

RUSSIA AND THE QUESTION OF THE GREEK PARTICIPATION IN THE DARDANELLES EXPEDITION

The first World War presented Russia with a unique opportunity to solve the Straits Question according to her own interests. The Dardanelles Expedition, in particular, resulted in a new impetus given to Pan-Slavic aims, foremost among which was the dream of the annexation of Constantinople and the domination of the Turkish Straits.

The first attempt by the Russian Foreign Minister Sasonoff to outline the Russian position to the allies occurred in the latter part of September, 1914. "This question is a problem of life and death for us," he remarked to the French Ambassador Paléologue. "It is impossible to delay its solution any longer."¹ Tsar Nicolas II speaking to the Russian people on the occasion of the declaration of War against Turkey declared on November 2, 1915, the following:

Together with the whole of Russian peoples we are absolutely convinced that the senseless intervention of Turkey will open to Russia the door for the solution of the historic problem, which we have inherited from our ancestors in the shores of the Black Sea.²

In the meantime, King George V of England had assured the Russian Ambassador that Constantinople must belong to Russia.³ A few days before the English Foreign Minister Sir Edward Grey had pledged to Sasonoff that the end of the war would see the Straits Question solved in the interest of Russia.⁴

1. Telegram of Sasonoff, Russian Foreign Minister to Giers, Russian Ambassador in Constantinople, July 25/August 7 1914, Russia, Komissia po izdaniu dokumentov epokhi imperialisma, *Die internationale Beziehungen im Zeitalter des Imperialismus; Dokumente aus den Archiven der zarischen und provisorischen Regierung*, German ed. by Otto Höttsch (Berlin: 1931-1942), Ser. II. vol. 6. part 1 note 2, p.11.

2. Paléologue, *La Russie des Tzars pendant la grande guerre* (Paris: 1921) vol. I, p.182-183.

3. Telegram of Benckendorff, Russian Ambassador in London to Sasonoff, Russian Foreign Minister, October 31/November, 13, 1914. *Internationale Beziehungen*, Ser. II, vol.6, par 2, no.506, p. 441.

4. Telegram of Benckendorff to Sasonoff, October 27/November 9, 1914. *Ibid.*, no. 484, p. 422.

On the basis of these foreign policy aspirations Sasonoff wrote, already in December, 1914, to the Chief of Staff of the Russian Armies, General Janushkevitch, that the conflict cannot be permitted to end without a Russian occupation of both shores of the Straits, so as to secure a free exit into the Mediterranean. As the result of Turkish resistance to the Russian aims to gain these ends and the failure of diplomatic means she must have recourse to force. A victory over Germany and Austria-Hungary would not suffice to secure these ends. A separate action against Turkey would, therefore, become necessary.⁵

The reply of the Chief of Staff of the Russian Armies deflated the aspirations of the Russian diplomats. Janushkevitch informed Sasonoff of the critical situation on Russia's western front and that no forces would be available for such a major undertaking before the final defeat of Germany in the west.⁶

In spite of these warnings from the General Staff, the Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia, Neratoff, exercised pressure on the High Command of the Army for a campaign against Turkey. He suggested that since landings on Turkish territory must be excluded, the only way to solve the Straits Question according to Russian interests was a campaign against Turkey through Rumania, with whom Russia had already concluded a secret alliance.⁷

The reply of the Army High Command was not destined to bolster the spirits of the Foreign Office Planners. The Assistant Director of the Diplomatic Bureau of the Russian General Headquarters for the Armed Forces, Basili, replied to Sasonoff that no Russian troops could be available prior to the defeat of Germany.⁸

At the beginning of the war, though Germany had to fight on two fronts, she was engaged in a war against allies who had little coordination between them. The development of the war operations proved the significance of the Turkish Straits for the allies. The Russian plea that supplies were exhausted and the difficulties as on account of the isolation of Russia, following the closure of the Straits, convinced London that a military expedition should take place to relieve Turkish pressure on the Caucasus and reopen the supply route to Russia through the Straits.

Urged by Winston Churchill as First Lord of the Admiralty and by Lord

5. Letter of Sasonoff to Janushkevitch, December 8/21, 1914. *Ibid.*, no. 675, p.571.

6. Letter of Janushkevitch, December 12/25, 1914. *Ibid.*, no. 675, p.571.

7. Memorandum of Deputy Foreign Minister Neratoff of December 4/27, 1914. *Ibid.*, no.697, pp.591-592.

8. Letter of Basili to Sasonoff, December 15/28, 1914. *Ibid.*, no.705, pp.602-3.

Fisher, the English Cabinet considered on November 25, 1914, a project to attack on the Dardanelles without reaching a decision.⁹ While England projected the attack on the Dardanelles, the Generalissimo Grand Duke Nicholas Nicholaievitch demanded on December 30, that the allies undertake operations against Turkey to relieve pressure on the Caucasus.¹⁰ Despite the opposition of the French Government which deplored any diversion of forces away from the Western Front, the War Council decided in London on January 13, 1915, to prepare a naval expedition to the Dardanelles to occupy the Gallipoli peninsula and Constantinople.¹¹ The success of this expedition was believed that would result not only in the collapse of the Ottoman Empire but would also lead to the participation of Greece, Bulgaria and Italy on the side of the allies.¹²

When on January 20, 1915, Sir George Buchanan, British Ambassador to Petrograd, notified the Russian Foreign Minister of the intention of the English General Staff to force a break-through in the Straits,¹³ Sasonoff received the news without enthusiasm. He was in fact worried of the real intentions of the British in undertaking this expedition.¹⁴ In the Memorandum of January 20, 1915, the British Government expressed the hope that Russia would collaborate strongly in the attack under preparation and that she would undertake naval and army operations to facilitate the break-through of the Straits.¹⁵ Despite this clear invitation Sasonoff worried that the allies were

9. Dardanelles Commission, *First Report* (London. H.M.Stationery Office:1917) p.14. Plans for an attack on the Dardanelles were prepared even before the entrance of Turkey on the war. See in this connection a letter of Winston Churchill to the Chief of the Imperial GHQ General Douglas, dated September 1, 1914, in which mention is made of Lord Kitchener's project for a capture of the Gallipoli peninsula with the help of the Greek Armed Forces in case of a war with Turkey. See: Dardanelles Commission, *Supplement*, p.2.

10. Memorandum of Kudasheff, Director of the Diplomatic Bureau of the Russian GHQ, to Sasonoff, December 18/31, 1914, *Internationale Beziehungen*, Ser.II, vol.6, part 2, no.708 p.605.

11. W.Churchill, *The World Crisis*, 1915 (London: 1923) p.93.

12. Dardanelles Commission, *Ibid.*, p.21.

13. H.H.Asquith, *Memories and Reflections*, 1852-1927, (London: 1928), vol. II, p.62. W. Churchill, *op.cit.*, p.179-180.

14. Sasonoff describes in the following words his reaction of the news: "I could not easily hide my displeasure at these news. I felt a deep sorrow thinking that the Straits of Constantinople could be occupied by our allies and not by Russian troops." S. Sazonov, *Fateful Years 1909-1916: Reminiscences* (London: 1928), p.255

15. Memorandum of Buchanan to Sasonoff, 7/20 January 1915, *Internationale Beziehungen*, vol. II, part I. no.43, p.42-43.

interested in reaching Constantinople first as to be in a position to prohibit the annexation of the city by Russia.¹⁶

On January 21, Sasonoff asked the Army High Command whether it was in a position to participate in the Dardanelles expedition and play an active role in the attack against Constantinople or whether it would be better to ask the allies to postpone for a while the attack against the Dardanelles in view of the improvement in the situation in Caucasus.¹⁷ When Russian General Headquarters were notified of the allied demands, Kudasheff, the Director of the Diplomatic Bureau of the General Staff, doubted the possible success of such an undertaking. He was constrained to inform Great Britain that no Russian landing troops would be available for the Dardanelles expedition until the defeat of Germany.¹⁸

The Russian High Command was aware of the fact that even if the breakthrough was successful, Constantinople would not be won, and Russia, for lack of available troops, would not even occupy the city. Kudasheff warned Sasonoff that the possession of the city will remain only a dream for a long time, and that Russian public opinion must be prepared for its non-fulfilment.¹⁹

Although Sir Edward Grey had given renewed assurances of British support for Russia's plans regarding the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles,²⁰ Sasonoff was constantly agitated by doubts as to British intentions in case Constantinople was occupied. The Dardanelles expedition was the occasion for outlining the new Russian demands. On February 1915, a conference of Russian military, political and diplomatic leaders decided to make use of the war for realizing the following aims:

1. the occupation of the European shore of the Bosphorus,
2. the occupation of the Sea of Marmara,
3. the occupation of the Dardanelles to the line Enos-Midia in the European sector of Turkey,
4. the seizure of the asiatic coast to a line along the river Sakaria to the city of Lefka, and from there by way of Balikesri to the Gulf of Mytilene,
5. the annexation of the Aegean islands in the vicinity of the Dardanelles,
6. the heavy fortification of the Bosphorus, and

16. Sazonov, *Fateful Years*, p.255.

17. Letter of Sasonoff to Kudasheff, 8/21 January 1915, *Internationale Beziehungen*, vol. 7, part 1, no.43, p.42-43.

18. Letter of Kudasheff to Sasonoff, 12/25 January 1915, *Ibid.*, no. 79. pp.69-71.

19. Letter of Kudasheff to Sasonoff, 10/23 February 1915, *Ibid.*, no.245, p.p.224-225.

20. Telegram of Benckendorff to Sasonoff, January 29/February 11, 1915. *Ibid.*, no.174 p.160.

7. the incorporation to Russia of the city of Constantinople.²¹

In the deliberations concerning the Straits the Tsar himself took a lively interest. He ordered the High Command to centralize all work with regard to this subject, so that when the time came the project could be executed in the most efficient manner.²² The requirements outlined in the Conference of February 21, were further elucidated. Russia was to make all preparations to lodge herself on both shores of the Bosphorus, which was to become in the future the main base of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. The Gallipoli (Cherson) Peninsula would also serve for the erection of a naval station. The islands of Tenedos and Imbros were also needed by Russia for the domination of the Dardanelles' exit into the Aegean. To ensure the continued security of the Straits Russia intended to demand also the islands of Lemnos and Samothrace.²³

At the same time Russia made public her aspirations over Constantinople. Thus, on February 9, 1915, Sasonoff delivered a speech before the *Duma* in which he declared that the Russian Government planned to occupy Constantinople forever. He went on to say that the victory of the Russian troops in the Caucasus will bring the moment closer when the problems of an economic and political nature connected with an open approach for Russia to the Mediterranean will be solved.²⁴ Russian aspirations over Constantinople and the Straits were also underlined by the Prime Minister of Russia, Goremykin, by the leader of the opposition, Miliukoff and others.²⁵ Characteristic of Russian ambitions was the speech of the leader of the Liberal Party, Professor Trubetzky, who spoke of the Church of *Aghia Sophia* "as the most brilliant jewel for which Russia must be prepared to give everything."²⁶

On February 25, 1915, the very day that the British navy started the attack on the Dardanelles, questions were posed before the House of Commons in England on the subject of Russian territorial aspirations. Sir Edward Grey declared that the British Government had no objections and that the definite future of Constantinople and the Straits would be decided during the Peace Conference.²⁷

21. Memorandum of the conference of February 8/21, 1915. *Ibid.*, no.232, p.216.

22. Letter of Kudasheff to Sasonoff, February 1/14, 1915. *Ibid.*, no.245, p. 225.

23. Basic requirements for preparation for landing on the Straits, Jan.27/February 9, 1915. *Ibid.*, no.192. p.176.

24. *Ibid.*, no.192, p.176.

25. *Ibid.*, note 2 to no.258, p.239; See also H.Poincaré, *Au Service de la France*. (Paris: 1915). vol. 4, p.290-291.

26. Paléologue, *op.cit.*, vol.I. p.291.

27. W.Gottlieb, *Studies in Secret Diplomacy during the First World War*. (London: 1956) p.91.

On March 3, 1915, Paléologue, the French Ambassador to Russia, was received in audience by Tsar Nicholas II who declared that he was determined to reward his people with Constantinople, "the fulfilment of its century old dream." That city as well as southeastern Thrace would have to be incorporated to Russia.²⁸ The Russian claims over Constantinople were officially included in the aide-mémoire of March 4, 1915.

The lack of firm British and French guaranties for the realization of Russian territorial aspirations increased the Russian worry that, at the end, she might be deprived of her spoils. As soon as Sasonoff received the reply of the Army General Staff that no army units would become available for the Dardanelles expedition, his preoccupation became to avoid the participation of troops, other than French and English. His objection to the participation of the Greek troops and naval forces was absolute.

Even before Turkey's entry into the war, as early as in August 1914, Sir Winston Churchill was considering the possibility of using Greek army forces for an attack on the Dardanelles in case of Turkish participation in the war on the side of the Central Powers. On September 1, 1914, Sir Winston Churchill wrote to the Chief of the Imperial Headquarters General Douglas that together with General Kitchener he planned an occupation of the Gallipoli Peninsula and for that purpose he planned to use Greek armed forces.²⁹ At that time the possibility of Greece entering the war on the side of the allies was great. Greece had as early as August 18, 1914, declared her determination to fight together with the allies, if they considered it useful. The Entente Powers had rejected in the early days of the war the Greek offer.³⁰ In February 1915, however, England pressed for a Greek participation in the Dardanelles expedition.³¹ On March 1, 1915, Sir Edward Grey was grateful to accept the offer of Greek Prime Minister E. Venizelos to send an Army Corps in Gallipoli and asked furthermore the participation of Greek naval units in the expedition.³² Venizelos asked at the same time the Chief of the Army Staff Colonel Metaxas to prepare the plans for the Greek participation in the Dardanelles expedition. He submitted also to the king a Memorandum proposing the Greek participation in the allied Expedition through an Army Corps. The other

28. Audience of Paléologue with Tsar Nicholas II, March 3, 1915. *Internationale Beziehungen* note "a" to no. 290, p. 417.

29. Dardanelles Commission, *op. cit.*, Supplement, p. 2.

30. Laskaris, *Διπλωματική Ιστορία της συγχρόνου Εγγρώπης*, 1914-1939. (Thessaloniki: 1954) p. 24.

31. Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

32. Laskaris, *op. cit.*

four Greek Army Corps would have to cover the Greek-Bulgarian frontiers.³³

On March 2, 1915, Venizelos was received in audience by the king and he discussed with him his Memorandum. While leaving, however, the king's office he was approached by Colonel Metaxas who rendered his resignation. According to the Report submitted by Metaxas to Venizelos the Greek participation in the Dardanelles Expedition was considered as highly dangerous. In his report Metaxas considered the Expedition as doomed to failure due to the small number of Allied forces engaged, the lack of a possibility for surprising the enemy and the heavy fortification of the Straits. Metaxas concluded his report by stating that, in case the Greek participation in the Expedition was finally decided, care should be taken for a Russian participation and the increase of British and French Forces.³⁴

The resignation of Metaxas and the Army's negative attitude to the question of the Greek participation in the Expedition alarmed Venizelos. He advised the king to convoke a Crown Council for the next day to discuss the situation and take decisions on the matter.

Meanwhile, on the eve of March 2, Sasonoff was informed of the talks between the British Ambassador in Athens and the Greek Government. He cabled his Ambassadors in Athens, London and Paris that under no circumstances was he disposed to countenance the presence of Greek detachments in the Straits Expedition and in the entrance into the Ottoman capital.³⁵ Since Russia could spare no important troops for this operation in the Dardanelles, he was very concerned that Constantinople might fall before any Russian detachments were ready to take part in the entry of the city.³⁶ When it appeared likely that no Russian troops would take part in the main operations against the Straits, the Foreign Ministry became even more concerned that no units from any other nation, besides those of Britain and France, participate in the assault.

The Russian objections to the Greek participation were increased by the news that the Greek Government was considering the internationalization of Constantinople. This information was later confirmed by a dispatch of the Greek Prime Minister Venizelos to the Greek Ambassador Dragoumis

33. Vendiris, 'Η Ἑλλάς τοῦ 1910-1920, v.I. p.383 ff.

34. Archives of the Greek General Staff.

35. Telegram of Sasonoff to Demidoff, Russian Minister to Greece, and to Benckendorff and Isvolsky, Adamov, *Die europäischen Mächte and die Türkei während des Weltkrieges: Konstantinople und die Meerengen* (Dresden, 1930-1932), v.II, no.98, p.187.

36. Letter of Sasonoff to Kudashev, Febr.15/28, 1915, *Internationale Beziehungen*, Ser.II, vol.7 part 1, no.268, p.258.

in Petrograd on February 29, 1915, which was deciphered in the Russian Foreign Ministry.³⁷

In view of these circumstances Sasonoff cabled to Demidoff, the Russian Minister to Athens, to see that the Greek participation in the Dardanelles Expedition was cancelled.³⁸ Next day Demidoff suggested to his Government the following:

"Since you consider the Greek participation inadmissible we could use a most serious argument. We could suggest that the detaching of Greek troops from their main task, that of restraining the Bulgarian forces, could prove dangerous to Russian security."³⁹

While Demidoff was trying in Athens to get informed of the decisions of the Greek Government, the Crown Council was held in Athens on March 3, under the presidency of King Constantine. All ex-Prime ministers of Greece attended; S.Dragoumis, G.Theotokis, K.Mavromichalis, D.Rallis, as well as the President of the Government E.Venizelos, who explained his proposal for Greece's entrance into the war and for the participation in the Dardanelles Expedition. Venizelos proposed that Greece could take part in the Expedition with naval units and army troops not more than 35,000 strong. The meeting did not result in any decision. The participants of the Crown Council were divided in their opinions and a new meeting was decided for March 5th.⁴⁰

The same day in Petrograd Sasonoff summoned the British Ambassador Sir George Buchanan and informed him that he had been received in audience the previous day by the Tsar who objected himself to the participation of Greek Forces in the Expedition. It was his view that Greece would be sufficiently rewarded in Asia Minor. It was of the utmost importance that she do not win a foothold in an area where the sole domination of Russia was required for the security of her free exit into the Mediterranean. Sasonoff thought that Greece might raise claims on Constantinople and that the Greek participation in the Expedition would result in unfavourable complications.⁴¹

37. Adamov, *ibid.*

38. Telegram of Sasonoff to Demidoff February 17/March 2, 1915, *Internationale Beziehungen*, no.277, p.263.

39. Telegram of Demidoff to Sasonoff, February 18/March 3, 1915, *Internationale Beziehungen*, and *Documents diplomatiques secrets russes*, no.80, p.253.

40. Frangulis, *La Grèce et la crise mondiale*, (Paris: 1926), vol. I, p.179 ff. Ventiris, *op.cit.* p.277 ff. Laskaris *op.cit.*, p.29 ff. Driault et Lhéritier, *Histoire Diplomatique de la Grèce*. v.V. p.181 ff.

41. Telegram of Sasonoff to Demidoff, February 19/March 4, 1915, *Internationale Beziehungen*, no. 277, p.263.

On May, 4, 1915, Benckendorff, the Russian Ambassador in London, visited the British Foreign Minister and told him of Russian official claims for the annexation of Constantinople as well as of the objections of his Government for the Greek participation. The Russian Ambassador was confronted, however, by the arguments advanced by the British Government. The British Minister told Benckendorff that the Admiralty had absolute need of the Greek naval units, which were indispensable for the struggle against mines. The Greek army could be used for the capture of the Gallipoli Peninsula. Creating obstacles to the Greek participation was tantamount to a delay of the operations.⁴²

When Benckendorff suggested that the Greek Army would enter into Constantinople and thus facilitate Greek claims, Sir Edward Grey replied that the final distribution of the gains would take place in the peace conference irrespective of the nationality of the occupation forces.⁴³ He admitted that Russia was facing difficulties but he thought they could be overcome, as in the case of Japan who recognized that the occupation of the German islands by British and Japanese troops was only provisional.⁴⁴

On March 5, the day when the Crown Council met again in Athens to consider the question of Greek participation, Sasonoff asked Demidoff to try hard to cancel the participation of Greek armed forces. In his telegram the Russian Foreign Minister reiterated that the Greek interference in the question of Constantinople must be avoided since Greek historic claims over Constantinople could create difficulties. Furthermore, he cabled that strategic considerations necessitated that Greece be kept away from a region, where only Russian influence should prevail and where the sole domination of Russia was required for the security of her free exit into the warm seas.⁴⁵

Russia was also opposed to any Italian participation in the campaign, unless her troops were only employed outside the Straits and their neighbouring areas.⁴⁶ On the other hand, France favoured their use. Since Italy was still neutral at that time, Delcassé, although opposing the Greek participation,⁴⁷

42. Telegram of Benckendorff to Sasonoff February 19/March 4, 1915, *Documents diplomatiques secrets russes*, 1914-1917, no.153, p.253.

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Ibid.*

45. Telegram of Sasonoff to Demidoff, February 20/March 5, 1915, *Internationale Beziehungen*, ser. II, v.7, part 1, note 1, in no.294, p.277.

46. Telegram of Buchanan to Grey, deciphered by Russian Foreign Office, Feb. 20/March 5, 1915. *Internationale Beziehungen*, note 1 to no.306, p.284.

47. Poincaré, *op.cit.*, v.VI, p.151, Churchill, *op.cit.*, p.202, Asquith, *op.cit.*, v.II, p.64.

felt that by giving Italy a chance for territorial rewards for services rendered to the common cause, her entry into the conflict might be hastened. The situation on the western front was then critical, and it was thought that Italian manpower resources were vital for the final defeat of Germany and Austria-Hungary.⁴⁸

Churchill expressed himself in favour of the Greek participation. Faced with the Russian objections, Churchill wrote to Sir E. Grey asking for his intervention so that the Greek naval units and armed forces would be accepted in the operation. Churchill concluded his letter by emphasizing the following: "I am afraid that you are going to lose Greece and at the same time you will surrender the future course in Russian hands."⁴⁹

On March 6, Buchanan presented the Russian Foreign Minister with a British Memorandum on the necessity of Greek participation in the Dardanelles campaign. In this memorandum it was stated that the British Government undertook the Dardanelles Expedition for the common allied interests. Great Britain does not have a special interest in the Straits region. Her only aim is to defeat Turkey and succeed in obtaining the collaboration of the neutral Balkan States. The Greek military help in the Gallipoli peninsula might prove important, even vital for the successful accomplishment of the operation. Under these circumstances it would not be advisable to deteriorate the situation by refusing the Greek aid. His Majesty's Government must take under consideration that the failure of the Dardanelles Expedition would have far reaching consequences. His Majesty's Government never envisaged the possibility of an annexation by Greece of any part of the Straits and accepts that Greece must not obtain rights on the Straits, which would conflict with Russian interests.⁵⁰

When it appeared to Sir Edward Grey that it would be difficult to obtain the Russian consent he asked for a French intervention in favour of the Greek participation.⁵¹ The French Government undertook to exert pressure on Petrograd and the French Foreign Minister told Isvolsky that he well understood Russian arguments for the exclusion of Greece, but since Great Britain and France were for their participation, he advised no refusal. He suggested that

48. Telegram of Isvolsky to Sasonoff, February 19/March 4, 1915, *Ibid.*, no.306, p.284.

49. Churchill, *op.cit.*, p.204.

50. Note verbal of Great Britain to Russia, February 21/March 6, 1915, *Die europäischen Mächte und die Türkei während des Weltkrieges*, v. IV. no. 56, p.78 ff

51. Grey, *op.cit.*, v.II, p.180, Asquith, *op.cit.*, v.II, p.64.

the final solution of the Straits Question would not [take account of the desires of the smaller States anyway].⁵²

Probably as the outcome of these conversations and the assurances given by Venizelos before his resignation that Greece had no claims whatsoever on Constantinople and was interested only for the order, morality and her commercial interests, Russia, somehow, modified her obdurate stand. On March 6, before it came known that the Second Crown Council in Athens resulted in the King's insistence on neutrality and the resignation of the Venizelos Government on that date, Russia reluctantly agreed to the presence of Greek troops in wholly subordinate theatres of action, in which they would have no contact with Constantinople.

The Russian consent was cabled from Paris to Athens, following the conversation between Delcassé and Iswolsky. The Greek Ambassador Romanos stated in this respect that "M. Delcassé had intervened strongly in favour of the Greek participation and he received last Sunday the reply that the Russian Government accepts in principle the proposal."⁵³

Russia did not accept, however, the Greek participation without conditions. For the Russian Government Greek armed forces could be used only:

1. If Greek troops were used in the already existing theatres of action,
2. The Greek troops would not enter into Constantinople, and
3. The Greek troops would remain in a distance of 50 miles outside Constantinople.

Russian reluctance for the Greek participation continued, however, even after the declaration of the Greek neutrality. On March 7, Sasonoff summoned the Greek Ambassador Dragoumis and declared to him that it would not be to Greece's advantage to risk her fleet in the Dardanelles, since she might later need it against Italy, whose interests collided in some areas with those of Greece. At the same time he was officially informed of the resignation on March 6, of the Venizelos Government and the decision of the King to continue Greek neutrality under present circumstances.⁵⁴

On March 10, the day Great Britain accepted the Russian claims over

52. Telegram of Iswolsky to Sasonoff, February 21/March 6, 1915, *Internationale Beziehungen*, Ser. II, no.322, pp.296-297.

53. Telegram of Ambassador Romanos to Zografos, the Greek Foreign Minister, February 26/March 11, 1915. no.22917 A/S. Archives of the Greek Foreign Ministry.

54. Telegram of Sasonoff to Benckendorff, February 22/March 7, 1915. *Ibid.*, no.326. pp.298-299.

55. Daily Memo. of the Russian Foreign Ministry, February 22/March 7, 1915. *Internationale Beziehungen*, Ser. II, vol.7, part 1, no.327. p.299.

Constantinople, a new Government was formed in Greece under D.Gounaris. The new Foreign Minister, G.Zografos, continued, however, negotiations with the Allies in view of Greek participation in the war. In April 1915, when it appeared that these negotiations were resulting to Greece's entry into the war, Russia once more repeated her firm determination not to allow the entrance of Greek armed forces into Constantinople, when the expected fall of that city materialized. Sasonoff was particularly aghast at the possibility of the Greek King heading such a procession. In view of the supposed Greek territorial aspirations, he feared the emergence of innumerable difficulties if Russia gave way in this matter.⁵⁶ It was much more to the liking of Russia to have a weak Turkish State as her neighbour, than to suffer the creation of an expanded Hellenic State.⁵⁷ Despite the final agreement by Great Britain and France to recognize the Russian territorial aspirations over Constantinople and the Straits, as provided in the Russian aide mémoire of March 4, for Petrograd Turkish sovereignty was always preferable to that of any other foreign Power, as long as Russia herself could not occupy Constantinople and the area of the Straits.

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56. Telegram of Sasonoff to Isvolsky, April 8/21, 1915, *ibid.*, part 2, no.527, p.573.

57. Telegram of the Russian Military Attaché in Athens Leokovich to Sasonoff, March 28/April 10, 1915, *ibid.*, no.510, p.510.