

³⁰ Brzezinski, p. 47. Brzezinski, however, expresses the fear that the internal strains within Turkey are likely not only to get worse but to greatly reduce the stabilizing role Turkey can play within this volcanic region. Such a development, he argues, "will in turn make it more difficult to assimilate the new Central Asian states into the international community, while also adversely affecting the American dominated security in the Persian Gulf region. In any case, both America and the international community may be faced here with a challenge that will dwarf the recent crisis in the former Yugoslavia." Ibid, p. 53.

³¹ Brzezinski, pp. 203-204.

³² Ebel, p. 9.

The Balkan Entente: A Reassessment of an Aspect of Balkan Diplomacy in the Interwar Period*

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The Balkan Entente – these two, seemingly incongruous words describe one of the least known and most misunderstood aspects of inter-war European diplomatic history. Signed in February 1934 by representatives of Romania, Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey, the diplomatic agreement known alternatively as the Balkan Entente or the Balkan Pact represented yet another attempt to introduce a measure of security into a region whose reputation for volatility has always been proverbial. That the initiative for such an attempt did not originate from any of the Great Powers of Europe but from the Balkan states themselves endowed the Balkan Entente with a particularly unique character.

In spite of its singularity, however, the Balkan Entente has yet to receive satisfactory treatment from historians. Even today, virtually all English-language works dealing with the subject seek to assess the origins, achievements and the ultimate fate of the Balkan Entente on assumptions formulated by a small number of writers in the late 1930s.¹ Eventually, these views were synthesized into a single, cohesive school of thought by L.S. Stavrianos in the early 1940s.² As a result, Stavrianos' theories have dominated the historical discourse pertaining to the Balkan Entente.³

The thrust of Stavrianos' thesis, faithfully emulated by other historians is that the Balkan Entente represented little more than an exercise in futility.⁴ According to the noted historian, the Balkan Entente did not contribute to the stabilization of the Balkan Peninsula and only served to further alienate Bulgaria and Albania, the

region's chief pariah states in the inter-war period, pushing them into the arms of Italy and Germany – powers whose leaders viewed the domination of the Balkans as vital in the context of their own expansionist and revisionist policies.⁵ Furthermore, the final structure and composition of the Balkan Entente is said to have departed from the lofty aims of unity professed by the representatives of the Balkan states during the course of the Balkan Conferences. In this context, the Balkan Entente is presented as a divisive, rather than a unifying movement in the region.⁶ By allowing old wounds to fester, it may actually have been counterproductive to the cause of peace in Southeastern Europe. Finally, it has been argued by Stavrianos, the Balkan Entente was completely incapable of resisting Great Power intervention in the region.⁷ For these, as well as a variety of other, less significant reasons, the "Stavrianos school" has classified the Balkan Entente as a well-intentioned failure whose eventual demise was the result of the structural flaws inherent in this diplomatic arrangement.⁸

Stavrianos' claim that the Balkan Entente was an ineffectual diplomatic initiative is in one respect a perfectly viable interpretation of the dynamics of the Entente's rise and fall. However, this traditionally accepted view has a number of limitations that seriously undermine its validity. First, it displays a tendency to focus on the negative, rather than the positive attributes of the Balkan Entente by highlighting its shortcomings rather than its merits. Second, its primary consideration is the role of the Entente and its relative effectiveness or ineffectiveness as a barrier against the extension of the Second World War into Southeastern Europe.

The relevance of this assumption in relation to the dynamic of the Balkan Entente is another question altogether. A reassessment of the factors that influenced the Balkan Entente's creation, aims and nature make it possible to argue that the traditionally negative and widely accepted view of the Entente as an ineffectual and futile exercise in diplomacy cannot be regarded as irrefutable. Indeed, a contention may be made that the Balkan Entente represented the utmost effort that its member-states were capable of undertaking – under the prevailing circumstances – for the purpose of preserving peace in South-Eastern Europe. The Balkan Entente fully reflected the astute and coldly realistic appraisal of the con-

temporary international situation by its individual member states and made a significant contribution to the maintenance of peace in the region. Lastly, it completely fulfilled the objective for which it was designed.

The long-term origins of the Balkan Entente may be traced as far back as the second half of the nineteenth century. The period between the 1860s and 1912 witnessed two attempts on the part of individual Balkan states to construct a lasting framework of regional co-operation. The initiative for the first attempt originated with Prince Michael Obrenovic of Serbia in the early 1860s. Realizing that the territorial ambitions of the Great Powers presented a serious threat to the precarious independence of the fledgling Balkan states, Obrenovic endeavoured to bind his own principality in a series of interlocking alliances with Montenegro, Greece and Romania.⁹ In spite of his efforts, however, this first attempt at constructing a regional power bloc in the Balkans failed. In 1868, Obrenovic was assassinated, and his death deprived the Balkan co-operation movement of much of its impetus. Moreover, the usefulness of the alliances was severely restricted by the limited military effectiveness of the Balkan states. Finally, the signatories' mutual suspicions and jealousies undermined the efforts to such an extent as to render them virtually worthless.¹⁰

These dissensions became even more acute with the establishment of the Bulgarian national state as a new factor in inter-Balkan relations. Bulgaria emerged as a result of the Treaty of San Stefano and the Congress of Berlin which followed the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877 – 1878. The new state espoused irredentist ambitions which were no less grandiose than those professed by Greece and Serbia. Indeed, Bulgaria's aspirations, based as they were on the restoration of the medieval Bulgarian empire at the time of its greatest territorial extent in the 9th – 10th centuries, frequently overlapped with the irredentist claims of the other two independent Balkan states.¹¹

The conflicting territorial ambitions and national objectives soon divided the region into two mutually hostile groups of states: Serbia and Greece on the one hand and Bulgaria on the other. Due to the geographic distance separating them, as well as their mutual acceptance of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the first two states had

never engaged in any serious territorial, linguistic, religious or racial competition. As a result, Greco-Serbian relations had always been friendly. The creation of an autonomous Bulgaria served to bring Greece and Serbia even closer together in an effort to resist the territorial designs of the Bulgarians. Both Greeks and Serbs bitterly resented the creation of the Exarchate – the autocephalous Bulgarian Orthodox Church between 1870 – 1872. An autonomous Bulgarian ecclesiastical organization threatened to undermine historical Greek and Serbian territorial claims to areas that had either been included within the original jurisdictional boundaries of the Exarchate, or had been progressively added to it in accordance with Article 10 of the Ottoman imperial *firman* (decree) of 11 March 1870, which formally established the Bulgarian Exarchate.¹²

In the last three decades of the 19th century, Article 10 was applied repeatedly, thus contributing to what Greeks and Serbs considered an alarming growth of the Exarchate. The expansion of the Exarchate was particularly marked in Macedonia, where seven dioceses voluntarily went over to the Bulgarian church by 1912.¹³ As a result, this region would become the scene of a vicious, three decade-long struggle between Bulgarian, Serbian and Greek guerrillas whose activities were supported by their respective governments. In this context, the Bulgarians sought to incorporate the entire area into their state or encourage the creation of an independent Macedonia under the tutelage of the Great Powers, while the Greeks and Serbs favored a partition of Macedonia as a means of maintaining the precarious balance of power in the region.¹⁴

For their own part, the Bulgarians resented Greek and Serb attempts to curtail Bulgaria's own irredentist programme. Serbia's decision to attack Bulgaria in 1885, motivated by Prince Milan Obrenovic's unwillingness to accept the incorporation of Eastern Rumelia into Bulgaria was particularly damaging to the relations between the two Slav Balkan states.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the enmity between Serbia and Bulgaria would never attain the levels of hostility that characterized Greco-Bulgarian relations. The views of S. P. Waterlow, the British minister to Sofia in the 1920s, though based for the most part on a stereotypical understanding of the national traits of the Balkan peoples, summarize the differences between Serbo-Bulgarian and Greco-Bulgarian antagonisms and graphically

convey the intensity of the enmity that marked the relations between Greece and Bulgaria for a considerable period:

[...] the hatred between Greek and Bulgarian is in its very nature a different kind of thing from the hatred between Bulgarian and Serb – different in quality and much deeper and more intense. Serbo-Bulgarian enmity is, after all, essentially no more than the mutual dislike for each other of two more or less kindred peasant clans, each in the same early stage of culture, each equally pugnacious, and each equally appreciative of the other's fighting qualities; it is a pure accident, due to geographical position and to its relatively large scale, that this tribal, one might say this family, feud between two peoples of Slav language should keep Europe uneasy.... On the other hand, the reluctance of Bulgarian and Greek to come together comes from a deeper source.... The amalgam of fear and contempt which makes up the attitude of the Bulgar towards the Greek belongs to a well-marked category of historical phenomena.... The hatred felt in such cases by the race of infant or adolescent culture for the older and more cunning race that insinuates a highly matured and alien civilization... like a leprosy is no ordinary hatred; it is an instinctive recoil, like the recoil of the child from the terrifyingly old and wise, and is liable at any moment to explode incalculably in massacres and pogroms.¹⁶

In the context of such fierce antagonisms, it was little wonder that the next attempt at closer diplomatic co-operation in the region would prove no more successful than its 19th century predecessor. In 1912, the Balkan states agreed to work toward a greater objective – that of delivering a death-blow to the Ottoman Empire in Europe – under the provisions of a series of alliances known collectively as the Balkan League. The diplomatic maneuvers which immediately preceded the First Balkan War (October 1912), witnessed an almost unexpected degree of foreign policy and military co-ordination on the part of the League's members. However, the outcome of the war, and the subsequent division of the territorial

spoils under the stipulations of the Treaty of London (May 1913) left Bulgaria's leaders unsatisfied. At the same time, the leaders of Serbia and Greece were equally determined to guard their own territorial acquisitions and resist Bulgaria's calls for revisions of the treaty – all the more so because Bulgaria's demands for territorial adjustments could only be carried out in recently acquired Serbian and Greek Macedonia. In just a few months, amidst escalating tension, the Balkan League disintegrated. Bulgaria, unable to obtain satisfaction, attacked Serbia in late June 1913 and initiated the Second Balkan War. By the end of the following month, Bulgaria's armies had been defeated. The Treaty of Bucharest (August 1913) not only failed to redress Bulgaria's grievances, but compounded them even further by depriving Bulgaria of some of the territories which she had acquired during the First Balkan War.¹⁷

The contentions, recriminations, and rivalries that were either created or exacerbated by the two Balkan wars appeared to argue against the possibility that the Balkan States might take steps toward yet another attempt at closer diplomatic co-ordination in the near future. This pessimistic prospect seemed to be borne out in the decade following the events of 1912 – 1913, as the realities of the First World War and the Greco-Turkish conflict of 1919 – 1922 only served to heighten inter-Balkan tensions. However, such gloomy assessments of the inter-state relations in South-Eastern Europe proved deceptive. Beginning in the mid-1920s, a number of conditions evolved which greatly facilitated a third attempt at constructing a regional Balkan power block and laid the foundation of the Balkan Entente.

The first of these conditions was the gradual stabilization of European inter-state relations – a trend that eventually culminated in the signing of the Locarno Agreements of 1925 – 1926. The initial success of the Locarno Pact provided the impetus and encouragement for a number of diplomatic initiatives designed to buttress the system of collective security advocated by the League of Nations as the best guarantee of preserving European and global peace. Next to Locarno, the so-called "Little Entente" stood as the most prominent example of this trend. Formed between 1920 – 1921 by Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia, and sanctioned by France, this alliance system aimed at ensuring that Hungary

would not carry out unilateral revisions of the Treaty of Trianon and prevent the restoration of the Habsburgs in either Austria or Hungary.¹⁸ Initiatives of this kind were frequently and contemptuously dismissed by many contemporaries as nothing more than an ineffectual "pactomania."¹⁹ Nevertheless, the example of Locarno was sufficiently impressive to prompt calls from many quarters for the creation of a Balkan equivalent.²⁰

Similarly, in South-Eastern Europe itself, a remarkable process of détente unfolded between individual Balkan states in the late 1920s and 1930s. Manifesting itself through the conclusion of a number of bilateral diplomatic and economic agreements, this dramatic improvement in inter-Balkan relations made a significant contribution towards the eventual emergence of the Balkan Entente. The conclusion of the Treaty of Lausanne (23 July 1923) and the Greco-Turkish population exchanges removed some of the more critical sources of discord that existed between the two countries and opened the way for reconciliation.²¹ Simultaneously, the trend toward closer Greco-Turkish relations was also reinforced by the establishment of the Turkish secular republic, whose leader, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk made a deliberate decision to forfeit any territorial claims Turkey might have had against any of its neighbors. Having rid himself of all irredentist ambitions, Ataturk instead focused his energies on internal reform and on fostering friendly relations with Turkey's former enemies.²²

As a direct result of these developments the Greco-Turkish Treaty of Friendship, Arbitration and Conciliation was signed on 30 October 1930.²³ It was followed three years later by the Greco-Turkish "Entente Cordiale" of 14 September 1933.²⁴ Mutual population exchanges between Greece and Bulgaria also did much to significantly improve the relations between these two neighbors, though this improvement would never be as complete or thorough as the new Greco-Turkish understanding.²⁵

In the same time period, a number of other agreements, more limited in scope but still significant in the context of Balkan diplomatic co-operation, also came into force. These included a pact of conciliation, arbitration and judicial settlement between Romania and Yugoslavia (1929); a treaty of non-aggression and arbitration between Romania and Greece (1928); a property settlement be-

tween Romania and Bulgaria (1930); and a Greco-Yugoslav agreement concerning Yugoslavia's commercial privileges in the Greek port of Thessaloniki. Supplementing the political agreements listed above was a series of commercial treaties linking individual Balkan states.²⁶

The diplomatic and commercial agreements concluded between 1925 and 1933 undoubtedly did much to diffuse some of the pressing international problems that complicated the relations between individual Balkan states. However, the agreements did not solve all the problems in the region. The most pressing point of contention was Bulgaria's revisionism. As a consequence of its participation on the losing side in the First World War, Bulgaria was forced to cede Western Thrace (and with it, access to the Aegean) to Greece according to the provisions of the Treaty of Neuilly. This loss added another grievance to Bulgaria's long list of objections to the distribution of territory in the region and placed an additional stumbling block on the path toward an all-inclusive Balkan diplomatic agreement. By the early 1930s, Bulgaria's demands for territorial revisions in the Dobrudja, Greek and Serbian Macedonia and Western Thrace seemed as insoluble a problem as it had been at the time of the Second Balkan War.²⁷

Nevertheless, as mentioned above by 1929, inter-state relations in the region had improved significantly enough to allow the representatives of the Balkan states to meet in a series of gatherings known as the Balkan Conferences. Four such meetings were held between October 1930 and November 1933. The ostensible purpose of the Conferences was to capitalize on the détente of the late 1920s and construct a political, economic and cultural framework for an all-inclusive Balkan federation.²⁸ The Conferences were semi-official in character. In other words, they did enjoy the moral backing of the Balkan governments, which exercised a significant amount of influence with regards to appointing the members of individual national delegations, but the decisions reached in the course of the meetings were not binding on any of the states represented.²⁹

While the Balkan Conferences sought Balkan reconciliation and union by addressing several specific issues, the most important question that the meetings addressed was the subject of a Balkan

Pact.³⁰ The proposed pact was to draw on the notions of collective security outlined in the Covenant of the League of Nations and function as a mechanism of collective security in the Balkans.³¹ The work on the Pact began during the First Conference held in Athens in October 1930, and continued until October 1932 when the final draft of the pact was approved in the course of the Third Balkan Conference. In its final form, the Pact was approved by all states except Bulgaria, which refused to give unconditional approval to the agreement because its recognition would be tantamount to Bulgaria's acceptance of the territorial status quo in the Balkans.³² However, Greece, Turkey, Romania and Yugoslavia proceeded to work out the details of the Pact without Bulgaria's participation. Representatives of the four countries signed the final version of the Pact on 9 February 1934.³³ For the first time in more than two decades, a multilateral alliance was finally in existence in the Balkans. Moreover, unlike the Balkan alliance systems of the 1860s and 1912–1913, the Balkan Entente was not designed for aggressive, but rather for defensive aims.³⁴

The relationship between the Balkan Conferences and the Balkan Entente is a good starting point for a reevaluation of the latter's effectiveness. Stavrianos and his followers imply that the Balkan Entente was a failure due to its departure from the noble goal of Balkan unity professed in the course of Balkan Conferences. Specifically, Stavrianos points to the wide disparity that existed between the idealistic goals of the Balkan Conferences and the more pragmatic character of the Balkan Entente: "While the Balkan Conference looked toward a fundamental and comprehensive union of all the Balkan peoples politically, economically, socially and intellectually, the Entente was, for all intents and purposes, purely political."³⁵

In other words, the relative effectiveness of the Balkan Entente is gauged according to the degree to which this diplomatic agreement measured up – or, more accurately, failed to measure up – to the optimistic expectations of regional unity espoused in the course of the Balkan Conferences.

The validity of this standpoint is debatable. Indeed, the proposition that the Balkan Entente was the first tangible step toward the grand expectations of Balkan unity advocated during the Confer-

ences may be a misconception.³⁶ This interpretation presupposes that the participants of the Balkan Conference genuinely and sincerely believed in the possibility of producing a regional diplomatic agreement that would satisfy the conflicting interests of South-eastern European states. Moreover, the accuracy of such conclusions also depends on the assumption that individual Balkan states were willing to exert utmost efforts to address whatever grievances their neighbours might have had to outstanding territorial, minority and economic issues.

The conferences were never interested in the first place to tackle the most pressing issues that hindered the progress toward a lasting regional co-operation. If that was indeed the case, then the Balkan Pact was never intended to function as anything more than the traditional alliance as it eventually became, rather than an unsuccessful attempt at laying the foundations for the utopian dreams of a Balkan federation, which Stavrianos implies it was.

As early as the First Balkan Conference, which took place in Athens between 6 – 13 October 1930, individual national delegations assumed the diplomatic positions they would maintain for the following four years with regards to the prospects for a comprehensive regional rapprochement. In general, these standpoints were characterized by obstinacy and inflexibility that collectively were a far cry from the principles of unity and conciliation on the basis of which the Conferences were convened. None of the delegations appear to have been wholeheartedly devoted to the optimistic visions of Balkan federation and all were careful to point out that the progress toward regional political unity must be a slow one, in the course of which economic and customs agreements must precede any diplomatic or political understanding.³⁷ The delegations participating in all four conferences quickly fell into two distinct groups defined along traditional lines – one made up of satisfied, or anti-revisionist states (Greece, Turkey, Romania, Yugoslavia), and the other composed of revisionist powers (Bulgaria and Albania).³⁸

Both groups persisted stubbornly in accepting any tangible schemes for a Balkan union subject to the other camp's willingness to accept conditions that the other side could never possibly tolerate. For instance, the Bulgarian and Albanian delegations in-

sisted on emphasizing the need for making minority rights the main priority of the Conferences, even though it must have been evident to both countries' representatives that such a demand would not appeal to the Yugoslav and Romanian delegations – two countries which included Bulgarian and/or Albanian minorities and against which Bulgaria had significant territorial claims.³⁹ The Yugoslav and Romanian delegations responded by stressing the necessity of effecting closer economic, cultural and intellectual ties instead, regardless of the fact that proposals which elevated relatively mundane matters such as these over more pressing issues of minority rights were bound to aggravate the Bulgarians and Albanians.⁴⁰

In turn, the Greek and Turkish delegations, while paying lip service to the problem of minority rights by agreeing to discuss them in a very broad form, insisted that any schemes for a Balkan union must be based firmly within the framework of existing treaties.⁴¹ The Greeks and the Turks persisted in emphasizing this point despite the fact that it was unacceptable to the members of the revisionist block, particularly Bulgaria. After all, even the most naïve Balkan politician understood that the Bulgarians would be unwilling to participate in any diplomatic or political venture that would require acceptance of the territorial status quo.⁴² Indeed, the Bulgarian leadership made its country's adherence to the Balkan Entente conditional upon immediate territorial revisions – a provision which none of the anti-revisionist states could possibly accept.⁴³

The examples mentioned above represent only a small sample of the conflicting agendas espoused by the national delegations that attended the four Balkan Conferences. Nonetheless, even as limited a demonstration of conflicting interests as the one just presented effectively indicates that the participants of the Balkan Conferences never displayed any serious interest in working toward the elevated goal of a Balkan union. In the absence of any such expectations, Stavrianos' implied criticism to the effect that the Balkan Entente was a failure due to its deviation from the agenda of Balkan unity becomes impossible to sustain.⁴⁴ Obviously, the Balkan Entente can hardly be blamed for departing from the concepts of regional unity if the participants of the Balkan Conferences never placed much faith in such principles in the first place.

Similarly, the refutation of the Entente as a failure due to its alleged incompatibility with the original aims of the Balkan Conferences strengthens the case for the argument that the Entente was a success. In light of the contentious atmosphere of the Balkan Conferences, the fact that four out of the six participants were capable of concluding a diplomatic agreement of any kind must be regarded as a significant accomplishment.

The magnitude of this accomplishment, and the extent to which the Entente may be seen as a success, is underlined by the fact that the signatories themselves were deeply suspicious of each other's motives and intentions. Both Greece and Turkey, whose advocacy of the Balkan Pact was the most vehement, feared the possibility of a Yugoslav-Bulgarian rapprochement.⁴⁵ The anxieties of both states were rooted in the belief that the two Slavic countries might settle their disputes over Macedonia and instead concentrate their efforts on obtaining access to the Aegean at the expense of Greece or Turkey.⁴⁶

Greek and Turkish apprehensions over the possibility of an aggressive Yugoslav-Bulgarian combination were not entirely groundless. Both Bulgaria and Yugoslavia had powerful incentives for directing their attention towards territorial expansion in the direction of the Aegean. The motivations of the former – a revisionist state seeking to redress what it considered to be the unjust verdict of the Treaty of Neuilly – are well known.⁴⁷ Yugoslavia, though a satisfied power, had strategic reasons to covet Thessaloniki. In a possible war with Italy, Yugoslavia would require a port outside of the Adriatic, which could easily be blocked by the Italians at the Straits of Otranto. As long as Greece remained friendly, Yugoslavia could receive supplies and foreign military aid through Thessaloniki. However, if Greece were to assume a neutral or hostile stance, Yugoslavia's ability to utilize the port might be jeopardized. Given these considerations, a "radical solution" to what Yugoslav political and military leaders dubbed their "Salonica problem" looked like an attractive option.⁴⁸ In fact, radical nationalists in both south Slavic countries were known to favour a Yugoslav-Bulgarian alliance as a first step toward the attainment of an outlet to the Aegean for the two countries – by means of force if necessary.⁴⁹ In Bulgaria, even relative moderates, most notably the leaders of the Agrar-

ian Party, voiced the opinion that the abandonment of any Bulgarian claims to Macedonia was a fair price to pay for securing Yugoslav co-operation for the purpose of attaining other territorial objectives.⁵⁰

While there is little indication that such views ever received official backing, it is quite possible that the political leadership of both states, but particularly those of Yugoslavia, entertained them to some degree. For example, highly circumstantial evidence suggests that King Alexander of Yugoslavia was willing to make minor territorial adjustments in favour of Bulgaria if the latter ever decided to conclude an alliance with Yugoslavia.⁵¹ As well, the rather hasty conclusion of the Entente provoked a high degree of resentment within Yugoslavia – undoubtedly because its signing seemed to be detrimental to any prospects for an improvement in Yugoslav-Bulgarian relations.⁵² The Yugoslav government's unsuccessful attempts to limit the duration of the Pact to five years and couch the text of the Pact in such terms as to cause the least offense to Bulgaria, may also be interpreted as an indication of its dissatisfaction with the final form of the Pact.⁵³ Nevertheless, none of the tensions existing between Greece and Turkey on the one hand, and Yugoslavia on the other were sufficiently serious to hamper the conclusion or jeopardize the existence of the Balkan Entente.

Another criticism customarily leveled at the Balkan Entente in an effort to highlight its futility is the claim that the Pact was completely ineffective as an instrument for resisting possible diplomatic or military aggression by a non-Balkan Great Power against any of the Entente's member states.⁵⁴ If Germany and Italy did initiate any offensive moves against the Balkans at the beginning of the Second World War, it is argued, this was not because they were deterred from doing so by the existence of the Balkan Entente, but because they themselves were simply unready or unwilling to extend their military activities into South-Eastern Europe.⁵⁵ Its inability to ultimately prevent hostile Great Powers from interfering in Balkan affairs, the argument continues, reduced the Balkan Entente to nothing more than a mere anti-revisionist, regional power block directed solely against revisionist Bulgaria, and to a smaller degree, against Italian-dominated Albania.⁵⁶

Once again, the accuracy of this assessment of the Entente's

effectiveness depends upon a debatable assumption, namely, the supposition that the architects of the Balkan Pact intended it to serve as an instrument for resisting Great Power aggression in the Balkans. When this resolution proved impossible to carry out due to Bulgaria's decision to abstain from the Pact, the planners of the Balkan Entente decided to settle for a poor second best and transform the Entente into an anti-revisionist agreement directed exclusively against Bulgaria.

Such view fails to stand up to closer scrutiny. Available evidence suggests that the member states of the Balkan Entente were never genuinely interested in bringing Bulgaria into the Pact. This is proven by the diplomatic inflexibility displayed by the anti-revisionist group of Balkan states in the course of the Balkan Conferences examined above. At the same time, it is possible to argue that resisting the encroachments of the Great Powers was never the Entente's purpose to begin with, in which case the Pact's ability to prevent the Second World War from spreading to the region loses its validity as a criterion for assessing the overall success or failure of the Entente. Instead, containing Bulgaria and preventing it from carrying out unilateral revisions of the territorial status quo in the Balkans may be said to have been the Entente's chief aim from its very inception.

Available sources make it possible to offer evidence in support of the assertion that the Balkan Entente was not directed against any Great Power but against Bulgaria. The first of these consists of the remarks made by Nicolae Titulescu, Romania's foreign minister in the 1930s and one of the chief architects of the Pact, concerning the aim and purpose of the Balkan Entente. In a 1933 conversation with a British diplomat, Titulescu declared that while the preservation of the territorial status quo in South-Eastern Europe would be the main aim of the proposed Balkan Entente, the agreement would not be aimed at any of the Great Powers.⁵⁷ And if the Entente was not aimed at non-Balkan power, which other state or states could it have been directed against? By implication, the only logical answer is Bulgaria.

Another item of evidence that testifies in support of the assertion in regards to the true purpose of the Balkan Entente is Article 1 of the Four-Power Balkan Pact. Undoubtedly the most important

of the Entente's provision, Article 1 obliges the signatories to "mutually guarantee the security of all their Balkan frontiers."⁵⁸ By the implication of simple geography, such a guarantee may be interpreted to apply only to Bulgaria – a country whose geopolitical situation makes it one of only two truly "Balkan" states. Moreover, at no point does the text of the Pact so much as hint at the possibility that the Entente's members would ever be required to extend the obligation to cover contingencies of aggression by non-Balkan powers against any of the Pact's signatories.

The argument that the Balkan Entente was not directed against any of the Great Powers is further strengthened by the manner in which the Entente's member-states seemed to go out of their way to assure fellow members that their adherence to the Pact would not require them to become involved in a military confrontation with a Great Power. This policy is most clearly visible in the context of Romania's reaction to the manner in which Turkey's commitment to the Balkan Entente appeared to clash with the provisions of the treaty of neutrality that country signed with the U.S.S.R. in 1925. Shortly after the signing of the Balkan Entente, the Soviet ambassador to Turkey pointed out that in the contingency of a Russo-Romanian war – in which Bulgaria might participate on the side of the U.S.S.R – the provisions of the Balkan Entente would oblige Turkey to side with Romania against Bulgaria, and by implication against Russia. Naturally, if Turkey chose such a course of action, she would be in violation of the Turco-Soviet neutrality agreement.⁵⁹ Turkey's dilemma was solved by the Romanian government which voluntarily issued a declaration to the effect that Romania would not require Turkey to provide military aid in the event of a Russo-Romanian war.⁶⁰

The practical effect of this declaration was to make Turkey's obligation to Romania under the provisions of Article 1 of the Balkan Pact conditional on the basis of an attack against Romania by Bulgaria alone. It is plausible to interpret Romania's action in this regard as yet further evidence in favor of the claim that the security of their Balkan frontiers was much more important to the member-states of the Entente than the safety of their borders with non-Balkan powers. After all, Romania's leaders must have realized that in a two-front war with both the U.S.S.R and Bulgaria, it

would be impossible for Romania to win even with Turkish help. However, in case of a limited Romanian-Bulgarian war, Turkish aid could be potentially decisive.

If this hypothesis is correct, then it may be used to prove that member-states of the Balkan Entente were much more concerned with the Pact's effectiveness as a mechanism for preventing Bulgaria from embarking upon unilateral territorial revisions than they were with its ability to resist Great Power encroachments in the region. Balkan statesmen must surely have realized that a small grouping of states like their own could never hope to challenge successfully stronger powers. This realization was undoubtedly reinforced by the Balkan states' steadily growing economic dependence on Germany, a Great Power whose interest in South-Eastern Europe was on the rise throughout the 1930s.⁶¹

Accordingly, from this perspective, the Balkan Entente's limitation to a purely anti-Bulgarian alliance acquires a significance radically opposite to that furnished by traditional interpretations of the Entente's character. The limitation now appears as a merit rather than a shortcoming. The restriction of the Pact to an anti-revisionist instrument suggests a high degree of diplomatic astuteness on the part of the Balkan statesmen responsible for the creation of the Entente. In light of the practical inability of an alliance of small states to challenge the aspirations of Great Powers – and given Germany's increasingly dominant economic position in the region – Greece, Turkey, Yugoslavia and Romania may well have regarded the pursuit of a purely anti-Bulgarian, anti-revisionist diplomatic stance as the only remaining sphere in which the four countries could conduct a truly independent foreign policy. It is entirely to the credit of the leaders of the four countries that they were able to recognize this fact and conclude the Balkan Entente. Their ability to do so at least permitted them to exercise the last vestiges of autonomous diplomatic activity left to them at a time when the political and economic domination of South-Eastern Europe by the Great Powers was becoming more conspicuous than it had been at any time since the end of the First World War.

The Balkan Entente's failure to include Albania and Bulgaria among its members represents yet another criticism which historians and contemporary observers alike have used to show that the

Pact was an ineffectual diplomatic agreement. For example, the exclusion of Bulgaria from the Pact was seized upon by contemporary press to suggest that a Balkan Entente in which that country did not participate was a contradiction in terms.⁶² The Entente's inability to respond satisfactorily to Bulgaria's grievances and persuade that state to join the Pact has traditionally been seen as a grievous error; a mistake which aggravated Bulgaria's complaints to an even greater degree and transformed it into a potential "foothold" for any Great Power interested in projecting its influence into the Balkans.⁶³

Similarly, the conscious and deliberate decision of the Entente members not to invite Albania to join the Pact is also considered a blunder that reduced the Entente's effectiveness to an even greater degree. This decision, made on the basis of the assumption that Italy would never permit its Balkan puppet to sign the Pact anyway, has been criticized on the grounds that it offended the Albanians and was tantamount to a recognition of that country's subordination to Italy.⁶⁴ A closer examination of the reasoning behind such criticisms reveals that they have little validity. By the early 1930s, both Albania and Bulgaria had already developed strong ties with Italy. Albania's economy and infrastructure were almost completely dependent on Italian trade and loans; the country's National Bank, though headquartered in Tirana was, for all intents and purposes, controlled from Rome.⁶⁵ Furthermore, as a result of the Tirana Pact of 27 November 1926 and the Italo-Albanian military alliance of 22 November 1927, Italy held complete sway over Albania's foreign policy and armed forces.⁶⁶

Bulgaria's relations with Italy were not characterized by such one-sided subservience but they were sufficiently amiable to classify Bulgaria as a firmly pro-Italian state. Mussolini provided material support for the Bulgarian-based terrorist Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) and encouraged Bulgaria to nurse its territorial claims against Yugoslavia; Italian naval and air units paid "visits" to Bulgaria and the Italian navy was allowed to use the harbour facilities at Varna.⁶⁷ The marriage of Bulgaria's ruler, King Boris III, to a princess of the Italian royal house in October 1930 was also rightly regarded by contemporaries as a purely political maneuver designed to strengthen Italian influence

in Bulgaria and the Balkans.⁶⁸

This brief examination of Bulgaria and Albania's close ties with Italy indicates that even prior to the signing of the Balkan Entente, both states had been a collective "bridgehead" for Great Power penetration of the region. This fact is significant in two ways. First, it undermines the argument that the Balkan Entente exacerbated Bulgaria and Albania's revisionist aspirations and pushed them into the arms of the revisionist Great Powers.⁶⁹ Such a contention simply cannot be sustained given the considerable amount of foreign influence in both countries years before the conclusion of the Entente.

Second, it proves that the Entente members' resolve not to invite Albania to join the Pact and make it difficult for Bulgaria to do the same was a highly thoughtful decision, not as the blunder as it has often been presented. It can be argued that as long as Bulgaria and Albania were kept out of the pact, any possible Italian interference in Balkan affairs would only be limited to those two countries. However, if either or both states were permitted to sign the Pact, Italy would have been presented with a golden opportunity to extend its political, economic and military influence to other Balkan states as well, with potentially corrosive and disastrous results for the integrity of the Entente itself. The Balkan Entente could do very well without "weaker brethren" like Bulgaria and Albania. Their membership would only constitute a liability, rather than an asset to the organization.

The final argument which may be used to support the view that the Balkan Entente did indeed work is provided by the actual record of the Entente's practical ability to attain its main goal: preventing Bulgaria from effecting unilateral territorial revisions. It was an objective in which the Entente succeeded completely – at no point in the 1930s did Bulgaria ever attempt to effect territorial revisions by force. The Entente's members were subjected to an ultimate "trial by fire" twice. In both instances, the Balkan Entente fully demonstrated its effectiveness.

In early March 1935, in the course of the failed Venizelist coup attempted by a faction within the Greek officer corps, the Bulgarian government mobilized two classes of reservists and concentrated substantial military forces on the Greek border.⁷⁰ The osten-

sible purpose of this action was to ensure that the fighting between the rival Greek political groups did not spread into Bulgarian territory.⁷¹ However, it is plausible to assume that the Bulgarian mobilization may well have been intended to exploit the domestic upheaval in Greece and further Bulgaria's territorial ambitions against Greek Macedonia and Western Thrace.⁷² If the Bulgarian political leadership really entertained hopes of this kind, the Turkish government quickly dashed them by keeping with the spirit of the Balkan Entente. According to Bulgarian sources, Turkey reinforced the two infantry and cavalry divisions already stationed in Thrace with three additional infantry divisions. In addition, the Turkish army called up 24,000 reservists, issued arms and ammunition to the civilian population of Thrace, set up supply dumps near the Bulgarian frontier and began to actively train guerilla contingents near Adrianople.⁷³ Ankara's immediate reaction to Bulgaria's partial mobilization clearly indicated that Turkey would not stand idly by if Bulgaria attempted to profit from Greece's domestic problems.

Turkey's commitment to the Entente was repeated in October/November 1940. The Italian invasion of Greece prompted fears that Bulgaria might take advantage of the Greek army's preoccupation with the Epirote front and attack the weak defenses of Greek Macedonia and Western Thrace. However, any Greek anxieties over Bulgaria were quickly dispelled when Turkey concentrated twenty of its forty active divisions in Thrace,⁷⁴ thus sending a strong signal to Sofia to stay out of the Greco-Italian conflict.⁷⁵ Although Turkey acted under the provisions of the Greco-Turkish treaty of September 1936, Ankara's reaction was also a response as a member of the Balkan Entente. Bulgaria did finally revise its borders in the spring of 1941, but only because it was able to capitalize on the military intervention of a non-Balkan Great Power against two of the Balkan Entente's members. As stated previously, however, that was a contingency that the Entente was *not* designed to address. Viewed from the perspective of its ability to serve the purpose for which it was originally designed, the Balkan Entente must be said to have worked remarkably well.

In effect, the framers of the Balkan Entente envisioned a consciously limited role for the organization. The architects of the

Balkan Pact restricted the alliance to enable the four countries to focus on carrying out that aspect of independent foreign policy which they were still capable of conducting independently, that is, preventing Bulgaria from embarking upon unilateral revisions of the post-World War One peace settlement. It was not designed to resist the projection of Great Power influence in the Balkans, nor was it meant to advance the cause of a Balkan federal union. Therefore, pointing out the Entente's alleged inability to fulfill aims that it was not intended to serve cannot be regarded as a fair or valid criterion for assessing its effectiveness. In reality, the Entente furnished its signatories with a mechanism for what they could accomplish.

The Balkan Entente's effectiveness is demonstrated by its ability to fulfill its objectives in practical terms. Here, the Entente's record speaks for itself. No war broke out in the Balkans in the 1930s and Bulgaria never attempted to carry out unilateral treaty revisions during that time. When war finally did come to the Balkans in late 1940/early 1941, it did so as an extension of a conflict which had its origins in other parts of Europe. As well, when the Pact was subjected to a practical test in October and November 1940, the Entente's mechanism performed as it was intended to; with Bulgaria's hopes of benefiting from the troubles of one member of the Entente being dashed by the firm stance of another.

* I would like to thank Professor Harry Psomiades of Queens College - CUNY and Professor Andre Gerolymatos of Simon Fraser University for the useful suggestions they offered with regards to this article.

¹ See Theodore I. Geshkoff, *Balkan Union: A Road to Peace in South-eastern Europe* (New York, 1940); Robert J. Kerner and Harry N. Howard, *The Balkan Conferences and the Balkan Entente, 1930 - 1935* (Westport, Connecticut, 1936); and Norman J. Padelford, *Peace in the Balkans: The Movement Towards International Organization in the Balkans* (New York, 1935).

² L. S. Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation: A History of the Movement Toward Balkan Unity in Modern Times* (Hamden, Connecticut), 1942. Also see the same author's *The Balkans Since 1453* (New York, 1965).

³ For views derivative of Stavrianos' standpoint, see Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans, Vol. 2: Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1983); J. B. Hoptner, *Yugoslavia in Crisis* (New York, 1962); Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe Between the Two World Wars* (Seattle, 1974); and Robert Lee Wolf, *The Balkans in Our Time* (Cambridge, Massachusetts,

⁴ Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation*, 241.

⁵ Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453*, 738; and *Balkan Federation*, 242 - 244.

⁶ Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation*, 240.

⁷ Ibid., 250 - 251.

⁸ Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation*, *passim*; Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, Vol. 2, 212 - 213; Hoptner, *Yugoslavia in Crisis*, 17; Rothschild, *East Central Europe*, 10 - 11; and Robert Lee Wolf, *The Balkans in Our Time*, 157 - 158.

⁹ Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, Vol. 1, 332 - 334; Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation*, 84 - 102.

¹⁰ Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, Vol. 1, 335 - 335; Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation*, 102 - 113.

¹¹ Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, Vol. 1, 10 - 19; and Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation*, 130.

¹² According to Article 10, any district within the Ottoman Empire whose inhabitants wished to join the Exarchate would be permitted to do so provided that at least two-thirds of the voting population of a locality expressed their approval. For an examination of the controversy over the Patriarchate see Geshkoff, 25 - 27; Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, Vol. 1, 343 - 345; and Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453*, 371 - 375.

¹³ Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453*, 519.

¹⁴ What made the "Macedonian Struggle" particularly harsh and bitter was the fact that its participants had claims not only on territory but also on the national consciousness of the its inhabitants, whose development of a distinct national identity trailed far behind that of other Balkan peoples. See Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453*, 518; and Geshkoff, 34.

¹⁵ See Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, Vol. 1, 371; and Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation*, 127 - 130.

¹⁶ PRO FO 13776/75 C10082/930/7, Waterlow to Henderson, 21 Dec. 1929.

¹⁷ General accounts of the rise and fall of the Balkan League, as well as the causes and consequences of the Balkan Wars may be found in Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, Vol. 2, 95 - 100; Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation*, 152 - 195; Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453*, 532 - 543; and Geshkoff, *Balkan Union*, 39 - 45.

¹⁸ Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453*, 733.

¹⁹ See for example Mussolini's unflattering remark regarding Yugoslavia's attempts to conclude a lasting diplomatic agreement with Italy in the late 1920s. PRO FO 13632/3 C123/123/92, Graham to Chamberlain, 1 Jan. 1929.

²⁰ Robert Joseph Kerner and Harry Nicholas Howard, *The Balkan Conferences and the Balkan Entente, 1930 - 1935* (Westport, Connecticut,

1936), 21; PRO FO 13776/75 C10082/930/7, Waterlow to Henderson, 21 Dec. 1929.

²¹ Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (Oxford, 1968), 254 – 256. For an overview of population exchanges in the Balkans during and after the First World War, see Dimitrije Djordjevic, "Migrations During the 1912 – 1913 Balkan Wars and World War One," in Ivan Ninic, ed., *Migrations in Balkan History* (Belgrade, 1989), 115 – 129.

²² Lewis, 255 – 256.

²³ For the Greco-Turkish rapprochement of 1930 see Harry J. Psomiades, *The Eastern Question: The Last Phase; A Study in Greek-Turkish Diplomacy* (Thessaloniki, 1968), 106 – 109; and Harry J. Psomiades, "The Diplomacy of Eleftherios Venizelos, 1928 – 1930," in *Essays in Memory of Basil Laourdas* (Thessaloniki, 1975).

²⁴ Mustafa Turkes, "The Balkan Pact and Its Immediate Implications for the Balkan States, 1930 – 1934," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (January 1994), 130.

²⁵ Djordjevic, 115 – 129.

²⁶ Kerner and Howard, *The Balkan Conferences*, 21 – 22.

²⁷ Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453*, 736.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 737.

²⁹ Padelford, *Peace in the Balkans*, 9 – 10.; Geshkoff, 82 – 83; and Eugene Boia, *Romania's Diplomatic Relations With Yugoslavia in the Interwar Period, 1919 – 1941* (Boulder, Colorado, 1941), 160.

³⁰ Summaries of the proceedings of the four Balkan Conferences may be found in Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation*, 230 – 235; Geshkoff, 78 – 108; Padelford, 11 – 90; and Kerner and Howard, 21 – 115. Also useful is the *Survey of International Affairs* for the years between 1930 – 1934. For a British view regarding the usefulness of the Balkan Conferences see PRO FO 14086/46 C8153/178/62, Clerk to Reading, 28 Oct. 1931.

³¹ Turkes, "The Balkan Pact," 132.

³² *Ibid.*, 133 – 134.

³³ The events leading to the signing of the Balkan Entente are analyzed in Kerner and Howard, 116 – 132; Geshkoff, 200 – 215; and Boia, *Romania's Diplomatic Relations With Yugoslavia*, 191 – 193.

³⁴ Padelford, 95.

³⁵ Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation*, 241.

³⁶ Padelford, 96.

³⁷ Kerner and Howard, 29.

³⁸ Geshkoff, 85.

³⁹ Kerner and Howard, 29, 31 – 33, 47, 51 – 52, 74. That Bulgaria and Albania insisted on this point even though their delegates knew full well that such demands would be unacceptable to Romania and Yugoslavia is not really surprising. As one contemporary observer put it: "Sometimes a Balkan country would rather have its minority ill treated so as to keep

warm a grievance that might be used as a basis for later territorial claims; but in public, every Balkan politician professes to want his co-nationals in neighboring states to have fair minority treatment." Clare Hollingworth, "Bulgaria," in Barbara Ward et al., eds., *Hitler's Route to Bagdad* (London, 1939), 199.

⁴⁰ Kerner and Howard, 29.

⁴¹ Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation*, 235; Kerner and Howard, 32 – 33, 53.

⁴² Turkes, 134; Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453*, 738; Padelford, 91 – 92.

⁴³ Hoptner, *Yugoslavia in Crisis*, 162.

⁴⁴ Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation*, 241.

⁴⁵ Turkes, 135; and Boia, 191, Geshkoff, 226 – 227; FO PRO 14495/46 R667/22/67, Waterlow to Simon, 23 Jan. 1934; and PRO FO 14480/27 C7031/2496/19, Cavendish-Bentinck to Simon, 21 July 1933.

⁴⁶ Padelford, 99. Also see PRO FO 14495/44 R520/22/67, Balfour to Simon, 19 Jan. 1934.

⁴⁷ Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, Vol. 2, 166.

⁴⁸ Iljia Jukic, *The Fall of Yugoslavia* (New York, 1974), 22.

⁴⁹ PRO FO 14495/43 R518/22/67, Balfour to Simon, 15 Jan. 1934.

⁵⁰ PRO FO 14480/47 C7235/66/7, Balfour to Simon, 4 Aug. 1933.

⁵¹ Kosta Todorov, *Balkan Firebrand: The Autobiography of a Rebel, Soldier and Statesman* (Chicago, 1943), 253.

⁵² Geshkoff, 215.

⁵³ PRO FO 14495/68 R1130/22/67, Henderson to Simon, 19 Feb. 1934. Also see Boia, 191.

⁵⁴ Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453*, 739; Geshkoff, 228; and Hoptner, 17.

⁵⁵ Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation*, 252.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 241.

⁵⁷ PRO FO 14480/96 C9578/435/19, Ramsay to Simon, 25 Oct. 1933.

⁵⁸ See "Appendix: Document XIV: The Four-Power Balkan Pact (Greece, Yugoslavia, Romania, and Turkey). Athens, February 9, 1934," in Kerner and Howard, 232 – 233.

⁵⁹ Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453*, 739.

⁶⁰ Toynbee, Arnold J., ed., *Survey of International Affairs: 1934*, 528.

⁶¹ Turkes, 128. Between 1933 and 1937, the percentage of German imports into the Balkans increased from 19.5 to 35%, while the amount of German-bound Balkan exports rose from 16% to 27%. See Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453*, 740; and Turkes, 128. Precise statistical data to illustrate the escalating German economic domination of individual Balkan states in the 1930s may also be found in Barbara Ward et al., eds., *Hitler's Route to Bagdad*, *passim.*; and Frank Littlefield, *Germany and Yugosla-*

via, 1933 – 1941: *The German Conquest of Yugoslavia* (Boulder, Colorado, 1988), 25 – 35.

⁶² *The Times* (London), 12 Feb. 1934, 11. Also see PRO FO 14495/68 R1130/22/67, Henderson to Simon, 19 Feb. 1934.

⁶³ An example of this view may be found in Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs*, 530; and Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453*, 738.

⁶⁴ Geshkoff, 215.

⁶⁵ Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453*, 721 – 722.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 723; Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, Vol. 2, 181 – 182. Also see Rothschild, 364 – 365; and Turkes, 133.

⁶⁷ Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453*, 735.

⁶⁸ PRO FO 13966/57 C7661/7467/7, Waterlow to Henderson, 8 Oct. 1930; and PRO FO 13966/72 C8292/7467/7, Waterlow to Henderson, 5 Nov. 1930.

⁶⁹ Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453*, 738; and *Balkan Federation*, 242 – 244.

⁷⁰ PRO FO 14904/102 R1911/34/19, Henderson to Simon, 16 March 1935; and *The Times*, 6 March 1935, 14. For an examination of the March 1935 coup see Thanos Veremis, *The Military in Greek Politics: From Independence to Democracy* (London, 1997), 99 – 133.

⁷¹ *The Times*, 6 March 1935, 14; 8 March 1935, 15, 16.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 7 March 1935, 14.

⁷³ The Turkish government handled the situation very carefully. Ankara's decision to reinforce the Thracian garrison beyond the number of troops permitted by the Treaty of Lausanne was in clear violation of that agreement. When, on 7 March, the Bulgarian delegate to the League of Nations complained about Turkey's aggressive moves, the Turkish government officially expressed "great surprise" at the Bulgarians' decision to interpret the reinforcement of Thrace as a sign of Turkish hostility. Turkey claimed that far from constituting a violation of any international agreements, the troop movements were openly initiated the previous year. Concurrently with this statement, however, the Turkish Prime Minister delivered a speech before the Grand National Assembly in which he reaffirmed the Turkish commitment to the Balkan Entente and expressed the desire for an improvement of Turco-Bulgarian relations. See *The Times*, 8 March 1935, 15; 9 March 1935, 12.

⁷⁴ PRO WO 33/1651, as quoted in Brock Millman, "Turkish Foreign and Strategic Policy, 1934 – 1942," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (July 1995), 498.

⁷⁵ See Martin Van Creveld, *Hitler's Strategy, 1940 – 1941: The Balkan Clue* (Cambridge, 1973), 50; and Marshall Lee Miller, *Bulgaria During the Second World War* (Stanford, 1975), 35.

The Silent Confrontation: Greek Shipping in World War II

MATHEOS D. LOS

We were left alone on the ocean, with only the sky and the sea for company. The darkness was still deep and the weather somewhat mild despite the south wind that was blowing... Suddenly, after about an hour, we heard the sound of engines and almost immediately we saw the black mass of the submarine emerging in front of us again. When it neared, a machine gun started firing at us. The bullets fell like hail into the sea and onto our raft. For moment the shooting stopped and the submarine shone a small spotlight to verify that its heinous crime had been completed. The Germans, apparently realizing that the two of us who had remained on the raft had not been killed, threw hand grenades. One of them exploded on the right side of the raft very close to me, causing several large wounds on my shoulder. In spite of the terrible pains I continued to play dead. At the same time the submarine shone the spotlight on the raft again and because they didn't see any movement, it seems they presumed me dead. Then the sound of the engines started again and I saw the submarine moving away. In a little while, however, I heard its guns again. It had closed in on my unfortunate companions who were desperately swimming in the water or clinging on to floating wreckage, speechless. To start with, the fir-