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Serbia and Greece in the First World War: An Overview

I

Serbia and Greece had established a close political cooperation already in the second half of the nineteenth century, in order to foster the common struggle against the Ottoman rule in the Balkans. The first alliance treaty, within the context of the broader Balkan alliance, was signed in 1867, followed by the military convention in 1868. Although there was no immediate military outcome of this treaty, due to the assassination of the Balkan alliance architect, Prince Michael Obrenović in June 1868, its existence was highlighting the long-term commitment of both Greece and Serbia for the coordinating efforts to fight Ottomans¹.

It was only in 1912, through second Balkan alliance, that both Serbia and Greece were able to fulfill their political goals by military means. However, the First Balkan War started without a signed political treaty, regulating bilateral obligations between Serbia and Greece. After they gained a common frontier in Macedonia, Serbia and Greece have signed a defensive alliance treaty and a military convention in June 1913, prior to the Second Balkan War². The Serbian-Greek treaty aimed, in the first place, to maintain the new Balkan settlement by implementing the decisions of the Bucharest Treaty. In case of Bulgarian

1. D. Djordjević, *Revolutions nationales des peuples balkaniques 1804-1914*, Belgrade 1965, pp. 114-117.

2. The Treaty of Alliance was signed by diplomats Jean Alexandropoulos, Greek Minister in Belgrade and Mateja Bošković, Serbian Minister in Athens, while the Military convention was signed by captain of the Greek General Staff Xenophon Stratigos, and the Serbian colonels Petar Pešić and Dušan Tufegdžić. Both documents were signed on the same day 1 June 1913, while their ratification took place in Athens on 21 June 1913. In Serbian they are available in *Dokumenti o spoljnoj politici Kraljevine Srbije 1903-1914*, (Documents on Foreign Policy of the Kingdom of Serbia 1903-1914), vol. VI, t. 2, Beograd 1981, doc. no 308.

attack (art. 2), according to the military convention Serbia committed herself to provide 150,000 soldiers (covering the areas of Gevgelija, Veles, Kumanovo, Pirot) while Greece pledged to supply 90,000 soldiers (areas of Panaghion, Salonica and Gumendze), and to keep her fleet ready to act³.

The main provisions of the military convention (art. 1), which later became a source of misinterpretation and misunderstandings, comprised not only the defensive alliance in case of Bulgarian attack but also a military assistance to each other in case of the attack coming from the third side, meaning, from Serbian perspective, an attack by Austria-Hungary, and a general threat by Ottomans from the Greek understanding. Both the alliance treaty and the military convention were fully implemented in the case of the Second Balkan War, waged by the Balkan allies against Bulgaria that ended by Bucharest Treaty in 1913, a war which did not, as expected by the Balkan allies, establish a long-term Balkan equilibrium.

The first test of the Serbian-Greek military alliance was in April 1914, when Ottomans threatened the war with Greece due to troubles in the Aegean and Asia Minor. The Prime Minister of Greece, Eleftherios Venizelos, evoking the art. 1 of the 1913 military convention asked the Serbian government if Greece can count on military support of Serbia in a possible war with Turkey. The Serbian response was negative, justifying the rejection by financial and military shortcomings, necessary integration of newly absorbed territories and by the lack of the popular support for another war. However, the Serbian government suggested moderation to Turkey in her conflict with Greece, asking in addition the Entente Powers to do the same. Conflict eventually did not take place and the Greek-Serbian alliance past its first test without seriously damaging the strategic partnership between Athens and Belgrade⁴.

3. G. B. Leon, *Greece and the Great Powers*, Thessaloniki 1974, pp. 10-11; I. A. Papadrianos, "Die Beziehungen zwischen Griechenland und Serbien vor dem Ausbruch des Ersten Weltkrieges", *Proceedings of the Fifth Greek-Serbian Symposium*, Thessaloniki 1991, pp. 14-15.

4. D. Visvizi-Dontas, "Troubled Friendship: Greco-Serbian Relations, 1914-1918" in D. Djordjevic (ed.), *The Creation of Yugoslavia 1914-1918*, Santa Barbara & Oxford 1980, pp. 96-97.

II

The Sarajevo assassination on 28 June 1914 followed by the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum to Serbia on 23 July provoked great concern in Athens. Greek Foreign Minister emphasized that the Serbian-Austrian difficulty provoked by assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand should not force Serbia to accept conditions that restrict her sovereign rights. The whole of the Balkan Peninsula, according to Greek government, would be in perturbation which can have grave consequences for Greece. Therefore, the Greek government suggested to Serbia moderation in order to avoid that the Serbian-Austrian conflict enflames the whole of the Balkans⁵.

Nevertheless, a day after Austria-Hungary submitted the ultimatum to Serbia on 23 July 1914, Prime Minister Nikola Pašić asked the Greek government if Serbia in case of the attack of Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria can count on the Greek military support. Venizelos government responded that in case of Austro-Hungarian attack, she will remain neutral, with full moral support for Serbia, while in case of Bulgarian attack Greece was ready to fulfill its commitments from the 1913 alliance treaty. Pašić was strongly counting that Greece can protect newly established borders of Serbia and Greece with Bulgaria. On 28 of July Pašić tried again to mobilize Greek support, sending the following telegram to Athens: "As Austria-Hungary has declared us a war, tell the Government that *casus foederis* is fulfilled"⁶.

A day after the war was officially declared by Austria-Hungary to Serbia on July 28, the Greek Foreign Minister Streit conveyed to Živojin Balugdžić, the Serbian Minister in Athens, that Greece, as announced previously, will remain neutral in this conflict, as it was later officially confirmed by the Greek government by the telegram sent to Niš⁷. The Greek Foreign Minister explained that Greek participation in

5. *Dokumenti o spoljnoj politici Kraljevine Srbije*, op.cit., vol. VII, t. 2, Beograd 1980, doc. no 554, despatch of Balugdžić from Athens, No 144, 25 July 1914; G. B. Leon, op.cit., pp. 16-17.

6. *Dokumenti*, op.cit., vol. VII, t. 2, doc. No 620, tel. of Pašić, No 2836, Niš, 28. July 1914.

7. M. Milošević, *Srbija i Grčka 1914-1918. Iz istorije diplomatskih odnosa*, (Serbia and Greece 1914-1918. From the History of Diplomatic Relations), Zaječar 1997, pp. 25-26 ; D. Visvizi-Dontas, op.cit., p. 98. Cf. also: A. F. Frangoulis, *La Grèce et la crise mondiale*, t. I,

the war will not be of significant benefit for Serbia while it might have dangerous consequences for Greece: destruction of her fleet by Austria-Hungary, and the general weakening of Greek military potential for future conflicts⁸. To the German ambassador, when asked if Greece might join Bulgaria to attack Serbia, Venizelos replied that Greece was “too small a state to commit such a big infamy”⁹.

Greece was becoming increasingly divided after the outbreak of the First World War. While Venizelos and his supporters were strongly in favour of joining the Entente Powers, King Constantine was convinced that Greece should remain neutral and that Germany might eventually emerge victorious¹⁰. The public opinion in Greece was also growingly divided, with sympathies significantly stronger for Entente Powers, but somewhat confused by the aggressive and well-organized pro-German propaganda backed both by the Palace and the influential German-trained officers from the Greek General Staff. Nevertheless, the majority of Greeks were in favour of assisting Serbia, which was confirmed by many demands of the potential Greek volunteers, mostly from Crete, to join the Serbian army in a war against Dual Monarchy¹¹.

Pašić was fully aware of the pro-German stance of the Palace, the General Staff and other elements in favour of Germany in the war that soon turned into the full-scale world conflict. Therefore, Pašić had reduced his immediate demands on Greece to enable free transport of arms and ammunition through Greek ports and territory: most of the military equipment for Serbia, bought in France, was transferred through the port of Salonica. The demands of Vienna to Athens to halt transporting of the military goods for Serbia, were not, after Pašić's intervention, taken into account¹².

Paris 1926, pp. 140-141.

8. *Dokumenti, op.cit.*, vol. VII, t. 2, doc. no 548, despatch of Balugdžić from Athens, No 153, 29 July 1914.

9. D. Dakin, *The Unification in Greece 1770-1923*, London 1972, p. 203.

10. G. B. Leon, *op.cit.*, pp. 14-15.

11. Lacking armament and ammunition, Pašić replied to Balugdžić that receiving of Greek volunteers into the Serbian army was not viable (*Dokumenti, op.cit.*, vol. VII, t. 2).

12. Pašić had asked the French government to block all the plans of Austria-Hungary to close Salonica port for the shipments for Serbia (*Dokumenti, op.cit.*, vol. VII, t. 2, doc. no 683, tel. from consul general in Salonica, 30 July 1914 and no. 768, despatch of Bošković from Paris, No 73, 12 August 1914, with Pašić's reply).

In order to bring Greece closer to the Entente, Venizelos had launched in August 1914 the initiative of forming a renewed Balkan block, under auspices of Russia, comprising Greece, Serbia and Romania that would contain potential threat of Bulgaria to her neighbours, and paralyze action of Germany among the Balkan states. All the actions by Venizelos on the Balkan scene were based on Belgrade-Athens axis, but involved Romania as well, as an important factor of containing the Bulgarian territorial aspirations and possible threat of Turkey. Serbia was in favour of Greek initiative, although Pašić was skeptical that within wider war context this might produce any viable result, predicting that Bulgaria, as during the previous crisis, will eventually join the Central Powers against Russia¹³.

It soon proved that Romanian government was not ready to join the renewed block which should include certain territorial concessions to Bulgaria by all three Balkan states. This attitude, combined with additional complications of Greek-Turkish relations, requiring further territorial concessions to keep Turkey out of the war, made the whole Venizelos proposal unviable. Both Serbia and Greece abandoned the plan after the Entente Powers asked all Bulgarian neighbours for significant territorial concessions. Russia was initially strongly in favour of triangular Balkan alliance aiming to attract Bulgaria into the Allied camp. Great Britain eventually dropped the Russian view, probably after demands from Athens, proposing that Balkan countries should find their own way, without foreign pressures, to accommodate mutual territorial arrangements¹⁴.

The other attempt to comply with the treaty of alliance was unsuccessful, after Venizelos asked Pašić in August 1914 to deploy 150,000 troops to the Bulgarian border, following information that both Turkey and Bulgaria could jointly enter the war on the side of the Central Powers. Pašić replied that due to the engagement of the Serbian troops on the northern front with Austria-Hungary, this demand cannot be met, except in the case of imminent Bulgarian attack¹⁵. The treaty of al-

13. *Arhiv Jugoslavije*, (Archives of Yugoslavia), Belgrade (cited hereafter as AJ), fond J. M. Jovanovića, 80-4-763; M. Milošević, *op.cit.*, pp. 41-42.

14. Despatch of Balugdžić from Athens to Serbian envoy in London, see AJ, No 431, 30 August 1914; M. Milošević, *op.cit.*, p. 47.

15. G. B. Leon, *op.cit.*, pp. 56-57; D. Visvizi-Dontas, *op.cit.*, p. 99.

liance, therefore, was still valid, limited, due to the given situation, to the Bulgarian threat. Venizelos, nevertheless, fearing that Allies might offer to Bulgaria certain portions of the territories in Greek Macedonia, made of Greece's obligations to support Serbia one of his major arguments to the Greek public for joining the Entente Powers camp in the Great War. When Foreign Minister Streit resigned in September 1914, the pro-Venizelos *Patris* accused him that he wanted to separate Greece from Serbia, judging his policy as treason. Venizelos was, however, bound to the support of the reluctant King Constantine for all his designs concerning the role of the Greece in the Great War.

On 20 November 1914, Serbia asked again for Greek military assistance, demanding of at least 80.000 soldiers in order to resist full-scale Austrian assault into Serbia, and prevent eventual Bulgarian attack in Serbian Macedonia. Pašić insisted that the vital interest of Greece was to prevent the destruction of Serbia. The Serbian demand was strongly supported by the Allies, who offered southern Albania, short of Valona, to Greece. Nevertheless, sudden Serbian counter-attack followed by the tremendous victory at the battle of Kolubara in mid-December 1914 and the expulsion of Austro-Hungarian troops from the Serbian soil made the Pašić's request for military assistance irrelevant¹⁶.

After receiving Serbian request Venizelos was, as usual, strongly in favour of support to Serbia, while King Constantine, in order to avoid negative answer, was demanding additional guarantees from potential Bulgarian attack. Venizelos, conveyed the message of the King that Greece would need additional guaranties by Romania: a firm assurance of Bucharest that Romania would intervene against Bulgaria if Sofia decided to attack either Serbia or Greece¹⁷. Serbian Minister Balugdžić reported from Athens that, prior to the Serbian victory of Kolubara, Greek General Staff was, as firmly as King Constantine, against any military assistance to Serbia¹⁸.

Nevertheless, Pašić and Venizelos had a common opinion of how to

16. G. B. Leon, *op.cit.*, pp. 89-90. On the battle cf. more in: *Kolubarska bitka* (The Battle of Kolubara) (ed. D. T. Bataković & N. B. Popović), Beograd 1989.

17. D. Visvizi-Dontas, *op.cit.*, p. 103.

18. AJ, nesredjena gradja 1916, f. 1: Ekspoze predsednika Ministarstva i ministra inostranih dela, čitan na tajnoj sednici Narodne skupštine od 4. septembra 1916 g. Na Krfu (hereafter cited as Ekspoze); M. Milošević, *op.cit.*, p. 73.

handle the situation in favour of a long-term interest of both Serbia and Greece. Already in January 1915 Venizelos came out with the proposal how to break the firm resistance of King Constantine to any support to Serbia. Venizelos thought that the landing of the Allied forces in Salonica, combined with the support of Romania, was the only viable long-term solution to this problem. Venizelos was confident that the presence of the significant Allied military contingent in Salonica would prevent Bulgaria from attacking Serbia and would make Greece less vulnerable to continual threats from Bulgarians. However, this plan, conceiving bringing Entente troops to Salonica came to effect too late to provide necessary military support for Serbia, with insufficient forces, only after the Dardanelles disaster.

III

After Venizelos' resignation in March 1915, following his failed attempt to send the Greek troops at Dardanelles, the Greek-Serbian relations became more distant than before, despite renewed assurances of the new Gounaris cabinet that the strategic partnership with Serbia remained a long-term commitment of the Greek foreign policy. However, Balugđžić informed Prime Minister Pašić that Serbia should not take these polite statements as a serious commitment¹⁹.

After Venizelos managed to win the elections again, he immediately revived the policy of Greek-Serbian strategic partnership. He insisted that the fulfilling of allied obligations towards Serbia should be the main ingredient of Greek Balkan policy. He managed to proclaim partial mobilization as soon as Bulgaria mobilized in September 1915, committed to support Serbia. Venizelos conveyed to Bulgarian Minister that any attack on Serbia would be considered as an attack on Greece. Serbia was obliged as stipulated by the 1913 military convention: to deploy at least 150,000 soldiers along the Bulgarian border. Facing massive attack by Austro-Germans on the north, Serbia was unable to fulfill this commitment.

The Entente Powers, invited by Venizelos to provide 150,000

19. AJ, Despatch of Balugđžić from Athens, no. 464, 2 March 1915; M. Milošević, *op.cit.*, p. 108.

troops to assist Serbia, decided to accept offer hoping to additionally motivate Greece to send her military forces to support Serbia. Salonica, after the landing of the Allied troops, became an Allied naval base for the assistance to Serbia against the Central Powers. The French ambassador, aware of only formal protest by Venizelos in future, had sent a diplomatic note to Athens highlighting that "France and Great Britain, allies of Serbia, are dispatching troops [to Salonica] ... relying on Greece, which has already in the past provided ample proof of its friendly disposition, that it will not oppose measures that are being taken in the interest of Serbia of which also happens to be an ally"²⁰.

This attitude brought Venizelos into another conflict with King Constantine who was continuously reluctant to assist Serbia by any kind of military means. In order to encourage the Greek allies, Serbian Premier Pašić even agreed on certain territorial concessions to Greece in case that the Greek army provided efficient military support for Serbia, which was expecting the joint Austro-German and potentially Bulgarian attack. Pašić had committed himself for territorial compensation for Greece in the Doiran Lake triangle and Gevgelija triangle after the war, under conditions that Bulgarians were defeated and Serbia territorially enlarged elsewhere. This offer was eventually officially confirmed by the Serbian government in Niš²¹. It was the only time during the Great War that the Serbian Premier, adamantly against to all proposals of the Allies concerning territorial adjustments in favour of Bulgaria that involved Serbian Macedonia, was prepared to make an exception and to accommodate Greek territorial aspirations in this area²².

Venizelos was still adamant on necessity that Greece should support Serbia, threatened by the new offensive of Central Powers. After the territorial concessions offered by the Allies to Bulgaria were withdrawn in early October 1915, Venizelos was preparing his speech in the Greek

20. Hellenic Army General Staff, Army History Directorate, *A Concise History of the Participation of the Hellenic Army in the First World War*, Athens 1999, p. 43.

21. *Arhiv Srbije, Ministarstvo inostranih dela, Političko odeljenje* (Archives of Serbia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Political Department) (cited hereafter as AS, MID, PO), f. VI, despatch of Balugdžić from Athens, no. 9922, 21 September 1915; M. Milošević, *op.cit.*, pp. 151-152.

22. On certain occasions, Pašić was pressured by the Allies, showing readiness to certain territorial concessions to Bulgaria, but conditioned them with dozens of other elements, in order to make them unviable.

parliament. On 4 October he has asked Pašić for permission to publish the text of Greek-Serbian treaty of alliance, in order to confirm his thesis that according to his stipulations, "Greece must in any case come to assist Serbia"²³. The next day, after returning from the army headquarters in Kragujevac, Pašić approved his demand, but Venizelos had already delivered his speech in the Parliament after the confirmation came from Niš, the wartime capital of Serbia.

Nevertheless, Venizelos was persistent on Greece's commitment to the alliance with Serbia. On the day of his speech in the Parliament, his party's daily stressed that "Serbian-Greek treaty does not know for any kind of reserve, and Greece must come to support Serbia not only if she is attacked by Bulgaria, but even if she is attacked by the third power". In his speech, as reported by Balugdžić from Athens, Venizelos insisted that Greece had to go to help Serbia in case of Bulgarian attack even if she had to face there some other bayonets, stressing that if necessary the war with Austria-Hungary and Germany should be waged as well²⁴. Venizelos managed to obtain necessary majority (147 out of 257 votes) for his plan to assist Serbia, not only against Bulgaria alone, but potentially against the Central Powers as well²⁵. The massive approval of Venizelos speech among the Greek parliamentarians was, as expected, warmly received in Serbia. The next day Venizelos was called to the Palace and was forced to resign.

The resignation of Venizelos, a day before the Austro-German attack on Serbia, provoked serious concern in Niš, where both Prince-Regent Aleksandar Karadjordjević and Serbian government expected stronger support and military assistance from Athens. Balugdžić reported that "the resignation of Venizelos is a catastrophe and the hopes that Greece will be drawn into action have become significantly weaker, while her stance has suggested to Bulgaria that she has no reason to fear from Greece"²⁶. In a meeting a day after his resignation, Balugdžić reported that Venizelos, with tears in his eyes, told him that he was

23. M. Milošević, *op.cit.*, p. 157.

24. AS, MID, PO, 1915, f. VI, despatch of Balugdžić from Athens, no 1445, quoted in: M. Milošević, *op.cit.*, p. 158.

25. D. Dakin, *op.cit.*, p. 209.

26. AS, MID, PO, 1915, f. VI, despatch of Balugdžić from Athens, No 1459, 7 October 1915; M. Milošević, *op.cit.*, p. 177.

ashamed because of the position of the Greece toward Serbia²⁷.

In early October 1915, on the eve of the Austro-German attack on northern borders of Serbia, prior to the Bulgarian assault from the east, Prince-Regent of Serbia was first to demand support from King Constantine, asking if Greece was ready to fulfill its obligations to Serbia from the defensive treaty of alliance. Constantine replied that Serbia should immediately sign a peace treaty with both Germany and Austria-Hungary. King Constantine had stressed that Germany only wanted a safe passage for her troops through the territory of Serbia, and even offered himself to mediate between Belgrade and Berlin. In case of alliance of Germany and Serbia, King Constantine was confident that Germany would put pressure on Austria-Hungary to cede to Serbia an exit to the Adriatic Sea by granting her a portion of Dalmatia²⁸.

Despite the negative reply by King Constantine, Pašić again demanded the Greek government if she would fulfill her *casus foederis* in case of Bulgarian attack on Serbia. New Greek Prime Minister Zaimis responded that 1913 treaty of alliance had a purely Balkan character, which did not commit Greece to a wider war, as in the case if Bulgaria attacked Serbia jointly with Germany, a position that Venizelos considered as a ridiculous excuse²⁹.

In another conversation with Balugdžić, Prime Minister Zaimis stressed that Berlin had informed King Constantine that Greek attack on Bulgaria would be considered as attack against Germany. The government decision became public during the parliament session on 11 October, when complete neutrality of Greece, without mentioning Serbian-Greek treaty of alliance, was solemnly confirmed. The Greek government, as King Constantine had repeatedly promised to Germans, remained strictly neutral. The official reply to Pašić was presented by the Greek Minister in Niš Jean Alexandropoulos, a day after Bulgarian attack on Serbia. The official note contained regrets of the Greek government for not being able to accept the demands of the Serbian govern-

27. AS, MID, PO, 1915, f. VI, despatch of Balugdžić from Athens, No 1457, 6 October 1915; *Ibid*.

28. B. Gligorijević, *Kralj Aleksandar Karadjordjević* (King Alexander Karadjordjević), Beograd 1996, pp. 184-185.

29. AS, MID, PO, 1915, f. VI, despatches of Balugdžić from Athens, no 1462, 7 October 1915, and 1465, 8 October 1915; M. Milošević, *op.cit.*, p. 179.

ment. The Greek response stressed the previous arguments about the purely Balkan character of the treaty of alliance, and that the *casus foederis* concerned Bulgaria only, evoking article 4 of the military convention:

“If the Bulgarian attack, which concerns the Royal Serbian government, takes place, it will be the consequence of the joint agreement with combined attack, already effected by two Central Empires. It will be just one episode of the European war. The Serbian government herself has acknowledged this character in advance by cutting of diplomatic relations with Bulgaria at the same time as the Entente Powers, her allies, without previous consultations with Greece as her ally”. Greek note emphasized that in the event of intervening in this case “Greece would be ruined without any hope to save Serbia. Serbia, obviously, would not like this result. On the contrary, the common [Greco-Serbian] interest requires that Greek forces should be held in reserve, in order to be used later in a more efficient way. It is needed, therefore, for Greece to remain neutral and armed, to monitor the current developments committed to observe at the same time, by the most useful means, her vital interests as well as the interests which are common with Serbia”³⁰. It was underscored, though, that Greece had already, in response to Bulgarian mobilization, proclaimed mobilization of her army, and that she would do her best to monitor the situation, highlighting anew her friendship for Serbia and readiness, within the given situation, to provide necessary support³¹.

Nevertheless, as reported by the Serbian Minister from Athens, there were other members of Zaimis’ cabinet who were more in favour of Venizelos’ interpretation of Greek-Serbian alliance treaty. Minister Rallis, who was in charge to study the stipulations of the alliance treaty, as well as admiral Koundouriotis, were more inclined to Venizelos’ approach regarding its interpretation. Politis, a renowned lawyer and Venizelist himself, had suggested to Venizelos, prior to his resignation that he should not evoke the treaty of alliance, due to its somewhat ambiguous stipulations, but to the vital interest of Greece as the main

30. M. Milošević, *op.cit.*, pp. 184-185.

31. D. Janković - B. Hrabak (ed.), *Zapisnici sednica Ministarskog saveta Srbije 1915-1917* (Minutes of the Sessions of Serbian Government 1915-1917), Beograd 1976, p. 174.

argument in favour of assisting Serbia. Venizelos, however, remained adamant that the treaty of alliance did not provide any reservations on Greece's obligation to provide military support to Serbia³².

The reply of Pašić to the note of Zaimis' government, considered as necessary explanation by the Serbian cabinet, was tending to overturn the Greek arguments and provide additional explanations in favour of joining forces against Bulgaria and the Central Powers:

"It seems obvious to the government of Kingdom of Serbia that Bulgarians had attacked Serbia only to take from her portions of territories that Serbia obtained by the London and Bucharest treaties and to obstruct Serbia and Montenegro to have common frontiers. The goal of the Greek-Serbian treaty of alliance is to guarantee the established situation in the Balkans after our war with Turkey, and has a character of a treaty for mutual guarantees of territorial integrity of both Serbia and Greece (art. 1 of the treaty). This article does not provide that Serbia or Greece should be attacked by just a single enemy and not by several ones; this article talks about attack in general and not about the number of aggressors. Supposing that the treaty envisaged only one and not more aggressor would mean that treaty stipulated to protect Serbia and Greece from a minor danger, not from the major one, and that the implementation of the treaty should be terminated at the moment when the need for it is the highest. [...] It is the same if the territorial status of the Balkans would be changed by simple Balkan war or combined European-Balkan one. In both cases Serbian-Greek interests are equally violated"³³.

The exchange of notes between Zaimis and Pašić displayed a complete disagreement on the interpretation of the treaty of alliance and the military convention. Therefore, Serbian government decided not to publish the disputed articles of both documents, as agreed already with Venizelos, judging that this might lead to severing of relations with Athens. It would fuel, as perceived in Niš, additional disputes in the Greek press. The Serbian government was informed that the pro-government and pro-German Greek press was already developing all

32. AS, MID, PO, 1915, f. VI, dispatch of Balugdžić from Athens, no 1482, 10 October 1915; M. Milošević, *op.cit.*, p. 185.

33. AJ, Ekspoze; M. Milošević, *op.cit.*, p. 188.

kinds of arguments against Serbia: that it had a purely anti-Bulgarian character, that the treaty of alliance was nullified since 1914 after Serbia did not accept Greek demand to help her against Turkey, and after Greece did not send troops to help Serbia when she was attacked by Austria-Hungary, that Serbia declared war on Germany without any need, and so on³⁴.

IV

Zaimis' government was replaced in November 1915 by Skouloudis' cabinet. The change of the cabinet was perceived in Serbia as another pro-German move, after Skouloudis himself said to Serbian Minister that Greece, despite her friendship for Serbia would, if asked for, be forced to disarm Serbian troops if they cross onto the Greek territory. This statement came at one of the most difficult moments for the Serbian army, during its full retreat towards Kosovo, and desperate efforts to halt Bulgarian offensive which threatened to cut off Serbian troops in Serbian Macedonia from all territorial links with Greece³⁵. The same argumentation, for possible disarmament of both Serbian and Allied troops, justified by neutrality of Greece, was conveyed to the representatives of the Entente Powers in Athens. The Entente replied with a threatening note on 11 November 1915, after which the Greek government publicly renounced of any attempt to disarm either Serbian or Allied troops³⁶.

The Entente Powers, whose troops in Salonica were significantly enlarged, were not prepared to respect the formal neutrality of Greece. The French government, after the proposal by General Joffre, accepted to settle the Serbian troops on the island of Corfu. Joffre reported on 30 December to Prime Minister Briand: "As regards the political side of the affair, if we settle the Serbs on Corfu, we shall *ipso facto* be able to occupy the island", counting that Greeks would eventually accept this *fait accompli*, having in mind that Serbs and Greeks were the allies³⁷. In

34. M. Milošević, *op.cit.*, p. 191.

35. AJ, Ekspoze; M. Milošević, *op.cit.*, p. 196.

36. AJ, Ekspoze; M. Milošević, *op.cit.*, p. 197.

37. A. Tounda-Fergadi, "The Serbian Troops on Corfu: The Problem of transporting them to Thessaloniki and Greek Public Opinion on the Affair", *Proceedings of the Fifth Greek-Serbian Symposium*, p. 33.

spite of skepticism of the British, the French government had decided, on 5 January 1916, to transfer temporarily the whole of the Serbian army from Albania to Corfu³⁸. The Entente ambassadors in Athens announced on 10 January the decision that the Serbian army after its painful retreat through Albania since late November 1915 would be transported by Allied ships in order to be reorganized on the island of Corfu. Allies were demanding Athens not to oppose to this decision, while the French marine forces occupied the island the next day³⁹. Vice-Admiral Chocheprat falsely informed the Prefect of Corfu, that the occupation had been done “with the consent of the Greek government”, in order to facilitate the coming of the Serbian troops⁴⁰.

A day after the Serbian government came to Corfu, on 19 January 1916, the Greek government, pressured by the Germans, protested against landing of both Allied forces and Serbian troops in Corfu, stressing, however, that they would always help to accommodate Serbian troops, but repeating that because of diseases within Serbian army this operation was not considered as possible. In addition, Athens demanded that Corfu, as provided by the 1863 accord, should remain neutral territory⁴¹.

As a signal of its full disagreement with the transfer of the Serbs to Corfu the Greek cabinet on 16 January 1916 gave its envoy to Serbian government unlimited leave that lasted until the end of September 1917. Observant of traditional Greek-Serbian alliance, Pašić, after the Serbian government settled in Corfu on January 1916, sent an official note to Skouloudis' cabinet emphasizing that Serbs came to Corfu as “a friend to a friend”, and that after the fierce resistance to the Germans, the Serbian government and the army were obliged to withdraw to a friendly Balkan state: “Resisting this [German] evil, we believe that we were defending

38. B. Visković, “Evakuacija srpske vojske sa albanskog primorja na otok Krk” (The Evacuation of the Serbian Army from Albanian littoral to the island of Corfu), in *Srbija 1916. godine*, Beograd 1987, p. 127; cf. also: Ch. Theodoulou, *Greece and the Entente*, Thessaloniki 1971, pp. 228-229.

39. Hellenic Army General Staff, Army History Directorate, *A Concise History of the Participation of the Hellenic Army in the First World War*, pp. 57-58.

40. A. Tounda-Fergadi, *op.cit.*, p. 33.

41. Allies replied that Corfu was already used as a Greek naval base during the first Balkan war, and that Athens afterwards allowed Germans and Austro-Hungarians to use Corfu as a base for their submarines (M. Milošević, *op.cit.*, p. 200).

the other Balkan states as well, and therefore we expect that Greece will not object that we came to one of her islands, hoping to find a friendly reception”⁴². Pašić had stressed, in addition, that the Serbs would stay in Greece only as long as war situation required, and would return to their country as soon as it became possible.

In his reply to Pašić on 22 January 1916, Skouloudis welcomed the Serbs that came to Corfu, stressing that “Serbian government can always count on sympathetic reception in Greece”, from government and the people as well, but asked the Pašić cabinet to formulate their wishes, suggesting further communication with Athens should be established independently of Allies⁴³. After the Italian troops, following the French arrived at Corfu, Greek government became more hostile to the whole project of reorganizing and rearming the Serbian troops on Greek soil.

Roughly 151,000 Serbian soldiers, including the Government, MP’s of the National Assembly and civilians were transported by Allied ships to Corfu. Most of them were transported from mid-January to late February while the rest who remained in Valona, mostly the cavalry forces of the Serbian army, were transferred to the island as late as in April 1916. Despite the warm and friendly welcome by the Greeks in Corfu and strong efforts of the French mission who were in charge of their recovery, Serbs, plagued with typhus, exhausted by famine and other diseases, were dying in hundreds during the first weeks of their sojourn in the island⁴⁴. The infected ones were, therefore, transported to the nearby islet of Vido, in order to be isolated from those who remained in Corfu. At least 7,000 Serbian soldiers died in Vido, of whom the majority were buried in the Ionian Sea which later became known among the Serbs as a “blue tomb”⁴⁵.

The new challenge to Greek-Serbian relations came in April 1916, after the Allies, on 3 April, demanded from Athens to agree with the plan of providing territorial corridor for the transfer of the 115,000 strong, freshly reorganized Serbian troops from the island of Corfu to the Salonica Front. This decision had been made a month earlier, at the con-

42. M. Milošević, *op.cit.*, p. 201.

43. AJ, Ekspoze; M. Milošević, *op.cit.*

44. Cf. more in: Lieutenant-Colonel de Ripert d’Alauzier, *Un drame historique. La résurrection de l’armée serbe. Albanie - Corfou (1915-1916)*, Paris 1923.

45. P. Opašić, *Le front de Salonique*, Belgrade 1979, pp. 46-47.

ference of the Allied powers at Chantilly. The refusal of the Greek government was formally justified by the fear that the Serbian troops, although successfully reorganized, were until recently suffering from dangerous infections and diseases, and that they might block the communications that were already in poor conditions and jeopardize the health of the civilians on the Greek mainland. The main reason was, however, left for the end of this negative reply: such a decision by Athens would again violate strict neutrality of Greece in the Great War⁴⁶. After the long deliberations with the Entente representatives, the solution was eventually found on 13 April 1916: Serbian troops would be transported by Allies' ships through the canal of Corinth to Chalcidice. This decision of the Greek government was presented not as a concession to the Allies, but as a concession exclusively to the Serbs, in order to manifest friendship and maintain traditionally good relations between two nations⁴⁷.

Yet, the friendly relations, fully manifested by the Greeks in Corfu who generously helped the Serbian troops, were poisoned by isolated incidents provoked by the pro-German officers of the Greek army in Salonica, who often refused to salute the Serbian officers as well as the Allied ones. Among several provocations the worst one was when one Greek officer shot at two Serbian soldiers killing one and wounded another. The Serbian Minister strongly protested in Athens to the deputy Foreign Minister Politis, highlighting unacceptable provocations by the Greek allies. Those incidents additionally made situation between Serbian and Greek officers' corps, at least for a while, rather tense, although the main source of Greek discontent was the presence of the Allied troops in Salonica⁴⁸.

The Entente Powers, concerned for the safety of their troops in Salonica, were exerting additional pressure on the Greek government,

46. A. Tounda-Fergadi, *op.cit.*, p. 35.

47. More details in: D. Todorović, "Pregovori između Grčke i savezničkih vlada u vezi sa transportovanjem srpske vojske s Krfa u Solun" (Negotiations between Greece and the Allied Governments Concerning the Transport of the Serbian Army from Corfu to Salonica), *Istorijski glasnik* 4 (1964) 101-127.

48. The explanation given by Politis that the Serbian soldiers were allegedly cursing the Greek King was not justified, as they did not speak any Greek, and were unable to communicate with the Greek officer. (*Zapisnici Ministarskog saveta Srbije 1915-1917*, p. 296).

considered it insufficiently friendly to the Allied cause. The surrender of the fort of Rupel to the German-Bulgarian troops was justified to the Serbian Minister in Athens as an unavoidable concession to the Central Powers, after the previous acceptance of Entente troops in Salonica and the transport of Serbian troops from Corfu to the frontlines in Macedonia⁴⁹.

The Entente Powers were exerting mounting pressure on King Constantine and Skouloudis' government to provide necessary measures for security of the Allied troops in Greek Macedonia⁵⁰. After the Allies threatened Greece to withdraw their ambassadors from Athens, Serbian Minister felt uneasy to make choice between the Entente and Greece, as the only formal ally of Serbia. In June 1916, Balugdžić, was, however, instructed by the Serbian government in Corfu to leave Athens, if other Entente Ministers decided to leave the Greek capital. Although eventually that did not take place, the Serbian-Greek relations gradually worsened: the pro-German Greek press under the control of the King in Athens was reporting that Serbian troops were lacking morale, while the allegedly frequent executions of both officers and soldiers was a sign of growing desertion from the army. The same, unjustified, but negative rumours on alleged chronic weakness of moral in the Serbian ranks was spread by the brothers of King Constantine as well, during their travels in the European capitals⁵¹.

V

The formation of the provisional government of Venizelos in Salonica was greeted by the Serbian cabinet in Corfu, as a return of the credible ally. The Serbian government criticized the attitude of the Allies who were still balancing between the pro-Entente Venizelists and the pro-German political forces around the King. Venizelos was additionally encouraged in his plans to join the Allies by the Serbian and Allied victory in Serbian Macedonia, warmly congratulating Pašić on libe-

49. M. Milošević, *op.cit.*, p. 207.

50. Cf. more: Y. G. Mourellos, *L'intervention de la Grèce dans la Grande Guerre*, Athènes 1983.

51. AJ, Poslanstvo u Parizu, 1916, f. 60, No 5071, 23 July 1916; M. Milošević, *op.cit.*, p. 211.

rating Bitolj (Monastir) in Serbian Macedonia on 19 November 1916. Nevertheless, the demand of the Serbs, strongly supported by Russia, that the French-led Allied troops should remain in the area instead of rushing to Athens, to solve the problems between rival Greek factions, made the Serbian military successes confirmed, while Greece was spared of another internal conflict⁵².

Venizelos had sent a message to Pašić through Serbian general Pavle Jurišić in Salonica highlighting that his government, "after establishing official ties with great protecting powers of Greece, plans to establish the same relations with the other Allied governments, having in mind, in the first place the Serbian government to which we are tied with special allied and friendly relations ...". Venizelos, in conclusion, asked Pašić to accredit a diplomatic representative to his government in Salonica⁵³. The Serbian cabinet on 17 February 1917 agreed to accredit a diplomatic envoy to Venizelos' government.

In his frequent meetings with General Jurišić in Salonica, Venizelos stressed that he wanted Greek-Serbian relations to become again as close as possible, and both Greece and Serbia to take in their hands the developments on the Salonica front and start working on the future of the Balkans. General Jurišić was convinced that Venizelos, in order to stabilize the situation and reinforce his own position, badly needed "moral support of Serbia". The fall of King Constantine should be used to revive the principle to respect an important international treaty, as it was the Greek-Serbian treaty of alliance. In this respect, plans were made to publish the original texts of both treaty of alliance and the military convention of 1913, and to provide necessary comments and explanations⁵⁴.

For Venizelos, who met with General Pavle Jurišić, a day after the abdication of the King, his destitution was a plain victory of Serbian-Greek alliance. Venizelos had selected Jean Koundouriotis, a brother of the admiral, who had already established friendly relations with Serbian politicians in Corfu, as the new Greek Minister to Serbian government,

52. D. Visvizi-Dontas, *op.cit.*, pp. 113-114.

53. AS, MID, PO 1917, f. II, tel. to Corfu, no. 180, 28. January 1917; M. Milošević, *op.cit.*, p. 268.

54. *Ibid.* Cf. Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Documents diplomatiques 1913-1917. Traité d'alliance gréco-serbe. Invasion germano-bulgare en Macédoine*, Athènes 1917.

while the agreement was given by the Serbian cabinet in July 1917.

In August 1917 a "White Book" was published, with the Greek-Serbian treaty of alliance and a military convention, without, as demanded by the Serbian government, the provisions concerning the spheres of interests in Albania. It was the fulfillment of the agreement with Venizelos in March 1915, after Pašić consented to the publication of these texts. The goal of Venizelos was to show to the wider Greek public, that this treaty of alliance was not directed against Bulgaria only but against Austria-Hungary as well⁵⁵.

The heated debate in the Greek parliament was marked by the demand of deputy Stratos, who demanded that government provided to the Parliament the response of the Serbian government to the Greek cabinet from mid-July 1914, concerning the potential conflict with Turkey. The opposition was claiming that Serbia did not fulfill her allied obligations towards Greece. Venizelos obtained consent of the Serbian government to provide the act of the Greek government sent to Serbian cabinet which stressed that both governments considered that there was a *casus foederis*, concerning not Bulgaria only, but Turkey as well, involving Serbian efforts to solve the crisis between Greece and Turkey with peaceful means. Politis stressed, during the debate, that the Serbian envoy to Constantinople had protested in the Turkish foreign ministry against the persecutions of the Greeks. After the protest of the grand vizier, the Serbian envoy declared "that everything concerning Greece concerns Serbia, because Greece is our ally". Politis had emphasized that Greece, under King Constantine, had not fulfilled her obligations as an ally toward Serbia. At the end of the heated debate the Greek parliament, by acclamation, solemnly praised a "holy character" of the Greek-Serbian treaty of alliance and had sent a fraternal greeting to the Serbian nation⁵⁶.

The relations between the governments of Pašić and Venizelos,

55. The other part of the White Book contained the correspondence of Serbian-Greek relations in 19th century and the documents concerning the German-Bulgarian attack on Greek Macedonia (*Ibid.*, *Supplément*, Athènes 1917).

56. M. Milošević, *op.cit.*, pp. 273-274; D. Visvizi Dontas, *op.cit.*, p. 115. The minority in the Parliament had a separate statement, claiming dissatisfaction with this decision and challenged the legitimacy of the parliament itself (AJ, KK, dispatch from Athens, 27 August 1917; J. Dučić, *Diplomatski spisi* (Diplomatic Despatches), Beograd 1991, doc. N. 9, 71-73).

became close, producing several joint actions aimed to protect the vital interests of both Serbia and Greece. In October 1917, they jointly pressured the Allies not to accept the Bulgarian proposals for a separate peace. Diplomats of both countries were instructed to carefully follow and halt the Bulgarian intrigues⁵⁷. Instructed by their Prime Ministers, the Serbian and Greek Ministers in London, in coordination with the Romanian one, submitted a joint note to British Foreign Office against Bulgarian intrigues designed to obtain separate peace and maintain some of the occupied territories in Serbian and Greek Macedonia. A note was, practically, a protest against the willingness of the British to consider the Bulgarian offer⁵⁸.

Another result of Greek-Serbian diplomatic cooperation was a memorandum on Salonica front, prepared for British Foreign Office and submitted to Lord Harding at the end of November 1917. The joint Greek-Serbian memorandum highlighted the necessity to additionally strengthen the Salonica front, as well as the demand that Great Britain influence USA to declare war on Austria-Hungary. The similar demand of two Ministers was conveyed to the American ambassador in London demanding that USA declared war on Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria⁵⁹. During his visit to London in November 1917, Venizelos met with the Serbian Minister Jovan M. Jovanović, urging him to work together with his Greek colleague and emphasized the need for the joint actions of Greece and Serbia in both London and Paris in order to protect the interests of the small Balkan countries⁶⁰. On his return to Greece, after visiting London and Paris, Venizelos went to Corfu to exchange views with Pašić and to coordinate their future actions⁶¹.

After Lloyd George in December made declaration in the House of Commons concerning the war aims of the Allies, omitting the aspirations of Serbia and Greece, joint actions of both Serbian and Greek diplomacy were enhanced in order to prevent any concessions by the Allies to Bulgaria, and to dissipate all their concerns regarding the Salonica front, after several military setbacks in mid-1917, in order to

57. M. Milošević, *op.cit.*, pp. 278-279.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 280.

59. AJ, Dnevnik J. M. Jovanovića, entries on 12 and 28 November 1917.

60. *Ibid.*, 17 November 1917.

61. D. Visvizi-Dontas, *op.cit.*, p. 115.

maintain it as an important theatre of war.

The Pašić declaration on the foreign policy of Serbia at the session of the National Assembly in Corfu, on 30 March 1918 dedicated to the right of self-determination of nations, stressed, apart from the need to establishment of Yugoslavia, and restoration of other states on the ruins of Austria-Hungary, evoked the need that Greeks out of Greece as well should be reunited with its motherland⁶². His declaration was warmly welcomed by the Greek foreign minister Politis, who sent a note to Serbian government stressing mutual solidarity and cooperation among two friendly states⁶³. Greece and Serbia had no territorial disputes, while their main national aspirations went in different directions: the Serbian towards the west, to the Serb-inhabited and South Slav-inhabited provinces in Austria-Hungary, while the Greek towards east, in the Aegean and in Asia Minor. The point of their accordance was the common interest of maintaining after the end of the Great War the equilibrium created by 1913 Treaty of Bucharest.

The additional maneuvers among the Allies and their designs for the future of Balkans, made frequent consultations necessary. Prince-Regent Aleksandar paid a visit to Venizelos in Athens in April 1918, and they had easily agreed to “play a fruitful double game between the Allies and the German Powers”, in order to protect their common interest. It was only after the new French commander of the Allied forces General Franchet d’Espérey had arrived and assumed his duties, that both Serbs and Greeks were reassured of the protection of their common interests⁶⁴.

Both Greece and Serbia, still in exile with her government at Corfu and her army under the command of the Prince-Regent on Salonica front, were successfully working together on different issues, often co-ordinating their future diplomatic and military efforts: new joint actions were taken among the allied powers against separate peace with Bulgaria prior to its capitulation in the autumn of 1918, while in parallel efforts were made to strengthen the Salonica front, where their troops were operating within the French-led command of the *Armée d’Orient*.

62. AS, MID, PO, 1918, Deklaracija srpske vlade o spoljnoj politici, 30 (17) mart 1918.

63. AJ, KK, tel. from Athens, 7 April 1918; M. Milošević, *op.cit.*, p. 287.

64. D. Visvizi-Dontas, *op.cit.*

VI

Despite the partially troubled relations during the first two years of the Great war incited by the different priorities concerning the participation of Greece in the war, and disagreements on the interpretations of Greek-Serbian treaty of alliance of 1913, the axis of the Greek-Serbian cooperation during the First World War was based on mutual understanding between Venizelos and Pašić. Both were confident to Allied victory and fully committed to the Serbian-Greek strategic partnership as a main precondition to long-term Balkan stability. Despite a number of internal and external pressures, they had managed to overcome all the obstacles that were in the way of the mutually valuable, long-term Greek-Serbian cooperation.