



Some Aspects of Albania's Attitudes Towards Jews During World War II (1939–1944)

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Abstract

This paper uses a qualitative method to provide a comprehensive overview of the policies of the Albanian collaborationist governments towards Jews during the Italian and German occupations and examines the ways and the extent to which Albanians managed to protect and save Jews seeking asylum in their country. Moreover, from the perspective of first-person accounts, it aims to make a socioeconomic analysis both of Albanian rescuers as well as of the Jewish individuals and families they rescued, with a focus on the dynamics of the rescue efforts of officials and ordinary Albanians. The research produces two main findings: Albanian collaborationist governments did indeed manage to rescue Jews despite threats posed by the invaders; the rescuers' efforts to save Jews did not necessarily correlate with their socioeconomic status.

Keywords: Albanian puppet governments, Nazi Germany, rescued Jews, typology of the rescuers, socioeconomic analysis

1. Introduction

The history of Jews in Albania dates back to antiquity. They were settled in the Illyrian territories since the Roman invasions (Fischer, 2007, p. 101), followed by a second wave of Romaniote Jews coming from Greece in the late fourteenth century (Weinstein, 1998, p. 142). While the Spanish Inquisition at the end of the fifteenth century brought a wave of Sephardic Jews to the Albanian territories, in which for centuries they found a safe haven (Mashbaum, 'Jews in Albania'). Jews inhabited small urban settlements, including Durrës, Elbasan, Berat, Vlorë and Korçë, and they were distinguished mainly as merchants and traders (Neumann, 2015). After 1895, another wave of Jews emigrated from Greece and established their largest settlement in Vlorë. In order to keep marriages within their community, and also for religious needs, they maintained contacts with the Jewish communities of Ioannina and Corfu in Greece (Mashbaum, 'Jews in Albania'). Jews in Albania managed to preserve their traditions and identity (Neumann, 2015), and in April 1937, King Zog officially recognized Albanian Jews as one of country's religious communities (Fischer, 2007, p. 97).

When Hitler rose to power and his anti-Semitic activities began gaining momentum, the American ambassador to Albania, Herman Bernstein, himself a Jew, negotiated with King Zog for the resettlement of Jews fleeing Nazi persecution (Fischer, 2007, p. 97). In fact, both the Albanian Monarchy and the puppet governments under the Italian and German occupations provided safe refuge to Jews coming from Europe and Balkan countries (Luku, 2019). According to Fischer (2007), 'Albanians, often at personal risk, have opened their country and often their homes to not only Albanian Jews but to foreign Jews as well' (p. 95).

The rescue of Jews in Albania has recently drawn the attention of scholars and has generated research in Albania

and abroad. Most of the works, such as *A History of Jews in Albania*, authored by Apostol Kotani (2013), which rounds out his first two editions, *Albanians and Jews Throughout the Centuries* (2007) and *Albania and the Jews* (1995), as well as the books written by Harvey Sarnier entitled *The Jews of Albania* (1992) and *Rescue in Albania: One Hundred Percent of Jews in Albania Rescued From Holocaust* (1999), provide a historical background of the Jewish community before, during and after World War II, concentrating mainly on the attitude of Albanians who gave them shelter and safety during the Holocaust. Similarly, a work published by the Albanian historian Shaban Sinani, *Jews in Albania: Their Presence and Salvation* (2009), deals with the policy of the Axis powers towards Jews in Albania, its degree of implementation by the collaborationist governments and the rescue of Jews from deportation to extermination camps in Axis-occupied Europe. In his book entitled *Besa: Muslims Who Saved Jews During World War II* (2008), Norman H. Gershman argues that it was the Albanians' code of honour, Besa, that drove them, at great risk to themselves, to shelter Jews fleeing the Nazis. There is also a small number of research papers on the topic that address the policy of the Albanian Monarchy towards Jews (Puto, 1996; Rama, 2008), plans for the resettlement of Jews in Albania in the 1930s (Puto, 1995), the efforts of Albanian officials and people to save Jews from being deported to concentration camps and the motivations behind Albania's rescue of Jews (Lalaj, 2004; Luku, 2019; Stafa, 2020). Perez (2013), in a paper entitled 'Our Conscience is Clean', analyses the instrumentalization of the Holocaust by Albanian elites to provide the country with a positive post-communist image.

Building on the existing research, the present study reconstructs the narrative of Albania's rescue of Jews during the Holocaust through the lens of the protagonists and attempts to draw the socioeconomic profile of both the rescuers and the rescued, adding a new perspective to the current state of the art.

2. Methodology

The study employs a qualitative research method to examine the stance of the Albanian puppet governments and people towards Jews during the Second World War. More specifically, it investigates the ways and the extent to which Albanians provided safe refuge to Jews and the experiences of the rescued in *old Albania*, namely the country within its current borders. It does not include the territories of Kosovo, western Macedonia or southern Montenegro, inhabited mostly by Albanians, that were annexed to Italian-occupied Albania in 1941. Furthermore, the study offers a socioeconomic analysis of both the Albanian rescuers and the rescued Jewish individuals and families in wartime Albania based on first-hand accounts. Drawing on archival documents, historical literature and personal accounts, the study recounts the save of Jews in Albania from the perspective of the protagonists, providing compelling insights on the dynamic of rescue efforts of officials and ordinary Albanians to help Jews find shelter during the Holocaust.

3. The Position of the Albanian Governments towards Jews under the Italian and German Occupations

The 1930 Albanian population census contains records for approximately 200 resident Jews living throughout the country (Sinani, 2004b, p. 12). Their number began to increase soon after Hitler came to power and racial anti-Semitism became his official ideology and the policy of the German regime. At the outbreak of World War II, nearly 200 Jewish people from Germany, Austria, Poland, Hungary and other countries settled in Albania, arriving in large groups. The historian Bernd Fischer (2007) states that 'only in March 1939, 95 Jewish families came to Albania, mainly from Austria and Germany' (p. 97).

The next month, Italy invaded Albania, and the fascist authorities, under the direction of viceroy general Francesco Jacomoni, introduced Italian legislation prohibiting Jewish immigration to Albania and mandating the deportation of foreign Jews (Perez, 2013, p. 26). On 14 May 1939, the Albanian interior minister of the puppet government, Maliq Bushati, issued a circular letter asking the prefectures for lists of Jews living in Albania (Central State Archive, Fond 152, Year 1939, Folder 60, p. 1). Even though the Italian invading authorities provided data of native and immigrant Jews, they refused to hand over the lists to the German forces in support of the deal with the Albanian government. They acted with respect to the Albanians' stance to protect and save the lives of Jewish people who either lived in their country or sought asylum there during the Holocaust. The slogan of the Italian fascist authorities was 'to keep under observation, but not to punish the Jews' (Sinani, 2004a, p. 18). They justified their positive attitude with a so-called 'certificate of good behaviour' issued by the General Police Directorate, as in the case of Heinrich and Elisabethe Garde (CSA, Fond General Police Directorate, Year 1943, Folder 501, p. 99), Tendel Blimo (CSA, Fond General Police Directorate, Year 1943, Folder 501, p. 138) and others. The relatively tolerant attitude of Fascist Italy towards the Jews at home and in the occupied areas was twofold. First, as Pedatella (1985) states, 'Italian governmental and military non-compliance with its own racial laws was a reflection of public sentiment' (p. 54). In the same vein, Ledeen (1975, p. 3), citing Chabod, argues that the adoption of the racial measures marked the beginning of the rejection of fascism and paved the way for the downfall of

the regime. Second, Mussolini's hesitancy to consecutively implement the racial laws of 1938 was, according to Di Pietro (1990), 'a way for the Italians to assert their independence from the German allies' (p. 843).

Consequently, 'the dichotomy between the de jure and de facto position of the Italian government' (Pedatella, 1985, p. 54) towards the Jews favoured the Albanian policy of protecting the Jews under the Italian occupation. The majority of them found shelter in Albanian households in cities that supplied them with basic goods. Some Jews were even given identity cards with local Albanian names, thus hiding their true origin from the Italian police and military. To some extent, they led a normal life, but as the threat grew due to an increasing number of checkpoints set up by the occupying forces, they moved to inland towns or to remote mountain areas (Marzouk, 2009). Although the law required the repatriation of foreign Jews, in practice they were not expelled. Instead, they were placed in so-called concentration camps, mainly in Berat, Kavaja, Durrës and Burrel. In reality, these camps bore no resemblance to the institutions of torture and mass extermination built by Nazi Germany throughout Europe with the aim of carrying out the 'Final Solution'. Typically, they were located on the outskirts of towns already accustomed to having Jews under control and protecting them from the occupying forces (Sinani, 2009a, p. 77).

When the Nazis invaded Albania after Italy's capitulation in September 1943, German authorities, who were determined to begin deportations from a new region, demanded the Albanian collaborationist government to provide a list of all the Jews in the country (Fischer, 2007, p. 99). The High Regency Council, comprised of four members elected by the Albanian National Assembly to govern the country, refused to comply with occupiers' orders to turn over a list of Jews residing within the country's borders (Gilbert, 2003, p. 242). This attitude was a consequence of a compromise reached with Hermann Neubacher, Hitler's special envoy to Southeastern Europe and personal representative of the German foreign minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop. According to the agreement, the German authorities would recognize the country's 'relative neutrality and sovereignty' in exchange for minimizing the Wehrmacht's presence in Albania to two and a half divisions (Perez, 2013, p. 28). With this arrangement, the Albanian central and local governments were able to protect Jews by regarding their presence as an internal issue (Sinani, 2005, p. 21; Meta, 2008, p. 49). They provided many Jewish families with fake documentation that allowed them to intermingle with the rest of the population. Under the German occupation, the Jews who sought refuge in Albania were spared the horrors that the rest of the Jews of Europe endured (Avraham, 2013). This explains why the Jewish population grew tenfold in Albania during World War II, with nearly 2,000 Jews finding a safe haven here (Sinani, 2009b, p. 16).

4. The Relationship between the Rescued and the Rescuers: A Socioeconomic Analysis

In order to build a comprehensive view of the relationship between the rescued native and immigrant Jews and the Albanian people who risked their lives to save them, as well as their respective socioeconomic status, we will mainly refer to their testimonies, since there is very little in the way of archival resources to draw upon. The long communist rule of over four and a half decades has much to do with this paucity of information (DioGuardi, 2007, p. 9); moreover, isolation and propaganda had a profound effect on Albanians' self-perceptions, particularly those of the rescuers, who saw themselves as simple workers, a stark contrast from statements provided by survivors, who saw them as rich. These conflicting perceptions of Albanian rescuers are due to memory or changing perspectives, which, to some extent, could influence the completeness of the data analysis, but this does not prevent us from reaching certain historical conclusions (Orvieto and Steinfeldt).

To date, seventy-five Albanian rescuers have been recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations (*Shqipëria me 75 'Fisnikë mes Kombeve' në museum Yad Vashem* 2015). The thirty-seven files comprising their stories reveal that most of the rescued are Jewish families, not individuals. Albania was the country of residence for only seven of those families, such as that of Mojs Arditi, who lived in Tirana, or of Jakov Solomoni in Vlora, Haim Batino in Durrës, Avram Eliasaf Gani in Vlora, Ilia Solomoni in Vlora, Mateo Mathatia in Vlora and the family of Josef Negrin, also in Vlora. In most of the cases, the Jews who survived in Albania proper were refugees from Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia, Greece, Poland and Germany.

The majority of immigrant Jewish people arrived in Albania in the early 1940s, when the country was already under Italian control. Both the Italian and Albanian authorities helped Jewish refugees find shelter in Albania proper (Stafa, 2020, p. 42), and the testimonies of the latter group described these refugees' living situation as quite safe until Italy surrendered to the Allies in September 1943. Some of the Jews even operated small businesses, and these commercial activities helped them get to know their rescuers. The same occurred in the case of the Bivas family, who found temporary lodging and employment making biscuits in Shkodër. Isak Bivas would buy supplies to make biscuits from Shaqir Boriçi, a merchant, who in turn welcomed the Bivases into his home when the Germans arrived in the region (Gershman, 2008, p. 86). This fate was similar to that of the Batino family, who owned a wholesale shop in Durrës. Upon learning of the danger they were facing, one of their customers, Abdulla Myrto, a fabric merchant in Kavaja, invited them

Name	Age	Religion	Occupation	Rescue place	Immigrant or resident Jews	Did the rescuers previously know the rescued?	Number of people they survived	Where were they hidden?	Rescue mode	Why did they save Jews?
Kocerri, Kasem Jakup		Muslim	Farmer, Shepherd	Vlora	Resident in Vlora	Yes (commercial relations)	2 Jews	At home	Illegal transfer, providing false evidence, hiding	Friendship, Humanity
Kona, Vasil & Kristina	38/29	Christian	Montenefice	Tirana	Resident in Tirana	Yes (neighborhood)	5 members of Mitrë Acëri family	At home	Hiding; supplying basic goods; other	Friendship, Humanity
Lokantari, Mihal		Orthodox	Activist/ partisan	Kavaja, Tirana	Immigrants from Belgrade, Serbia	No			Providing forged documents; illegal transfer; arranging shelter; other	Humanity
Meço, Saljman & Zengep		Muslim	Farmer	Kruja	Resident in Durres	No	6 Jews	At home	Hiding; supplying basic goods; other	Humanity
Masli, Didaj			Textile merchant	Trethazor - Vlora	Resident in Vlora	Yes (commercial relations)	6 Jews	At home	Illegal transfer; hiding; supplying basic goods	Friendship, Humanity
Myrto, Abdulla & Ije		Muslim	Textile merchant	Kavaja	Resident in Durres	Yes (commercial relations)	2 Jews	At home	Hiding; supplying basic goods; other	Friendship, Humanity
Myrto, Shyqyri		Muslim	Textile salesman	Tirana, Kavaja	Resident in Durres	Yes (commercial relations)	2 Jews	At home	Hiding; supplying basic goods; illegal transfer; arranging shelter; other	Friendship, Humanity
Nosi, Vasil & Kallian; brother Dr. Stilian; sis. Adilina Kosturi		Orthodox	Graduate of Vlora University; Alcohol Manufacturer/ Biochemist/ Physician	Erbani	Immigrants from Macedonia	No	1 Jew	At home; in their factory for alcoholic beverage; in a remote house	Hiding; supplying basic goods; arranging shelter; other	Humanity, Friendship; Bias
Orgocka, Paskal & Lefterose		Christian	Taxi driver	Korce	Immigrants from Ioannina, Greece	No	4 Jews	At home	Hiding; supplying basic goods; hiding; other	Humanity
Parasiti, Isuf & Naji			Merchant	Korce	Immigrants from Thessaloniki, Greece	Yes (business connections)	3 members of Krasno family	At home	Hiding	Friendship, Humanity
Pilko, Ngari & Lira			Civil engineer	Durres; Kruja	Immigrants from Hamburg, Germany	Yes (neighbors)	3 members of Corceho family	At home	Hiding; supplying basic goods; arranging shelter; providing false evidence; other	Friendship, Humanity
Qosja, Hoqir		Muslim	Tailors shop	Tirana	Resident in Vlora	Yes	1 Jew	At home	Hiding; arranging shelter; supplying basic goods	Friendship, Humanity
Rilli, Mirita Aziz & Shpresa Ali		Muslim		Tirana	Immigrants from Shkopi, Macedonia	Yes	3 members of Kozditi family	At home	Hiding; providing false evidence; arranging shelter; other	Friendship, Humanity
Shkoti, Stavro & Nora		Christian	Buisnessman/ Housewife	Erbani; Tirana	Immigrants from Macedonia, Greece, Yugoslavia	Yes	2 members of Pasko's family; 1 member of De Mijon family; 2 members of Rofu' family and Josef Kozubi	At home	Hiding; supplying basic goods; illegal transfer; arranging shelter; providing false evidence; other	Friendship, Humanity

Name	Age	Religion	Occupation	Rescue place	Immigrant or resident Jews	Did the rescuers previously know the rescued?	Number of people they survived	Where were they hidden?	Rescue mode	Why did they save Jews?
Shqepi Pashaj Ali		Muslim	Cafe/bar manager	Lapthice	Immigrant from Pristina, Kosovo	No	1 Jew	Caravan; shelter; At home; safe place in the mountain	Hiding	Humanity
Shkurti, Pietro & Magdalena				Berzi; Shkoder	Immigrants from Pristina, Kosovo	No	6 members of Kevoni's family	Rental a room	Supplying basic goods; providing false evidence; other	Friendship, humanity
Shpiza, Esheref		Muslim	Clerk in the city hall	Kavaja; Shkoder	Immigrants from Macedonia	No	7 Jews	Rented out an apartment; Christian quarter	Providing forged documents; illegal transfer; providing false evidence; arranging shelter; other	Humanity
Toprani, Anif & Garazat		Muslim	Real estate owner	Karza; Tirana	Immigrants from Yugoslavia	No	5 Jews	In Karza estate; At their home in Tirana	Hiding; supplying basic goods; providing false evidence; arranging shelter; other	Humanity
Veseli, Hamid; brother Zhevat		Muslim	Clothing store owner	Tirana; Kruja	Immigrants from Belgrade	Yes	5 members of Mendi's family; 3 members of Ben Joseph's family	In their parent's house in Kruja	Hiding; supplying basic goods; illegal transfer; other	Friendship, Humanity
Veseli, Vesel & Fatima; son Refik		Muslim	Farmer	Tirana; Kruja	Immigrants from Belgrade	Yes	3 members of Mendi's family; 3 members of Ben Joseph's family	At their home in Kruja	Hiding; supplying basic goods; illegal transfer; arranging shelter; other	Friendship, Humanity
Xhyberi, Qemil & Hamene		Muslim		Vlora	Resident in Vlora	Yes	4 Jews	At home in Vlora	Hiding; supplying basic goods; providing false evidence; other	Code of Honor, Bias; Friendship, Humanity
Zyma, Besvika & Hignat	42		DR, Otolaryngologist; Surgeon	Tirana	Immigrant from Poland	No	1 Jew	In his clinic in Tirana	Providing false evidence; other	Humanity
Veseli, Hamid; brother Zhevat		Muslim	Clothing store owner	Tirana; Kruja	Immigrants from Belgrade	Yes	5 members of Mendi's family; 3 members of Ben Joseph's family	In their parent's house in Kruja	Hiding; supplying basic goods; illegal transfer; other	Friendship, Humanity
Veseli, Vesel & Fatima; son Refik		Muslim	Farmer	Tirana; Kruja	Immigrants from Belgrade	Yes	5 members of Mendi's family; 3 members of Ben Joseph's family	At their home in Kruja	Hiding; supplying basic goods; illegal transfer; arranging shelter; other	Friendship, Humanity
Xhyberi, Qemil & Hamene		Muslim		Vlora	Resident in Vlora	Yes	4 Jews	At home in Vlora	Hiding; supplying basic goods; providing false evidence; other	Code of Honor, Bias; Friendship, Humanity
Zyma, Besvika & Hignat	42		DR, Otolaryngologist; Surgeon	Tirana	Immigrant from Poland	No	1 Jew	In his clinic in Tirana	Providing false evidence; other	Humanity
Zyma, Besvika & Hignat	42		DR, Otolaryngologist; Surgeon	Tirana	Immigrant from Poland	No	1 Jew	In his clinic in Tirana	Providing false evidence; other	Humanity
Zyma, Besvika & Hignat	42		DR, Otolaryngologist; Surgeon	Tirana	Immigrant from Poland	No	1 Jew	In his clinic in Tirana	Providing false evidence; other	Humanity

5. Dynamics of Albanians' Efforts to Rescue Jews during the Holocaust

Rescue activities took place in both urban and rural areas. In many cases, Albanian rescuers arranged shelter for Jews they had known earlier through their work in business or a property rented out to Jewish refugees. In some cases, these friendships deepened after the war into marriages between the children of the rescuer-rescued families, as in the examples of Kona and Ardit or Orgocka and Jakoel (Orvieto and Steinfeldt).

The majority of Jews were hidden in the homes of the rescuers, living together with the host family members. Only a small number of testimonies from surviving Jews speak of total seclusion, where the only contact was with the rescuers.

This was the case of Rafael Faraggi and his friend Jakov Aoresti from Bitola, who were hidden by Mifail Biçaku in a hut outside the village of Qarrisht-Librashd, which was constructed particularly for this purpose and was guarded by one of Biçaku's sons (Kerem, 2014, p. 45). Furthermore, there are some Albanian Righteous who saved Jews by providing false identity papers or helping secure their release from detention. Njazi Pilku, a civil engineer from Durrës, arranged for the release of the Gerechter family, originally of Hamburg, who were arrested by the local police based on a false claim (Neumann, 2015; Sarner 1999, p. 73). Marko Menachem, a Jewish refugee from Macedonia, was released from Gestapo custody following the intervention of Vasil Nosi (Kotani, 2007, p. 86). Niko Pardo and his sister-in-law Alegra Pardo were released when Stavro Sheko, a businessman from Tirana, paid a ransom to the Italian police (The Righteous Among the Nations, Sheko Family). There were others.

A fundamental question for the dynamic of the rescue efforts of the Albanians is to examine to what extent they were endangered, either by the German occupiers or by local collaborators. There are several testimonies mentioning that Albanian rescuers faced the risk of denunciation by strangers or neighbours who aimed to surrender Jews to the authorities. One such case is that of Sulejman Meçe, a well-to-do farmer who offered shelter to six members of the Batino family and saw to all of their needs (Meça, 2003, p. 12). One day, Meçe learned that a local resident was planning to betray his wards. He thought of shooting this traitor, but his family persuaded him not to. Instead, he spoke with the potential informer and threatened to avenge any actions he took that led to the Jews being caught. The man backed down from his intention. The family stayed with the Meçes from November 1943 until the liberation of Albania on 29 November 1944 (The Righteous Among the Nations, Meçe Family).

Another testimony is that of Hamdi Kasapi, who took in the Frances family even though it was absolutely forbidden for local residents to hide Jewish refugees in their homes. He describes in detail the day when a German soldier and two local accomplices knocked loudly at the door asking for Mois Frances. Despite being brutally interrogated and beaten to unconsciousness, Hamdi repeatedly denied that he was harbouring Jews (Gershman, 2008, p. 50).

Another inspiring story is that of an Albanian rescuer from Puka named Ali Sheqer Pashkaj, who risked not only his own life but also his entire village to save a young Jew. He owned a store with food provisions. One day, a German transport appeared carrying nineteen Albanians and Yeoshua Baruchowicz, a Jew destined for execution. Ali offered food and wine to the Nazis, and as soon as they became drunk, he instructed the Jew to flee to a certain place in the forest. When the Germans noticed the Jew was missing, they came back and threatened to kill Ali Sheqer Pashkaj and burn down the village unless he confessed. Ali resisted their threats, and they finally left. He had saved the young Jew, and went on to keep him in hiding in his home for the two years until the end of the war (Gross, 2017).

The motivation of Albanians to provide shelter and refuge to Jews has its roots in a national creed known as *Besa*, which obligates them to protect guests even to the point of forfeiting one own's life (Berger, 2003; Stafa, 2007, p. 42; Portes, 2010, p. 18). *Besa*, the Albanian code of honour, which dictates that once someone has enjoyed a family's hospitality, they are forever protected by the hosts (Shaviv, 2013), is mentioned in several testimonies, including that of Marko Menachem, who says: 'There is an Albanian word, *Besa*, which is the word of honour. There is nothing holier for an Albanian than his *Besa*. When he gives it, he will go through hell and fire, but he will keep his word of honour. *Besa* was the key that saved the Jews'. There were other factors contributing the rescue of persecuted Jews, such as humanity (Lalaj, 2004, pp. 180–181), religious tolerance (Lushi, 2003, p. 14), the small number of Jewish refugees, which did not pose a threat to the Albanian community (Fischer, 2003, p. 176), a lack of anti-Semitism (Sinani, 2004a, p. 19) and antifascist attitudes (Duka, 2008, p. 21).

Another issue that must be addressed is whether underground anti-Nazi organizations also engaged in helping Jews. Testimonies in the Albanian files appear to be individual initiatives, and there is no hint of any involvement by resistance groups (Orvieto and Steinfeldt). This is the case of Mihal Lekatari, an active Albanian partisan who in 1942 warmly welcomed and offered help to Jewish refugees arriving in Kavaja from a prison in Pristina. He became friendly with the Konforti family, who had originally fled from Belgrade, and taught them the Albanian language, arranged discounts for them at the market and rebuked anyone who abused them. When the Germans took control of the area, Mihal Lekatari stole blank identity papers from the municipality of Harizaj, forged them with Muslim names and gave them to the Jews (Marinaj, 2009, p. 11). He also instructed them how to reach Tirana and gave them the addresses of his friends in the capital who would find shelter for them to use until the war was over ('Kavaja: A Story to Be Unfold', 2014, p. 50).

In contrast, there were some Jews who contributed to the antifascist effort by enlisting with the Albanian National Liberation Army (Guga, 2008, p. 158). They joined partisan brigades and fought bravely against the German invaders. Among them were Nissim Aladjem, Eli Kuonne and Julijana Hara, whose knowledge of the German language helped the partisans in interrogating captured Germans. According to Samuil Mandil (1945), a rescued Jew from Belgrade, five Jewish refugees, Jakov Avramović, Jusef Konforti, Jusef Bivas, Zhak Ruben and David Koen, died in battle, while a few

others were wounded, some of them seriously, in the Albanian National Liberation War against the Nazis. The involvement of these Jews in Albanian military operations against German troops was a manifestation of mutual friendship and solidarity.

6. Conclusions

Analysis of the Albanian governments' stance on the Jewish question during World War II and examination of the economic and social situation both of rescuers and rescued Jews together with the dynamic of Albanians' efforts to protect and save native and immigrant Jews bring us to the following conclusions:

1) During the Italian occupation, the Albanian authorities managed to pursue a somewhat liberal and pacifist policy towards resident and refugee Jews thanks to Italy's own contradictory official policy towards Jews. According to Pedatella (1985, pp. 51–52), Fascist Italy proved ineffective at strictly enforcing measures based on Germany's model of denying the civil and political rights of the Jews. The ineffectiveness of this policy at home led to its unequivocal failure in the Italian-occupied areas during World War II.

2) The puppet governments of Albania during the German occupation used the compromise agreement reached with the representative of the German foreign ministry Hermann Neubacher, which guaranteed the 'relative neutrality and sovereignty' of Albania in not complying with the orders of the occupying forces regarding Jews. On the contrary, Albanian officials provided the Jewish people with paperwork hiding their true identity under false Muslim names.

3) Regardless of their religious faith, economic situation and social status, Albanians tried to help Jews by hiding them in their homes or moving them to safe places, supplying basic goods, providing forged documents, enabling illegal transfer, securing release from detention, etc.

4) *Besa*, the Albanian code of honour, a sacred oath that is considered the main motivation of Albanians who risked their lives to shelter displaced Jewish families during the Holocaust. Other factors included hospitality, humanity, religious tolerance and the absence of anti-Semitism.

5) Albania is one of only a few countries in Europe whose Jewish population grew during World War II, increasing approximately tenfold (from 200 to 2,000) over the course of the conflict (DioGuardi, 2007, p. 9). From 1944 onwards, Jewish refugees left the country and returned home (Neumann, 2015); however, there were still more Jews living in postwar Albania than at the beginning of the war (Weinstein, 1998, p. 141).

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