

Small War on the Yugoslav-Greek Border (1945-1950)

Years between 1945 and 1949/1950, in the history of the Yugoslav-Greek relations, are marked by the constant political tensions, propagandistic activities, internationalization of the problems between Athens and Belgrade, and, what was the most dangerous component —by the constant and numerous violations of the border regime. Hundreds of incidents often with human victims on both sides of the borderline were a high price of the new political and ideological division between two neighbouring Balkan countries. The new general international political and ideological context, and the division of the Europe, find at the Yugoslav-Greek border their dramatic and tragically expression at the beginning of the Cold War.

Reshaping of the Balkan space, arranged by the division of the “spheres of influences” at the end-phases of the Second World War, was decisive for the next five decades in the internal Balkan relations. Greece stayed as only Balkan non-communist country on the other side of the “iron curtain”. Yugoslavia, on the other side, in the first years after the end of WWII (until the 1948/1949 and the Tito-Stalin split) was a leading and most eager member of the Soviet-Balkan sub-block.

Greek civil conflict (escalated in the last “round” 1946-1949 in bloody civil conflict, which created a “local” background) in the context of the just borne Cold War, gave, also, an opportunity with the different pretexts (not to forget an importance of the “Macedonian Question” for both sides), to the neighbouring communist countries for the interfering in the Greek affairs. Helping the Democratic Army and KKE action by political, propaganda military, and different material support, receiving the political émigrés and refugees, supporting at the international scene the cause of the Greek communists, Yugoslavia played a very specific, active, role in the Greek crisis¹.

1. See: Dragan Kljakić, *Izgubljena pobjeda generala Markosa. Građanski rat u Grčkoj 1946-1949. i KPJ (General Markos' Lost Victory. Civil War in Greece and CPY)*, Narodna

All those elements gave a complicated frame, also for one, less or more hidden, or better to say, forgotten aspect of those dramatic years. Border incidents got some times a shape of the small, bloody battles, with the tenths of victims; villages on both sides of the border were attacked and bombarded, political émigrés, adventurers, agents and refugees crossed the dangerous line of the division illegally in the almost everyday rhythm, and all those factors gave to the relations of two countries a taste not only of ideological and political rigidity and mistrust but also, of gunpowder, and bitterness. This “small war” on the border marked “gray years” in the history of the Greek-Yugoslav relations, with the serious repercussions, and also, symbolized lowest level of the relations in the modern history of two countries and peoples. This paper is based on the results of research in the first place, Yugoslav archives, and at the some extent, British and Greek documents, as part of the project concerning Yugoslav policy toward Greece in the time of the Greek Civil War.

Since 1945 borderline was crossed illegally from the north southwards by fugitives guided by various reasons and pretence. Among those there were mostly members of scattered formations of Kosovo-Albanian Balli combatant units, soldiers of Mihailović's Yugoslav Army in Fatherland (“Chetniks”), political opponents to the new Yugoslav regime, deserters from the Yugoslav Army, various adventurers and common criminals².

After the failure of the ELAS uprising in Athens (ta Dekemvriana) in December 1944 - January 1945, refusing to accept resolutions of the Varkiza agreement, a number of the ex-ELAS members, together with their families, fled to the north since the beginning of 1945³. In the first group of fugitives consisted, by large, of the population of Slav Macedonians inhabiting the villages in the borderline area, but also, of a great

knjiga, Beograd 1987, pp. 279-285; Milan Ristović, “Jugoslawien und der Bürgerkrieg in Griechenland 1945-1950, *Thetis. Mannheimer Beiträge zur klassischen Archeologie und Geschichte Griechenlands und Zyperns*, Bd-4, Mannheim 1997, pp. 283-289.

2. Milan Ristović, “Jugoslavskata emigracija v Grcia prez 1945-1949g.” (Yugoslav emigration in Greece 1945-1949), in: *Ricari i mirotvorci na Balkanite. Pohodi, preselenia i pokloničestvo* [Knights and Peacemakers on the Balkans. Campaigns, Resettlings and Pilgrimages] (under redaction of S. Dimitrova and E. Tkačeva), Blagoevgrad 2001, pp. 97-110.

3. Richard Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece*, Cambridge 1993, vol. 3, p. 137.

number of Greeks coming from various parts of the country⁴. Members of the war-time leftist local authorities also took refuge in Yugoslavia, in order to escape revenge of the rightist squads. Among the fugitives there were deserters from the Greek Royal Army, too.

During the ascent of combats in the Greek Civil War 1946-1949, in the frontier zone (on the Yugoslav side) there were refugee centres, hospital for treatment and recuperation of the wounded, warehouses storing war materials as well as food and medical supplies sent as an aid to the units of DAG.

Strategic significance of the northern and western frontiers for DAG in their combats against National Army squads clearly indicates a map of the most important military operations. The "porousness" of the frontier was controlled by both sides. This control was essential for existence and operations of the DAG, since its pushing out of some frontier sectors, especially during 1948-1949, gave space for numerous, and almost everyday incidents between the National Army and the Frontier Units of the Yugoslav Army (KNOJ). These clashes resulted in a significant number of casualties and jeopardized further the already feeble relationships between the two states. The frontier remained the scene of incidents even after the defeat of the DAG and the cease of military operations in the second half of 1949 and during 1950. The incidents were reduced to an insignificant range by normalization of relationship between Athens and Belgrade.

Evidence of intensity, the course and the causalities of this frontier "war", together with its impact on the inter-state relationships of Greece and Yugoslavia, are comprised in a number of protest notes by both sides, which were constantly forwarded to diplomatic missions, ministries and governments but to international forums, first of all to the United Nations Security Council, as well⁵.

During 1945-1946, the issue of persons taken as "hostages" by the members of ELAS from Greece to Yugoslavia was regularly included in

4. Momčilo Mitrović, "Izbeglice iz Grčke u Jugoslaviji 1945-1960" (Greek refugees in Yugoslavia 1945-1960), *Tokovi istorije*, 3-4/1997, pp. 185-199; D. Kljakić, *Izgubljena pobjeda generala Markosa*, op.cit., pp. 188-191.

5. See Amikam Nachmani, *International Intervention in the Greek Civil War. The United Nations Special Committee on the Balkans 1947-1952*, New York, Westport/Conn., London 1990.

the correspondence between Athens and Belgrade. On May 19th, 1945, while regular diplomatic relationships were still unestablished with the new Yugoslav regime, Greek Foreign Ministry forwarded a note concerning "the hostages" taken over frontier to Yugoslavia⁶. This issue was intensified particularly in September of 1945 by the Greek public and rightist press insisting that the Government took action in bringing back the "taken persons". Yugoslav diplomatic mission in Athens confirmed, on September 22nd, that there was indeed such a practice of taking political opponents "hostages"⁷.

At the beginning of November of 1945 Greek press issued the news about groups of Kosovo Albanians, members of Balli combëtar⁸ and members of Yugoslav royalist units ("chetniks") escaping from Yugoslavia. After being kept in a refugee camp in the Thessaloniki barracks Pavlos Melas, and in Florina, the émigrés were transferred to the island of Syros and then to Crete. Several hundreds of former Mihailović's movement members with their families were settled in the camp in Lavrion near Athens, in 1947⁹.

Yugoslav consul general in Thessaloniki, Antun Ilijić, reported on May 5th, 1946, that a group of 50 to 60 soldiers from Yugoslav frontier units deserted, and was transferred to the island of Syros. A former report by consul general Ilijic, also given in 1946, gives information and details on the escape of a large group of Yugoslav Army soldiers (30 of which came from the frontier zone village Bogdanci)¹⁰.

There had been previous violations of the frontier, but by the second half of 1946 they were less in number and not as dramatic as in the

6. Savezno ministarstvo inostranih poslova (Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs) (= SMIP), *Politička arhiva* (Political archive = PA), Grčka, 1945, f 10, d 14, 5958, 19. V 1945.

7. *Ibid.*, Yugoslav Legation in Athens to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 22. IX 1945.

8. From Yugoslavia on 8th September 1946, fled to Greece Muharem Barjaktar, one of the war commanders of Balli combëtar at Kosovo. According to the information from Yugoslav sources to Greece fled until the beginning of 1947 about 300 former members of Balli kombetar units; *Arhiv Josipa Broza Tita* (Josip Broz Tito Archive = AJBT), I-3-b/249, Report on enemy activities, end of 1946.

9. SMIP, PA, Grčka, 1947, f 41, d 16, 419105, Šerif Šehović (Yugoslav Legation, Athens) to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Belgrade), 1. X 1947.

10. SMIP, PA, Grčka, 1946, 1526, Izbeglice iz Jugoslavije (Refugees from Yugoslavia), consul general Anton Ilijić (Thessaloniki) to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Belgrade), 29. I 1946.

period of the Greek fiercest internal conflicts. As those conflicts were increasing and blazing up, the accusations against the neighbouring communist countries for interference in the Greek internal affairs became more frequent as for relationship between Athens and Belgrade.

During 1946 until the autumn of that year, diplomatic language kept within acceptable form in disputes over the frontier situation. Thus on June 14th, 1946, Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs, Konstantinos Tsaldaris, told the Yugoslav Envoy in Athens Dr. Izidor Cankar, that he did not believe the Yugoslav Government sent “armed groups of bandits” over the frontier and that “he realized there was no use in such group’s crossing over (to Greece)”. Cankar’s response was that the Yugoslav government had “nothing to do with those bandit groups and that Greece would do best not to let them cross the frontier”¹¹.

The tone of diplomatic communication on the subject of the frontier situation noticeably changed in September 1946, when the diplomatic language was replaced completely by inflexible language of propaganda. A signal for attacking Yugoslavia came from Athens after a clash between the government forces and the rebel forces in the village of Skra, where 50 officers and soldiers of the Greek National Army as well as 45 civilians got killed —according to the information by the Greek Government. The official report of the Greek Ministry of Press and Communications stated that “the gangs coming from Serbia (!) which consisted of about 600 men”, were claimed to have performed the attack and “... have fled back to the Serbian territory” after the counterattack of the Greek Army. The report also stated that their withdrawal was supported “by the Serbian soldiers” firing at the Greek Army units. Minister Tsaldaris stated that it was all part of a synchronized action taking part along the entire northern frontier from the Marica River to Albania¹².

On November 19th, 1946, Greek Ministry of Press presented an extensive list of incidents occurring on the Greek frontiers, the ones on the frontier with Yugoslavia being the largest in number. According to this report, between September 1st and November 14th, there had been

11. SMIP, PA, Grčka, 1946, f 29, d 6, 7459, Dr. Izidor Cankar (Athens) to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 15. VI 1946.

12. SMIP, PA, Grčka, 1946, 1363, Nr. 522, Yugoslav Legation (Athens) to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Belgrade), 15. XI 1946.

21 incidents provoked by the “numerous bandit groups” crossing the borderline and plundering Greek villages, attacking the police and Greek Army forces¹³. In some incidents, as occurred on September 20th in the region of Beles, the attackers were stated to have been fully supported by “Yugoslav Army Units”¹⁴.

Since the beginning of 1947, the *Commission of Investigation Concerning Greek Frontier Incidents*, formed by the United Nations, conducted inspection in Greece and its Balkan neighbours. From January until July 1947 the Commission held 91 meetings in Athens, Thessaloniki, Sofia, Belgrade, Geneva and New York.

Evidence submitted to the Enquire Commission of the Security Council in the spring of 1947 confirmed that, since the end of the WWII, there had been a large number of incidents along the Yugoslav-Greek frontier. Yugoslav representative to the Committee Josip Djerdja, reported on 35 such incidents between May 18th, 1945, until December 1946, and on 43 cases of violation of the air space of Yugoslavia by 77 Greek airplanes in the same period. Greece claimed that during 1946 there had been 57 incidents in which 19 Greek officers and soldiers were killed¹⁵.

In the report to the Security Council of the UN, dated June 27th, 1947, it was emphasized that “the rebels” in Greece were rendered help by Yugoslavia and to a smaller extent by Albania and Bulgaria. Among others, there was a recommendation that the Security Council should establish a special body (“an agency”) to investigate into the situation and solve the problem of violation of the Greek frontier and kept it under constant surveillance¹⁶. According to the opinion of the Yugoslav Government, accepting the arguments of the Commission’s report would lead to biased conclusions and in favour of those “... who are truly guilty of presently creating the tensions in this part of the world” and,

13. SMIP, PA, Grčka, 1946, f 30, d 7, 13775, Š. Šehović (Yugoslav Legation, Athens) to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 19. XI 1946.

14. *Ibid.*

15. AJBT, I-3-b/270, Projekat američkih zaključaka (the Project of American conclusions); SMIP, PA, Grčka, 1947, f 44, d.2, Anketna komisija Saveta bezbednosti [Security Councils’ Survey commission].

16. Amikam Nachmani, *International Intervention in the Greek Civil War*, *op.cit.*, p. 23.

furthermore, that shifting the blame for the situation in Greece to the neighbouring countries meant concealing the true reasons for the crisis and both its Greek and foreign participants¹⁷.

Resolution passed by the Security Council stimulated the founding of a special commission for investigation into interference of the neighbouring communist states into the events in Greece, including those occurring along the Yugoslav-Greek frontier. The Special Commission of the UN (UNSCOB) for the Balkans was founded on October 21st, 1947, and it was working until December 1951. The founding of this commission was voted for by 40 members of the General Assembly whereas the delegations of six Soviet-block countries voted against it. Greek neighbouring countries considered this special monitoring mission "incompetent" and investigation on the territories of these states was not permitted. UNSCOB was accused to have been instructed by the western bloc to discredit the governments of the Balkan "peoples' democracy" countries¹⁸.

From the beginning of 1949 until May of that year, there was some kind of an "independent", private mission of the President of the General Assembly, an Australian Dr. Herbert Evatt, working on the same task but completely unsuccessfully¹⁹.

In a report on the incidents along the frontier, between March 1st and June 1st, 1947, Yugoslav Corps of National Defense (KNOJ-border police) informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about some 30 cases including: violation of the air space, opening fire from the Greek territory, wounding of the guards, landing of artillery granates to the Yugoslav territory during the battles close to the frontier, desertation of the Greek government Army soldiers, etc.²⁰.

There was a request from Belgrade to the Security Council to investigate the attack of Greek air forces on the frontier watch-tower No 130, occurring on June 13th, 1947, when a Yugoslav army officer

17. AJBT, I-3-b/270, Nacrt izjave povodom izveštaja Anketne komisije Saveta Bezbednosti (A draft of the statement concerning the UN Commission's report).

18. A. Nachmani, *op.cit.*, pp. 34, 35.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

20. SMIP, PA, Grčka, 1947, f 41, d 13, 421501. Izveštaj o incidentima na grčkoj granici između 1 III i 1 VI 1947 (Report on incidents on Greek border between 1 III and 1 VI 1947).

was killed and several soldiers were wounded²¹. This event motivated an organized action thought Yugoslavia of sending hundreds of protest telegrams by the local Peoples Municipal Committees²².

The summer and autumn of 1947 passed in frequent exchange of notes full of new accusations and their rejections²³. During the combat in mountain Dub, on August 11th, troops of Greek Army forced a group of 35 DAG fighters to cross the borderline. They were disarmed and later on taken to a refugee camp in PR of Macedonia. In a report by UDBa (State Security Police) it was mentioned that, during the same year, "there had been a number of cases of escape of civilians (men, elderly people, women and children) to our territory"²⁴.

In a speech given on February 10th, 1948, Josip Broz Tito declared that "provocations by the Greek monarchofascists are occurring every day along the frontier with Albania and Bulgaria, and to a lesser degree, along the Yugoslav/Greek frontier ... Allegedly, Albania is to blame, Yugoslavia is a hard nut (to crack). But we won't let them think Yugoslavia is not going to be hard nut ... there, on the Albanian frontier as well. We have an alliance with Albania and we have our obligations towards it, as well as towards Bulgaria"²⁵.

Reports on the clashes along the frontier had increased in number rapidly from the beginning of 1948, when the war operations in Greece were intensified. There is a large documentation including correspondence of the Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Internal Affairs, and numerous protest notes and responses to them between Belgrade and Athens, but also the correspondence of the Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the delegation of FPRY in the UN. All these represent proof of the frontier incidents, participated

21. SMIP, PA, Grčka, 1947, f 42, d 11, 413631, a telegram sent by Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the president of the Subsidiary Group of the International Survey Commission in Thessaloniki, 26. VII 1947.

22. SMIP, PA, Grčka, 1947, f 42, d 9, 41493, Border incidents.

23. SMIP, PA, Grčka, 1947, f 42, d 11, 41631, 26 VII 1947.

24. SMIP, PA, Grčka, 1947, f 43, d 23, 417520, lieutenant-colonel Edi Brajnik (Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs) to Vladimir Velebit, deputy minister (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), 12. IX 1947.

25. SMIP, PA, Grčka, 1947, f 43, d 23, 424756, Košmrlj (Yugoslav Legation Tirana) – MIP (Belgrade), 4. XII 1947; *ibid.*, 424756, I. Vejvoda, deputy minister (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Belgrade to Yugoslav Legation Tirana), 6. XII 1947.

by the Yugoslav frontier troops on the one side and, on the other, predominantly the Greek Royal Army. The documentation shows the number of these incidents and their seriousness.

On September 11th, 1948, three captured Yugoslav soldiers were brought to the Headquarters of the 7th Corps in Thessaloniki. They were previously interrogated by the Monitoring Mission of the UNSCOB. Weapons taken off the dead Yugoslav border guards were also brought, as evidence. It was, in fact, a case of one of the most serious incidents on the frontier since 1945²⁶.

A group of Yugoslav soldiers of 56th battalion, clashed near Koutsumbey, on September 8th against the Greek National Army soldiers. According to the statement of the Greek Minister of War, Stratiotis, on this incident there were 9 killed and 3 captured Yugoslav border guards. However, the final, more accurate result of the clash was 3 captured and 17 dead. Both the dead bodies and the captured soldiers were exchanged for the captured Greek soldiers on September 29th²⁷.

The Balkan Commission also investigated upon the causes and circumstances of this incident. After more than a month, on October 16th, Commission accepted the conclusions of its Sub-commission on the clash near Koutsumbey, which said that:

“The units of Greek forces crossed the demarcation line and entered the Yugoslav territory at Profitis Ilias, before September 6th where they remained until 4 p.m. on September 8th”, while, “on September 8th the units of Yugoslav troops crossed the borderline and entered the Greek territory at Koutsumbey, in order to attack the Greek forces”. The Commission made a Solomonic decision that it could not find evidence to prove that these violations of the frontier were “consciously pro-

26. SMIP, PA, Grčka, 1948, f 56, d 11, 425067, A. Kyrrou, Permanent Representative of Greece to Trygve Lie, Secretary General of the OUN, 27. VIII 1948.

27. SMIP, PA, Grčka, 1948, f 57, d 12, 424055, Consul general of FPRY (Federal Peoples Republic of Yugoslavia) (Thessaloniki) to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 11. IX 1948; *ibid.*, d 13, 425568, Popović (Yugoslav Embassy Paris) to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Belgrade), to Edvard Kardelj Minister for Foreign Affairs, 5. X 1948; *ibid.*, Zapisnik o predaji tela poginulih vojika (Protocol on the delivery of the bodies of the soldiers killed in action) 29. IX 1948; *ibid.*, Grčka, 1948, f 39, d 19, 410515, (Yugoslav) Ministry of Peoples' Defence, Department XII, general Jefko Šašić to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, strong confidential, 1603, 25, X 1948.

jected by the Greek and Yugoslav governments”²⁸.

In a draft seen by Marko Ristić, Yugoslav Ambassador in Paris, of the supplementary report of the UNSCOB, for the period from June 17th until September 10th, 1948, it was emphasized that, according to the statements of witnesses who were interrogated in June, “about 600 of partisans, coming from Buljkes, crossed the Greek frontier near Gevgelia, in the groups of 50 to 120 persons, between October 1947 and September of this year”. The Commission came to a conclusion that, the attack on Neos Kavazos on May 24th, 1948, was launched by a group based on the Yugoslav territory where they returned after the clash²⁹.

A Greek passenger plane, carrying 21 persons, landed at Kukurechane, a village near Negotino on the Vardar. According to the report, six of the so-called “youths” were left on the Yugoslav territory. During interrogation at the KNOJ Headquarters, these “youths” declared that the plane had landed on their command, as they had forced the pilot to take them over to Yugoslavia”³⁰.

One of the greatest incidents happened in the early morning of May 30th, 1949, when a fighter-plane (at the first, by Yugoslav authorities, considered to be British, then Greek) flew over the village Skočivir and machine-gunned (by the first report), while the Yugoslav protest notes said that the village had been bombed. The plane, after the attack, flew over the village Bač, and continued over the village Doboveni, where attacked the workers on land reclamation of Crna Reka. The plane was fired at from land by machine guns and antitank guns. Two Yugoslav soldiers were killed and five were wounded in Skočivir, and one of the latter died on the way to hospital³¹.

28. SMIP, PA, Grčka, 1948, f 59, d 5, 426928, Š. Šehović (Yugoslav Legation Athens) to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Belgrade), 17. X 1948.

29. SMIP, PA, Grčka, 1948, f 59, d 4, 424380. Marko Ristić (Yugoslav Embassy Paris) to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Belgrade), 16. IX 1948.

30. SMIP, PA, Grčka, 1948, f 57, d 11, Pogranični incidenti sa Grčkom (Border incidents with Greece), 4240099, Komanda KNOJ-a (Corps of People's Defence), Štab II odeljenja (Staf of the 2nd Dept.), strong confidential, 1635- to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 14. X 1948.

31. SMIP, PA, Grčka, 1948, f 39, d 21, 49573, Federal Ministry of Interiors to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 30. V 1949. Report on incident; *ibid.*, d 22, 410020, leut. colonel Rašo Radović (Federal Ministry of Interiors) to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 4. VI 1948.

In the supplement to the report of Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs it was stated that the village was bombed and machine-gunned by a "single/engine fighter plane-type "Hawker tempest VI", which had a blue and white and red circle painted under the wings and blue-white-and red flag painted on the body, and therefore it was concluded that the attack was launched by a British plane. On June 13th the British Embassy in Belgrade replied that "not a single armed airplane under RAF's command existed in Greece on May 30th, nor was any single RAF aircraft, armed or unarmed, anywhere near the Greek-Yugoslav frontier".

Yugoslav Government also accused the Greek side of provoking the incident. It was requested that, apart from punishing the guilty ones, compensation should be paid to the families of the dead and wounded soldiers. On June 6th Greek mission in Belgrade replied that the violation of the Yugoslav air space and attack on the village was not committed by a Greek airplane and also that the Greek Air Force did not consisted of the "Spitfire" planes³².

On June 1st, Yugoslav permanent Envoy at the UN Joze Vilfan informed Secretary General about the attack on Skochivir. As agreed by both Yugoslav and Greek Governments, a special Commission was to investigate the event, on July 11th but, later on Greek representatives refused to cross the border and witness the consequences of the attack³³.

The last battles of the Greek Government troops against DAG in the summer of 1949 also took place in the close vicinity of the frontier zone with Yugoslavia, and during that period violations of the Yugoslav territory became very frequent. Break off in the relations with the KKE and closing the frontier on July 8th, 1949, as ordered by Tito, led to accusations by the Soviet block that the Yugoslav troops, in arrangement with the Greek National Army eagled war against the DAG units situated in the vicinity of the frontier³⁴.

The need of armed actions, after defeat of the DAG, did not bring

32. *Ibid.*, d 22, 410084, Greek Legation's Note Nr. 1609, 6. VI 1949.

33. SMIP, PA, Grčka, 1949, f 39, d 22, 414039, Jože Vilfan, Permanent Representative of the F.P.R. of Yugoslavia to the United Nations to His Excellency Mr. Trygve Lie, Secretary General of the U.N. 26 VI 1949.

34. SMIP, PA, Grčka, 1949, pov. 411602, lieutenant-colonel Rašo Radović (Federal Ministry of Interiors) to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Incidents on Yugoslav-Greek border, 28 VI 1949.

complete pacification of the situation along the frontier. The incidents continued to occur taking new victims. On October 2nd, 1949, according to the report, a Greek soldier going as deep as 3 meters into the Yugoslav territory got killed³⁵. Three days later, at Yugoslav watchtower Kravice, a larger group of the Greek National Army soldiers crossed the border and took by force two Yugoslav soldiers over to Greece³⁶.

As the reports for the years 1950 show, the number of cases of the frontier violation was significantly reduced. In the report of the UNSCOB, dated March 10th, 1950, it was estimated that the situation on the frontier had improved³⁷. However, during the first half of the year there were several incidents sometimes for unbelievable reasons. Thus, on April 2nd, 1950, the Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs informed that a Yugoslav border guard had wounded a "Greek youth" nearby Dorian. The 15-year old Greek boy, accompanied by two young girls of his age, come close (at 5-10 meters) to the borderline. The three of them started "provoking", the girls as well as the boy, started showing to the guard "the naked parts of their bodies", and after several warnings, the guard shot once and wounded the boy by one bullet on the leg³⁸.

After the talks between Bevin and Politis, Minister Venizelos stated that Yugoslavia had not shown readiness to settle the affairs with Greece, since it refused to return to Greece the captured soldiers and children. It was a condition required both by the Greek and Western public opinion and, therefore, it was necessary to exert pressure on Yugoslavia to do so. Leo Mates, Yugoslav Deputy of the Yugoslav Minister for Foreign Affairs, informed the Yugoslav Delegation in New York that he considered "that regarding these facts gradual return of Greek prisoners would be necessary at this moment. We would seem to be giving in to the renewed Greek campaign and the pressure they put us under". Mates

35. SMIP, PA, Grčka, 1950, f 31, d 9, Federal Ministry of Interiors to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 4181850, 3 X 1949.

36. SMIP, PA, Grčka, 1949, f 39, d 25, Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Royal Greek Legation at Belgrade, Nr. 421627, 6 XII 1949.

37. SMIP, PA, Grčka, 1950, f 32, d 3, pov. 47216, Jakša Petrić (New York) - to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Belgrade), 2 III 1950.

38. SMIP, PA, Grčka, 1950, f 31, d 10, 410600, Federal Ministry of Interiors to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2. V 1950.

stressed out that it was “the opinion of comrade Marshal (Tito)”³⁹.

Such decision made real the agreement on return and exchange of the prisoners. On November 2nd, 1950, Ivo Vejvoda, Deputy Minister of FO called Caloutsis, Greek Chargé d’Affaires in Belgrade, and informed him that the Yugoslav government decided upon repatriation to Greece of “the members of armed forces of the Greek government who deserted and crossed over to Yugoslavia”, and that they would be brought in on May 7th in Gevgelia⁴⁰.

The exchange was conducted at the appointed time and 57 soldiers were returned to Greece. On November 9th Caloutsis expressed to Vejvoda “on behalf of the President of Greek Government, joy and gratitude that the decision of the Yugoslav government had brought”, emphasizing his opinion that “the decision would certainly contribute to improvement of relationships” between the two governments. Vejvoda assured him that “all the military persons, identified as such so far were brought to the exchange, apart from a dozen of them who wished to remain in Yugoslavia”⁴¹.

Greek public opinion evaluated the return of the soldiers as the first step Yugoslavia had made in normalization of the relationships with southern neighbouring country. It was a synchronized action with the preparations for the repatriation of Greek children⁴².

This closed a file on the undeclared “small war” along the frontier that took tenths of victims on both sides. This “war” was part of the atmosphere of ideological and political confrontation during the first years of the “cold war”, when the two neighbouring states belonged to the opposite sides of the barricades. Approaching the West after the break off with Stalin and defeat of Greek communists who had inclined predominantly to his politics brought a gradual improvement in the relations between Belgrade and Athens, and relaxation of the frontier situa-

39. SMIP, PA, Grčka, 1950, f 32, d 8, 419393/III, August 1950.

40. AJBT, I-3-b/280, Note on the I. Vejvoda’s talk with Caloutsis, 2 XI 1950.

41. *Ibid.*, Note on the I. Vejvoda’s talk with Caloutsis, 9 XI 1950.

42. SMIP, PA, Grčka, 1950, f 32, d 10, 421776, A. Bebler (New York) to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 20 X 1950. About the repatriation of the children to Greece from Yugoslavia see: Milan Ristović, *A Long Journey Home. Greek Refugee Children in Yugoslavia 1948-1960*, Institute for Balkan Studies, Thessalonki 2000, chapter VII “The Doors are open: The Beginning and the Unfolding of Repatriation”, pp. 99-118.

tion. In one report on the state of the Yugoslav-Greek relationship it was decided that it had improved after coming to power, in Athens, in 1950, of the “liberal and democratic elements”. The return of the soldiers and children to Greece was a sign of “goodwill on our part to give a positive solution in the mutual approach of Yugoslavia and Greece”, and that “a positive solution to the problem of returning the soldiers was also found”⁴³.

43. AJBT, I-3-b/286, Yugoslav-Greek relations, 1951.