

## Urban Diplomacy and the Influence of Italian Architecture in Tirana During 1920-1930

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**Abstract:** *This study explores the architectural and urban planning diplomacy of Italy within Albania. It will investigate the case of Tirana, utilizing a comprehensive methodology that incorporates a detailed examination of relevant literature from secondary sources, as well as an assessment of the progression of contemporary architecture in the region. The objective of this research is to enhance the dialogue on Italian-Albanian connections, emphasizing the impact of Italian art and external diplomacy in Albania dating back to the early years of its establishment. This investigation adds to the ongoing discourse on the influence of architectural edifices on the global relations of an Italy over Albania and Western Balkans both historically and in the foreseeable future.*

**Keywords:** urban architecture, urban diplomacy, foreign policies, bilateral relations, Italy, Albania

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### INTRODUCTION

This paper originates from a deeply personal encounter with the nation, serving as the primary rationale for undertaking this research. Upon my initial arrival in Tirana, I possessed little knowledge of a country positioned directly facing the shores of Italy. While the city seemed to be transitioning from a "post-communist" era, it exuded an atmosphere filled with the vibes of youth and new opportunities. I harbored great eagerness to discover that 70% of the Albanian population was proficient in the Italian language and culture, facilitating seamless interactions. Although I had acquaintances who had pursued studies and employment in Italy, residing in the city presents a starkly distinct experience compared to merely hearing about it. As a connoisseur of beauty and admirer of aesthetic appeal, I found the architectural and urban planning aspects of Tirana particularly impressive, bearing a resemblance to the architectural principles prevalent in Italian cities. It is widely acknowledged that a city transcends being a mere collection of structures; it

embodies a convergence of lives, aspirations, dreams, and yearnings that illuminate the human spirit as vividly as the spirit of the city itself. In their work, Hysa et al. (2021), argue that the post-socialist turbulent and uncontrolled chaotic urban development in Tirana inevitably sparks a debate on the existential significance of its identity. On the one hand, the city's historical urban layout comprises pre-socialist and socialist elements. On the other hand, the imbalanced post-socialist architectural landscape has led to a mixed discordant identity, prompting the question "*quo vadis*" Tirana (Dino et al.,2016). Despite the municipality's considerable endeavors to bring order to the "spontaneousness" arising in the post-socialist era, there seems to be a missing link in Tirana's development strategies. The new Masterplan (TR030) falls short of adequately addressing two fundamental aspects of the city: the dispersed historical legacy and the adaptive urban community that organically evolved within the super-blocks structure of the Capital (Dickhaut et al.,2021; Gjoka,2016). This work seeks to recover the Italian-Albanian friendship and highlight the influences of Italian art and foreign diplomacy in Albania. It also aims to further the discourse on the evolution of modern architecture in Albania. The histories of Albania and Italy have often been interwoven between them over the centuries. From this reflection, relations, and exchange relations with each other have been born and developed. This paper focuses on the period of 1925-1943 of relations between Italy and Albania, years that also coincide with the activity of architects and engineers in the Albanian territory and a broad foreign policy in the country (Gresleri,2012). The theoretical framework of the paper is rooted in the prior research of various prominent authors, predominantly of Albanian and Italian descent, who have delved into this field. Their studies revolve around themes such as collaboration, identity formation in urban settings, and the diplomatic connections manifested through architectural endeavors. After an initial exploration of the political landscapes in Albania and Italy during this time, a specific examination of the architectural landscape in Tirana, Italy, is undertaken. The study employs a pooling of methodologies, including a thorough literature review drawing from secondary sources, primarily archival materials, and an analysis of the architectural evolution in Tirana as a case study.

### **A stance of the internal and foreign political status in Albania during the 1920-1930**

At the beginning of the 1920s, Albanian society witnessed a division between two opposing political factions. The initial faction comprised the stratum of *beylers* and prominent *pashalars*, landowners, intellectuals with foreign education, instigators of the movement for the amalgamation of the Albanian Vilayets, and key figures in the Declaration of Independence. Among them were individuals such as the Vlorajs, Vrionas, Biçakçi, Toptanas, Vërlacs, and Këlcyraj(Pacukaj,2020). This political and economic coalition epitomized the conventional Albanian forces and sought to modernize Albania in accordance with Western norms, with a distinctly right-wing political stance. Noteworthy among them was Ahmet Zogu, a landowner hailing from the district of Mat (in the north of the country), who received education in Istanbul and Austria and was distinguished by his ambitious nature(Pacukaj,2014). The second faction was comprised of progressive traders and politicians with democratic inclinations of that era, also aspiring to modernize Albania based on Western principles, albeit with a left-leaning political

orientation. Leading this faction was Fan Noli, an Orthodox bishop educated in the United States of America (Çali,2020; Pacukaj,2014). These divergent political entities, marked by contrasting agendas and memberships, encapsulated the conflicting landscape of Albanian politics post-World War I. Between the 1920 and 1924, the leftist-liberal factions gained momentum steadily, culminating in a popular revolt in 1924 that compelled Ahmet Zogu to depart Albania for Yugoslavia(Çali,2020). While serving as the prime minister of the newly established Albanian government, Noli actively engaged in a social initiative focused on implementing a comprehensive agrarian reform and enhancing the nation's administrative framework in alignment with the practices observed in Western democracies. This initiative faced resistance from the *beylers* and prominent *pashalars*, who were reluctant to relinquish their influential positions within the state's hierarchy. Moreover, Noli's administration struggled to garner support from the international community. Consequently, Noli's governance was perceived as excessively leftist and ultimately evolved into an experimental phase in Albanian political history(Çali,2020; Pacukaj,2020). Following a brief tenure of six months, Noli's government was overthrown, leading to the reinstatement of Zogu as the Prime Minister of Albania. Zogu resumed his leadership for a period of fourteen years, initially as the president of Albania (1925-1928) and later as the monarch of the Albanian people. The democratic revolution spearheaded by Noli sent shockwaves through the Albanian political landscape, compelling even Zogu to recognize the necessity of substantial reforms for the nation's progress. Subsequently, Zogu effectively restored public order, inaugurated primary and secondary educational institutions, and implemented policies aimed at societal organization and development (Yzeiraj,2021; Pacukaj,2020; Ahmetaj,2018). Despite their positive intent, these reformative actions were viewed by some as acts of national subjugation, particularly due to their perceived alignment with Italy's interests. Zogu's engagements and agreements with Mussolini's regime often sparked speculations about Albania's potential transformation into an Italian colony (Bedini,2024). Alternatively, certain historical analyses shed light on the notion that Zogu's modernization endeavors were strategic measures toward a friendly diplomatic approach to neighbors. Zogu's eventually departed from Albania in 1939, leaving the country without any political power or functionality (Yzeiraj,2021). Within the legal framework, Albania functioned as a constitutional monarchy, where the parliament represented the contrasting ideologies of right-wing traditionalists and left-wing progressives. However, Zog, shifted his focus away from issues in foreign policy. Concurrently, a particular emphasis would be placed on relations with Italy in the foreign policy. Attention was directed towards Italy not solely due to its economic capabilities but also owing to its geographical proximity. Italy undeniably held greater significance for Albania on the global stage. It was in the best interest of Albania to achieve greater stability. Italy viewed with considerable apprehension the prospect of Austria-Hungary being replaced, post its dissolution at the war's conclusion, by the formation of a large Slavic nation that extended to the Adriatic (Bedini,2024). The rivalry between Italy and Yugoslavia was consistently conspicuous, despite both administrations entering agreements like the Pact inked in Rome by Mussolini and Pašić in late January 1924, stipulating cooperation for a five-year period. This agreement bound both parties to refrain from taking any actions regarding Albania without prior mutual consent.

Italy ensured that Yugoslavia would not act independently, while Yugoslavia obtained assurance that Italy would not endorse Albanian irredentism in Kosovo. Nonetheless, the Pact was formulated in broad terms, constituting a commitment of inaction. After this accord, additional affirmations were made. Mussolini encountered hindrances in his expansionist endeavors for a period. Following certain strategic moves, he successfully paved the way for fascist Italy to pursue expansionist policies in the Balkans. This inclination was primarily directed towards Albania. Initial communications were established from the conclusion of 1922 through what could be termed as "*informal diplomacy*" (Bedini,2024). This involved certain businessmen with vested interests in Albania who maintained trade connections discreetly alongside official Italian-Albanian relations. Due to reservations Mussolini harbored about Zog assuming power in 1925 with assistance from Yugoslavia, he arranged a meeting between Zog and two Italian emissaries. Commencing from this era, there existed two primary objectives of great importance, namely oil concessions and banking (Bedini,2024; Yzeiraj,2021). Although economic agreements proved advantageous for the Italian influence in Albania, they were deemed insufficient unless intertwined with political accords (Iaselli,2006). The initial political treaty between Italy and Albania was the "Secret Pact", formalized through an exchange of correspondence between Mussolini and Zogu on August 26, 1925<sup>10</sup>. This agreement stipulated Italy's commitment to support Albania in case of aggression<sup>11</sup>. Zogu's pursuit of authority continued to escalate. Rooted deeply in his psyche was the warrior ethos, a tribal legacy that impelled him to govern his people. His ambitions now transcended to the attainment of the royal crown. While achievable, he sought external backing, primarily from the neighboring nation across the Adriatic. Prior to the signing of the inaugural Italo-Albanian treaty in November 1926, Zogu confidentially revealed his aspiration to kingship to Rome. Numerous officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome harbored reservations, questioning Zogu's reliability as a negotiator. Throughout the prolonged discussions, Bird's paramount concern revolved around financial demands. However, Mussolini was disinclined to accord significant weight to these pleas. It was during the 1926 treaty that Mussolini personally witnessed Zog's commendable conduct. Zogu further substantiated his dependability, particularly following the ratification of the 1926 Treaty, when confronted with Yugoslav pressures. Zogu broached this subject with Mussolini as early as September 1927, expressing his kingdom's heavy reliance on the allied nation (Yzeiraj,2021). Mussolini promptly assured him that while there might be complications with others, Italy would steadfastly support him. The period of tranquility between 1928-1930 gave way to internal instability in Albania and a deterioration of Italian-Albanian relations, leading to a prolonged period of tension. This tension escalated to the extent that Albania appeared as a volatile hotspot in Europe(Bedini,2024;Yzeiraj,2021). The economic downturn in Europe during this time further strained the Albanian economy, which was ill-equipped to handle the complexities of the global crisis. Adverse weather conditions also impacted local production by affecting agricultural exports(Isaelli,2006). Simultaneously, external factors such as the economic nationalization policies adopted by other nations significantly hindered Albanian exports and restricted sources of state revenue, including remittances, foreign currency exports, and SVEA credit(Iaselli,2006). Furthermore, Italy's economic ventures in Albania fell

short of expectations, disappointing both officials and the general populace. King Zogu's coronation marked the conclusion of the initial phase of Italian influence in Albania, with no significant developments anticipated in the subsequent years. Zog's ascension to the throne not only secured the promised protection from the Italian government but also bolstered the formal autonomy of his authority. The establishment of the Albanian kingdom represented the culmination of a policy initiated in 1925 to fortify the Zog regime and establish parity in Italian-Albanian relations (Bedini,2024). From this perspective, the March 1936 agreements were timely, serving as a precursor to the strategy for occupying Albania. Research asserts here that the period spanning 1937-1938 witnessed the apex of stability within the nation. During that time, governmental operations were effective, legal regulations were upheld, the repressive mechanisms were efficient, external contributions alleviated the challenges of economic progress, and ameliorated the severe social divisions (Tase,2012). Consequently, Zogu developed a sense of confidence and satisfaction regarding the reinforcement of his authority. Notably, a decline in foreign policy diligence became apparent since the outset of 1937. The primary diplomatic interaction that remained functional was the one with the official Rome (Yzeiraj,2021; Tase,2012). Zogu recognized the necessity of engaging with Italy, leaving him with no viable option but to pursue this course. In pursuit of this objective, he endeavored to establish a direct personal rapport with Ciano. In this period, two agreements between Italy and Albania were stipulated but, I will focus on the Second Pact of Tirana here, which highlights the framework of the diplomatic relations between Italy and Albania. It is well known in history that this Agreement brought light to a close relationship between the countries even in the post-communist era.

The Preliminary Agreement of the Italian-Albanian Defense Coalition (The Second Pact of Tirana), was endorsed in Tirana on November 22, 1927, by the Albanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Iliaz Vrioni and the Italian Representative in Albania Ugo Sola (Luku,2013;Capolino,2011;Ellery,1927). The main features of this Pact included:

- 1. All prior agreements between Albania and Italy after Albania's accession to the League of Nations would be faithfully adhered to ensure complete amity between the two nations and governments. Each party would ardently promote the interests of the other in alignment with its own interests.*
- 2. Italy and Albania would establish a 20-year alliance, subject to termination only in the 18th and 19th years. In the absence of any such action, the alliance would be automatically renewed for an additional term of equal duration. Both parties would ensure the security of their respective territories and defend themselves against any external aggression.*
- 3. Considering the obligations outlined in the clauses, the two signatories pledged to collaborate in upholding peace. Should one party face an unprovoked threat of war, the other would employ all available means to halt hostilities and secure equitable redress for the imperiled party.*



4. *In cases where reconciliation efforts prove futile, each party is obligated to align its fate with that of the other and provide its ally with military, financial, or any other necessary resources upon request.*

5. *Regarding the provisions of Article 2 of the Pact, the contracting parties undertook not to engage in any peace or truce agreements without mutual consent.*

6. *This accord was executed in four original copies, two in Italian and two in Albanian.*

7. *The treaty would be ratified and recorded within the League of Nations. Between 1933 and 1935, the economic landscape began displaying initial signs of recovery, attributed to enhanced agricultural output. Consequently, the accrued savings facilitated the establishment of new financial institutions, namely Albanian agricultural banks, directly affiliated with the financial sector in Rome. The signatories of this treaty were the Albanian Foreign Minister, Iliaz Vrioni, and the Italian Minister in Albania, Ugo Sola.*

In terms of the economic and financial relations, between Italia and Albania, a strong interdependence emerged, leading the Italian Bank to consider the establishment of a shared currency for both nations (Bedini,2024; Luku,2013; Iaselli,2006).At the same time, the option of resolving the situation by eliminating King Zog was being contemplated. The Italian Bank unveiled its new headquarters in Tirana in 1938, a project crafted by Vitorio Balio Morpurgo. AGIP had been operating in Devoll and Vlora since the 1930s, solidifying its presence in Albania alongside the Italian Oil Company (Iaselli,2006). The headquarters of the Italian Oil Company were designed by Angiolo Mazzoni, who also created the offices of ANIC in 1939. Amidst this politically turbulent environment, a decision was made to escalate spending on public works in Albania, particularly the finalization of Tirana's city center projects overseen by Florestano Di Fausto. Subsequently, a settlement known as a "pater" village was erected, accommodating 500 Italian families relocated abroad by a Milanese company specializing in prefabricated housing. Moreover, ETAL (Tourist and Hotel Agency of Libya) constructed several hotels in Durrës, Tirana, and other major urban hubs in Albania (Lang,2024; Bedini,2024; Pandelejmoni,2021; Yzeiraj,2021; Veizaj,2020; Prifti,2013; Santojani,2008).

### **Albanian and Italian architecture and its relations to the foreign policy.**

Albanian Modern Architecture is represented by the construction projects of Italian architects in the time span of the two world wars, that is, the 20s and 30s (Prifti,2013). This period also coincides with the time of birth, development and consolidation of Modern European Architecture and the spread of internationalization. Modern Albanian Architecture is related to Modern European Architecture of the time, not only in terms of syntax and formal architectural values, but also in the social and political field (Veizaj,2020; Prifti,2013). The main characteristic of Modern European and Albanian Architecture is the avant-garde value of all aspects of architectural design, such as the conceptualization of form and space, the relationship between internal and external space, the minimalist treatment of plans, as well as the hybridization and abstraction of architectural typologies. popular or regional. It is important to note that the crystallization of the

syntax or style of Modern Albanian Architecture, as well as the European one, was part of an evolutionary process that included a variety of styles, conceptualizations and architectural influences of the time(Hysa et al.,2021; Pallini& Scaccabarozzi,2014). The architecture of this period creates a clear contrast with the "institutional" or "official" architecture of the time which represented conservative values using monumental neo-classical architectural styles. The Central Technical Archive of Construction (AQTN) in Albania encompasses a vast collection of urban planning documentation for various cities, notably Tirana, which possesses the most extensive records. Architectural and environmental heritage evaluation played a pivotal role in the promotion of tourism, viewing cities as dynamic entities interconnected through the juxtaposition of new and existing elements. The implementation of Italian regulations in coastal urban areas sparked discussions regarding the significance of historical ties. Albanian municipalities characterized by their rich ethnic heritage underwent redevelopment, with the execution of an aerial photogrammetric assessment in the year 1937. Professionals from Italian colonies, encompassing engineers, architects, and artists, made valuable contributions to these endeavors. They elucidated the distinctions between Italian architectural styles and the necessary adaptations for overseas territories. By offering solutions to challenges encountered in these regions through specialized education, they actively engaged in dialogues within the Italian architectural community (Pacukaj,2020). Dissenting factions opposing the rationalist avant-garde movement began to surface in the 1920s. Architectural and environmental heritage evaluation played a pivotal role in the promotion of tourism in Albania, viewing cities as dynamic entities with a symbiotic relationship between the old and the new and fostering the country international profile. The application of Italian regulations was observed in coastal urban centers, sparking discussions on their historical significance. Albanian municipalities, boasting ancient roots and cultural diversity, underwent revitalization efforts, with an aerial photogrammetric examination being carried out in 1937. Professionals from Italian colonies, encompassing engineers, architects, and artists, made substantial contributions to these endeavors by highlighting the distinctions between Italian architectural styles and their adaptations in overseas territories. Their endeavors included addressing local challenges through specialized education and active engagement in Italian intellectual discourses. Dissenting factions opposing the rationalist avant-garde movement began to emerge during the 1920s. Italian architecture in the 1920s was impacted by the advancements in Italian territories overseas. The architects' interaction with the novel geographical and cultural environment influenced their readiness and receptiveness. Italian architects reevaluated key urban blueprints and executed numerous Italian initiatives, such as erecting the ministry complex. In addition to the Italian architects, Albanian experts like S. Luarasi, A. Lufi, Qemal Butka, Kristo Sotiri, Dh. Dhespoti, and Omer Fortuzi, played a role in shaping the new architectural landscape by amalgamating traditional and contemporary elements. Their avant-garde approach to architectural design, which integrated elements of popular and regional traditions with the minimalist characteristics of modern architecture, reflected a harmonious relationship with the broader European architectural landscape. The architects of this period navigated the complexities of design objectives and stylistic choices within a colonial context, blurring the boundaries

between different architectural positions. Through their works, these architects embodied emblematic ways of engaging with the architectural challenges of their time, drawing on a range of influences to address functional needs, symbolic meanings, and aesthetic objectives. The visual transformations observed in colonial architecture during this period underscored the diverse perspectives and divisions within Italian architectural culture. The visible alterations in colonial architecture reflected the divergences and schisms within Italian architectural culture at that time. Italian architects, including Di Fausto, played a significant role in reshaping the urban landscape of Albania during the period of "Romanization" under Fascist Italy. Their interventions not only transformed the appearance of cities like Tirana but also respected the local psychology and traditions related to private property. The regulatory plans developed by Italian architects for Albanian cities, such as Tirana, Durrës, and Vlorë, reflected a blend of rational architecture, urbanism, and consideration for the cultural context. King Zog recognized the importance of these plans, some of which were successfully implemented. The collaboration between Italian and Albanian workers during this period contributed to the rich architectural heritage of Albania, with a lasting impact on the urban designs of the country. In the first half of the 20th century, the architecture and planning of the Albanian territory showcased collaborations between designers and architects from both Albania and Italy. Numerous projects were carried out by the Italian government throughout Albania during that time, leaving behind traces of designed projects that are still preserved in Albanian archives. These projects reveal the evolution of modern Albanian constructions from the years 1920-1930, marking a transition from classical to modern architectural styles. This shift was characterized by the move from manual to mechanized construction techniques. The early establishment of a suitable typology, advancements in construction technology, and the development of a new artistic taste influenced by changing lifestyles, all played a role in directing craftsmen towards exploring new architectural and decorative expressions. Construction techniques during this period saw not only technological advancements but also an enrichment of structural elements. The focus shifted from ornamental details to pure architecture, with stone and brick remaining the primary materials for building walls. External plastering not only enhanced the aesthetic appeal of buildings but also provided protection against external elements. The emphasis on modern architecture and urban interventions between 1925 and 1945 has become a focal point for understanding the past and shaping the present. As attention shifts towards revitalizing significant architectural landmarks, the importance of preserving national heritage is increasingly recognized.

### **Italian Architects who developed Tirana**

During the timeframe spanning from 1915 to 1939, Italian architects and engineers were actively engaged in technical bureaus, the Ministry of World Affairs, where they were involved in formulating regulations and organizing city centers. The period of 1940 to 1943 witnessed the Central Office of Construction and Urban Planning in Albania concentrating on the supervision of both public and private construction endeavors, the formulation of regulations, and the enhancement of infrastructure to facilitate urban growth (Dickhaut et al.,2021; Pallini&



Scaccabarozzi,2014). Following there is a description of the most prominent figures of Italian architects and their contribution in the Albanian urbanistic development.

***Armando Brasini's project for Tirana; the resemblance to Saint Peter's Square in the Vatican***

*Armando Brasini* (1879 – 1965) was a prominent Italian architect during the Fascist period and is considered one of the most important Italian architects of the Italian colonies (Qyqja,2009). In Europe, the significant shift in architecture and urban planning commenced with the advent of the Modern Movement, influenced by the theories of Le Corbusier and other architects. Armando Brasini, shaped by the late 1800s generation, persisted in employing neoclassical techniques in both urban planning and architecture. Highly esteemed by Mussolini, Brasini was the mastermind behind the impactful interventions in Rome during the 1920s and 1930s, particularly the "*I Fori Imperiali*" (Godoli & Tramonti,2012). Considering his background as a decorator, his ability to transition from frame carving to urban and territorial scenography solutions is understandable. In response to a request from the Albanian government, the Italian government, which had consolidated its power in Italy, sent the architect Armando Brasini to design the regulatory plan of Tirana (Resta,2016; Qyqja,2009). His unwavering dedication to Rome led to delays in responding to Zog's requests, ultimately resulting in strained relations and the termination of the project. Brasini arrived in Albania in 1925, aiming to convey the themes of monumental city design through his architecture. Inspired by the baroque style, he proposed significant changes to Tirana, evident in the scenography of his project drawing. After analyzing the predominantly oriental features of the capital, Brasini sought to make radical urban interventions, creating a monumental boulevard oriented along the north-south axis, reminiscent of the ancient Roman "cardo maximus" axis, with a "Forum" at the intersection of the axes. He gave a strong semi-circular character to the square of the ministries, employing a neoclassical-monumental architectural language with prominent baroque forms. The boulevard culminated in a large park, reminiscent of the model of Versailles in Paris, where the monumental presidential palace would be built, taking advantage of the hills' unevenness to create balconies and panoramic terraces. This design also incorporated stairs and terraces for accessibility. Brasini's vision for Tirana's city center included a cluster of six ministry buildings connected by a central boulevard, a concept that was later simplified by Florestano di Fausto. His grand design bore resemblance to St. Peter's Square in the Vatican, aiming to establish a monumental longitudinal center distinct from the city's prevailing oriental influence. This axis was envisioned as a symbolic link between the old and new city, emphasizing the ceremonial act of defining boundaries and marking the city's foundation. The project involved creating a wide boulevard in the north-south direction to separate the existing city from its outskirts, proposing a new and autonomous city as a monumental and governing center. His project for Tirana bears obvious similarities to his previous project for a neighborhood in Flaminio of Rome, where he designed his monumental work called "Urbe Massima"(Godoli & Tramonti,2012). He had already gained experience in Rome in the search for the forms of the Urbis. In Tirana, he faced a completely different design context from his previous experience. The formal characterization of the city was entrusted to be built around circular squares along the axis

and at its scenographic terminals. In the center, defined by the plan of its architectures, descending in scale to the sculptural groups, the continuity of the city was opposed to the newly sketched periphery in its direction. Brasini, being an artist architect, paid great attention to the monumental image of the city. In 1925, Brasini designed the regulatory plan for Tirana, featuring a prominent north-south boulevard that delineated the existing city from its outskirts, embodying a monumental architectural statement (Godoli & Tramonti, 2012; Gesleri, 1993). Compared to the 1923 City Regulatory Plan, which completely rationalized the road structure, Brasini's project contained a different idea for the city, embodied in the construction of the center. Brasini was the interpreter of a historical continuity based on the great architects of the past. His craft and artistic formation led him to create models more like those of the architects of the past, especially the Baroque architects, than to the contemporary ones. Brasini sought forms and models from the past and reconstructed with them an idea of his own modern Romano-Baroque. Through the rediscovery and re-appropriation of building methods with ancient building forms and techniques, he sought mediation between the art. The vast squares lining the axis were delineated by clusters of grandiose structures adorned in the Romanesque architectural style (Guitera, 2021; Godoni & Tramonti, 2012). Within these edifices, the distinctive features of Brasini's Roman-inspired design language were evident, with triumphal arches preceding the entrance to the square, colossal porticoes flanking the public buildings' entrances, robust plinths jutting out, niches with arched ceilings, simplified columns, and lodges. The nascent Tirana emerged as a manifestation of the contemporary Western culture that prioritized visibility and presentation, embodying a grand political spectacle symbolizing the republic's newfound power. The layout of the forthcoming Scanderbeg Square distinctly reflects the baroque aesthetics, characterized by a continuous interplay between the curvilinear and intricate forms that shape the square resembling a whirlwind. An aesthetic coherence among the adjacent structures is achieved through a portico-aqueduct that links them, from which radial paths extend towards the periphery. The axis culminated in the presidential palace, resembling a fortress when viewed along the axis, featuring angular cylindrical towers and solid lateral walls that conferred sturdiness and grandeur to the edifice; only upon traversing the frontal space adorned with two rows of columns, one could access the private garden at the rear, creating a dynamic interplay of stenographic fields. The construction was situated on a foundation excavated within the plot, where sinuous and curved lines prevailed once more. The 1926 Regulatory Plan materialized Brasini's vision of the north-south axis as a pivotal element in the hierarchical organization of the orthogonal street grid, guiding urban expansion towards the southwest of the bazaar. Three individuals contributed to this blueprint: the Albanian engineer Eshref Frashëri, the Italian engineer Castellani, and the Austrian Weiss. A revised version of the Scanderbeg Square design was also put forth, featuring an elongated configuration compared to Brasini's original concept (Guitera, 2021). Several radial roads originated from it, tracing the paths of the interprovincial roads that linked to the major Albanian cities. Prior to his arrival in Albania, he was extensively involved in activities in Libya. In 1921-214, the Governor of Tripoli (a province in Libya), Giuseppe Volpi, announced the decision to depart for Libya. The architect held a prominent position within the professional circles of Rome. Assigned by Volpi in Tripoli, he was

entrusted with overseeing the city's master plan, which laid the foundation for an ambitious urban renewal project in the capital of Tripolitania, involving the construction of a series of grand buildings. In his autobiography, Brasini also documented additional projects related to urban planning, with his initial task being the organization of a new promenade along the seashore, known as Lungomare Volpi (1922-24), a distinctive feature of Italian coastal cities. Described in contemporary literature as having a dual purpose, Lungomare was intended to rejuvenate the coastal area while establishing a focal point for the city's main architectural structures. Throughout his various projects in this Italian colony, Brasini drew inspiration from the stylistic elements of baroque monuments in Malta, as well as motifs from the island's military architecture dating back to the Cavalier period. Volpi's strategic vision was to infuse Western architectural characteristics into the Eastern territories through the architecture of Tripoli. However, accounts from that period suggest that Brasini's somewhat hesitant attempts to incorporate elements of Romanesque classicism into the local architecture were met with caution. Many construction materials, including Carrara marble, were imported from Italy, along with other materials for the external cladding of buildings sourced from regions near Rome. Since the early 20th century, Tirana has experienced continuous urban growth. In historical Tirana, alongside the traditional vernacular houses erected by local craftsmen, modern residences designed by both foreign and local architects were also present. The district of "Tirana e Re" (the New Tirana) is characterized by planned structures influenced by neoclassical, eclectic, and rationalist architectural styles, aligning with similar trends seen in other parts of Europe(Guitera,2021).

Another Italian engineer, architect, and politician who made a significant contribution to Albania was *Florestano Di Fausto* (1890–1965) (Godoni & Tramonti,2012). Regarded as a prominent figure of architectural design within the Fascist regime's colonies, Di Fausto capitalized on the unique opportunity to craft distinctive structures, resulting in a prolific portfolio of constructions across Italian territories. The freedom of creative expression afforded by the expansive landscapes of the colonies facilitated his architectural endeavors (Gesleri,2013). Upon encountering Brasini's urban development plan for Tirana and the central project draft, Di Fausto drew inspiration from the Italian Renaissance, notably manifesting in his contributions to the ministries' complex surrounding Scanderbeg Square. This sector, unveiled in 1932 and subsequently finalized by Gherardo Bosio, stands as a testament to his architectural vision. Additionally, in 1928, Di Fausto undertook the construction of the Royal Villa and the edifices comprising the Italian Industrial School of Art in Scutari (Godoni & Tramonti,2012).

Yet another renowned architect who made significant contributions to the development of Tirana was *Gherardo Bosio* (Godoni & Tramonti,2012). Bosio was entrusted with a pivotal assignment that posed a distinctive challenge for any professional: to materialize the master plan of a European capital. This capital, viewed from an urban perspective, was nearly non-existent, yet Bosio believed it should embody the aspirations of a burgeoning new authority emerging on the global platform: the new Italy. The emerging Italian Empire, leveraging the magnificent legacy and

enduring roots of Ancient Rome in the Western Balkans (as well as across the Mediterranean region), endeavored to reaffirm its dominance over the area through a comprehensive initiative where architectural and urban planning received meticulous attention and substantial financial backing. The Italian government assumed the financial responsibility of the endeavor, and the Florentine architect undertook the responsibility of overseeing the management of this bureau, particularly for the development, revision, or finalization of regulation plans, the construction of regulations for major Albanian urban centers, and the supervision of all infrastructure and facilities (from railways to industrial sites) to ensure a coherent evolution of urban hubs and surrounding territories. Disregarding the oriental-inspired influences of the Ottoman legacy in the nation, Bosio concentrated on the significance and symbolism that the “Kulla” (the Tower) had embodied for generations, and in his forthcoming architectural discourse, he adeptly incorporated this emblematic element of Albania. In collaboration with Berardi, he erected the Albania Pavilion at the Fiera del Levante in Bari, envisioning an architectural structure in the shape of a solid parallelepiped where the utilization of stone endowed the pavilion with a fortress-like attribute(Kodra,2017). These forms evoked the essence of the "Albanian Kulla" albeit reinterpreted with a contemporary touch. Adhering to the same architectural vocabulary albeit enhanced with a remarkable sense of grandeur, Bosio embarked on designing the “Pallatin Fasho” (Fasho Palace, presently housing the University of Tirana). This edifice is different not just from the “Tre Kullat” (Colonnade Palace) and the Academy of Arts (as they are known today), but also from the Prime Minister's Office and notably of the “Pallati i Brigadave” (the ceremonial housing of the President of Albania). Despite facing international censure, we posit that Bosio's approach was not so much a concession to traditional forms, which today is no longer deemed a flaw, but rather a stance aligned with the prevailing regime. During this era in Italy, rationalism underwent reassessment, and factions of architects increasingly advocated for a form of rationalism characterized by individuality rather than an international approach(Bedini,2024).Bosio's endeavors in Tirana represent a remarkable contribution; apart from the urban schemes, only in Tirana did he actualize the University, the Academy of Arts, the Colonnade with the Archaeological Institute, the Stadium (today Air Albania), the Prime Minister's Office, the Dajti Hotel the Palace of the Brigades with its entire park and unique furniture. He also designed the volumetric Palace of Culture and the National Museum of Albania(Pallini & Saccabarrozi,2014). Bosio was focused on attaining a balanced aesthetic for all architectural connections, by standardizing the volume, length, external cladding materials, and front facades of each building, organized based on 4-meter modular interactions, resulting in buildings of equal size, spaced apart. These urban planning criteria allowed for immediate construction on the main civic streets without hindering the potential development of the regulatory plan, which required thorough examination. The restructuring plan of Tirana was meticulously devised to fulfill the requirements and growth expectations of the capital of a colonial state, anticipating a population surge of around 100,000 inhabitants. According to research, Tirana differed from other Albanian urban centers in lacking structures of significant historical and architectural value, aside from a few mosques and the gardens surrounding the former royal residence(Veizaj,2020; Prifti,2013). Bosio proposed

conserving the entire historic center of Tirana "*to retain the historical remnants of Muslim civilization*"; these were the aspirations of the designer and his team, outlining the guiding principles of Tirana's regulatory plan, aiming to imbue the city with a Westernized appearance while preserving its essence by enhancing the delicate balance of the "*green garden city*."

### **From the 1930s to the reformulation of bilateral relations and the stability of the Western Balkans.**

The revival of Italian-Albanian relations can be attributed to a process of reassessing the priorities of Italian foreign policy that has been ongoing since the early 1990s and especially at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Following the conclusion of the bipolar standoff, Italian foreign policy has transitioned due to the disappearance of key assumptions underpinning the country's international engagements. With the termination of the "position rent of the Cold War" and global changes, the Italian administrations, while still holding onto traditional frameworks, displayed diplomatic strategies to reconstruct outdated coalitions and partnerships to align with prevailing power dynamics. The collapse of the dictatorship in Albania led to the breakdown of its institutional and economic framework, resulting in social unrest and the emigration of thousands of individuals (Bonifazi& Sabatino,2003). Italy successfully accommodated these refugees through effective diplomatic measures, establishing itself as the primary actor in managing the Balkan crisis. The Italian diplomatic efforts are currently concentrated on promoting the integration process among Western Balkan countries. Among these nations, Albania emerges as a significant ally due to its political stability and lack of conflict with the European Union, unlike Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which face ongoing instability. Albania's role in stabilizing Kosovo and facilitating Serbia's transition into a stable political environment is crucial. Italy's overarching strategy is to reshape the power dynamics within the European Union, positioning itself favorably against other key players such as France and Germany. Italy continues to prioritize its presence in the region's major nations while anticipating Albania and Serbia's contributions to the EU's expansion into the Adriatic region. Italy's notable presence in the Albanian economy is well-documented. The dedication of Italian diplomacy towards supporting Corridor VIII serves as a prime illustration here. The establishment of six industrial parks in regions like Shengjin, Koplik, Spitalle, Durres, Shkodra, Elbasan, and Vlora is set to involve Italian enterprises, thereby enhancing the eco-friendly aspects of production processes(Shibkova,2023). Nonetheless, there is a pressing need to align environmental policies with industrialization objectives that encompass Italian stakeholders. Crafting an environmental governance framework tailored for the Balkans and Albania stands as a significant endeavor within Italian foreign relations. This initiative not only facilitates the attraction of substantial financial backing from European and global schemes but also safeguards Italian national interests, notably the advancement of tourism. Considering the ecological and economic value of the Adriatic, alongside the fragility of its ecosystem, underscores the risks associated with potential declines in environmental standards within the Albanian production context. Albania affirms itself as a reliable partner of Italy, and the significance of the agreement is regardless of the policy directions of the various governments in both nations. This alignment



transcends the bilateral scope, encompassing the European and Atlantic outlooks as well: Albania's emphasis on EU accession and the Atlantic alliance further bolsters its ties with Rome. Italy's increasing involvement in stabilizing the Western Balkans has evolved from military and law enforcement efforts to civilian initiatives. Consequently, Albania has emerged as a key ally of Italy, engaging in the nation's modernization endeavors, particularly in the energy sector. These strategic collaborations serve to strengthen the existing presence of Italian businesses and financial institutions in Albania. On a diplomatic level, Italy has aspired to position itself as a primary partner for the Western Balkan states, advocating for their eventual membership in the EU (Shibkova,2023; Naselli,2021;Niented & Aliaj,2018;Jamac & Ira,2018;Ramos et al.,2016; Diener et al.,2013). This strategic approach is designed to rebalance the EU by diminishing the geopolitical influence of the Franco-German axis. Nevertheless, the drawback of this strategy lies in its long-term nature: Albania is projected to conclude its accession process in 2030, with similar timelines for Turkey and Serbia, although each country might progress differently(Ramos et al.,2016). Italian authorities in this sense must enhance the coherence and coordination of their support initiatives. This endeavor should encompass backing for development and modernization projects at the European and global scales, as well as aligning the goals of major Italian corporations with those of the national framework.

## **CONCLUSIVE REMARKS**

In the great path of construction and progress that prevailed in the Albanian capital, Tirana, including those built after the 90s, undoubtedly the buildings built during the government of Ahmet Zogu and the Italian occupation of the country, such as the National Bank of Albania, The Dajti Hotel, the Prime Minister's Office, the Academy of Fine Arts, the Central Corps of the University of Tirana, as well as the headquarters of the ministries, differ from other public buildings built after 1943. They differ in their external appearance, the materials used during construction, the architectural aspect, as well as their functional one (Capolino, 2011). To analyze the representation of foreign relations within the case study, the theoretical framework is utilized, with an emphasis on identifying instances of 'metaphor' and 'mediated reference', substantiated by relevant secondary sources. This research contributes to the ongoing conversation regarding the impact of architectural structures on the international relations of a nation aspiring to accede to the European Union. Examining the architectural realm exclusively, a meticulous evaluation of the creations of prominent Italian architects from that period underscores the significant progress made by the country in terms of urban planning and design proficiency, which could potentially symbolize authority. In a broader scope, it underscores the practical implications of the importance Italy has placed on Albania and the Western Balkans from early times and into the foreseeable future.

A strong relation between architectural buildings and politics is seen through the '30s, a relation that raise power and build capacities for ideologies and politics. Similar in many aspects, the architectural and urban development in King Zog's Albania exhibited commonalities with the European line. Following the neo-renaissance and mannerist trends of the early 1930s, the

architectural landscape saw the emergence of monumental rationalism, as exemplified by Gherardo Bosio, in subsequent projects. From 1924 until 1944, the "Central Office of Building and Urban Planning of Albania," under the leadership of Bosio, fostered bilateral relations and created superior and aesthetically pleasing structures across Albania. It served as a hub for urban and architectural planning, as well as for monitoring the project advancements. During its brief existence, the institution expanded its planning initiatives to encompass various cities such as Tirana, Durrës, Shkodra, Elbasan, Korça, Vlora, Gjirokastra, and Berat. The architecture of each building is derived from an absolute monumentality of a scenic space, decorated with material values. The interweaving of different languages among the Italian architectural complexity in Tirana, as the present paper explores, is visible, both in the entirety of sometimes monumental and sometimes eclectic structures. The Italian project for fostering the architecture of Albania encompasses some political and social values such as fostering knowledge, social cohesion, hospitality, generational identity, creativity, etc. These values would not only bring Albania as a country at a more EU perspective progress but, also empower the political stability of the Western Balkans. Although today Tirana is a country of youth, is not a youth country. It has a long history of becoming since 1920 when it was first proclaimed Capital. As the analysis of this work suggests, there can be no future without the memory of the past, it is very important to recover it for the new generations that will follow, that is, those who will build the future. We must preserve and maintain from time to time the buildings that represent different periods of our history, because unfortunately we have often torn important pages of that. Tearing down or denying a building that carries a piece of history brings nothing to the generational identity and heritage of a country.

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