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The Greek Minority in Albania

When Albania joined the League of Nations, the country's representative, Fan Noli, issued an official statement on 2 October 1921 explicitly undertaking to safeguard the privileges of the Greek minority living in Albanian territory. It goes without saying that the privileges in question were not newly created; they had existed since Ottoman times. The relevant articles of the statement were as follows:

Article 1: The terms of this statement are regarded as fundamental laws of Albania. No law, no provision, and no official action will conflict with or transgress these terms, either now or in the future.

Article 5: Members of ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities who are under Albanian jurisdiction will received the same treatment under the law as everyone else who is under Albanian jurisdiction. They will have the right to maintain, to run, to control, and to establish in the future, at their own expense, charitable, religious, and social institutions in which they will be able to use their own language, and they will be free to believe in any religion they wish.

Within six months of the publication of this provision, the Albanian government will present the Council of the League of Nations with detailed information about the legal status of the religious communities, the churches, the monasteris, the schools, and the charitable institutions and associations of the ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities. The Albanian government will take into account all the recommendations the League of Nations may make in respect of this matter.

Article 6: With regard to public education, in the towns and districts with many inhabitants under Albanian jurisdiction

who speak a language other than the official one, the Albanian government will provide facilities for primary-school pupils to be taught in the language they speak. This provision will not prevent the Albanian government from making the teaching of the Albanian language compulsory in these schools¹.

Noli's statement was ratified by the Albanian parliament on 17 February 1922, and Tirana undertook to furnish the League of Nations with details of its provisions for the protection of minorities within six months of that date. However, Albania granted official minority status only to the Greeks living in the areas of Argyrokastró and Aghii Saranda and in the three of the Himara villages (Himara, Drymades, Palassa), excluding from the protective legal minority status framework the Greeks living in the area of Koritsa and in the other four Himara villages. According to a report submitted by the Albanian Foreign Minister, Djafer Ypi, to the League of Nations on 7 July 1922... "the provisions for minorities that had been mentioned in Noli's statement of 2 October 1921 and ratified by the Albanian parliament could be summed up under three main headings: i) absolute equality of political, civil, and social rights, irrespective of race, language, or creed; ii) the right to education; iii) freedom of religion and freedom to discharge religious obligations, including the freedom to change religion..."². Significantly, the Albanian government acknowledged the existence in Albania of only 16,000 'Greek-speaking Orthodox Christians', as they put it³.

For reasons not only of diplomatic strategy, but also in order to protect the Greek element in the long term, when the Albanians made their statements to the League of Nations the Greek government asked that body to implement the Corfu Protocol, by which Albania acknowledged the complete autonomy of Northern Epirus⁴. The competent organs of the League of Nations never discussed the request, and the only guarantee the Greek minority had in the end was Albania's international

1. P. Papadakis, *Documents officiels concernant l'Épire du nord*, p. 172-4.

2. A.Y.E., 1922, A/5, League of Nations, Minorities in Albania, 22 August 1922, Letter from Ypi, Tirana, 7 July 1922.

3. *Ibid.*

4. A.Y.E., 1923, B/35 (7), Dendramis to Foreign Ministry, Geneva, 24 August 1922.

recognition of its rights before the League of Nations.

Once the border had been fixed, Athens did its best to secure Greek-Albanian co-operation. Trade agreements were signed in 1926, as were citizenship agreements and an extradition treaty. Many Albanians were awarded Greek government scholarships to attend colleges of further education, universities, and military academies in Greece. Greece voiced no protest over the Albano-Italian agreements of 1925 and 1926, and in September 1928 was the first country to recognise Zog as King of Albania.

In contrast, despite its international pledges, Albania lost no time in embarking on a programme of systematic 'dehellenisation'. The government allowed Greek schools to operate only in those areas where the existence of Greek minorities had been officially acknowledged, and banned the teaching of Greek everywhere else in Albania. Given this climate of persecution, Athens tried to put a stop to Albanian high-handedness by calling for the implementation of the Kapestitsa Protocol of 28 May 1920, article 2 of which stated that 'Greek schools shall operate freely in Albanian territory'⁵. The Greek government's main argument was that the Kapestitsa Protocol had been ratified and reinforced by Albania's international commitment in the statement of 2 October 1921⁶.

As far as education was concerned, the intention was to abolish private education altogether and replace it with an absolute state monopoly, in blatant violation of Albania's international pledges⁷. The *chargé d'affaires* in the Greek Embassy in Berne suggested that Greece inform the League of Nations about Albania's international commitments and the legislative violation of the rights of the Greek minority in Northern Epirus⁸.

Despite the Greek government's efforts, Albania went back on its pledges and introduced a string of restrictive measures covering the Greek schools. Teachers in the Greek-speaking communities would be appointed only with the approval of the Albanian Ministry of Edu-

5. A.Y.E., 1923, LN/T5 (51), No 7503, Foreign Ministry to Durrës Embassy, Athens, 16 October 1923.

6. *Ibid.*

7. A.Y.E., 1925-6, Γ/62, Berne Embassy to Foreign Ministry, Berne, 22 July 1925.

8. *Ibid.*

cation. The Albanian government dismissed Greek teachers who did not speak Albanian and replaced them with state-appointed Albanian-speakers, and reduced the number of hours devoted to the Greek language (with a concomitant increase in the number of hours devoted to Albanian). All the Greek schools in areas that were not officially recognised as minority areas were converted into Albanian schools. Lastly, the new Albanian constitution of 1928 prescribed that primary education would be compulsory and provided only by state schools, and that religious communities would have the right to establish their own schools only with the permission of the Minister of Education.

In April 1933, the Ministry of Education closed all the minority schools on the basis of articles 206 and 207 of the constitution, which abolished private education. So that was the end of the Greek schools. Needless to say, it was an illicit action, because Albania's international commitments could never be superseded by a domestic law, particularly in view of the fact that the Albanian government had assumed an explicit obligation in accordance with article 1 of the statement of 2 October 1921⁹.

The Greek schools had flourished under Ottoman rule, so that by the time of the Balkan Wars they had numbered 360. After that, however, they gradually began to decline. In the early years of Albanian administration the educational system remained much the same as under the Turks (with the communities maintaining the schools) and until 1924 there were 100 Greek schools operating in Albania. From 1925 onwards, however, the repressive measures implemented by the government led to a clear annual reduction in their number, as the table below shows¹⁰.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of schools</i>	<i>Number of teachers</i>
1925-6	78	113
1926-7	68	102
1927-8	66	95
1928-9	60	85

9. A.Y.E., 1935, A.A.K.9, Memorandum I Political Department (Kouostas), re N. Epirus, Athens, 7 February 1935, p. 68.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

1929-30	63	83
1930-1	64	82
1931-2	43	50
1932-3	10	11

The ban on the Greek schools forced the Greek minority to appeal to the League of Nations, which referred the case to the Hague Tribunal. The Greeks based their case on articles 1, 5, and 6 of Noli's statement of 2 October 1921. This is how the Greek Foreign Ministry interpreted the articles: with reference to article 1 "the constitutional charter is more binding, because it imposes upon Albania the commitment that no law nor any official act may ever, now or in the future, conflict with the provisions included in the statement of 2 October 1921". Article 5 "explicitly imposes on the Albanian government the obligation to allow the minorities the freedom on the one hand to maintain, administer, and control their existing schools and on the other to establish charitable and religious institutions and schools etc. in the future and freely to use their own language and religion"¹¹. Article 6 "safeguards certain minority rights in public education. Specifically, it designates the Albanian government's commitment, in those areas where there resides *une proportion considérable des ressortissants albanais de langue autre que la langue officielle* (such as, for instance, the Greek-speaking populations), to take the necessary steps to ensure that teaching in primary schools in conducted in the language of the minority, which at the same time does not, however, prevent the Albanian government from making the teaching of the Albanian language compulsory"¹².

In April 1935 the Hague Tribunal decided in favour of the Greeks and Albania was forced to allow the Greek schools to operate¹³.

As well as persecuting the Greek minority in the educational sphere, the Albanians had also set their sights on the Orthodox Church. Ever since the birth of the Albanian state, Albanian nationalists had been cultivating the notion of an autocephalous Albanian Church as the most

11. A.Y.E., 1934, A.22.Iq/2, Note I Political Department, Athens, n.d.

12. A.Y.E., 1935, A.A.K.9, Memorandum I Political Department, Athens, 7 February 1935, p. 49. The memorandum analyses the subject in greater detail.

13. Georgios Papadopoulos, *The Greek Ethnic Minority in Albania and the Educational Question* (in Greek), Ioannina 1981, pp. 120-1.

effective way of counteracting the influence of the Oecumenical Patriarchate and of Greece on the Orthodox Christians of Northern Epirus. The ringleaders of the movement to 'Albanianise' the Church were Fan Noli, Vassilios Markou, and Evangelos (Agathangelos) Tsamtsis, clergymen who had come from the United States in 1920.

On 10 September 1922, a clerical and secular conference was held at Berat, which unilaterally declared the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Albania and appointed an eight-member Supreme Church Council. But since the Oecumenical Patriarchate refused to recognise it, early in 1929 the Albanian government decided to resolve the issue once and for all, whether the Patriarchate agreed or not. So on 11 February King Zog again declared the autocephaly of the Albanian Orthodox Church and set up a Synod headed by Bessarion Giovanni, who was proclaimed Archbishop of Tirana and All Albania. This provoked an outcry from Albania's Christian population, and in 1937 Zog was forced to ask the Oecumenical Patriarchate to recognise the Orthodox Albanian Church as autocephalous. Christopher was appointed Archbishop of Tirana and All Albania, and the Synod of the Albanian Orthodox Church consisted of three bishops, Eulogios of Korçë, Panteleimon of Gjirokastër, and Agathangelos of Berat. But when Italy invaded Albania in April 1939, the bishops of Koritsa and Argyrokastro were exiled¹⁴.

Although the 'dehellenisation' of Northern Epirus was proceeding apace, in September 1930 Zog tried to reach an agreement with the Greek government in an effort to resolve the Greek-Albanian dispute and improve relations between the two countries. The Albanians were of the opinion that a voluntary exchange of the Greeks living in Albania and the Moslems living in 'Çamëria' (Thesprotia) would largely resolve the problem.

Naturally, Greece could not accept the proposal, believing that "...possessed as it is by unrestrained nationalism, the Albanian government will resort to any means of pressure and violence to uproot from their homes not only the 20,000 ethnic Greeks and Greek-speakers of whom Mr Frassari has spoken, but all those who are regarded as a potential threat to the present régime. Furthermore, it is the economically

14. For a more detailed account of the ecclesiastical question, see Apostolos Glavinas, *The Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania* (in Greek), Thessaloniki 1985.

and socially weakest of our people who would leave Albania, for the rest will manage to resist Albanian pressure... Under the projected circumstances it seems that it is by no means in our interests even to consider the one-sided notion of an exchange, for it would cause us serious social, economic, and national problems”¹⁵.

In the inter-war period, persecution of Church and schools clearly reflected Albania’s hostile policy towards Greece. All the same, despite the relentless persecution, the morale of the Greeks of Northern Epirus remained high, as became evident in November and December 1940, when the Greek army liberated the region for the third time.

During the Second World War, many prominent figures from all over Northern Epirus were flung into prison and exiled in order to intimidate the Greek population. The Greeks were caught between two lines of fire, persecuted both by the Italian and German collaborators and by the Communists, who seized power after the Germans left, in November 1944.

During the occupation serious problems were caused by the Tchams in Thesprotia, who collaborated closely with the Italians and the Germans and robbed and massacred the local Greek population. It is interesting to note that, under the terms of the Greek-Turkish agreement for the exchange of populations signed on 30 January 1923, the Tchams (Albanian Moslems living in Thesprotia; the League of Nations estimated their number at 20,000) could have been sent to Turkey. But at Lausanne the Greek government asked for an exception to be made in their case since they were of Albanian origin. In fact, many of them had no clearly defined national consciousness, and some five thousand of them applied to emigrate to Turkey in 1926; but this time Athens sided with Tirana and kept them in Greece as Albanians, in an effort to demonstrate its friendly sentiments towards the neighbouring country¹⁶.

In the interwar years, apart from the tensions arising out of the expropriation of Albanian property, when the Albanians demanded preferential treatment in the form of greater compensation than other

15. A.Y.E., 1930, A/4/I, No 12371, Greek Delegation to the League of Nations to Foreign Ministry, Geneva, 27 September 1930.

16. For more about this affair, see Dimitris Mihalopoulos, *Relations between Greece and Albania, 1923-1928* (in Greek), Thessaloniki 1986, pp. 24-38.

Greek citizens (the demand was rejected by the League of Nations in 1928, as was their request to be recognised as a minority), relations between the Tchams and the Greek population were quite good and there was no serious friction¹⁷. But in April 1939, after the Italian army had invaded Albania, the Tchams declared that they wanted the Italians to occupy Çamëria too, in the hope of thus recovering their expropriated land and attaining a better standard of living after the Greeks had been expelled and they had got their hands on the Greeks' land as well¹⁸. In November 1939, the Tchams set up a committee, whose purpose was to work towards the annexation of Thesprotia to Albania; and three months later they sent a memorandum to the Italian government asking that the prefecture be annexed to the Albanian state¹⁹. During the Greek-Italian War, the Tchams even attacked the Greek army in the Kalamas sector of the front and set fire to Igoumenitsa.

During the Italian occupation of Greece (April 1941 - September 1943), the Tchams, assisted by the Italians, formed armed bands and committed countless crimes. A British officer who liaised with the Greek resistance units in Epirus reported that the Tchams took advantage of the privileged position the Italians granted them and frequently collaborated with the Italians in destroying and looting Greek villages²⁰.

After the Italians had surrendered (September 1943), the British Allied Mission in Epirus tried to reach an understanding with the Tchams so as to turn them against the Germans. But they refused, collaborated with the Germans, and committed atrocities against the Greeks. This is confirmed by British officers' reports in the Public Record Office in London²¹.

In the spring of 1944, as part of the operations against the Germans

17. Public Records Office, London, War Office (WO) 204/9348, Report on Albanian Minority in Epirus, 16 April 1945.

18. A.Y.E., 1940, A/4/9(II), No 18224, Sub-ministry of Public Security to Foreign Ministry, Athens, 24 July 1940.

19. *Ibid.*

20. WO 204/9348, 16 April 1945.

21. *Ibid.* This particular report states: "Most of the villages in [the Fanari plain] area were occupied by force at one time or another during the winter of 1943-44, sometimes admittedly by Turko-Albanians with German equipment and support... They [Tchams] assisted them in the old Hum and Balkan custom of village burning or followed them up so as to be able to loot whatever was worthwhile...".

in Epirus, the British Allied Mission decided that Zervas should take the coast around Parga (which was controlled by the Tchams) so that the National Democratic Greek League (EDES) could more easily receive supplies from small craft from Italy. Armed bands of Tchams fought side-by-side with the Germans during these operations, particularly around Parga, Paramythia, and Igoumenitsa²². The British records clearly show that, since the Tchams were fighting with the Germans against the EDES and the Anglo-Americans, the Allied Mission ordered Zervas to disband these bands, in order to facilitate operations against the Germans as they retreated towards Albania in October 1944²³. So, the retreating Germans were accompanied by 16,000-18,000 Tchams. A report by an American officer also notes that a large number of Tchams were conveyed to Albania in German vehicles²⁴.

After the War, the main objectives of Greek foreign policy were to secure economic aid to get the country back on its feet and to further national claims connected with state security and historical factors. Greece was demanding Northern Epirus from Albania and the Dodecanese from Italy and seeking an adjustment of the border with Bulgaria. But above all, the government was concerned about Northern Epirus, where the Greek element was on the verge of disappearing.

When Prime Minister Konstantinos Tsaldaris addressed Parliament on 17 May 1946, he said that the government's foreign policy was simple: it sought the return of Northern Epirus and the Dodecanese to Greece, the fixing of the border with Bulgaria for reasons of security, and an agreement with Great Britain about Cyprus. He also asserted that Greece wanted good relations with all three Great Powers, but its position in the Mediterranean meant that it had to align itself with the naval powers, i.e. the United States and Great Britain²⁵.

On 17 April 1946 the Greek Ambassador to Washington had de-

22. WO 204/9348, 16 April 1945.

23. FO 371/48094/18138, Note from C. Woodhouse, 16 October 1945. Woodhouse comments, "Zervas, encouraged by the Allied Mission under myself, chased them [Tchams] out of their homes in 1944 in order to facilitate operations against the enemy..."

24. Department of State (DS) 768.75/8-345, Attached report from the assistant of the military attaché William McNeil to Department of State, Athens, 3 August 1945.

25. Stephen Xydis, *Greece and the Great Powers, 1944-1947*, Thessaloniki 1963, pp. 196-7.

livered a memorandum to the Department of State outlining Greece's national demands. The memorandum pointed out that, as the USA was well aware, Greece was and would continue to be the peace-loving democracies' main bastion in the Eastern Mediterranean. It was therefore in America's interests to help Greece to fulfil this strategic role and, if necessary, to support Greece's efforts to fix the Greek-Bulgarian and the Greek-Albanian border²⁶.

At this stage, the government was presenting Greece as more a Mediterranean than a Balkan country. In their meetings with the Americans, the Greek officials argued that it was in the United States' interest to support Greece as a countervailing force against Soviet influence in the Balkans, and they particularly emphasised the fact that Greece controlled the exit from the Dardanelles and guaranteed sea communications on the routes to Suez and India and that the Greek people were looking to the US to support their national claims at the Peace Conference, in the hope that some recompense would be forthcoming for all they had suffered during the War. The Greek government particularly hoped that the desired recompense might take the form of territorial gains from Albania and Bulgaria.

The Government wanted to safeguard Northern Epirus on a national and strategic basis. On 22 April an official memorandum pointed out that the restructuring of the Greek-Bulgarian border had two aims: to strengthen the defence of Greece's border with a new, stronger line and, as a logical consequence of this, to give the Greeks living near the border a sense of security after all they had suffered from repeated Bulgarian attacks.

Since Athens was adducing strategic reasons, the Department of State asked the War Office to study and appraise Greece's demand. The Joint Staff of the armed forces responded as follows:

- i. Northern Epirus was a mountainous region which included the major points of access from the north Albanian plains to the Greek border and had no major sea ports or airports. It had a certain amount of mineral wealth and the small food

26. DS 868.00/4-1746, Greek Embassy to Department of State, Washington, 17 April 1946.

surplus it produced was very important to Albania, a poor country.

ii. Greece could successfully defend its existing borders if Albania attacked alone. Greece's annexation of Northern Epirus would improve its possibilities of defence, but not to the extent of guaranteeing that an assault by an alliance of countries, including Albania, could be successfully repulsed.

iii. Without prior preparations to reinforce Greece, it was unlikely that the annexation of Northern Epirus would strengthen Greece enough to enable it to prevent an invasion by an alliance of countries before effective external help arrived.

iv. The annexation of Northern Epirus by Greece would deprive Albania of its only natural positions of defence against an attack from the south. The converse did not apply, because with its existing borders Greece was able to control the territory to be defended (along the Albanian border).

v. Albania depended on Yugoslavia for the importation of certain foodstuffs. The loss of Northern Epirus, which Albania regarded as its own territory, coupled with the loss of the region's produce, would necessitate a closer economic and military association with Yugoslavia, which might eventually make Albania part of the Yugoslav confederation.

vi. The cession of Northern Epirus to Greece would probably trigger a guerrilla war, which would endanger peace in the Balkans²⁷.

The officials in the American Embassy in Athens warned their own government not to underestimate the political consequences of a negative response to Greece's reasonable claim to Northern Epirus. Patriotic feeling was running high in Greece and the Greeks believed that they would be vindicated at the Peace Conference. Therefore, the officials maintained, if the US took a negative stand, or if the issue were set aside for reasons of expediency, Greek feeling would turn sharply against the Western powers and left-wing support would rise sharply, as

27. DS 768.75/4-2246, Memorandum from Joint Staff to Department of State, Washington, 22 April 1946.

would sympathy for the Soviet Union, which supported Greece's demand for the annexation of Eastern Thrace. The American diplomats also underlined the fact that it was not feasible to extend the border to the detriment of Bulgaria; only a radical change in Soviet policy (which was highly unlikely, since the Balkan frontiers were about to be discussed at the Peace Conference) would make it possible for attention to be paid to Greece's demands²⁸.

The Council of Foreign Ministers met in Paris on 25 April 1946. Athens sent Filippos Dragoumis, sub-Minister of Foreign Affairs, with instructions to promote the Greek demands. Early in May Dragoumis noted to the US Secretary of State, James Burns, that Greece was making territorial claims against Albania and Bulgaria for reasons of national security, and pointed out that no Greek government could sign peace treaties that gave no guarantees of Greek security. Burns' response was noncommittal: Greece's position would be carefully considered. But he did express the opinion that neither Greece's nor any other country's security in this part of the world could be achieved by territorial reconfiguration. Any hope of security lay with the United Nations, and if the UN failed then no amount of territorial annexation would grant Greece security. As far as the Dodecanese were concerned, Burns said that the members of the Council had initially agreed that the islands should be given to Greece, but the USSR had so far refused to accept a definitive agreement on the matter.

On 8 May the Foreign Ministers agreed that article 1 of the Bulgarian Peace Treaty should leave the Bulgarian borders as they were on 1 January 1941. The text of the agreement would not be finalised until the governments of Greece and Bulgaria had presented their views. The Greek government was profoundly alarmed. On 10 May 1946, Dragoumis sent identical letters to James Burns and Ernest Bevin expressing his keen interest in the decision. Once again he pointed out the importance, both to the US and to Great Britain, of Greece's strategic position in the East Mediterranean and the necessity of redrawing the northern Greek border, for otherwise an enemy could easily pass

28. DS 868.014/4-1846, Athens Embassy to Department of State, Athens, 18 April 1946. On the issue of national claims, see Basil Kondis, *Anglo-American Policy and the Greek Problem, 1945-1949* (in Greek), Thessaloniki 1984, pp. 157-99.

through the Dardanelles and gain control of the north Aegean coast. Dragoumis also asserted that Northern Epirus should be given to Greece to protect the Corfu and Otranto straits from the Albanian Communists. He ended with a request that Britain and the US give their support to Greece's demands²⁹.

The American and British governments agreed that Greece should have every opportunity to express its views at the Peace Conference, though they believed its position was weak. Nonetheless, the Greek government insisted forcefully on its territorial claims, for it was disturbed by rumours that Albania was to be united with Yugoslavia. The British were given to understand that this would necessitate a revision of the Albanian-Greek border, with a view to pushing it even further north in order to keep the Slavs away from the Corfu strait. However, at the first meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers none of Greece's demands was met.

At the second meeting, on 27 June 1946, Greece won the Dodecanese. Molotof proposed that the islands be given to Greece as soon as peace was signed with Italy and that they be demilitarised. Yet the same day Molotof charged Greece with corruption, aggression, and unannounced attacks on its peace-loving neighbours, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Albania.

On 30 August Dragoumis asked the Conference to include the Greek proposal for the resolution of the Northern Epirus question on the next day's agenda. The Soviet and Yugoslav delegates objected, while Burns and Bevin insisted that Greece had the right, like any other member, to state its case. The Greek proposal was accepted by the Council with 12 for, 7 against, and 2 abstentions³⁰.

By mid-September, however, it was clear that none of Greece's claims would be supported by the United States, for the latter was not prepared to risk a Soviet backlash by supporting such demands. According to Dragoumis, the United States did not want to cause a split between the four Great Powers and to wreck the Conference merely for the sake of Greek interest.

On 1 October 1946 the Greek delegation had a meeting with Burns,

29. Kondis, *Anglo-American Policy*, p. 163.

30. Kondis, *Anglo-American Policy*, p. 188.

who declared that the United States had the friendliest of intentions towards Greece and would do anything, within the bounds of reason, to help. But Greece had to appreciate what the US could and could not do. He explained that the American government could not support Greece's claims at the Peace Conference, but would gladly present them to Council of Foreign Ministers³¹.

The next day, Burns spoke to Greek Prime Minister Tsaldaris about the state of the Greek economy. The Premier told him that the country needed economic aid and armaments. The United States could provide the armaments, as long as the *matériel* was available in its European depots. Although he could not promise economic aid without congressional approval, Burns assured Tsaldaris that the US government was prepared to ask for 350 million dollars and that Greece would certainly receive a considerable proportion of that sum.

Berns' position was that he would do everything possible to help Greece economically, but he could not support Greece's national claims. Every time the Greek delegates sought American support at the Peace Conference they received the same response: Greece's security would be safeguarded by the United Nations, not by the acquisition of more territory. The Americans showed sympathy and understanding for the Greek arguments for territorial gains and understood the Greeks' disappointment when they failed to achieve their aims; but they felt that, in the interests of the long-term goal of Balkan peace and stability, they had to support a return to the 1939 borders. All the same, the Americans assured the Greek government that they would support it in the event of any attempt to change Greece's borders³².

On 11 October 1946, the American delegate Jefferson Caffery summed up his country's position with regard to the Greek-Bulgarian border by saying that the US could not support Greece's demands, but would take action through the United Nations if the security of Greece were threatened by any foreign attack.

The Paris Peace Conference ended on 15 October 1946. Greece's

31. US Department of State, 'Foreign Relations of the United States 1946', *Paris Peace Conference Proceedings*, vol. III, Washington 1970, pp. 614-15.

32. DS 868.00/10-2346, Department of State to Athens Embassy, Washington, 23 October 1946.

national claims were not rejected, but referred to the Council of Foreign Ministers with no special recommendation. For Greece, the most important outcome of the Conference was the Americans' promise of economic aid and Caffery's statement that the United States would defend Greece in the event of an attack.

Despite its failure at the Peace Conference, the Greek government decided to present Greece's national claims to the Council of Foreign Ministers. Greek Prime Minister Tsaldaris asked the Department of State what the American government's attitude to Greece's national demands would be. The Americans repeated that, for the sake of peace in the Balkans, they could not give their support. Greece ought to appreciate the United States' position and refrain from presenting its claims to the Council of Foreign Ministers, for this would contribute appreciably to a more stable situation in the Balkans and the United States would thus be in a better position to help Greece on other vital issues³³.

Ignoring the Americans' advice, the Greek government asked the Council of Foreign Ministers in New York to examine Greece's national claims. The Council examined article 1 of the Bulgarian Peace Treaty on 11 November 1946. Ernest Bevin proposed some minor changes to the Greek-Bulgarian border (much more minor than Greece had asked for), but when Burns refused to support them and Molotov refused to discuss them, he backed down.

All the same, on 3 December 1946 the Council of Foreign Ministers decided that the Bulgarian border should remain as it had been on 1 January 1941 and that Greece should receive 150 million dollars from Italy and Bulgaria as compensation. The question of any revision of the Greek-Bulgarian border and Bulgaria's claim to Western Thrace was now closed; but the issue of Albania's southern border remained. Greece's claims against Albania were ignored and the Council never discussed them.

The Council's decision left Greece feeling hard done by and crestfallen. The Greek people could not believe that the high principles of international ethics and justice had lost all value and that a loyal ally was to receive no reward, while Bulgaria was to be recompensed for its

33. DS 868.014/11-446, Conversation between Dean Acheson and the Greek Ambassador to Washington, 4 November 1946.

disloyalty during the War. The Greek government believed that, instead of bringing the desired peace to the Balkans, the decision would embolden the Bulgarian government's aggressive policy. This had already been borne out by Bulgaria's claim to Western Thrace and the increased activity of armed bands in Northern Greece, which were entering Thrace from Bulgaria.

According to the American delegates, the responsibility for Greece's failure at the Conference lay chiefly with the Greek delegation itself. Cavendish Cannon, the political advisor, felt that "the Greeks had given the impression of having come without any definite idea of what they had to achieve and without making any distinction between their major objectives and the less important matters. Of course, we realised that the Greeks felt obliged to overstep the limit in order to satisfy public opinion back home; but we had expected the Greeks to be rather more efficient and somewhat better prepared. In view of the acumen, insight, and versatility of Greek diplomacy in the past, I have been disappointed by the lack of planning, the obtuseness shown during negotiations, and the Greeks' panic when things were not going their way. It could have been part and parcel of the general debasement; but we have been surprised to find not a single capable man in the Greek delegation. It had been a pleasure to work with Agnidis, but since Pipinelis did not get on with him he had been on leave in Switzerland, or somewhere else, for most of the time. The Greeks had also been unfortunate in the presentation of their case. The numerous and mostly insignificant modifications they had proposed had been for the most part ill thought out and short on facts, and had not been successfully presented"³⁴.

Harsh words indeed, but a realistic appraisal. The Greek government had not done its homework properly and expected Greece to be rewarded for its brave services during the War. In other words, its strategy rested solely on the argument of the 'heroic ally'. But the government was overlooking the fact that Great Britain and the United States' interests did not see eye to eye on this point. The issue of Greece's national demands excepted, the American government had done all it could in Paris and at the United Nations to demonstrate its support for Greece. As Burns had told the leaders of the opposition, the Americans

34. DS 868.00/10-546, Cannon to the Athens Embassy, Paris, 5 October 1946.

considered it a matter of principle to support the Greek delegation whenever possible, particularly when it was up against the eastern bloc. The British, on the other hand, were less ready to help Greece, possibly because every time a Greek proposal came up for discussion, there was much talk of how favourably democracy in Albania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia contrasted with Greek reactionism and British imperialism. The British therefore preferred to stay out of the discussions and allow the United States to take the initiative.

Greece followed an independent foreign policy in pursuit of its territorial claims, even when the United States and Britain did not endorse it. At the same time, being a minor power, Greece was able to achieve only limited aims. The policy of the United States and Britain was to curb Greek aspirations and conduce to an atmosphere of peace in the Balkans.

Between 1946 and 1949 the Albanians openly helped the Greek Communists. In fact, after Tito's rift with the Cominform, Hoxha increased his aid and allowed the Democratic Army to enter Albania at will. In August 1949 there were even skirmishes along the Greek-Albanian border. The situation deteriorated further in 1951, when the Americans and the British used Greece and Italy as bases from which to send agents into Albania to foment an insurrectionary movement against the Communist régime. The whole operation was a lamentable failure, for it was headed by the notorious Kim Philby, the top-ranking Foreign Office official who was later exposed as a Soviet double agent. Hoxha exploited the situation to the full, maintaining that the whole operation had been designed not to overthrow the Communist régime but to dismember Albania, owing to the involvement of Greece and Italy.

Only after Stalin's death did Greek-Albanian relations improve slightly. At that time, the Albanians were alarmed by the Soviet-Yugoslav rapprochement, fearing that the Soviet Union might allow Belgrade to detach part of Northern Albania. But they were even more disturbed in June 1960 by Sofoklis Venizelos' talks with Khrushchev in Moscow. Khrushchev promised to talk to Hoxha about the possibility of granting the Greek minority a greater degree of autonomy with regard to education and the Church. The Albanians interpreted the Venizelos-Khrushchev talks as an indication that the Soviets were not entirely

opposed to the Greek demands³⁵. Venizelos, however, had sought not the annexation of Northern Epirus, but only a degree of autonomy for the region so that the Greeks there could secure better living conditions and preserve their racial, cultural, and spiritual unity and traditions.

The Soviet-Yugoslav rapprochement and the fear that Greece might annex Northern Epirus were important factors in Albania's rift with the Soviet Union and its move towards China. This was a major strategic and political blow to Moscow. The Soviet Union had naval bases in Albania and had set up submarine bases on the island of Sason. Khrushchev had also been threatening to install missile bases in Albania. Consequently, Albania's defection was detrimental to Moscow and advantageous to the West.

In the '60s Greek-Albanian relations improved slightly. In 1962, the Greek government announced that relations with Albania could be restored if the right means were found. In a gesture of good will, the Albanians allowed a large number of Greeks to return to Greece. In 1970, after meetings between Greeks and Albanians at the United Nations, a trade agreement was signed by the two countries' chambers of commerce. Diplomatic relations were restored in May 1971. In October 1972 the first three-year interstate trade agreement was signed in Tirana; the second followed in May 1976.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that, under Enver Hoxha, the policy of 'dehellenisation' and forcible assimilation of the Greek minority continued. The first thing the communist régime did in 1945 was arbitrarily to reduce the geographical area officially occupied by the Greek element. The area officially characterised as a 'minority zone' was restricted to ninety-nine villages in the provinces of Argyrokastro and Aghii Saranda. The three Himara villages (Himara, Drymadés, and Pálassa), which, it will be remembered, had been recognised as minority villages in 1921, were excluded from the 'minority zone'. So all the Greeks who were now living outside the 'minority zone' were no longer regarded as Greeks, and Tirana was thus able to say that the Greek minority numbered 58,000, rather than the true figure of close to 300,000.

35. William Griffith, *Albania and the Sino-Soviet Rift*, Cambridge Mass. 1963, pp. 40, 95.

The Greeks who lived in the 'minority zone' enjoyed certain fundamental rights. They attended Greek primary schools for four years and from the fifth to the eighth year they were taught Greek as a foreign language. There was no Greek secondary school, only a teacher training college in Argyrokastro, which produced teachers for the Greek minority schools. The textbooks were translations of the Albanian ones, so the children were taught only about Albanian history and culture and were completely cut off from anything to do with Greece. For propaganda purposes a Greek-language newspaper circulated in the 'minority villages', carrying the Albanian Communist Party line.

According to the memorandum submitted in September 1991 by the Greek association 'Omonia' to the CSCE in Moscow, the Communists made systematic efforts to dilute the Greek ethnic character of the 'minority zone' by colonising Greek villages with Albanians; the resulting mixed villages were no longer regarded as 'minority villages' and the Greek residents were deprived of their right to be taught in Greek. Also, Greeks were forcibly moved out of the 'minority zone' to other areas, chiefly in the north, and many of them were forced, for professional reasons, to settle in Tirana and other Albanian towns. Needless to say, as soon as they left the 'minority zone' they lost their minority status. At the same time, the Albanians were doing their best to Albanianise the 'minority zone' in other ways: Greek place-names were replaced by Albanian ones and Greek archaeological finds and sites were baptised 'Illyrian'. The worst blow the Greek element suffered, however, was the abolition of religion in 1967, for Orthodoxy had always been the defining component of its ethnic identity.

In the political sphere, the Greek government officially ended the state of war with Albania in 1987 (Albania had been an 'enemy state' since a royal decree of November 1940), feeling that this would be a good starting-point for sorting out various problems, particularly those relating to the Greek minority. It was a one-sided gesture, however, for no concern was shown for the Greeks' living conditions nor, naturally, was the desired result achieved.

Since the recent changes that have taken place in Albania, and despite the Albanians' assertions that 'the minority is a bridge of friendship between the two nations', the Albanian government still regards the minority as a threat and would like to be rid of it. Tirana's aim is to

force the Greeks out of their ancestral homes. This is why we must somehow ensure that they stay in Northern Epirus and their human rights be secured in accordance with international treaties and agreements. At the same time, the Greek minority must feel secure; investments must be made, public works carried out; and there must be free communication between the Northern Epirots and Greece.