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**Traditional Friends and Occasional Claimants: Serbian Claims in Macedonia between the Wars<sup>1</sup>**

We do not want, nor can we want, to defend Serbian Macedonia by the force of arms alone. We deem it essential that no third party should be able to challenge the fact that it is Serbian. For this reason, the doctrine that the Slav population of Macedonia is Serbian is the very bedrock of our policy. We cannot accept that the Slavs are Serbs as far as the frontier and Bulgarians beyond. If we acknowledge that the Slavs of Vodena and Florina are Bulgarians, we demolish the very basis of our policy regarding Serbian Macedonia. This is the basis of our policy, and if Greece does not want to help us, we shall regretfully be compelled to change this basis and seek what we desire through an agreement with Bulgaria, dividing Greek Macedonia into spheres of influence<sup>2</sup>.

In November 1924, it was thus, in a diplomatic note to the Greek Ambassador in Belgrade, that the Serbian Foreign Minister Vojislav Marigovitch denounced the Greek-Serbian treaty of alliance of 1913<sup>3</sup>. The reason was the Politis-Kalfov Protocol, signed by Greece and Bulgaria a short time before, in which the Slavonic-speakers in Greek Macedonia were termed “Bulgarians”.

1. This study is part of a Ph.D. thesis being written for the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, titled “Μεταναστεύσεις Σλαβοφώνων από τη Μακεδονία και τη Δυτική Θράκη, 1913-1930”. I should like to extend sincere thanks to the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle for financially assisting my studies.

2. Panagiotis N. Pipinelis, *Ιστορία της εξωτερικής πολιτικής της Ελλάδος, 1923-1941*, Athens 1948, p. 28.

3. Evangelos Kofos, *Nationalism and Communism in Macedonia*, Thessaloniki 1964, p. 49.

This sudden deterioration of Greek-Yugoslav relations provoked some consternation in Athens, where the government had hitherto been complacently basking in its love affair with Belgrade, the famous Greek-Serbian axis. It also became apparent that many more factors than the Greek side had bargained for were involved in the issue of the Slavonic-speaking population, factors that would tax even Greece's traditional friendship with Serbia.

In 1924 the provisions of the Treaty of Neuilly for the mutual exchange of minorities between Greece and Bulgaria had just begun to be implemented, after some four years of strenuous efforts by the Mixed Committee to resolve procedural issues relating to the mass emigration. Despite the problems, however, the emigration process was well under way<sup>4</sup>. The Greeks, as also the officials of the League of Nations, undoubtedly expected that the completion of the exchange of populations would defuse the rivalry between the adjacent Balkan countries over the Slavonic-speaking population of Macedonia, and lead to the departure from Greece of their more extreme non-Greek elements. They probably also expected that Greek-Bulgarian relations would be smoothed out, since there would no longer be any reason for the government in Sofia to involve itself in the plots that were being hatched in Greek Macedonia. However, these assumptions overlooked, or at least underestimated, the Serbian factor, which, although apparently indifferent to the Slavonic-speakers in Greece, in fact nurtured a keen interest in their fate. Besides, Belgrade had attempted in the past (sometimes quite clumsily) to win over the Slavonic-speakers in Greek Macedonia<sup>5</sup>.

At the end of 1924, the Serbian consulate in Thessaloniki informed the Governorate-General of Macedonia that Belgrade looked unfavourably on the escalating Bulgarian propaganda that had resulted in the mass emigration to Bulgaria of Slavonic-speakers from the Yannitsa and Goumenissa areas in August 1924. The Serbian officials also told their Greek counterparts that many Slavonic-speakers in Greek Macedonia

4. Some 23,000 Slavonic-speakers had left Greek Macedonia for Bulgaria; see my unpublished doctoral thesis, "Μεταναστεύσεις Σλαβοφώνων".

5. Chiefly during the First World War, Serbian soldiers had busied themselves with spreading propaganda in Western Macedonia; see Konstantina Zahopoulou-Apostolidi, "Γαλλική πολιτική και ξένες προπαγάνδες στη Μακεδονία (1914-1918)" (unpublished postgraduate dissertation, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 1990).

wanted to emigrate to Serbia, but were prevented from doing so by the Treaty of Neuilly, which made provision for emigration only between Greece and Bulgaria. The Greek government found itself in an extremely awkward position. If it rejected the Serbs' request, it would exacerbate Greece's already tense relations with Serbia; yet if it agreed, it risked compromising itself *vis-à-vis* the League of Nations. Eventually Athens opted for a settlement with Belgrade. After secret talks between the Greek Foreign Ministry and the Serbian embassy in Athens, it was decided that any Slavonic-speakers who wanted to do so should be allowed to emigrate to Serbia, on condition that their departure was kept secret, since no official convention could be signed between Greece and Serbia. It was also agreed that the émigrés would give up their Greek citizenship, sell their immovable property, and take their movable effects with them<sup>6</sup>. An unofficial Serbian committee was even set up to oversee the emigration process: its members were M. Ivanovitch, Supervisor of the Serbian Ministry of the Interior, G. Magoftchevitch, Supervisor of Agrarian Reform, and Rista Hadjikoitchevitch, Police Commissioner of Gevgelija<sup>7</sup>. The committee immediately started to tour the villages of Greek Macedonia, listing the names of all those who wanted to emigrate to Serbia. In November and December 1924 they were travelling in the Goumenissa and Yannitsa areas<sup>8</sup>. It seems,

6. Foreign Ministry Archive (hereafter AYE)/1927/B/46, "Μετανάστευσις Σλαβοφώνων. Κτήματα αυτών ως και ελληνικά κτήματα εν Σερβία" (Emigration of Slavonic-speakers: their property and Greek property in Serbia): letter from the Deputy Governor-General of Thessaloniki, V. Makris, to the Greek embassy in Belgrade, Thessaloniki, 13 October 1924, No 1015. See also AYE/1927/B/46: telegram from Kannavos to the Foreign Ministry, Thessaloniki, 8 October 1924, No 38191; Archive of the Governor-General of Macedonia (hereafter ΑΓΔΜ)/f. 89, "Προπαγάνδες" (Propaganda), subf. B, "Υπόμνημα της από απόψεως ξένων προπαγανδών παρουσιαζομένης καταστάσεως εν τη περιοχή του Σώματος Στρατού και γενικώτερον καθ' άπασαν την Βορείαν Ελλάδα και επιβαλλόμενα μέτρα" (Memorandum on the situation in the area of the Army Corps and all over Northern Greece in general as presented by foreign propaganda, and the measures imposed).

7. *Notios Astir*, 10 October 1924.

8. AYE/1927/B/46, Report by the Governor-General of Thessaloniki, I. Kannavos, to the Department for the Settlement of Macedonia, Thessaloniki, 9 December 1924, confidential file No 22702; see also AYE/1927/B/46, Independent Defence Battalion to 11th Division, "Περί αναχωρήσεως σερβικής επιτροπής εκ Γουμένιτσας" (On the departure of the Serbian committee from Goumenitsa), TT 305, 31 December 1924, c.f. No 2545.

however, that the committee members, particularly Hadjikoitchevitch (a native of Yannitsa), deviated considerably from their original mission and started to spread propaganda, promising all those who declared themselves to be Serbs but did not want to emigrate that Serbia would give them its full support so that they could have their own churches and schools and be protected from the refugees<sup>9</sup>. In the end, despite the initial declarations, the Serbs' efforts met with little response from the local population, and then only in the Goumenissa and Yannitsa areas. In Western Macedonia the response was negligible<sup>10</sup>. In all, ninety-two families and one individual<sup>11</sup> emigrated to Serbia from the villages<sup>12</sup>.

34	families	from	Axioupoli
25	families	from	Idomeni
12	families	from	Dogani
5	families	from	Piyi
3	families	from	Kilkis

9. AYE/1927/B/46, Goumenissa Gendarmerie Command to Macedonian Gendarmerie Supreme Command, "Περί της σερβικής Επιτροπής" (On the Serbian Committee), Goumenissa, 1 December 1924, c.f. No 165/10.

10. A report from the Deputy Governor of Kastoria to the Governorate-General of Thessaloniki noted that there were no signs of pro-Serbian propaganda among the local Slavonic-speaking population, apart from the distribution of the Monastir newspaper *Notios Astir* to various villages; see AYE/1927/B/46, Report from the Deputy Governor of Kastoria to the Governorate-General of Thessaloniki, Kastoria, 21 November 1924, c.f. No 119.

11. AYE/1927/B/46, Report from the Governor-General of Thessaloniki, Ahilleas Kalevras, to the Foreign Ministry, Thessaloniki, 10 May 1927, No 21290.

12. AYE/1927/B/46, "Πίναξ μεταναστευσάντων εις Σερβίαν και μη υποβαλλόντων προτάσεις εξαγοράς ακινήτου περιουσίας" (List of émigrés to Serbia who have not submitted proposals for the purchase of their immovable property) attached to a letter from the Governor-General of Macedonia to the Foreign Ministry, Thessaloniki, 1 March 1926, No 285; "Κατάστασις ολικής αξίας εκτιμηθέντων κτημάτων των Σλαβοφώνων μεταναστευσάντων εις Σερβίαν" (Register of the total value of the assessed property of Slavonic-speakers emigrating to Serbia), "Κατάστασις ολικής αξίας εκτιμηθέντων κτημάτων των Σλαβοφώνων μεταναστευσάντων εις Σερβίαν εκ Κουφαλίων" (Register of the total value of the assessed property of Slavonic-speakers emigrating to Serbia from Koufalia), "Κατάστασις ολικής αξίας εκτιμηθέντων κτημάτων Σλαβοφώνων μεταναστευσάντων εις Σερβίαν εκ Ματσικόβου" (Register of the total value of the assessed property of Slavonic-speakers emigrating to Serbia from Matsikovo). These lists show that the total number of émigrés to Serbia was ninety families and one individual. Other sources mention ninety-two families.

2 families	from	Toumba
2 families	from	Goumenissa
2 families	from	Yannitsa
2 families	from	Evzoni
1 family	from	Ayios Petros
1 family	from	Valtotopio
1 family	from	Koufalia
1 family	from	Yannitsa

Simultaneously with the wave of emigration to Serbia, at the end of 1924 talk arose in Serbian circles of an oppressed Serbian minority in Greece, estimated at some 300.000<sup>13</sup>. The Greek-Serbian negotiations that had begun a few months earlier were conducted in an atmosphere of mutual suspicion and were marked by the Serbs' immoderate demands for Greek concessions regarding the Gevgelija-Thessaloniki railway line and the Serbian zone in the port of Thessaloniki, as also for Greece to recognise the existence of a Serbian minority in Macedonia. Contemporary diplomatic circles believed Belgrade's demand for recognition of the Serbian minority had the ulterior motive of pressuring Greece to give way over the Gevgelija-Thessaloniki railway line<sup>14</sup>, along which most of Serbia's transit trade travelled<sup>15</sup>. At the same time, the Serbian authorities banned all Greek newspapers<sup>16</sup>, while articles in the Serbian press increasingly maintained that Serbs were being oppressed by the Greek authorities<sup>17</sup>. Anti-Greek rallies were also held in various towns

13. Georgios Modis, *Η Μακεδονία μας και η μακεδονική μειονότητα*, Athens 1962, p. 13.

14. 'The Serbian complaint is obviously an eleventh-hour phenomenon. It is designed to bring pressure upon the Greeks in connection with the Salonica-Ghevgheli Railway question'; see Public Record Office/Foreign Office (hereafter PRO/FO)/421/310, C. H. Bateman, "Memorandum on Serbian 'Minorities' in Greek Macedonia", Foreign Office, 3 March 1926, No 66.

15. AYE/1928/A/19, Report from D. Kaklamanos to Foreign Minister G. Roussos, London, 20 December 1924, c.f. No 3759.

16. AYE/1926/Γ/64α, confidential archive, "Έλληνοσερβικά σχέσεις [Greek-Serbian relations] (1)", Captain Lambrakis (Commander of the Florina Gendarmerie) to the Governorate-General of Macedonia, Florina, 30 May 1925, c.f. No 1388/2.

17. PRO/FO/421/310, C. H. Bateman, "Memorandum on Serbian 'Minorities' in Greek Macedonia", Foreign Office, 3 March 1926, No 66.

in Serbia<sup>18</sup>. In the circumstances, discussion with Belgrade seemed pointless, and in June 1925 the Greek-Serbian talks ceased<sup>19</sup>.

The Serbian diplomatic counter-attack soon bore fruit. On 20 August 1925 more than thirty inhabitants of the village of Perdikka, in Kozani prefecture, signed a letter to the League of Nations declaring that they were of Serbian ethnicity, demanding minority rights, and asking for a Serbian school and church. They also accused the Greek authorities of oppressing them and giving their land to refugees<sup>20</sup>. In a subsequent letter to the League of Nations, they even asked for protection, on the grounds that, since they had made their feelings known, the refugees, encouraged by the police, were now siezing their land and preventing them from cultivating their fields<sup>21</sup>. On 8 October 1925, forty-six inhabitants of the village of Asvestopetra in Kozani prefecture also sought recognition as a Serbian minority, condemned the Greek administration for allowing refugees to occupy their homes, and demanded a Serbian school and church. They also pointed out with displeasure that they did not know how to write in Serbian because they were obliged to attend Greek schools<sup>22</sup>.

Following these developments, the Secretary-General of the League of Nations, Eric Drummond, wrote to the Greek government on 21 September and 5 November 1925, informing it of the accusations and asking for its reactions. Greece replied on 9 November 1925 through its

18. In December 1925, some fifteen thousand demonstrators in Monastir protested against the intimidation tactics of the Greek authorities and demanded that the Serbian schools and churches in Greek Macedonia be opened again; see *Efimeris ton Valkanion*, 29 December 1925, and *Makedonia*, 30 December 1925. A similar demonstration was held in Tipkes; see *Makedonia*, 14 January 1926.

19. For a detailed analysis of the Greek-Yugoslav talks in this period, see Areti Tounda-Fergadi, *Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικές μειονότητες: Πρωτόκολλο Πολίτη-Καλφώφ, 1924-1925*, Thessaloniki 1986, pp. 145-56.

20. Archives of the League of Nations. Fond of the Secretariat, 1919-27: Section 41/ Minorities (hereafter ALN)/R 1700(3), dossier No 46069, doc. No 46069, "Petitions from Serbians in Greek Macedonia", Letter from inhabitants of the village of Perdikkas (Nalbankioi), Kozani prefecture, to the League of Nations, 20 August 1925

21. ALN/R 1700(3), dossier No 46069, doc. No 46069, Letter from inhabitants of the village of Perdikkas to the Secretary of the Minorities Department of the League of Nations, Eric Colban, n.d.

22. ALN/R 1700(3), dossier No 46069, doc. No 46069, Letter from inhabitants of the village of Asvestopetra (Hassankioi), Kozani prefecture, to the League of Nations, Asvestopetra, 8 October 1925.

League of Nations representative, Vassilis Dendramis, asking for a month's grace in which to investigate the accusations. The request was granted<sup>23</sup>.

Dendramis delivered Greece's reply to Drummond on 5 December 1925. The answer was that the villagers' demands had not arisen out of a spontaneous desire for minority rights. The government also refuted the allegations about the high-handedness of the Greek authorities, and maintained that the demands were spurious fabrications created by propaganda spread among the villagers, most of whom had no knowledge of them nor had even signed them. Dendramis then went on to answer the three separate accusations in detail, namely that the Greek government i) had requisitioned land, ii) had confiscated large quantities of grain, and iii) would not allow Serbian schools and churches to be established. With regard to the first point, the Greek chargé d'affaires replied that land had been attached in areas from which Moslems had departed after the exchange of populations, and in which refugees had subsequently been settled. He pointed out that some local people had unlawfully appropriated Moslem land, which the Colonial Service had been obliged to take away from them. The second point was also connected with the grabbing of the Moslems' land. The local people had sown the fields, and the Ministry of Agriculture had decided that if the refugees wanted them they should have them and the locals would receive compensation. Dendramis admitted that the decision had not been fully implemented and implied that the local people's protests were justified. He also gave assurances that the Greek government was determined to get to the bottom of the matter and to punish those responsible. Lastly, as far as the schools and churches were concerned, he stated categorically that there had never been a Serbian school or church in these areas, nor did the local people have any knowledge of the Serbian language<sup>24</sup>.

The League of Nations was particularly sensitive to the issue of minority rights. All the same, one of its own officials ascertained that the villagers' allegations about schools and churches were not really very

23. ALN/R 1700(3), dossier No 46069, doc. No 46069, "Minorities in Greece", note by the Secretary-General, Geneva, 16 December 1925.

24. ALN/R 1700(3), dossier No 46069, doc. No 46069, Letter from Vassilis Dendramis to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations, Berne, 5 December 1925.

credible<sup>25</sup>. So when the League of Nations committee examined the petitions from the two villages and the Greek government's assertions on 16 March 1926, it accepted the latter's contention that the inhabitants spoke not Serbian but a local dialect, and the matter ended there.

The gesture made by the people of Perdikka and Asvestopetra certainly reflected a measure of discontent that was also smouldering elsewhere in Western Macedonia. Inhabitants of Olymbiada<sup>26</sup>, Meliti<sup>27</sup>, Itea, Papayannis<sup>28</sup>, Messonissio, Ammohorio<sup>29</sup>, Ano and Kato Loutraki<sup>30</sup>, and Kato Koryfi asked the Serbian consulate in Thessaloniki for protection; and the Serbian initiatives also met with varying levels of response in Emborio<sup>31</sup>, Ano Klinai, Polyplatanos<sup>32</sup>, Ayios Athanassios, Zervi<sup>33</sup>, Sarakini<sup>34</sup>, Neohorakio, Skopos<sup>35</sup>, Messohorio, Messokambos,

25. "The few lines in the petition relating to this case are not worded in a way that could convince one that the petitioners had already attempted to open such a school and church and had been refused permission by the Greek authorities. The complaint might be justified, but I do not think that this part of the petition contains sufficient information for us to take action"; see ALN/R 1700(3), dossier No 46069, doc. No 46069, Letter from an unknown League of Nations official to Ascarate, 1925.

26. AYE/1926/Γ/63/η, B/37, "Ελληνοβουλγαρική μετανάστευσις —Μειονότητες" (Greek-Bulgarian emigration— Minorities), Letter from the Prefect of Kozani to the Foreign Ministry, Kozani, 21 January 1926, c.f. No 15.

27. AYE/1926/Γ/63/η, B/37, Lieutenant Stefanos Grigoriou to 1st Defence Battalion, "Περί σερβικής προπαγάνδας" (On Serbian propaganda), Vostarani, 12 January 1926.

28. AYE/1926/Γ/63/η, B/37, 1st Defence Battalion to 10th Division, Florina, 15 January 1926, c.f. No 53/39.

29. AYE/1925/B/37, 12, "Αναφοραί μειονοτήτων εις το Συμβούλιο της Κ.τ.Ε. Μειονότητες Μακεδονίας" (Reports by minorities to the Council of the League of Nations, Minorities of Macedonia), Florina Police Station to its own Command, Florina, 12 October 1925, c.f. No 131/1.

30. AYE/1926/Γ/63/η, B/37, Enotia Gendarmerie Vice-Command to Pella Gendarmerie Command, Edessa, 11 January 1926, c.f. No 133/13.

31. AYE/1925/A/2, 7, "Σερβική προπαγάνδα εν Ελλάδι" (Serbian propaganda in Greece), Kozani Gendarmerie Command to Gendarmerie HQ, Kozani, 9 August 1925, c.f. No 13/151.

32. AYE/1925/B/37, 12, Florina Gendarmerie Command to Macedonia Gendarmerie Supreme Command, Florina, 15 October 1925, c.f. No 154/7/9.

33. AYE/1925/A/2, 7, Report from Pella Gendarmerie Command to the Prime Minister's Political Bureau, "Περί των ξένων προπαγανδών" (On foreign propaganda), Edessa, 2 September 1925, No 5/82.

34. AYE/1926/Γ/63/η, B/37, Enotia Gendarmerie Vice-Command to Pella Gendarmerie Command, "Περί των δηλωσάντων σερβικήν υπηκοότητα κατοίκων Σαρακινόβου" (On the inhabitants of Sarakinovo declaring Serbian nationality), Edessa, 12 January



and Ahlada<sup>36</sup>.

These developments understandably perturbed the Greek authorities, and in January 1926 Lieutenant Stefanos Grigoriou was sent to the Florina area to find out what was going on<sup>37</sup>. Lieutenant Mathioudakis of the Gendarmerie and the Governor of Enotia also visited Ano and Kato Loutraki in an effort to find out what was wrong and resolve the inhabitants' problems<sup>38</sup>; and the Commander of the Kozani Gendarmerie also went to various villages, trying to bring the inhabitants round<sup>39</sup>. At the same time, the Governorate-General of Macedonia sent a teacher named Pandelis Kapellakis to Asvestopetra with orders to elicit from the inhabitants declarations of loyalty to the Greek administration<sup>40</sup>. The Prefecture of Florina also summoned the community councils of the rebellious villages and advised them not to continue their actions<sup>41</sup>.

The actions in question were apparently being instigated from vari-

1926, c.f. No 133/1.

35. A letter from an inhabitant of Meliti reports that 26 families had publicly announced their Serbian origins; ALN/R 1700(3), dossier No 46069, doc. No 46069, Letter from an inhabitant of Vostarani to Mr Stepanovitch, 4 December 1925.

36. Dimitris Lithoxödu, "Δύο ανέκδοτα ντοκουμέντα για την ιστορία και τη συνείδηση της σλαβομακεδονικής μειονότητας κατά την προμεταξική περίοδο", *Ektos Orion*, 6 (Athens, July 1992), 36-42.

37. AYE/1926/Γ/63/η, B/37, 1st Independent Defence Battalion to 10th West Macedonian Division, Florina, 14 January 1926, c.f. No 35/24.

38. AYE/1926/Γ/63/η, B/37, Enotia Gendarmerie Vice-Command to Pella Gendarmerie Command, "Περί της ενεργουμένης σερβικής προπαγάνδας εν Καρατζόβη" (On the Serbian propaganda being spread in Karadzovi), Aridaia, 22 January 1926, c.f. No 133/16.

39. AYE/1926/B/37, "Εκπαιδευτικά Σλαβοφώνων" (Slavonic-speakers' educational affairs), Confidential report from Pandelis Kapellakis to the Governorate-General of Thessaloniki, 21 January 1926.

40. AYE/1926/B/37, Letter from the Governorate-General of Thessaloniki to the Foreign Ministry, Thessaloniki, 21 January 1926, c.f. No 88. Kapellakis went to Asvestopetra to try to talk the villagers round. He asked them to sign a new report repudiating their petition for recognition as a Serbian minority. He added that all their problems with the refugees would be resolved; but the villagers refused, asserting that the Serbian Consul had treated them very well. They also expressed fears that if they changed their minds worse might befall them; AYE/1926/B/37, "Εμπιστευτική έκθεσις" (Confidential report). Pandelis Kapellakis to the Governorate-General of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, 21 January 1926.

41. However, the community leaders showed no signs of complying with the Prefect's advice; see the Archive of Athanassios Souliotis-Nikolaïdis, subf. 2/II, Stefos Grigoriou to the Prefect of Florina, Florina, 23 December 1934.

ous quarters, chiefly in Serbian Macedonia, and by a number of opposition MPs. Animated by notions of a Greater Serbia, they were supported by and used as their mouthpiece the newspapers *Politika* and *Notios Astir*, produced in Belgrade and Monastir respectively<sup>42</sup>. At the same time, the parliamentary weakness of the Serbian government, coupled with the personal weakness of Prime Minister Nikola Pasitch, made it possible for Foreign Minister Momtchilo Nintsitch and certain nationalist cliques to advance irredentist claims regarding Greek Macedonia<sup>43</sup>.

The Politis-Kalfov Protocol was undoubtedly the inspiration behind the Serbs' actions. Belgrade was justifiably anxious lest Greece's recognition of a Bulgarian minority in Greek Macedonia create a bad precedent and undermine the policy of "Serbianisation" being implemented in Serbian Macedonia. So the Serbs' irritation and their acrimonious reaction were understandable. One cannot help wondering, however, why they did not call a halt when the protocol was dismissed twice in quick succession, by the Greek parliament in February and by the League of Nations in March 1925.

It is also very likely that the subject of the Serbian minority was brought up as a deliberate manoeuvre so that Belgrade might obtain greater concessions on the burning issue of the Thessaloniki free zone and the Gevgelija-Thessaloniki railway line. Yet, in the summer of 1926, when the Pangalos administration bestowed unhoped-for privileges upon Belgrade regarding the free zone and the frontier line, Serbia was still not content, and demanded —and briefly got— official

42. AYE/1923/B/37, 1, "Μειονότητες εν Ελλάδι" (Minorities in Greece), Telegram from N. Mavroudis to the Foreign Ministry, Belgrade, 3 October 1923, No 29385. According to Greek intelligence, the Serbian propaganda was being instigated by Hadzikoitchevitch, a policeman in Gevgelija, Dustinovitch, an interpreter at the Serbian Consulate in Thessaloniki, Filippos Stefanovitch from Akrita, Florina prefecture, and two Serbian MPs, Rafailovitch and Kirkovitch; see AYE/1925/A/2, 7, "Σερβική προπαγάνδα εν Ελλάδι" (Serbian propaganda in Greece), Pella Gendarmerie Command to the Prime Minister's Political Bureau, Edessa, 2 September 1925, No 5/82; AYE/1926/B/37, Letter from the Governorate-General of Thessaloniki to the Foreign Ministry, Thessaloniki, 21 January 1926, c.f. No 88; AYE/1925/A/2, 7, Florina Gendarmerie Command to Gendarmerie HQ, Florina, 1 September 1925, c.f. No 156/2/11; *Eleftheron Vima*, 6 June 1923.

43. AYE/1928/A/19, Report from Kaklamanos to the Foreign Ministry, Belgrade, 4 June 1925, c.f. No 182.

recognition of a Serbian minority on Greek territory.

To be sure, none of this negates the existence and the importance of the Greek-Serbian axis; nor indeed does it suggest that Greek Macedonia was in any danger from its Serbian neighbours. Besides, the Greek-Bulgarian exchange of populations was virtually complete by then, and most of the non-Greek extremists had left Greece. This is also confirmed by the limited response to the Serbian plans in the villages of Macedonia. Perhaps the conclusion to be drawn from the Serbs' actions is that even the various traditional friendships were (and probably still are) no obstacle and easily collapsed whenever national interest required it.

The Serbian consulate in Thessaloniki played a decisive part in these events. The Serbian diplomats incited many villagers to declare themselves members of a Serbian minority. The Greek government was aware of Belgrade's activities. Indeed, a report to Eric Colban accused the Serbian vice-consul in particular of assuring the villagers that he would see to it that they retained their land if they declared themselves to be of Serbian origin<sup>44</sup>. Alexey Savelliev and Ivan Kudianov, two Russian engineers on the Greek-Bulgarian Emigration Committee, were also accused of roaming around the Edessa area spreading pro-Serbian propaganda<sup>45</sup>. It was even requested that they be deported<sup>46</sup>.

Two fundamental factors were at the root of the villagers' bid for Serbian nationality. The main one was their economic malaise. The local people regarded the arrival of thousands of refugees from Asia Minor as an invasion. The question of the Moslem property, the problem of land-grabbing<sup>47</sup>, the expropriations, and the irregular purchases and sales<sup>48</sup> all together created a climate of uncertainty and insecurity among

44. ALN/R 1700(3), dossier No 46069, doc. No 46069, "Résumé of a Report dated January 15th, 1926, submitted by the Governor of Salonica".

45. AYE/1926/B/45, Letter from Lieutenant-Colonel Kolokotronis, Commander of the Kozani Gendarmerie, to Gendarmerie HQ, Kozani, 14 December 1925, No 13/265; see also AYE/1926/B/45, Letter from G. Fessopoulos, Director of General State Security to Foreign Ministry, Athens, 31 May 1926, c.f. No 916/1.

46. AYE/1926/B/45, Telegram from Rossetis to Foreign Ministry, Sofia, 17 January 1926, No 78.

47. AYE/1926/Γ/63/η, B/37, Letter from the Prefect of Kozani to the Foreign Ministry, Kozani, 21 January 1926, c.f. No 15.

48. AYE/1925/B/37, 12, Report by S. Zografos, Second Lieutenant of the Gendarmerie and Commander of Florina Police Station, to his Command, "Περί της εις το σεο-

the local people. At the same time, the Greek authorities' inflexibility and mishandling of the situation increased the local people's dissatisfaction. Furthermore, local problems alone —the thermal springs were taken out of the hands of the inhabitants of Ano and Kato Loutraki, for instance, communal pastures were rented to outsiders, a tax was imposed on the gathering of chestnuts— were enough to goad the impoverished smallholders and sharecroppers to seek Serbian protection<sup>49</sup>.

The second factor was connected with the question of emigration to Bulgaria. Many Slavonic-speakers who had applied to emigrate after the signing of the Treaty of Neuilly and had not yet left —because it usually took a considerable time (up to two years) to set their property and affairs in order— sought the help of the Serbs in the hope of thus averting their departure from Greece<sup>50</sup>. The problem took on epidemic proportions, and the Greek authorities were forced to ask the Greek-Bulgarian Mixed Committee to speed up the émigrés' departure<sup>51</sup>.

All this was compounded by the opinion expressed by a number of Greek officials that the moves to have a Serbian minority recognised were being supported by Bulgaria, which, having realised that it could not actively intervene in the Macedonian Question, preferred the region's Slavonic-speakers to be temporarily "Serbianised", rather than risk their being assimilated by the Greek element. However, this hypothesis presupposes that Bulgaria was in a position at that time to influence developments in the Slavonic-speaking villages of Greek Mace-

βικόν Προξενείον προσφυγής κατοίκων του χωρίου Λαζένης" (On the appeal by inhabitants of the village of Lazeni to the Serbian Consulate), Florina, 12 October 1925, c.f. No 131/1; see also AYE/1925/B/37, 12, Report by Major M. Lambrakis, Commander of Florina Gendarmerie Command, to Macedonian Gendarmerie Supreme Command, Florina, 15 October 1925, c.f. No 154/7/9.

49. AYE/1926/Γ/63/η, B/37, Report by Lieutenant Mathioudakis, Commander of Enotia Gendarmerie Vice-Command, to Pella Gendarmerie Command, "Περί της ενεργουμένης σερβικής προπαγάνδας εν Καρατζόβη", Aridaia, 22 January 1926, c.f. No 133/16.

50. AYE/1926/Γ/63/η, B/37, Report by Mathioudakis to Pella Gendarmerie Command, Edessa, 12 January 1926, c.f. No 133/1.

51. AYE/1926/Γ/63/η, B/37, Macedonian Supreme Gendarmerie HQ to the Governorate-General of Thessaloniki, Résumé, "Περί των ενεργειών της σερβικής προπαγάνδας εν τη περιφερεία Ενωτίας" (On the effects of Serbian propaganda in the environs of Enotia), Thessaloniki, 20 January 1926, c.f. No 167/83.

donia, which is very doubtful<sup>52</sup>.

These developments aroused justifiable apprehension and scepticism in the Greek government. It was clear that the growing indignation of many of the villagers, chiefly owing to their economic plight, was dangerous, but absolutely justified. It was also obvious that only a more effective administration would be able to restore order. Many government officials proposed various measures, which ranged from resolving the problem of the irregular sales and purchases to deporting certain individuals whose conduct was detrimental to the national interest. In the end, at a meeting in Florina on 9 February 1926, attended by Vassilios Dzionizios, the Prefect of Kozani Ioannis Makaronas, and Lieutenant-Colonel Vassilios Kolokotronis, Commander of the Kozani Gendarmerie, it was decided that the crisis should be defused by: i) expelling certain individuals from Asvestopetra, Perdikkas, and Olymbiada; ii) resolving the property disputes between refugees and local people; iii) paying an allowance to the priests serving in the Slavonic-speaking villages; iv) selecting teachers and appointing more of them; v) allowing Slavonic-speakers to attend state boarding-schools; vi) appointing rural constables with impeccable Greek views and credentials; vii) carefully vetting state officials visiting Slavonic-speaking villages and monitoring their conduct; and viii) frequent tours by state functionaries to forestall and effectively deal with local problems<sup>53</sup>.

Most of these measures were pointing in the right direction and showed that the officials who had devised them had put their finger on the real reasons behind the problem, which were economic and had nothing to do with ethnic preferences at all. But despite all the findings and recommendations that converged on the issue of the economic and educational regeneration of the Macedonian region, the situation did not in fact improve until the early 1930s. It was helped along, certainly, both

52. AYE/1926/Γ/63/η, B/37, the Deputy Governor of Enotia to the Governorate-General of Thessaloniki, Aridaia, 23 January 1926, c.f. No 3; see also AYE/1929/A/21/II, "Σλαβόφωνοι" (Slavonic-speakers), Report by P. Dimitriadis to the President (of the Government?), Athens, 12 August 1927, c.f. No 13. A few years later, this argument was repeated by Lieutenant Stéfos Grigoriou in a letter to the Prefect of Florina; see Souliotis-Nikolaïdis Archive, subf. 2/II, Stéfos Grigoriou to the Prefect of Florina, Florina, 23 December 1934.

53. AYE/1926/Γ/63/η, B/37, Minutes of a meeting held in Florina and signed in Kozani on 10 February 1926.

by the departure of the last Slavonic-speakers for Bulgaria and by the successful outcome of the colossal task of providing the Greek refugees with agricultural land. But it was preceded by other deplorable incidents connected with the Slavonic-speakers, incidents which further impeded Macedonia's smooth integration into the rest of the Greek nation. Perhaps the nub of the whole affair is reflected in this illspelt, but heartfelt appeal sent to the Governor-General of Thessaloniki by an inhabitant of Asvestopetra who had signed the petition sent to the League of Nations<sup>54</sup>:

Dear Governor-General,

I am very sorry to inform you that serious reasons made us sign ourselves Serbian nationals, not because of Serbian sentiments but other reasons which I cannot write down. I only warn you to look out for the Slavonic-speaking villages of Macedonia, because they are all going to sign themselves as Serbian and it is a serious matter for Greece, which country I desire and feel for, even though I signed myself a Serbian national.

54. AYE/1926/B/37, Letter from an inhabitant of Hassankioi to the Governor-General of Thessaloniki, Hassankioi, 3 January 1926.