

*D. J. DELIVANIS*

THE ACTIVITY OF PROFESSOR CHARALAMBOS FRAGISTAS  
IN THE INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES \*

The Board of Directors of the Institute for Balkan Studies decided to honour its deceased ex-President Charalambos Fragistas with a ceremony in which today's speaker was asked to analyse the activity of Charalambos Fragistas in the Institute for Balkan Studies. Today's speaker was a close friend of Charalambos Fragistas, who contributed to the former's election to associate and three years later to full professor in the Faculty of Law and Economics of the University of Thessaloniki. They have thus had the opportunity to collaborate for more than 25 years at the University of Thessaloniki, for several years in the association "Greek Light", and finally for about 15 years in the Institute for Balkan Studies. The collaboration there was even more accentuated during the 19 months in which today's speaker took over the functions and responsibilities of the late Basil Laourdas, who was the personification of the Institute for Balkan Studies, 1953-71. During those 19 months, today's speaker had even more opportunity to understand the manner in which Charalambos Fragistas chose to exercise his presidential functions.

It is not the purpose of today's lecture to analyse the scientific work of Charalambos Fragistas. Today's speaker is certain that this will be done in due time by the Faculty of Law and Economics of the University of Thessaloniki, where the majority of Professors now teaching have studied law with Professor Fragistas. The latter had the good luck to be succeeded by Professor Constantine Kerameus, if, of course, we believe that an outstanding successor constitutes an advantage. We all know that according to another concept—I should say a somewhat cynical one—it is better to have a lower caliber successor to make the comparison even more favorable.

Furthermore, today's speaker will not deal with Professor Fragistas' writings, nor with his activity at the University of Thessaloniki, especially in the Faculty of Law and Economics, and at the various foreign Universities where he was so often invited, neither with his activity all over the country, particularly in Northern Greece, nor with the special esteem in which the Church and the judges held our deceased friend.

The Institute for Balkan Studies was founded by the Society of Macedonian Studies in 1953, and it was arranged that the president of the latter would

\* Text of a memorial lecture delivered on February 10, 1977, by Prof. D. J. Delivanis.

simultaneously be president of the former. Thus, the Institute has had the good fortune to have two outstanding presidents —Stilpon Kyriakidis (1953-64) and Charalambos Fragistas (1964-74). Since 1974 the two institutions have had different presidents. The double presidentship could be applied and function when the Institute for Balkan Studies had one collaborator, that is, Basil Laourdas, and when Stilpon Kyriakidis was practically never out of town, moving only between his home, the University, the Society of Macedonian Studies, and the Institute. When Charalambos Fragistas assumed the Institute's presidentship, things became more complicated. As a matter of fact, Charalambos Fragistas was active:

- 1) at the University of Thessaloniki;
- 2) in the Society of Macedonian Studies;
- 3) in the Institute for Balkan Studies, which had in the meantime grown considerably;
- 4) with frequent invitations to visit foreign Universities;
- 5) as a lawyer, not only in Thessaloniki and the rest of Greece, but also abroad;
- 6) as president of the Greek and the International Committee of South-eastern Europe, which necessitated frequent trips abroad; Charalambos Fragistas, as well as today's speaker, found them greatly enjoyable;
- 7) in public affairs, as shown by his willingness to participate in many caretaker governments, without which responsibilities Charalambos Fragistas would probably have gone into politics, according to the opinion of a well-known retired professor of law;
- 8) as president of a dozen institutions;
- 9) as author of a number of books, essays and articles;
- 10) as member of several committees dealing with the preparation of new laws of fundamental importance, or with the codification of laws dealing with certain subjects.

Charalambos Fragistas was very clever and could adapt himself to changing conditions. He understood that the Institute should not have to suffer from his frequent absences and from his inability to give much time to meetings and long discussions. Thus he started to make decisions alone with the certitude that the board of directors would ratify them *ex post facto*, that his decisions were appropriate, and that his colleagues and collaborators would do their best to assist him. Whenever Charalambos Fragistas noticed that on this last point conditions had changed, he withdrew his confidence from those concerned without complaint. If he understood that those people were supported by others more powerful than himself, he resigned without lamenting or losing face. Let me mention in regard to this that this happened with the

creation of the University of Thraki, where his substantial contribution was ignored, both before and after 1974.

In judging Charalambos Fragistas activity as President of the Institute for Balkan Studies in more detail, we have to consider that the latter's president had to bear in mind that the "cold war" lasted until 1968 and that he ought to:

- a) be fully informed about Greek history and civilisation;
- b) be faithful to his country;
- c) have confidence in the nation's destiny;
- d) know what the Greek nation can conquer, obtain, and hold;
- e) be able to ascertain how much we may rely on the conciliatory tendencies of our neighbours and on their readiness to forget the past;
- f) understand the need in teaching to omit nothing whatsoever from Greek history and from what the Greek nation had to suffer without, however, continually referring to unfavourable developments. The Greek people would have acted wisely if they had applied in this connection the recommendation of Clemenceau to the French people in the years 1871-1914 never to forget the provinces of Alsace Lorraine which the Germans had annexed in 1871, but never to speak about them in public;
- g) be acquainted with developments in neighbouring countries and their aims, without entering into detail, and without insisting *ex post* that he was right in his forecasts.

The necessity of having all these abilities which our deceased colleague and friend had cultivated, is, however, linked with some dangers, such as omissions, protests of those who feel, right or wrong, that they have been forgotten, also efforts of being forced to resign by those who do not accept his success.

The Institute for Balkan Studies is indebted to Charalambos Fragistas for many achievements in various sectors, though it must be understood that the president of an institute cannot take care of details and execute decisions which have been made. The institute's president has to be aware of the way his decisions and instructions can be carried out, to rectify misdirected initiatives, and to recommend necessary improvements, to be carried out. In this regard Charalambos Fragistas was very careful, very polite, and very successful. He acted in the best possible way, with the best possible results, and on the basis of the Institute's interest, which coincides with the general interest. As the Institute of Balkan Studies was then linked with the Society of Macedonian Studies, many questions, mainly those affecting the staff, could not be settled without the latter's consent, which was not always easily obtained.

Charalambos Fragistas had all the qualities needed to direct the relations of the Institute for Balkan Studies in the appropriate way with other Greek

scientific institutions, with foreign scientific institutions, with those in need of the Institute's help, with those willing to support it, with those willing to work there or to secure the publication of their books, essays and articles, either as independent publications or as articles in the periodical *Balkan Studies*, or to deliver lectures.

Charalambos Fragistas did not like to make hurried decisions, to take steps which had not been thoroughly examined, to accept claims he considered irrational—a behaviour offensive for those with whom he was speaking, collaborating, or contacting, to extend or to shorten meetings beyond a certain level, or to exaggerate. That means that Charalambos Fragistas was rational, able to grasp the main points on which he alone insisted, honest, and complying to his duty as he conceived it independently of the reaction of other people, whom he had the tendency, without showing it, to somewhat underestimate.

Charalambos Fragistas' contribution to the Institute for Balkan Studies has been substantial and will not be forgotten. The Institute's aim is to prove scientifically and abstaining from propaganda 1) that the territories within the Greek frontiers are 98% Greek in population, 2) that the same applied to those numerous areas whose liberation had not been achieved before their Greek inhabitants had been exterminated or had been forced to leave; they are linked with Greece and with Greek history despite the fact that Greece did not succeed in recovering them. If not only Greek but also foreign historians concur, so much the better. This preference of the Institute is, of course, not agreeable to Greek scientists, and induces them to attack the Institute, the latter's leaders and collaborators. Fragistas ignored these complaints and, of course, did not bother to yield to these pressures. He knew as a realist that the Institute cannot persuade those who are of bad faith, those who purposefully lie, and those who refuse to understand, as, for instance, the authors of the so-called *History of Macedonia* published in Skopje, those who claimed that Alexander the Great was a Bulgarian, and those who say that the Turks have continued the Byzantine Empire. Accordingly, Professor Fragistas urged the Institute for Balkan Studies to translate and make available the not too serious history of Skopje in order to facilitate criticisms and answers without believing, however, that the question would be settled thus at once, that nothing else would be needed, that those ruling in Skopje would comply with historical truth and that indignant reactions on our side could be justified.

As we face the need to oppose the false arguments about the origin of the Thracians, which were produced mainly after the withdrawal of Charalambos Fragistas from the Institute, it is certain that he would have acted in a similar way, presenting only the truth as confirmed by scientific research, without

knowing whether he would remain alone. Accordingly, the belief of today's speaker is that the Institute has applied the procedure which Charalambos Fragistas would have followed if we were fortunate enough to still have him with us.

In choosing the articles to be published in the *Balkan Studies*, for which authors queue in line, Charalambos Fragistas did not ignore the duties and responsibilities of the chief editor and the editing committee, but he nevertheless gave the appropriate instructions for priority as a function of the personality of the author, the importance of the subject, the date of dispatch, the anticipation of the necessity of establishing collaboration with the author, the latter's nationality, the originality of the view presented, or the possibility of suddenly presenting a disputed view or a new point supporting the Greek cause, especially when coming from a foreigner. Charalambos Fragistas followed the same procedure in the choice of the books to be published by the Institute for Balkan Studies. He knew very well the importance of being aware of international literature in his own field and was anxious to secure the greatest number possible of research publications on Balkan questions from all over the world, provided they were in languages used by the Institute. This effort had not yet been completed when Charalambos Fragistas withdrew from the Institute. The Institute aims not only to help foreigners become acquainted with Greek history, Greek tradition and Greek views, but also to allow Greeks to get information about their neighbours. The publication of bulletins including all information available on the above topics in major newspapers, and the operation of the School of Balkan languages, which includes Russian, both served and serve this end.

Charalambos Fragistas was, of course, aware that the Institute cannot be run without the appropriate resources, but he never considered this an insoluble problem. For him the scarcity of financial resources was not a justification for inefficient operation, poor planning, of inappropriate keeping of data and archives, and insufficient facing of the needs of the Institute, except if those responsible for the financing did not react favorably, and if borrowing were not possible. In the choosing of foreign collaborators, Charalambos Fragistas had until 1971 the benefit of Basil Laourdas' advice. Of course, some disagreeable surprises could not be avoided, but Charalambos Fragistas knew how to limit the unfavourable consequences. The same applies to the choice of foreigners invited to lecture.

In judging Professor Fragistas' activity in the Institute, consideration is due to:

a) the growing number of international and Greek seminars organised by the Institute;

b) the contribution until 1971 of Basil Laourdas and since 1973 of K. Mitsakis. The latter initiated the Summer School, which proved a success despite the speaker's reserves;

c) Professor Fragistas' idea of starting an economic and a juridical section, although he did not implement it himself. The economic section began in 1976, when the services of a very fine economist were secured for the Institute;

d) Professor Fragistas' keen desire for collaboration with other institutes, both Greek and foreign, and of avoiding competition under the influence of local incentives which harm every one, particularly in Mediterranean countries.

Charalambos Fragistas took a particular interest in canonic law and was often asked to join committees dealing with this topic. His relations with many prominent members of the Greek Church and of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the latter of which granted Charalambos Fragistas the title of "Leader and Great Orator of the Great and Holy Christian Church", had only an indirect influence on the Institute's activity. A number of books dealing with canonic law were published. One of the most important has been the work of the Metropolitan of Kitros Monseigneur Varnavas. Some conferences held by both Greeks and foreigners, mainly Austrians, referred to these problems. An assistant professor of theology from the University of Thessaloniki works in the Institute permanently. In addition, investigations and research work on Mount Athos and on various orthodox churches are conducted in combination with political developments in Greece and abroad.

Charalambos Fragistas also took care for the continuation of the Institute's interest in those problems which his predecessor Stilpon Kyriakidis considered important in the frame of the conception of what can be achieved, how it can be achieved and how it can be continued.

Let me end by stressing how useful Charalambos Fragistas considered personal contacts, field research and comparisons of research conclusions with preconceived ideas. It should be mentioned in connection to this that Charalambos Fragistas participated in the investigation of Bulgarian atrocities in Eastern Macedonia and Thraki, 1941-44. During these years he followed the developments there with keen interest as we now do with corresponding Turkish brutality in Northern Cyprus.

These have been the main points of Charalambos Fragistas' activity in the Institute for Balkan Studies. This great Greek spent nearly 50 years in Northern Greece, where he married an outstanding lady born in this area. He contributed greatly to the development of Northern Greece from every angle. He thus applied what another famous Greek, that is, John Dragoumis, had

said more than 50 years ago: “Save Macedonia and Macedonia will save Greece”.

Let us be silent for one minute, and let us always remember our great countryman, colleague and friend, Charalambos Fragistas.

*Institute for Balkan Studies  
Thessaloniki*