

## THE CONGRESS OF ELBASAN AND ITS ATTITUDE TOWARD ELBASANISHT

**Manola Myrta**

Faculty of Education“ Aleksander Moisiu “University Dures, Albania.  
E mail: manola.myrta@yahoo.com

### **Abstract**

The Congress of Elbasan is a valuable institution, which stands alongside all the other organisms, which discussed, not only general problems related to Albanian and the widespread of education in Albania, but also to an existential problem of Albanian: the Albanian unification and the foundation of standard Albanian. As it is known, the Literary Committee of Shkodra decided the central Gheg dialect as the basis of common Albanian. However, the idea of putting Elbasanisht as standard language has been even earlier. The data tell us that this issue was discussed earlier in 1909 in the Congress of Elbasan. One of the decisions, which this congress decided, was to use the Elbasanisht as the basis of a common variant of Albanian, as a variant which is understandable by all Albanians. Was the decision supported at that time? Who were the main representatives who supported this idea? What was the attitude of the foreign authorities on this decision? Was this issue reflected in the press of that time? Was this problem reflected in the writings of foreign personalities? This study aims to highlight the goals of the Congress of Elbasan and to give a general picture of the reality on which the decision was made, to establish Elbasanisht as the basis of a common variant of Albanian. The focus of this study will also be the attitude of different foreign scholars about this decision, as well as the fact that this decision was presented in the correspondence of that time. This study will present the ways in which this variant would be spread to all Albanians. This study will help all the linguists who have the focus of their study the foundation of the Standard Albanian.

**Keywords:** *Albanian language, Standard Albanian, Congress of Elbasan, arguments, opinions*

### **Introduction:**

The Congress of Elbasan is an institution that occupies an important role in the country's progress in establishing standard Albanian language. According to the content and decisions, we can admit that this Congress contributed to the foundation of standard Albanian and even crystallized it institutionally. If we refer to the history of standard Albanian and in particular the Elbasanisht variant, the Literary Commission of Shkodra and its decisions contributed in setting Elbasanisht as the common language for all Albanians. But, on the other hand, we have to admit the fact that we are not dealing with a sudden decision of the Commission or a random coincidence, that this variant was presented as a model on which linguists had to rely to establish the standard Albanian.

## Aim of study/research:

Facts show that the idea of setting Elbasanisht as the standard language was taken earlier, in the Congress of Elbasan, which was held on 2<sup>nd</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> September 1909. The Congress consisted of a number of delegates who represent different Albanian clubs and organizations within the country and abroad, among whom the patriots, activists and linguistics like Simon Shuteriqi, Thoma Papapano, Gjergj Qiriazi, Sevasti Qiriazi, Dhimiter Buda, Nikolle Kacorri, Orhan Pojani etc.

## Data analysis:

The Congress of Elbasan was held in those circumstances, when it was a need to open schools in the Albanian language and institutionally recognize it as a an instruction language when it was also a need for teachers and textbooks in the native language. Priority was given to the Congress the idea that the alphabet used should be that of the Congress of Manastir, to be against the Arabic alphabet and to write in their native language. These were some of the objectives of Congress on which discussions were conducted but of course with different positions. As it was mentioned above, the Congress of Elbasan, besides the issue of orthography, discussed the problem of the common written language for all Albanians, which were reflected in the media of that time: "*They treated the problem of the written language and asked for a unique literary Albanian ...*". (The Alphabet of the Albanian and the Congress of Manastir, 1972, p. 103). Regarding this issue, the Congress reached a very important decision for the Albanian language, which was reflected in his article 11. This decision was related to the unification of the Albanian language using a literary language, without significant dialectical forms, which have basically "the variant" of Elbasan, as a better understood variant by all Albanians as well as it was required that all writers should use it in their writings.

This decision was also widely reflected in the press of that time. In the newspaper "Lirija", published in Thessaloniki in 1909, the decision was reflected in this form: "*The Congress decided to use the variant of Elbasan by all the Albanian writers, because it is understood by all Albanians.*" (p. 251)

This issue was also reflected in the newspaper "Dielli" (1909). It was presented in the article 11 of the Congress, which it was proposed the use of Elbasan variant by all Albanian writers, as a "a variant" which is understood throughout the country. More specifically, it claimed: "*The Congress decided that all Albanian writers should use the variant of Elbasan as a variant understood throughout Albania.*" (Journal "Dielli", article "Nga Elbasani", 1909).

In the periodic of Manastir "Bashkimi i Kombit", it was written that in Elbasan Congress a significant number of delegates expressed the opinion that the variant of Elbasan should be the Albanian literary language. Such a proposal considering the fact that the dialect of Elbasan is closer to the two main Albanian dialects, north and south - and it is the most accessible to all Albanians. (Visko, 1992, p. 229). According to this interpretation, we notice that the primary importance of this variant is because it is understood by all Albanians. The decisions made at the Congress of Elbasan are presented not only in the local press, but also in some foreign documents, especially in correspondence of foreign personalities of the time. Among them, it is worth mentioning a letter to the British Embassy in Istanbul, written by Gerard Llowther, on September 29, 1909, about the Congress of Elbasan and its

achievements. Among the other points mentioned, it was considered the article four, under which states: *“The dialect of Elbasan was chosen as the Albanian literary language and all Albanian writers are required to popularize its use as wide as possible”*. (Lloshi, 2005, p. 71) Meanwhile, in a letter of vice consul Matthers to Sir Gerard Llowther, in Manastir, on October 6, 1909, it was said: *“The choice of Elbasan variant, with the aim of becoming the national language, was made after a thorough review. Elbasan is located on the dividing line - Shkumbin River - between the Tosk and Gheg, although the name is Gheg, in fact it is as much as gheg and tosk, due to the suitable position to become the point of union of the two branches of the Albanian race.”* (Lloshi, 2005, p. 72-73)

Quite interesting is also another letter to the U.S. Department for T.R Hodgson (The foreigner agent of British Bible Society, Istanbul) written on April 25, 1911 in Thessaloniki. We present the full letter below:

*Dear Sir,*

*We learned with great interest and pleasure about the purpose of your Society to provide the Albanian nation the saint scripts in their language. You know their battles to save their ancient language and you accept it, we are sure of this, an excellent case of this fact contributes to give the nation a great service by serving simultaneously the interests of God kingdom.*

*Albanian leaders have worked diligently to integrate language and have agreed to a national alphabet. They have already agreed to choose the variant of Elbasan as standard and probably will agree on the Latin alphabet with very small changes. We respectfully suggest that you should keep in mind these important facts in your translation and revision work.*

*We gladly acknowledge the valuable services that you have made as our associates in these areas and we wish that you had the honor to specify the standard language for this nation, as is done for many other nations with the Book of books.*

*Expressing our honors, with respect*

*The mission of the American Section in European Turkey*

*( Signed ) Robt. Thomson*

*Chairman of the Annual Meeting .(Lloshi, 2005, p. 52-53)*

Below it is presented a note added by T.R.Hodgson, in which he sets Albanian dialects and, especially, the variant of Elbasan, as it follows:

*Gheg : irregular mixture of dialects*

*Tosk : uniform rules of grammar , generally understood everywhere in Albania*

*Elbasanisht : a mix of both but more Gheg than Tosk .*

*BFBS Archives*

*Translation Department Correspondence*

*Albanian, I.. (Lloshi, 2005, p. 52-53)*

The events of Albania could not be out of attention of foreign ambassadors, concerned about an issue so important to Albanians as language, something, which they have shown in their correspondence. Below we present two British documents about the Congress of Elbasan.

Initially, we present a brief passage of a letter of the British vice consul about the Congress of Elbasan. This document (written form) was prepared two weeks after the event. It was taken from the article 15 of the Congress decisions, in the British report was reflected the decision about Elbasanisht.

*British Embassy in Istanbul*

*September 29, 1909*

*Sir,*

*I have the honor to report to Your Excellency the information that in Elbasan was held an Albanian Congress 2<sup>nd</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> September...*

*1) The variant of Elbasan was chosen as the literary language and Albanian authors are required to use and popularize it as wide as possible....*

*I have the honor etc.*

*W.D.W Matthews (Lloshi, 2005, p. 71)*

In addition to this document, there is also a second document, which was drafted after two weeks. British Vice Consul has not disconnected his attention from this event and has assembled the most complete information about the discussions of the alphabet and the reasons why Elbasanisht variant was selected to become the national language. It was even richer the presentation of various aspects of the national movement and the progress of the Albanian school.

Sir Edward Grey Sir G.Lowther for

(Received on 18 October)

(No. 835). Istanbul, October 11, 1909.

*Sir,*

*I have the honor to send you attached a notice by vice consul in charge in Manastir, who reports about the Congress of Elbasan and the Albanian movement.*

*I have the honor etc. .*

*Gerard Loether*

*The Attachment Nr.1.*

*Vice consul in charge*

*Matthews for Sir G.Lowther*

(No. 56). Manastir, Oct. 6, 1909.

*Sir,*

*The choice of Elbasan variant ..., with the aim of becoming the national language, became after a thorough review. Elbasan located on the dividing line – Shkumbin river between Gheg and Tosk, though it is named Gheg, in fact, it is as much as Gheg and Tosk, it is its suitable position to become the point of union of the two branches of the Albanian race .....*

*I have the honor etc.*

*W.D.W.MATTHEWS*

Regarding the use of the dialect of Elbasan as the basis of standard Albanian is also worth noting an interesting fact, which relates to Hoxhonsen, representative of a long tradition, from almost a century of the Albanian Bible Society, which does not support this decision. He was adamant to protect his organization name and he was against the interference by others in this field. It refers to the U.S. Mission in American Turkey. Given the known fact of the impact of Bible translation by Martin Luther in the German standard definition, expressed the opinion that the same thing will happen with the Albanian language. Foreign representatives, regarding the common variant of Albanians were, " that the bases had already been decided: the variant of Elbasan will be the national standard." (Lloshi, 2005, p. 29-30)

This was contradicted by Hoxhonsen, as he was a supporter of Tosk as linguistic variant which was being used by his organization in the translation of the holy books. His attitude was expressed in the letter that he delivered to London, which reflected his attitude against this decision. He valued the Tosk as the standard variant and underestimated Gheg because he had worked on translations using Tosk variant.

In, "The minutes of the Publications Subcommittee" Volume 38, p.14, we note exactly Hoxhonsoni letters sent with the application to the U.S. Mission. Summary of paper, inter alia that "... *this mission has failed to open any job in the country, nor do they know the Albanian dialects. The key is to draw the Scriptures in the proposed national alphabet now and not to be confused with dialects for the moment...* (Lloshi, 2005, p. 30)

These documents , which reflects widely any decision taken on the issue of Albanian alphabet and common language of Albanians, show once again that even the foreign opinion was interested in a faster resolution of these problems for existential of Albanians and Albania itself as a nation.

If we refer to Albanian reality, we will notice besides the positive impact of this decision it had its counterparts as well. Let us look at some of the attitudes that bore the most important figures of the Albanian directly involved in discussions about these issues:

Regarding this decision, Alexander Xhuvani, known as Dok Sula, maintains the inclusion of specific aspects of the two dialects: *Tosk as literary basis, but written using the letters of Bashkimi society. Among other things, he claimed: " In this way, I think that both parts should be pleased because Tosk will use their dialect and Gheg to whom the society belongs to, will use their letters which are the most used and preferred by many writers."* (Alphabet of Albanian language and the Congress of Manastir, 1972, p. 191). Gjergj Fishta, as a member of the Commission, formally adopted this decision but he never implemented it.

However, the decisions of the Congress of Elbasan was widely accepted and, finally, the model was determined as a base for the common language of all Albanians.

But now, after casting this very important step, the problem consists in, which steps should be taken ,what organisms will be included and in what way would Elbasanisht spread in all Albanian lands as the common language of all Albanians.

There were two ways through which would be reflected and spread Elbasanisht in that period: First: through books, press and official documents. The decision of the Congress of Elbasan was made not only about Elbasanisht as a common language of all Albanians, but it also recommended that Elbasanisht should be used in the written books press. It was also recommended to all the secretaries that during the meetings of Congress, all the writing notes, reports, discussions and decisions should be made in the variant of Elbasan. (Visko, 1992, p. 229).

Associated with this initiative to spread Elbasanisht, Hoxhonsoni , who had opposed in his open letter the setting of Elbasanisht as the common language or writing of Albanians, a month later, he wrote to London but with another attitude in relation to publications in Albanian. In his letter, he wrote, "Articles that we are publishing will contribute to the formation of the Albanian language" (Lloshi, 2005, p. 31)

At this point, it is worth mentioning the finding of the famous historian Irina Senkeviç: "Congress of Elbasan, amongst others, was also a rally for Albanian ." (Visko, 1992, p. 229) Second: as a nest of the spread of Elbasanisht will serve the Normal School of Elbasan, for the spread of the decision which was taken exactly at the Congress of Elbasan. If we refer to the history, before the Congress of Elbasan, despite the great efforts of Renaissance, it was little achieved according to the Albanian language. Until then, in Albania, in addition to the Mësonjëtorë, the first Albanian class opened in Korca in 1887 and some few other schools that opened after; there were only Turkish and Greek schools. While the teaching of Albanian language in schools, it was a demand of that time.

The facts appeared immediately. In the fall of 1909 according to the decision of the Congress of Elbasan it was opened the first Normal School in Elbasan, which prepared teachers for Albanian schools. This was another event in the history of the development of education and culture in our country.

The Normal of Elbasan, as it was anticipated and set in the Congress, played a major role in the unification of Albanian literary language and its spread. What made the Normal a nest of literary Albanian and created opportunities for it to return in a center of spread and radiation of the variant of Elbasan was the arrival of students from all regions of Albania and distribute them as teachers in all the corners the country. Students from Kosovo and those who worked in Kosovo, Albania, Montenegro and Macedonia made a great contribution to support linguistic convergence in those regions. Southern Gheg was spread there from those teachers and it was used as a literary variant in schools and publishing activity, until it was held the linguistic consultation in Prishtina (1968) and the Congress of Spell (1972). (Çeliku, 2009, p. 109).

Unification and the spread of standard Albanian have served other Pedagogical activities, such as rapid opening of courses for the training of teachers of different regions of the country, temporarily edition of "Normalisti" which was published for eight years (1929-1938), the organization of sports activities, art etc.

Congress of Elbasan through the Normal school gave an outstanding contribution to national Albanian culture and development of education, to spread the teaching of the mother tongue, to unify the common Albanian in the version of literary Elbasanisht and to develop the Albanian linguistic opinion. Luigj Gurakuqi claimed, "The Normal school is a national temple of knowledge. "Elbasanisht is a sweet variant." He stated that, "Here the rural, the central, the highlander and the poor will become one, here Tosk and Gheg will be only one, will be mixed together, will forget their names; Albanian here will be a sweet variant, will take the form of a common face, Albanians will come here, only Albanians." (Çeliku, 2005. p. 109).

## **Findings:**

Congress of Elbasan with its decisions tried to raise in our country a new educational system, providing, thus, a major contribution to the establishment of national education. It was called the "The Congress of Albanian teachers" or "National Congress about the problems of education," he realized coronation of great efforts to establish the common Albanian of all Albanians, the standard version Albanian language. The Flower Tree of 1909, as they called the Normal of Elbasan, gave its fruits in the field of education, culture and science. Given the undeniable importance and values of the Congress of Elbasan, we can list it besides other very important institutions, which dealt with the issue of defining and establishing standard Albanian language.

## **Conclusions:**

Congress of Elbasan is a very important institution, which was held in a period when Albania and Albanians were taken up as an existential issue: the opening of schools in Albanian language, the development of teaching in the mother tongue and not in other languages, as already was practiced, as well as establishing a common language version for all Albanians.

The Congress, after numerous discussions, took a number of important decisions regarding educational issues of the Albanian language, among which are mentioned:

- Opening of Normal School
- Establishing a common language, this was based on the variant of Elbasan.

The performance and decisions of Congress were widely nationally and internationally. Its decisions were widely covered in the press of the time, especially in the Elbasan press, but also in the correspondence of the foreign ambassadors' personalities present in Albania during that period. The decisions of the Congress were widely accepted, but there were objections from Albanian and foreign representatives.

However, despite the objections, we can affirm that this Congress achieved its goals successfully for the Albanian language and education, at a time when these issues were vital for Albanians and Albania as a country.

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