not come as humanitarian aid. Most of it, if not all, comes in terms of donations for investments. So Italy instead of giving Albanians fish has been teaching them how to fish.

Other than this, Italy has continuously been supporting security forces in Albania. During the 1997 pyramidal schemes crisis in Albania Italy insisted on sending an international peacekeeping troop in Albania of 3500 troops, out of which 2500 were Italian. This call was seen as an attempt of invasion by some, but still got approved and the international force led by the Italians helped in humanitarian aid distribution around the time. (18) Under NATO directives Italy (together with Greece) is responsible for the protection of Albanian airspace being that Albania has no military jet. (19) And just recently Italian party prolonged its history of donations for the army by donating 5000 Beretta rifles to the troops. (20) PAMECA IV is another project that involves EU as the kicker and Italy as the main contributor. It aims at assisting police in Albania. Under this project Italy also provides air surveillance during summer months in search of plantations of cannabis sativa as Albania is it has been a big problem for years. (21)

But different from Italy that focuses mostly on institutional aid and investments, Turkey has been focusing more on humanitarian aid, reaching the people.

Also, Turkey has been very active too in aid. This aid increased in amount, especially during AKP era. Davutoglu's "strategic depth" is a contribution to this.

"This doctrine particularly encourages recognition of the Ottoman heritage and Turkey's engagement with former Ottoman territories through empowering these assets with aid. Within this trajectory, the conservative political elite perceives humanitarian aid as Turkey's manifest destiny." (22)

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According to Senem Cevik: "As Turkey has been practicing a more active foreign policy, civic engagement and humanitarian assistance are playing a large role in contributing to this policy change. In this sense, Turkish policymakers have taken humanitarian responsibility as a priority where a humanitarian rhetoric meets with value-based policies. With that Turkey has been involved in regions that were previously beyond its reach. In the last several years Turkey has offered a helping hand to Kenya, Niger, Somalia, Sudan, Mali, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Indonesia, Uzbekistan, Myanmar, Philippines, Egypt, Yemen, Lebanon, Tunisia, Gaza, Iran, Syria, Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Montenegro where civil unrest, conflict, famine, and natural disasters prevail." (23)

This aid has been provided mostly by some public institutions like Diyanet and TIKA and by some NGO's like IHH. Diyanet has been focusing more on humanitarian aid in times of disasters and with religious activities. They have generously donated in building mosques. Currently, the biggest mosque in Balkans is being built in Tirana with the donations of Diyanet and its style is expected to be a mixture of Albanian and Turkish mosques' architecture. (24) TIKA, too, has been providing humanitarian aid, development assistance, but not only. They carry out some cultural and educational projects as well. For example, they renovate old Ottoman period castles and mosques. One of them, Preza Castle and mosque inside it were inaugurated by Turkish president Erdogan himself in May 2015 after TIKAs renovation. This castle and mosque were finished renovating one year before and were expected to be inaugurated at that time by president Erdogan, but the visit had to be postponed due to Soma mine tragedy. Despite being late, still it was inaugurated and the ceremony attracted thousands of people. Also, TIKA has been aiding the healthcare system by providing training for Albanian doctors and paramedics in Turkey, free healthcare in Turkey for dozens of patients, renovations of healthcare providing buildings, construction of labs, and social care system by providing equipment and furniture for elderly people houses, female shelters. Also, they have renovated several schools and provided cleaning equipment to municipalities. (25)

Turkey too has been assisting Albanian security forces. In 1997 it provided around 700-900 troops under FMP Italian led ALBA mission. (26) During an interview, Albanian military attaché in Ankara during

1994-2000 declared that until end of July 2012:

1. Turkey has invested in modernizing Albanian army more than 120 million dollars.
2. In Turkey 1647 military student have studied
3. 1000 troops have been cured

Also, he recounts Turkey's help in the international arena during 1997 crisis especially against Greece that brought its army to the border amidst its claims of Northern Epirus. (27) Other than that, this military assistance in material terms includes weapons, military transportation buses, armored troops carrier, troops transporters etc. Recently Turkey donated 9000 uniforms for Albanian police, uniforms which are of the same design and color as the ones that Turkish police wear.

Conclusion

Italy and Turkey have been readdressing the Albanians in the post-dictatorship era due to their old relations with them. Both of them characterize their historical interactions with Albania and Albanians with their own ways and special features. Italy engaged deeply at the beginning of the 1990s, but Turkey's engagement up to 2000s was limited. Albania has been left aside compared to Kosovo and Macedonia, two countries with a majority of the Albanian population. Later on, with the coming of AKP in power and the revision of foreign policy, Turkey started to have a more active involvement in Albania. New institutions that serve the new vision engage in activities in Albania as all over the world. In the last years, after being disappointed by Democrat Prime Minister Sali Berisha, Turkey and its leadership addressed more the new Prime Minister Edi Rama. With his engagement in Albania increased and now Albania is seen as a hub for Albanians. A strategic move: reaching the Albanian populated regions in Balkans through influencing Albania rather than establishing complicated relations with each of them. Different from Turkey, Italy has found it easy to pave its way into Albania and Albanians' worldview. This mostly due to relative closeness and EU aspirations of Albania.

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