

ACTIVITIES OF THE ALBANIAN DIASPORA IN ROMANIA  
IN SUPPORT OF THE ALBANIAN NATIONAL CAUSE

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**Abstract**

Under the circumstances of the Ottoman rule in Albanian territories during 18-19th centuries, an important role in supporting the Albanian national cause was given by the Albanian colonies in Romania, Bulgaria, Egypt, the USA, etc. The largest and earliest Albanian colony was established in Bucharest, Romania. It mostly consisted of Albanian emigrants, who had settled in Romania in the second half of the 19-th century. Most of them began to organize themselves in associations, strongly supporting the movement for the Albanian language and culture, as a good opportunity to support Albanian patriots operating in Albania. The first created associations, despite their appearance as demonstrating cultural profile, in essence they were engaged in political activities, in support of the Albanian national cause. Initially, these associations maintained close ties with the Istanbul Association which had an important contribution the spread of the Albanian language and culture and also to the creation of the first associations in Romania. The first association established in Bucharest was named "Drita" would split into two branches, forming two new associations. The process of creating the first Albanian associations in Romania, would not be easy and it was conditioned by objective and subjective factors. They faced difficulties of various natures, ranging from financial difficulties, internal contradictions between their members, the obstacles of the Greek Orthodox clergy as well as the interventions of the *Sublime Porte*. The consequence of these difficulties would as well be the birth of different groups within these colonies, reorganization and the creation of new associations. Despite the dynamics of their activity, these associations held the same attitude when national interests were violated. We aim to analyze these issues by using and analyzing document of the Central State Archive, as well as the publications of academic institutions of the communist and post-communist periods as a comparative approach between them.

**Key words:** *Albanian Diaspora, cultural associations, Statute, "Drita", "Dituria".*

**Introduction**

In the second half of the 19th century, after the suppression of the League of Prizren, there was a new wave of emigration from all parts of Albania, Kosovo, and Macedonia. The wave of emigration was so large, due to the slow and one-sided development of capitalist agrarian relations in Albania. Their position was worsened by the lack of communication and the uncertainty of the movement of people and goods (Dermaku, 1983). This is the period when the exiled Albanians settled in Romania, Egypt, Bulgaria, etc., expanding the network of old colonies in these countries. The peasantry constituted the main mass of emigrants, but alongside them, some Albanian craftsmen and merchants immigrated from cities such as Korça, Berati, Gjirokastra, Pogradeci, Vlora, Prizren, Prishtina, etc. The placement of a large number of Albanians

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in the Romanian lands, who have rightly called it their "second homeland" has had a rather large impact. Albanians had found better conditions to live and work in Romania, but also the freedom to organize and contribute to the good of Albania. Taking advantage of these existing freedoms, in neighboring countries, they created the first colonies in exile to act legally economically, culturally, and politically. Even though associations with a cultural character were created in these colonies, their real purpose was activation in the Albanian national movement, helping directly to the development of the culture of the Albanian Renaissance and the liberation of the homeland from Ottoman rule. Among the largest Albanian colonies in the Balkans in that historical period was the Albanian colony in Romania.

### **The First Albanian Associations In Romania**

The Romanian state, formed by the unification of the two principalities of Wallachia and Moldova (1861), after the victory of independence in 1878, became the main settlement of emigrants coming from different provinces of the Ottoman Empire, as well as Albanian emigrants. In Bucharest, Iași, Craiova, Kostanta, Braila, etc., the development of industry took off, the construction of roads and railways, the exploitation of underground resources, etc. This development required, among other things, workforce (Myzyri, 2004).

The earliest and most important Albanian colony was formed in Romania. Orthodox Albanians from the province of Korça, had settled in the Romanian capital, Bucharest (Skëndi, 2000). Most of them, working as merchants or craftsmen, managed to accumulate considerable wealth, while gradually, they began to free themselves from the influence of the Greek Orthodox Church by increasing their attention on the Albanian language and culture. Meanwhile, Romanian diplomacy also supported the Albanian national cause for two reasons; firstly, because of the traditional ties between the two peoples and secondly, because of the common political interests in the Balkans ( Akademia e Shkencave të Shqipërisë, 2002) .

In the new political circumstances created after the suppression of the League of Prizren, *Shoqëria e të Shtypurit Shkronja Shqip*, (the Association of Printing the Albanian Letters) which was established in Istanbul several years ago, could not continue its activity. Some of the members left it and the rest together with the president of the society Sami Frashëri continued their individual activity in a completely illegal way. As early as 1880, the Istanbul Association had sent one of its active members Jani Vreto to Bucharest, with the mission to establish a branch of the association there (Skëndi, 2000). Thus, in the meeting organized by the Albanian Diaspora in Bucharest, in 1881 the first association was created. It was known as the "Branch of the Istanbul Association", whose main representatives were Jani Vreto and Pandeli Sotiri. There is an opinion that, in the first years of its creation, this association functioned as a branch of the Istanbul Association, and not as an independent association. This is due to the fact that the Istanbul Association continued to be active, despite operating illegally ( Akademia e Shkencave të Shqipërisë, 2002). In Istanbul in August 1884, the first edition of the cultural magazine "Drita" was published under the name of an Albanian Orthodox, but the real publisher of the magazine was Naim Frashëri. After the resignation of Petro Poga, as a result of the pressures of the Greek patriarchate, the magazine continued to

be published under the name "Dituria" by Pandeli Sotiri (Skëndi, 2000) . This magazine was also short-lived, due to the many difficulties encountered in the capital of the empire, so at this time the presidency of the Istanbul Association would be established in Bucharest, and in January 1885 its branch ("Branch of the Society of Istanbul") was named "Drita" (Skëndi, 2000) . Meanwhile, in another source, the formation of the "Drita" association is given in December 1884, in the assembly convened in Bucharest ( Akademia e Shkencave të Shqipërisë, 2002).

The cultural association named "Drita", was organized on the basis of a genuine program, based on the Statute and created its Steering Committee. Anastas Avramidhi Lacke, a rich man from Korça, was elected president of the society. The first decision that was taken at the meeting for the establishment of the "Drita" association, was gathering funds for the purchase of a printing house, to enable the printing of books in the Albanian language. Meanwhile, its chairman promised a sum of 100 thousand francs and that he would bequeath his property to the association in question. The aim of the association "Drita" for the development and advancement of the Albanian language, was defined in the first article of its statute, while in the second article, it was stated that the association would not be engaged in political activities. The main goal would be the printing of books in the Albanian language, aiming at the opening of Albanian schools in Albania in order to increase national awareness among Albanians. Article 3 of the statute required that the Turkish language be optional in Albanian schools. Meanwhile, according to article 4 of the statute of the society, for the writing of the Albanian language it was decided to use the Istanbul alphabet of the Frashëri brothers, which also proved the close connections with the association of Istanbul. The statute of the association "Drita" had 43 articles, which also regulated its relations with branches that would be established in other cities (Clayer, 2009).

One of the main achievements of "Drita" association was the purchase within two years of a printing house, where books and newspapers would be printed and published in Albanian and then they would be sent to Albania. Among the closest collaborators of this association were Sami and Naim Frashëri, Jani Vreto, who also prepared the first textbooks that were published in 1886 in the printing house of the association "Drita". The "Drita" association asked the Ottoman Government to transform foreign schools in Albania into Albanian schools. But, being unable to fulfil this request, at least, this association asked the Ottoman government to allow teaching the Albanian language in these schools. The "Drita" association created a new era of thinking for Albania, by opening an enlightenment path for the Albanians (Instituti i Studimeve Historike "Lumo Skëndo", 2017).

The creation of the "Drita" association and the fact that it was mostly composed of Orthodox emigrants from Korça, did not go unnoticed by the Greek chauvinist circles, which had claims on Korça and all of Lower Albania ( Akademia e Shkencave të Shqipërisë, 2002). In the pages of the Greek press of the time, the creation of this association and its demands for the delivery of the Albanian language, were considered extremely dangerous, for the final secession of Albania from Greece. (Myzyri, Levizja Kombetare shqiptare ne vitet 1882-1895, 1985) Also, for a long time there were several Greek associations and newspapers affiliated with the Istanbul Patriarchate, which were strongly committed to prevent the activity of the "Drita"

association by using various forms to incite the contradictions that brought about the contradictions between members of this association. Thus, very soon two currents were formed in the bosom of this association. Also, the president of the association "Drita" Anastas A. Lakce, who was decorated for "loyalty" by the king of Greece, was the first to abandon the mission and scope of the association. In these circumstances, the association "Drita" in 1886 would be dissolved and in its place would be created two other associations named "Drita" and "Dituria", which, not finding agreement between them, continued their activity independently of one another.

### Reorganization of the cultural "Drita" association

In January 1887, with the proposal of a group from the "Drita" association, there was created a new association with the same name, led by Nikola Naço (Akademia e Shkencave të Shqipërisë, 2002). The group that created this society is considered to be the discordant group of the old association, because there were also Romanian personalities on its board (Skëndi, 2000). N. Naço, considered as very dangerous for the activity of the association "Drita", the influence of the Greek ruling circles and Pan-Slavism operating in Romania and the Balkans. He pays great importance to the cooperation of the Albanians with the Vlachs of Albania, Macedonia and Pindus, because according to him, only through this cooperation could Romania's support to the Albanians be ensured. But N. Naço's views, in order to secure outside support in favour of the national cause, were considered to be dubious. There is an opinion that N. Naço was for the merging of the Albanian National Movement with that of the Vlachs (Skëndi, 2000). As for the writing of the Albanian language, Nikola Naço supported the idea of an alphabet entirely in Latin letters and that could bring about the unification of all Albanians, opposing the Istanbul alphabet and adopting an alphabet based on that of the Romanian language. There is a conviction that the association and its governing body were funded by the Romanian government.

The "Drita" association expanded its activity by creating new branches in several other cities of Romania, such as Constanta, Pitești, Braïla, etc ((AQSH), Shkresa është bazuar mbi vendimin e marrë që në 15 nëntor 1886., 1887). From the Albanians in Braïla, Romania, we are informed about the creation of the Bucharest branch of the association, asking of its members for the association's charter, membership diplomas and books in the Albanian language. Initially, in this city, about 300 Albanians were ready to become part of the branch of the Bucharest society.

In a letter of N. Naço to the Albanians who lived in the city of Pitesti, the importance of the promulgation of the Albanian language was propagated, and support was sought for the opening of schools in the Albanian language. Seeking the cooperation of the Albanians in this city, N. Naço continued by reminding them *that it was the Albanians who had helped the Greeks to form their kingdom, who, when they need us, call us brothers and when they overcome difficulties, they call us Arvanites. The Turks call us "pis Arnaut" (filthy Arnaut). Here in Wallachia some call us Greeks, some call us Bulgarians, they curse us worse than the eunuchs. This disease was brought to us by the darkness that has plagued us and we do not look at it. So, we have to brush away the darkness. The nation that has a written language is not lost. I remind you that Slavic has penetrated Gegeri, both from the liturgy and from school, they started to learn Slavic and little by little they were being assimilated. He claimed that in Wallachia there were 20*

*thousand Albanians, who with the income that could be collected by contributing just one franc, there could be published as many books as to fill the towns and villages in Albania* ((AQSH), Shoqërite Shqiptare ne Rumani., 1888).

With the creation of the new "Drita" association, it was agreed that the old typography would also be officially transferred to this society, accompanied by the relevant minutes and the decision according to which this typography would be used only for cultural purposes ((AQSH), Shkresa është bazuar mbi vendimin e marrë që në 15 nëntor 1886., 1887).

The support given by the Albanians who were in these cities to the "Drita" association, enabled the publication of some works of didactic character in Albanian. The branch of the "Drita" in Braille in 1887, published a literary-scientific newspaper called "Drita" (Lumina) which published 11 issues. Meanwhile, an important achievement was the publication of the first issue of the newspaper "Albanian" (Albanezul) in August 1888, a weekly newspaper in Albanian, Romanian and French (Skëndi, 2000). In the first issue of the newspaper "Shqiptari" ("The Albanian"), under the title "Çfarë kërkohet" ("What we seek") was also introduced the program of the "Drita" association, where it was requested:

1. The use of the Albanian language in schools and churches
2. The foundation of cultural associations and the opening of Albanian schools
3. The development of the national language, history and literature
4. The publication of textbooks, magazines and newspapers in the Albanian language. Through the pages of this newspaper, Albanians were called upon, regardless of religion, to stand up together to contribute with their work, wealth, knowledge, words with mind and heart and even with their lives to eradicate slavery of the Albanian people.

Through the pages of this newspaper, Albanians were called to unite regardless of religion, to contribute together with their work, wealth, knowledge, words with mind and heart and even with their lives to eradicate slavery of the Albanian people.

Through the printed sources of the time, we get informed about the correspondence between Nikolla Naco and the linguist from Elbasan Kostandin Kristoforidhi, who had been struggling to publish an Albanian language dictionary, which he has worked upon for some several years. In 1888, Kristoforidhi expressed his worries confirming the fact that with the initiative of Jani Vreto from the Albanian of Wallachia, Romania and Egypt a considerable amount of funds had been gathered for the publication of his dictionary, but unfortunately this money was not used for this purpose. Thus, Kristoforidhi was directly accusing Nikolla Naco for such an injustice, because referring to him, that sum of money was used for the establishment of the Albanian Association of Bucharest instead, and such an action was taken without his knowledge. He exclaimed that except from the Albanian people of Wallachia, another considerable financial contribution for the establishment of the association was given by the Albanians in Egypt. Also, Kristoforidhi criticized the fact that part of the funds raised in his name, destined for the publication of his dictionary were used for the publication of books in the Albanian language from the "Drita" association "stating: ... *they intended to build a wall, without constructing its basis* (Shqiptar, 1889).

Through the articles in the newspaper "The Albanian", he suggested that *Europe cannot have other more secure and reliable factors in the Balkans than the Albanian-Romanians* ((AQSH), Shoqërite shqiptare ne Rumani, 1890). N. Naço was for the creation of a joint Albanian - Vlach state. According to him, in order to face the Slavic threat and ensure peace in the Balkans, the Great Powers had to oppose the claims of the Balkan states (Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro). Referring to its program, the "Drita" association was not for the secession of Albanians from the Sultan, as long as there was a risk of fragmentation of Albanian territories by the Balkan states. This view was expressed by the Arbëresh Jeronim De Rada years ago, who saw the fate of the Albanians as closely linked to the Ottoman Empire (Bozborra, 2002). Such an attitude, we think, should be seen in the context of the regional geopolitics of the time. Optimistic about the legitimate right of Albanians to be free and independent, he considered autonomy under the Ottoman Empire as a temporary but necessary phase that would precede the creation of an independent Albanian state. The same opinion with De Rada was shared at this time by the Romanian princess of Albanian origin Dora d'Istria, who will best complement the continuation of J. De Rada's opinion through the words... *that otherwise Albanians could be exploited by the interests that are quite unknown* (Teuta Hoxha, Kujtim Nuro, Arta Nika, Almira Bubsji, 1987)

One of the most important achievements of the Albanian "Drita" association was the creation of the first Albanian-Vlach school for learning not only the Albanian language but also Vlach, and for the preparation of Albanian teachers. In this school, initially at least 15 teachers would teach, whose expenses would be covered by the "Drita". The teachers who would teach in this school would be from Albanian but also Macedonian territories. The basic subjects in the approved program were:

- a. Orthodox, Mohammedan and Catholic religions
- b. Ottoman, Albanian and Romanian languages
- c. Hekëtor i çunave, (Pedagogy, Saying and Doing) (Theory and Practice)
- d. History and general Geography mostly of the Ottoman Kingdom.
- e. Counting meters (Mathematics)
- f. Knowledge of Nature (what is in the sky)
- g. Codes ruled by the Ottoman Empire
- h. Orthography and spelling
- i. Music: singing and instrumental music
- j. Games: gymnastics

The program also included the teaching of three religions, while lessons would be conducted in three languages; Ottoman, Albanian and Romanian.

N. Naço's activity at the head of the "Drita" association would not pass without being noticed by the Romanian authorities. In a letter from the Secretary General of the Kingdom of Romania a year after the opening of the school, Nikola Naço was praised and congratulated for his activity at the head of the "Drita" for the benefit of the homeland ((AQSH), Shoqërite shqiptare ne Rumani, 1893).

Albanian Renaissance in the last decade of the 19-th century, had started a movement to create an Albanian independent church with Albanian priests and if this was not possible, they would aim to introduce the Albanian language in church services.

According to Sami Frashëri, this effort was considered the second most important one, after the Albanian language. Undoubtedly, achieving these objectives of the Albanian Renaissance at that time was impossible, so the creation of an Albanian church abroad was seen as an alternative. Bucharest was considered one of the most suitable places for the establishment of an Albanian church. Exactly, it was the "Drita" of N. Naço that as the first point of its program had the separation of the Albanian church from the Greek Patriarchate and the introduction of the Albanian language in the liturgy.

Despite the fact that the associations established in Bucharest appeared in their program as associations of a cultural character, illegally they also carried out political activities. The members of the "Drita" association under the leadership of N. Naço, made a maximum of efforts to sensitize public opinion and European diplomacy about the importance of the Albanian cause, as an opportunity to establish balance in the Balkan region. In a letter that N. Naço sent to the King of Italy Umberto I, he outlined the difficulties that Albanians had to face for their national development, asking for support and assistance for the Albanian cause. N. Naço requested the intervention of the King of Italy to mediate at the Sublime Porte to alleviate the obstacles that hindered the Albanian national cause.

In 1904, in correspondence with the representative of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy in Bucharest M. Pallaviçin, N. Naço asked for support for the reopening of Albanian schools in the villages of Kolonjë, support that they had had before (Skëndi, 2000). In his study, Stavro Skëndo appears contradictory when he states that the activity of the "Drita" association in the political field, did not succeed while in the cultural one, the achievements were insignificant. While it is stated that the association "Drita" had few Albanian and Vlach members, he continues to write that: *The Drita association was supported by the overwhelming majority of patriots and cooperated with other Albanian organizations, avoiding cooperation with any foreign power* (Skëndi, 2000). He also evaluates the newspaper "Albanian" published in Albanian, Romanian and French by N. Naço, as the oldest newspaper in Romania.

### **"Dituria" Association**

In the middle of 1887, the rest of the members who were not included in the "Drita" association created another association called "Dituria". The essence of the contradictions between the two new Albanian associations, lay in their disagreement, about some of the approaches they had with the development of the Albanian National Movement. The "Dituria" defended the view that the Albanian National Movement should rely on the Albanian forces, without needing any outside support, unlike the association "Drita", which considered the support of a great power as fundamental to the success of the Albanian cause. Referring to Stavro Skëndo and his study, the "Dituria" association was established in 1887 as a result of the reformation of the association "Drita", two years after its creation (Skëndi, 2000).

The name of the "Dituria" association was related to the name of the second Albanian magazine published in Istanbul. The majority of Albanians in Bucharest joined the "Dituria" and Kristaq Duro was initially placed at its head. The activity of this society, as well as the "Drita", included publications of books and manuscripts that were mainly sent by Naim Frashëri and his brother Samiu. Due to financial difficulties, this

association could not establish its own branch like the "Drita" ( Akademia e Shkencave të Shqipërisë, 2002) .

An important moment for the "Dituria" association marks the year 1896, when Pandeli Evangjeli was elected as the head of this association, whose leadership and organizational skills would significantly improve the framework of its activity. Vice head of the association was elected Mr. Kristaq Naumi and the secretary was Sotir Terpo (Maj-dhjetor 1898). In January 1896, the statutes of the association were modified, by so creating a seniority of 14 representatives, a governing committee, a treasurer, a clerk and nine advisors. The members of the association, based on their contributions in the association could be classified into four groups: the everlastings (the members who paid their dues each month), the founders (those who gave away 1-3 Albanian books to be published), the benefactors and the gift givers.

During 1896-1899, when Pandeli Evangjeli was at the head of the "Dituria" association, it developed greater activity than before. This activity coincided with the improvement that the Albanian National Movement received during these years, giving a new impetus and a further rise to the entire development of its patriotic activity (Dermaku, 1983).

This association made a great contribution to the support of schools in the Albanian language, mainly in the region of Korça, by constantly sending books in the Albanian language free of charge and financially supporting the teachers who contributed to the teaching of the Albanian language. The organ of the association "Dituria" was the newspaper Albania published under the direction of Visar Dodani, a rich man and at the same time an honest patriot from Bucharest. In 1898, this newspaper opened the debate about the discussion of the Albanian alphabet, which was a very sensitive and very controversial issue in the circle of Albanian Renaissance representatives (Dodani, 1898).

As far as the issue of the Alphabet was concerned, referring to Visar Dodan, the association "The statute of the "Dituria" association can be found in the personal archive of Kristaq Pepo, which is a document submitted as a call of this association published in May 1901. Among other things, this call also reflected the structure of the association that resulted; with a chairman, an advisor, treasurer, and clerk. The aim of the society was to print Albanian books, and by 1901 it turned out that about 25 books had been published. According to the society's regulations, each of the members of the association had to deal with the distribution of books that would be printed by the association but also of other books that were published for free. Also, each member of the society had the mission to teach the Albanian language to those who could not read and write, thus aiming to expand the society with new members (Petraq Pepo, Mihallaq Pela, 2007).

### **The "Shpresa" Association of Bucharest**

On September 12, 1900 in Bucharest, the third cultural association of Albanians was established under the name "Shpresa" (Skëndi, 2000). It consisted of university students, but due to lack of financial income, its active activity would start after two years. In 1902, the number of members of this association increased to 150 members. The vice head of the association was the poet Asdreni, while the secretary was an

energetic literature student at the University of Bucharest Kristaq Daku. The purpose of this association was to enlighten the Albanian people. But its activity as an independent association did not last long. Kristaq Daku, had represented the two associations before their merger at the Congress of the Subjugated People of Turkey held in Vienna in 1902. In the program presented at this congress he demanded:

1. The establishment of Albanian schools throughout Albania and in the localities of Turkey where the majority of the population was Albanian, schools were maintained with taxes in the respective districts.
2. Religious services in all Orthodox churches to be conducted in the Albanian language.
3. A general amnesty for political prisoners (Skëndi, 2000).

Just as the "Drita" association had addressed the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the King of Italy to support the Albanian cause, the "Shpresa" association also called on the French Minister of Foreign Affairs T. Delcasse to urge Turkey to grant to the Albanians what it had already given to the other peoples; learning their language (Skëndi, 2000). But as S. Skëndi writes, the members of the association "Shpresa" were enthusiastic nationalists, but being young, even the diplomats of Vienna considered them immature to deserve any help from Austria-Hungary. From the merger of the "Shpresa" and the "Dituria" association was formed a new association headed by Kristaq Daku.

Meanwhile, it is proved that the association "Shpresa" has led a considerable activity about the establishment of an Albanian church in Bucharest. For the realization of this aim, a committee was founded. However, referring to same information, such a decision was not realized because even two years after the same proposal resulted to have been made again (Skëndi, 2000).

### **Conclusions**

Despite the many problems that the Albanian associations created in Romania, had in their organization, they converged on a common point, which was related to the continuous contribution that they gave in support of the cultural emancipation of the Albanians who were under the Ottoman Empire.

The process of their organization went through two phases; The first phase at the end of the century XIX was accompanied by contradictions between the members of the Albanian associations created in Romania, while in the second phase, starting from the years 1905-1906, a prudence and quality improvement at the organizational level is observed, strengthening the cooperative framework between them. So, in December 1906, the three associations; "Drita", "Dituria" and "Shpresa" came together, creating a single association called "Bashkimi". Despite the fact that even this association in its statute was presented as an association of cultural character, its activity would focus mostly on activities of political character. This association maintained close connections with the Committee of Monastery. One of the most active representatives of this Committee was Grigor Cilka, whose mission and responsibility was gathering funds from the Albanian Diaspora in Bucharest and Sofia. He would create the proper conditions to send in Albania magazines and books in the Albanian language. Due to security reasons, the centre of the Committee "For the Liberty of Albania", in 1906 would be transposed to

Bucharest, where its activity would be more active. Nikolla Naço would be appointed as the secretary of the Committee. In May 1906, Bajo Topulli accepted the influence of the Committee of Monastery and the movement led by it not only on Ioannina, Gjirokaster, Berat, Vlorë, Mallakastër, Kolonjë, Korçë, Tiranë, but also in Elbasan. Through the trip that the secretary of the Hidden Committee of Monastery Nuci Naçi took in the main Albanian cities in 1906, it is noticed that the longest stops he had had, were in the cities of Elbasan and Shkoder. He published the first impressions of Elbasan in the journal "Kombi" ("The nation") by using the nickname *Shkumbia*. What had impressed him more and he would always remember were the national feelings that predominated in this city, not being influenced of the religious affiliation.

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