

Skanderbeg's Activity During the Period of 1443 – 1448

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Abstract: The period of 1443-1448 marks the first step of the unification of many Albanian territories, under the leadership of Gjergj Kastriot-Skanderbeg, for the overall organization to fight the Ottoman invader and the usurper, the Republic of Venice. This union was realized with the Assembly of Lezha on March 2 of 1444 with the participation of all the Albanian princes, where the appropriate institutions were formed in the overall political and military organization of the country. Skanderbeg was appointed as commander and leader of the League of Lezha and Commander of the Arber Army. In such commitments the country was united politically and economically in the interest of realisation of a liberation war. In its beginnings the League of Lezha achieved great success by expelling Ottoman invaders in a number of cities and the headquarters of the League of Lezha became Kruja, the seat of the Kastriots. In an effort to preserve the territorial integrity of the country and to create preconditions for the country's economic development, the Lezha League headed by Skanderbeg had to go into war with the Republic of Venice, as a result of the Venetian occupation of the city of Deza, this war ended with the peace signed on 4 October of 1448. In October of 1448 a major war broke in Fushë Kosovo between danubian coalition led by the Polish-Hungarian Empire with the main military leader, Janos Hunyad, against the Ottoman occupation in Balkan. Only Skanderbeg was ready to join to the military expedition of Hunyad. Despite efforts to participate in the battles between the Danubian coalition and the Ottomans, Skanderbeg inadvertently failed to be present. In the final moments of the battle, Skanderbeg helped the Hungarian troops to whom they offered help and allowed them to leave safely and to go to Ragusa, from where they will be able to go to their homelands.

Keywords: Gjergj Kastriot-Skanderbeg, Assembly of Lezha, Janos Hunyad, The Ottoman Empire, The Republic of Venice, Sultan Murad II, Djuragj Brankovic, Pope Nicholas V

1. Return of Skanderbeg in Albania

November of the year 1443, for George Kastriot - Skanderbeg marks the year of turning for him and his people who call Epirus and Macedonia in terms of the geographical extent of its people, named as Arber. (The Arber is a political and geographical concept for the Albanian territories in the Middle Ages. The Albanian population in the Middle Ages was known as Arber)

The timing, manner and purpose of his return to his headquarters in Kruja has aroused numerous discussions in historical writing written at that time and thereafter.

The military event of battle in Nis of 1443 between the Ottoman and Polish-Hungarian military forces under the leadership of Janos Hunyadi is taken as the most appropriate moment that Skanderbeg had appreciated for the

abandonment of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment and take of his father's principality up to the year 1436.

In the second quarter of the 15th century, the Ottomans continued intensively their campaigns to occupy central Europe. In front of Ottoman conquests, European states appeared to be largely unorganized. They tried in this situation created like Venice, Genoa, Florence to take advantage of the panic spread by the Ottoman invasions, to derive benefits while maintaining good relations with the sultan, to deal freely with the occupation of the occupied countries by the sultan. The situation changed slightly when Hungary in 1442, militarily reinforced and elected Vladislav as king of Poland, and thus joined forces with those of Poland [8]. After some initial victories Hunyadi prepared the military plan to confront the Ottomans with offensive attacks, not just defensive, war. His main goal was trying to cooperate with the Ottoman-occupied peoples of the Balkans. The

Papacy also expressed interest in Huniadi and his offensive war against the Ottomans. Pope Eugene IV through the Catholic bishops of Arber, made contacts with lords such as George Araniti and even with Skanderbeg [8]. In September of the year 1443 George Arianiti attacked Ottoman forces on the east of his possessions and expelled the invaders from many provinces of Central the Arber. His victories influenced the political life of Albanian and echoed in other places [9]. In the south, Gjin Zenebishi, supported by many soldiers, marched through the outskirts of Gjirokastra towards Kostur, where his forces were attacked by surprise and were shattered by Ottoman army, Gjin himself was killed [8]. Otherwise, Skanderbeg apparently intended to launch an uprising after the Hungarian offensive had exploded so as not to be isolated [8]. Therefore, Skanderbeg, who had the charge of senior functionary of Ottoman Empire, that of Nikopol's Sanjakbe, departed with his spahi and jibali equestrians toward the Danube front, under the orders of Kasem Pasha, who was the Rumelian Beylerbe [8]. In October 1443 the Hungarians crossed the Danube River, penetrated in depth of the Balkans and began the "Long Campaign" that continued until the beginning of 1444. During the marching many volunteers joined the Hungarian army including here even the arbres [8] Hunyadi himself wrote in those days that his army was "growing day by day with many Bulgarians, Arbers, Serbs, Bosniaks [9]". On November 3, 1443, they bravely attacked the Ottoman armies close the city of Nis. The Ottomans suffered defeat and withdrew shattered. This case gave Scanderbeg the opportunity to implement his plan to return home. Upon returning from Nis, Skanderbeg reached in Fushe-Dardania, followed the Pristina-Prizren free route from the Ottomans, and then went down to the Dibra region [9].

Skanderbeg's departure from the Ottoman army significantly influenced Hunyadi's victory over the Ottoman forces at the Battle of Nis 1443. There are many opinions about the motives that led Scanderbeg to abandon the Ottoman Empire and settle to take into his possession the principalship that his father, John Castrioti, had until 1436. The scholars' motives went into the direction of Skanderbeg's purpose who evaluated the favourable political situation to begin his political and military activities to his people, who would fight foreign invaders and in particular the Ottoman army that was a great risk of that time. This moment is well described by Marin Barleti when talks about the battle of Nis that took place in the year 1443. According to him, "the Sultan sent Rumelian pasha and Skanderbeg with 20,000 fighters against 35,000 Hungarians. Opposite of them was a Hunyadi called Janko. Skanderbeg understood that the time had come and began to withdraw. Pasha was frightened. Together with his nephew Hamza, a young man of remarkable quality, followed Pasha's secretary and drafted a false letter to the Kruja governors, in which case he was designated as the new ruler, governing and taking care of the city [9], by which he was ordered, on behalf of Murat, to hand over the city of Kruja to Skanderbeg. With him joined 300 people, Skanderbeg made the plan known and returned

to Epirus, reached the Upper Debar, summoned the country's nobles, and told them his plans" [2]. Of the 300 cavalymen he had with him he kept few of them. He had previously sent the others to hide in the forests and gorges near Kruja until he got Kruja, then secretly put them in a castle to remove the Ottoman guard. Skanderbeg appeared before the Ottoman authorities of Kruja as reappointed to his task as soubash, a function he had exercised in the late 1930s of XV century [9]. After taking over Kruja, he allowed the Ottoman soldiers to leave Albania, including even the dizdar of the fortress, Ballaban, who after two decades would head the Ottoman troops to retake Kruja [9].

On November 28, 1443, Skanderbeg ordered the replacement of the Turkish flag with the flag of two-headed black eagle, which was the flag of the Castriots, hailed by all, with fiery cries, "Long live, our Prince, the Great Skanderbeg [9]". The Albanian population expressed their full readiness to unite with their prince. This willingness was also expressed by Skanderbeg himself who on the occasion of the liberation of Kruja on November 28, according to Barlet, he gave the inhabitants of Kruja a fiery speech full of political pathos. Highly praising the Arberians' great readiness to fight, according to Barlet, he addressed the Krutans with the lapidary words: "You, Epirots, could have found another defender of freedom, another perfectionist man to fulfill your goals and aspirations, because, in this country, seemingly never were lacking brighter minds [2]." You, known as strong men, raised in freedom, resisted so long under the barbaric conquest, did not bored until you saw me [2]". Indeed, Skanderbeg appreciated the readiness of the Arber population to fight for the freedom of the country and according to Barlet he expressed it with words: "Why do you want me to keep the name of the liberator unjustly? Freedom was not brought, but I found it here [2]".

After receiving of Kruja Skanderbeg headed toward the provinces of Mat and Dibra, which were part of the Kastriot possessions, where he addressed the population with a call to rise against the Ottomans [8]. In Debar, Skanderbeg found the population ready for uprising.

With armed forces that were gathered immediately, Skanderbeg, taking advantage of the further advance of Hunyadi, which was penetrating deep into the Balkan peninsula and entering Bulgaria, and during the month of december has taken in his possession, one after the other: the Petrela's castle, Guri i Bardhë's castle (White Stone), Stelush and Tornaçat in Debar [8]. Skanderbeg's fighters, meanwhile, crossed into the Dibra e Sipërme (Upper Dibra), where, in collaboration with the troops of George Arianit and Zahir Gropa, they liberated the city of Ohrid and the castle of Sopotnica (Stetigrad), raised in northwest of Manastir that had a very strategic position for controlling roads connecting Perlep and Monastery with the regions to their west. Along with Ohrid and Sopotnica, in the possession of Arber's fell even Struga, Kërçova (Kicevo), as well as smaller castles that controlled the trade routes in the Dibra e Sipërme (Upper Dibra) area [9]. Also, in the south of Skopje Skanderbeg for the first time took in possession the mountain region of

Mokra (Jakupica Mountains). He took control of the important Shkup – Kërçovë (Skopje-Kicevo) road, whose path runs along the Treska River valley [9]. At this time other Arber regions were also administered by Arber nobility. In Upper Arber the fortress of Jelica (Yenipazar - New Bazaar) and that of Zvecan should have been taken by the Spaniards, and the Peja region by the Dukagjini [9]. Stefan Djurashi (Crnojevic), with the support of Skanderbeg, expanded the boundaries of his possessions and made Zabjak the main centre of them [9]. In the Arber areas liberated by the general uprising of 1443 were the possessions of many Arber nobles. The most important was the State of Castriots, which rose very rapidly under Skanderbeg's rule. It was located in the center of liberated regions, extended to the Lezhe - Durrës sea line and reached east to the vicinity of Skopje [9].

2. The Assembly of Lezha 1444 and Albanian State of Skanderbeg

Skanderbeg succeeded in persuading the feudal leaders, demoralized by previous failures, to set aside disputes between them and to be united on a single combat front against the foreign enemy. He united the Albanian princes in the Assembly which was held on 2 March of 1444, at the Cathedral of Saint Koll in Lezha. The assembly was attended by the most prominent Arber's generous generals, such as: Arianit Golem Topia, Andrea Topia with his two sons Komnin and Muzaka his and nephew Tanush Topia, Gjergj Stres Balsha, Nicholas and Pal Dukagjini, Leke Zahria, Peter Spani, Lek Dushmani, Stefan Cernjovic with his sons: George and John. What is more noticeable is that in the Assembly was decided the unification – alliance of the Arber's forces by forming a bond between Arber's rulers. The unification would have the character of confederation or of an Albanian political alliance. Its chairman was elected promoter of the Assembly of Lezha, Gjergj Kastrioti - Skanderbeg. Another very important decision made at the convention was the formation of a joint army, which would be ready to take part in the war and, if needed, help the Arber rulers to protect their possessions. The general captain (*Capitaneus generalis*) of the army was elected Gjergj Kastrioti - Skanderbeg. To cover the expenses of military and war needs it was decided to create a joint crate. Its funds would be formed, *inter alia*, by the contribution of the money that the Arberian rulers would give according to the quota allocated to each.

Skanderbeg as commander-in-chief of the Albanian League managed to establish a regular army for a short time. Skanderbeg the leader of the League, was only a first among equals (*primus inter pares*) and did not enjoy the right to interfere in the possessions of other nobles, but, as it was known to the Albanian League, Skanderbeg later served to the interests of the Arber resistance and for this reason later will interfere in many domains of Arber nobles [9]. Historical reality became the best proof stone to this union that was not a mere connection of the rulers of the country, but had deep

foundations.

The Lezha League marks a crucial step in the history of Albania. It represents the first political organization of our country, the first unification of the provinces and their hitherto segregated populations that had lived a separate life. It was the first joint political organization that laid the foundations for the political unification of the Albanian people and the creation of a central government for all free Albanian areas, a power represented by Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg [16]. In fact, the decisions of the Lezha Assembly gave Skanderbeg a special position over other Albanian nobles, and these, as John Muzaka put it, "in the conditions of danger of Ottoman occupation they were obligated to obey him [16]".

3. The League of Lezha Enters in War with Venice

Upon the death of Lek Zaharia, the city of Deja, an important Arber's centre, passed into the hands of Venice. Boska, mother of Lek Zaharia, together with her two nephews Paul and Lekë Dukagjini handed Deja to the Venetians. Although planned for Deja to be taken by Nikole Dukagjini, he failed to do so, because the aristocratic nobles of the city of Deja have had their ties with the Venetian princes of Shkodra, so for this reason Deja fell into the hands of the Venetian princes of Shkodra, before reaching his army, which in this occasion occupied only the villages associated with the castle [7]. The fall of Deja at the hands of the Venetians was a great loss not only for Nicholas Dukagjini, but also for the League of Lezha. As early as in the summer of 1446 Nicholas Dukagjini launched fierce attacks for occupation of Deja, which led to the irritation of relations with Venice [9].

The conquest of Deja was a wedge that made it difficult to unite the northern areas with other Arber's territories for which Skanderbeg and the League of Lezha were committed in 1444 [9]. The Venetian takeover of Deja was opposed by Skanderbeg and he took concrete action on the Deja issue. Skanderbeg was in a very strong friendship with Lekë Zaharia. "You all know - Skanderbeg said at the meeting of the Albanian League - before starting the war against the Republic of Saint Mark, what a great love and friendship I had throughout my life with Lek Zaharia, whose death today, how cruel and sad it has been for this whole army., We had this agreement with our common consent that everyone amongst us would die first, and has no children, would leave the kingdom to the others, and they had sworn never to break this agreement [2].

Venice, fully recognizing the situation of the Arber princes, in order to discredit them and to discredit Skanderbeg had spread news that Skanderbeg, in order to take Deja for himself, had prompted the assassination of Lek Zaharia and now he was trying to alienate Arber princes with the Venetians. In the fall of 1447, assessing the situation as favourable, Skanderbeg called a meeting of the Assembly of

the League of Lezha and urged its members to declare war to the Republic of Venice if they do not return to the League the city of Danja. Skanderbeg at the meeting was forced to publicly vow that he had nothing to do with the murder of his ally Lek Zaharia. At the Assembly meeting, the majority of members accepted Skanderbeg's proposal to take the city of Deja, if needed even with the war against the Venetians. Only Peter Spani and Gjergj Dushmani objected this decision [7]. Skanderbeg's decision to go to war with Venice was influenced not only by financial factors (customs revenue from the city of Deja), but also by political factors. With conquest of Drishti and then of Deja, Venice held the two "keys" controlling the roads of the two Pultas (Dukagjini) and other northeaster highlands. Skanderbeg in this direction was also supported by Nicholas Dukagjini, who, as a member of the League, demanded to take into possession the castle of Deja. Skanderbeg has seen as an opportune moment to take care seriously regarding city of Deja, seeing that since Venice was engaged in war with the Duchy of Lombardy (Milan), it had no avail to open a second front in Arberia. But the Republic of Venice did not return Deja to the League of Lezha, and decided to defend it at all costs. At the end of the year 1447 Skanderbeg, along with most of the League's members, began military actions against the Venetians. Within the Arber units, that surrounded Deja, the forces of Nicholas Dukagjini were also included [7]. Deja's siege continued for several months. The Venetians faced constant Arber's attacks, and in other Arber's cities possessed by Venetians. Gjergj Arianiti had attacked the city of Durres the Arber forces of the Lezha Covenant reaped success in the fight against the Venetians. During the summer of 1448, while were keeping besieged Durres and Deja, Arber's Covenant military forces approached to the Shkodra area, which was Venice's most important possession in the Arber's lands. Crossing the Drin River, on its shores the army of the Albanian covenant clashed with the mercenary army commanded by Danile Juric Sebencin and reaped an excellent victory. After that they went toward Shkodra and Drishti [9]. The situation of the Venetian forces got worse day by day. To get out of critical condition, the Secret Council of the Rogates of the Republic of Venice on May 4, 1448, issued a decree regarding the person who could kill Skanderbeg and the Republic would give him a high and eternal reward of 100 ducats per year [7]. Also, instructed its governors to disunity local forces, notably to dislodge Pal and Leke Dukagjini from Skanderbeg and to urge the Ottoman army to attack the Arbers to create a serious military situation in the war on the two fronts of Skanderbeg's Albanian Army [9]. The pressure the Republic exerted on Pal Dukagjini and Lekë Dukagjini to instigate them against the Arber's League was considered a serious danger not only by Skanderbeg but also by the Pope [7]. For this reason, the Pope intervened (we do not know if was with his own initiative or with Skanderbeg's request) to prevent the disunity of the Arber's forces. For this mission the Pope commissioned Pal Engjell. His choice was not by chance. He was a cousin of the nobles of Dukagjini [7]. Paul the Angel

(1408 - 1468) was the progeny of the Duzi or Dussius family (Dusius or Dussius) from the nobility of the city of Drisht (bishopric seat since the VIII century), whose ancestors had embezzled since the XIV century the surname of the Byzantine imperial family: Angelos (Engjelli) [7]. Paul Angel was educated in Venice starting his career as a Catholic clergyman in the parish of St. Augustine in the Diocese of Treviso (Italy). In 1440 Pope Eugene IV appointed him bishop in the diocese of Shas (Suacium) and a year later as bishop in the diocese of Drisht, in order for Bishop Palmund to succeed in reconciliation between Skanderbeg and Paul and Leke Dukagjini [7]. In fact, Paul Angel accomplished the mission successfully. The Dukagjins, father and son, were persuaded to not be at enmity with Skanderbeg for the benefit of Venice. The Dukagjini severed ties with Venice, though they remained as a separate political force alongside the Lezha League with this diplomatic victory, Paul Engell became closely associated with Skanderbeg and served to Arber's warlord as ambassador and foreign policy adviser till the end [7].

The successes of Skanderbeg's army were seen with concern by the Ottoman Empire. In June 1448 the Ottoman armies commanded by Sultan Murad II, and at the instigation of Venice, launched an invasive campaign in the Arber's territories at a time inconvenient for them, because in that time Skanderbeg was at war with the Republic of Venice. With the main part of the Arber's Army, Skanderbeg and Gjergj Arianiti crossed by the Shkodra area toward the eastern provinces and rapidly fortified the country's castles as well as the gorges from which the enemy could come. In June 1448 the Ottoman armies of Rumelia and Anatolia, commanded by Sultan Mutai II himself, who was accompanied by his 21-year-old son, the Sultan Mehmet II, approached the eastern border in order to enter in the depths of the independent Arber's lands, in order to restore their Ottoman power and put an end to Arber's resistance once and for all.

The Ottoman army was concentrated on the occupation of the Sopotnica castle (Sfetigrad), which was the most important border base on the southern part of the eastern front of the liberated Arber's areas, which would open the way for the occupation of Ohrid [9]. Through the possession of the castle of Sopotnica, the Arbers had in their control very important inter-provincial roads (linking the Vardar valley and the Prilep and Monastery regions, which were under Ottoman occupation, with independent Arber's areas in the western part of them), such as road Velesh - Kercove - Rahovik (Debar) - Adriatic Sea, road Prilep - Resnje - Ohrid - Struga - Shkumbin Valley, as well as road Manastir - Resnje - Ohrid - Struga - Shkumbini Valley [9]. The important geographical position of Sopotnica for the possession of inter-coastal roads led Sultan Murat II to use all his military might to retake it. The great war took place in the castle of Sopotnica.

Therefore, the war for Sopotnica is widely reflected in Barleti's work on Skanderbeg, as well as by Byzantine and Ottoman chroniclers and historians, and even in Arberian and

Slavic folk songs. The Byzantine chronicler Leonik Halkokondili, as the earliest source talking about this event, mentions the castle named Sfeti, near the castle of Sopotnica. Marin Baleti, on the other hand, calls Sfetigrad (Slavic Holy City), a name associated with the many monasteries and churches in the Sopotnica region. While to the data of Oruçi, and under his influence the other Ottoman chroniclers and historians, the name of the castle is confused with that of Koxhaxhik. Koxhaxhik Castle was located on the road along the river Drini i Zi and maintained a secondary provincial road, Struga - Rahovnik (Debar) and for the capture of such a castle, without strategic importance, could not engage all military forces of the Ottoman Empire [9].

The resistance from inside the Sopotnica castle was led by the priest from Mati, Pjetër Perlati, while from the outside of the castle, the attacking military forces of Skanderbeg and Gjergj Arianiti were operating, which caused significant losses to the Ottoman military forces. The resistance of Sopotnica garrison continued for as long as the Ottomans managed to discover and break down the castle's supply channel with potable water, which worsened the state of Arber's resistance [9]. The thirst forced the garrison of the castle to start negotiations with the Sultan and to accept his offer to leave freely with their weapons with condition to surrender the castle. After nearly three months of fighting in August 1448 Sopotnica fell into the hands of the Ottomans [9]. The fall of Sopotnica fortress was a severe loss for the Arber's fortification system. However, its fall showed to Skanderbeg the damage he suffered from the war on two fronts. However, news of military preparations against the Ottomans, initiated by the Hungarian army under the leadership of J. Huniadi, forced the Ottoman army to stop the war and orient itself to be confronted with Huniadi, without continuing the invasive attacks on Western Arber and had as main purpose a total defeat of Arber resistance. After the Ottoman troops left, Skanderbeg returned to the front of the war against Venice, in an attempt to retake Deja in his control. In the current situation, the Lezha Covenant convened the Assembly and decided to join Janos Hunyadi's forces [7]. For this reason, in front of the prospect of successfully developing a joint Arber-Hungarian campaign, Skanderbeg decided to abandon the siege of Deja and normalize relations with the Republic of Venice.

The peace was signed on October 4 of 1448 at the military camp of Skanderbeg near Lezha (in exercitu magnifici Scanderbeg apud Alexium) [15] where other lords of the country had also gathered, apparently they were members of the Lezha Covenant. However, the Albanian side here was represented by Skanderbeg and Nicholas Dukagjini, accompanied by Andrea, the bishop of Arberia, and by George Pellini, abbot of St. Mary of Rotec, who at this time served as Chancellor of Skanderbeg for relations with Signoria [15]. The Republic was represented by the Venice proveditor in Albania, Antonio Venerio, and Pal Loredani, the Count and the Venetian captain of Shkodra and the general provident in Albania [15]. According to the treaty of 4 October 1448, Deja remained in Venice possession, and the

Republic provided Scanderbeg and his heirs (i.e. Skanderbeg only and no other lords) with a pension of 1,400 ducats a year, which would be paid the day of St. Miter (October 26) every year; exempted from the customs duty of Durres 200 salt-loaded horses per year; granted George Arianiti some commercial privileges he previously enjoyed in Durres; guaranteed refuge in Venetian land if Skanderbeg and his allies were expelled from Albania by their enemies; gave two scarlet clothes per year to Scanderbeg's (al perfato signor Scanderbego agni anno veste do de scarlatin); whereas Skanderbeg, in addition to giving up of Danja in favor of Venice and the lands he occupied on the right bank of the Drin River, would give to Signoria, as a homage, two hunting dogs and two falcons a year (do levrieri et do astori mudadi, come se soleva far per antiqua usanza) [15].

At the end of the text of the treaty it is stated that in the camp of Skanderbeg the princes of Arberia-Albania (i signori de l'Albania) decided that Skanderbeg should leave as soon as possible and with a large army to join to Janos Hunyadi in the campaign that he was taking against the Ottoman armies behind his back. For this reason, the Arber commanders asked the Signoria to give them, within 15 days, the annual pension of 1400 ducats [15].

4. The Second Battle of Kosovo 1448 and Skanderbeg

Among the most important international events of the 15th century is undoubtedly the Second Battle of Kosovo (1448). This battle was between the two major powers — the largest empires of that time, the Ottoman Empire and the Polish-Hungarian Empire. The significance of this war for the history of the Albanian people is that it took place in the center of Dardania, in Kosovo, and that through this international event can be clearly understand the role that the Arbers had at that time, headed by Skanderbeg [11].

Janos Hunyadi had the role of king of Hungary since 1446 (replacing the infant king Ladislav Pathumsi) and could now make a revenge the Ottomans over the defeat suffered at the Battle of Varna in 1444 Since 1447 Hunyadi has been trying to form an alliance. He asked support from Venice, the king of Aragon and Naples, but such attempts failed. They were unwilling to embark on uncertain warfare adventures, or Venice made fruitful deals with the sultan who secured Venice free trade in the Levant [11]. The Republic of Ragusa helped the Hunyadi expedition with money [11]. The Holy See wanted to postpone this expedition for later [11]. Hunyadi also sought allies from the Balkan rulers. The only one was Skanderbeg who responded call of Hunyadi to military campaign against the Ottomans [11]. According to chroniclers Hunyadi sent envoys to Skanderbeg who accepted and was completely agreed to cooperate with him [14]. The "Raguzian Chronicle" of Juno Resti talks about an Albanian-Arberian alliance. In a note dating back to 1447, Skanderbeg was described as "the prince of Epirus" and that "this Albanian prince had become a rock where all Ottoman

attempts to harm Christianity collided and crushed" (Questo principe Albanese era divenuto lo scoglio nel quale naufragavano tutti li sforzi Ottomani diretti a danno della cristianita) [11]. For this reason, in another chronicle, one year later (1448) for Huniadi and Skanderbeg J. Resti describes as "the two most powerful Christian champions of those times" (li piu famosi campioni cristiani di quei tempi), related to an agreement to join Slavonia and to launch from there a joint campaign against the Ottoman armies [14]. At that time, Hunyadi had also addressed to the Raska despot, Djurag Brankovic, who replied "that he was tied to a peace deal with the Porte (Ottoman Sublime Porte)". He had no desire to rise against the Sultan, whose faith he bought, because he knew that relations with Sultan were more important than association with the Hungarian Court. The Serbian despot refused to participate in the Battle [10]. On 16 April 1446, two letters were sent from Ragusa, one toward the Hungarian Barons and the other toward the Pope of Rome, with which Council conveyed Skanderbeg's wish for an alliance with Hungary [7]. Laonik Halkokondil, a contemporary of these events, points out that Hunyadi sent representatives to Skanderbeg and to Gjergj Aranit that was known as prominent Albanian ruler, intending to join them in a previously agreed arrangement [3]. Regarding Skanderbeg's preliminary alliance with Hunyadi, the historian of the royal court of Matijas Corvin (son of Hunyadi and king of Hungary in 1458-1490), also informs us historian Antonio Bofin. According to Antonio Bofin, the military alliance between the Hungarians and Skanderbeg (Sandorbegum, Albanesem Principem) was concluded shortly before the campaign of 1448 began (*litteris vexare quocum adversus Turcam aaulo ante foetus cercusserat*) [7]. According to the agreement, when the Hungarians will attack from the North, he "Sandorbegos" would attack the Turks from the Illyrian areas (*ille al Illyrico*). This is believed to be the reason why the Hungarians would not march, as in the years 1443 and 1444, from the Southeast, but from the South through Serbia and Kosovo [7].

Thus, until Sultan Murad II attacked Albania in July 1448 with a large army in the war against Skanderbeg, Hunyadi saw this as an opportune moment to take the course of the Ottoman fighting. He gathered an army of about 50,000 soldiers, mostly Hungarian, and small Vlach (Roman) units, as well as German and Czech mercenaries [14]. The penetration of the Hungarian army into Serbia was prevented by Djuradj Brankovic, who was in vassal relations with Sultan Murad II. Being loyal to Murad II, Djuradj Brankovic had succeeded in informing Murad II in the army camps of Huniadi, through his agent network, about the army officers led by Janos Hunyadi [14].

By the end of September 1448, Hunyadi entered Serbia, neglecting Gjergj Brankovic at all, marching along the Morava valley. During the penetration of the Hunyadi army through Raska, Gjergj Brankovic announced to Sultan Murat II giving him secret information on the composition of the Huniadi's army. That information's were sent through Pascual de Sorgos, who was in the service of Gjurgj Brankovic.

Gjergj Brankovic had had earlier reports of Skanderbeg and Hunyadi contacts and had received them through his delegate Pasquale de Sorgo, a generous ragusian who had stayed in the Hungarian camp. Sorgo had gone to talk about negotiations with Hunyadi three times but had not reached a co-operation agreement [4]. From a letter dated on September 5, 1448, sent by Sorgo from the Hunyadi camp, we understand that Albanians will also participate in the Second Battle of Kosovo [5]. "... Selgianeche Turchus suo cum exercitu potimo ordine paratus est Panones vero, qiu et Hungari vicitantur, Appolinique el Transilvani una simul et Albaneses unanimiter sancto patri fidelitatem iuvavere [4]." This representative appears to us as the main suspect who transmits information to Brankovic about Hunyadi's intentions, which he then transmits to Murat II [4]. A letter dated on 11 September 1448 sent by Pasqualis Junii de Sorgo to Brankovic details the state of the Hunyadi army. In Sorgo's report was also included even information that Hunyadi had reached the Skanderbeg emissaries who had promised him 2000 soldiers [15]. Sultan Murat II, who was well informed about the movements of the Hunyadi army, withdrew from the siege of Kruja he had planned in time and gathered his army to be ready.

At the beginning of September 1448, Hunyadi was in the town of Kovin opposite of Smederevo city, where the headquarters of Gjergj Brankovic was located. To the Hungarian forces were also joined even the Duke of Vojvodina, Dani, with 8,000 warriors as well as some 200 Czech howitzers artillery and some German volunteers. Among Huniadi's soldiers was even Daud, who pretended the throne of sultan. Also, as a participant in the Second Battle of Kosovo, is also mentioned a Croat of the noble De Luka family [13].

From Kovini Huniadi, during the September of 1448, had sent to Pope Nicholas V several letters in a row, asking for more help from him. The pope suggested that the expedition be postponed for the next year, but Hunyadi reasoned that he was obliged to fight because the war had been imposed to him. Hunyadi, in need of allies, tried to persuade Gjergj Brankovic to join them in the common struggle but without success. So, on 28 September he went toward south with about 24,000 Hungarians, Croats, Romanians, Czechs to meet in the Field of Kosovo with Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg and to attack together Murat II. Gjergj Brankovic decided to not take part in the Hunyadi's expedition, especially since he wanted to maintain his vassalship with the Ottomans and given the previous not good relations with Hunyadi. In fact, Gjergj Brankovic previously has had deep discords with Hunyadi over some properties in southern Hungary, which Janoshi had occupied from him, after Gjergj Brankovic had accepted Ottoman vassality [13]. Hunyadi, crossing the Danube near of Kovin, along the Morava valley reached Krushevc and from there through Kopaonik and went toward the Toplica valley to reach Sitnica near Pristina, exactly where the First Kosovo Battle of 1389 took place.

Hunyadi must have arrived in Fushë e Kosovës in mid-September 1448 and has stopped there, either to rest his

troops from a few weeks' journey or to wait for Skënderbeg to meet there [13]. According to the records of Matej Mazreku in the year of 1762, Hunyadi had also arrived in Janjevo, where as a sign of gratitude to God for his victories, he had participated in Mass in the church of St. Nicholas. For his stay in Janjevo the folk tradition had kept this memory alive for centuries [13].

Skanderbeg despite numerous obligations and commitments to the Ottoman occupation in Albania at this time, where he was in front of possible Ottoman expedition to Dibra, which were also encouraged by Venice due to the conflict with Danja. Skanderbeg with his own forces about 1200 to 1500 people, as soon as he received the news about the purpose of Hunyadi, interrupted the expedition to Debar and headed to Kosovo. Skanderbeg's purpose was to follow the sultan and to help Hunyadi [13].

On October 17 of 1448, Hunyadi's army was confronted by a large front of Ottoman forces in almost the same area where another famous battle had taken place 59 years earlier.

Hunyadi and his coalition were awaiting the arrival of Skanderbeg and the Arber's army. There are views that Murat II, fearing a coalition, had preferred peace to Hunyadi, promising him 100,000 ducats as reward and compensation for military spending if he gave up of expedition, but Hunyadi had refused. On October 17 of 1448 several small conflicts took place between Hungarian and Ottoman troops. In this case, it is noted that Hunyadi's vanguards captured a Turkish and sent him to see the military camp, especially the large cannons of the Hungarian army and then let him go free, in order to inform the sultan of the Hungarian force and at the same time to demoralize the Osman army.

The decisive battle took place on 18 October of 1448. The competitor of the Ottoman throne, Dauti, who was in coalition with Hunyadi, had proposed that he would not stop the fight even at night, especially against the Janissaries, claiming that they would run away and would be broken down easily. Hunyadi accepted the proposal and attacked the Janissaries at night, but they did not run away but responded successfully. The next morning on 19 October of 1448, the battle began from the right side of the Christians and the left of Ottomans. In the battle was killed Ivan Sekeli (Hunyadi's grandson) who fought valiantly. His death is said to have had a negative effect on moral of Christians. Vojvoda Dan of Wallachia was handed over to the sultan.

The disorganized Hunyadi in retreat through Serbia, toward Danube, was captivated and handed to Gjergj Brankovic, who imprisoned him [11]. According to Giacomo di Luccari data, Gjergj had ordered to drown Hunyadi in the Resava River, and only after the intervention of Pasqual Sorgos, who was the emissary of the despot and ambassador Damiano Giorgi, he had survived [11].

This means that Skanderbeg was not in the arena of war development. But the truth is that Skanderbeg was headed to the front of the war. About 20 miles from the Kosovo Field, Skanderbeg encountered the shattered Hungarian army fleeing from battlefield. Skanderbeg encountered obstacles as Gjergj Brankovic closed all roads and paths, with the sole

purpose of preventing the unification of these forces with those of Hunyadi, on the common front against his "son-in-law" Murad II. Therefore, in order not to be left unpunished for this crime, as Barleti writes, Skanderbeg had attacked the lands ruled by Gjergji and had devastated a part of them [2]. Skanderbeg points out Barleti offered food and shelter to the defeated Hungarian and Polish military troops. Pasta, helped them transport them by boat to the city of Ragusa, from where they were able to return to their homeland [2]. According to historian Franc Babinger 17,000 Hunyadi army men were killed, Hungarians. The Ottoman losses, according to this author, were twice as big [12].

In historiography about this important battle was usually raised the question of Skanderbeg's delay in taking part in the battle because of negotiations with Venice [13]. However, if we rely on the agreement of October 4, 1448 between Skanderbeg and Venice, where Skanderbeg hastily sought a peace too went to the aid of the Hunyadi coalition. We can assume that Skanderbeg and the delegates of Hunyadi had agreed that the battle would begin on October 19, always keeping in mind the request of Skanderbeg, who on October 4 of 1448 requested 15 days in advance the 1400 ducats by Venice. However, it is known that the battle began on October 17 and ended on October 19, when Skanderbeg also appeared in Kosovo. Apparently, Brankovic information's forced him to go to war prematurely, and so the defeat took place [11]. So all the merits for Hunyadi's defeat goes to Gjergj Brankovic's betrayal and not at all to Skanderbeg's delay. Because at the time when Hunyadi was expecting the Skanderbeg's reports in Fushë Kosovo, Murad II who had been informed of all this by Djuragj Brankovic, had forced Hunyadi to enter into the war prematurely [11].

All that is important to say about the Second Battle of Kosovo in 1448, is that this Battle is an "alliance" of peoples led by the Huns of Hungary where besides the Hungarians, Poles, Romanians, Germans, Czechs and others participated, the data of the time announce that the Albanians also participated in the alliance.

It is interesting to note that Serbian historiography gives almost no importance to this event. In a few works it is said about the Battle, even those data are passed in two or three lines, and what is important is that in many historical works when the Middle Ages are studied, this Battle is not even mentioned at all. While for the First Battle of Kosovo 1389 hundreds of studies have been written, while for the issue in question the lack of studies for the event stands out.

Regarding the data we provided for the development of the Second Battle of Kosovo, we must say that Serbian historiography deliberately avoided a more detailed study of the event given the vassal and good relations of Gjergj Brankovi, the ruler of Raska at the time with the sultan, who in addition to the secret information given to the sultan, he, caused obstacles that made it difficult for the coalition army to pass through his territories, made him against the coalition of Christian peoples (alliance) led by Janos Hunyadi-at the same time made him fight on the opposite side of the other peoples of the Balkans, who were struggling for liberation

from the Ottomans. Apparently due to *erergj* Brankovi marrëdhën's relations at that time with the Ottoman sultans and family marriages, Serbian historiography apparently will not deal with this important historical event, but tries to ignore important historical events, an issue that does not happen with the case of the First Battle of Kosovo, where they try to treat it as special to Serbian history.

The documents of the time related to the Battle of Kosovo in 1448 also inform about the number of armies participating in the Battle. It is said that Sultan Murat II had marched towards Bulgaria in Sofia to assemble his army, also expecting forces from the lands of Asia and Europe (Edirne). Thus Ottoman sources report at least 50,000-60,000 troops [16]. Meanwhile, it is understood in the western chronicles, the number of the Ottoman army turns out to be increased to 150,000 soldiers [1]. The chronicler P. Sorgo gives the number of the Christian army to the figure of 72,000 soldiers [14]. An approximate number for the composition of the Hunyadi army is also offered by the historian of the humanistic period Enea Silvio Piccolomini, who according to him the Christian army consisted of 70,000 cavalries and 2,000 others. Ragusa historians J. Turoci says the Christian army participated with 24,000 soldiers; Bonifini 22,000 soldiers, while Venetian sources indicate 45,000 soldiers. In the first place here is important the figure of the number of the Christian army which, according to him, had 72,000 soldiers. According to Halkokondiliot, Hunyadi's army had 40,000 infantries, 7,000 cavalries, and 2,000 others [14].

But for this important event, researcher N. Malcolm writes: "This Second Battle of Kosovo is one of those events that could have changed the history of the Balkans. If it is the truth that the battle lasted three days, then this is an indication that the forces of both sides were almost equal [14]. The arrival of Skanderbeg, who had experience of the anti-Ottoman war and had reaped considerable success, would have been decisive. If the Turkish army had failed in this battle, "the whole history of the Balkans could change [9]."

5. Conclusion

The activity of Gjergj Kastriot - Skanderbeg in the years 1443-1448, marks numerous historical and political events in his principality. In the year 1443, Skanderbeg was an army officer in the Ottoman kingdom. He decides to leave the kingdom and return to his principality. This return took place in the year 1443. Skanderbeg used the moment in the battle of the year 1443 between the Ottoman and Polish-Hungarian armies. There are historical sources that prove that Skanderbeg had come in contact with Janos Hunyadi and that the two together organize a war against the Ottoman invading penetration into their territories. When Skanderbeg returned to his Principality, he gathered all the Albanian princes in the Assembly of Lezha in March 1444. In this Assembly was drafted the Albanian platform for organizing against the Ottoman invasions. Skanderbeg became the main leader of the union of Albanian princes, he was elected Captain

General (*Capitaneus generalis*) of the Albanian army. In the year 1444 Skanderbeg managed to take some of the main castles which were occupied by the Ottomans.

In the year 1447, Skanderbeg went to war against the Republic of Venice who conquered the city of Deja, a very important place from where the roads to the entire territory of Skanderbeg were controlled. This conflict ended with the agreement of the year 1448. Skanderbeg managed to revive the Albanian principality. He became a well-known military figure. Thus we have the cooperation of Skanderbeg with Hunyadi in the Second Battle of Kosovo, in the year 1448.

Undoubtedly, one of the most important international events of the 15th century is the Second Battle of Kosovo (1448). This Battle took place between the two greatest powers (empires) of that time, the Ottoman Empire and the Polish-Hungarian Kingdom. This historical event attracted the attention of many chroniclers, historians and at the same time left traces in many documents of the time. The importance of this war for the history of the Albanian people is that it took place in the centre of Dardania, in Kosovo, and that through this international event one can clearly understand the role that the Albanians had at that time, led by Skanderbeg, in Europe.

Skanderbeg, the leader of the Albanian state and Janos Hunyadi, the leader of the Danubian Christian coalition, within the Hungarian Kingdom of King Vladislav, with their heroic wars, have marked the most important events in Europe, in the second half of the XV century. Their reality is that these great European heroes of that time who fought unceasingly throughout their lives against the Ottoman Empire, never managed to join forces against the Ottoman forces, never managed to lead the fight against the sultans together, they probably never met, but always between them as leaders of the liberation war there was primarily interest and desire for a common war against the Ottoman Empire.

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