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Communist Relations in Crisis: The End of Soviet-Albanian Relations, and the Sino-Soviet Split, 1960–1961

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ABSTRACT

When in 1960 the Sino-Soviet split created a schism within the international Communist movement, Albania supported China, becoming Beijing's only European ally. The reforms of the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, promoted in the aftermath of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, had undermined the Stalinist regime of the Albanian leader Enver Hoxha. Hoxha perceived the destalinization process, Moscow's rapprochement with Yugoslavia, and Khrushchev's refusal to support Albania's heavy industrialization as a threat to his personal rule and to Albania's national security. Therefore, during 1960 when Beijing's dissent with Moscow manifested, Hoxha skilfully seized the opportunity to join Beijing in a united front against what Chinese and Albanian leaders called Soviet revisionism. For China's leader Mao Zedong it was a chance to establish a bridgehead in Europe and challenge Moscow's leadership of the Communist camp. For Hoxha, convergence with Mao's ideological positions, and Beijing's support for the Albanian economy together with the geographic distance between Beijing and Tirana, made the partnership with Beijing more advantageous and equal than the one with Moscow. Although Chinese relevant archives were inaccessible, in light of newly declassified Albanian documents, this article analyses Albania's role in important forums of the world Communist parties in 1960–1961. The article contributes to a growing field in Cold War studies that emphasizes the active role of small countries, which in pursuing their domestic and international agendas, shaped the global Cold War landscape.

KEYWORDS

Soviet Union; Albania; China; International Communist Movement

Introduction

Unlike any other European country of the Communist camp, Albania cycled through three major alliances during the Cold War: from under Yugoslavia's protection until 1948, to being Moscow's satellite until 1960, until finally entering into an alliance with China from 1960–1961 to 1978. Following the Second World War, Albania became a vassal state of Yugoslavia, then ruled by Josip Broz Tito, who had greatly contributed to the rise to power of the Albanian leader Enver Hoxha.¹ In the post war plans of Marshal Tito, Albania would unite with Yugoslavia as a first step towards a Balkan Federation, which would possibly also include Bulgaria.² However, the Yugoslav–Albanian collaboration was revealed to be problematic due to the emergence within the Albanian leadership of old nationalist resentments towards Yugoslavia, which included,

among other disputes, claims over territories inhabited mainly by Albanians (today's Kosovo and parts of North Macedonia) left under Yugoslavia.³ Fortunately for the Albanian leaders, Tito's ambition for hegemony in the Balkans clashed with the reality of Soviet hegemony over the Communist camp. What saved Tirana from possible Yugoslav annexation was the intervention of Joseph V. Stalin in 1948 that, for reasons not concerning Albania's security, expelled Yugoslavia from the Cominform.⁴ Thereafter, the Albanian leaders perceived and portrayed Yugoslavia as the greatest threat to Albania's national security and to their rule, and began a crusade against what they called Yugoslav revisionism. Subsequently, Albania tied its fate to that of the Soviet Union. Consequently, Stalin, together with his ruling style, became the Albanian leaders' non-negotiable model of communism.

Under Moscow's umbrella, Albania benefitted enormously from Soviet economic assistance and cultural exchanges with the Soviet Union and other East European countries.⁵ However, the situation changed after Stalin's death in 1953, and in particular with the reform policies that the new leader of the Soviet Union, Nikita S. Khrushchev, promoted in the aftermath of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in February 1956. Khrushchev's reversal of Stalin's policies threatened Albanian leaders' regime. Consequently, they sought new partners and gradually intensified contacts with China, which in their eyes emerged as Albania's new ideal ally. The process of estrangement between Tirana and Moscow took a dramatic turn in the years 1960–1961, concurrently with the parallel process of the Sino-Soviet split. In this context, Albanian leaders chose to stand on Beijing's side, therefore ending the alliance with the Soviet Union and establishing a new one with China – the only European country to do so.

Unfortunately access to pertinent Chinese documents regarding this period was impossible, but in light of newly released Albanian archival documents, the aim of this article is to explore the dynamics established during 1960–1961 in the Moscow–Tirana–Beijing triangle. These documents consist of Politburo records of the Party of Labour of Albania (PLA), documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence, documents of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) relayed to Albania, and letters of correspondence and minutes of conversations with foreign leaders. These sources reveal the active role Albania played in the conflicted relations within the Communist camp during three crucial forums in 1960: first, the meeting of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) in Beijing in June; second, the meeting of Communist parties in Bucharest the same month and third, the Moscow Conference in November. Although these meetings did not end Sino-Soviet relations, they definitively sealed the end of the Soviet-Albanian alliance and the beginning of the Sino-Albanian one.

The existing studies on Albania's role during this period either predate the end of the Cold War, and are thus based on official published materials, or treat these events marginally, giving more attention to the events after 1960. William E. Griffith has made an important attempt, in 1963, to address Albania's role in the Sino-Soviet split. But due to limited available sources many passages in his account consists of assumptions that now new documents can better contextualise with new insights and evidence.⁶ However, Griffith has the merit to have placed Albania in a central position in the Sino-Soviet split. Recently, Lorenz Lüthi has suggested that Albania's role in Beijing-Moscow disagreements was functional to China's challenge of the Soviet Union's leadership of the Communist camp.⁷ Yet, for Tirana the Sino-Soviet split increased possibility for maneuver. Therefore, rather than following Beijing's directives, Albanian leaders actively promoted their own interests in important forums of the international Communist movement. Other studies on Eastern Europe, and Sino-European relations during the Cold War, overlook Albania's position, mentioning it marginally in the larger context of the complex Sino-Soviet and Sino-East European web of relations.⁸ More recently, Elidor Mëhilli has provided an important contribution to Albania's Cold War history. But Mëhilli's analysis of the years 1960–1961 is marginal to his broader study which centers more on the multilevel exchanges – political, economic, cultural and social – between Albania and the socialist world, and how they shaped the building of the Albanian socialist society.⁹

As Janick Marina Schaufelbuehl, Marco Wyss and Valeria Zanier have argued, 'The unfolding Sino-Soviet split could provide a platform for break between the Soviet Union and its allies, such as in the case of Albania'.¹⁰ I specifically analyse how Albanian leaders sought an opportunity in the Sino-Soviet split to align definitively with Beijing and embark on a strategy of disengagement from their cumbersome Soviet ally. The analysis of Albania's role in this period allows us to further reconsider the important role small countries often played during the Cold War era in an international context and under political circumstances apparently adverse to the pursuit of their political agendas.¹¹ I argue that the Albanian leaders maximised the benefits deriving from the emerging Sino-Soviet conflict, and skilfully joined Beijing in forming a coordinated Sino-Albanian opposition to the Soviet Union during crucial meetings in 1960. The available documents show that Albania's decision to end the alliance with Moscow, and support China, was more carefully and cautiously calculated than historians have previously thought. Although Hoxha's regime felt threatened by Khrushchev's new course after 1956, it was China's refusal to be relegated to being Soviet Union's appendage, and Beijing's emergence as Moscow's rival in the international Communist movement from 1960 that facilitated and boosted Albanian leaders' decision to sever relations with Moscow and support Beijing instead. In this context, Albanian leaders seized the opportunity they had perhaps been waiting for since 1956 to exit from the status of Soviet satellite, and develop a mutually beneficial partnership with China; an alliance that the geographic distance made less hierarchic for Albania than the one Tirana had with Moscow. Thus, the Soviet-Albanian split in 1960–1961 was only the final outcome, a conclusive moment of a longer process of estrangement between Tirana and Moscow that had begun shortly after Stalin's death. Similarly, these documents reveal that China used Albanian leaders' radicalism as a sort of sound box: a channel to convey and promote the CCP's own position in Europe. Chinese leaders found in Albania the weak link of the Soviet-dominated Communist camp. Therefore, they incited Albanian leaders to openly oppose Moscow, offering in turn ideological legitimisation and economic support. Moreover, Albania's mounting divergences with the Soviet Union were also a chance for Beijing to defy Moscow by allying with the weakest of its subordinate European satellites.

The process of the split with Moscow, however, would not be easy for Hoxha and his leadership. Archival evidence shows how the Soviet Union looked for the possibility of opening a breach within the Albanian leadership, counting on those Albanian officials that had been educated in the Soviet Union. Therefore, Hoxha's challenge to the Soviet leadership could have been a risky step. Yet Hoxha took advantage of many factors: China's support for him; Soviet difficulties in international relations after Moscow's intervention in Hungary; Albania's geographical position, which would have made possible but undesirable any Soviet military intervention to overthrow Hoxha, and Soviet attention to the emerging Cuban issue.

Dissenting from Moscow

I have elaborated elsewhere on the impact of Khrushchev's policies on Soviet-Albanian relations, and how they triggered Albania's irreversible process of leaning towards China.¹² First, Khrushchev promoted rapprochement with Yugoslavia, and asked Albanian leaders to follow his step, thus undermining the privileged relations between Tirana and Moscow that Stalin had established after the Soviet-Yugoslav break in 1948. Then, following Khrushchev's secret speech on Stalin's crimes, Hoxha faced criticism in the Tirana party conference in April 1956. Eventually, he managed to control and subsequently purge all of his critics within the party, but the event reinforced Hoxha's determination to reject the destalinization process, and he conveniently linked the party conference to Yugoslavia's attempt to overthrow him.¹³ When in late October and early November 1956 protests broke out in Hungary, which provoked the military intervention of the Soviet Union that reasserted Moscow's control over Budapest, Albanian leaders saw it

as a counterrevolutionary upheaval inspired by Khrushchev's openness and his condemnation of Stalin, further boosting Hoxha's opposition to any reform.¹⁴ Finally, the Soviet Union refused to provide the economic assistance that Hoxha had requested for developing heavy industry, which for him had become a national priority.¹⁵

For a short period in 1959, Hoxha thought that Khrushchev, by visiting Albania in summer 1959, was strengthening Soviet relations with Albania even further, so as to balance Tito. The Soviet decision to build a Warsaw Pact naval base, which Hoxha claimed to have requested before Stalin's death, in the coastal city of Vlora in South Albania, supported this interpretation. At a time when Khrushchev had accused Tito of intervention in Hungary, Hoxha believed that the Warsaw Pact naval base in Albania would provide clear and definitive protection for Albania against any Yugoslav interference, or deter any possible expansionist ambitions that Belgrade may have retained. On the other hand, the existence of such a military base in Vlora could have also become a boomerang for Hoxha, in providing the means for a direct Soviet intervention to overthrow him. Khrushchev however, during his visit, reaffirmed his new policy towards Albania: the improvement of Albania's relations with Yugoslavia, and investments in agriculture rather than heavy industry.¹⁶

Similarly, Sino-Soviet disagreements went through a crescendo of events in which China's domestic and foreign policies, and the ideological concerns of Mao Zedong – some dating back to the founding of the CCP – became strictly intertwined.¹⁷ Lüthi highlights the 'vital role of ideology in the Sino-Soviet split', reflected in three moments: first, Mao's adoption after 1955 of economic policies similar to those of the late Stalinist period, 'which had already been discredited in Soviet Union'; second, Mao's opposition to destalinization, and third, Sino-Soviet tension on issues regarding foreign policy.¹⁸ Recently, Danhui Li and Yafeng Xia have argued that at a time when the Twenty-first CPSU Congress in 1959 'stressed the possibility of avoiding war, peaceful co-existence, and peaceful transition to socialism ... the CCP stressed the inevitability of war, transition to socialism by violence, and the impossibility of peaceful co-existence with imperialism'.¹⁹ Similarly, Mingjiang Li has argued that both the ideology and the different economic model Mao 'wanted to imprint' by launching the Great Leap Forward played an important role in the Sino-Soviet split.²⁰ These scholars see the years 1959-1961 as a period of relative 'truce' in Beijing-Moscow relations.²¹ Yet, it was during the period 1960-1961 that Sino-Soviet disagreements resulted in an open split, with dramatic consequences for the international Communist movement.

Concurrent with the emerging Sino-Soviet disagreements was the Sino-Albanian entente, which had its origin in the events following the CPSU Twentieth Congress in 1956. Contrary to Khrushchev, Hoxha and Mao made a positive reassessment of Stalin during Hoxha's visit to China in 1956, and Mao endorsed Albanian leaders' policies.²² In the aftermath of the Hungarian upheaval in 1956, the common understanding between Mao and Hoxha further strengthened as China fully supported Hoxha's position against Yugoslavia.²³ Furthermore, Chinese leaders showed a great availability to assist Hoxha in his plans for Albania's industrialization. Yet, Tirana and Beijing used ideological dogmatism instrumentally to disguise the real reasons behind their antagonism to the Soviet Union: Moscow's new course had undermined the ideological and economic axis upon which Hoxha and Mao had based their own political and economic models for their respective countries.

The meeting of the World Federation of Trade Unions in Beijing

To participate in the meeting, which was scheduled to begin on 31 May 1960, a delegation headed by Gogo Nushi, representing Albanian trade unions, landed in Beijing on 10 May 1960. Another delegation from Tirana, headed by Liri Belishova and Haxhi Lleshi, both members of the Albanian party Politburo, and old comrades of Hoxha since the war, toured China. To the surprise of many, however, the meeting did not begin the next day. Despite the fact that Albanian

leaders knew of the Sino-Soviet divergences, it was in Beijing where they witnessed for the first time how serious they were.²⁴ On 1 June 1960, Chinese officials informed Albanian delegates that the delay was due to disagreements between China and the Soviet Union, caused by the Soviet criticism of the Great Leap Forward campaign in China. Liu Ningyi, the Chinese representative of the unions, requested amendments to the draft the secretariat had presented, which his Soviet counterpart, Viktor Grishin, refused. The Soviet representatives instead told the Albanians that the disputes came about from Chinese views on issues such as the peaceful coexistence, peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism, or the issue of general disarmament. This meeting in Beijing was preceded by a series of articles in the Chinese press (called Lenin Polemics), which, although praising Lenin and attacking Yugoslav revisionism, were a veiled, but obvious, criticism of Moscow. They touched upon all the issues for which the CCP's views differed from those of the CPSU.²⁵

The WFTU meeting in Beijing eventually began on 5 June 1960, but the Albanian delegation noted how in the days before the meeting, 'Chinese officials met with many delegations, trying to bring them on their side'. That same day, some seventeen delegations were invited to have dinner with Chinese leaders, including the Premier Zhou Enlai, general secretary of the secretariat of the CCP Politburo Deng Xiaoping, and Liu Shaoqi, vice-chairman of the party and president of China. Their intention was, according to Zhou, 'to inform you of the disagreements we have with Soviet Union on issues of [political] line'. Deng explained how, contrary to the Soviets, China 'considers our time ... an epoch of the proletarian revolution', rather than of peaceful coexistence with capitalism and a peaceful transition to socialism. After that, Zhou Enlai took to the floor, but he was opposed by many delegations, including the Soviets, on the grounds that 'these issues should be discussed in a CPSU-CCP bilateral meeting'. The Albanian delegates in Beijing noted 'a marked anti-Soviet tone in Chinese standing'. The Albanian leadership showed extreme interest in the emerging Sino-Soviet disputes, but also exercised a calculated caution before taking any position: Hoxha instructed his comrades to 'avoid any comment', and not to take sides in the dispute.²⁶

Decades ago, William Griffith argued that it was at the WFTU meeting in Beijing where 'the Albanian support for China publicly emerged'.²⁷ But the archival documentation reveals that, at this stage of the Sino-Soviet disputes, Hoxha decided to advance without openly supporting Beijing, as shown by the letters Hoxha sent to Belishova in China, suggesting that she 'emphasize the decisive role of Soviet Union'.²⁸ Belishova, however, interpreted Hoxha's messages as support for the Soviet side, and informed the Soviet embassy in Beijing what Chinese leaders had told her about the disagreements.²⁹ For this reason, once the Soviet-Albanian split became evident a few months later, Belishova was expelled from the party and from political offices. In Beijing, however, China had reached its objective of bringing the world's attention to its position – different from that of the Soviet Union – on the most important questions regarding the international Communist movement. In the Politburo in Tirana, Hoxha analysed the situation, and officially maintained equal distance from both Beijing and Moscow. He preferred to 'see carefully how they [Soviets and Chinese] pose these issues in detail and then we will say our opinion'.³⁰ In this sense, although being closer to Beijing's positions since 1956, Hoxha sought to first see the road ahead in its entirety, to better calculate his steps. To this aim, when Beijing informed Albania that most of China's leaders did not wish to attend the Bucharest meeting, Hoxha strongly urged the Chinese contingent to participate. He wanted to see how determined China was in its positions against Moscow, but perhaps wanted even more to see Moscow's reaction.

Bucharest, June 1960: A twofold split

The great convergence between China and Albania, and the great divergence between China and the Soviet Union and between the Soviet Union and Albania, emerged very clearly at the congress of the Romanian Workers' Party (RWP) in Bucharest, attended by representatives of the

Communist parties in the aforementioned countries. The invitation letter sent by the Soviets on 2 June 1960, did not mention Sino-Soviet disputes, but the necessity for consultations among the Communist parties on the international situation.³¹ The meeting eventually took place between 24 and 26 June 1960, right at the margins of the Third RWP Congress (20–25 June). Soon, however, this letter was interpreted, at least in hindsight by Albania, as a duplicitous means of convening the Communist parties to discuss the Sino-Soviet divergences.³² In fact, for Albanian leaders it had become clear that Soviet intentions from the beginning were to turn the Bucharest meeting into a forum for enacting revenge against China for its attempt to gain support from the Communist parties during the WFTU in Beijing just days earlier. They were not wrong, as confirmed by Mikhail Suslov who is reported to have affirmed that ‘the conference in Bucharest was called to reverse the result of the conference at Beijing’.³³ Immediately after the Albanian delegation’s arrival in Bucharest, Yuri Andropov, head of the CPSU’s international liaison department, together with a member of the Romanian government, Alexandru Moghioroş, met with Hysni Kapo – one of Hoxha’s closest comrades. But instead of mentioning disputes regarding international relations, as mentioned in the letter of invitation, Andropov repeated all of the Sino-Soviet disagreements since 1956.³⁴ Moghioroş reinforced Andropov’s point by labelling Mao ‘a warmonger’ for not accepting peaceful coexistence; he accused China of taking the ‘wrong course’ and of disloyalty, referring to the earlier events in Beijing.³⁵ Albania’s official position had not changed from Beijing and so Kapo had instructions to take no side.

The fact that almost all the leaders of the Communist countries of Eastern Europe were participants at Bucharest reinforced Albanian suspicion that this meeting had been prepared in advance, that its aim differed from that stated in the letter, and that Albania had been left at the margins by the Soviet Union. In fact, in Bucharest Hoxha was almost the only leader absent – which had been his decision. But the fact remains that he had just received a short letter in which no information was provided on the nature or content of this meeting except Soviet-American disagreements. Since the discussion switched to problems that had emerged after the CPSU Twentieth Congress – issues on which Albania was now closer to Beijing – Hoxha eventually chose to abort his plans to attend the meeting he saw as a Soviet manoeuvre to isolate Beijing. Most importantly, he wanted to survey the situation and be well prepared to defy Moscow only after full exposure of its position. Nonetheless, he remained continuously informed through intense correspondence with Kapo, head of the Albanian delegation. On this point, based on the *Selected Works* later published by Hoxha, Lorenz Lüthi states that ‘the Albanian party was struggling over how to respond to the situation’.³⁶ What apparently seemed to be a struggle was actually a calculated tactic to frustrate the now inconvenient partner, so as to force and test the Soviet leadership’s determination, or lack thereof, to interfere with China and Albania – as indicated by the correspondence between Hoxha and Kapo as Albania awaited China’s decision to seek a more definitive alliance with Albania.

Regarding the Soviet attempt at bringing Albania to its side on key issues, Hoxha instructed Kapo to respond firmly by rejecting Moghioroş’ ‘lessons of the right or wrong course of China. Moghioroş can go and sell his goods in another market, not to Albania’.³⁷ More specifically, on the Sino-Soviet quarrel, Hoxha’s tactic since the very beginning consisted of taking no side – no matter how the situation evolved. But Albanian refusal to unconditionally support the Soviet Union was already a challenge to Moscow and did not pass unobserved, as the Bulgarian leader Todor Zhivkov told Kapo that ‘you Albanians do not agree’, with Moscow.³⁸ Indeed, the statement was true. When Chinese and Soviet views became a matter of public contention in Bucharest, Albania took the chance to criticize the way Moscow and Beijing were dealing with these disputes – a criticism that was addressed to the Soviet Union as the provocateur in the situation.³⁹

The Soviet Union instead challenged Albania, trying to force its leadership to take a position. During those days, Anastas Mikoyan, Soviet vice-premier, had spoken to two Albanian diplomats in Moscow, and mentioning Sino-Soviet disputes, had stated ‘I am surprised that the leadership [Hoxha] did not inform you of these disputes’. He was referring to the conversation he had had

with Hoxha and Shehu on the Sino-Soviet disputes in February 1960, about which Hoxha 'did not immediately report to the Politburo'.⁴⁰ Furious at this statement, Hoxha instructed Kapo to remind Andropov that since it had been Mikoyan who had asked Hoxha to keep secret the conversation, then 'our party keeps always its given word, and does not treat these issues as a public gossip'. The most important point for Hoxha was that 'Albania notes two dangerous tendencies in the Soviet standing: first, underestimation of revisionism [Yugoslavia], second, the tendency to blame the [Albanian] leadership' by insinuating the presence of secrets between the leader and the Politburo members, thus trying to break the unity of the Albanian leadership.⁴¹

Contrary to their letter of invitation, the sixty-eight page document that the Soviets distributed in the afternoon of 21 June, focused on issues concerning Chinese domestic policies, such as the Great Leap Forward or the Hundred Flowers campaign.⁴² In fact Peng Zhen, CCP Politburo member, wondered rhetorically in the presence of Khrushchev whether the aim of this meeting was, 'to exchange views on international issues, or judge and accuse our party [for its domestic policies]?'⁴³ The document was urgently sent to Albania, where Hoxha noted his views in handwritten annotations on the draft. In Hoxha's handwritten notes, he clearly praises China's position. For instance, to the Soviet remark that 'we cannot agree with Chinese declarations such as "we should not fear war"', Hoxha noted that 'to imperialists we should show firmness not flatteries', rejecting the Soviet claim and embracing the Chinese view. To the Soviet affirmation of the possibility of peaceful coexistence between countries with different social systems, Hoxha wondered 'how should the class struggle develop then?' Regarding general world disarmament, Hoxha noted that 'for me this is quite an illusion'. He reinforced, some pages later, that this was a soviet 'lie ... a propagandistic issue'.⁴⁴ Clearly, Hoxha at this point was ideologically on Beijing's side. Yet, officially and publicly, he refused to declare his position.

On 24 June, after receiving another telegram from Hoxha, Kapo met with Andropov, to whom he transmitted Hoxha's message for the Soviets: that Albania did not take lessons on right and wrong [referring to Moghioros̆'s affirmation that China was wrong], and that they stood firm on the decision that these divergences should be discussed in Sino-Soviet bilateral talks. Andropov pressured the Albanians, implying this meeting may have been their last possible chance to align. After this meeting, Hoxha instructed Kapo to not sign any document or communiqué that was not first studied by Tirana – in fact, he wanted to see if Beijing would sign it first.⁴⁵

But the situation was evolving rapidly, and with the intention of bringing participants to the Soviet side, Khrushchev wanted the parties to speak in the meeting shortly after they had received the material. Kapo reported that, 'the other socialist countries, their leaders, must have agreed before on everything ... They have organized everything in the way that others must speak against China'.⁴⁶ It is not clear if Peng and Kapo discussed this issue – years later they affirmed to have not – but it is significant that a telegram with similar content was sent by Peng to Beijing.⁴⁷ Among the European socialist countries, and among the world's Communist parties, Albania was the only one that did not support the Soviet Union.⁴⁸ The North Korean and Vietnamese representatives, although refusing to attack China, remained in silence.⁴⁹ To persuade Albania, Khrushchev sent Andropov again, at around midnight on 24 June, to speak with Kapo before the opening of the next session. Andropov told Kapo that 'Khrushchev is very concerned about Albania's consideration that these disputes are first of all between the two parties.' For Kapo 'the point is that they [the Soviets] want to know which side we will take', but he repeated to Andropov Albania's official stance.⁵⁰ At the plenary meeting the next day, Kapo delivered an official speech that reflected Hoxha's instructions, which moved the attention to procedural issues such as the necessity of CPSU-CCP bilateral meetings. Albania's stubborn position of not officially supporting any side was frustrating for the Soviet leadership.

Khrushchev exacerbated the situation when he exposed publicly his frustration and disappointment with the Albanian position. Khrushchev spoke at the end of the meeting, and when attacking China, he turned towards Kapo, wondering aloud '[do you share my view] or not, comrade Kapo?' Kapo, who had been instructed to respond firmly, promptly took the floor, trying to

calm Khrushchev by saying ‘please, I just have expressed the view of our party’. The quarrel followed with Khrushchev suggesting provocatively that ‘[since] I don’t get to understand the Chinese comrades, perhaps we should send you [Albanians]’.⁵¹ Kapo replied in a polemical manner that he considered this an accusation against his party. Khrushchev responded with a menacing tone: ‘then I want to express the point of view of our party. We have taken note of your standing, but you do not want to take note of ours instead’.⁵² Therefore, the meeting on the Sino-Soviet disputes resulted into a Soviet-Albanian quarrel. This meeting made also it definitively clear to the participants that China had a European supporter in its opposition to the Soviet Union. But this must have not come as a surprise to Khrushchev, who had ignored Hoxha’s claims, aims and interests since at least 1956. In fact, Kapo reminded Khrushchev of issues that revealed part of the reasons for the real dissent between Tirana and Moscow since 1956. Kapo pointed out that Moscow did not have a clear standing against Yugoslavia, ‘which only in the last years has sent 194 spies to our country’. Khrushchev had further contributed to Albania’s animosity when, only a few days before the meeting of Bucharest, he received Sophokles Venizelos, a prominent Greek political leader, who complained about the alleged repression by the Albanian authorities of the Greek minority in South Albania. Khrushchev promised to convey Venizelos’ concerns to Albanian leaders.⁵³ Hoxha interpreted this step as Soviet quasi endorsement of Greek territorial claims towards Albania.

In the end, Kapo affirmed the need for a conference of Communist parties, and stated in a tone that verged on menacing that ‘there our party will state clearly its view’.⁵⁴ Curiously, after this polemic, Kapo’s telegrams to Hoxha denoted an ironic attitude towards Khrushchev, who is referred to as ‘the big’ [*I Madhi*], which in Albanian can sardonically mean “the boss”.⁵⁵ At the end, all the delegations decided to appoint an Editorial Board (consisting of the twelve ruling parties of the Communist camp and fourteen largest parties of the non-Communist camp), which would convene in Moscow in early October 1960, and draft the documents to be discussed at the conference of the eighty-one Communist parties in Moscow, which would take place in November 1960.

The road to Moscow

The road to the Moscow conference in November 1960 entailed a summer of intense contacts between Tirana, Moscow and Beijing. In fact, the situation was not easy for Hoxha. Hundreds of Soviet soldiers, managing powerful weapons, were stationed in Vlora in the joint military base agreed to in 1959. Moreover, Albania was tightly tied to the Warsaw Pact and to a series of agreements with the Soviet Union and the East European bloc in general.

Moscow used the time between the Bucharest meeting and the Moscow conference to pressure Albania, rejecting again its economic requests.⁵⁶ Furthermore, during summer 1960 when drought-stricken Albania struggled to provide the necessary amount of wheat for its population, the Albanian authorities sent two letters requesting assistance: one to the Soviet government, and one to the Chinese. Only Beijing replied, providing fifty thousand tons of grain, which paradoxically had been purchased in part from the Soviet Union.⁵⁷ Soviet rejection was a hard blow for Albania, especially if it was true, as Hoxha claimed sometime later to have been told by the Soviets, that ‘the grain Albania needed was nothing but the amount the mice eat in Soviet warehouses’.⁵⁸ Moreover, when Albania asked to conclude the agreements on Albania’s annual quotas of exports to the Soviet Union for the Albanian Five Year Plan (FYP) 1961–1965, the Soviet government wanted the Albanian economic delegation to visit Moscow in November 1960, concurrent with the conference of the Communist parties – a way to test, and pressure Albania. In Moscow, the Albanian delegation was left behind the door for more than two months before the Soviets decided to receive them. Even after the talks had started, there were continuous obstacles put in place by the Soviets, further delaying the talks.⁵⁹ Ultimately, instead of

concluding agreements for the entire FYP 1961–1965, Soviet authorities insisted that the talks only regarded possible assistance for the year 1961. Albania agreed to sign the agreement but understood that it was a Soviet signal to Tirana to conform to the Soviet course, the implication being that extension beyond one year would be dependent on Albania's loyalty.

The tension between Moscow and Tirana was reflected in most of the multilevel contacts between the two sides. In October 1960 a highly ranked official at the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs, referred to in the document as Pisarev, told the Albanian ambassador in Moscow in no uncertain terms that 'you are against the CPSU and against Khrushchev'.⁶⁰ In Moscow, Albanian army generals met in mid-October to discuss Soviet military assistance. The Soviet minister of defence, Rodion Malinovskii, stated that the 'Albanian people are going away from the friendship [with the Soviet Union] because of some personal standings, which leads to the individual cult [of Hoxha]'.⁶¹ The next day, Andrei Grechko, commander in chief of the Warsaw Pact forces, went further yet, stating menacingly that 'your party is going far from the CPSU and it would be better if you think about this before it is too late'. In Albania instead, 'the Soviet ambassador Ivanov went so far as to ask to some Albanian generals, to who is the army loyal?'.⁶² All this leaves room for the hypothesis of a Soviet search for a breach within the Albanian leadership.

In fact, from the Soviet viewpoint, the possibility must have been real. Within the Albanian establishment, a large number of cadres had been educated in the Soviet Union, including the Premier Mehmet Shehu, the minister of defence Beqir Balluku, the Politburo members Ramiz Alia and Liri Belishova, and nearly all the commanders of the general staff of the army. That summer, Hoxha purged Belishova, perhaps the most pro-Soviet of the Politburo who in all cases never displayed any serious opposition to Hoxha's disputes with Moscow. At a lower level, hundreds of army officials had passed through Soviet military academies, and a large number of the intelligentsia had been educated in Soviet universities, where many of them had also found their partners.⁶³ No Soviet soldier had passed through Albania during the Second World War, so Albanian people did not experience any of the horrors East Europeans had endured when the Red Army marched to Berlin.⁶⁴ Moreover, the Albanian people in general had been imbued for more than a decade, through official propaganda, to appreciate the Soviet Union and to love it as the fatherland of the revolution. In this context, Hoxha had a difficult situation to manage. But, most likely giving consideration not to what was best for his country, but for himself, he made the choice with ease.

The Sino-Soviet situation was evolving at this time as well: in July 1960, the Soviet Union withdrew all of their specialists from China, interrupting around 200 projects,⁶⁵ shortly after following the mediation work of Ho Chi Minh.⁶⁶ So, in August the CPSU invited the CCP for bilateral talks, with the aim of finding a common understanding and settling the issues in advance of the conference.⁶⁷ Significantly, Hoxha's handwritten notes praised China's answer to the CPSU, and commented negatively on the Soviet position instead; China's and Albania's standing definitely converged, if not merged. The CCP-CPSU bilateral talks eventually took place in Moscow in mid-September 1960, and ultimately concluded unsuccessfully, with the two parties still holding their previous positions.⁶⁸ The Soviet Union also promoted bilateral talks with Albania. Initially, they invited Hoxha on a vacation, where they hoped to convince him to support Moscow. After he refused, on 13 August they sent a letter inviting a delegation for talks, to which again Hoxha refused, 'because we could not go there and talk behind the CCP's back'.⁶⁹ Hoxha most likely refused to visit Moscow due to concerns for his own safety.

In October 1960, Chinese and Albanian teams on the Editorial Board of the Moscow Conference, headed by Deng Xiaoping and Hysni Kapo respectively, met twice in Moscow with the clear purpose of coordinating their standings and actions. In their meeting on 2 October 1960, Deng further inflamed Albania's already tense relations with Moscow, clearly trying to maximise the benefits for China. He first told Kapo that 'your ideas [on all the issues] are correct' and encouraged him to 'speak out openly during the conference'. Then, during their meeting on 23 October 1960, Deng first deemed impossible any conciliation with Khrushchev, and then

spoke of the talks he claimed to have had with Khrushchev regarding Albania. Khrushchev, according to Deng, had affirmed that 'to Albania we have given everything and now they spit on us'. On the Sino-Soviet issues, Deng claimed to have been told that 'you defend Stalin and Molotov, why don't you just take Molotov to China ... if you want to raise Stalin high we will do the same with the Gao Gang [purged by Mao]'. Khrushchev had also reportedly accused Kang Sheng of being 'China's Ezhov [Nikolai Ezhov, the head of the NKVD who had led Stalin's purges in the late 1930s before being shot]'.⁷⁰ Finally for Deng 'it is clear that yours [Albania's] and our [China's] party's divergences with the Soviet Union are the same'.⁷¹ By this time Albania had accumulated a number of documents that Beijing had relayed, and on the other hand, the CCP was also informed of the Albanian position on each and all issues of dispute.

The Moscow conference, November 1960: Hoxha's attack on Khrushchev

Hoxha decided to lead the Albanian delegation to Moscow, where eighty-one Communist and workers' parties met in November 1960. After digesting pros and cons all summer, re-assessing years of relations with the Soviet Union, and thinking of his personal future and rule, he had prepared enough to face Khrushchev and to end the alliance with Moscow. Beijing's reassurances of political and economic support were further determinants in Hoxha's decision. Until this moment Hoxha had often been called commander [*Komandanti*] for his participation in the war. However, beyond the official propaganda narrative, his name hardly appears in the records of a single battle, and his lieutenants knew this. By contrast, those under him, including Premier Shehu – who had fought in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939 – along with many Politburo members had fought on the front line in the mountains. Hoxha knew that this contrast could discredit him, and he used the visit to Moscow as a chance to show bravery to the Albanian people and to party officials. The split with Khrushchev, displayed in front of hundreds of world Communist party' leaders, in which Hoxha claimed to defend Marxism from revisionism, was a marvellous spectacle that he knew would increase his credibility – and his cult – even further among his people. In fact, the event was later reflected in propagandistic art pieces – depicting Hoxha speaking with fervour, hand raised, whilst defending Marxism against Soviet revisionism at the Moscow Conference. Another hypothesis is that Hoxha wanted to make it clear to China, as the coming protector of Albania that he was determined to oppose the Soviet Union, and was therefore a reliable European partner for Beijing's crusade against Moscow. What is clear, instead, is the fact that Hoxha went to Moscow certain that Khrushchev too was determined not to cede to Albanian requests to reconsider Moscow's political position towards Belgrade, nor endorse and assist Hoxha's economic model, which prioritized heavy industry.

The Albanian delegation arrived in Moscow in early November 1960. The next day, Soviet officials relayed to Albania the Soviet response to the CCP's letter in September, where at a certain point Albania was mentioned as an example of tyranny: 'as the expulsion of Belishova shows ... and for what? ... for being friends of the Soviet Union'. Under such conditions Hoxha refused to meet with Khrushchev on 9 November 1960. An attempt, on that same day, to talk with Hoxha was made by Maurice Thorez, head of the French Communist Party, who reminded Hoxha in a three-hour-long speech of the 'dogmatic line' of the CCP and also of the great Soviet assistance to Albania.⁷² Thorez was interested in Sino-Soviet unity, because his party 'struggled to preserve an identity that was revolutionary without the Chinese type of "adventurism" ... and orthodox without the heavy Soviet bureaucracy'.⁷³ His talk failed to change the Albanian leadership's final position, but convinced Hoxha to meet with his Soviet counterparts. Over the next three days, the Albanian delegation met three times with Soviet leaders, the last meeting being on 12 November with Khrushchev. According to Albanian accounts, in the first meeting, where participated Mikhail Suslov, Yuri Andropov, Frol Kozlov, Anastas Mikoyan, and Petr Pospelov, the Soviets asked, 'what do you want in exchange for an improvement of your relations with us?' To

which Hoxha reminded them of all the incidents that had happened during the summer: the Soviet attempt to undermine the Albanian leadership's unity, the comments on political dissidents, and the incidents in the Vlora military base between Albanian and Soviet soldiers and officials. In the end, Hoxha asked them 'to accept, condemn and not to repeat such actions in the future'.⁷⁴ He was asking them for an endorsement and to accept his way of ruling without questioning it. The Soviets rejected the Albanian demands and affirmed that in Albania 'an anti-Soviet spirit has been put in place'.

It was the meeting between Hoxha and Khrushchev, on 12 November, that better revealed the real divide between Tirana and Moscow. It is well documented, in both Soviet and Albanian records, how this meeting contributed to the further deterioration of their relations rather than their improvement. After formal greetings Khrushchev said that 'I do not understand what has happened since my visit to Albania in 1959. If you have been unhappy with us since then, I must be very dense and naïve not to have understood this'. Hoxha replied that 'we have had disagreements before, such as about the Yugoslavs ... and it is all coming from your end'. Khrushchev answered 'that we have had different views on this issue is news to me. I hear it for the first time ... The Yugoslav matter, which you consider as contentious between us, we may set aside for the moment. That is not a principal issue'. But for Hoxha this was indeed a principal issue, one which Khrushchev had neglected to understand for a long time. Hoxha then blamed Khrushchev for the deterioration of their relations after Bucharest. But Khrushchev realized correctly that 'the issue seems to be that even before Bucharest you have not been in agreement with us'.⁷⁵ Then they exchanged very animated accusations regarding the possible Soviet support for recently expelled prominent Albanian leaders such as Belishova. On this point Khrushchev attacked Hoxha for 'expelling a strong woman like Belishova in a Stalinist way'. Then, the already-tense conversation switched to the issue of the military base in Vlora. To Albanian accusations of Soviet officials' quarrels with the Albanians within the base, Khrushchev said 'if you want we can remove our base' and retold how Albania's membership in the Warsaw Pact had been opposed by Molotov, who had wondered why the Soviet Union should fight for Albania.⁷⁶ The meeting continued with reciprocal accusations until the Albanians literally just left the room.

Unlike in Bucharest, this time the Albanian leadership had gone to Moscow prepared to take a side on all issues that had emerged in the Sino-Soviet divergences.⁷⁷ Relying on Griffith and Biberaj, who wrote of the events in 1963 and 1985 respectively, Lüthi affirms that 'it was only the outcome of the Albanian intraparty struggles in late summer that triggered a clear pro-Beijing line in Tirana's stance'.⁷⁸ But, as Mëhilli has affirmed, by 1960 'there was no intraparty struggle. It was all manufactured [by Hoxha] after the fact'.⁷⁹ In the aftermath of Khrushchev's secret speech, Hoxha had prevented possible dissenting voices by purging many party members and high officials.⁸⁰

Consulting with the Chinese party, Hoxha endorsed Chinese consideration of the present as a revolutionary period. In this sense he interpreted and supported Mao's affirmation that 'the east wind prevails over the west wind'.⁸¹ Both sides, China and Albania, made great efforts to convince other parties to bring them to their side, but the success was minimal. Nonetheless, unlike at the Bucharest meeting, when China had been left almost completely alone, in Moscow, some parties, mainly from Asia, agreed in part or completely with the Chinese thesis.⁸² Albania's real dissent with Moscow was, however, on issues regarding Albania's national security – possible conflicts with neighbours – and issues regarding the legitimacy of Hoxha's personal rule. In fact, Hoxha reminded his Politburo that 'we have disagreed with the Soviets since 1955 ... on relations with Yugoslavia ... also regarding the Soviet evaluation of the Hungarian events ... also with criticism of Stalin'.⁸³ So Hoxha was in Moscow with the intent to defy the Soviet Union, eventually becoming the only Warsaw Pact member to do so after the failed Hungarian upheaval.

At the meeting, Khrushchev's opening speech ignored the disputes with Albania and China and Moscow's attitude to Beijing seemed to be conciliatory, but China assumed a conflictual

position.⁸⁴ Some days later, Deng delivered his speech, which was less neutral than Khrushchev's as he criticized the events of Bucharest. Although less passionate than Hoxha, who spoke later, Deng reminded the Soviet Union that 'not because the Soviet Union aids Albania, does it have the right to interfere in Albanian internal affairs ... The CPSU ... goes so far as to support anti-party elements in Albania [Belishova], calling them friends of the Soviet Union'.⁸⁵ The tone of confrontation reached a crescendo on 16 November, when Hoxha delivered his fiery speech, and certainly provoked the most negative reactions – intentionally so, if the speech's title is any indication.⁸⁶

Although Hoxha praised the Soviet Union's leadership of the Communist camp, he also added that 'some [Khrushchev] even go so far as to assert such absurdities as China and Albania are allegedly opposed to peaceful coexistence. Obviously, such harmful and erroneous views should be rejected once and for all'. Disputing peaceful transition and the parliamentary system as viable means for the Communist parties of the capitalist countries to achieve their goals, Hoxha asked rhetorically: 'Will they do this by violence or by the peaceful parliamentary road? This question has been clear, and it was not necessary for Comrade Khrushchev to confuse it in the Twentieth Congress, and do so in such a way as to please the opportunists'. Then he attacked the Bulgarian leadership for promoting complete disarmament in the Balkans, and also the Polish leader Gomulka for his proposal in the United Nations that there should be no further expansion of the military bases between the two camps. On this point, he posed: 'why should China not have the atomic bomb?' Hoxha strongly emphasized Albania's tense relations with the 'revisionist' Yugoslavs and 'chauvinist' Greeks, both with which he rejected any peaceful coexistence. Then Hoxha condemned the Bucharest meeting as an 'anti-Marxist Soviet trap', where Khrushchev had accused China 'without any facts'. The final major issue for Hoxha was the revisionist assessment of Stalin. On this point he claimed that: 'the PLA solemnly declares that it is opposed to these acts and to these assessments of the work and person of Joseph Stalin'.⁸⁷ Throughout his speech, Hoxha carefully attacked only the current leadership of the Soviet Union (Khrushchev), not the country.

Outrage at Hoxha's speech came from all directions. It began with Dolores Ibarruri, the leader of the Communist Party of Spain, who called Hoxha 'a dog who bites the hand that feeds it'.⁸⁸ The Polish leader, Gomulka, found it to be a 'disgusting speech'.⁸⁹ Similar reactions were expressed by western Communist parties, and almost all of the East European ruling parties. On the last day of 1960, Hoxha decided, in a meeting of the Politburo, to go public in Albania about Albanian-Soviet disagreements and discuss them in all the party's local committees.⁹⁰

The final break with Moscow, 1961

After their return from Moscow, Albanian leaders were officially invited back in December 1960, in order to close the barter agreements that had been left to further negotiations. But the Soviets did not make a mystery of their real intention when they stated that 'the economic issues are directly related to the normalization of our relations, which under present conditions should be discussed at the highest level of the parties and governments'.⁹¹ Hoxha rejected the invitation. He was also working in parallel with China, in order to assure the FYP in case of Soviet withdrawal. To this aim, vice-premier Spiro Koleka paid a visit to China in January 1961. By early February Hoxha could inform his plenum that 'even if the Soviet Union, and all other European socialist countries provide nothing [a loan], the plan [FYP 1961–1965] has been assured [by China]'.⁹² To seal conclusively the new course of Albania, in February 1961 Hoxha called the Fourth Party Congress. China was looking forward to the Soviet-Albanian split, which Mao used 'to radicalize domestic political discourse'.⁹³ Hoxha's speech to the congress was conciliatory towards the Soviet Union, perhaps because the message that Li Xiannian, head of the Chinese delegation, brought from Moscow on his way to Tirana, affirmed that Soviet leaders wanted this

to be 'the congress of the friendship' between Albania and the Soviet Union.⁹⁴ Moscow's leading role within the Communist movement, in Hoxha's report to the congress, was praised and highlighted. However, the struggle against revisionism was outlined throughout the report, together with the need to fight against Titoism. Khrushchev was never mentioned.

At the end of the congress in Tirana, on 20 February 1961, Hoxha received Peter Pospelov, Yuri Andropov and the Soviet ambassador in Tirana Josif Shikin. Unfortunately, this meeting was as futile as all of the other meetings between Albanian and Soviet leaders since the confrontation in Bucharest the previous year. Here, the Soviets made a point of reminding Hoxha of Khrushchev's role as their leader – and that to improve relations with the Soviet Union meant Hoxha would have to improve his relations with Khrushchev. On the other hand, they too, out of necessity, endorsed Hoxha's leadership, affirming that they wanted 'this friendship [Soviet-Albanian] to be with comrade Hoxha, and comrade Shehu'.⁹⁵ But the Soviet half-endorsement came too late, and without sufficient sincerity, for Hoxha.

Khrushchev again invited Hoxha and Shehu to visit Moscow only one month later, to attend the meeting of the Warsaw Pact Political Consultative Committee. Hoxha and Shehu refused to participate 'for health reasons', appointing the minister of defence, Balluku, and the minister of foreign affairs, Behar Shtylla, as their delegates.⁹⁶ In the meeting another issue emerged, which aggravated the Albanian position in the Warsaw Pact. The Bulgarian leader, Todor Zhivkov, asked 'why Albania did not inform the Warsaw Pact of the Yugoslav-Greek plot'.⁹⁷ What he was referring to was Hoxha's speech to the party congress a month earlier, where he had affirmed that the 'governments of Greece and Yugoslavia, in collaboration with internal reactionary enemies, and the sixth American fleet, had organized an attack on Albania'.⁹⁸ On this point Gomulka accused Hoxha of the 'fabrication of such facts'. He criticized Hoxha's purge of Belishova, and underlined that 'the process against them [Belishova, and another purged official, Koço Tashko] in Albania is not just an internal affair of Albania ... but an issue of the international Communist movement ... we should send a commission there and have access to all documents on this process'.⁹⁹ In the end Khrushchev proposed removing the Warsaw Pact naval base from Albania, or to 'have the sole command of the base in Soviet hands, without Albanian interferences, and the military vessels should have only Soviet crew'.¹⁰⁰ So the plot Hoxha announced in the congress turned into a boomerang, against which Balluku, in Moscow, had to go on the defensive, reconsidering the magnitude of the plot, and reducing it from 'an organized attack against Albania' to 'the arrest of internal conspirators before the organizing of the attack against Albania'.¹⁰¹ Finally the Soviets, imposing their authority, approved a document according to which 'Albania has violated the articles 3 and 5 of the Warsaw Pact by having provided no information on the alleged foreign attack... . [Consequently] ... the warships in Vlora bay should be served only by Soviet crew and their command should depend on the Commander of the Warsaw Pact forces [a Soviet general]'.¹⁰² Alarmed by these decisions, and to avoid further Soviet interferences, which could possibly escalate into clashes involving the Warsaw Pact, Hoxha hastened to 'create all the necessary facilities for the evacuation of Soviet forces from the naval base' if the decision was made to remove it.¹⁰³

The situation in the Vlora base was very tense.¹⁰⁴ Between May and June 1961 the Soviets decided to withdraw their vessels, but had to leave behind those already in the hands of Albanian crews, because Albania claimed all the vessels as its own – in accordance with the agreement.¹⁰⁵ In August 1961, East German leader Walter Ulbricht invited Hoxha to attend the meeting of the Warsaw Pact members to discuss the peace treaty with [West] Germany and the Berlin issue – in fact, the meeting was to discuss the building of the Berlin Wall.¹⁰⁶ To Moscow, Hoxha sent Alia, who was prevented from taking the floor because 'Albania was under-represented in the meeting, and the invitation was for the first secretaries of the parties'.¹⁰⁷ Only China, which participated as an observer during all these Warsaw Pact meetings, defended Albania, because it was also a chance for Beijing 'to sever the institutional links of the People's Republic with the Warsaw Pact'.¹⁰⁸ However, what saved Hoxha from possible and feared Soviet

intervention was the international situation. It is not the case that Hoxha actively decided to aggravate tensions in 1961, knowing that Khrushchev's international attention was elsewhere, tackling issues such as the Berlin Crisis. In this same year, the situation in Cuba grew into a military collaboration between Havana and Moscow, which led to the missile crisis the following year.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, Albania had not been part of the Yalta division of Europe; therefore, the Albanian-Soviet split did not challenge the post-war European divide. Hoxha realised that the Soviet Union could hardly afford another crisis in its already large list of confrontations with the West, with countries, and on issues, more important to Moscow than Albania. As Klaus Lange has argued, Soviet intervention in the Adriatic Sea 'would have required a major naval operation ... to which America could not have remained indifferent. This in turn would have affected the build-up of missile capability in Cuba'.¹¹⁰ Moreover, Albania was the smallest, and poorest, of the communist countries of Eastern Europe, and its leadership the most radical. Therefore, Khrushchev probably saw Albania more as a weight: a hassle for the promotion of his own policies, rather than a precious ally and supporter. In August 1961, the Soviet ambassador left Albania, officially for the holidays, but never to return. What followed during the rest of the year was an intense exchange of accusations in correspondence between the Albanian and Soviet leaderships, ending what little was left of the Soviet-Albanian entente.¹¹¹ Finally, in early December 1961, the Soviet Union interrupted all diplomatic relations with Albania.¹¹²

Conclusion

Although officially Albania protested the Soviet interruption of diplomatic relations, Hoxha – we can say in hindsight – must have been happy with the end of Soviet influence over Albania. Now his hands were free of any regional or continental alliance system which could have interfered with the Albanian leadership's plans, as first Yugoslavia and later the Soviet Union had done. In this sense, China's geographical distance was highly advantageous, and gave Hoxha more room for manoeuvrability. Two main factors pushed Albania towards China: economic necessity and ideological affinity. Yet, ideology was perhaps the most important factor. The events since the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU showed that it was Soviet undermining of ideological legitimacy, not only the lack of Soviet economic support, that eroded Hoxha's power. Khrushchev's denouncement of Stalin, Soviet rapprochement with Yugoslavia, together with the events in Hungary, had irreversibly eroded Albania's ties with Moscow. To Hoxha, Khrushchev's leadership could not guarantee continuous support because it depended on factors others than ideology – and consequently, was unpredictable.

By 1960, it was not a matter of if, but how, the split would occur. With Khrushchev exacerbating relations with China, he gave the opportunity to Hoxha to move forward with denouncing Albania's alliance with Moscow. Yet in Bucharest Albania pursued caution rather than confrontation. Hoxha's instructions to Belishova – to praise Soviet leadership of the Communist camp during her stay in Beijing – were just a calculated contradiction in Hoxha's policy. In a way, he was waiting to fully maximize the benefits from the Sino-Soviet split. Meanwhile, his caution was a means of preventing Moscow from stretching relations with Belgrade – which could possibly have happened in the event of Albania's conflict with Moscow. In 1960–1961, Hoxha tried to play the ideology card to accredit himself as the true upholder of the banner of Marxism, so as to align himself with China and distance himself from Khrushchev. Once he successfully played this card, and his hands were free of ties to the Soviet Union, ideological considerations became less important, and economic construction would be prioritized. In fact, from 1961 onward, China became Albania's only ally. Although Chinese leaders continuously questioned Hoxha's economic plans with the same argument used by the Soviets years earlier, they almost never denied economic assistance to Albania. For China, a European supporter was politically relevant because it provided a window, albeit a narrow one, to the western hemisphere, which could,

and eventually did, help Beijing reach political organizations, Marxist groups, and supporters in countries where China lacked diplomatic recognition.¹¹³ Albania became even more important for China in the mid-1960s, when the Chinese Cultural Revolution, combined with its limited international recognition, to a certain extent isolated Beijing from the world – an isolation that ended only with Sino-American normalization from 1971.¹¹⁴ Yet, regardless Albania's role as China's strongest ally in Europe, even after the Sino-Soviet break Beijing maintained diplomatic relations and exchanges with all East European countries, and China's embassies often played an important role in promoting China's interests in Moscow's backyard.¹¹⁵

Notes

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