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**“A Mysterious Bond forged by History”:  
The Making of Greek-Serbian Traditional Friendship  
in 19th Century Greece**

*For Dimitra, in memoriam*

*Σε μια φιλία άδολη σε μια φιλία αγνή  
Κι αλλοίμονον σε κείνονε όστις ποτέ θελήση  
Αδέλφια Σέρβους κ' Έλληνας ποτέ του να εγγίση<sup>1</sup>.*

To argue that Greece and Serbia were in contact during the 19th century in the premises of the Institute for Balkan Studies and in this particular academic environment is like bringing coal to Manchester. Scores of papers presented in several conferences during the last thirty years have shed considerable light on many aspects of the incomplete and ineffectual diplomatic relationship between the two young states and on the mutual —though unofficial and occasional— assistance between Greek and Serbian warlords and other distinguished personalities. In my view these contacts, official or unofficial, are disproportional in effect compared to the sense of “traditional friendship” that had developed in Greece long before the Great and the Balkan Wars; a sense that easily overshadowed occasional confrontations. It would not be far fetched to claim that the invocation and the rhetoric of this friendship are more traditional and certainly more effective as an argument than in deed. How came?

The task here is not to question the actual friendship. That would be impossible to claim given the ample evidence for the opposite. In fact there are two basic tasks, which will be dealt with simultaneously: The former is to trace the timetable and the fluctuation of this friendship in terms of theory. The latter is to locate the actual grounds, arguments, counter-arguments, and patterns on which this friendship was publicly recognized as “traditional” and granted by Greek public opinion. The overall assumption is that this friendly tradition, though hollow and short

1. *Ελλάς* [Hellas], 27 June 1913.

of facts, proved in time as functional and as durable as the strongest alliance.

I must make three points in advance. My analysis concerns exclusively the public rhetoric, which was the product of the daily press and other journals of Athens, and not the process of the diplomatic or other clandestine contacts. The latter, of course, were far from irrelevant, but at that time, public opinion was mostly unaware or misinformed about such endeavours. To what extent and since when the press influenced public opinion—if indeed public opinion existed outside Athens or other major urban centres and was really interested in Balkan affairs—this is a question that can not be answered here. It relates to the degree of literacy in the process of time, newspaper circulation, social integration, and party politics in general. However, regardless of its social range at any given decade, the “traditional” character of the Greek-Serbian friendship was never publicly questioned even when the actual friendship was in doubt. The third point is reversed: Did the press represent true public views about Serbia and the Serbs? Had public views about the Balkan peoples existed at all without the mediation of the press, I am sure that at any time they would have been no more solid and clear than Greek views of “self” as a distinct people would<sup>2</sup>. To avoid this lengthy debate, in this paper it is taken for granted that, when we deal with this “friendship”, we refer to an ideology totally constructed by Greek politicians, academics, and journalists—a new breed—not by masses who had never had direct contact with the Serbs. Naturally this “friendship” from above reflected political and intellectual meanderings of the time.

Despite intellectual and commercial contacts, sufficient information, and some military co-operation in the 1800s, the question of “friendship” between Greeks and Serbs as a symbolic capital or as a degree of

2. Similar questions were asked by Constantinos Svolopoulos in his papers “Ο ελληνικός Τύπος απέναντι στο σερβικό ζήτημα, 1804-1830” [The Greek Press vis-à-vis the Serbian Question, 1804-1830], “Η εθνική εξέγερση των Σέρβων ως παράδειγμα για την ελληνική επανάσταση του 1821” [The National Uprising of the Serbs as a Paradigm for the Greek Revolution of 1821] in *Συνεργασία Ελλήνων και Σέρβων κατά τους απελευθερωτικούς αγώνες 1804-1830. 1ο Ελληνοσερβικό συμπόσιο* [Co-operation between Greeks and Serbs during the Struggles for Liberation. 1st Greek-Serbian Symposium], Thessaloniki 1979, pp. 181-183.

sentimental proximity is hard to locate in the press, at least until the Eastern Crisis. The reason is that Serbs were not identified simply as friends but as Christian Orthodox brothers. They were exemplarily brave and simple people with an original thirst for liberty<sup>3</sup>. If not included *a priori* then they were certainly welcomed to the Greek *genos* or even to the brand new nation—for some optimists the would-be Eastern Empire—of the Hellenes<sup>4</sup>. In the same ideological context the notorious general Hatzihristos Dangović from Belgrade, a Slav-speaker veteran of the Greek Revolution and adjutant of King Otto, had represented Serbs, Bulgarians and Thracians in the 1844 Greek national assembly<sup>5</sup>. In the first volume of *Pandora*, a prestigious intellectual journal, an article on Black George [Petrović], accompanied by his picture, mentioned that he had initially opted for hegemony under a Greek ruler. The author, the newly appointed University Professor Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos (the Greek *par excellence* national historian), even classified him among the unknown victims of the Greek revolution<sup>6</sup>. Greeks and Serbs were bound with the "instinctive and mysterious feeling" which connected all the Orthodox to the south of Danube<sup>7</sup> or, as others put it, "a mysterious bond forged by history"<sup>8</sup>.

3. Cf. Apostolos Vakalopoulos, *Συνεργασία Ελλήνων και Σέρβων*, *op.cit.*, pp. 9-17.

4. See for example Anonymos o Ellin, *Ελληνική Νομαρχία ήτοι λόγος περί ελευθερίας* [Hellenic Nomarchy i.e. a Speech on Liberty], G. Valetas (ed.), Athens 1982, 1st ed. 1806, pp. 215-216 and 220-221; Dionysios Pyrros o Thettalos, *Γεωγραφία μεθοδική απάσης της οικουμένης* [Methodological Geography of the Whole World], Venice 1818, p. 203; *Εφημερίς Αθηνών* [Gazette of Athens], 22 November 1824; *Αιών* [Century], 21 April 1843 and 7 March 1845.

5. Georgios Aspreas, *Πολιτική ιστορία της νεωτέρας Ελλάδος 1821-1928* [Political History of Modern Greece], Athens 1930, vol.1, p. 185.

6. K. P. [Paparrigopoulos], "Μαυρογεώργης ο των Σέρβων ηγεμών" [Black George, the Prince of the Serbs], *Πανδώρα* 1 (1851) 473-474. Cf. Stephanos I. Papadopoulos, "Το 'Σχέδιον Γενικόν' της Φιλικής Εταιρείας και οι επαφές με τους Σέρβους" [The 'General Plan' of the Friends' Society and its Contacts with the Serbs] in *Συνεργασία Ελλήνων και Σέρβων*, *op.cit.*, pp. 51-64.

7. *Αιών*, 7 March 1845.

8. *Αιών*, 12 October 1860. The comment was made on the occasion of a memorial service for Miloš Obrenović. The obituary was delivered by Markos Renieris shortly before his appointment to the embassy in Constantinople and the initiation of the Greek-Serbian pourparler. The expenses were covered by A. Manakis, probably resident of Belgrade, the son of Anastasios Manakis, a Vlach merchant from Metsovo, a *Heterist* who had been involved in the contacts of *Philiki Etaireia* with the Serbs.

What was that “mystery” remains to be seen.

Frankly speaking brotherhood in arms with the Serbs was not a simple recollection. For some belligerent Greeks Serbs were a constant example of unconditional resistance against the will of the Sublime Port which they had to follow<sup>9</sup>. For the Greek supporters of Russia they were typical friendly Orthodox Slavs, governed by Orthodox rulers, people of extreme national sensitivity; they could not resist their nature and tradition to love the Greeks and to hate the Turks<sup>10</sup>. This was why men like Hatzihristos and other Slavs had supported the Greek cause in the 1820s<sup>11</sup>. They were the natural, pure and only allies of Greece, “co-rustlers” in the struggle for freedom, united by fortunes, tradition, and history; divided only by the anti-Hellenic politics of Catholicism and its agents in the East<sup>12</sup>. Serbs, after liberation, went on arming themselves and working assiduously for union with their brethren. They were united in an honest national policy regardless of party affiliations, while Greek politics, it was lamented, were concerned only with the appointment of coast-guards, candidates, and porters<sup>13</sup>.

For well-known diplomatic reasons the rhetoric of brotherhood based on the common struggle for independence protracted into the 1860s<sup>14</sup>. *Pandora* was still calling Serbia “Greece’s sister” and was ad-

9. Αιών, 19 June 1843.

10. Αιών, 28 November 1853; 22 May 1854.

11. P. Kalevras, *Η Ρωσσοφοβία και ο Πανσλαβισμός* [Russophobia and the Panslavism], Athens 1860, p. 14. For South Slav volunteers in the Greek war for independence see E. G. Protopsaltis, “Σέρβοι και Μαυροβούνιοι Φιλέλληνες κατά την επανάστασιν του 1821” [Serbian and Montenegrin Philhellenes in the 1821 Revolution], *Συνεργασία Ελλήνων και Σέρβων*, *op.cit.*, pp. 65-88 and Spyros D. Loukatos, “Σέρβοι, Μαυροβούνιοι και Βόσνιοι, μαχητές της ελληνικής ανεξαρτησίας” [Serbs, Montenegrins and Bosnians, Fighters of Greek Independence], *Συνεργασία Ελλήνων και Σέρβων*, *op.cit.*, pp. 101-151. For more extensive accounts see Michail Lascaris, *Έλληνες και Σέρβοι κατά τους απελευθερωτικούς αγώνες 1804-1830* [Greeks and Serbs in the Struggles for Liberation], Athens 1936 and Spyros D. Loukatos, *Σχέσεις Ελλήνων μετά Σέρβων και Μαυροβουνίων κατά την ελληνικήν επανάστασιν 1823-1826* [Relations between Greeks, Serbs and Montenegrins during the Greek Revolution 1823-1826], Thessaloniki 1970.

12. Αιών, 26 June 1854; 12 October 1860.

13. Αιών, 28 September 1859; 8 October 1862. For compliments to Serbian army preparation see *Ονήσανδρος* 2/1 (1865) 46.

14. For the diplomatic ventures in the 1860s which led to the 1867 Greek-Serbian Treaty of Voeslau see D. Djordjević, *Ιστορία της Σερβίας 1800-1918* [History of Serbia] translated from Serbian by Nikolaos Paparrodou, Thessaloniki 2001, 1st ed. 1970, pp. 147-

vertising Serbian history and nature; the decision to introduce Greek language as a compulsory course in Serbian schools rejoiced everybody, very much like the generous donation of Miloš to the University of Athens in 1842<sup>15</sup>. Princess Julia Hunyadi, the wife of Michael Obrenović, paid a flattering visit to the Greek school in Belgrade<sup>16</sup>. Were they not clear signs that Serbs recognized Greek cultural superiority? Alexandros Kostis translated in 1862 from the German *The Revolution of Serbia according to Serbian Sources and Documents* and Major Lambros Koutsonikas, a veteran fighter and amateur historian from Epirus, dreamed of a Greek-Serbian federation of the two "sisters"<sup>17</sup>. But his generation was passing away. Hatzihristos himself—a true incarnation of the Ottoman Balkans in terms of loyalty—had died in the fall of 1853<sup>18</sup>. Something was missing. I am not referring to the inability for an

155 which is based on earlier works of Michail Laskaris; see also Emmanuel Protopsaltis, "Aide hellénique aux Monténégrins et Serbs durant leurs combats contre les Turks" in *Greek-Serbian Co-operation 1830-1908. Collection of Reports from the Second Greek-Serbian Symposium*, Belgrade 1982, pp. 9-21 and Georgia Ioannidou-Bitsiadou, "Οι ελληνοσερβικές πολιτικές και πολιτιστικές σχέσεις κατά την περίοδο της σερβικής ανθηγεμονίας" [Greek-Serbian political and cultural relations during the period of the Serbian regency] in the minutes of the *4th Panhellenic Historical Conference*, Thessaloniki 1983, pp. 61-70.

15. *Πανδώρα* 12 (1862) 257-258; *Αιών*, 29 July 1842; Kleanthis, "Γεώργιος ο Μέλας της Σερβίας" [Black George of Serbia], *Πανδώρα* 13 (1863) 35-37. See also a translation of an article by Ubicini on Serbia in the same journal, vol. 15 (1864-1865) 128-131 and another one praising Prince Michael for his "manly and liberal policy" in vol. 13 (1862) 54-55.

16. See *Πανδώρα* 16 (1866) 166-167. For the issue of Greek education and letters in Serbia see: Glykeria-Sophia Vouri, "L'intellectuel serbe Vukašin Radišić et son Rapport sur l'expansion des lettres grecques en Serbie", *Proceedings of the Fifth Greek-Serbian Symposium*, Thessaloniki 1991, pp. 141-148; Miroliub Manojlović, "Le grec et les manuels de grec aux écoles Serbes du XIXe siècle" in A. Kazantzis (ed.), *Οι πνευματικές σχέσεις του Ελληνισμού με τους βαλκανικούς λαούς 18ος-20ος αιών. Α' Διαβαλκανικό Συνέδριο* [The Intellectual Relations of Hellenism and the Balkan Peoples 18th-20th c. 1st Interbalkan Conference], Komotini 1999, pp. 65-70; Jovanka Djordjević-Jovanović, "Η διδασκαλία της ελληνικής γλώσσας στο Βελιγράδι (από τον 18ο αιώνα μέχρι το 1921)" [Teaching the Greek Language in Belgrade (18th c. to 1921)] in A. Kazantzis (ed.), *Οι πνευματικές σχέσεις του Ελληνισμού με τους βαλκανικούς λαούς. Β' Διαβαλκανικό Συνέδριο* [The Intellectual Relations of Hellenism and the Balkan Peoples. 2nd Interbalkan Conference], Komotini 2002, pp. 165-171.

17. Lambros Koutsonikas, *Γενική Ιστορία της ελληνικής επανάστασης* [General History of the Greek Revolution], Athens 1863, vol. 1, p. 121.

18. *Αιών* and *Εσπερος* [Vesper] quarrelled, when the latter wrote that the days of Ha-

easy and effective diplomatic compromise, which marked the 1860s. This was also a symptom rather than the cause of change in Greek attitude *vis-à-vis* Serbia.

Were the Serbs really honest to Greece? How could Greeks be so sure that Serbs were not going to exploit their progress exclusively for their own favour and claim for themselves the Ottoman heritage, while Greece was divided by politics<sup>19</sup>? When rumours run high that the Porte was about to give to Belgrade the mandate of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the press in Athens could not hide its disappointment. Was it possible that Serbia was seriously claiming new territories just because some “filthy Turkish troops” had abandoned on their will their non-defendable fortresses? Was this a sufficient cause for national celebration? How could the Turks surrender their fortresses to Serbia without a single battle but refused to give up in Crete where so much blood was shed? How could Bosnia gain freedom without revolution while the sacrifices of Thessaly and Epirus had been in vain? Such questions started gradually to haunt the Greek press. If Greeks were to share the joy of the Serbs this was only due to the reasonable expectation that similar offers ought to be made to Greece, whose history was identical to the Serbian<sup>20</sup>. Epameinondas Deligeorgis, former Premier, put it more bluntly in one of his speeches in 1869:

What I see is Serbia, which is a hundred times stronger than Crete, gradually, in doses, gaining freedom and independence, like medicine offered to a patient, while it is Crete who fights for independence, and takes the arms every five or ten years<sup>21</sup>.

In 1871, in a correspondence of the newspaper *Aion* [Century] from Belgrade, under the title “A cry from a brother people”, it was

tziehristos were gone or would be gone soon. *Αιών* responded that in the days of Hatzihristos, when the Orthodox people were united against the Turks, Greece was respected. It was after his days that Greece was humiliated (*Αιών*, 3 September 1873).

19. *Παλιγγενεσία* [Rebirth], 19 March 1865.

20. *Αιών*, 27 March 1867; *Παλιγγενεσία*, 20 April 1867.

21. See the reprint of his speech of 25 July 1869 (response to the speech of the Crown) (*Zakynthos*, 1869), p. 20. See also the introduction by K. Ramfos to *Τα την ελληνικήν λεγεώνα του Αυτοκράτορος Νικολάου Α΄ την κατά το 1853 εν Μολδοβλαχία συσταθείσαν αφορόντα* [Regarding the Greek Legion of Emperor Nicholas I mustered in 1853 in Moldo-Wallachia], Athens 1867, p. xii, where the preferential treatment of the Serbs and the Montenegrins by the Powers in 1866 is commented not without some envy.

mentioned that the sympathies of the Serbian public and press were rising anew. Serbs were aware that the two nations had to retain their brotherhood<sup>22</sup>. *Aion* was a traditional zealot of Greek-Slav co-operation and federation in the Balkans and opposed fiercely the prospect of a Greek-Ottoman approach<sup>23</sup>. It claimed that it was to the interest of Greece to support the right of nationalities for independence: if this principle was applied to the Slavs of Austria and Turkey, then the unredeemed Greeks would have better chances to follow<sup>24</sup>.

In this vein, the expected success of the Slav uprising in the mid-1870s would be a Greek victory as well. It was considered as "a prelude" of the coming Greek unity<sup>25</sup>. Through the work of E. Kofos we know that some Greeks shared the views of *Aion* and conspired openly for the expansion of the Christian rising<sup>26</sup>. Yet it is not clear to me what all of them had in mind. Was it *fraternity* with the Orthodox peoples of the East<sup>27</sup> or Greek *national defence* in Macedonia<sup>28</sup>? Probably it was both, judging from the personalities that were involved in the movement. Many more Greeks rejected the government's decision to stay neutral and all of them wished for a Serbian victory. "Just like Hatzihristos, the Bulgarian [or Serbian], and Vasos, the Montenegrin, had fought with us against the Turks, we always support the revolutionaries be them Serbs, Albanians or Italians", wrote a newspaper. And it went on: "we did not go out to the streets for Herzegovina, we did not cry for them, because we have been taught a lot from bitter experience. Yet we felt them in the bottom of our hearts"<sup>29</sup>.

22. Αιών, 6 May 1871.

23. Loukianos Hassiotis, *Η Ανατολική Ομοσπονδία. Δύο ελληνικές φεντεραλαστικές κινήσεις του 19ου αιώνα* [The Eastern Federation. Two Greek Federalist Movements in the 19th Century], Thessaloniki 2001, p. 27.

24. Αιών, 6 and 20 September 1873.

25. Αιών, 22 August 1875. See also the favourable presentations of Serbian industry, economy, government and armed forces in *Εστία* [Fireside] 5 and 26 September, pp. 568-570 and 617-621 respectively.

26. Evangelos Kofos, *Η Ελλάδα και το Ανατολικό Ζήτημα, 1875-1881* [Greece and the Eastern Crisis, 1875-1881] transl. by Lexicon, Athens 2001, pp. 86-89.

27. See the views of the association *Αδελφότης* [Fraternity] that was established in June 1876 (*Εφημερίς* [Gazette], 28 June 1876).

28. *Αδελφότης* [Fraternity] and *Εθνική Άμυνα* [National Defence] were the two basic committees who undertook action within the European provinces of the Porte.

29. *Παλιγγενεσία*, 28 August 1875.

The apologetic tone was due to the anti-Greek press-campaign launched both in Serbia and Croatia following the pro-Turkish stand of a sole Greek newspaper in Constantinople. Nevertheless what followed showed that under the warm rhetoric mistrust had been accumulating. When a year later an anonymous Serb rejected rigorously the term “petty-nation” [*ethnarion*] used by a Greek newspaper to undermine the importance of Serbia and thus to excuse Greek neutrality, he was overwhelmed by an extensive and ironic editorial. “Serbia has decided war twenty times and postponed it twenty times not unwisely doing so. The nations which lack”, the editorial said, “sciences, arts, government, wealth, railways, engines, guns, regular education, a knowledge of social life and development are called ‘petty-nations’, if they don’t want to be called uneducated people. Such ‘petty-nations’”, it went on, “when they go to war, their only chances to win is by moving the civilized world through their bloodthirsty force and the sacrifice of their own miserable homes. But then they also prove themselves illiterate students of the modern civilization. If the Serbs think that they can hide their nakedness when they hop between Turkey and Russia and they can avoid the Turkish malicious laughter, then we feel sorry for them”, concluded the stormy reply of the editor<sup>30</sup>.

Even *Aion* doubted Serbian military qualities —compared to the Greek— and criticized Milan’s declaration of war to Turkey. He should have imitated the declaration of Alexandros Ypsilantis or that of the first Greek national assembly instead, it commented and asked rhetorically: “What was the meaning of his appeal for assistance to the ‘children of Greece’? Was this directed to the citizens of our kingdom? If it was, then certain things must be said openly. What did Serbia do for us when we fought for nine years in the 1820s? when Crete revolted in 1840? when Epirus and Thessaly rose in 1854, and Crete anew in 1866? Serbs, Montenegrins, and the people of Herzegovina have our sympathy and support which is well known to the world and constant as long as they fight for their own homeland and their faith, and they confine themselves—in terms of geography— within their own historical borders”<sup>31</sup>. A few days later in another paper it was reported that, according to British

30. *Εφημερίς*, 17 June 1876.

31. *Αιών*, 1 July 1876.



sources, an alliance between Athens and Belgrade had never been signed<sup>32</sup>. Greece owed the Serbs nothing.

In the early 1880s it was obvious that Greek public opinion was irritated by the luck of Serbia to enjoy the benefits of the Austrian involvement in the Balkans, shortly after the territorial gains it had received through Russian mediation<sup>33</sup>. In an interview held in London Prime-Minister Trikoupis announced to Europe that Greece was neither jealous of Serbia or Romania for their Austro-German relations nor willing to follow Belgrade in this fruitless policy. It was a matter of integrity and national pride, he said<sup>34</sup>. The implication was clear. Serbian diplomacy of underdog was dismissed. But in any case, none of the aforementioned references implies that Serbs had irrevocably lost their position as "brothers", even though there were scant signs of such rhetoric in the newspapers for almost a decade. Yet it is obvious and was widely known even then that Hatzihristos —be he a Serb or a Bulgarian— Black George, and Georgakis, a famous chieftain from Mt. Olympus who had fought with the Serbs, were no longer sufficient pillars to support this relation. A Sunday newspaper published in its first page the picture of Milan with some friendly comments on his bravery just a month before the battle of Slivnitsa<sup>35</sup>. But it was not enough to make up for the widening gap.

Shortly after the autumn crisis of 1885 the romantic and pompous poet Panayiotis Synodinos recited in front of the temple of Olympian Zeus his poem "Macedonia". In his verses one can hardly see a different attitude towards Serbs and Bulgarians.

And you Serbs, the so-called Italians of the Balkans, you threaten us,  
By hoisting your banner, the shred of your Kral?  
Were those who fought at Dragatsani Serbs?  
Were they Serbs, Nikitaras, Botsaris, and Drakos?

32. *Εφημερίς*, 20 July 1876. See also 18 August 1877 on the same subject. When King Milan was interviewed by N. Spandonis, shortly after his abdication, he confirmed that neither an alliance nor an entente had ever existed. "We shared common interests", he said, or rather "there was accordance full of sentiments". See *Ακρόπολις* [Acropolis], 30 March 1889.

33. Once again Russian support was seen as a medicine (quinine) offered to Serbs, Romanians, and Bulgarians; *Μη Χάνεσαι* [Do not Disappear], 11 December 1880.

34. *Παλιγγενεσία*, 9 September 1883.

35. *Το Άστυ* [City], 20 October 1885.

You, who have been created simply to form a link in the Russian chain,  
 You dare the homeland of Justinian to claim? [...]  
 Suffocating, led by hate and hunger,  
 You fixed your tents of bandits close to Drina [...]<sup>36</sup>.

It was no longer a secret to the Greeks that Serbia was developing her southern plan of expansion. "Old Serbia" was imperative for Belgrade to balance the Bulgarian gain of Eastern Roumelia. Their medieval arguments were strong enough for the Greek criteria but Greeks also acknowledged that tough and rough Albanians, illiterate and armed to the teeth, inhabited the district<sup>37</sup>. When Vladan Georgević, a medical doctor from Epirus (or Macedonia?) and a promising politician, concluded in his study for the Serbian Army Health Service that the solution to the Eastern Question was a large Serbia (from the Adriatic to the Black Sea and from Belgrade to the Aegean), the Greek press responded ironically. "If this is the lesson of Slivnitsa for Serbia's future leaders then we pity them, for they are condemned to become satellites of the Power, the least interested to fulfil their expansionist dreams"<sup>38</sup>. When the opening of Serbian consulates in Bitola and Thessaloniki was decided, comments became bitterer. "It looks as if our brothers the Serbs have decided to put claims on Greek Macedonia following the Romanians and the Bulgarians" [...]. We never rejected their rights in Northern Macedonia, in Skopje, but what can we say now that we see the Serbs, formerly in agreement with us, putting claims on those parts of Macedonia that no Serb exists?"<sup>39</sup>. This climate affected even K. Paparrigopoulos. In the fifth volume of his revised *History* in the chapter on the Serbian advances of *Philiki Etaireia* and the assassination of Black George by Miloš, he wrote

Serbia having chosen, very much like it did ever after, [i.e.] to profit from the difficulties of the Ottoman government in order to increase her advantages with as little sacrifice as possible, she insisted on the preservation of neutrality<sup>40</sup>.

36. Panayiotis Synodinos, *Η Μακεδονία. Ποίημα εις άσματα πέντε* [Macedonia. A Poem in Five Odes], Athens 1885, p. 13.

37. *Παλιγγενεσία*, 4 October 1885; 1 February 1886.

38. *Παλιγγενεσία*, 19 July 1886.

39. *Εφημερίς*, 3 November 1888.

40. Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos, *Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Έθνους από των αρ-*

When Jovan Ristić, a known friend of Russia, widely expected to negate Austrian influence, came to power in 1888, it was hard to neglect the mistrust hidden between the lines of otherwise friendly and gentle statements<sup>41</sup>. Apparently the word “brothers” had become an irony.

*Akropolis*, a new daily newspaper with steady correspondence from Belgrade, was the first to comment extensively and admit openly the changing character of Greek-Serbian relations. The article was published after the successful visit of Serbian experts who studied the Greek constitution and the Serbian press reprinted it shortly afterwards. In brief it tried to mend the schism by making an appeal for good will and patriotism free of machinations. “Greeks”, it read, “had never stopped sympathizing with the Serbs, our brothers. Greeks were the only people who watched the progress of Serbia without anxiety, suspicion, jealousy, or hate, and they did not doubt that the Serbs shared the same feelings. Unfortunately the identification of interests which had been prepared by the laws of history and nature was undermined by politics. Politics have tried to turn a friendship, which had been the product of nature and reason, into friction. Politics managed to neutralize the mutual magnetism, which was paving the way for an alliance. Magnetism has ceased to exist and it was not improbable that in the future animosity or even open confrontation might replace it. Both sides ‘assisted’ by the Great Powers have made mistakes in the past. Political parties in Serbia were perpetuating the impact of such mistakes by articulating territorial claims on littoral Macedonia. Greeks had become more sober and willing to bargain for Macedonia. If they could reach a settlement with the Bulgarians, the fiercest enemies, then they could certainly do the same with the Serbs. Only in unity and co-operation would the Balkan states escape their fate to be the puppets of the Powers”<sup>42</sup>.

There is no doubt to me that *Akropolis* contributed a lot towards a more balanced approach of Serbia. During the last 10-15 years of the nineteenth century Greek newspapers had grown in size and in pages, while telegraphs, frequent steam communications, and railways facilita-

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χαισιτάτων χρόνων μέχρι των καθ’ ημᾶς [History of the Greek Nation from Antiquity until our days], A. Konstantinidis (ed.), vol. 5, Athens n.d. 2nd ed., pp. 698-699.

41. *Ακρόπολις*, 5 November 1888.

42. *Ακρόπολις*, 25 January 1889 and 18 February 1889.

ted not only the speedy communication of news but also of journalists<sup>43</sup>. Serbia on many occasions hit the headlines. Greek pioneer journalists, Nikolaos Spandonis, Georgios Frangoudis, Dimitrios Kokkos, and others have had fair chances to study closely Serbian politics and to interview distinguished Serbian personalities. Among them were Regent Stojan Protić and his Finance Minister Vujić (1891), ex-Premier Milan Piroćanac (1891), Professor Svetomir Nikolaijević (1895), Stojan Novaković (1895, 1897), the Liberal leader Jevrem Grujić (1895)<sup>44</sup>, Ambassador Maringović (1896), Foreign Minister Major Andonić and his desk-officer for Macedonia Sveta Simić (1902), and Ambassador Bosković (1903). Trikoupis' visit to Belgrade in 1891—in the days when Balkan federalism was running high<sup>45</sup>—and King Alexander's visit to Athens in 1896 multiplied the occasions for friendly contacts as well as for a theoretical reconsideration of the “mysterious” relationship or “magnetism”.

In Constantinople N. Spandonis<sup>46</sup>, used all his charm and the mediation of S. Novaković young and beautiful daughter to convince the retired King, Milan, to give an interview for the readers of *Akropolis*<sup>47</sup>. It was a big success. Shortly afterwards regular and special correspondents from Serbia described in detail the glamorous celebrations of the 500th anniversary of the Kosovo battle<sup>48</sup>. The heroic character of these festivities and Serbian historicism offered the necessary grounds for a reappraisal of Greek-Serbian historical similarities. Republications or summaries in the Greek press of Serbian interviews to other European newspapers

43. Telegraphic communication with Belgrade was already available during the Eastern Crisis.

44. See also Dušan T. Bataković, “Les premiers libéraux de Serbie: Le cercle des ‘Parisiens’”, *Balkan Studies* 41/1 (2000) 83-111.

45. Dimitrije Djordjević, “La société ‘L’Alliance des Peuples des Balkans’ en Serbie en 1890-1891”, *Balkan Studies* 4 (1963) 137-154. See also Constantinos Svolopoulos, Charilaos Trikoupis et l’entente balkanique: Réalités et hypothèses formulées à l’occasion de sa visite à Belgrade (juin 1891)”, *Greek-Serbian Co-operation*, pp. 69-74 and Georges Ploumidis, “Les Slaves et la Serbie dans la pensée politique de Ch. Trikoupis et des ses collaborateurs”, *Greek-Serbian Co-operation*, pp. 79-82.

46. Kostas Mayer, *Ιστορία του ελληνικού Τύπου* [History of the Greek Press], vol. 1 (1790-1900), Athens 1957, pp. 204-205.

47. *Ακρόπολις*, 30 March 1889.

48. For similar celebrations in Athens in the honour of Serbia, see *Ακρόπολις*, 15 June 1889. Extensive historical passages written by Leopold von Ranke were translated, while Achilles Paraschos composed a lengthy poem.

increased the knowledge about the Serbs further on together with articles, which were published in various journals. Nikolaos Politis, the founder of Greek folklore studies, wrote briefly on Dositej Obradović<sup>49</sup>. The pictures of the Serbian regents appeared on the front page of *To Asty*<sup>50</sup>. "The Serbs are good, brave and peaceful people; they have the same religion with us but speak a different language", was mentioned in *Diaplasia ton Paidon*, a fashionable journal for the education of children<sup>51</sup>. Vladan Djordjević, the aforementioned Macedonian, published in *Parnassos* an article on the Serbian poet L. K. Lazarević to promote a deeper understanding between the two peoples<sup>52</sup>. Pavlos Deltas commented favourably on King Alexander's *coup d'État* in 1903<sup>53</sup> and Aristeidis Kyriakos published a romantic novel on the life of Queen Draga<sup>54</sup>.

In this context the traditional motives of brotherhood and friendship were repeated and elaborated. Both nations shared the same fortunes—from medieval disaster to brigand revolution—both were inspired by the vision of Rigas Velestinlis<sup>55</sup>. Beyond the common past Greeks and Serbs were aware that they could not exist in the Balkans without each other<sup>56</sup>. They were the oldest Balkan states<sup>57</sup>; they shared the same enemies, the Bulgarians and the Turks<sup>58</sup>; they suffered from common dome-

49. N. Politis, "Δοσίθεος Οβράντοβιτς, ο θεμελιωτής της σερβικής φιλολογίας" [Dositej Obradović the Founder of Serbian Filology], *Εστία*, 17 November 1885.

50. *Το Άστυ*, 26 March 1889.

51. See issue 4 in vol. 15 (28 February 1889), 61. The article commented on the abdication of Milan and the ascension of young Alexander.

52. "Ο Σέρβος ποιητής Λ. Κ. Λαζάρεβιτς" [The Serbian Poet L. K. Lazarević], *Παρνασσός* 15 (1892) 481-512.

53. "Επιστολαί εκ Βελιγραδίου. Το πραξικόπημα" [Letters from Belgrade. The Coup d'État], *Παναθήναια* 5 (1903) 442-443.

54. *Η Δράγα* [Draga] (Athens 1906).

55. *Ακρόπολις*, 27 March 1889. This was by far the most common motive and handy argument. See for example Konstantinos Rados, *Η Ρουμανία και το εν Γιουργέβω συνέδριον* [Romania and the Conference in Giurgiu], Athens 1891, p. 43. See also a response by Professor Spyridon Lambros to Novaković historical arguments. Lambros felt obliged to make only minor corrections regarding the history of Archbishoprics of Ochrid and Peć (*Ακρόπολις*, 14 December 1896).

56. *Ακρόπολις*, 21 June 1891.

57. *Ακρόπολις*, 4 May 1894.

58. *Ακρόπολις*, 14 August 1891.

stic problems and miseries<sup>59</sup>. The interests of the two states might not be identical but were certainly the least conflicting in the Balkan Peninsula<sup>60</sup>. They had never fought against each other; if they did, it was in the medieval ages and the impact was negligible, compared to the clash with the Bulgarians<sup>61</sup>. They had a common historical mission. Both were on their own in the international arena, the Greek without racial brethren, the Serbs abandoned by their Slav brothers. The more the Serbs were isolated the stronger their friendship with the Greeks would grow and would evolve into a deep affection, stronger than brotherhood<sup>62</sup>. Yet in the ensuing twenty years things were not likely to follow that direction.

The question of Macedonia was undoubtedly the basic reason<sup>63</sup>. During the same period of time, from the late 1880s onwards, this controversy stimulated an anti-Serbian rhetoric no less pompous than the pro-Serbian one but certainly less striking and less dense. The campaign escalated from calls to imitate the Serbs in terms of government —an almost clear appeal to violate the constitution<sup>64</sup>— and in irredentist preparations to open insults easily found in the arsenal of endemic Slavophobia. During the 1888 Kosovo celebration observers watched that Macedonia had already taken a place in Serbian historic symbolism and “St. Savva” Association was spreading<sup>65</sup>. Later on the press wrote that Serbs being Slavs were not hospitable or warm, as a people. They were sly, ready to insult and bully outsiders. For some this attitude explained sufficiently the disappearance and serbianization of the Greek community in Belgrade and elsewhere. “Friends” sometimes turn out to be the worst enemies, they warned. In fact those Serbs who hated the

59. *Ακρόπολις*, 9 September 1895.

60. *Ακρόπολις*, 28 March 1889.

61. *Ακρόπολις*, 7 November 1892; 14 December 1896.

62. *Ακρόπολις*, 30 April 1889; 15 June 1889; 23 June 1889; 5-6 July 1889.

63. For a quick reference see the chapter “Macedonia vs Balkan Unity” in L. S. Stavrianos’ study, *Balkan Federation. A History of the Movement toward Balkan Unity in Modern Times*, Hamden Co 1964, pp. 123-151. See also Evangelos Kofos, “Greek-Serbian Relations and the Question of Macedonia, 1879-1896”, *Greek-Serbian Co-operation*, pp. 93-106.

64. *Ακρόπολις*, 2 January 1891; 6 July 1894.

65. *Ακρόπολις*, 23 June 1899; 3 August 1889. It was a historic irony that “St. Savva” was chaired by the then well-known philhellene, Professor Nikolajević, who was never short of praises for Rigas Velestinlis and shared his vision for an Eastern Federation. For his moderate views see E. Kofos, “Greek-Serbian”, pp. 99 and 105-106.

Greeks most were not the poor and simple classes but the serbianized Albanians, Vlachs, and Greeks<sup>66</sup>. They did not ask for less than the Bulgarians in Macedonia. In due time they would claim Skopje, Bitola, even Thessaloniki. Whatever they may have felt in the past for the Greeks, compassion or sympathy, it was weaker and less steady than the Greek feelings. Serbs would never free themselves from the shortcomings of the Slav nature unless they fraternized with the Greeks and put an end to their mutual mistrust<sup>67</sup>.

Was it possible to preserve Serbian friendship without reducing Greek claims in Macedonia? The answer was negative. All Serbian officials in their interviews had made clear that the Greeks were dismissing any Serbian rights in Macedonia while the land was ample and they, the Serbs, were not going to question Greek historical rights. The Greek press seemed not to reject totally their views<sup>68</sup>. Of course the idea to reach an agreement over Macedonia with the Serbs was not an invention of the journalists but still it is interesting that the Greek press could accommodate easily both fervent nationalism and a plea for compromise. Journalist Fotios Virvilis under the title "Greeks and Serbs in Macedonia" wrote one of the most sincere and ironic analyses on the issue of friendship and compromise.

Enthusiastic and effusive when it is a question of platonic demonstrations and brotherly sympathies, we are possessed by fear, childish mistrust when the moment comes to settle a certain positive issue. We want the Serbs to be our friends, in fact we call them brothers and allies who share common interests, fortunes, and activities in the Illyric peninsula. But politics—for we are talking about politics—is not a science of sentiments but of interests. Why would the Serbs be our brothers if we deny their interests in Macedonia? Just to reap our platonic friendship? [...] Had there been no Serbs in Northern Macedonia, it would have been our top political interest to create them ourselves<sup>69</sup>.

F. Virvilis suggested that Serbs should be given a bishopric in

66. *Ακρόπολις*, 8 September 1895.

67. *Ακρόπολις*, 6 June 1894.

68. *Ακρόπολις*, 12 and 14 September 1895.

69. *Ακρόπολις*, 14 November 1895.

Northern Macedonia in the context of a “divide and rule” policy which would widen the gap between the Serbs and the Bulgarians. But then he questioned the validity of all these agreements and of this unrealistic geography of influence. After all, didn’t the Powers decide it all?

In the early years of the twentieth century, although the royal assassination secured for Serbia many front pages, no one in Greece was going to spare for the Serbs either friendly words or territories. Dimitrios Kokkos, who had reported on the Kosovo celebrations, composed a poem shortly after the death of Pavlos Melas —the most powerful figure in the Greek 20th c. national pantheon— in Macedonia in the vein of P. Synodinos.

What do the Slavs want in the land of Alexander?

What do the Serbs want in the land of Skenderbey? [...]

What is their origin? Who has ever seen them? Who knows them?

What do they seek on the soil of Niausta<sup>70</sup>

Serbs, Slavs, Romanians and Bulgarians<sup>71</sup>?

The comment about Skenderbey was not simply to match the rime. Serbs had to leave from Kosovo very much like the Slavs had to leave from Macedonia, where Albanians and Greeks respectively have been “hosting” them generously for centuries, thus giving ground to unsubstantiated historical and ethnological arguments<sup>72</sup>. Even in 1908 a rapprochement with Serbia was called “utopic”. Serbs might be more human than the Bulgarians and more honest friends but still being Slavs they could bring nothing more than harm to Hellenism, judging from their assimilatory policy against the Albanians, it was argued. “Let us not indulge into a hysteric friendship as we did in the days of Trikoupis”, wrote an editor<sup>73</sup>. Yet, despite the profound lack of courtesy, it was widely recognized and systematically stressed by the press that Serbs had always been and still were the enemies of the Bulgarians<sup>74</sup>. How could they ever come to an understanding with them<sup>75</sup>? If Serbs were the ene-

70. A town in southern Greek Macedonia, modern Naussa.

71. *Ακρόπολις*, 22 October 1904.

72. *Αθήναι*, 11 and 23 April 1908.

73. *Αθήναι*, 3 May 1908.

74. See for example the articles on the Serbian policy in Macedonia in *Ελληνισμός* [Hellenism] 7 (1904) 774-778 and 922-923 as well as in *Ακρόπολις*, 28 January 1906.

75. Such questions followed the Serbo-Bulgarian rapprochement of 1904-1905; see



mies of the Bulgarians, then they certainly were the friends of the Greeks.

This was not the proper way to define friendship for two “brother nations”. Obviously many things had changed in the Balkans in the course of the nineteenth century in terms of diplomacy, which should not be disregarded when we treat the issue of international relations. The public image of Serbia and the Serbs was more strongly influenced by the specific diplomatic choices made by Athens or Belgrade rather than it affected these choices. But the argument in this paper is beyond diplomacy: Serbs were unlikely to retain their prestigious position as “brotherly friends” in the Greek concept of the Balkans for reasons of ideology. Alienation was bound to happen but it did not concern only the Serbs. It reflected the changing nature of the Greek state and nation and its Balkan vision. One can not fail to detect that the nature of Greek-Serbian friendship is strongly related to the hot question of Greek nationality, the quest for an Eastern Federation, the delimitation of Greek historical rights, and the false dilemma between the Slav Orthodox world and the modernized West<sup>76</sup>. In other words the Serbs, not alone of the Balkan peoples, became the negative image of the Greeks, a truly “special” partner in history. Their Slav character was more distinct whenever Panslavism was seen as a threat to Greece. Their progress, territorial expansion, revolutionary manners, and domestic policy became the standard for a painful comparison. The making of their national past threatened Greek historical arguments. The serbianization of their society marked the end of the Greek merchant communities in Serbia.

But unlike other Balkan peoples Serbs retained if not the love at least the sympathy of the Greeks beyond the point when other nations in the region started to loose it irrevocably. It was from the 1860s onwards —when there was no more room inside the Greek nation— that the “tradition” of the Greek-Serbian friendship was defined, enriched and treasured as a symbolic capital. Everybody knew that there was no much substance in this tradition —from time to time it was admitted openly—

Wayne S. Vucinich, *Serbia between East and West. The Events of 1903-1908*, New York 1968, pp. 136-147.

76. The best analysis of these issues is by Elli Skopetea, *Το “πρότυπο βασίλειο” και η Μεγάλη Ιδέα. Όψεις του εθνικού προβλήματος στην Ελλάδα (1830-1880)* [The “Model Kingdom” and the Great Idea. Aspects of the National Problem in Greece], Athens 1988.

nor direct contacts between the two peoples were particularly brisk. But still tradition counterbalanced effectively all the shortcomings of the relationship between Athens and Belgrade and even survived the Macedonian crisis, including the painful Firmilgian Question<sup>77</sup>. How could this durance be explained without “natural magnetism”? Was it not a “mystery”? Tradition is not to be questioned anyhow, especially if it dated back to the days of the Independence war. Therefore it became a convenient alibi for diplomats, Greeks and Serbs alike, who continued their fruitless efforts for co-operation for decades dedicated to the mutating vision of Rigas and determined to succeed. And they did succeed in 1913.

In April 1912 the name day of King George of the Hellenes was celebrated in Belgrade with unmatched glamour, probably more glamorously than in any other capital. The local correspondent reported in undisguised irony that the spontaneous manifestation of so much philehellenic feelings by the Serbs was beyond expectation and certainly beyond belief<sup>78</sup>. The two states were about to enter the era of close and successful military co-operation. In fact it was the first time. But no one thought it was a strange or a new experience, although no formal alliance existed yet<sup>79</sup>. Were they writing a new chapter of traditional Greek-Serbian friendship or constructing that tradition retrospectively, it was totally irrelevant.

77. Cf. Dimitrios Philippidis, *Το Φιρμιλιάνειον Ζήτημα ήτοι ο εκ Σερβίας κίνδυνος της Μακεδονίας και το Οικουμενικόν Πατριαρχείον* [The Firmigian Question, i.e. the Serbian Danger of Macedonia and the Ecumenical Patriarchate], Athens 1903.

78. *Ακρόπολις*, 7 May 1912.

79. Georgia Ioannidou-Bitsiadou, “Η ελληνοσερβική προσέγγιση και ο καθορισμός των ελληνοσερβικών συνόρων” [The Greek-Serbian Rapprochement and the Demarcation of the Greek-Serbian Border] in *Συμπόσιο. Η συνθήκη του Βουκουρεστίου και η Ελλάδα* [Symposium. The Treaty of Bucharest and Greece], Thessaloniki 1990, pp. 74-75.