

THE GREAT WAR AS THE REFERENCE POINT IN BILATERAL COOPERATION BETWEEN SERBIA AND PORTUGAL

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Resumo

Hoje, uma vez mais, a Europa como região que há muito tempo é uma zona de religiões, ideologias, nacionalismos e ambições opostas, enfrenta desafios históricos. Parece que o período de evolução pacífica das relações internacionais após a Guerra Fria terminou, e que é muito difícil prever cenários futuros e, de acordo com eles, a evolução dos acontecimentos na cena mundial. Durante a Guerra Fria, os acontecimentos da Grande Guerra não possuíam ligação aos problemas actuais. Contudo, o facto de os procedimentos diplomáticos, e a sua correlação com as operações militares no final da Primeira Guerra Mundial, terem voltado a atrair a atenção ultimamente, pode ser em grande parte justificado pela preocupação, mas também pela necessidade de descobrir o nosso próprio mundo.

A fim de analisar as dimensões menos conhecidas das relações diplomáticas e militares da Sérvia e de Portugal, as reviravoltas da política de guerra sérvia e portuguesa são brevemente demonstradas no seu contexto internacional, enquanto a utilidade de certos territórios e instalações para os beligerantes é sumariamente explicada. O papel das forças armadas sérvias e portuguesas é também brevemente examinado em termos das suas realizações e restrições contemporâneas durante a secção cronológica acima referida. Caracterizando a Grande Guerra como o ponto de referência na história das relações bilaterais entre duas nações heróicas, comemoramos também os milhares de mortos de ambos os lados que lutaram e caíram durante a Grande Guerra.

Palavras-chave: Sérvia; Portugal; Grande Guerra; diplomacia; relações militares

Abstract

Today, once again, Europe as region that has long been area of opposing religions, ideologies, nationalisms and ambitions is once again facing historical challenges. It seems that the period of peaceful evolution of international relations after the Cold War is over, and that it is very difficult to predict future scenarios and, in accordance with them, the development of events on the global stage. During the Cold War, the events of the Great War were not linked to the current problems. However, the fact that the diplomatic procedures and their correlation with military operations at the end of the WWI have been attracting attention again lately, can be largely justified by the concern, but also by the need to figure out our own world.

In order to analyse the less known dimensions of diplomatic and military relations of Serbia and Portugal, the twists and turns of Serbian and Portuguese war policy are briefly shown in its international context, while the utility of certain territories and facilities for the belligerents is summarily explained. The role of the Serbian and Portuguese armed forces is also briefly examined in terms of its achievements and contemporary constraints during the aforementioned chronological section. Characterizing the Great War as the reference point in history of bilateral relations between two heroic nations, we also commemorate the thousands of dead on both sides who fought and fell during the Great War.

Key words: Serbia; Portugal; Great War; diplomacy; military relations

On March 10th 1882, the King of Serbia, Milan Obrenovic sent a letter to King Luis I of Portugal and the Algarves, informing him about the new status of the former principality of Serbia and the establishment of the independent kingdom. A few days later, Serbian King sent also the highest Serbian decoration, the Grand Cross of the Royal Order of Takovo. Although theoretically it can be assumed that the date of establishment of diplomatic relations between two countries was a little earlier, a strongest assertion is that of November 14th 1842, when in response a special envoy of King of Portugal delivered the decorations of Portugal Monarch to the Serbian King.¹

A quarter of a century elapsed between the independence of Serbia in 1878, as a result of the Berlin Congress, and the opening of the first Consulate in Lisbon, which attests to the traditional distance of Portugal to the Eastern

¹ O. Antic, „Jubilee of 140 years of diplomatic relations between Serbia and Portugal, *Diario de Noticias*, 14.02.2022

European affairs. In addition, from the date of the opening of the Consulate to the continued establishment of diplomatic relations was another sixteen years, if we consider, according to H.N. Oliveira, the debatable date of 1919.² In spite of certain estimates (which specifies the opening date of the legation of the Kingdom of Serbia in Lisbon on October 19, 1917)³, truth is that only in 1919, there is a reference to the Envoy and Minister Plenipotentiary Dragomir Stefanovitch presenting credentials to the President of the Republic, Admiral Canto e Castro, „charged with the mission of establishing and strengthening the bonds of friendship” between Kingdom of SCS and Portugal.⁴

Unambiguously, due to distance the diplomatic affairs of Serbia and Portugal were often little known. However, the fact that could not be neglected is that during the World War I, the two countries were on the same side, as allied powers. In spite of the fact that the Battle of the Lys marked the end of independent existence of the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps (CEP) in France and „from that point until the end of the war the Portuguese were held in reserve as labor troops”, there is another information that could not be substantiated yet, but is under investigation, regarding the presence of two battalions from Portugal at Salonica Front at the beginning of 1918.⁵ Although the official Portuguese history states that: “From the Battle of Lys Portuguese forces as a large cohesive unit were left with only a diminished role”⁶, the aforementioned reference potentially means that Portuguese army was involved and contributed to the Salonica Theatre of operations. Here, we should notice, in support to it, that the sizes and the multinational character of armies involved in this important “area of supply and transit” lead us to denominate the military conflict in this secondary front as “A Mini World War in the Balkans”.⁷

Contemporary strategies in historical perspective

Today, once again, Europe as region that has long been area of opposing religions, ideologies, nationalisms and ambitions is once again facing historical challenges. It seems that the period of peaceful evolution of international

² H.N. Oliveira, (2010). Subsídio para a história das relações bilaterais entre Portugal e a Sérvia. Lusíada. História 7.

³ Also the Wikipedia entry “Portugal-Serbia relations”

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portugal%E2%80%93Serbia_relations – accessed February 14, 2022) points to the same date, basing it on the supposed information on page 35 of Gerhard Schultz’s work, *Revolutions and peace treaties, 1917-1920*, which does not correspond to reality. However, Santos Carvalho also mentions the date 1917 (1986: 53), possibly by consulting Serbian sources.

⁴ Ibid 2.

⁵ <https://www.kathimerini.gr/life/city/848127/i-vavel-ton-fylon-sti-thessaloniki-toy-1916/>

⁶ <https://fsi.stanford.edu/events/geographies-memory-geographies-loss-first-world-war-portuguese-east-africa>

⁷ The term *A Mini World War in the Balkans* was coined by the author of the article in 2018 on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of WWI

relations after the Cold War is over, and that it is very difficult to predict future scenarios and, in accordance with them, the development of events on the global stage. All the more so, the perspective of this region. Namely, the withdrawal of Great Britain from European institutions, the rise of extremist national leaders, as well as the challenges imposed by aggressive policies of global political actors, pose new, seemingly difficult-to-understand questions. The “neighbourhood” of the European Union has been turned into an area of instability in recent years, and especially the Mediterranean area is facing uncertain political and security situations. It turns out that Europe is far from achieving one of its main goals contained in the revised common policy strategy - establishing security in the EU’s neighbourhood and in the Balkans, the Mediterranean, the Middle East and the Caucasus.

Due to the global confrontation for new distribution of power and influence around the world, in all these scenarios Europe has been brought to the brink of a new, modern version of the Cold War confrontation, much more dangerous than the classic Cold War, because its actors are unable to control the consequences of their actions.

During the Cold War, the events of the Great War were not linked to current problems. However, the fact that the diplomatic procedures and their correlation with military operations at the end of the WWI, the peace solution from Paris in 1919 and the territorial changes caused by it, have been attracting attention again lately, can be largely justified by the concern, but also by the need to figure out our own world. Although history is so often misused to support political ideologies, or to promote extravagant territorial demands, we conclude that it is necessary to understand the historical perspective of contemporary political, economic and security dilemmas we are witnessing and strategies that are more or less successfully implemented. In itself, the question arises as to where the real causes of such a development are.

Following the long thread of history and winding it backwards, we will get to the tangle from when the events began. This hub bears the “stamp” of the First World War, today only a seemingly faded event of modern history.

In time of war it is difficult to speak of diplomacy *stricto sensu*, in the sense that country uses its influence to expand its` international, territorial, political, economic or any other status. What occurs is rather an exercise in navigation and in searching for tactical supports in the maze of conflicting interests of the Great Powers and the peripheral interests. Nevertheless, in an attempt to emphasize the importance of the research of WWI, we would try to correlate some military operations and diplomatic developments during the Great War.⁸

The twists and turns of Serbian and Portugues war policy are briefly shown

⁸ Cyril Benthams, *Military Operations Macedonia from the Outbreak of War to the Spring of 1917*. [... From the Spring of 1917 to the End of the War.], vols I-II, London, HMSO, 1933-35.

in its international context, while the utility of certain territories and facilities for the belligerents is summarily explained. The role of the Serbian and Portuguese armed forces is also briefly examined in terms of its achievements and contemporary constraints during the aforementioned chronological section.

Salonika Theatre of Operations

Although the name of Salonica front does not have the same resonance as those of Verdun or the Somme e.g., which have become history landmarks, it could and should claim a share both in the collective endeavor of 1914-1918 and in its eventual outcome. As far as the significance of the Salonika Theatre of Operations is concerned, the leadership, press and public opinion of the Western Alliance had already made up their minds during the course of the First World War: it was a far-off and insignificant front, a waste of manpower and resources, and was depriving the main field of operations of forces. However, we attempt to provide an answer to the question of what is the role and the value of secondary fronts, which after period of relative inertia, are activated at just the right moment with a view to dynamically reversing the current situation and even forcing the final outcome.

Undoubtedly, the political division in Greece contributed to this lack of clear strategic policy and diminished allied interest in the significance of this front. Nevertheless, diplomatic processes closely related to strategic development of operations at Salonika front, greatly affected the outcome of the Great War. The intensity of diplomatic initiatives to obtain the consent of political leadership of ideologically, but also territorially divided Greece for the country's entry into the war, as well as the size and multinational character of armies that were located in the "entrenched Camp of Thessalonica" from the moment of its creation until the breakthrough of the Front, lead us to more detailed appraisal of military and diplomatic developments on this secondary battle front. The importance of the analysis of strategic options and goals of divided Greek political and military leadership in the light of Great Powers' tendencies in the Balkans and their efforts to preserve this region as the "safe route to the East", become even more striking if the outburst of war in this "area of supply and transit" should be further clarified by examining the significance of Greece in German strategy, the place of Southern front in Bulgaria's foreign policy, the aims and prospects of Italy, but also the activities of "Athens Intelligence", geo-strategic importance of Cyprus, and especially the Allied operations to "neutral" Greek territory that followed later.

As to Serbia, after the victory of the Serbian army in the Battle of Kolubara, in December in 1914, on the Serbian front there was a lull until the early autumn of 1915. Under the command of Field Marshal August von Mackensen, the Austro-Hungarian Balkan Army, the German 11th Army and river flotillas on

the Danube and the Sava began an offensive on 6 October 1915, the largest offensive against Serbia. By September 1915, despite the extreme sacrifice of the Serbian army, the Austro-Hungarian Balkan Army, having crossed the rivers Sava and Drina and the German 11th Army after crossing the Danube, occupied Belgrade, Smederevo, Požarevac and Golubac, creating a wide bridgehead south of the Sava and Danube rivers, forcing Serbian forces to withdraw to southern Serbia. That same day, 15 October in 1915, the two Bulgarian army was suppressed the weak Serbian units, penetrated into the valley of the South Morava river near Vranje up to 22 October 1915, occupied Kumanovo, Štip, Skopje, and prevented the withdrawal of the Serbian army to the Greek border and Thessaloniki. For a year, the Allies (Britain and France) had repeatedly promised to send military forces to Serbia, while nothing had been realized. But with Bulgaria's mobilization to its south, the situation for Serbia became desperate. The developments finally forced the French and the British to decide upon sending a small expedition force of two divisions to help Serbia, but even these arrived too late in the Greek port of Salonika to have any impact in the operations. The main reason for the delay was the lack of available Allied forces due to the critical situation in the Western front, while the Greek neutrality was used as an excuse, although the Albanian coast was also available for a rapid deployment of reinforcements and supplying of equipment during the past 14 months. In any case the lack of Allied support sealed the fate of the Serbian Army. Against Serbia were marched the Bulgarian Army, a German Army, and an Austro-Hungarian Army, all under the command of Field Marshal Mackensen. The Germans and Austro-Hungarians began their attack on October 7 with a massive artillery barrage, followed by attacks across the rivers. Then, on the 11th, the Bulgarian Army attacked from two directions, one from the north of Bulgaria towards Niš, the other from the south towards Skopje. The Bulgarian Army rapidly broke through the weaker Serbian forces, that tried to block its advance. With the Bulgarian breakthrough, the Serbian position became hopeless; either their main army in the north would be surrounded and forced to surrender, or it would try to retreat. Serbian Marshal Putnik ordered a full retreat, south and west through Montenegro and into Albania. The weather was terrible, the roads poor and the army had to help the tens of thousands of civilians who retreated with them. Only c. 125,000 Serbian soldiers reached the Adriatic coast and embarked on Italian transport ships that carried the army to Corfu and other Greek islands before being sent to Thessaloniki. The French and British divisions marched north from Thessaloniki in late November under the command of French General Maurice Sarrail. However, the British divisions were ordered by the War Office in London not to cross the Greek frontier. So the French divisions advanced on their own up the Vardar River. This advance was of some limited help to the retreating Serbian Army as the Bulgarian Army had to concentrate larger forces on their southern flank to deal with the threat, which led to the Battle of Krivolak. By mid-December, General Sarrail concluded

retreat was necessary in the face of massive Bulgarian assaults on his positions. As with the British, the Germans ordered the Bulgarians not to cross the Greek borders reluctant to risk a Greek entrance to the war against a Bulgarian invasion in Macedonia. The Allies for their part took advantage of that, reinforcing and consolidating their positions behind the borders.

A flaw in the victory was that the Allies managed to save a part of the Serbian Army, which although battered, seriously reduced and almost unarmed, escaped total destruction and after reorganizing was able to resume operations six months later. But the most damaging event for the Central Powers was that the Allies—using the moral excuse of saving the Serbian Army—managed to replace the impossible Serbian front with a viable one established in Macedonia.⁹

Greek Prime minister, Eleftherios Venizelos, was the architect of Greek involvement in the First World War and it was him who invited the British and French troops to land at Thessalonica in September 1915.¹⁰ At the same time, in his foreign policy, he was defending the balance of power which had emerged in the Balkans following the Treaty of Bucharest and was envisioning a peaceful future for this region as well as the creation of a Balkan federation.¹¹ The international conditions, however, were not all favorable to such a policy. The new state of affairs in the Balkans which had arisen from the Balkan wars was at odds with the territorial claims of Bulgaria and Turkey and also represented a setback for the imperialist ambitions of Austria-Hungary and Italy in the area.¹² Thus, on the eve of the outbreak of the Great War Greece was again facing the threat of a new Greek-Turkish war. The Turks laid claim to the islands of the Eastern Aegean and were unleashing a wave of pitiless persecution against the Greeks in Asia Minor. The revisionist policy in Bulgaria, the enmity of Austria–Hungary, the conflicts with Italy over the Dodecanese Islands and the frontier with the Albania, and first and foremost the Turkish threat, in the conjunction with the reluctance of Romania and Serbia to be drawn into a war with Turkey over the Aegean Islands, obliged Venizelos to seek strong international support in order to counter the serious danger threatening the country.¹³

When Austria-Hungary declared war against Serbia in 1914, she thought

⁹ Falls, C. (1933). *Military Operations Macedonia, From the Outbreak of War to the Spring of 1917* (IWM and Battery Press 1996 ed.). London: HMSO. ISBN [0-89839-242-X](#).

¹⁰ Papadakis, N.E., “Eleftherios Venizelos` Strategic Goals and the Salonica Theatre of Operations”, *The Salonica Theatre of Operations and the Outcome of the Great War* (Thessalonica 2005).

¹¹ Venizelos` address to Parliament which is published in the nsp. Efimeris Sizitiseon Voulis (September 21, 1915).

¹² G. Leontaritis, “The international situation of Greece on the eve of the World War I”, (in: *Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Έθνους*, 15), Athens 1978, 8-10.

¹³ E. Gardikas-Katsiadakis, “Venizelos and Churchill: the bases of the anglo-hellenic understanding (1912-1913)”, in: Th. Veremis&Od. Dimitrakopoulos (ed.), *Μελετήματα γύρω από το Βενιζέλο και την εποχή του*, (Athens 1980), 87-100.

of a sharp, short, military engagement, which would have resolved the South Slav question to her benefit. However, the absorption of much of her military resources in the fighting against the Russians, and several suboptimal decisions of the Austrian High Command, enabled Serbia to withstand successfully several Austrian offensive operations.¹⁴

The concurrent failure of the Moltke's version of the Schlieffen plan, the nature of the coalition warfare, which encouraged exhausted belligerents to remain in the war by the hope and promises of aid from their allies, and the singular inability of achieving a breakthrough through the enemy lines for most of the war, led to its prolongation, and spurred a search for new allies by the competing European Alliances.¹⁵

Despite the fact that the grand total of the mobilized men of the Balkan states could have been higher than that of Austria-Hungary, their backward transport system and underdeveloped productive base, meant that they could not sustain a long war without outside help. Indeed, the geographic unity of the Balkans and the relative weakness of the Balkan States made advisable their entry to the Great War as a Bloc, since this would have enhanced their military and diplomatic standing, while opening the way for a mutually-agreed post war settlement of the outstanding questions there.¹⁶ Venizelos never really abandoned the idea of a reconstituted Balkan Block against the Central Powers and their Balkan Allies (Turkey and Bulgaria) with which Greece was seriously divided on a number of issues, but the course of the War dictated that Greece would enter it individually.¹⁷ He had always intended to "tie Greece to the apron-strings of the Sea Powers,"¹⁸ and the First World War offered a promising opportunity for this to happen. At the beginning of the War, he permitted the use of various bays in the Ionian and the Aegean Seas by Entente destroyers and torpedo boats.¹⁹ He also entrusted the command of the Greek fleet to Vice Admiral Mark Kerr, the Head of the British Naval Mission to Greece²⁰ in the aftermath of the Greek rejection of Kaiser's offer of alliance and the escape of the Goeben and Breslau to the Dardanelles. Under these circumstances the outbreak of war was presented Venizelos with unique opportunity to obtain the support he was seeking. His proposal eventually fell through due to the preference of Russia for a Serbo-Bulgarian understanding and British pre-occupation with the situation in Antwerp and the Channel ports. Venizelos further offered to place all the

¹⁴ H. Strachan, *The First World War: To Arms*, vol. 1, (Oxford New York 2001), 335-347.

¹⁵ P. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers. Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*, (New York 1987), 256.

¹⁶ M. S. Anderson, *The Eastern question, 1774-1923: a study in international relations*, (London & New York 1966), 310.

¹⁷ C. Svolopoulos, *Ελληνική εξωτερική πολιτική 1900-1945*, (Athens 1993), 109.

¹⁸ G. F. Abbot, *Greece and the Allies 1914-1922*, (London, 1922) 4-5.

¹⁹ Z. Fotakis, *Greek Naval Strategy and Policy 1910-1919*, (London & New York 2005), 108.

²⁰ Ibid 19.

naval and military forces of Greece at the disposal of the Entente. This was also declined, since it was feared that it would push Turkey and Bulgaria into the opposite camp and complicate the Russian claim to Constantinople before the stabilization of the Western front and the reinforcement with Indian troops of the Suez Canal had been effected.²¹ In spite of the rejection of this proposal, the Greek Prime minister returned to the Allies on the 18th August 1914 with the proposal that his country should participate in the war on condition that it would be accepted as an ally. Realizing that domestic and inter-allied considerations precluded the conclusion of a formal alliance between Greece and the Entente at the time,²² he offered good services to it, without usually asking for *quid pro quo*.²³ The logic of Venizelos' proposal lies within the terms of his strategic aim, namely, first to ensure the security and territorial integrity of the country in face of Turkish threat within the framework of an allied system of security such as that of the Entente, and subsequently to seek satisfaction of the unredeemed territorial claims of the country.²⁴

As is known, Venizelos' initiatives did not find acceptance with the Western Allies, who, after Turkey's decision to join the camp of the Central Powers, were exerting pressure on Greece and Serbia to make territorial concessions to Bulgaria in order to bring Bulgaria into their side. The allied leadership couldn't appreciate that the Athens-Belgrade axis constituted the only stable support which it possessed at the start of the war. The exploitation of this axis could, if nothing else, have secured the neutrality of Bulgaria and influenced the final decisions of Romania. This anything but clear sighted policy of the allied states would not only fail to bring the Bulgaria into their camp, but would undermine Venizelos' position domestically and strengthen the pro- German neutrality of the Palace and the General Staff.

The events, which followed, were to test severely the policy of Allies in the Balkans and were to draw them into the whirlpool of the Greek drama, which, for the Greeks cost a disastrous division, and for the allies cost in all probability the prolongation of the war.²⁵

At the beginning of 1915 a Greek offer of support for Serbia conditional upon Romania covering Bulgaria was withdrawn because Sazonov promised Romania in October 1914, all that she could have reasonably hoped to gain

²¹ J. C. Smith, "Great Britain and the 1914-1915 Straits Agreement with Russia: The British Promise of November 1914", *The American Historical Review*, 70 (4) (1965) 1017.

²² G. Leon, *Greece and the Great Powers, 1914-1917*, (Thessaloniki 1974).

²³ G. Leontaritis, *Greece and the First World War: From Neutrality to Intervention 1917-1918*, (New York 1990), 409.

²⁴ Venizelos was convinced from the outset that Great Britain, the country which was ruling at sea, would be the country which would affect decisively the outcome of the war. (S. Markezinis, *Political History of Greece*, (Athens 1967), 274.)

²⁵ Papadakis, *The Salonica Theatre of Operations*, 99

in return for her neutrality, thus making Romania unwilling to enter the war, unless she was tempted with extravagant promises by the Allies.²⁶ On January 7th 1915 Venizelos also told Elliot that a war against Turkey would be popular in Greece and that in return for Greek intervention the allies should guarantee his country territorial gains in Asia Minor. Thus he alluded for the first time to a possible partition of the Ottoman Empire and to a firm allied control of the Straits as the only guarantee for the future security of Greek acquisitions in Anatolia. His Majesty's Government took up this proposal and offered on 24th January the Smyrna area to Greece in the event of Greek help to Serbia against Austria. Venizelos and King Constantine of Greece eventually shrunk from this, since it did not appear to be a practical proposition given the poor state of the Thessalonica-Belgrade line and the reluctance of Romania to help.²⁷

In March 1915 the Greek Prime Minister offered to help the Allies in the Dardanelles campaign, thus creating a profound impression in London.²⁸ Notwithstanding the quality of the Greek troops, which appeared eminently high to the British military attaché in Athens, the contribution of the Greek light fleet was, in British eyes, of greater importance for the success of this campaign. The insistence of the British Admiralty on the participation of the Greek flotillas in the Dardanelles operations is understandable considering that Greek naval assistance could have been useful for minesweeping purposes.²⁹ King Constantine of Greece eventually blocked Greek participation in the Dardanelles campaign setting off the "National Schism", which divided the Greek people until the Second World War. Indeed, in Greece, "as in other belligerent regimes across Europe, the war served to radicalize pre-war political animosities and expose political military tensions".³⁰ The Dardanelles campaign took then its well-known, unhappy path and contributed to the prolongation of the war and its many, severe concomitants. However, what was unfortunate for humanity at large, was not necessarily bad for Greek national interests, since the Greek King maintained "that it would be folly to go to war in order to help Russia to obtain and retain Constantinople". In the summer of 1915, after his visit to the Balkans, Hanke, the Secretary to the Committee of Imperial Defense similarly reported that "all authorities on the Balkans and on Turkey insisted on the objections which all Balkan states have to a Russian occupation of Constantinople". In all truth, the establishment of Russia in the Balkans would have made a Greek alliance of little utility to Serbia, thus opening the way

²⁶ C. J. Lowe, "The Failure of British Diplomacy in the Balkans, 1914- 1916", *Canadian Journal of History*, 4 (1) (1969) 81.

²⁷ Leon, *Greece and the Great Powers*, 99.

²⁸ Fotakis, *Greek Naval Strategy*, 112.

²⁹ The National Archives, ADM 116/1437B,(Dardanelles Commission), Examination of Sir Thomas Montgomery Cunningham, 13 March 1917, 1152.

³⁰ Fotakis, *Greek Naval Strategy* 118-119.

to a Serbo-Bulgarian territorial understanding at the expense of Greece.³¹

The Allies were soon to pay for their blindness with the failed operation in Dardanelles, which with Greek participation would in all probability have had successful outcome with unforeseeable consequences for the length of the war. However, this operation, besides everything else, brought about the first open clash between the King and the Prime Minister leading the resignation of Venizelos who, after elections, returned to power in August 1915.

In the meantime, helped by the inept allied policy in playing the Bulgaria card, a strong current of public opinion in favor of neutrality had formed, issuing from the Palace the military, Venizelos' political opponents and of course, the German propaganda. Venizelos had no longer the domestic support which he had enjoyed at the beginning of the war. One month after Venizelos' return to government Bulgaria announced a general mobilization and Greece responded with the same measure. In the meantime Serbia found itself in a dire situation in view of the impending joint attack of German and Austrian forces against the country. This, together with the certainty of Bulgaria's joining the camp of Central Powers, would lead inescapably to the crushing of the Serbian army and the eclipse of the Serbian factor from the Balkan chess-board.³²

The Serbian campaign in autumn 1915 was the moment in which the Greek question became urgent. The German Army Commanders in Serbia, Field Marshal August v. Mackensen and his Chief of Staff, Hans v. Seeckt, wanted to attack the Allied forces in Thessalonika and "throw them into the Mediterranean". Their Bulgarian allies were in a very similar mood, but they did not attack for two essential reasons: The railway connections were not sufficient to bring the necessary troops and ammunition to the Salonica front, and, the Germans did not want to bring Greece into the war, since they knew quite well the very difficult internal situation and feared that an advance into Greek territory would drive the country into the arms of the Allied powers. Greek neutrality was considered a great advantage and the Germans initially respected it, despite the open violation by the Allied Powers.³³

While the war was raging in the Balkans, and the Kingdom of Serbia accepted a powerful attack from the German-Austrian forces, the Kingdom of Greece remained neutral, a fact that went hand in hand to the Central Powers, and weakened the alliance of Entente, to which Serbia belonged. After the disastrous defeat of Anglo-French in the Dardanelles (February 1915), while during the

³¹ Ibid, 114-115.

³² P. Spyropoulos, "The civil-military situation in the Balkans on the eve of World War One- The reasons of Greece's neutrality in relation to the position of the other Balkan states and Great Powers", *The Serbian (Yugoslav)- Greek relations in the first half of the twentieth century*, (Belgrade 2016), 82-83.

³³ H. Afflerbach, "Greece and the Balkan Area in German Strategy, 1914- 1918", *The Salonica Theatre of Operations and the Outcome of the Great War* (Thessaloniki 2005), 53-66.

April-December 1915 Allied operations in Gallipoli, the British Embassy in Athens was transformed into a military information collection center, found in continuous contact with the British General Staff in Cairo, as the largest city of Africa and the Arab world. The main source of information collection and the center of intelligence-counter-intelligence was established in Athens in 1915 as a part of the Secret Operations Office, with the code name “Organization R”, which was subordinate to the British Admiralty. The British Ministry of the Armed Forces considered that, as a result of the widespread operations in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean, the priority was to set up an Information Processing Expert in relation to the Ottoman army, as well as to coordinate services in Athens and Cairo.

The withdrawal of the Serbian army under the pressure of the joint attacks by Germany, Austria-Bulgaria and Bulgaria in October 1915 made Greece a territory of key importance for the Allies. In October 1915, British Prime Minister Herbert Asquith offered Greek Cyprus, as well as post-war territorial concessions in Thrace and Asia Minor, where the Greek population lived, in exchange for its entry into the war on the side of the forces of Entente and the attack on Bulgaria. The King of Greece, Constantine, rejected this offer, and pro-British Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos was forced to retreat.³⁴ The conquest of Serbia was of the utmost importance for Germany, because it represented the bridge, through its Austro-Hungarian ally with Bulgaria, and through it with the allied Turkey. All this should have been done in order to create a continental passage Germany-Turkey-Middle East. In this way, Germany would have had direct access to the natural resources of the Middle East, as well as the possibility of easier transportation of military troops and equipment to the front. On the other hand, this “territory of high priority” was the last Allied bridgehead to the Middle East.³⁵

These developments confirmed Venizelos’ worst fears. From the very outset he had believed and proclaimed that the defeat of Serbia would mean a dramatic overthrow of strategic balances in the Balkans, leading unavoidably to the creation of an powerful Bulgaria, which, sooner or later, Greece would be obliged to deal with alone after the war.³⁶

Venizelos at this point reminded Constantine of Greece’s treaty obligations towards Serbia, but the Palace and General Staff cited as a pretext for ignoring these obligations Serbia’s inability to position 150.000 troops in the Axios valley as required by one of the provisions in the Greek-Serbian treaty. With an inspired maneuver and against all expectations, Venizelos succeeded in persuading

³⁴ Toni Breidel Hatzhdemetriou, *War and diplomacy in the Middle East*, (Athens 2015), 184-188.

³⁵ A. Mitrović, “Political Consequences of the Break up of Salonica Front,” *The Salonica Theatre of Operations and the Outcome of the Great War*, (Thessalonica 2005), 321-343.

³⁶ A more extensive exposition of Venizelos’ positions on this question is to be found in his speech to Parliament on 13th August 1917, Efimeris Sizitiseon Voulis (August 13, 1917)

Constantine, albeit for a few hours, to accept the landing of British and French troops at Thessalonica to take the place of the Serbian troops envisaged in the Greek-Serbian treaty. After receiving the King's assent, Venizelos, fearing that Constantine would change his mind, moved with lightening speed and requested the Allies to dispatch the troops required. In the event, the Allies responded at once to the request and the forces that were based at the Dardanelles embarked and set sail for Thessalonica. Despite Greek neutrality of the Anglo-French troops, they landed in Thessalonica under the command of General Morris Sarrai, and in Macedonia where they were created the Salonika Front (1915-1918). Also on the Greek island of Limnos (in the Gulf of Mudros), from the beginning of 1915, the Expedition Corps of the Mediterranean was anchored, from where it was led by the anti-war operations in Dardanelles and Gallipoli.³⁷

Thus the curtain was raised on the Salonica Theatre of Operations.³⁸ The Armée d'Orient also prepared the ground for the postwar economic penetration of the Balkans by France and for the containment of Russia, Italy and Germany in the Near East. It was finally expected that it would facilitate the postwar political preponderance of France in Greece and French territorial expansion into Syria and Cilicia.³⁹ Over the same period Britain shifted her attention to the protection of her Eastern Empire through the encouragement of Arab nationalism and paid a reluctant regard to the French insistence on maintaining the Allied camp in Macedonia, whose high handiness vis-a-vis Royalist Greece climaxed.

In the next couple of years, the Armée d'Orient established itself in Macedonia in order to preclude Romania or Greece from coming in against the Entente according to Asquith⁴⁰, and to prohibit the use of Greek naval facilities by German submarines.⁴¹

In May 1918, General Guillaumat's Greek troops attacked and captured the strong Bulgarian position of Skra-di-Legen, marking the first major Greek action on the Allied side in the war. With the German spring offensive threatening France, Guillaumat was recalled to Paris and replaced by General Franchet d'Esperey. Although d'Esperey urged an attack on the Bulgarian Army, the French government refused to allow an offensive unless all the countries agreed. General Guillaumat, no longer needed in France, traveled from London to Rome, trying to win approval for an attack. Finally in September, agreement was reached

³⁷ It should be noted that in addition to the French troops (the "Eastern Army") and the British military units ("Salonica Army"), the Russian and Italian units were present on the Salonica front as well as the recovered Serbian army.

³⁸ From Venizelos's speech to Parliament on 13th August 1917.

³⁹ D. J. Dutton, "The Balkan campaign and French war aims in the Great War" *English Historical Review*, 94 (170) (1979) 101-107.

⁴⁰ Lowe, "The Failure of British Diplomacy", 94.

⁴¹ M. Larcher, *La grande guerre dans les Balkans, direction de la guerre* (Paris 1929) 15-16.

and d'Esperey was allowed to launch his grand offensive. The Allies were certain of their impending victory, while the Bulgarians could see the war was lost. The Ottoman Empire was near collapse, the Austro-Hungarian government was in chaos and the German Army was beaten on the decisive Western Front. The Bulgarians were not willing to fight and die for a lost cause.

The preparatory artillery bombardment of enemy positions for the Battle of Dobro Pole began on September 14. The following day, the French and Serbians attacked and captured their objective. On September 18, the Greeks and the British attacked but were stopped with heavy losses by the Bulgarians in the Battle of Doiran. The Franco-Serbian army continued advancing vigorously and next day, some Bulgarian units started surrendering positions without a fight and the Bulgarian command ordered a retreat. On September 29, the Bulgarians were granted the Armistice of Thessaloniki by General d'Esperey, ending their war. The Salonika front was brought to an end at noon on 30 September 1918 when the ceasefire came into effect.⁴²

Portugal in WWI

In the first decades of the twentieth century, Portugal's overseas possessions were generally seen as a critical component of the nation's self-identity and standing in the world. Even though many contradictions and paradoxes can be identified in Portugal's imperial project, it seems indisputable that among the ruling classes and large sectors of the nation's public opinion there was a solid consensus regarding the necessity of defending the overseas territories. As a small, backward, semi-peripheral, and near bankrupt country, Portugal struggled to mobilize the necessary means to take full advantage of its vast African possessions. Those campaigns consumed most of the available fiscal resources of the state, leaving it with few means to promote the economic development of the territories. Even though the preservation of the colonies may not have been the key issue behind Portugal's decision to play an active part in the Western Front in 1916, it was nevertheless an important element in the debates sparked by the outbreak of the hostilities in Europe and Africa in 1914.⁴³

Portugal went to war after a long and acrimonious debate agitated public opinion. The decision to seize the German merchant vessels at anchor in Portuguese waters since 1914, which provoked Germany's declaration of war, was initially presented by Prime Minister Afonso Costa (1871-1937) as arising

⁴² Falls, C. (1935). *History of the Great War: Military Operations Macedonia, From the Spring of 1917 to the End of the War* (IWM and Battery Press 1996 ed.). Nashville, TN: HMSO. ISBN [0-89839-243-8](#)

⁴³ P.A. Oliveira, *Portugal's empire in the wake of WWI: Coping with the challenges of pan-africanism and the league of nations*, E-Journal of Portuguese History, Volume15, Issue number1, Published - 1 Jun 2017

out of economic necessity. Soon afterwards, however, Portugal's belligerence began to be ascribed to the obligations arising out of the country's ancient alliance with Great Britain, a more consensual explanation. These diplomatic arrangements were necessary for the preservation of nationalities, while for Portugal, it was not a war of conquest. It was very difficult for those in power to deviate from description of Portugal's participation in the conflict based on material gains, given the generalized lack of public enthusiasm for military intervention in Europe. However, the link to Great Britain placed on the old alliance served as well to obscure the difficulties experienced by the Portuguese in obtaining permission from London to become a belligerent and to send an expeditionary force to France.⁴⁴

The Great War witnessed the most important military operation carried out by Portuguese troops outside the country's borders during the first half of the twentieth century. Portugal was the only country involved in the conflict which, between 1914 and 1916, was able to preserve a position of undeclared neutrality in Europe and, simultaneously, wage war against Germany in Africa. The defence of the Portuguese colonial empire's integrity has often been signalled by historians as one of the factors which justified the declaration of war against Germany in March 1916 and Portugal's participation in the European theatre of operations alongside its ally, Great Britain. From early 1917 onwards, however, the Portuguese military intervention on the African battlefield always played second fiddle to the sending of troops to Flanders. Moreover, the attitude towards the sending of troops to Africa, provoking grave doubts among the colonial and metropolitan population regarding its necessity, changed in March 1916 when Germany declared war on Portugal and thus began the preparations for the dispatch of the CEP to France.⁴⁵

In December 1917 Sidonio Pais (1872-1918), Portugal's prewar minister in Berlin, took power after a quick military struggle on the streets of Lisbon. A number of leading interventionists, beginning with Prime Minister Afonso Costa, were detained; others sought shelter aboard British ships at anchor in Lisbon. The *coup* represented a shock to interventionist opinion, which cast Pais in the role of a German agent, doing Berlin's bidding against the Allies – a Portuguese Lenin of sorts. Pais moved swiftly to exile a number of figures, beginning with President Bernardino Machado; he then closed down parliament and municipal chambers. For the interventionists, the war now took a backseat to the struggle to recapture power, undoing Pais' attempt to establish a "New Republic." Pais and his supporters, meanwhile, concentrated on securing their hold on the country. While they paid lip service to the ongoing war effort, and professed their support for the Allied cause, there is no doubt that the war meant

⁴⁴ <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/war/republic-portugal-facts>

⁴⁵ <https://fsi.stanford.edu/events/geographies-memory-geographies-loss-first-world-war-portuguese-east-africa>

a lot less to them than to their displaced predecessors. Pais understood that as close an alignment as possible with Britain would allow him to wind down the CEP gradually; in the meantime, its officers provided him with the administrative staff necessary to replace previously elected local officials.

Abandoned to their fate, interventionist officers were left with a choice: remain in France or return to Portugal to fight the nascent “New Republic.” This choice was made easier by the military defeat suffered on 9 April 1918 at the battle of La Lys, after which the CEP disappeared from the front lines.⁴⁶

The CEP suffered an undeniable defeat on the Lys. An objective view of the evidence reveals that the British made the Portuguese the scapegoat for the embarrassing defeat. Several prominent historians have drawn similar conclusions. The manner in which the CEP’s relief was carried demonstrates the First Army’s acute lack of preparedness for the impending attack. Lloyd George pulled no punches in assessing the blunder: An incomprehensible piece of carelessness on the part of our Army Command was directly responsible for what happened. General Horne, the Commander of the Second Army, being warned that the next general attack would come in that sector decided to withdraw the Portuguese Corps from the line and substitute two British divisions. However, he only withdrew one Portuguese division (the second) without substituting a British division and then left the forward position, which had been held by a corps of two divisions, with a brigade of the other division in reserve. What followed was inevitable with any troops.⁴⁷

Morale of CEP was low throughout the winter of 1917–1918, partly due to bad weather and partly due to a perception among the soldiers that there was no reason for them to be in France. Another major problem was a gradual loss of manpower; by April 1918, 10% of the CEP’s strength had become casualties, due to the constant attrition of front-line service, and almost half of the officers were no longer present at the front. After the Lys, the remnants of the CEP were withdrawn for rear-area pioneer and security duties, though the 1st Division would later be returned to the front line for a short period. On 16th June 1918, the 1st Division, supplemented by British units, replaced the 14th British Division in the defense of the Lillers-Steenbekque line. In September 1918, already under the command of General Garcia Rosado, the remnants of the CEP started to be re-organised in order to re-enter combat. The objective was to form three brigades, composed of nine infantry battalions, that were to be organised with the remnants of the former CEP’s original infantry units. By the end of October, four battalions were already combat-capable. These four infantry battalions (I, IV, VIII and IX battalions), together with several artillery,

⁴⁶ F.R de Meneses, *Making Sense of the War (Portugal)*, Available at https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/making_sense_of_the_war_portugal Last updated 12 October 2017

⁴⁷<https://fsi.stanford.edu/events/geographies-memory-geographies-loss-first-world-war-portuguese-east-africa>

engineer, heavy machine gun and other remaining CEP units, participated in the *Hundred Days Offensive*.

The last Portuguese combat action in World War I happened on the day of the Armistice. On 11th November 1918, under the command of Captain Barros Bastos, the 4th Company of the IV Infantry Battalion (former 23rd Battalion of the 1st Division) made the last assault against the Germans on the passage of the Scheldt river, Belgium.

By the Armistice in 1918, the CEP had lost 2,160 dead, 5,224 wounded and 6,678 taken prisoner – 14,000 casualties and losses out of an establishment of 60,000.⁴⁸

Conclusion

The ongoing research dedicated to WWI have resumed once more among historians and politicians, the long lasting debate on the responsibility of the conflict. Political implications from various sides still prevent an objective approach of the question. Nevertheless, the fast deployment of a heavy military power by the German Empire, threatening in particular the British naval supremacy; the aspiration of the Austrian Double Monarchy to dominate the Balkans against the old Russian influence, the growing collapse of the Ottoman Empire on one side; on the other the colonial rivalries between Great Powers; French revanchism and Italian irredentism had spread germs of deep antagonism for decades.

Almost everything that happened in the remainder of the century was in one way or another a result of World War I, including the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, World War II, the Holocaust, and the development of the atomic bomb. The Great Depression, the Cold War, and the collapse of European colonialism can also be traced, at least indirectly, to the First World War. Its` political importance could be understood by perceiving it as global and three-part historical process, consisting of series of diverse but essentially the same events.⁴⁹ World War I probably had more far-reaching consequences than any other proceeding war. It represented historical turning point that conditioned the downfall of four monarchies--in Russia in 1917, in Austria-Hungary and Germany in 1918, and in Turkey in 1922. It contributed to the Bolshevik rise to power in Russia in 1917 and the triumph of fascism in Italy in 1922.⁵⁰ The Treaties of Versailles, Saint Germaine, Trianon and Sevres, as well as the end of four continental empires upon which the European balance of power had laid

⁴⁸ Pyles, J. (2012). "The Portuguese Expeditionary Corps in World War I: From Inception to Destruction, 1914–1918" (PDF). PhD. Texas US: University of North Texas. OCLC 823504820.

⁴⁹ Andrej Mitrović, "Political Consequences of the Break up of Salonica Front," *The Salonica Theatre of Operations and the Outcome of the Great War*, (Thessalonica 2005), 321-343.

⁵⁰ <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/teaching-resource/historical-context-global-effect-world-war-i>

for a century had opened the way to a second conflict, after a truce seriously troubled by the aggressive impact of dictatorships and devastating economic crisis as a consequence of political instability.⁵¹ Accordingly, WWI created the preconditions for the complete geopolitical transformation of Europe in the period that followed.

A more than century after the conclusion of the World War I, the reopening of a matter of this kind for public discussion is of particular historical and moral value. It is of historical value because it provides us with the opportunity to arrive at a more definitive appraisal of its` significance and consequences. It is, moreover, of moral value, because, after so many years, we commemorate once again the thousands of dead on both sides who fought and fell during the Great War.

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⁵¹ Pasquale Baldocci, 1914-2014: From the clash of Imperialism to the Soft Power of the European Union, 52-55, *New Balkans and Europe-Peace Development Integration* Proceedings of the Tenth ECPD International Conference on Reconciliation, Tolerance and Human Security in the Balkans, Belgrade 2015.

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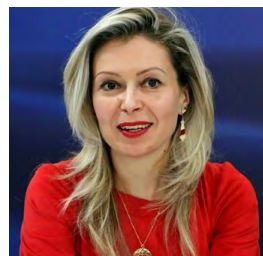
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