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Abstracts

LUCA MICHELETTA, Italy, Greater Albania, and Kosovo 1939-1943

After the 1939 occupation of Albania, the Italian Government supported Albania's ambitions regarding Kosovo in the event of a war with Yugoslavia. Italy tried to exploit the desire for the unity of all Albanians as part of its efforts to build consensus and increase its popularity. Mussolini's government, moreover, planned to build an Italian empire in the Balkans, which would be based on an enlarged and powerful Albanian state. Greater Albania was to serve not only as the territorial basis for the Italian empire, but also as a political tool for containing the drive of Hitler's Germany towards the Balkans and the Mediterranean. From 1940 onwards, the Italians subsidized Ferad Bey Draga, the most important political figure in inter-war Kosovo, and other leading Kosovan Albanian figures, who were convinced that the liberation of Kosovo from Serbian oppression could be obtained only with the help of Italy. In October 1940 Ferad Draga addressed a letter to the King of Italy and to the Duce calling for Italy's support for the liberation of Kosovo. Speaking in the name of the Albanian people of Kosovo, he asked for the protection of King Vittorio Emanuele III and of the 'genius' of Mussolini, writing that the Albanians of Kosovo looked forward to unification with the rest of the Albanians within the framework of the new Italian Empire. After the dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1941 and the enlargement of Albania to include part of Kosovo and the western part of Macedonia, Italy became involved in the violent and irreconcilable national conflicts which Rome was not able to manage. Thus Italy's search for a Greater Albania proved to be a factor of weakness and not the foundation of its military-political power in the Balkans as the Fascist regime had imagined and hoped for in 1939.