

Helen Gardikas-Katsiadakis

**Greek-Serbian Relations 1912-1913:
Communication Gap or Deliberate Policy**

In Greek domestic politics during the turbulent years of the First World War, the issue of the obligations stemming from the Greek-Serbian treaty became one of the pivotal issues of Greek foreign policy. In this paper I will explain how this issue arose when it did, why it had not arisen before, and what, in my view, is the real extent of its significance.

The first earnest and specifically targeted attempts at a political understanding between Athens and Turkey's Balkan neighbours dated to the period of the Italian attack against Libya in September 1911. At that point, all the Balkan states were concerned as to the possible spreading of trouble in the central Mediterranean to the Balkans. For in the initial days of the Italian expedition it appeared likely that Italy would choose to destabilize the Balkans by mounting an attack on the Albanian coast. The Balkan states issued decrees of partial mobilisation. Both Belgrade and Athens turned to Sofia in an effort to discern what Sofia planned to do if Turkey moved. In contrast to her attitude toward Belgrade, Sofia kept Athens at some distance. This was understandable for two reasons. Firstly, Greece was considered a second rate power, as her military and naval forces were reported to be antiquated and ineffective and their leaders had been responsible for the 1897 defeat in Thessaly. Secondly, the explosive Cretan question, which Athens seemed unable to control, was likely to lead to a sudden declaration of war by the Porte before Sofia had completed her diplomatic and military preparations.

Shortly after the outbreak of the Turko-Italian war, Bulgaria was engaged in more pressing and constructive negotiations: Under Russian auspices negotiations began between Sofia and Belgrade that eventually led to the signing of the March 1912 Treaty. Athens too was keen on embarking in talks with Sofia. Dimitrios Panas, the Greek Minister at

Sofia, received instructions to inform the Bulgarian Prime Minister, Ivan Guesov, that Greece would assist Bulgaria in the event of a Turkish attack, if Bulgaria undertook to do the same if Turkey attacked Greece. This he did on 16 October¹. Without divulging that he had begun similar talks with Belgrade, Guesov avoided any commitment and left the Greeks to believe that his reluctance was due to his fear of the Cretan crisis. As he later explained in his memoirs, he had just begun discussions with the Serbian Prime Minister concerning a defensive alliance, but these discussions had come to no conclusion yet².

The Russian design, which Guesov had adopted, considered the alliance with Serbia a priority. The entente with Greece, he maintained, should be exclusively confined to a guarantee of the status quo. If Greece wanted a defensive agreement, she could eventually join the Serbo-Bulgarian alliance, in which case she should accede to all its clauses³.

The Serbo-Bulgarian negotiations for a treaty of Alliance, eventually signed on March 13, 1912, were carefully concealed from Panas. Not until after the Greek proposals for an alliance with Bulgaria had been drawn up in Athens, in April 1912, did the Greeks learn of the existence of a treaty with Serbia. And even then, all that Guesov had told Panas was that Serbia and Bulgaria had agreed to lend each other mutual aid in case of a common danger, that the principle of entente had been established, but that Bulgaria had postponed the discussion of details until after the conclusion of a treaty with Greece. This misleading information caused Panas to underestimate the importance of the Serbian alliance for Bulgaria and to believe that Bulgaria considered Serbia merely a buffer state between herself and Austria. Consequently, he failed to make clear to his Prime Minister, Eleftherios Venizelos, the offensive character of the Serbo-Bulgarian agreement. Thus, Venizelos failed to realize the

1. Helen Gardikas-Katsiadakis, *Greece and the Balkan Imbroglia. Greek Foreign Policy, 1911-1913*, Athens 1995, p. 95. See also I. E. Gueshov, *L'alliance balkanique*, Paris 1915, pp. 64-66.

2. Gardikas-Katsiadakis, *op.cit.*, p. 95; Gueshov, *op.cit.*, p. 66; D. J. D. Drossos, *La fondation de l'alliance balkanique*, Athènes 1929, p. 24. See also Gunnar Hering, "Die Serbisch-bulgarischen Beziehungen am vorabend und während der Balkankriege", *Balkan Studies* III (1962) 313-318.

3. Gardikas-Katsiadakis, *op.cit.*, p. 95; E. C. Thaden, *Russia and the Balkan Alliance of 1912*, University Park Penn. 1965, p. 101.

importance of the Serbian factor and to seek a close relationship with Belgrade⁴.

Until the outbreak of the Libyan war, there had been very scarce direct communication between the Governments of Athens and Belgrade. Over the previous years, the Greek Foreign Ministry had attached no particular importance to its Mission in the Serbian capital. The situation remained unchanged even after the crisis of September 1911.

It is surprising that, during the first decade of the twentieth century Greece had shown little interest in approaching Serbia, until 1908 the only independent state south of the Danube besides Greece, and a state that shared with Greece a mistrust for the growing Bulgarian influence in Macedonia. On several occasions during the second half of the 19th century, leading Greek politicians had indeed shown some interest in coming to an understanding with Serbia over questions of territorial and church interests in Macedonia, but had not been willing to make substantial concessions in order to reach an agreement. This inertia continued even during the most acute phase of the Macedonian Struggle, when Greek Slavophobia reached its peak. It is also surprising that Venizelos did not revise this policy when he came to power in 1910. In theory, Venizelos had formed a comprehensive picture of the dynamics of the Balkan situation, after having reviewed the entire situation in June 1910. This picture had included Serbia and the other Balkan neighbours of the Ottoman Empire. As he had confided to one of his doctors,

Unfortunately, it appears difficult to avoid the war against Turkey, eventually. But since all hope of a future sincere cooperation between Greeks and Turks has vanished, I believe that we must reach an understanding with Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, and, if possible, with the Albanians, so that, by means of *reasonable mutual concessions* we may conclude an alliance of all these peoples for the purpose of ousting Turkey from Europe and of limiting her control to Constantinople alone, with a specific surrounding area⁵.

4. Gardikas-Katsiadakis, *op.cit.*, p. 99. On the deliberate policy practiced by Bulgaria of keeping negotiations with Athens and Belgrade separate, see Sazonov to Urussov, 17/30 May 1912, in B. Siebert, *Entente Diplomacy and the World*, London 1921, no. 405.

5. Venizelos to Bensis, Chania, June 7/20, 1910. Copy in the archives of the National Research Foundation "Eleftherios K. Venizelos". Author's italics.

The situation that Venizelos was anticipating in June 1910 was not a distant possibility. Less than two years later, as the Italian war continued with no visible outcome through the winter and early spring of 1912, Italy transferred the war to the Southern Aegean. In the early summer, the Albanian leaders began their annual uprising against the Ottoman authorities. The Cretans were once again attempting to force their union with Greece by sending their representatives to sit in the Greek Parliament, paying no heed to warnings that their action would cause a Turkish attack on Greece. In view of these rapid developments, it is a moot question why, in the early summer of 1912, Venizelos did not apply the remedy he had prescribed two years earlier; why, having signed the Greek-Bulgarian treaty in May, he did not seek a closer understanding with Belgrade.

In the early weeks of the summer, when the diplomats of the other countries of the region were in intense secret communication, Venizelos was kept in the dark. He knew neither of the military convention signed between Serbia and Bulgaria on July 2, nor of the oral agreement between Bulgaria and Montenegro. Thus, two crucial decisions taken in August, the decision of Montenegro to declare war on Turkey unilaterally, and the decision of the Bulgarian Government to cooperate with Montenegro in addressing an ultimatum to the Porte to be followed by a declaration of war against Turkey took Greece completely by surprise.

This is definitely true, despite what Venizelos claimed in later years, when the intervening domestic political dispute over the implications of the Greek-Serbian Treaty of 1913 had distorted his recollection. Indeed, shortly before he died he claimed:

I will prove that nothing had escaped me regarding the secret negotiations and treaties of the Serbs and the Bulgarians, nothing whatsoever; that I too had laid a plan, after considering the situation and the possibilities for many days and nights. If I had demanded guarantees and an explicit participation in the division of Turkish territories, then surely they would have ignored us and they would have either gone to war without Greece or they would have postponed its outbreak, and both these eventualities would have been disastrous⁶.

6. Newspaper *Ethnos*, March 26, 1936.

It is clear that, unless his aging memory was failing him, he was deliberately referring not to the period when he was negotiating the treaty with Bulgaria in April and May 1912, but to the very last days preceding the outbreak of the First Balkan War, when Athens hastily engaged in ineffective last minute talks with Belgrade.

After all, if an understanding with Belgrade had been a priority for the Greek Prime Minister, he could have adopted the principle that had worked out so well in his dealings with Sofia. He could have at least attempted a purely defensive agreement without provisions for a war against Turkey and without a division of territories.

Though Venizelos went to great lengths to achieve the rapprochement with Sofia, there is no record of his having made any sincere effort to approach Belgrade, either in September 1911 or during the critical stage of the Greek-Bulgarian negotiations in April and May 1912. In the Greek sources there is no record either in the archives of the Foreign Ministry, or in Venizelos' papers or in the numerous memoirs and second-hand accounts.

Several months later, in the light of increasing Greek-Bulgarian tension and the outbreak of the Second Balkan War, Venizelos was heavily criticized by his domestic opposition for not having insisted on including a partition agreement in the defensive treaty, or in the military convention with Bulgaria. No one, however, criticized him for having neglected an early rapprochement with Belgrade. The reason was probably that those who criticized the omission of the division agreement in the Greek-Bulgarian treaty belonged to the faction that opposed the signing of a Greek-Serbian defensive treaty.

The answer to the question why Greece was reluctant to engage in talks for a defensive alliance with Serbia must be examined against the backdrop of Greece's diplomatic tradition. Since the establishment of the independent State in 1830, although it had concluded various types of treaties and conventions, it had embarked on spontaneous expansionist ventures against the Ottoman Empire without prior alliance arrangements. Greece's likely allies, the Orthodox Christian neighbours of the Empire, attained independence long after 1830, Serbia at the Congress of Berlin in 1878 and Bulgaria in 1908. Only after that date could an alliance agreement policy have any practical implication. But by that time Greek politicians had abandoned their traditional, albeit

half-hearted, 19th century preference for Serbia. The deterioration of Austro-Serbian relations after the Bosnian crisis of 1908 had added a new component to Greek-Serbian relations. It meant that any attempt to approach Serbia would arouse Austro-Hungarian suspicions and ill will. At any rate, the diplomatic procedure leading to the signature of the Greek-Bulgarian alliance treaty was a novel experience for Greece.

More specifically, the answer to the question why Greece was reluctant to engage in talks with Serbia may be attributed, at least partly, to the fear that closer relations with Serbia would estrange Austria. Venizelos shared the views of George Streit, the Greek Minister at Vienna, that it was dangerous to antagonize Austrian interests respecting Albania and Bulgaria. Relations with Austria were a pivotal factor of Greek foreign policy.

Apparently fear of Austria outweighed the importance of Serbia's partnership. Greece underestimated the importance of Serbia, not only as a potential check on Bulgarian expansionism, but also as a partner in dealing with the increasing threat of the Albanian factor.

In the summer of 1912 the annual Albanian uprising had developed into a generalized and uncontrollable insurrection against the Ottoman Government and was spreading across Northern Albania and Central Macedonia. Hitherto, the traditional Greek expedient in dealing with the "Slav danger" had been to support either the rebel Albanians or the Ottoman authorities. This policy had reached its heyday during the Macedonian Struggle between 1904 and 1908. In later years, Greek authorities had been watching with passive apprehension the rise of Albanian nationalism in the south as well as in the north. As long as the revolt itself did not spread south of Valona and as long as the Albanians were disposed to rely on Greek assistance, the Greeks had maintained a close link with the South Albanian leaders in the hope of containing their nationalist movement. As late as mid-June 1912, while open rebellion was still limited to the north, the newly appointed Greek Foreign Minister Lambros Koromilas, an ardent slavophobe amateur politician, saw no reason to change the Greek attitude, according to the instructions he sent to the Greek Consuls in the region.

The Greek-Albanian rapprochement ended suddenly, at the end of July, when the South Albanian rebels gave a territorial definition to their national aspirations. On 29 July, in a memorandum addressed to the

Porte the chiefs of Southern Albania demanded autonomy for the vilayets of Janina and Scutari and the adjacent *sanjaks* of the vilayets of Kosovo and Monastir. Unable to subdue them the Porte attempted to appease them by appointing an Albanian from Leskovik named Hassan Pasha as Vali of Janina⁷. The appointment of an Albanian to the vilayet of Janina, whose capital was one of the liveliest centres of Hellenism in the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire, awakened the Greeks to the full extent of the Albanian threat to their interests. The last days of the summer 1912 witnessed a frantic effort to resolve this miscalculation.

As a matter of fact, failure to acknowledge the importance of Albania, both as a potentially independent state and as a foothold for Austrian and Italian interests on the east coast of the Adriatic was a common trait of Serbian and Greek policy that the two states tried to deal with in common. As George Leontaritis has pointed out in his exemplary work on the involvement of Greece in the First World War, the territorial clauses of the Greek-Serbian alliance of 1913 were based on the assumption that Serbia would obtain an exit to the Adriatic⁸.

On account of these two Greek miscalculations, ignorance of the offensive character of the Serbo-Bulgarian treaty and confidence in the loyalty of the Southern Albanian chiefs, in the last days of August, Venizelos approached Serbia with extreme caution and with no sense of urgency. His aim was to complete the system of Balkan defensive alliances he had in mind and he hesitated to commit himself beyond a defensive agreement by proposing a division of territories. In the last days of August, it appears that the Serbian Government demanded a written entente with Greece. It is not clear whether the initiative had originated in Athens or Belgrade; according to Venizelos's account the initiative had come from him. Koromilas gave Matthias Bosković, the Serbian Minister in Athens, a draft agreement based on the Greek-Bulgarian Treaty in the form of a tripartite entente. Bosković left for Belgrade with the draft treaty on 7 September, while Captain John Metaxas, who had left Athens on his way to Sofia to sign a military

7. Gardikas-Katsiadakis, *op.cit.*, p. 103; Stavro Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening 1878-1912*, Princeton N.J. 1967, pp. 429-436; Basil Kondis, *Greece and Albania 1908-1914*, Thessaloniki 1976, pp. 69-75.

8. George B. Leon, *Greece and the Great Powers 1914-1917*, Thessaloniki 1974, p. 7.

convention with the Bulgarians, would follow Bosković to Belgrade to prepare the military convention, which would be signed in Athens immediately after the treaty⁹.

The whole plan miscarried, as Serbia and Bulgaria both rejected the Greek proposed tripartite treaty on the grounds that it was incompatible with the Serbo-Bulgarian alliance Treaty. Without explaining the reasons for the incompatibility, Serbia suggested a separate bipartite Greek-Serbian alliance agreement instead. According to this plan, Greece would then proceed to sign a treaty with Montenegro. Eventually all four states would sign a collective loose agreement merely amounting to a declaration of solidarity.

By the time Metaxas had reached Belgrade for the purpose of concluding a military convention, there was no time for either political or military negotiations. The war was about to break out and Metaxas was urgently recalled to Athens. All he had managed to accomplish was to sign the Greek-Bulgarian military convention on the 5th of October¹⁰.

Five days after the outbreak of the war, on October 23 the Serbian Government came up with its own military convention proposal. A week later, as the Greek Macedonian army was rapidly moving north toward Thessaloniki, Venizelos replied that a military convention was no longer required; all that was now required was the establishment of a *liaison* between the two General Staffs¹¹.

As for the fate of the defensive alliance proposal, since the departure of Bosković from Athens on 7 September with the draft of the Greek-Serbian alliance and until the assassination of King George in Thessaloniki on 18 March 1913, Venizelos's fear of Austria and his unwillingness to proceed to a preliminary division of territories had prevented progress in the negotiations with Belgrade.

By that time, however, Greece's position in the Balkans was

9. Gardikas-Katsiadakis, *op.cit.*, p. 111. See also Loukianos Hassiotis, *Ελληνοσερβικές σχέσεις 1913-1918. Συμμαχικές προτεραιότητες και πολιτικές αντιπαλότητες* (Greek - Serbian Relations 1913-1918. Alliance Priorities and Political Dissensions), Thessaloniki 2004, p. 29.

10. Gardikas-Katsiadakis, *op.cit.*, pp. 111-116; John Metaxas, *Το προσωπικό του ημερολόγιο* (His Personal Diary), vol. II 1910-1920, ed. Ch. Christidis, Athens 1952, p. 171.

11. Gardikas-Katsiadakis, *op.cit.*, p. 186.

undergoing a revolutionary change: The pre-war equilibrium had collapsed. In the vacuum created by the disappearance of the Ottoman authority in Europe stood the troops of the three Balkan allies. A new accommodation with both Serbia and Bulgaria was necessary, since Greece was now becoming their neighbour. She had to transform her recently devised voluntary selective alliance pattern into a working system of permanent neighbourhood. The new situation created new dilemmas that revolutionized Greek foreign policy in an unprecedented manner. Not only did it generate the need for a new relationship between Greece and the Balkan States; it also upgraded the relative importance for Greece of relations with the Continental Great Powers.

Shortly after the first military victories of the Balkan Allies it became clear that they would have to come to some kind of a partition agreement, if they wished to avoid an inter-allied conflict. As early as the first days of November, Venizelos had communicated to both Sofia and Belgrade his first partition proposals covering Central Macedonia. But at that point the Serbian Prime Minister Nikolai Pašić was reluctant to discuss the partition of Central Macedonia, as he was primarily concerned with Serbia's exit to the Adriatic. In fact, he seized the opportunity to ask for Greece's support in that matter. For the purpose of thwarting primarily Austrian and not Bulgarian designs, Pašić asked for Venizelos's support on 11 November. To agree to support Serbia, Venizelos demanded Serbia's assistance against Bulgaria. When Pašić pressed for a commitment, Venizelos replied: "If the Balkan alliance existed and was not in disharmony, *opposition to Austria* could be envisaged, under the condition that peace was concluded with Turkey and that the Balkans enjoyed the *support of Russia, whose aid alone would render such an attitude against Austria possible*"¹².

This was the first time that the Greeks were facing the likelihood of direct involvement in a confrontation with a continental Power beyond the Balkans. The implications were far-reaching. In 1910 the political leaders in Greece, first Prime Minister Stephanos Dragoumis and then his successor Eleftherios Venizelos had decided to launch a defensive alliance policy. In doing so they had to consider the implications of this policy

12. Gardikas-Katsiadakis, *op.cit.*, p. 187. Author's italics. See also George Ventiris, *Η Ελλάς τον 1910-1920* (Greece of 1910-1920), Athens 2nd ed., I, p. 156.

on the general situation in the Balkans. No sooner had the Ottoman Empire withdrawn from its European provinces following the victorious advance of the Balkan armies, than Greece had to weigh her decisions in the light of their impact on the attitude of the Continental Great Powers, Austria-Hungary in particular.

Indeed this new complexity was not particular to Greek foreign policy alone. It was a symptom all the Balkan states were facing even before they had completed their military operations. New circumstances were leading to the search for new defensive arrangements. For Serbia this meant primarily a revision of the secret partition agreement annexed to the defensive alliance of March 1912.

As Serbia realized that the Great Powers were depriving her of an outlet on the Adriatic, she sought compensation in the Southeast by means of a revision of the secret partition agreement annexed to the Serbo-Bulgarian treaty of March 1912. That agreement had assigned to Bulgaria the lands between Lake Orchid and Mount Beles including the towns of Monastir, Florina and Voden. This division had precluded a coterminous Greek-Serbian frontier.

Among Serbian political circles, there prevailed two lines of thought. The Government, which feared Austria, wished to honour its commitment to Bulgaria. The military and the Court, on the other hand, who resented the Treaty of partition, wanted Greek support for a reversal of that Treaty. By confining Bulgaria to the left bank of the Vardar, Serbia would avoid encirclement by Austria in the North and West and by Bulgaria in the East and South¹³.

For Greece too, the new circumstances generated new dilemmas and revived old ones. Foreign Minister Koromilas feared that, if Greece did not press for an agreement with the military party of Serbia, Premier Pašić would reach a *modus vivendi* with Guesov that would ignore Greek claims in Central Macedonia. The Court shared his views. In January 1913, under the auspices of King George, who had moved his residence to Thessaloniki, his son the Greek Military Commander Prince Nicholas began negotiations with the Serbian Consul in that city¹⁴.

13. G. Hering, "Die Serbisch-bulgarischen Beziehungen am Vorabend und während der Balkankriege", *Balkan Studies* IV (1963) 353, 355.

14. Gardikas-Katsiadakis, *op.cit.*, p. 188.

Unlike Koromilas and the aging King, Venizelos hesitated. Aware not so much of the changes that had occurred but of the need for the broadest range of support from the Great Powers, he held that unconditional commitment to Serbia would estrange Austria-Hungary, on whose goodwill he hoped to rely in order to secure Greek control over Thessaloniki and Epirus.

The growing tension in Macedonia, however, soon convinced Venizelos that his original proposal for a tripartite partition agreement could be enforced on Bulgaria only if Greece and Serbia presented a united front¹⁵. After King George's funeral, negotiations assumed an official character, King Constantine and the entire General Staff establishing their headquarters in Athens to assist Koromilas in defining the details of partition.

The Serbian proposal and the Greek counter-proposal of 11 April were the basis of the negotiations. On 5 May, Koromilas and Bosković signed a preliminary protocol in Athens, according to which the two Governments undertook to conclude a defensive alliance within twenty days and established the general directions of the Greek-Serbian frontier, of the Serbo-Bulgarian frontier along the Vardar and of the Greek-Bulgarian frontier beyond the Vardar on the basis of actual occupation. The two states would support each other in their negotiations with Bulgaria for the partition of occupied territories (article III) and if, in the event of disagreement, recourse to arbitration were to fail, the two states would undertake a mutual guarantee of occupied territories and common defence against a Bulgarian threat (article IV). A military convention should shield the two countries from an attack by a third unspecified power (article V). Albania should be divided into spheres of influence (article VI). The military convention was signed on 14 May.

After overcoming a number of minor difficulties, on 1 June, in the utmost secrecy, the Serbian and Greek delegations met in the villa of Prince Nicholas in Thessaloniki and, in the presence of Venizelos, they signed the defensive Treaty and a revised military convention¹⁶.

These two documents were, not only the outcome of meticulous and tenacious negotiations, but also the solution of a critical tactical

15. Koromilas to Nicholas, Athens, 7/21 Feb. 1913, *E.S.*, III, appendix no. 565iv.

16. Gardikas-Katsiadakis, *op.cit.*, pp. 198-203.

dilemma. Prime Minister Venizelos reached a painful compromise, which he imposed on an unwilling King. On the one hand, to reject the alliance proposal at the moment when the Bulgarian army was threatening to overrun Greek forces in Macedonia would deprive Greece of Serbia's assistance. On the other hand, the provision for defensive preparations against an attack by an unspecified third power, on which the Serbs insisted, and the likelihood of Austrian intervention in Albania in April at the height of the Scutari crisis had raised for Greece the spectre of a confrontation with Austria. For King Constantine the risk of a war against Austria for the benefit of Serbia was too high a price. In Venizelos's view, the risk of a local war was theoretical. According to the terms of the treaty, Greece had no obligation to support Serbia, if Serbia attacked Austria. If, on the other hand, Austria attacked Serbia, then Russia would intervene and a European war would break out, and Greece would throw in her lot with the Entente. King Constantine half-heartedly accepted the conditions of the treaty, but hastened to imply that he had no intention of abiding by its provisions¹⁷.

For the Greeks, the real purpose of the Greek-Serbian treaty was to meet the immediate threat of Bulgarian expansionism. One might contend with some exaggeration that it had served its purpose after the annihilation of the Bulgarian forces during the Second Balkan War in July 1913. It had been the risk Venizelos had deliberately taken in May 1913 to confront the Bulgarian troops threatening to take Thessaloniki. Thereafter, despite the rhetoric, it was more of a burden than an asset for Greece.

Nevertheless, in 1914 the commitment that Greece had undertaken toward Serbia in May 1913 played high in the arguments of the liberal government for joining the war. But what was the true extent of its long-term significance?

The first real test as to the long-term significance of the Treaty came in July 1914, as a result of the Sarajevo crisis. To Pašić's request for an implementation of the provisions of the Treaty, Venizelos replied that Greece would remain neutral in a local Austro-Serbian conflict, but

17. Gardikas-Katsiadakis, *op.cit.*, pp. 196-197.

would intervene only if Bulgaria moved¹⁸. It was clear that Greece was reducing the generalized crisis to fit the requirements of her Balkan policy. In a similar manner a month earlier, at the peak of the Greek-Turkish crisis, Serbia had warned Greece that she would not assist her in a conflict against Turkey¹⁹. In both instances, only if Bulgaria moved was the other party disposed to honour the defensive alliance provisions. The mutual interest that had justified the conclusion of the Treaty in June 1913, the least common denominator, was their common fear of Bulgaria. In that case alone was the treaty unquestionably valid. Beyond that, neither state was disposed to go, unless broader national interests were at stake. In November, when Pašić renewed his request for military assistance, Venizelos offered a slightly altered variant of the original argument, Greece had advanced two years earlier, in November 1912, long before the conclusion of the treaty: Greece would assist Serbia by deploying troops in Macedonia and against the Austrians, only if the Entente offered Greece a guarantee against a Bulgarian attack²⁰. This scepticism is in sharp contrast to the eagerness with which Venizelos offered his assistance to the Gallipoli expedition at precisely the same time. The reason is that in the case of the operations against Turkey, Greece enjoyed the support of Great Britain.

Whatever the true intentions of the opposing political parties in Greece with regard to the treaty obligations toward Serbia, both Venizelos and the short-lived Gounaris Ministry abided by the position that in order to support Serbia Greece required an Entente guarantee against a Bulgarian attack.

The test as to the validity of the treaty came when Bulgaria decided to mobilize her army, on September 21, 1915. At that point, Venizelos and King Constantine repeated their arguments for and against the pertinence of the treaty, Venizelos maintaining that it had a general validity and the King insisting that it was limited to the Balkans. The resulting clash and the resignation of the Venizelos Ministry on October 6 plunged Greece into a severe and widespread domestic crisis over a foreign policy dilemma —whether to side with the Entente or to remain

18. George B. Leon, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

20. Hassiotis, *op.cit.*, p. 93.

neutral in the European war— a dilemma that involved the interpretation of the notion of national interest.

In effect, even before the outbreak of the European conflict, the clear-sighted Venizelos, betting on what he considered the winning side, had hastened to assure the French that Greece would follow the advice of the Entente-powers²¹. When the war broke out, he was determined to be part of it. In fact as early as August 14, he used the danger of Greece's being involved in the war against Bulgaria or Turkey on account of her commitment to Serbia as a pretext to invoke an alliance proposal by the Triple Entente²². Furthermore, the commitment to Serbia served as a convenient "rationalizing instrument", not only on the international level by invoking the burden Greece had been saddled with, but also on the domestic scene in order to embarrass the pro-neutrality sympathizers in Greece.

The pro-neutrality sympathizers, on the other hand, went to extremes to prove that the Greek-Serbian treaty was irrelevant. Some even questioned its existence. The dispute about its existence and its worth was part of the embittered domestic conflict that culminated in the summer of 1916. At the height of this dispute, on the 15th and 16th of August, on the eve of the Alliance offensive against Eastern Macedonia, the French newspaper *Le Temps* "revealed" extracts of the secret Treaty to prove its relevance²³. And a few days later the prominent Venizelist politician, Andreas Michalakopoulos, taking advantage of the French revelation, used it as another weapon against the pro-neutrality Government in a rally at Patras:

I will expose facts, which had remained secret for so long, while Greece was being led to ruin and humiliation. They had the courage to tell you that we invented the treaty obligation toward Serbia in order to lead Greece to enter the war. They had the courage to tell you that the Serbian treaty was only a Balkan and not a general treaty. We remained silent for a long time, respecting the diplomatic customs, which safeguard the higher interests of the States. And fortunately the French

21. Leon, *op.cit.*, p. 22.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

23. S. P. Cosmin, *Dossiers secrets de la Triple Entente. Grèce 1914-1922*, Paris 1969, p. 230.

press came forth and disclosed the treaty. After this publication the Greek people can judge those who concealed from them the truth, which alone will lead to the road of honour. And if irresponsible journalists put forth these arguments on the Serbian treaty, however harmful they might be they could be forgiven. But when the text of the treaty was distorted by those who had seen it and who are familiar with the documents exchanged before its conclusion, when these people have the courage to denounce their opponents for corroborating inaccurate facts, then, my fellow-citizens, allow me not to permit my lips to utter the word that ought to describe them²⁴.

This speech was made on the very eve of the coup of the National Defence, which resulted in the establishment of a Venizelist Provisional Government at Thessaloniki and the split of the Greek State (Dichasmos).

In August 1917, soon after Venizelos returned to power in Athens, the foreign policy issue was debated in parliament. At the centre of the debate was the interpretation of the Greek-Serbian alliance treaty. The Government Ministers and Venizelos himself went to great lengths to prove that all the royalist cabinets had misinterpreted the articles of the treaty and to incriminate them published its text together with other documents in a White Book²⁵.

What then, besides providing fuel for the domestic party quarrels, was the true significance of the Greek-Serbian treaty? Its true significance was that, despite original intentions, it was in effect merely a deterrent strictly limited to the Balkans, against the threat posed by Bulgarian revisionism. The misfortune was that neither of the signatory parties acknowledged as much. Greece wanted to be free to invoke it against Turkey and, even more so, Serbia wanted it as a safeguard against Austria-Hungary. In neither instance, when invoked, did it prove

24. A. Michalakopoulos, *Κοινοβουλευτικοί Λόγοι* (Parliamentary Speeches), vol. 2, Athens 1964, p. 613.

25. Greek Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Διπλωματικά έγγραφα: 1913-1917, Ελληνο-σερβική συνθήκη συμμαχίας. Εισβολή γερμανοβουλγάρων εις Μακεδονίαν* (Diplomatic Documents: 1913-1913, Greek-Serbian Alliance Treaty. German-Bulgarian invasion into Macedonia), Athens 1917.

its validity. By the same token, the same considerations that had prevented an understanding between Greece and Serbia in 1912 held true after 1913. As the first days of the 1914 crisis demonstrated, both countries were extremely reluctant to expose themselves to the dangers incurred by full compliance with the Treaty. For Venizelos and his party honouring the treaty obligations toward Serbia was tantamount to joining the cause of the Entente in the European war. The generalization of the local conflict into a World War ultimately served to obscure this fact, as, in the dilemma of participation or non-participation in the war, matters of general national interest overshadowed the issue of the relevance of the Treaty.