

“From the Mürzsteg Agreement to the Epirus Front, 1903-1913”

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The outcome of the Eastern crisis of 1897 had determined the status quo of the Balkans for the next ten years. Therefore, the Powers involved in the Balkans (Austria-Hungary, Russia, Great Britain, Germany, Italy and France) supported the preservation of the legal status quo set by the Berlin Conference (1878), while promoting their interests in the region in every way, despite the open confrontation between them in other geographic areas. The understanding concluded between Austria-Hungary and Russia in May 1897, to put the Balkan question ‘on ice’, was followed by a similar treaty with Italy in November, at Monza, pledging to maintain the status-quo. The political concern of the Great Powers for the Balkans during the first decade of the 20th century remained circumstantial, while the Balkan states tried to consolidate their existence, creating perspectives for further territorial gains at the expense of their neighbors and most of all of the Ottoman Empire. The motivation for this, varied from ethnographical, geopolitical and economic realities to historical and cultural rights.

The Mürzsteg Agreement

In the period before 1897, the Hellenic-Ottoman relations were mainly troubled by the Cretan Question¹. Both the Cretan and the Macedonian questions were closely connected and since after Crete gained virtual autonomy, the Bulgarians demanded the same right for Macedonia. Greece felt increasingly threatened by Ottoman and Slav nationalism and its official policy shifted, depending on which of these two threats the government considered predominant. The Bulgarian aim of promoting autonomy of Macedonia, as a first stage towards a possible annexation, started with a religious and cultural propaganda though soon armed guerrilla bands took action². Conditions of law and order steadily deteriorated. A failure of a revolt in north-eastern Macedonia, in October 1902, aroused Europe. In February 1903, the Foreign Ministers of Russia and Austria-Hungary (Lamsdorff and Galuchowski), reached an agreement of reforms, called the ‘Vienna scheme’, which was accepted by the Porte. It envisaged, among other measures, the appointment of an Inspector General to the

Macedonian vilayets and the appointment of Christians in the police and the gendarmerie, in proportion to the respective population. Initially, the newly appointed Inspector General Hilmi Pasha was successful and, during 1903 there were some encouraging signs of progress. But, reform was soon impeded since the guerrilla bands activity culminated in the Illinden uprising of August 1903, in Monastir. Under the banner of Macedonian autonomy, the uprising spread quickly towards Adrianople and was not entirely suppressed till November. To save what could still be saved, the Russian and Austrian Ministers met again in September, at Mürzsteg, and reached a new agreement which provided for: (i) attaching two civil agents, an Austrian and a Russian, to the Inspector General; (ii) entrusting the reorganisation of the gendarmerie to a foreign general; (iii) "a modification of the territorial delimitation of the administrative units in view of a more regular grouping of the different nationalities", as soon as order was established; and (iv) the reorganisation of the administrative and judicial institutions and the admission of Christians to them. Additionally, a number of small Christian and Muslim committees would be set up to investigate matters in the case of various incidents, the Turkish government would compensate the Christians who lost their properties, while the destroyed villages would be exempted from any taxes for a year. Of all the points of the Mürzsteg program, only the one providing for the reorganisation of the gendarmerie met with some success. The program as a whole, especially point three, bore the seeds of its own failure; for all the rival nationalities attempted to benefit from the promised rearrangement of the administrative units. With an eye to point three, a fierce struggle began, as Bulgarian, Greek and Serbian bands tried to stake out areas of exclusive control for their respective nationals in the four Macedonian vilayets of Kossovo, Monastir, Thessaloniki and Adrianople. The Greeks interpreted the Mürzsteg program as a guarantee against autonomy and firstly, decided to assist the Ottoman authorities in ensuring its success. Nonetheless, the reforms allowed the Bulgarian guerrilla bands the breathing space to recover after the failed uprising but returned the following spring with greater zeal³. Indeed, by 1904 Greece was confronted with the dilemma of whether to continue to maintain a passive attitude towards Bulgarian encroachment in Macedonia, and simply confine itself to protests directed at the Great Powers, or whether to undertake action. The second view prevailed and from that year on the response became indisputable. The activities and hostilities virtually expanded for the

four coming years; all means of unconventional warfare were used, while the Greek government created an armed defensive organisation, supported by officers, active guerrilla and religious leaders, along with distinguished personalities from the country's intellectual and political life⁴.

Venturing to the Balkan Wars

The expansion of Austria-Hungary to the south-east, through the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908, and the Young Turks revolution in Thessaloniki in June of the same year, radically changed the existing situation in the Balkans. The Young Turks led a rebellion against the authoritarian rule of the Ottoman sultan claiming a regime that would give liberty and equality to all the nationalities within the empire. In reality, its aims included the prevention of further European power involvement in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire.

Under these conditions, the idea of a rapprochement of the Balkan states in order jointly to face the new danger, and to achieve their national goals without the intervention of the Great Powers, began to gain ever more ground. The Italian-Turkish War of 1911 revealed the weaknesses of the Ottoman army, despite the efforts of the German military mission and the Young Turks to upgrade it, and accelerated developments in the Balkans. In spite of the anti-Ottoman feelings of the Balkan states and their common aspiration to broaden their lands to the detriment of Turkey, they came up against historical memories, ecclesiastical controversies, ethnic conflicts and territorial claims. Russia, after its failure towards a revision of the status of the Straits, re-activated its Balkan policy, no longer in terms of alliance with Turkey but through an alliance between the Balkan states to turn against it. Each Balkan state understood that it could not stand up by itself against a yet military strong Ottoman Empire in case of armed conflict, thus cooperation among the states was necessary. Simultaneously, Greece embarked on an intense diplomatic campaign, since it had become apparent that she alone could not successfully confront the Ottoman Empire militarily, nor did Athens expect that it could unilaterally force it to accede to Greek demands. Conditions were conducive to a diplomatic initiative, as a spirit of conciliation and mutual understanding had already begun to take hold among the rulers of the Christian states of the Balkans. A rapprochement between Greece and

Bulgaria was achieved rapidly and reflected the prevailing mood in both countries, which was conducive to cooperation. Nonetheless, the Greco-Bulgarian treaty did not contain terms regarding the division of territories that would be liberated. Bulgaria simply expected the Hellenic fleet to prevent the transport of Turkish troops to Europe and did not want to commit itself to any territorial distribution. By contrast, the Greek government hoped that the Hellenic Army, now completely re-organized, would be able to liberate the Greek territories of Macedonia and Epirus in time⁵. Based on the demand and supervision of Russia, there took place negotiations with a view to joint action between Serbia, Bulgaria and Montenegro. Therefore, by the beginning of autumn 1912, the four Christian Balkan states, although they had not signed a common defense pact, were in solidarity and of united purpose against the Ottoman Empire.

Greece did not sign any treaty or military agreement with Serbia or Montenegro. Only after the war against Turkey began did Greece and Serbia agree to exchange representatives to their General Headquarters, in order to co-ordinate operations. Various border incidents and provocative actions by the Ottoman Empire directed against the Balkan states led the Great Powers to advise moderation. Later, aiming to keep Austria-Hungary from intervening in the conflict, they declared that they would not allow any territorial changes to the regions of European Turkey in the event of war. The allied governments of Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia ignored the warning of the Great Powers and delivered in common an ultimatum to the Turkish government, demanding radical reforms and autonomy for the ethnic groups in the territories of European Ottoman Empire. Once the deadline for a response passed, they proclaimed war: Serbia, and Bulgaria on October, 3 1912 and Greece on October, 5 1912. Montenegro had preceded the others by declaring war on September, 25 1912⁶.

The Balkan Wars

The operations against the Turks in Macedonia began on October, 5 1912 and lasted approximately two months⁷. During this brief period of time, the Hellenic Army under the command of Crown Prince Constantine engaged in many victorious battles and utterly defeated the opposing Turkish forces, liberating the greater part of Macedonia

and the islands of the North Aegean. The high point of this period came within a few days after the outbreak of the war, with the unconditional surrender of Thessaloniki.

The bulk of the Hellenic Army (seven Infantry divisions, one Cavalry brigade, and six Evzone battalions) had assembled in Thessaly; the Greek government allocated only a small part of its forces to Epirus⁸, in the region of Arta (amounting to eight Infantry battalions, six Artillery batteries, and one Cavalry battalion) in order to ensure the borders by taking limited offensive initiatives. By the end of October, in spite of the Turkish Army's superiority in forces and means the Army of Epirus succeeded in liberating significant areas and in repelling the Turks back to Ioannina.

In the meantime, operations on the other Balkan fronts had developed rapidly, and the allied forces gained decisive victories. The Field Army of Thessaly⁹, after liberating Thessaloniki on October, 26 turned the main part of its forces to the region of Florina-Monastir, where the Serbs were descending from the north. Further west, the Montenegrins had reached Scutari (Skodra), while other Serbian forces were heading in a sweeping movement towards Durazzo, which they occupied on November, 17. On the other side of the peninsula, in eastern Thrace, the Bulgarians had reached Tsatalca (October, 31) and had begun to lay siege to Adrianople. In order to avoid complete annihilation Turkey soon was forced to ask for a cessation of hostilities.

The Epirus Front

From ancient times, Epirus, together with Macedonia, formed northern Greece, of which the northwestern corner reached the Acroceraunian mountains and the Genusus river. Hecataeus of Miletus (545-475 BC), historian and geographer even before Herodotus, identifies Oricum as a port of Epirus. Many years later, Strabo (67 BC-23AD), who crossed the valley of the Genusus in his travels, confirms that the Epirots lived to the right (south) of the Egnatian Way, while the Illyrians lived to the left (north) of it¹⁰. Many other historians and geographers of antiquity, Thucydides, Scylax¹¹, Polybius, Pausanias, Claudius Ptolemy¹², the Romans Pliny and Pomponius, the Byzantine Procopius¹³ and others, repeat the same information. The Epirots were conscious of their tribal descent; they took part in the Hellenic overseas campaigns,

such as that against Troy¹⁴, as they also took part in the panhellenic festivals and athletic games which were held at regular intervals at Isthmus, Nemea, Delphi and, the most famous of all, at Olympia¹⁵. Aristotle states that Epirus, the district around Dodona, was the first region to be called Hellas and its inhabitants Hellenes, adding, in fact, that this was where the Greeks were first called Graikoi, a name that the Romans would later spread through Western Europe¹⁶.

In the eve of the Balkan Wars, October 1912, the mission initially given to the commander of the Army of Epirus, Lieutenant General Constantine Sapountzakes, was to ensure the borders by taking limited offensive initiatives, in proportion to the available forces and existing means¹⁷. By the end of October, in spite of the Ottoman army's superiority in forces and means (nine active army battalions, nine reserve battalions, eight artillery batteries, and a battalion of cavalry) the Army of Epirus succeeded in liberating Philippias and Preveza, seizing a strong defensive area around, and finally, repelling the Ottomans back to the fortified area of Ioannina. The left (western) flank of the army was covered by the vigorous action of bands of local volunteers. These volunteer bands, reinforced by a company of infantry, reached Manoliasa by October, 22¹⁸. The Army of Epirus also had been considerably strengthened during this period by the arrival in the field of operations of the Independent Regiment of Cretans, as well as by many Cretan volunteer bands (Scouts).

The Greek government, aiming to the rapid liberation of Ioannina and the advance of the Hellenic Army to the Acroceraunian line before the end of operations, ordered certain independent supporting operations on the Ionian and Adriatic coastline of Epirus. In order to bring to a decisive end the situation in Epirus more generally, and because the army there was not in a position to complete this mission on time, on account of its limited resources, the government decided to reinforce it, using troops from the field army operating in western Macedonia. This was now possible, after the positive development of operations there. Consequently, the Field Army of Macedonia ordered the transport by steamship of Division II from Thessaloniki to Preveza, which commenced on November, 16 and was completed by the 25¹⁹. The delay in dispatching this division, combined with other impediments (bad weather,

poor road network, difficult terrain, etc.), naturally had negative effects on the development of operations in Epirus.

The operation for the liberation of Cheimarra had been planned as an independent operation that was to commence at the beginning of mobilization²⁰. It was to form the starting point for other supporting operations, for the quickest possible advance of Greek troops into the northern regions of Epirus²¹. Its success was based on the superiority of the Hellenic fleet over that of the Ottoman, and the anticipated decisive support of the Greek population of Cheimarra. At the beginning of October 1912, Major of the Gendarmerie Spyros Spyromelios, whose roots were from Cheimarra, arrived in Corfu, with a mission to arm the inhabitants of the northern regions of Epirus and to form a band of volunteers. He also received orders from the Greek government to communicate with the local Albanian beys (notables) in northern Epirus, to bring about a joint uprising of the inhabitants against the Ottomans. Simultaneously, the commander of the Army of Epirus was ordered to extend all possible assistance to Spyromelios for the completion of his mission. The Ottoman government in the meantime, in order to avoid the complete destruction of the Turkish army in the Balkans, submitted cease-fire proposals towards the warring states, and asked for the commencement of negotiations leading to termination of hostilities. The Greek government immediately realized the inherent dangers of this manoeuvre for the fate of Hellenism in Epirus. Acceptance of a truce, especially without previously agreed upon terms, would be acceptable only after the Hellenic Army had occupied territory reaching to the furthest limits of Greek national claims to the north²². On November, 2 the commander of the Army of Epirus received urgent orders from the Ministry of the Army, for the swift occupation of Cheimarra by the band of volunteers led by Major Spyromelios, in two days time at the latest. Consequently, in early November, Spyromelios band along with 200 Cretan volunteers, after the surrender of the Ottoman garrison, entered Cheimarra, raised the Greek flag and called all the people to arms, in order to defend their liberty.

Spyromelios, well-versed in Albanian affairs, skilfully handled the negotiations with the Turk-Albanian notables of the region that were up to that point devoted to the Ottoman Empire, and faithfully identified with its fate. They knew about the Muslim

autonomist movement of the Albanian nationalists, but had not yet directly been influenced by Italian and Austrian propaganda on the issue of founding an independent Albanian state. During negotiations they accepted to join the Greek state, as soon as the army arrived and was in a position to safeguard their honor and property. They however did not accept the presence of volunteer bands in their villages. Only those Muslim villages closest to Cheimarra accepted being incorporated militarily in the Cheimarra Headquarters, and, in fact, to prove their reliability they sent there a number of their co-religionists as hostages²³. Spyromelios, in telegraphed reports to Lieutenant General Sapountzakes and to Venizelos, requested reinforcements of regular army troops and at the same time proposed a landing of a relatively small force at Valona, as soon as possible²⁴. His requests gave the Headquarters of the Army of Epirus the necessary opening to renew their previous proposals for supporting operations at the rear of the Ottoman Army, synchronized with the general attack against Ioannina, which would begin as soon as Division II reached Epirus²⁵.

On November, 15 the Ministry informed the Army of Epirus that political reasons made the occupation of Valona urgently imperative, and requested to be informed regarding the force and the time of the landing²⁶. Between November, 15/28 1912, the leader of the Turk-Albanian autonomists, Ismail Kemal Vljoara arrived by Austrian steamship, landed in Valona, and declared the independence of Albania. Under the guidance of Italy and Austria-Hungary he formed a temporary Albanian administration, aiming to facilitate in prolonging the resistance by the Ottoman Army besieged in Ioannina and to attempt to retake Cheimarra. Major Spyromelios telegraphed the Prime Minister and the Commander of the Army of Epirus on November, 18 and 21, notifying them of the capture of Durazzo by the Serbian Army. Furthermore, he returned to his proposals for immediate landing of even small regular army forces supported by volunteers at Valona and requested the same number of forces for the landing at Agioi Saranta. This small force acting swiftly would, in his opinion, paralyze every movement and certainly would force the Albanians into complete submission²⁷.

After the liberation of Thessaloniki, the Field Army of Macedonia turned towards western Macedonia. The Ministry of the Army recommended Crown Prince Constantine, to coordinate his offensive operations in the region of Monastir with the corresponding ones of the Serbs, with the objective to resolve the situation rapidly and to capture the Ottoman army that was withdrawing south. According to the government's views there was a danger that the respective forces might slip away and head towards Epirus to reinforce their garrison in Ioannina²⁸. The Ministry of the Army brought up again the same issue during operations in the context of the anticipated armistice between the Balkan allies and the Ottoman Empire. In this case also, the Ministry once again stressed the importance, from the political viewpoint, of having the Hellenic Army present in the area of Monastir. The prospects were shaping up well for the capitulation and surrender jointly to the Greeks and the Serbs of the Ottoman field army, which was withdrawing. The liberation of Korytsa would also follow before the conclusion of the armistice²⁹. The adverse weather conditions and the great distances involved resulted in Monastir being captured by the Serbs before the arrival of the Hellenic Army. The Commander of the Field Army of Macedonia informed the Ministry on November, 8 that it would be impossible to continue the advance for the next fifteen days, because of the inclement weather, the rough terrain, and the necessity to provide supplies to the units and allow them to rest³⁰. The Ministry, insisting on the implementation of the government's decisions, responded that it considered it expedient for two divisions to be allocated in order first to liberate Korytsa and then the cities of western Macedonia (Florina, Kastoria, Grevena, etc.) that were still occupied by the enemy. The other three divisions would return to Thessaloniki. From there one would be reallocated to Epirus, unless General Headquarters considered it preferable to send to Epirus by road, via Metsovo, a division that operated at the southern-most section of the Field Army's zone of operations³¹.

In the meantime however, it was announced that the Serbian army would not continue its operations further south than Monastir. On November, 17 an armistice was agreed between Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro and the Ottoman Empire. Greece, considering the terms of the armistice incompatible with its interests, would continue operations on its own. The Field Army reported to the Ministry of the Army that it did not

consider the continuation of operations towards Korytsa expedient, if it was established by November, 18 since the greater part of the Ottoman field army had retreated towards Ioannina. The government yielded in the face of new developments, as the assembly of a significant part of the army in Thessaloniki was essential, in view of the planned landing in Gallipoli peninsula for the forcing of the Dardanelles Straits. On November, 19 a Field Army Section was established, comprising Divisions III, V, VI and the 1st Cavalry Regiment, with a mission to secure the areas of Kastoria and Florina. In case the Turks would attempt to advance on Florina or Kastoria, the Field Army Section would launch a counterattack³². Intelligence indicated that the forces of the Ottoman army that had remained in the area of Korytsa³³ were estimated to be thirteen infantry battalions (between ten and twelve thousand men). As the Serbs had ceased operations, the largest part of the Ottoman troops had occupied positions facing the Greek forces, which they harassed with continuous skirmishes. On December, 6 the Greek troops continued to advance westward, in spite of the rough terrain and enemy resistance on the slopes of snow-covered Morava. In the evening hours they reached Korytsa and were deployed immediately east of the town. After the liberation of Cheimarra (November, 5) and Korytsa (December, 7), two major bastions in northern Epirus had been recovered by the Hellenic Army.

In view of the planned general attack for the liberation of Ioannina, the Ministry of the Army ordered significant forces to be forwarded in order to reinforce the Metsovo Detachment, aiming to support the efforts of the Army of Epirus from the direction of Driskos, Ioannina. By November 19, an infantry battalion, one artillery battery from Athens, the Western Macedonia Detachment (four battalions of infantry and a band of Cretan volunteers), the Garibaldine Corps (about 1,300 men), and the Greek Redshirt Corps (two battalions, a total force of approximately 1,100 men) had all assembled in the area of Metsovo³⁴. According to orders from the Army of Epirus, these forces³⁵ would have to occupy by the morning hours of November, 26 the Driskos line, just east of Ioannina, and then proceed to cut off the Turkish advance to the north. On November, 29 the Greek forces launched the scheduled attack against the Turks, who, though initially surprised, countered with strong resistance. The Greek troops however, continued their determined attack, closely supported by the artillery. After a raging battle lasting through to the afternoon, the attacking forces succeeded in

overcoming the Turks at bayonet point, and forced them into a disorderly retreat³⁶. The following day the Hellenic army continued its offensive efforts, in order to exploit its success, but came up against the fortified position of Ioannina and after a four-day battle, was forced to suspend any further attack. A period of inactivity followed at the front, until the Army of Epirus was reinforced with additional troops from Macedonia; operations in Macedonia had been completed in the meantime, and more forces now could be thus released.

The Greek forces, having already repulsed consecutive Turkish counterattacks and after being reinforced since mid-December by Divisions IV and VI from the Macedonian front, initiated a new attack on January, 7 1913. The main effort, assumed by the newly-formed Epirus Division, was directed against Bizani. The Greek offensive continued on the following day. The weather deteriorated dramatically; this, combined with strong enemy resistance, led to the progressive weakening of the attack until the front finally was stabilized before the enemy forts³⁷. On January, 10 by governmental decision, Commander in Chief, Crown Prince Constantine, personally assumed command of all the forces in Epirus, as well as the direction of all operations taking place there. His first concern was to take the necessary measures to reinforce, re-supply and permit the units to rest. A wide-ranging reorganization also took place and contributed to better exploitation of the combat effectiveness of the divisions³⁸.

On February, 15 General Headquarters reassessed the situation and modified the plan of operation, deciding to direct the main attack towards the western part of the fortified area of Ioannina³⁹. The Army of Epirus included a total of 762 officers and 40,647 enlisted men with forty-eight machine guns and ninety-three artillery guns. The Ottoman forces comprised four divisions, with a total strength of 30,000 men and 112 guns. On February, 20 at first light, a general attack was unleashed against the enemy's fortified area forcing Esat Pasha, the garrison commander, to offer the unconditional surrender of his army⁴⁰. The relevant protocol was signed on the morning of 21 February, and on the following day the Hellenic Army entered the liberated city⁴¹. The liberation of Ioannina, not only crushed the enemy and resulted in the capture of all kinds of war materiel, but also had raised the nation's morale and

prestige abroad. Greeks everywhere accepted the news with relief and genuine elation, while the international press praised the Hellenic army in the most flattering terms, characterizing the event a great victory and a triumph of Greek tactics.

On February, 22 immediately following the liberation of Ioannina, Venizelos, as Prime Minister and Minister of the Army, informed the Commander in Chief Crown Prince Constantine that paramount political interests deemed it necessary to continue the advance with a part of the forces, in order to liberate the rest of Epirus up to the line which formed the limits of national territorial claims⁴². At the same time the bulk of the army would assemble in Thessaloniki to deal with the threat developing as a result of the Bulgarian expansionist ambitions. The national territorial claims in Epirus, according to the official proclamation by the Greek government were limited by a line running from the bay of Valona, through Kleisoura, to Ohrid lake⁴³. Once the Hellenic army reached this line, two divisions would remain in Epirus in order to mop up and secure the area. General Headquarters, wanting to adapt military activity to the new policies and national requirements, ordered the reorganization and redeployment of the forces. On February, 28 the Hellenic army began its advance into the northern areas of Epirus. On March, 3 Division VIII continued its advance towards Argyrokastro after dispatching an Evzone regiment in the direction of Delvino. At the same day, the 1st Cavalry Regiment, which was covering the division's movement, entered Argyrokastro, where it was enthusiastically greeted by the Greek inhabitants of that city, while the Evzone regiment entered Delvino as well.

On March, 5 the covering troops of Division VIII, moving towards Tepelene found themselves under heavy enemy artillery fire. By the time the advance guard troops had been deployed, they were informed that the Ottoman army had abandoned Tepelene and was retreating towards Berat. The 1st Cavalry Regiment entered the town, where it found five field artillery guns abandoned by the enemy. The division moved forward two battalions to Tepelene and encamped⁴⁴. Division III had captured Erseka and Leskovik in the area of Korytsa by February, 23 following orders of General Headquarters. Divisional troops entered and occupied Premeti on February, 27 after receiving intelligence from the divisional cavalry indicating that Ottoman forces there had withdrawn. In order to reinforce the division, a detachment of

Division V from the area of Konitsa was ordered to assembly to the area of Korytsa. Troops of the 6th Regiment, supported by divisional artillery, continued their forward movement towards the enemy positions, successfully negotiating the difficult terrain. The enemy artillery ceased firing, and at about the same time small enemy forces were observed moving north. The 12th Infantry Regiment, which was the divisional reserve, moving along the Premeti-Kleisoura carriage road, launched a frontal attack on enemy positions outside Kleisoura. The Ottoman troops, under pressure from all sides, were forced to abandon their positions and flee towards Berat. The 12th Regiment captured Kleisoura and the defile by the same name, where it deployed covering forces⁴⁵. Division II assembled in the area of Kalpaki on March, 2 under orders of General Headquarters. Its mission was to move along the Kalpaki-Kakavia-Argyrokaastro axis, ready to intervene and assist the advanced divisions, primarily Division VIII, on the trail of which it was to follow. On March, 4 the division arrived and stationed itself at the crossroads of the Delvino and Argyrokaastro roads. It dispatched forces to garrison the cities of Argyrokaastro and Delvino, relieving units of Division VIII by orders of General Headquarters⁴⁶. Ottoman forces, which according to the army's estimates totalled approximately 15,000 men, constantly were retreating towards the Albanian interior. The Field Army requested that the government inform it as to whether and to what magnitude the extension of its operations northward would serve the government's diplomatic purposes. This issue arose because operations aiming at the enemy's final and total destruction may have required an extension beyond the line that was designated as the limit of Greek territorial claims in Epirus⁴⁷.

Political and Diplomatic Background

In the meantime, the demise of Ottoman power in the Balkans created a critical political situation in Europe. Austria-Hungary, whose interests to the south had received a crucial blow, seemed decided to declare war on Serbia, in order to prevent the Serbs acquiring a port on the Adriatic coast⁴⁸. Italy, prompted by Austria's stance, spared no effort to inform the Greek government of its interest in the bay of Valona⁴⁹. The Greek Prime Minister wished to avoid friction with the Adriatic powers at a time when the situation in Thessaloniki had become precarious and war appeared

imminent. He informed the Commander in Chief that the military operation must not extend beyond the limit set by the government, and he emphasized that on no account must the Hellenic army turn towards Valona⁵⁰. On March, 2 he had already communicated to the Commander in Chief, a cabled order to Spyromelios, by which he strictly forbade the Cheimarra Detachment to advance on Valona⁵¹.

On March, 5 the Commander in Chief, Crown Prince Constantine, was informed that his father, King George I, had been assassinated, and that it was urgent that he return to Athens and take over his new duties. Before departing, the new King signed an order for the reorganization and re-disposition of the army. In compliance to this order, the Field Army Section of Epirus was formed, with its headquarters in Ioannina. Major General Panagiotes Dangles, who, up to that point, had been Chief of Staff at General Headquarters, was appointed Commander of this formation. The remaining divisions were transported to Thessaloniki in accordance to the order. Division IX was formed on March, 18 from the forces of the various detachments, while Division III moved via Korytsa to the area of Florina. The 1st Cavalry Regiment also moved to Macedonia. The two divisions of the Field Army Section of Epirus completed the necessary redeployment of their forces and assumed their final dispositions. Division IX stationed itself in the western part of northern Epirus, and established headquarters in Argyrokastro, while Division VIII deployed in the eastern part, with its headquarters in Premeti.

The decision to suspend the northward advance of the Hellenic Army in order to liberate the remaining parts of Epirus, emboldened the Albanian provisional government. Protests were constantly received in Ioannina and Athens, addressed to the Greek government from the Greek inhabitants of the unliberated regions. These told the severe tale of the pressures and arbitrary behavior against them in order to force them to accept the Albanian nationality. Later on, during the time of the Greco-Bulgarian war, as more units were redeployed to Macedonia, the Albanian provisional government dispatched agents to, and also organized bands in northern Epirus, in order to encourage turmoil and provoke revolts by the local Muslim inhabitants with the ulterior aim to bring about Austrian or Italian intervention⁵². These actions resulted in massive demonstrations in the cities of Epirus, where the inhabitants

demanded that the Hellenic Army's advance continue and that it complete the task of liberating the remaining areas. In the meantime, Turk-Albanian bands had begun to penetrate in northern Epirus, and in response the Field Army Section of Epirus ordered that due consideration be given to arming the inhabitants of the northern areas. Furthermore, the Greek government issued a severe communiqué to the Great Powers stating that, if the Albanians continued their provocations, the Hellenic army would be forced to advance northwards⁵³.

Already in January 1913, Greece had made its views known regarding the future frontiers of Albania in a detailed memorandum to the Ambassadorial Conference. Firstly, this stated that Greece had proceeded in a struggle to liberate the Greek Epirotes and not in a war of conquest. Greece desired a continuous and stable peace, which would be completely insured by borders laid down according to ethnological, strategic and economic data. It promoted the Greek rights to Valona, and stated that it was not possible to negotiate regarding the port of Agioi Saranta, as this was the natural gateway to the sea for the mountain valley of Ioannina; additionally, Argyrokastro and the plateau of Korytsa formed a coherent geographic area. Even according to Ottoman statistics, which, naturally, did not favor the Greek element, two-thirds of the inhabitants in the claimed regions were Greeks. By March, 5 1913, Argyrokastro, Korytsa, Cheimarra, Agioi Saranta, Tepelene, Premeti and Kleisoura had been liberated from the Turkish yoke. However, the Great Powers made the decision to include their region in the newly created country of Albania.

Epilogue

The Balkan League's decisive victories against the Ottoman Empire resulted in the overturning of the situation in the Balkan peninsula. Turkey's impending defeat would of necessity bring about changes in the borders of the states of the region, despite the proclamation to the contrary by the Great Powers, made at the beginning of the war. The Great Powers no longer controlled the situation in southeast Europe, as the existing status quo had been disturbed, and the Eastern Question took on a new turn. Austria-Hungary regarded the liberation of Thessaloniki and the expansion of Serbia to the southwest as a political defeat. Italy, too, closely followed the Austrian policy

in the Adriatic; therefore, the only solution that remained was the creation of an Albanian state. In fact, in order to keep the Serbs away from the mid-Adriatic coastline and the Greeks away from the south Adriatic and the bay of Valona, the newly formed state would have to encompass the greatest possible area⁵⁴.

The signing of the peace treaty of the First Balkan War in London, on May, 17 1913 found Greece having liberated Epirus, Thessaly, Macedonia and the North Aegean islands. Greece, also finally gained possession of Crete; it wouldn't have been difficult, in military terms, for the Hellenic fleet to liberate the Dodecanese islands, if they were under the Ottoman and not the Italian occupation. The Second Balkan War⁵⁵ started without official declaration on June, 16 1913 with the attack of Bulgaria against its former allies, Greece and Serbia; distinctive for the speed with which it was carried out, the fierceness of its battles and the great number of casualties, terminated by the treaty of Bucharest in August 1913, which provided new borders for the Balkan states. Despite Russia's failure to prevent the war, Moscow never ceased pursuing a policy to put an end to it, especially after the initial defeats of the Bulgarian forces. Austria-Hungary and Romania also made overtures to end the hostilities.

The Ambassadorial Conference in London and, of course, the Protocol of Florence, had analytically defined the demarcation line, which is approximately the current boundary between Greece and Albania. The Great Powers sent Greece an official notification of their decision to cede all of the Aegean islands to Greece, which were in fact already under Greek authority, with the exceptions of the islands of Imbros and Tenedos, which were ceded to Turkey. The final award of the Aegean islands would not take effect until Greek troops had evacuated the territories of northern Epirus, which they had liberated during the First Balkan War. The Powers also demanded a formal commitment from the Greek government not to put up any resistance or support, or encourage directly or indirectly any kind of reaction against the regime established in "Southern Albania". With this announcement, they created a dilemma for the Greek government, forcing it to choose between northern Epirus and the Aegean islands. They also warned that if Greece did not withdraw its troops from

northern Epirus, this would be equivalent to rescinding the agreements they had signed and going against the will of the Great Powers.

Greece, having capable political and military leaders, a people with high ethics and morals, arose more united and stronger from the two Balkan Wars having accomplished a large part of its nationalistic goals with its territorial area and population almost doubled. Its economy was reinforced by new sources of wealth that gradually led to the marked improvement in the living standards of the entire nation which could now face its future with optimism and hope.

¹ E. S. Paschalidou "Military operations of the Great Powers during the Cretan Revolution (1897)", *Bilten Slovenske vojske*, April 2009 - 11št. 1, General Staff of Slovenian Armed Forces, p. 119-133.

² Detailed analysis in, Hellenic Army General Staff/Army History Directorate (HAGS/AHD), *Operations in Macedonia and the Aegean Islands against the Turks*, Athens 1988.

³ *Ibid*, p. 92-95.

⁴ E. S. Paschalidou "Organization and activities of Hellenism under the leadership of religious and distinguished personalities during the struggle for Macedonia, 1904-1908", *Military conflicts and civil population: Total wars, limited wars, asymmetrical wars*, XXXIV International Congress of Military History - ICMH, Trieste, Italy, 31 August - 5 September 2008, p. 294-301.

⁵ G. Venteres, *E Ellas tou 1910-1920* (Greece between 1910-1920), Athens, 1929, v. I, p. 93. "The Bulgarians forget -Venizelos told the Cabinet- that the Hellenic Army is battleworthy. The future operations against Turkey will very likely take the following form: the Bulgarians will direct their forces towards Adrianople and the Hebrus river; the Serbs will direct theirs towards Skopje; we will march against Thessaloniki and Serres. We will be there on time. The distribution then will take place on the basis of actual military occupation . . ."

⁶ E. S. Paschalidou, "Regional Alliances in South Eastern Europe in the beginning of the 20th century: The case of Balkan Wars", *Regions, Regional Organizations and Military Power*, XXXIII International Congress of Military History - ICMH, Cape Town, South Africa, 12-17 August 2007, p. 107-111.

⁷ Detailed analysis in, HAGS/AHD, *A Concise History of the Balkan Wars, 1912-1913*, Athens 1987.

⁸ HAGS/AHD, *O Ellenikos Stratos kata tous Valkanikous Polemous tou 1912-1913* (The Hellenic Army during the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, vol. I: Epicheireseis kata ton Tourkon ste Makedonia kai ta nesia tou Aigaiou, 1912 (Operations against the Turks in Macedonia and the Aegean islands, 1912), Athens, 1988, p. 34; vol. II: Epicheireseis kata ton Tourkon sten Epeiro, 1912-13 (Operations against the Turks in Epirus, 1912-13), Athens, 1991, p. 1-10.

⁹ The Field Army of Thessaly, after the liberation of Thessaloniki was redesigned the Field Army of Macedonia.

¹⁰ Strabo, states in his *Geography* (7.7.4): "As this road proceeds from the environs of Epidamnus (Dyrrachium, mod. Durazzo) and Apollonia, it keeps to its right the so called Epeirotan ethne, that reach from the Sicilian sea (the present Adriatic) to the Ambracian gulf, while to its left are the mountains of the Illyrians, and the ethne that dwell therein." (*The Geography of Strabo*, ed. H.L Jones. v. 4, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press).

¹¹ Scylax of Caryanda (5th c. B.C.) in his *Periplus*, 26-33, states: "Nearby are the Ceraunian mountains in Epirus and an island beside them, quite small, which bears the name Sason."

¹² Claudius Ptolemy (2nd c. A.D.), states in his *Geography*, 3.13: "Greece begins from the region of Oricum; Epirus is the primordial Hellas."

¹³ Procopius (6th c. A.D.), notes: "The first inhabitants are Greeks, those that are called Epirots", *History of the Wars*, 5.15.24, Loeb Classical Library.

¹⁴ *Iliad* 2.747-50; *Odyssey* 16.417; Aeschylus, *Suppliants* 256-58. Participation in the Trojan War was the paramount proof of Hellenicity in antiquity for a tribe, a city or the inhabitants of a region.

¹⁵ Herodotus, *Historiae*, 6 .26, Zacharopoulos ed.

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Meteorologica* 1.14, 21-22, 35: "Hellas is the area around Dodona and the Acheloos river. It was inhabited in the past by the Selloi and those that were then called Graeci, but now are called Hellenes.", Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press.

¹⁷ HAGS/AHD, op. cit., v. II, p. 10; Venteres, v. I, p. 105.

¹⁸ K. D. Stergiopoulos, To Mikton Epeirotikon Strateuma kata ten apeleutherosin tes Epeirou, Oktovrios-Noembrios 1912 (The Joint Epirotan Detachment during the liberation of Epirus, October-November 1912), Athens, 1968, p. 93: "it was specified that the force commanded by me [= Lieutenant D. N. Botsares] would act as the left flank guard of the Army." See also p. 100-104.

¹⁹ An Infantry Regiment of Division II had already been detached to liberate the Aegean islands.

²⁰ HAGS/AHD, op. cit., v. II, p. 82-86.

²¹ *Northern Epirus* forms that segment of Epirus lying to the north of the present Greek-Albanian border and reaching as far north as the Genusus river. Up to the year 1913, the term *Northern Epirus* didn't exist, as Epirus was considered a coherent and indivisible space, but it has been established since December of that year, when that region was made part of the newly-formed state of Albania by the terms of the Protocol of Florence (17 December 1913).

²² AHD Archive, F. 1699.a/G/310, 469.

²³ AHD Archive, F. 1699.a/G/467 a, b, 480 h, q.

²⁴ AHD Archive, F. 1699.a/G/467.

²⁵ AHD Archive, F. 1699.a/G/467 b, g.

²⁶ AHD Archive, F. 1699.a/G/469.

²⁷ AHD Archive, F. 1699. a/G/473 a, b.

²⁸ HAGS/AHD, op. cit., v. 1, p. 156.

²⁹ AHD Archive, F. 1699.a/A/937, 1083, 1134; also doc. no. 966 "In order to succeed in accelerating your movement, you may perhaps relieve the soldiers of advanced divisions of their kit-bags. 30 Oct. 1912, Venizelos."

³⁰ AHD Archive, F. 1699.a/A/1114.

³¹ AHD Archive, F. 1699.a/A/1134.

³² HAGS/AHD, op. cit., v. 1, p. 179; See also Appendix 29, p. 272-74.

³³ AHD Archive, F. 1699.a/A/1207, 1208.

³⁴ The Garibaldi Corps was a volunteer corps initially formed by the Italian Giuseppe Garibaldi in 1860. Its purpose was to fight on the side of any people fighting for liberty. His son, Ricciotti Garibaldi, took part in the Balkan Wars on the side of the Greeks at the head of approximately 2,300 philhellene and Greek volunteers, who also were dubbed "Redshirts" because of the red tunic that was part of their uniform. There were almost 1,100 Greeks in the Garibaldi Corps and they formed a separate group, led by Alexandros Romas, better known as the "Redshirt Corps."

³⁵ AHD Archive, F. 1699a/G/484a.

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- ³⁶ AHD Archive, F. 1699a/G/505-522.
- ³⁷ AHD Archive, F. 1699a/G/852, 858-864, 872, 880, 1051-1052.
- ³⁸ AHD Archive, F. 1699a/G/1062-1067.
- ³⁹ AHD Archive, F. 1699a/G/1364-1366.
- ⁴⁰ AHD Archive, F. 1699a/G/1451.b, 1493a, b.
- ⁴¹ AHD Archive, F. 1699a/G/1527.
- ⁴² AHD Archive, F. 1699a/G/1541.
- ⁴³ AHD Archive, F. 1699a/G/1671; F. 1699a/A/1412.
- ⁴⁴ HAGS/AHD, op. cit., v. II, p. 253.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 249.
- ⁴⁶ HAGS/War Report Office, op. cit, v. II, p. 473, 475.
- ⁴⁷ AHD Archive, F. 1699a/G/1670.
- ⁴⁸ AHD Archive, F. 1699a/G/1671, 1695, 1695a.
- ⁴⁹ AHD Archive, F. 1699a/G/1743.
- ⁵⁰ AHD Archive, F. 1699a/G/1673, 1694.
- ⁵¹ AHD Archive, F. 1699a/G/1693.
- ⁵² AHD Archive, F. 1699a/G/1835.b, 1837, 1840, 1841a, 1842, 1844, 1848.
- ⁵³ AHD Archive, F. 1699a/G/1838, 1845.
- ⁵⁴ In, HAGS/AHD, *O Voreioepeirotikos Agonas (The Struggle for Northern Epirus)*, Athens 1997, p. 70-111, detailed analysis of the diplomatic background.
- ⁵⁵ Detailed analysis in, HAGS/AHD, *O Ellenikos Stratos kata tous Valkanikous Polemous tou 1912-1913 (The Hellenic Army during the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913)*, vol. III: *Epicheireseis kata ton Voylgaron, 1913 (Operations against the Bulgarians, 1913)*, Athens, 1992.