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From Paris to Lausanne: Aspects of Greek-Yugoslav Relations during the First Interwar Years (1919–1923)

Abstract: This paper looks at the course of Greek-Yugoslav relations from the Paris Peace Conference to the Treaty of Lausanne. Following the end of the First World War Greece and the newly-created Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes formed a common front on an anti-Bulgarian basis, putting aside unresolved bilateral issues. Belgrade remained neutral during the Greek-Turkish war despite the return of King Constantine. But after the Greek catastrophe in Asia Minor the relations between Athens and Belgrade were lopsided.

Keywords: Greek-Serbian/Yugoslav relations, Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Greek-Turkish war 1920–1922, Serbian/Yugoslav free zone in Thessaloniki, Eleftherios Venizelos, Nikola Pašić, Macedonian problem, Western Thrace

The history of Greek-Serbian relations during the Balkan wars and the First World War has largely been already written.¹ By contrast, there are not

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¹ On Greek-Serbian relations during the period of 1912–1918 see Dušan Lukač, ed., *Dokumenti o spoljnoj politici Kraljevine Srbije (1903–1914)*, vol. 6–2 (Belgrade: SANU, 1981); Helen Gardikas-Katsiadakis, “Greek-Serbian relations 1912–1913: Communication Gap or Deliberate Policy”, *Balkan Studies* 45/1 (2004), 23–38; Dušan T. Bataković, “Serbia and Greece in the First World War”, *Balkan Studies* 45/1 (2004), 59–80; Loukianos Hasiotis, *Ελληνοσερβικές σχέσεις 1913–1918, συμμαχικές προτεραιότητες και πολιτικές αντιπαλοότητες* [Greek-Serbian relations 1913–1918. Allied priorities and political rivalries] (Thessaloniki: Vantias, 2004); Ioannis Papadrianos, “Die Beziehungen zwischen Griechenland und Serbien vor dem Ausbruch des Ersten Weltkrieges”, in *Proceedings of the Fifth Greek-Serbian Symposium: 1) Serbia and Greece during the First World War; 2) The Ideas of the French Revolution, The Enlightenment and the Pre-Romantic Period in the Balkans, 1780–1830*, organized by the Institute for Balkan Studies and the Serbian Academy of Science and Arts in Thessaloniki and Volos, 9–12 October 1987 (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1991); D. Donta, “Troubled Friendship. Greco-Serbian Relations, 1914–1918”, in *The Creation of Yugoslavia 1914–1918*, ed. D. Djordjević (Santa Barbara: Clio Books with the University of California, 1980), 95–124; Miladin Milošević, *Srbija i Grčka 1914–1918. Iz istorije diplomatskih odnosa* (Zaječar: Istorijski arhiv, 1997); Spyridon Sfetis, “Aspects of Greek-Serbian Relations in 1914 and the Image of the Serbs in the Greek Press”, in *Srbi i Prvi svetski rat 1914–1918* (Proceedings of the international conference held 13–15 June 2014), ed. Dragoljub R. Živojinović (Belgrade: SANU, 2015), 365–376.

many studies on Greek-Serbian/Yugoslav relations during the interwar period. This article is based on this author's study² on Greece and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes from the Paris Peace Conference in 1919/20 to the denunciation of the Greek-Serbian Treaty of Alliance (1913) in late 1924.

The prevalence of Eleftherios Venizelos in Greek politics after 1917 to the detriment of King Constantine and his supporters, that is to say the pro-German wing of the Greek political scene, was the key factor for a new rapprochement between Athens and Belgrade. Frequent border incidents and complaints of the local population living near the frontier on both sides did not lead to political tensions. Nikola Pašić along with El. Venizelos attached major importance to mutual understanding between the two states. Their main concern was to set up a common diplomatic front against Bulgaria. In October 1918 Venizelos met the Serbian minister in Athens, Živojin Balugdžić, and Nikola Pašić Greek chargé d'affaires in Belgrade, Ioannis Kountouriotis. At both meetings there were assurances that Serbia would support Greek claims to Eastern and Western Thrace³. However, Kountouriotis considered it necessary that Greece should regain Serbian public sympathy. To that end, he did not hesitate to ask Pašić to intervene in the Serbian Press in order for it to adopt a more friendly rhetoric towards Greece.⁴ The same request came from Pašić as regards the Greek Press. It probably was not a coincidence that the Greek newspapers at the end of 1918 and beginning of 1919 featured the tragic losses of the Serbian nation, the devastated Serbian capital, the suffering economy and the need to revive the Balkan coalition.⁵

Members of such a coalition should be considered Greece, Serbia and Romania. The coalition would be formed on an anti-Bulgarian basis. The enlargement of the coalition could be canvassed only after the signing of the Peace Treaty. On 21 November 1918, Greece, Serbia and Romania sent a joint memorandum to the Foreign Office, in which they were notifying their willingness to work together at the upcoming Conference according to the principle of nation-

² Athanasios Loupas, *Από τις σχέσεις συμμαχίας στην ψύχρανση: Η Ελλάδα και το Βασίλειο των Σέρβων, Κροατών και Σλοβένων, 1919–1924* [From alliance to cooling: Greece and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes] (Athens: Herodotos, in press).

³ Hassiotis, *Ελληνοσερβικές σχέσεις 1913–1918*, 231–232.

⁴ *Υπηρεσία Διπλωματικού και Ιστορικού Αρχείου* (Service of Diplomatic and Historical Archives, hereafter SDHA), *Αρχείο Κεντρικής Υπηρεσίας* (Central Service Archives, CSA) 1919 A-5-V (10) *Περί των Βαλκανικών Κρατών – Σερβία* [About Balkan States – Serbia], Kountouriotis to Diomidis, 28 December 1918, No. 647.

⁵ *Μακεδονία* (Macedonia), 31/12/1918; *Εμπρός* (Embros), 1/1/1919; *Ακρόπολις* (Akropolis), 4/1/1919.

alities.⁶ So, by the time the Peace Conference began, Athens and Belgrade had laid the foundations of a fruitful cooperation. The Greek kingdom was the only neighbouring country with which the newly-established Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (hereafter KSCS) did not have any border disputes.⁷ In his memorandum regarding Greek national claims, dated 30 December 1918 and distributed to the Entente delegations at Paris in January 1919, Venizelos did not mention at all the Greeks in Northern Macedonia, now part of the KSCS, while Yugoslav delegates counted on Greece's support to their national claims. In addition to Bulgarian aspirations in Macedonia and Thrace, Italian claims on the Adriatic (Dalmatia, Istria, Montenegro), Albania and Asia Minor constituted a great threat to both Greek and Yugoslav interests.

*From the Peace Conference in Paris to the Greek elections
(January 1919 – November 1920)*

The recognition of the new kingdom was of great importance to the Yugoslav delegation. Italian aspirations, however, appeared to be a considerable obstacle. The Greek delegation found itself in an awkward position in this matter. According to Venizelos, Greece should come to an understanding with Italy in order to settle their disputes over Northern Epirus and Asia Minor.⁸ On the other hand, however, the Greek Prime Minister was insisting on Greece becoming the first state to officially recognize the KSCS, as a gesture of symbolic significance which would positively impact Serbian public opinion. In his effort to remain neutral in the Italo-Yugoslav antagonism over the Adriatic, Venizelos instructed the Deputy Foreign Minister, Alexandros Diomidis, to handle the matter of recognition in such a manner as not to impair Italian interests.⁹ However, Diomidis failed to do so. Having in mind earlier instructions, according to which Greece was to refrain from any action which might dissatisfy Italy, Diomidis had held off carrying out Venizelos' orders. New and clearer instructions from Paris were

⁶ N. Petsalis-Diomidis, *Greece at the Paris Peace Conference 1919* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1978), 74.

⁷ A. Mitrović, "The 1919–1920 Peace Conference in Paris and the Yugoslav State: An Historical Evaluation", in *Creation of Yugoslavia*, ed. Djordjević, 209; I. Lederer, *Yugoslavia at the Paris Peace Conference. A Study in Frontier-making* (Yale University Press, 1963), 96.

⁸ E. Venizelos, *Ta Kείμενα, τ. Β' 1915–1920* [The Records, vol. II: 1915–1920] (Athens: Liberals' Club, 1982), 641, 648. See also R. L. Woodall, *The Albanian Problem during the Peace-making 1919–1920* (Memphis State University, 1978), 104.

⁹ SDHA, *Αρχείο Πρεσβείας Παρισίων* [Paris Embassy Archives, hereafter PEA] 1920/3.6 *Ελληνοσερβικές Σχέσεις* [Greek-Serbian Relations], Politis to Diomidis, Paris 19 December 1918/2 January 1919, No. 444

needed in order to overcome Diomidis' reservations. After all, a Greek-Italian understanding seemed out of reach in early 1919. But Greece had already lost precious time. At any rate, what mattered most was that Greece missed the opportunity to be the first country to recognize the KSCS, as Venizelos fervently desired.¹⁰ It is true, though, that it was believed in certain political and military circles in Athens that the new Yugoslav kingdom, due to its military power, might be a potential threat to Greece's national security in the long run.¹¹ On the whole, however, the establishment of the KSCS was cordially welcomed in Greece insofar as it was seen as an implementation of the principle of nationalities. The enlargement of Romania and the creation of the KSCS were viewed by Greek policy-makers as a shift in the balance of power in the Balkans. Thus, the territorial expansion of Greece was more than necessary to maintain the Balkan equilibrium.¹²

Since then, Greek and Yugoslav officials endeavoured to counter the Bulgarian initiatives at the Peace Conference and promote their common interests. Pointing out that Bulgaria's disarmament had been encountering a lot of difficulties the Yugoslav delegation proposed to Entente Headquarters in Constantinople the siege of Strumnitsa by Entente forces, including Greek units. The heads of the Greek and Yugoslav delegations also sent a joint diplomatic note to the French Prime Minister, Georges Clemenceau, alerting him to the threat stemming from the activities of Bulgarian komitadjis on the Yugoslav-Bulgarian and Greek-Bulgarian borders. Venizelos also suggested the deployment of Greek, Yugoslav and Romanian troops to the southern Bulgarian border in order to strengthen the meagre Entente forces and his country's negotiating position,¹³ but his suggestion was not adopted. The idea of launching military operations against Bulgaria was entertained once more in August 1919. In reply to Clemenceau's query about the Greek army's readiness, Venizelos stressed that it was capable of dealing with local insurrections in Thrace but that it was not in a position to wage a two-front war against Turkey and Bulgaria. He held, though, that should Sofia resist the implementation of the Peace Treaty, Greece along with the KSCS and Romania would be willing to force Bulgaria into accepting the agreement.¹⁴

¹⁰ Ibid., Venizelos to Diomidis, Paris 2/15 February 1919, No. 1488.

¹¹ SDHA, CSA, 1919 A-5-V (10), op. cit., Kountouriotis to Diomidis, 28 December 1918, No. 647

¹² Petsalis-Diomidis, *Greece at the Paris Peace Conference*, 67–68, Hassiotis, *Ελληνοσερβικές σχέσεις 1913–1918*, 223; D. Dakin, *Η ενσποίηση της Ελλάδας, 1770–1923* [The Unification of Greece], trans. A. Xanthopoulos (Athens: MIET, 2001), 334.

¹³ Desanka Todorović, *Jugoslavija i balkanske države, 1918–1923* (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, 1979), 36–37.

¹⁴ Petsalis-Diomidis, *Greece at the Paris Peace Conference*, 267.

The Greek-Serbian cooperation applied also to the field of propaganda during the Peace Conference in Paris. Both sides made several attempts to highlight the dramatic effect that the Bulgarian occupation had on the Greek and Serbian population in Eastern Macedonia and South Serbia respectively, and at the same time sought to promote their own perspectives on demographics in Macedonia and Thrace. The studies *Le Peninsule balkanique* by Jovan Cvijić, Professor at the University of Belgrade, and *Les Bulgares peints par eux-mêmes* by Victor Kühne – the latter also being translated in English at the initiative of the Greek-British Association¹⁵ – were the most typical examples of the above-mentioned policy. As products of Greek-Serbian cooperation may also be seen the pamphlets entitled *Les mensonges bulgaires* and *Une réponse à “la vérité sur les accusations contre la Bulgarie”*. Those two pamphlets were written in order to confute Bulgarian arguments (*La vérité sur les accusations contre la Bulgarie*) about the Bulgarian occupation in Eastern Macedonia.¹⁶

The Greek-Serbian cooperation produced palpable results on 17 September 1919 when the Paris Conference ordered the Bulgarian troops out of Strumnitsa and Western Thrace. Two days later the terms of the peace treaty were delivered to the Bulgarian delegation. On 27 November 1919 the newly-elected Bulgarian government of Aleksandar Stamboliyski signed the Treaty of Neuilly. The treaty provided for territorial cessions to neighbouring countries: to the KSCS: a) the western provinces of Tsaribrod and Bosilevgrad, which were of particular strategic importance; and b) the city of Strumnitsa; and to Romania: c) Southern Dobruja. At the same time, an inter-allied administration was imposed in Western Thrace, thereby depriving Bulgaria of a territorial outlet to the Aegean Sea. Nonetheless, an economic outlet was ensured to Bulgaria by the signatories (article 48, paragraph 3).

On 25 April 1920 the San Remo Conference transferred the administration of Western Thrace to the Greek authorities, concluding the integration of the territory into the Greek state. This triggered a common and prompt reaction of Turkish nationalists and Bulgarian komitadjis who wished to oust Greek political and military authorities and to declare Thrace autonomous. The leading figure of that short-lived movement was Cafer Tayar, an Ottoman officer of Albanian origin. The Turkish-Bulgarian danger was evident in South Serbia as well. The Serbian Press in Skoplje imputed the rise of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) to the collusion of Bulgarian and Turkish elements and stressed that there were contacts between the Young Turks and the Muslim

¹⁵ Hassiotis, *Ελληνοσερβικές σχέσεις 1913–1918*, 231; Miranda Paximadopoulou-Stavrinou, *Η Δυτική Θράκη στην εξωτερική πολιτική της Βουλγαρίας. Το Ζήτημα της Βουλγαρικής Οικονομικής Διεξόδου στο Αιγαίο (1919–1923)* [Western Thrace in the foreign policy of Bulgaria. The question of Bulgaria's economic outlet to the Aegean Sea] (Athens: Gutenberg, 1997), 28, fn. 15.

¹⁶ Petsalis-Diomidis, *Greece at the Paris Peace Conference*, 86–87.

population living in the southern provinces of the KSCS. At the same time, key figures of the Turkish community in Skoplje were arrested on the accusation of bearing subversive ideas against the Yugoslav state.¹⁷ Various rumours regarding the number of troops that Tayar had at his disposal for the upcoming Turkish-Bulgarian uprising in Thrace in September or the readiness of Albanian irregulars to take up arms against the KSCS¹⁸ proved to be false. Thus, Yugoslav assistance was not necessary in defeating Tayar's movement.¹⁹

In view of the new circumstances, i.e. the territorial enlargement of the two states and the fact that one of them (Kingdom of Serbia) no longer existed as a legal entity, a redefinition of the 1913 Greek-Serbian Treaty of Alliance was needed.²⁰ In the spring of 1920 Balugdžić tabled the issue claiming that "it would be ludicrous if Greece demanded military assistance from the Yugoslav Government for war in Asia Minor, just as it would be ridiculous if Yugoslavia had similar demands for military operations against Hungary or against some other far-flung state".²¹ Greece sought to preserve the alliance in order to secure the status quo as it had been formulated by the treaties of Bucharest (1913) and Neuilly (1919). In other words, to safeguard the Greek-Bulgarian border and to maintain a common front with the KSCS against Bulgaria. In order to prevent misunderstandings such as had arisen in 1915, it was agreed to clarify their mutual obligations. This was to be achieved either by concluding a new treaty or by signing an interpretative protocol. Both sides agreed on the latter solution. However, the negotiations had not been concluded and the issue remained unsettled.²²

Despite a convergence of political and strategic views between Athens and Belgrade, Greek-Yugoslav relations did not go without disagreements, the main of which concerned Italy. Being at loggerheads with Rome over Fiume

¹⁷ SDHA, CSA 1920/22.1, Ελληνοσερβικές σχέσεις (θέματα πολιτικά, στρατιωτικά, εμπορικά) [Greek-Serbian relations (political, military and commercial affairs)], Picheon to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Skoplje, 15 March 1920, No. 83; 25 February 1920, No. 60; and 10 March 1920, No. 75.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Picheon to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Skoplje, 26 August 1920, No. 296; Staff Service to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, 24 July 1920, No. 465/ii/2660.

¹⁹ Todorović, *Jugoslavija i balkanske države*, 85–86.

²⁰ In accordance with article 7 of the treaty Serbia was granted freedom for her transit trade through the port of Thessaloniki. On 10/23 May 1914 a Convention Relative to Transit through Salonica was concluded between the Royal Hellenic Government and the Royal Serbian Government. In accordance with article 1 of the Convention a section of the port was assigned to Serbia for its transit trade. Due to the outbreak of the First World War the Convention was not ratified.

²¹ SDHA, CSA 1920/21.3, Φάκελος Σερβίας [Serbia File], Memorandum, 28 May 1920.

²² *Ibid.*

(Rijeka), whose port was of vital importance to the Yugoslav economy, Belgrade perceived the Italian factor as a threat to Yugoslav interests.²³ On the other hand, Venizelos pursued a more conciliatory policy towards Rome which bore fruit on 29 July 1919 when a non-binding agreement with the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tomasso Tittoni, was signed. The agreement provided for an overall settlement of the Greek-Italian disputes: the Dodecanese, with the exception of Rhodes, was to be ceded to Greece and Italy was also to support Greek claims in Northern Epirus. Greece, for her part, pledged to support an Italian mandate for central Albania and to secure a free zone to the port of Smyrna, already under Greek administration. Venizelos had not intended to substitute the Greek-Yugoslav alliance, which was a keystone of his policy, with the agreement of 29 July 1919, but to square things with Rome. Nevertheless, the Venizelos-Tittoni agreement gave rise to considerable discontent in the KSCS. Greek officials made statements in the spirit of appeasement wishing to reassure their Yugoslavs counterparts that the agreement was not a turn against the KSCS, but quite the contrary, the latter would benefit from it since Italy should no longer back up Bulgarian claims.²⁴ In practice, however, the agreement never entered into force and in fact was terminated by Italy in July 1920.²⁵

Venizelos' adherence to the Greek-Yugoslav coalition was also proved on the question of Northern Macedonia. The Greek Prime Minister ruled out all possibility of claiming the territory for Greece as Greek refugees from Monastir (Bitolj), Gevgeli, Strumnitsa and Dojran wanted. Organized in various clubs, unions and associations, North-Macedonian refugees in Thessaloniki soon became a lobby which caused the Greek Government much trouble, giving rise to Yugoslav complaints on various occasions. However, Venizelos restricted himself to promising material assistance to those who should choose to stay in Greece permanently and stressed that he would not take any action to redraw the Greek-Yugoslav border.²⁶

In August 1919 negotiations about the re-establishment of the Serbian Patriarchate and its jurisdiction over South Serbia and Northern Macedonia began between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and a delegation of the KSCS. The main obstacle to the conclusion of the agreement was the issue of the fate of the Greek communities in Northern Macedonia. The Fanar demanded that the text of the agreement make an explicit mention of the cultural freedom of the Greek

²³ In a discussion with the American President, Woodrow Wilson, Pašić drew a parallel between the Austrian occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Italian presence in Albania, cf. Todorović, *Jugoslavija i balkanske države*, 54.

²⁴ Petsalis-Diomidis, *Greece at the Paris Peace Conference*, 256.

²⁵ Konstantinos Svolopoulos, *Η ελληνική εξωτερική πολιτική 1900–1945, τ. Α'* [Greek Foreign Policy 1900–1945, vol. I] (Athens: Vivliopolio tis Estias, 2005), 147.

²⁶ Hassiotis, *Ελληνοσερβικές σχέσεις 1913–1918*, 353.

communities. The Yugoslav delegation replied that the KSCS had no intention to impede Greeks' cultural life but they also stated that they were not authorized by their government to discuss such matters.²⁷ Having received further instructions from Belgrade, the delegation made a counterproposal according to which no special mention to that effect would be made in the text, but instead the Ecumenical Patriarchate would address a letter to the two governments asking them to come to an agreement on the Greek communities. At the same time they asked for Venizelos' intervention.²⁸ In the end, the Fanar, following Venizelos' advice, accepted the Yugoslav terms and issued the Synodal Tome. It was more than evident that the Greek Prime Minister did not have any intention to add such an issue to his agenda. In fact, Venizelos sacrificed the Greeks of Northern Macedonia for the sake of Greek-Yugoslav relations. To the same end, Belgrade raised neither the question of the Serbian free zone in the port of Thessaloniki²⁹ nor that of the Slavic population in Greek Macedonia and also turned down the French proposal for the internationalization of the city.³⁰

After the Treaty of Sevres (10 August 1920) was signed and the long-standing dream of the *Megali Idea* which had dominated Greek politics since Independence seemed to come true, Venizelos called elections. He believed that his achievements in Paris (Treaty of Neuilly and Treaty of Sevres) would bring him a splendid victory. The Serbian Press launched a campaign in favour of Venizelos' Liberal Party. The 10 October 1920 issue of *Politika* is highly indicative: "His victory would mean that the real carrier of a political entente with us is not merely a political figure but a whole nation. We shall be the first to sincerely salute such a victory."³¹ It was obvious, then, that for the KSCS, bilateral relations with Greece depended on the outcome of the elections.

²⁷ SDHA, CSA, 1920/49.2 *Εκκλησιαστικά Σερβίας* [Serbian ecclesiastical issues], Kanellopoulos to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Constantinople, 26 August 1919, No. 6482.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Kanellopoulos to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Constantinople, 7 March 1920, No. 1734

²⁹ The impact that the issue of the serbian/yugoslavian zone in the port of Thessaloniki had had on the greek-yugoslav relations during the interwar period is being thoroughly described in the article of Dragan Bakić, "The port of Salonica in Yugoslav Foreign Policy", *Balcanica* XLIII (2012), 191–219.

³⁰ Arhiv Jugoslavije [Archives of Yugoslavia; hereafter: AJ], 336–F-59-XIIG/2, Delegacija Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca na Konferenciji Mira u Parizu, Pašić to Gavrilović, Paris, 17 February 1919, No. 214.

³¹ *Politika*, 10/10/1920.

From the Greek elections (November 1920) to the end of the Greek-Turkish war (August/September 1922)

Liberals won the majority of votes in the elections, but because of the complicated electoral system the United Opposition won a vast majority of seats in Parliament and formed a new government. One of the first moves of the incoming pro-royalist government was to hold a referendum on the return of King Constantine, hated both by the Entente powers and by the KSCS because of his pro-German attitude during the First World War. On 6 December 1920, in a climate of fanaticism and deep political polarization, the referendum was held despite Liberals' abstention. A few days later King Constantine was reinstated triumphantly. The course of events caused considerable concern in Belgrade. The restoration of the pro-German political elite in Greece also had a psychological effect in the KSCS. Thus, their victory was considered as a setback in Greek-Yugoslav relations.

At the same time, the KSCS was coming to an agreement with Italy over Dalmatia. The Treaty of Rapallo signed on 12 November 1920 provided for the creation of the Free State of Fiume and the cession of Zara (Zadar) to Italy, thereby depriving the KSCS of an outlet to the ports of the Adriatic. So, the dependence of the Yugoslav trade on the port of Thessaloniki became even greater. Moreover, the prospect of Aleksandar Stamboliyski's visit to Belgrade in early 1921 was an additional cause for concern for Athens. Following Constantine's return, France had radically changed its policy towards Greece and supported a Yugoslav-Bulgarian rapprochement.³² The combination of all these factors generated in Athens the fear of a diplomatic isolation at a time when the war in Asia Minor was moving towards a new phase.

Yet, Belgrade had good reasons not to change its policy towards Athens. The Yugoslavs believed that Stamboliyski's party, the Bulgarian Agrarian People's Union (BAPU), maintained contacts with the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO), whose demand for an autonomous Macedonia was widening the rift between the two countries. The fact that the local population in Serbian Macedonia voted for the CPY, at IMRO leader's (Todor Aleksandrov) instigation, both in local and in parliamentary elections in 1920 was indicative of Bulgarian influence in the area. Furthermore, the armed action of IMRO in late 1920 and the Protocol of Tirana, i.e. an agreement signed by the Committee of Kosovo and IMRO, led to the closing of the Yugoslav-Bul-

³² *Documents on British Foreign Policy, First Series* [hereafter *DBFP*], vol. XII: *The Balkan States, January 19 – December 31, 1920* (London: HMSO, 1962), No. 488, Memorandum by Mr. Nicolson on future foreign policy towards King Constantine, London, 20 December 1920.

garian border.³³ Thus, although Constantine had not been officially recognized by the Yugoslav government, relations between Athens and Belgrade remained unharmed and Greece was still considered an ally.³⁴ The Bulgarian danger was still the common denominator of Greek-Yugoslav interests. On 11 April 1921 a joint note by Greece, KSCS and Romania was delivered to Sofia accusing the Bulgarian government of encouraging guerrilla activities and demanding urgent measures for the dissolution of revolutionary committees,³⁵ while at the same time Belgrade's Press made hints that the KSCS was planning to take over the mines in Pernik should Bulgaria keep avoiding implementing the Peace Treaties.³⁶ Additionally, contacts between Kemalists and Bulgarian revolutionary organizations, a visit of BAPU members to Ankara and the Bulgarian government's secret communication with Moscow were some of the proofs that Sofia's intentions were not in compliance with the spirit of the Peace Treaties.

At the insistence of both the French and British ambassadors in Belgrade, however, Pašić consented to receive the Bulgarian Minister of Interior, Aleksandar Dimitrov.³⁷ In view of the forthcoming vote on the new Constitution, Pašić wanted to appease the Croatian Peasant Party of Stjepan Radić and the Alliance of Agrarian Workers of Mihajlo Avramović, both supporters of a rapprochement with the Bulgarian Agrarian government.³⁸ Dimitrov assured Pašić that his government had abandoned its predecessors' policy towards Macedonia, informed him that a sum of 40 million levas had been spent on combating komitadjis, and also suggested that joint action should be taken by the two countries' border authorities. However, Dimitrov was not given a warm reception. Pašić pointed out that the time was not yet ripe for the full normalization of bilateral

³³ Spyridon Sfetas, *Makedonien und Interbalkanische Beziehungen 1920–1924* (Munich: Hieronymus, 1992), 66.

³⁴ Živko Avramovski, *Britanci o Kraljevini Jugoslaviji. Godišnji izveštaj Britanskog poslanstva u Beogradu 1921–1938*, vol. I: 1921–1930 (Belgrade: Arhiv Jugoslavije, 1986), 25.

³⁵ Sfetas, *Makedonien und Interbalkanische Beziehungen*, 69–70.

³⁶ *DBFP* vol. XXII: *Central Europe and the Balkans 1921* (London: HMSO, 1980), No. 128, Young to Curzon, Belgrade, 3 March 1921.

³⁷ At this point it should be noted that a Bulgarian representative, Kosta Todorov, had been appointed in Belgrade in September 1920. Todorov was a close associate of Stamboliyski and a firm advocate of Yugoslav-Bulgarian friendship as well. In his first statements he stressed that: "I have come to Belgrade to restore diplomatic relations between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria and to pave the way for a new era of friendship between our countries... I must confess that the war against Serbia was not only criminal but a fratricidal one as well. We must not forget that a man is now working in the opposite direction, a man who, when accused and imprisoned in 1914 because of his pro-Serbian sentiments, stated: 'I am neither Bulgarian nor Serb, I am Yugoslav.'" *Politika*, 9/9/1920. Todorov was referring to Aleksandar Stamboliyski.

³⁸ Sfetas, *Makedonien und Interbalkanische Beziehungen*, 72.

relations and, consequently, he turned down Bulgarian proposals.³⁹ What was more important, though, was that before Dimitrov's visit to Belgrade, the Bulgarian Prime Minister had let his Serbian counterpart know, through the Yugoslav representative in Sofia, Milan Rakić, that Bulgaria was ready to undertake, together with the KSCS, military operations against Greece. Not surprisingly, such a proposal was not even taken seriously by Pašić.⁴⁰

Similar suggestions had been also made by the Turkish side. In May 1921 the Kemalists offered an alliance to the KSCS, according to which the two countries should launch a joint attack against Greece. Turkey would regain Asia Minor and the KSCS would finally obtain an outlet in Thessaloniki. In the Turkish view the Great Powers were too engrossed with the German question to intervene, while Russia, as a Slavic country, would not oppose such a settlement.⁴¹ However, Belgrade kindly refused once again.⁴² Apart from geopolitical distortions which the return of the Turkish factor to the Balkans would entail, Pašić was also anxious about the influence that a victorious Kemalist Turkey might have upon the Muslim population in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbian Macedonia and Kosovo. The fliers found in Skoplje according to which IMRO and Mustafa Kemal were working together for an autonomous Macedonia showed that Belgrade's fears were justified.⁴³

In June 1921 the KSCS and Romania signed a defensive alliance which was extended by a military convention in January 1922. These agreements were parts of a wider alliance, formed by the KSCS, Romania and Czechoslovakia on the basis of bilateral agreements, which is known as Little Entente (*Petite Entente*). Greek representatives in Belgrade and Bucharest had been kept informed of the negotiations and were also satisfied hearing from Take Ionescu, Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, that the Greek-Serbian Treaty of Alliance and the bilateral agreements between Czechoslovakia, Romania and the KSCS were part of the same set.⁴⁴ In January 1922, General Victoras Dousmanis was sent to Belgrade and Bucharest to sound out the position of the Yugoslav and Romanian governments on the possibility of Greece participating in the Yugoslav-

³⁹ Todorović, *Jugoslavija i balkanske države*, 112.

⁴⁰ *DBFP*, vol. XXII: *Central Europe and the Balkans 1921*, No. 181, Peel to Curzon, Sofia, 16 June 1921.

⁴¹ AJ, 370-1-3, Poslanstvo KJ u Turskoj – Carigrad, Ankara, 1921, Chargé d'Affaires in Constantinople to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 8 May 1921.

⁴² *Ibid.*, Pašić to Chargé d'Affaires in Constantinople, Belgrade, 14 May 1921, con. No. 468.

⁴³ *SDHA*, CSA, 1922/12.3 *Μακεδονικό Ζήτημα. Θέσεις των Βαλκανικών Χωρών. Τρόπος δράσης Μακεδονικού Κομιτάτου* [Macedonian Question. Balkan Countries' Views. Macedonian Committee's mode of action], Picheon to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Skoplje, 28 October 1921, No. 1133.

⁴⁴ *DBFP* vol. XXII, No. 209, Grunville to Curzon, Athens, 1 July 1921.

Romanian defensive alliance and the prolongation of the Greek-Serbian Treaty of Alliance.⁴⁵ But sending Dousmanis, an ex-adjutant of King Constantine and ardently pro-German during the First World War, in the mission did not prove to be a wise choice.⁴⁶ However, Dousmanis was given assurances by Pašić that the KSCS would defend the Treaty of Neuilly. As far as the Greek-Turkish conflict was concerned, the Yugoslav government adopted a stance of benevolent neutrality.

In June 1922, on the occasion of the royal wedding between King Alexander Karadjordjević and the Romanian Princess, Maria of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, a Greek delegation made up of the Ministers of Foreign and Military Affairs, Georgios Baldatzis and Nikolaos Theotokis, was sent to Belgrade. The two men raised once more the question of Greece's joining the Little Entente.⁴⁷ The uncertainty about the final outcome of the Greek-Turkish war in Asia Minor was causing great anxiety in Athens about the fate of Western Thrace. That is the reason why the Greek government sought for diplomatic support abroad.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Alexis Kyrrou, *Οι Βαλκανικοί γείτονές μας* [Our Balkan neighbours] (Athens 1962) 162. According to Yugoslav diplomatic sources the purpose of Dousmanis' visit to Bucharest was to lay the foundations of a Greek-Romanian defensive alliance, something that the Romanians ruled out before the war in Asia Minor was over. AJ, 395-7-28 Poslanstvo KJ u Rumuniji – Bukurešt, Yugoslav Embassy to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bucharest, 25 January 1922, No. 47, and highly confidential, 28 January 1922, No. 50. It should also be noted that the first attempt of joining the Yugoslav-Romanian-Czechoslovak coalition had been made by Venizelos in 1920, just after signing the Treaty of Sevres. Venizelos believed that the safest way to secure his achievements was an alliance concluded by the winners, which would restrain revisionist tendencies. But he encountered firm opposition from Edvard Beneš, who was more inclined towards Bulgarian participation. On the other hand, Take Ionescu, who wanted a wider alliance which would extend from the North Sea to the gulf of Thessaloniki, supported Venizelos. The KSCS held an attitude of ambivalence. Although it did not oppose Venizelos' viewpoints, it wished to disassociate Central Europe's issues from the Balkan ones. SDHA, PEA, 1920/3.6, op. cit., Simopoulos to Politis, Prague, 3 August 1920, No. 298; Mavroudis to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Belgrade, 22 July 1920, No. 956, attached to No. 10130 confidential, Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Hellenic Embassy in Paris, Athens, 8 August 1920; Politis to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Paris, 15/28 August 1920, No. 5658

⁴⁶ C. Iordan, *România și relațiile internaționale din sud estul European: probleme ale păcii, securității și cooperării (1919–1924)* (Bucharest: All Istoric, 1999), 60. According to German sources the distrust towards Dousmanis shown by the Yugoslav side was a serious obstacle to the extension of the Treaty of Alliance which was to expire the following year, cf. Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes [hereafter PAAA], Bonn, Akten betreffend politische Beziehungen zwischen, Griechenland und Jugoslawien, R 72 627, B 1 (5.10.1921 – 27.11.1925), German Embassy to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Belgrade, 2 February 1922, No. 126.

⁴⁷ Avramovski, *Britanci o Kraljevini Jugoslaviji*, 94.

⁴⁸ PAAA, R 72 627, B 1, German Embassy to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, 8 May 1922, No. 177.

The Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that the two sides had discussed several matters, such as the status of Western Thrace, the renewal of the Greek-Serbian Treaty of Alliance (1913), the Serbian free zone in the port of Thessaloniki and coordinated action on behalf of Greece, the KSCS and Romania in order to eliminate the activities of komitadjis within their own countries.⁴⁹ Yet, measures were taken only for the latter. It was evident that the Greek-Yugoslav collaboration was limited to coping with Bulgarian revisionism. There were no doubts, thus, that a closer cooperation between Athens and Belgrade was hampered by the Greek involvement in Asia Minor.

From the Greek debacle in Asia Minor (August/September 1922) to the Treaty of Lausanne (July 1923)

Under the pressure of the military disaster, the chaotic and bloody evacuation of Smyrna and the uprooting of hundreds of thousands Greeks from their ancestral homeland in Asia Minor, King Constantine abdicated, for the second time in five years, and was succeeded by his son George II. A new government under Sotirios Krokidas was formed. Yet, the real power was in the hands of the Revolutionary Committee, composed by pro-Venizelist officers (Colonels Nikolaos Plastiras and Stylianos Gonatas, and Commander Dimitrios Fokas), while the reins of Greek foreign policy were given again to Eleftherios Venizelos provided that Greece should consent to the loss of Eastern Thrace, as France persistently wanted. Apart from rapid political changes in Greece, the rise of Benito Mussolini to power in Italy and the divergent attitudes of the French and the British towards Turkey were making up the political context in which Belgrade and Athens were to adjust their policies.

For the KSCS a Turkish comeback to European soil would only have an adverse effect. The 24 September 1922 issue of *Politika* remarked that “to the Italian-Hungarian-Bulgarian chain a Turkish link must also be added”.⁵⁰ Thus, the question of Thrace was of major importance for the Yugoslav officials. Pašić initially opposed the advance of Turkish troops beyond Gallipoli, while Momčilo Ninčić, Yugoslav Minister of Foreign Affairs, concurred with the French stance, which supported the restoration of Turkish rule in Eastern Thrace.⁵¹ Apart from that, for the KSCS it was fundamental that a possible amendment to the status quo in Thrace should not be combined with border change in favour of Bulgaria.⁵²

⁴⁹ *Politika*, 10/6/1922; *Καθημερινή* [Kathimerini], 2/6/1922.

⁵⁰ *Politika*, 24/09/1922.

⁵¹ In the end, however, Pašić aligned with his Minister's position.

⁵² Todorović, *Jugoslavija i balkanske države*, 177–178.

At the same time, Balugdžić in a bid to allay Greek concerns stated that the Yugoslav government would do its utmost to minimize Turkey's territorial gains in Thrace and that the KSCS did not intend to denunciate the Greek-Serbian Treaty of Alliance.⁵³ On the other hand, though, Ninčić finally accepted Stamboliyski's request to visit Belgrade. The rise of fascism in Italy forced Belgrade to reassess its relations with Sofia, given that Rome had been financing guerrilla activities and Bulgarian propaganda in Serbian Macedonia. From the Bulgarian perspective it was believed that after the Greek defeat in Asia Minor the circumstances were favourable for snatching Western Thrace and to that end a rapprochement with the KSCS was indispensable.

That really bothered Greek officials who rushed to arrange a meeting with their Yugoslav counterparts earlier than the Bulgarians. On 5 November 1922 the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nikolaos Politis, visited Belgrade. For Greece it was more necessary than ever before to tighten the relations with its traditional ally. Therefore the purpose of Politis' visit was to secure diplomatic support to the upcoming Conference in Lausanne. Politis was warmly welcomed by Pašić and Ninčić and the talks held in a friendly atmosphere. Several issues, both of economic and political nature, were put on the table. Politis conveyed to Ninčić his government's will to meet its commitments arising from the 1914 Convention on the Serbian transit trade through the port of Thessaloniki and he stressed that a new commercial agreement between the two countries was also needed.⁵⁴ As for political matters, Politis argued that the Greek government had no intentions to expel the Slavophones of Western Macedonia in order to settle Greek refugees from Asia Minor, as the Yugoslav Press had been suggesting.⁵⁵ He also argued that Greece had not so far intervened in favour of the Greek population in Northern Macedonia despite their countless appeals, and that Yugoslav press reports could be considered as interference in the internal affairs of Greece.⁵⁶ Moreover, Politis brought to Ninčić's attention the recent unrest in Nevrokop and suggested joint action with Romania in order to tackle the danger stemming from the Bulgarian komitadjis.⁵⁷ As far as the Bulgarian outlet to the Aegean Sea was concerned, the Greek Minister mentioned that it was his government's intentions to provide further facilitations, regarding the navigation on Evros (Maritsa) river and the railway line Karagatsi-Alexandroupoli (Dedeagach), following the example of the Convention signed for the navigation

⁵³ *Ibid.* 176.

⁵⁴ SDHA, CSA, 1922/17.5 Εξωτερικών και Εσωτερική Πολιτική Σερβίας [Foreign and Domestic Policy of Serbia], Records of the talks between Ninčić, Pašić and Politis, Belgrade, 23 October/5 November 1922.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

on Danube.⁵⁸ For their part, the Yugoslav officials stressed that the Greek government should not pay attention to various rumours spread by the press and that the minority issues between the two countries should be solved by bilateral agreements and not by the intervention of the League of Nations. For the same reason – that is to say to avoid international mediation – the Yugoslav Minister declined Politis' offer for common action against komitadjis. He noted, though, that due to racial kinship the Yugoslav government was obliged to maintain unrelenting focus on the Slavophones of Western Macedonia.⁵⁹ Regarding the Bulgarian outlet to the Aegean, Ninčić outlined that Belgrade would not give its consent to Bulgarian excessive demands and recommended that no initiative should be taken on this particular issue before the opening of the Conference.⁶⁰ In reply to Politis' query about the attitude of the KSCS in case of a new Greek-Turkish conflict, Ninčić gave assurances that Belgrade would not tolerate a Bulgarian assault on Greece,⁶¹ but evaded pledging direct military support to Greece. Finally, King Alexander pointed out that the reorganization of the Greek Army⁶² and the consolidation of the new regime in Athens was of paramount importance not only for Greece but also for the whole Balkan Peninsula.⁶³

A few days later Stamboliyski was received in Belgrade. It was the first time since the Balkan Wars that a Bulgarian Prime Minister visited Serbian capital. In order to gain Yugoslav government's support on the issue of the Bulgarian outlet to the Aegean, Stamboliyski had waived any territorial claims on Serbian Macedonia, renounced the destabilizing activities of the Bulgarian-Macedonian organizations which were turning against the KSCS and promised to take measures against the komitadjis.⁶⁴ For Bulgaria, an outlet, either as an internationalization of a strip of territory from the Bulgarian border to Alexandroupoli or as a form of autonomy for Western Thrace – which would ultimately lead to the annexation to Bulgaria – was interpreted as a territorial one. However, the Yu-

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² One of the most difficult tasks that the Revolutionary Committee had been charged with was to form a capable fighting force from the remnants of the Army of Asia and restore order and discipline in the army. This mission was carried out successfully by General Theodoros Pangalos. Very soon Greece disposed of an army of more than 100,000 soldiers capable of undertaking a new offensive on Eastern Thrace.

⁶³ Ιστορικό Αρχείο Ελευθερίου Βενιζέλου [Historical Archive of Eleftherios Venizelos (HAVE)], I/42/126, Politis to Venizelos, Belgrade, 5 November 1922, No. 212

⁶⁴ Živko Avramovski, "Makedonsko pitanje u jugoslovensko-bugarskim odnosima od 1918. do 1925. godine", in *Jugoslovensko-bugarski odnosi u XX veku*, vol. I, ed. Živko Avramovski (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju; Narodna knjiga, 1980), 162.

goslav officials doubted Stamboliyski's competence and decisiveness to impose his will in his own country. Besides that, the possibility of an autonomous Western Thrace entailed a lot of dangers for Serbian Macedonia, since it would infringe on the Treaty of Neuilly. In fact, during the Peace Conference in Lausanne Ninčić stated that "...the word autonomy should not be used in the Balkans."⁶⁵

The Conference in Lausanne opened in late November 1922. The Turkish delegation was highly assertive, raising territorial claims in Karaagach and Didymoteicho and demanding a plebiscite for Western Thrace. Likewise, the Bulgarian delegation put forward autonomy as the solution for Western Thrace, or at least its neutralization under international command, as the most appropriate way to ensure an outlet to the Aegean Sea, rejecting all alternatives presented by Venizelos. More or less the same also went for Turkey. As the Greek-Turkish differences seemed irreconcilable, the resumption of warfare was still a plausible scenario. In this fluctuating and uncertain situation, Venizelos sought to form a common front with the KSCS. In late December he submitted an informal proposal to the Yugoslav ambassador in Paris and member of the Yugoslav delegation in Lausanne, Miroslav Spalajković, according to which Greece was willing to cede the city of Florina with its districts to the KSCS in exchange for military cooperation against Turkey.⁶⁶ In particular, Venizelos' plan provided for a Yugoslav mediation to Paris and London in favour of Greece and for the deployment of two Yugoslav divisions (or one division and heavy artillery) across the Greek-Turkish front and of another two divisions to the Yugoslav-Bulgarian border. In case of success Greece would regain Eastern Thrace up to Çatalca and the Florina district would be granted to the KSCS.⁶⁷ Despite its initial objections due to the cession of Greek territory, the Revolutionary Committee gave its consent to Venizelos' plan.⁶⁸ In late January Lieutenant General Alexandros Mazarakis-Ainian was sent to Belgrade carrying a letter of Venizelos to Pašić with the aforementioned content. But Pašić avoided meeting him. According to Mazarakis, Pašić's reluctance to receive him should be imputed to French intervention.⁶⁹ Reckoning that a new round of the Greek-Turkish war in Eastern Thrace could lead to the Soviet invasion of Romania with the prospect of turn-

⁶⁵ Paximadopoulos-Stavrinou, *Η Δυτική Θράκη*, 216, fn. 19.

⁶⁶ Υπουργείο των Εξωτερικών, 1919–1940, *Ελληνικά Διπλωματικά Έγγραφα*, τ. 3 [Υπουργείο τον Eksoterikon, Greek Diplomatic Documents, vol. III] (Athens 1994), Venizelos to Alexandris, Lausanne, 18/31 December 1922, No. 216.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Venizelos to Alexandris, Lausanne, 8/21 January 1923, No. 321, ed. n. 408–409, and Venizelos to Alexandris, Lausanne, 9/22 January 1923, No. 323. See also HAVE, I/43/16α, Venizelos to Alexandris, Lausanne, 19 January 1923, No. 484.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Plastiras, Gonatas, Alexandris to Venizelos, Athens, 19 December 1922/1 January, 1923, No. 221.

⁶⁹ Alexandrou Mazaraki-Ainianos, *Απομνημονεύματα* [Memoirs] (Athens: Ikaros, 1948), 330.

ing a localized conflict into an international crisis, French policy-makers exercised their influence on the Yugoslav government to dodge military adventures.⁷⁰

Apart from that, the Yugoslavs did not intend to come to any political agreement with Greece unless the issue of the free zone in the port of Thessaloniki was solved.⁷¹ It was more than obvious that the circumstances favoured the Yugoslav cause and that it was the most opportune time for the KSCS to obtain tangible concessions. Having consulted with his government in Belgrade, Živojin Balugdžić addressed a memorandum to the Greek Minister of National Finance, Andreas Hadjikyriakos, which set forth the Yugoslav position (the free trade zone should be extended for the needs of bilateral trade with Greece; joint Greek-Yugoslav railway stations should be established in Thessaloniki and Gevgeli; and Yugoslav customs officials should operate in the free zone which should be granted to the KSCS).⁷² A group of Greek experts was charged with the task to assess the Yugoslav memorandum and come up with a plan. The Greek side acquiesced to ceding part of Thessaloniki's port but insisted that the customs, police and judicial authorities remain under Greek jurisdiction in that part as well. In order to maintain its sovereignty the Greek government was also planning, as an alternative, to hand over the management of the free zone to a private Yugoslavian enterprise.⁷³ As expected, Belgrade was not satisfied and, in fact, it did not fail to express its discontent. The statements that Balugdžić gave to the *Politika* on 11 February 1923 were most characteristic. In reference to the question of the Serbian free zone, the Yugoslav Minister in Athens stressed that: "...it was the fulfilment of an obligation in the framework of the Greek-Serbian Alliance as a condition for the recognition of Greek sovereignty over Thessaloniki... Thessaloniki had been saved in the Second Balkan War by common efforts... Complete freedom for our import and export trade must not be seen as a concession."⁷⁴ He also believed that Athens had no choice but to relent,⁷⁵ while both the Greek and Yugoslav Press were stressing that the Yugoslav government would exert much more pressure on Greece on the issue of the Thessaloniki port as long as the route to the Adriatic was cut off by Italy.⁷⁶ At the same time

⁷⁰ AJ, 395-9-96, Ninčić to Yugoslav Embassy in Bucharest, Belgrade, 15 January 1923, No. 339.

⁷¹ *DBFP*, vol. XXIV: *Central Europe and the Balkans 1922-23* (London: HMSO, 1983), Young to Curzon, Belgrade, 4 January 1923, No. 236.

⁷² See also Bakić, "The port of Salonica in Yugoslav Foreign Policy 1919-1941", 198.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, Bentinck to Curzon, Athens, 10 March 1923, No. 294.

⁷⁴ *Politika*, 23/02/1923.

⁷⁵ AJ, 334-9-29, Ministarstvo inostranih poslova KJ, Balugdžić to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, 24 December 1922.

⁷⁶ *DBFP*, vol. XXIV: *Central Europe and the Balkans 1922-23*, Young to Curzon, Belgrade, 4 January 1923, No. 238, fn. 1; *Ελεύθερο Βήμα* [Eleftheron Vima], 21/03/1923.

Yugoslav-Bulgarian negotiations about the question of komitadjis, whose action had become uncontrollable, were launched in Niš. As in the past, the likelihood of a South-Slavic rapprochement between Belgrade and Sofia fuelled anxiety in Athens.

In view of the re-opening of the Conference in Lausanne, the new Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs, Apostolos Alexandris, visited Belgrade on 14 April 1923 in order to be informed about the negotiations in Niš and also to obtain Yugoslav views on the questions that were to be further discussed in Lausanne. Alexandris was expressly reassured that the talks in Niš were of a technical nature and that no political agreement had been reached between the two sides.⁷⁷ Apart from that, Pašić and Ninčić reiterated that the KSCS should remain neutral in case of a Greek-Turkish war and that it was also willing to make a diplomatic demarche to Sofia so as to ward off an attack in the rear of the Greek army. The Yugoslav officials also stressed to Alexandris that the Yugoslav delegation would stand up for Greece on the question of the war reparations which Ankara persistently demanded and that the KSCS would not tolerate any solution for Western Thrace which would not be acceptable to Athens.⁷⁸ In return, Alexandris demonstrated good will to address Yugoslav demands regarding the free zone in the port of Thessaloniki on condition that Greek sovereignty was preserved. In particular, the Greeks accepted the establishment of Yugoslav custom authorities within the zone, but they insisted that the harbourmaster had police and judicial jurisdiction over the zone. Besides, the Greek side ruled out the possibility of the appointment of a Yugoslav vice-harbourmaster, which, for the Greeks, would indicate a form of a Greek-Yugoslav condominium over the port. The two sides came to terms on 10 May 1923 when the Convention on the Regulation of Transit via Salonica was signed at Belgrade. Unlike the 1914 Convention the new one contained an explicit reference to a “Serbian Free Zone”.⁷⁹ The zone was an integral part of Greek territory but labelled as “Serbian” and based on the legislation of the KSCS. The employees were citizens of the KSCS and were appointed by its government.

The agreement had a positive effect on the Greek cause in Lausanne. After the Convention had been signed the Yugoslav delegation sided with Venizelos in rejecting the Turkish demands for war reparations.⁸⁰ However, in mid-May 1923 while the negotiations in Lausanne seemed to have reached an impasse the Yugoslav government refused to make a demarche to Sofia as had been prom-

⁷⁷ Sfetas, *Makedonien und Interbalkanische Beziehungen*, 163.

⁷⁸ DBFP, vol. XXIV: *Central Europe and the Balkans 1922–23*, Young to Curzon, Belgrade, 12 April 1923, No. 325.

⁷⁹ Paximadopoulou-Stavrinou, *Η Δυτική Θράκη*, 242, fn. 106.

⁸⁰ Υπουργείο των Εξωτερικών, 1919–1940, Kaklamanos to Alexandris, Lausanne, 7 May 1923, No. 520.

ised to Alexandris. Ninčić justified his government's decision by stressing that Belgrade did not desire to encourage bellicose tendencies⁸¹ in Greece but, on the contrary, to preserve peace in the area. He reasserted that the KSCS would remain neutral as regards the Greek-Turkish conflict but underlined that similar assurances would not be given either to Turkey or to Bulgaria.⁸² In other words the Yugoslav government intended to create some sort of peer pressure on all concerned and also to highlight that the resumption of warfare was the worst-case scenario. Finally, the Greek-Turkish dispute was settled after a personal agreement between Venizelos and İsmet İnönü, head of the Turkish delegation in Lausanne. Venizelos consented to the cession of Karaagach to Turkey and in return İnönü abandoned all claims to war reparations. In this way Venizelos avoided a war which would probably have had unspeakable repercussions for Greece and at the same time posed a major obstacle to the Bulgarian outlet to the Aegean Sea, since that should now pass through Turkish territory.

Conclusion

For Greece the Treaty of Lausanne (24 June 1923) signified the end of an era. The dream of a *Greece of two continents and five seas* with Constantinople as its capital had faded away once and for all. The entombment of the *Megali Idea* drove Greek foreign policy in completely different directions. Territorial integrity and national security were now the main priorities of the Greek governments which at the same time were facing political instability, economic devastation and social upheaval caused by the influx of more than one million refugees from Asia Minor, Eastern Thrace and the Black Sea. By contrast, the KSCS, despite its domestic problems, had an enhanced role in European and, particularly, Balkan politics. In such circumstances the traditional Greek-Serbian/Yugoslav friendship was put to the test. In November 1924 Belgrade denounced the Greek-Serbian Treaty of Alliance (1913) on the pretext of the Greek-Bulgarian protocol on minorities signed in September 1924. Given that the Yugoslav of-

⁸¹ It is true that the high-ranking officers of the Revolutionary Committee were urging Venizelos to let them undertake military operations even without Yugoslav assistance. But Venizelos ruled out that possibility claiming that without the approval of the Entente Powers and Bulgarian neutrality every military initiative taken by the Greek Army should be considered as a national suicide. *Ibid.*, Venizelos to Alexandris, Lausanne, 2/15 January 1923, No. 296. See also HAVE, I/43/11, Venizelos to Alexandris (via London), Lausanne, 1/14 January 1923, No. 829.

⁸² Υπουργείο των Εξωτερικών, 1919–1940, Mavroudis to Venizelos, Belgrade, 24 May 1923, No. 578 and 579; AJ 395–9–95, Ninčić to Yugoslav Embassy in Bucharest, Belgrade, 24 May 1923, No. 219.

ficials had been aware of the content of the Greek-Bulgarian negotiations, one may conclude that the real reason for the denunciation was that the KSCS⁸³ wanted to impose its views regarding several bilateral issues upon Greece by negotiating a new alliance treaty with the Greek government from a position of strength. Apparently, Greece's weakness worked in the favour of such a manoeuvre. Since then bilateral relations between Athens and Belgrade entered a cold period. It was only after Venizelos' return to power in 1928 and the conclusion of a Greek-Italian Treaty of amity, reconciliation and juridical settlement that the policy-makers in the KSCS started again to look upon their Greek counterparts as equal partners.

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⁸³ See also Bakić, "The port of Salonica in Yugoslav Foreign Policy 1919–1941", 198–202.

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