Abstract: Refusing the state, defending the nation: Why local Albanian communities opposed their government in the summer of 1920.

In order to avoid the subjugation from the neighbors, in the beginning of 1920, Albanian elites gathered in Lushnjë where eventually decided to take back the sovereignty of which they where dispossessed. National historiography affirms that the Lushnjë Congress was the expression of the national political integrity and that it undertook decisive steps in reducing threats coming from outside and from within the country. Threats from outside were Italians and Yugoslavs (notably Serbs), while from within was everyone suspected to flirt with antagonist neighbors. National historiography cuts a sharp distinction between patriots and betrayers. The first group is made of those Albanians who took part in the conflicts against the Italians and the Yugoslavs in the summer of 1920, while in the second belong those who refused to do so or took the sides of the Yugoslavs. The latter are named as “agents” or “traitors” who “sold” their country for egoistic reasons, being substantially fooled by the empty promises of Belgrade politicians. While I was doing research in Albanian State archives for my postgraduate dissertation I found interesting unpublished documents which reveal a more complex - if not different - reality. As the minister of Interior Ahmet Zogolli had launched a campaign for conscription and tax collection he faced the refusal and hostility of many local communities, including that of the Mirditi who were to violently clash with the government the year after. But reasons for such refusals seem in no way related to a betrayal of the national project. On the contrary villagers refused to pay taxes and to serve in the gendarmerie because they were convinced that the effort would only harm the nation, thus criticizing the government for abuses and corruption. Letters sent from the villagers of Zadrima in the north – west of Albania, pushed to the point of giving to the minister lessons in state management policies that would serve to many states even nowadays.