

The Relations between the Entente Powers and Greece, 1923-6

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of PhD

The University of Leeds

School of History

September 1993

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

Abstract

This thesis examines the relations between the three *Entente* powers, Great Britain, France and Italy, and Greece, from 1923, the time of the Lausanne conference, until the middle of 1926, when the Greek dictator General Pangalos was ousted from power. The first part is chiefly concerned with Greek internal affairs, and charts the course of Greek politics as the country underwent a painful transition, in the wake of the Asia Minor disaster, from monarchy to republic. The second part focuses on Greek external affairs, or, more specifically, Greece's relations with Italy over the Dodecanese question and during the Corfu crisis, her relations with Bulgaria, particularly over the minorities problem, and her relations with Yugoslavia during their negotiations for an alliance from 1924-1926, which became subsumed in the search for a Balkan Locarno. The attitudes and policies of the *Entente* powers towards all these events are explored, in order to elucidate both the bilateral relationships between each of them and Greece, and their relations with each other over Greek matters. This in turn illuminates themes which have a relevance extending beyond the southern Balkans such as the evolving relationship between the *Entente* powers in the post-war world, the efficacy of the League of Nations in the field of collective security, the possibilities and limitations of the international minority protection regime established in 1919-1920 and the solidity and durability of the era of pacification apparently ushered in by the treaty of Locarno.

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Acknowledgements

I should like principally to thank my supervisor, Roy Bridge, who awakened my interest in the Balkans and whose advice, assistance and friendship during my years at Leeds has been unfailingly helpful and generous. I am very much indebted to him and his colleagues on the International History degree scheme for a rigorous intellectual training. I should also like to acknowledge assistance of various kinds during my postgraduate years from other tutors and friends in Leeds, especially Hugh Cecil, Phil Taylor, Geoff Waddington and Ian Whitehead. More recently I have also incurred debts of gratitude to my colleagues in the History Department at the University of Wales, Lampeter, who were understanding and helpful as this thesis edged towards completion, and to my friends in the Inter-disciplinary group there who furnished practical support and intellectual stimulation. The subject of this thesis was originally kindly suggested by Professor Douglas Dakin, and the work was facilitated by a British Academy Major State Studentship. The staff of the following libraries and archives assisted me in my research by their efficiency and helpfulness: the Brotherton Library, Leeds; the Public Record Office, India Office Library, Foreign Office Library, Institute for Historical Research and the London Library, London; the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Paris. I should like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, whose unflagging support and encouragement has been invaluable, and to Caron Heyes, for everything, but especially her patience.

Notes

Greece did not adopt the Gregorian calendar until 1 March 1923 (16 February 1923 according to the Julian calendar previously in force), but all dates are given here in the new style.

As a general rule I have referred to towns, cities and regions by the names in use in the 1920s - for example, Salonica rather than Thessaloniki and Smyrna rather than Izmir.

The transliteration of Greek and other Balkan names presents myriad problems and I have opted for clarity over consistency, in some cases adopting the forms used by contemporary English observers and in others employing modern transliteration. I have not anglicised Greek forenames (e.g., *Konstantinos* Rentis), except where individuals are better known by the English form (e.g. King *Constantine* I).

List of Abbreviations

<i>AmHR</i>	<i>American Historical Review</i>
<i>BDFA</i>	<i>British Documents on Foreign Affairs</i>
<i>BFSP</i>	<i>British and Foreign State Papers</i>
<i>DBFP</i>	<i>Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939</i>

<i>DDI</i>	<i>I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani</i>
<i>ESR</i>	<i>European Studies Review</i>
FO	Foreign Office
<i>FRUS</i>	<i>Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States</i>
<i>HJ</i>	<i>Historical Journal</i>
IFC	International Financial Commission (Athens)
<i>IHR</i>	<i>International History Review</i>
IMRO	Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation
<i>JCH</i>	<i>Journal of Contemporary History</i>
<i>JMH</i>	<i>Journal of Modern History</i>
KKE	Kommounistiko Komma Helladas (Communist Party of Greece)
<i>LNOJ</i>	<i>League of Nations Official Journal</i>
LNU	League of Nations Union
MAE	Ministère des Affaires Etrangères
PRO	Public Record Office
QO	Quai d'Orsay
RSC	Refugee Settlement Commission (Athens)
SCS	Serb-Croat-Slovene
SIS	Secret Intelligence Service

Introduction

This thesis examines the relations between the three *Entente* powers, Great Britain, France and Italy, and Greece, from 1923, the time of the Lausanne conference, until the middle of 1926, when the Greek dictator General Pangalos was ousted from power. The first part is chiefly concerned with Greek internal affairs, and charts the course of Greek politics as the country underwent a painful transition, in the wake of the Asia Minor disaster, from monarchy to republic. The second part focuses on Greek external affairs, or, more specifically, Greece's relations with Italy over the Dodecanese question and during the Corfu crisis, her relations with Bulgaria, particularly over the minorities problem, and her relations with Yugoslavia during their negotiations for an alliance from 1924-1926, which became subsumed in the search for a Balkan Locarno. The attitudes and policies of the *Entente* powers towards all these events are explored, in order to elucidate both the bilateral relationships between each of them and Greece, and their relations with each other over Greek matters. This in turn illuminates themes which have a relevance extending beyond the southern Balkans such as the evolving relationship between the *Entente* powers in the post-war world, the efficacy of the League of Nations in the field of collective security, the possibilities and limitations of the international minority protection regime established in 1919-1920 and the solidity and durability of the era of pacification apparently ushered in by the treaty of Locarno.

For a long time the 1920s were a neglected decade in international history. In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War little attention was paid even to the more immediate origins of that conflict: the wickedness of Hitler seemed to be a simple and sufficient explanation for its outbreak, and the war itself was 'the great subject of interest for reader and writer alike'. This was natural, since, at the height of the Cold War, current concerns diverted attention to more recent experiences: 'the origins of the second World war had little attraction when men were already studying the origins of the third'.¹ The publication in 1961 of A.J.P.Taylor's *The Origins of the*

¹ A.J.P.Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1964), pp.31,34 and 29-40 *passim*.

Second World War, 'probably the most celebrated, notorious and debated historical work of the post-war era', shattered this consensus and triggered a new wave of popular and academic interest in the war's origins.² Initially, however, most of the work Taylor's book generated tended to focus on the 1930s and the big issues of appeasement and German war guilt: this reflected the depiction of the 1920s in *Origins* as little more than a prelude to the 1930s.³ It was not until the 1970s, with the gradual opening of British and continental archives, that systematic attention came to be paid to the 1920s, and now this work forms quite a substantial corpus.⁴ Recent developments in international relations which have produced a situation, particularly in eastern Europe, that at least superficially resembles that of the post-Versailles era, should ensure that the 1920s remain in vogue.

It is perhaps not surprising, given the very long shadow cast by the Second World War, that much of this writing on the 1920s is still concerned with identifying the antecedents of 1939 in the earlier decade. In particular, it has focused on the Versailles settlement and the international system of the 1920s: were these so inherently flawed as to be doomed from the start, or could some sort of stable order have evolved from them in different circumstances? Much evidence has been accumulated to support both propositions and, although it can never be conclusive, there is at least now some recognition that later developments were not necessarily

² R.J.B. Bosworth, *Explaining Auschwitz and Hiroshima. History Writing and the Second World War 1945-1990* (London, Routledge, 1993), p.34 and pp.31-52 for a fuller examination of how Taylor's book 'would encourage an unfreezing of time in British historiography and signal the commencement of the Sixties in British society'.

³ The Taylor controversy and subsequent developments in the historiography of the war's origins can be traced in E.M. Robertson (ed.), *The Origins of the Second World War. Historical Interpretations* (London, Macmillan, 1971), G. Martel (ed.), *The Origins of the Second World War' Reconsidered. The A.J.P. Taylor debate after twenty-five years* (London, Unwin Hyman, 1986) and R. Boyce and E.M. Robertson (eds.), *Paths to War. New Essays on the Origins of the Second World War* (London, Macmillan, 1989). The 1964 Penguin edition of *Origins* devotes 24 pages to the legacy of the war and 22 to the 'post-war decade' out of 336 pages of text.

⁴ For a general survey, see J. Jacobson, 'Is there a New International History of the 1920s?', *American Historical Review* 88 1983 617-45, or S. Marks, '1918 and After: the Postwar Era' in Martel (ed.), *'Origins' Reconsidered*, pp.17-48.

inevitable.⁵ No historical inquiry into the narrower period of 1923-1926 can or should ignore these two contrasting interpretations of the nature of the decade. On the other hand, there seems good cause to agree with the contemporary view that this period saw a change for the better where the stability, security and prosperity of the international scene were concerned: as the British foreign secretary asserted in October 1926, a 'fundamental improvement' had occurred since 1923, 'the darkest moment in the history of Western Europe since the conclusion of the war'.⁶ The period which began with Anglo-French relations at their lowest point since Fashoda, with the French embroiled in their desperate attempts to enforce the Versailles settlement *via* the occupation of the Ruhr and inter-Allied wrangles over security and reparations seemingly interminable, ended with the reparations question apparently settled by the Dawes plan of 1924, security seemingly assured by Locarno and, symbolic of the new era of reconciliation and pacification Locarno inaugurated, Germany admitted to the League of Nations.⁷ In the long term this improvement did in fact prove to be built on false assumptions, but the architects of Locarno can scarcely be blamed for example, for failing to foresee the Depression.⁸ At any rate, regardless of the long term prospects of the system, the atmosphere of this three year period was one of problems overcome and faith restored.

The nature of Great Britain's position and rôle in the 1920s is also contested historiographical ground. As Britain was obviously a state of central importance in inter-war European international relations, this argument is in part simply an element in the wider debate about the nature of the decade and the possibilities for the

⁵ J.R.Ferris, "'The Greatest Power on Earth': Great Britain in the 1920s", *International History Review* 13(4) 1991 746-7. The two sides to the argument are mapped out in P.M.H.Bell, *The Origins of the Second World War in Europe* (London, Longman, 1986) pp.14-38.

⁶ [E.L.Woodward, R.Butler, W.N.Medlicott, D.Dakin et al. (eds.),] *D[ocuments on] B[ritish] F[oreign] P[olicy], 1919-1939* (London, HMSO, 1947-1986)/[series] 1a/[volume] II/919-20. It goes without saying that this was a purely anglocentric view of the previous three years.

⁷ For a general survey of international relations in the 1920s see, E.Wiskemann, *Europe of the Dictators 1919-1945* (Glasgow, Fontana/Collins, 1982), pp.9-74, S.Marks, *The Illusion of Peace. International Relations in Europe 1918-1933* (London, Macmillan, 1976), pp.1-107 or G.Ross, *The Great Powers and the Decline of the European States System 1914-1945* (London, Longman, 1983), pp.37-70.

⁸ Bell, *Origins*, pp.36-8.

international system in those years. Equally, however, it forms part of a separate debate about Britain's decline from world power status. For a long time, work on Britain's position after the First World War was dominated by this theme of decline, emphasising economic, military and strategic weaknesses, and postulating a steady deterioration in British strength from a mid-Victorian zenith to a late twentieth-century nadir. Recently, however, a more nuanced picture has begun to emerge which, whilst not denying the intrinsic weaknesses in Britain's position is also alive to the persistence of strengths and 'under-utilised potential', and which represents a healthy corrective to notions of an inexorable 'steady twentieth-century slide'.⁹

In this view, the post-war balance sheet for Britain can be read quite positively. True, the war did have adverse effects on Britain's position. The loss of life was devastating, as was the economic impact in the shape of lost markets, dissipated reserves, weakened infrastructure and a burden of debt - also serious from the point of view of a great trading power was the dislocation of the international economic system. Moreover, the pressures of war engendered or exacerbated discontent in the empire: there was nationalist unrest in India, Egypt, Mesopotamia and Ireland and the Dominions were growing increasingly assertive and independent. Combined with this were more general problems caused by the disruptive impact of the war: instability in Europe, the revolutionary Bolshevik regime in Russia and the transformation of the United States into a real international force. On the other hand, after a post-war period of readjustment the situation stabilised. By the early 1920s, for example, a 'relatively orderly' calm had returned to the Near and Middle East, fears of Moscow-inspired world revolution had eased and the United States had given notice of its intent to withdraw from Europe (except for providing finance and expertise for its recovery). Moreover, it was an indisputable fact that when Great Britain had been

⁹ D.Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled. British Policy and World Power in the Twentieth Century* (London, Longman, 1991), p.34 and *passim* for the best exposition of this viewpoint. See also Ferris *IHR* 13 726-50 and G.Martel, 'The Meaning of Power: Rethinking the Decline and Fall of Great Britain', *International History Review* 13(4) 1991 662-94.

tested by war she had emerged victorious, with her prestige immeasurably strengthened, 'with an enlarged empire and reduced enemies'.¹⁰

This view of Britain's post-war position can be placed in the context of a different perspective on the ebb and flow of British power in the longer term. Economically, Britain had been in decline for decades before 1919, but this did not automatically make Britain weak or uninfluential - the relationship between economic strength and state power is far from straightforward, and Britain's influence in Europe was certainly greater in the 1920s than at times of greater economic strength in the previous century. Moreover, despite the damage to British financial power caused by the war Britain was still a first rate industrial power: 'during the inter-war years, her relative industrial position was scarcely weaker than in the generation before 1914, and between 1888 and 1918 the economy had met Great Britain's strategic needs adequately, if not spectacularly'. Equally, the war did not hurt only Britain - it also severely retarded the challenge of European competitors whose greater population and productivity were in the long term to see them outstrip British economic performance.¹¹

After all, power is relative. It was by no means foreseeable that the three pronged revisionist challenge from Germany, Italy and Japan that in the 1930s and in the Second World War proved almost too much for Britain should arise. Through the 1920s British prestige and policy largely kept revisionism in check, and it was only later, as a result of contingent factors, that the balance shifted towards powers opposed to the *status quo*. This in turn was largely due to factors external to Britain: instability in Europe and general weaknesses in the international political and economic system, the rise of extra-European powers and changes in technology such as the growth of air power at the expense of Britain's traditional forte, sea power.

¹⁰ Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, pp.105-11,296; Ferris *IHR* 13 *passim*; Martel *IHR* 13 686-9. For this analysis and what follows I have also drawn on an unpublished paper given by Z.Steiner, 'The Impact of the First World War Upon Great Britain's World Position', at the Institute for Contemporary British History conference at the London School of Economics on 6 July 1992.

¹¹ Ferris *IHR* 13 730-1,737-8; Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, pp.11-19.

Britain's inability to cope with these challenges cannot then be interpreted as due simply to British decline, since 'the three power problem of the 1930s might have broken Great Britain at her relative peak of power'. Strength and weakness are dictated by context and, leaving aside the issue of whether the international system was doomed to collapse, it would be dangerous to extrapolate Britain's relative weakness in the 1930s back to the previous decade.¹²

Imperial factors must also be included in the equation, not least because 'it was the empire which made Britain great' by making her a world power. Recent research has illuminated the extent to which British control of overseas possessions was often rather informal or loose, and there is also a lively debate about the relative costs and benefits of imperialism. Certainly, it seems clear that empire was not an unmixed blessing and, for this reason, the British were often reluctant imperialists, keen to practise 'cut-price empire', 'getting little out, but putting little in'.¹³ It is also apparent that in the twentieth century the empire faced very serious challenges from the forces of colonial nationalism, Dominion centrifugalism and a loss of confidence at home in the morality and utility of imperialism, and that in the long term these problems did indeed mean that 'the days of British power were numbered'.¹⁴ There was, in fact, some truth in the assertion that the empire was 'a brontosaurus with huge, vulnerable limbs which the central nervous system had little capacity to protect, direct or control'.¹⁵ On the other hand, in the inter-war years and especially in the 1920s the British were able to manage these problems by conciliation, concession and calculated retreat - the empire was maintained and appeared at least to prosper.¹⁶ Moreover, in the longer term, the abandonment of empire was as much a symptom as

¹² Ferris *IHR* 13 729-30, 739-47. For a general discussion of how 'rivals' affected British power, see Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, pp.19-25.

¹³ Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, pp.25-33.

¹⁴ Ferris *IHR* 13 733-7; Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, pp.31-3.

¹⁵ M.Howard, *The Continental Commitment. The Dilemma of British Defence Policy in the Era of the Two World Wars* (London, Temple Smith, 1972), p.75.

¹⁶ This process, where relations between Britain and the Dominions are concerned, can be followed in R.F.Holland, *Britain and the Commonwealth Alliance 1918-1939* (London, Macmillan, 1981).

a cause of British decline, and it seems curious to bemoan withdrawal from untenable positions.

The common theme running through all this is that explanations of long term processes are of limited use and can be misleading in assessing the situation at a particular point in time. Specifically, in the 1920s, despite what actually came afterwards, British power was not necessarily doomed to decline in precisely the way it did, and undoubted weaknesses must be seen in the context of definite and palpable strengths. Moreover, 'the limits of power were not insuperable', and the way in which the British hand was played was as important as the cards it contained. Thus politics and policy, the way in which Britain 'tried to consolidate and retain its exposed position', constituted key contingent factors.¹⁷ It is certainly arguable that in the 1920s British policy-makers were largely successful in achieving their goals, and in increasing the stability of the international system: 'whatever the failure of British decision-makers during the 1920s, they bequeathed a strong bargaining position to their successors' who were more responsible than they for whatever decline followed.¹⁸

Before delineating the principles and outlines of British policy it is necessary to consider the process of policy-formulation, for this is another area where careful distinction must be made between long term trends and the precise situation at a given moment. Governments, rather than the public or pressure groups, still make external policy, but the relative influence of the various branches of government is a source of great debate. In the longer term, the twentieth century has seen the influence of the Foreign Office in external policy-making decline, and power pass to other departments, such as the Treasury, and more particularly the Cabinet Office. This same process has caused a considerable lack of co-ordination in British policy which has hardly improved its effectiveness.¹⁹ Lloyd George's premiership, 1916-1922, has

¹⁷ Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, pp.33-5,295.

¹⁸ Ferris *IHR* 13 746-50.

¹⁹ Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, pp.38-50.

been identified as a crucial phase in this process: his penchant for personal diplomacy, the pressures of policy-making in wartime and the weakness of Curzon, foreign secretary from 1919, all contributed to an erosion of Foreign Office influence. This was reinforced by structural changes - which excluded the Foreign Office from influence over, for example, many international economic issues - and the post-war backlash against the practitioners of old diplomacy.²⁰ On the other hand, these changes were not wholly irreversible. When Austen Chamberlain became foreign secretary in the second Baldwin government in November 1924, the fortunes of the Foreign Office recovered: Chamberlain used his own forceful personality and political position together with Baldwin's lack of interest in foreign affairs almost 'to exercise complete control over British foreign policy'.²¹ The evolution of Locarno perhaps provides a good illustration of the position and weight of the Foreign Office during this period: Chamberlain was unable to achieve his original goal of an Anglo-French alliance, but did force through - against serious opposition from cabinet colleagues - the idea of a western security pact.²²

Within this wider question of Foreign Office influence, some assessment must be made of the relationship between, and relative influence of, ministers and their officials - 'a crucial and permanent element in the formulation of British foreign policy'.²³ The Foreign Office under Curzon was a rather miserable place because of

²⁰ R.M.Warman, 'The Erosion of Foreign Office Influence in the Making of Foreign Policy, 1916-1918', *Historical Journal* 15(1) 1972 133-59; M.L.Dockrill and Z.Steiner, 'The Foreign Office at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919', *International History Review* 2(1) 1980 55-86; A.J.Sharp, 'The Foreign Office in Eclipse 1919-1922' *History* 61(2) 1976 198-218. These articles update the earlier essay by G.A.Craig, 'The British Foreign Office from Grey to Austen Chamberlain', in G.A.Craig and F.Gilbert (eds.), *The Diplomats 1919-1939 Volume I The Twenties* (New York, Atheneum, 1968) 15-48. A different argument emphasising the strength of Foreign Office influence in policy-making is presented in E.Goldstein, *Winning the Peace: British Diplomatic Strategy, Peace Planning and the Paris Peace Conference, 1916-1920* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1991).

²¹ B.J.C.McKercher, 'Austen Chamberlain's Control of British Foreign Policy, 1924-1929', *International History Review* 6(4) 1984 570-91; D.Dutton, *Austen Chamberlain. Gentleman in Politics* (Bolton, Ross Anderson, 1985), pp.232-7.

²² A.Orde, *Great Britain and International Security 1920-1926* (London, Royal Historical Society, 1978), pp.68-98; Dutton, *Chamberlain*, pp.238-46; S.E.Crowe, 'Sir Eyre Crowe and the Locarno Pact', *English Historical Review* 87(1) 1972 49-74. Sir Eyre Crowe was permanent under-secretary at the Foreign Office from 1919 until his untimely death in April 1925.

²³ D.C.Watt, *Personalities and Policies. Studies in the Formulation of British Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century* (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1975), pp.3-4.

the foreign secretary's autocracy, bad temper and feebleness in the face of Lloyd George.²⁴ Although Curzon had his admirers - notably Harold Nicolson²⁵ - he also aroused intense enmity: William Tyrrell, assistant under-secretary and from spring 1925 permanent under-secretary, was alienated enough by October 1923 to become involved in an intrigue with the French and the editor of the *Morning Post* to oust Curzon and inaugurate a more francophile policy in London.²⁶ Under Ramsay MacDonald, prime minister and foreign secretary in the Labour government of January - November 1924, matters improved somewhat. After initial difficulties he worked harmoniously with his officials who generally considered him to be a good foreign secretary, and after he left office he defended them from radical charges that they had sought to frustrate Labour policy.²⁷ Although officials probably had more leeway under him than under Curzon - because he could devote only a limited time to foreign affairs - his policy nonetheless seemed to bear his distinctive stamp.²⁸ Under Chamberlain, this harmony continued, with mutual respect between minister and officials but Chamberlain generally in the ascendant. On the other hand, some

²⁴ Sharp *History* 61 210-11; L.Mosley, *Curzon. The End of an Epoch* (London, Longmans, 1961), pp.195,211-12.

²⁵ J.Lees-Milne, *Harold Nicolson. A Biography Volume I 1886-1929* (London, Chatto and Windus, 1980) 173-4,185-90,214. Nicolson was a prominent figure in the Central Department of the Foreign Office during these years, and a voluble commentator on Greek affairs. He originally disliked Curzon and his 'tumid, caddish and disloyal domination' of the Foreign Office, even once referring to him in his diary as 'a shit'. He became an admirer during the Lausanne conference when Curzon was 'magnificent'. A generally sympathetic picture also emerges from the autobiography of Curzon's private secretary: R.G.Vansittart, *The Mist Procession. The Autobiography of Lord Vansittart* (London, Hutchinson, 1958).

²⁶ K.M.Wilson, *A Study in the History and Politics of the Morning Post 1905-1926* (Lampeter, Edwin Mellen, 1990), pp.193-223.

²⁷ D.Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald* (London, Cape, 1977), pp.299-310, 381-8, 416-8; Vansittart, *Mist Procession*, pp.322-3; Lees-Milne, *Nicolson I* 206,215,220,223 (Nicolson was an exception in the Foreign Office who never really took to MacDonald); [Public Record Office, MacDonald Papers] PRO 30/69/[volume] 200 MacDonald to Parmoor p[ri]vate l[etter] d[ated] 13 Aug.1924; PRO 30/69/1170 MacDonald to P.J.Baker p.l. d.25 May 1925.

²⁸ A.Cassels, 'Repairing the *Entente Cordiale* and the New Diplomacy', *Historical Journal* 23(1) 1980 133-53.

contemporary critics saw him as a creature of his officials,²⁹ a view echoed in part by some historians.³⁰

All this merely confirms the notorious difficulty of unravelling the tangled threads of bureaucratic policy-making. It may, however, be misleading to give too much credence to the argument that there was necessarily some conflict of interest between ministers and officials: after all, in general terms they were of a piece socially and intellectually, and they were in the main all members of a generation which had reached political maturity before the war.³¹ At any rate, continuity seems to have been a hallmark of British policy in the 1920s. This was doubtless in part due to the influence of a career civil service 'able to guide politicians along established grooves' by articulating the structural constraints and traditional interests which limit and shape policy. But, equally, it reflects the existence of a general consensus between the leaders of the political parties (as opposed to the rank and file) over external policy.³² Thus it was that even MacDonald, the erstwhile arch-radical, was able to continue 'in all essentials the main lines of British policy'.³³ True, there were changes of emphasis: Curzon's successors, for example, were notably more sympathetic to France than he, and MacDonald was determined to re-establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. In general, however, there was a broad consensus about British interests and the means to advance and protect them.

The influence of public opinion and domestic political considerations on foreign policy must also be considered. At first sight, it might seem that the direct influence of these factors would be negligible, given the consensus outlined above, the fact that in general 'the social structure of British political power does not weigh mass

²⁹ Dutton, *Chamberlain*, pp.237,255; Vansittart, *Mist Procession*, p.334.

³⁰ J.R.Ferris, *Men, Money and Diplomacy: the Evolution of British Strategic Policy, 1919-1926* (New York, Cornell University Press, 1989), pp.1-14,144-151 argues that in his crucial first months in office Chamberlain followed his officials, although he in any case shared their opinions.

³¹ Watt, *Personalities and Policies*, pp.1-15 is an attempt to identify the 'nature of the foreign - policy-making élite in Britain'.

³² Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, pp.39-40,44-5,49-50.

³³ F.S.Northedge, *The Troubled Giant. Britain Among the Great Powers 1916-1939* (London, Bell, 1966), pp.234-5.

movements of opinion very highly³⁴ and the basic fact that to the general public 'foreign affairs normally seem complex, remote and unimportant', the only exception being when questions of peace or war arise.³⁵ On the other hand, it is possible for public opinion to have a more indirect impact on foreign policy. After all, the 1920s witnessed the dawning of a new age of mass politics in Britain and considerable domestic political turbulence which produced not only the first Labour government but also the annihilation of the Liberals as a mass electoral force.³⁶ The struggle for votes in this transitional era of mass politics, it has been argued, produced a rush for the centre ground which consisted of retrenchment abroad and social reform and expenditure at home that could not but have an effect on foreign policy.³⁷

The main lines of this argument are well known. The economic weakness of Britain after the war meant that henceforth 'the availability of funds would determine defence strategy, and not *vice versa*'. This was reinforced by the hegemony of the Treasury in Whitehall and the notorious 'ten-year rule' of 1919, which meant that service budgets were drastically slashed, hampering foreign policy: the Washington naval limitation treaties are a prime example of this process. A key reason for the lack of readily available funds for the services was public opinion, which was revolted by militarism, clamoured for lower taxation and greater spending on housing, education and welfare and, in the politically volatile climate of the 1920s, could not be ignored.³⁸ This, in other words, was the 'parsimonious and pacific electorate' whose 'heavy and ominous breathing' Michael Howard detected whilst perusing the minutes and memoranda of the Committee of Imperial Defence after 1918.³⁹

³⁴ Watt, *Personalities and Policies*, p.19.

³⁵ Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, pp.40-1.

³⁶ For a general account of British politics in the 1920s, see A.J.P.Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1977), pp.216-331.

³⁷ P.M.Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy, 1865-1980* (London, Fontana, 1981), pp.236-40.

³⁸ Kennedy, *Realities*, pp.226-63.

³⁹ Howard, *Continental Commitment*, p.79.

This view is now in need of qualification. Recent detailed research into British strategic policy in the 1920s has concluded that although finite economic resources, social spending and Treasury thrift were influences on policy-making, they were by no means dominant.⁴⁰ 'The demands of the electorate ... did cause the British to increase their social spending ... but they did not significantly hamper British strategic policy between 1919 and 1929'.⁴¹ The services were not starved of funds but met Britain's 'strategic requirements without depleting her economic resources'.⁴² In particular, in the early 1920s the Treasury view of spending priorities was only paramount when the Foreign Office concurred, and it was only in the later 1920s that the Treasury won that control over service policies that is often imputed to it for the entire decade. The period from 1919-1925 was one of flux and unsettled priorities in strategic policy, but after 1925 the British perceived the world as more secure and British policy emphasised reconciliation over deterrence: the Foreign Office accepted the Treasury line on spending because it felt the plans of the services might otherwise compromise diplomacy.⁴³

Foreign policy was affected, but not hamstrung, by pressure for economy and social spending. The same was true of the other major component of public opinion, pacifism or, more accurately, anti-militarism. Such sentiments were intense and widespread after the senseless horrors of the Great War, permeated all social classes and political parties and were manifested in pressure groups, notably the League of Nations Union (LNU).⁴⁴ Despite their highly organised character, however, these lobbying groups were of limited influence. In part this was because of the complexity and unpredictability of pacifist thinking, quite able to favour simultaneously 'the

⁴⁰ Ferris, *Men, Money and Diplomacy*, *passim*. For a summary account, see J.R.Ferris, 'Treasury Control, The Ten Year Rule and British Service Policies, 1919-1924', *Historical Journal* 30(4) 1987 859-83.

⁴¹ Ferris *IHR* 13 735.

⁴² Ferris *IHR* 13 738-9.

⁴³ Ferris, *Men, Money and Diplomacy*, pp.43-9,158-85 and *passim*.

⁴⁴ For the history of this organisation, see D.S.Birn, *The League of Nations Union 1918-1945* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1981).

strongest navy on earth and reduced spending on the armed forces'.⁴⁵ Equally, the peace movement was a broad church, divided amongst itself⁴⁶: even within the LNU there was much muddled thinking about whether the League should use armed force or rely on moral persuasion, and many shrank from the conclusion that war might be needed to preserve peace.⁴⁷ Crucially, however, the pacifist movement in fact represented 'the mainstream of political opinion in Britain',⁴⁸ and when 'no significant body of opinion "wants" war then there is no need for a peace movement', and its scope for influence is limited.⁴⁹ In other words, pacifist opinion did not directly shape policy, but did constrain it by 'setting the broad ideological framework' within which foreign policy had to operate and by obliging governments 'to conduct themselves in ways that did not seem egregiously at odds with the principles of collective security'. As Britain's League record shows, this certainly did not guarantee a wholehearted commitment.⁵⁰

Policy-making was thus a complex business, but it held the key to whether those long term trends pointing to decline would be accelerated or countered, for it was through the medium of policy that resources were translated into power. In the background were factors that constrained policy: limited (but still adequate) economic means, widespread imperial commitments and the dictates of domestic politics. It was in this context that policy was made by the government: chiefly the Foreign Office (especially where Europe was concerned) but also other departments such as the India, Dominion and Colonial Offices and the services. Public opinion and the press had a limited impact (although it could be greater in times of crisis), chiefly in terms

⁴⁵ Ferris *IHR* 13 735.

⁴⁶ K.Robbins, 'European Peace Movements and their Influence on Policy after the First World War', in R.Ahmann, A.M.Burke and M.Howard (eds.), *The Quest for Stability. Problems of West European Security 1918-1957* (London, German Historical Institute/Oxford University Press, 1993), pp.79-80.

⁴⁷ The intertwining strands of utopian idealism and institutional reality embodied in the League and the false assumptions and illusions embedded in internationalist opinion were first unpicked by Carr as early as 1939: see E.H.Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919-1939. An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (London, Macmillan, 1981).

⁴⁸ M.Howard, *War and the Liberal Conscience* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989), p.86.

⁴⁹ Robbins, *Quest for Stability*, p.79.

⁵⁰ Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p.41.

of setting the parameters for rather than determining policy. These then were the chief factors affecting the calculations of policy-makers: resources, commitments and the vagaries of the policy-making process. At the same time, policy-making could often be a chaotic process, with decisions taken at short notice and on the basis of limited information. In these circumstances instinct came into play and there was a tendency to fall back onto the traditions of British policy: to hang on and appease those with grievances, to withdraw from excessive commitments, to defend the empire, to bluff, or even simply to try and stand still. Also important was generational mentality: in the 1920s this constituted chiefly a revulsion against war.⁵¹ On the other hand, British policy-makers rightly saw their country not as weak but as powerful (though not omnipotent), and mingled with an awareness of limitations was a definite air of confidence.

From this mass of factors a definite British policy emerged, one capable of being expressed by the simple equation that, for an imperial trading power, peace and stability would equal prosperity. An oft-quoted Foreign Office memorandum of April 1926 sums up this philosophy of the *status quo* power. 'We', it ran,

have no territorial ambitions nor desire for aggrandisement. We have got all that we want - perhaps more. Our sole object is to keep what we have and live in peace. ... The fact is that war and rumours of war, quarrels and friction in any corner of the world spell loss and harm to British commercial and financial interests. It is for the sake of these interests that we endeavour to pour oil on troubled waters.⁵²

Or, to put it another way, Britons were used

to being called a nation of shopkeepers, and that was in fact the literal truth. Our chief preoccupation was that peace and stability should be maintained throughout the world, in order that our trade might flourish and proceed without disturbance.⁵³

⁵¹ Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, pp.38-63.

⁵² DBFP/1a/I/846.

⁵³ [Public Record Office] F[oreign] O[ffice Papers series] 421/[volume]310 Chamberlain (Geneva) to F[oreign] O[ffice] [despatch] no.19 d.17 Mar.1926 and encl[osure].

This was the essential basis of British policy: as a powerful state with global interests Britain naturally identified her own interest with that of the stability of the international system and the perpetuation of the *status quo*. This identification meant that while British policy appeared to be (or was presented as) idealistic, altruistic and disinterested, it was, in fact, also quite selfish. Moreover, 'British aims were defined and pursued in a hard-headed fashion', and her statesmen were quite capable of exhibiting 'cynicism, perfidy, selfishness, calculation, ruthlessness - all those characteristics which have made Great Britain what it is'.⁵⁴

Although Britain was in broad terms a *status quo* power, this did not preclude the use of revisionist tactics. 'In order to establish a stable and balanced world order, [the British] endeavoured simultaneously to bolster and to alter the international system'. This involved buttressing and consolidating the strength of the *status quo* powers, and attempting to 'foster a new concert of powers' to manage the problems of the system. At the same time, they hoped to control the evolution of the system to preserve its stability; that is to make 'changes in some of its details - so long as the changes did not threaten specifically British interests'. During the 1920s, British efforts in these directions were generally successful. British power and the empire were maintained, revisionism was held in check, the system was bolstered by agreements like the Washington treaties and Locarno, and stability was established in some key areas (such as the Middle East) if not in others (such as eastern Europe). On the other hand, no really predictable balance was established between the powers, and some British policy decisions - for example, those concerning the Soviet Union - arguably reduced the stability of the system.⁵⁵

The way in which the British employed these strategies can be seen between 1923 and 1926. After the war the British were wary of commitments in Europe, because of the fear of entanglements and the primacy of imperial concerns. At the same time, they wanted to see Germany - now shorn of her colonies and navy - return to prosperity

⁵⁴ Ferris *IHR* 13 727,735-6,743,747.

⁵⁵ Ferris *IHR* 13 748-50.

and stability return to Europe. These complex and expansive priorities clashed with the more narrowly focused and single-minded French desire for absolute security from Germany. With the Ruhr crisis, this divergence threatened international stability to such an extent that the British felt obliged to come forward and take a leading rôle in reconciling France and Germany *via* the Dawes reparations settlement and then Locarno. In other words, the British were prepared to intervene in Europe, and to make a commitment (albeit a carefully limited one) at Locarno, in order to bring the stability they needed for the sake of their global interests, and they were also prepared to modify the 1919 settlement. The Dawes-Locarno settlement promised both to reinforce the Anglo-French *entente* and to draw Germany into the community of satisfied nations: the 'Locarno-cabal' which henceforth met regularly could even be construed as an informal reformed concert of the powers.

In the Balkans, a region of much less direct interest, the British were unwilling to play such a prominent rôle. As a memorandum of December 1925 made clear, they hoped that the leading part in containing conflicts and managing disputes there could be taken by the League of Nations. (This indicated their conception of the League as a potentially useful instrument that would take some of the burden of managing the system off British shoulders, although it rather begged the question of how far the League was autonomous from its constituent powers.) Britain had 'no purely political motive in the Balkans other than the preservation of peace', and so British policy should generally consist only of acting as a 'benevolent and disinterested observer'. As far as the *status quo* was concerned, it was recognised that the peace treaties had established a condition of 'unstable peace' in the region, but that this did 'at least conform to political realities'. Consequently, 'the only practical policy to pursue is one of insisting on the fulfilment of the present treaties - at least in spirit'. But not only were the British prepared to be flexible about the letter of the treaties, there was also an unspoken assumption that peaceful change in the region, in accordance with new political realities, should not be obstructed. This partly reflected an inability to

prevent such change, but also showed an awareness that for the system to remain stable it might have to evolve.⁵⁶

Britain and decline apart, the principal focus of much recent scholarship on the post-war period has been French policy and policy-making, and in particular the crucial relationship between France and Germany. The central issues in this historiographical debate have been whether French policy should be interpreted as essentially defensive or as motivated by a search for hegemony in Europe, and whether French reparations policy should be seen as basically moderate and reasonable or as designed to perpetuate German economic subjugation. The outcome has been to render extremely problematic an area of international history which was once viewed as straightforward, and to cast new light on the nature of international relations in the 1920s.⁵⁷

In the traditional account of this period, policy-making in France was seen as a relatively straightforward process.⁵⁸ The Quai d'Orsay suffered none of the reverses that the Foreign Office did, and French officials continued to be influential and respected - indeed, their influence was strengthened in order to ensure continuity of policy during a decade of rapidly succeeding ministries. There was some parliamentary control over the broad outlines of policy, but this rather reflected a national consensus and was in any case not insuperable. The nature of French policy was also seen as unproblematic. At first, the French nation, racked by economic, political and moral crisis, was united around the imperative of establishing security from Germany and trying to perpetuate the artificial French dominance of 1919. This determination manifested itself in the policy of Raymond Poincaré, foreign minister between 1922 and 1924 and a harsh, legalistic Lorrainer who could 'neither forget in

⁵⁶ DBFP/1a/I/203-13.

⁵⁷ Jacobson *AmHR* 88 617-45; J.Jacobson, 'Strategies of French Foreign Policy after World War I', *Journal of Modern History* 55(1) 1983 78-95; K.Hovi, 'Security before Disarmament, or Hegemony? The French Alliance Policy 1917-1927' in Ahmann, Birke and Howard (eds.), *Quest for Stability*, pp.115-26.

⁵⁸ Unless otherwise indicated, this paragraph is based on R.D.Challener, 'The French Foreign Office: the Era of Philippe Berthelot', in Craig and Gilbert (eds.), *Diplomats* I 49-85.

defeat nor forgive in victory'.⁵⁹ Poincaré was determined to impose the treaty of Versailles on Germany, and this culminated in the occupation of the Ruhr during 1923. This policy alarmed the British, who by tradition opposed the domination of the continent by any one power, and this in turn contributed to the failure of the occupation which showed Poincaré's policy to be untenable - the reparations question was passed on to the Dawes committee and Poincaré was ejected from office in the midst of an economic crisis in the spring of 1924. Edouard Herriot, foreign minister of the succeeding *Cartel des Gauches* administration, symbolised the new mood of conciliation in the French people, and his presence contributed to the success of the London conference on reparations and to faltering progress on the security question, evidenced by the evolution of the Geneva protocol. Herriot was succeeded in April 1925 by Aristide Briand, dedicated to international conciliation and determined to achieve security for France through *entente* with Britain, co-operation with the League and *rapprochement* with Germany. His pacific spirit contributed to the success of the Locarno treaties which settled the security question and created a new atmosphere in Europe, even though this also signified a failure by France to enforce Versailles that would redound to her peril in the 1930s.⁶⁰

This picture has now been substantially modified by works which reveal the complex and multi-faceted nature of French policy, whilst accepting that the German problem was of course its chief preoccupation. Policy-making was by no means the sole preserve of the Quai d'Orsay, but also involved a huge number of official and private institutions which competed to influence the economic and political decisions at the heart of the reparations-security problem, with the result that policy was often incoherent and confused. Between 1919 and 1924 various different policies were at work, often simultaneously: some aimed at the fulfilment of Versailles and the stabilisation of Germany, others at the revision of Versailles in France's favour which would involve the permanent destabilisation of Germany. These policies conflicted

⁵⁹ Sir A. Chamberlain, *Down the Years* (London, Cassell, 1935), p.190.

⁶⁰ For single volume biographies of Briand and Poincaré, see B. Oudin, *Aristide Briand. La Paix: une Idée Neuve en Europe* (Paris, Laffont, 1987) and P. Miquel, *Poincaré* (Paris, Fayard, 1984).

and ultimately failed, causing France to be forced to accept the Anglo-American imposed defeat that was the London reparations settlement. At the same time, however, new emphasis has been placed on the conciliatory aspects of French policy towards Germany and the potential for the creation of a stable and peaceful Europe which that policy offered - in stark contrast to the traditional view that French policy was the major obstacle to pacification. In particular, the various projects for bilateral economic co-operation put forward by the French in the 1920s have been seen as attempts to transcend the limits of national sovereignty for the common good which very much foreshadowed the way Europe was to be stabilised after the Second World War. This in turn permits a novel interpretation of the 1920s as a crucial decade when

the conditions for international stability were defined. The limitations of a return to the pre-World War I international system were reached, and the plans were drawn and the first efforts made toward what became the post-World War II settlement.⁶¹

Nevertheless, there is general agreement that the 1924 reparations settlement was a defeat for France. It meant the end of the Versailles system of 'coerced German compliance' and victory for the Anglo-American conception of the post-war world, a vision of stabilisation based on 'international competition, conciliation of Germany, and peaceful change rather than on Allied solidarity, coercion of Germany, and the *status quo*'. France henceforth faced a choice between 'dependency on the Anglo-Americans or domination by Germany'.⁶² This view rather tends to support the notion that 1924 was the time when 'the potentialities of the settlement of 1919 were exhausted'.⁶³ On the other hand, it can be argued that it did not set the pattern for subsequent developments and that French diplomacy soon recovered. Thus Anglo-French solidarity against Germany was a salient feature during 1924-1925 and the French retained the capacity to enforce compliance of aspects of Versailles after 1925: the *entente* was never broken and within it the French preserved a good deal of

⁶¹ Jacobson *AmHR* 88 623 and *passim*. For the influence of the Quai d'Orsay in policy-making, see also R.J.Young, *French Foreign Policy, 1918-1945. A Guide to Research and Research Materials* (Wilmington, Scholarly Resources, 1991), pp.1-42.

⁶² Jacobson *JMH* 55 93-5.

⁶³ Jacobson *AmHR* 88 641.

diplomatic independence. Although between 1924 and 1926 'financial duress did compel a tactical change in foreign policy from confrontation to *détente*', French policy generally after 1924 was 'an impressive holding action'. The corollary of this view is to emphasise the limited successes of German foreign policy in the same period and the numerous restrictions under which Germany still chafed. The net result of these re-interpretations is to point to the real degree of stabilisation that was achieved in Europe in the mid-1920s, even though the implications of this for the broader controversy about the nature of the decade have yet to be drawn out.⁶⁴ Moreover, although Franco-German relations have thus been illuminated in a new complexity, the same cannot be said for French policy in other areas, for example eastern Europe. The picture of French alliance policy as a remorseless drive for hegemony may now be extinct,⁶⁵ but much work on it remains to be done.

Italy is but a peripheral figure in the debates about British and French policy and the international system in the 1920s, reflecting a perception that Italy was not a key player in European affairs at the time. Just as Italy had been semi-detached from her *Entente* partners in the war - joining late, fighting essentially separate battles and overlooked at the peace conference - so, even after Mussolini's assumption of power in October 1922, did she plough her own furrow in the 1920s, participating in the war debt and reparations settlements and Locarno, but being rather more concerned with her own parochial interests.⁶⁶ On the other hand, the relative longevity of the fascist regime and the greater importance Italy assumed in international relations in the run-up to the Second World War provides a link between the 1920s and 1930s and meant that work was done on Italy in the 1920s - on the nature of the regime and its foreign policy - at a time when the decade was otherwise little studied. This work does not

⁶⁴ Jacobson *AmHR* 88 639-45.

⁶⁵ Hovi, *Quest for Stability*, p.115.

⁶⁶ The standard work on Italian policy in the 1920s, based on published documents and not archival material but generally reliable nonetheless, is A.Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1970), which covers 1922-1927.

directly connect with the larger questions more recently posed about the 1920s, but it is substantial and has generated lively debate and unresolved problems.⁶⁷

The main point at issue regarding fascist foreign policy is that of its coherence: was there a consistent motive behind Mussolini's conduct of foreign relations? Early anti-fascist writers attacked his policy as not only ineffective and immoral but as lacking any logic or purpose. This view seemed to be justified by the ignominious collapse of the fascist regime in 1943 and was echoed by, amongst others, A.J.P. Taylor, who in a famous passage declared that 'everything about Fascism was a fraud' and that Mussolini himself was 'a vain blundering boaster without either ideas or aims'.⁶⁸ According to these historians there were no long term goals in fascist policy, which was improvised solely for domestic propaganda purposes to shore up a regime beset by economic and political fragility - an argument for a *Primat der Innenpolitik* which precluded external consistency. Gradually, however, this view was challenged by historians who detected in Mussolini's policy a fairly consistent pursuit of two aims: revisionism and imperialism. Cassels, in *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy*, thus argued that after an initial period of tentative diplomacy, Mussolini embarked on a revisionist spell between 1923 and 1924 - characterised by the Corfu crisis and the Pact of Rome - before the Matteotti murder enforced a lull in this activity. Then, after the consolidation of the regime in 1925, he resumed a policy of imperialism and adventure. Work on fascist imperialism, especially as regards Ethiopia, seemed to confirm that Mussolini did indeed have clearly defined long term goals.⁶⁹

The other main historiographical problem with fascist foreign policy is the question of continuity - that is to say continuity between the 1920s and the 1930s and between the fascist regime and its liberal predecessor. The original picture of the 1920s as a decade of good behaviour was demolished by Cassels; but even he admitted that in

⁶⁷ Critical surveys of this literature include A. Cassels, 'Was there a Fascist Foreign Policy? Tradition and Novelty', *International History Review* 5(2) 1983 255-68, A. Cassels, 'Switching Partners: Italy in A.J.P. Taylor's *Origins of the Second World War*', in Martel (ed.), *'Origins' Reconsidered*, pp. 73-96 and S.C. Azzi, 'The Historiography of Fascist Foreign Policy', *Historical Journal* 36(1) 1993 187-203.

⁶⁸ Taylor, *Origins*, p. 85.

⁶⁹ Unless otherwise indicated, this paragraph is based on Azzi *HJ* 36 187-94.

the 1930s, as the regime ran out of steam on the domestic front amidst great economic troubles, Mussolini embarked on a revisionist policy that was more thoroughly planned and pursued than hitherto.⁷⁰ At the same time, historians detected a marked similarity between early fascist foreign policy and that of liberal Italy: this was especially true of work that attempted to trace the interaction between Mussolini and the career diplomats of the Palazzo Chigi, traditional Italian nationalists who in the early years concurred in the aims (if not the methods) of Mussolini's policy. The resignation of Contarini, secretary general of the Palazzo Chigi, in 1926 marked a realisation that perhaps Mussolini would not be so easily tamed by his officials, but the ascendancy thereafter of Dino Grandi, fascist hierarch turned diplomat, ensured that the Palazzo Chigi would still retain some influence over the Duce, even though he was ultimately in control of policy.⁷¹ Other work placed the roots of fascist foreign policy even more firmly in pre-war Italy, in terms of both aims and methods. Particular attention was drawn to the disparity between the actual power of Italy - always the least of the great powers - and the exaggerated expectations of its population, fuelled by the grandiose nationalist myths which bound the country tenuously together. Successive disappointments in foreign affairs from unification onwards produced tremendous feelings of resentment and gave Italian foreign policy its perennial tone of desperate neurosis.⁷²

A broad consensus has now emerged that the basic aim of Mussolini's policy was simply to increase Italian power and prestige and 'to make Italy a great power like Britain and France'.⁷³ This was not, however, easy to achieve. The old association with Britain and France could help to some extent, but it was those powers which had denied Italy the fruits of victory in 1919. At the same time, Italy was too weak to strike out on a wholly independent course in the face of Anglo-French opposition. A third option was co-operation with other revisionist states, but the international

⁷⁰ Cassels *IHR* 5 255-68; Cassels, *Early Diplomacy*, pp.393-4; Azzi *HJ* 36 194-6.

⁷¹ H.S.Hughes, 'The Early Diplomacy of Italian Fascism: 1922-1932', in Craig and Gilbert (eds.), *Diplomats* I 210-33.

⁷² Azzi *HJ* 36 196-7.

⁷³ Azzi *HJ* 36 197.

climate was not conducive to satisfying the voracious demands of Italian public opinion by this means. Consequently, since none of these strategies alone was sufficient, Mussolini's policy was a combination of all three. Since he could both pose as the 'good European' of Locarno whilst also acting as a 'trafficker in revisionism and spokesman for discontented, aggressive nationalism', it was not surprising that he was accused of inconsistency.⁷⁴ His policy may have been ineffective and ruinous to Italy, but there was consistency in his pursuit of great power status, the trappings of colonies and a European sphere of influence. The tone of fascist policy - the use of violence and intimidation - may have been distinctive, but this was largely because of the dilemma that confronted a social Darwinist 'who believed in "survival of the fittest" ... when he was not the fittest' and who thus had to resort to bluff and bluster. His rhetoric magnified the usual Italian problem of grasp outstripping reach and has obscured the similarity between his policy and that of his predecessors.⁷⁵

The dominant theme in Greek historiography for many years was that of foreign interference. This was not surprising, for the Greek peninsula is a borderline area with an international significance out of all proportion to its size where, throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the strategic interests of the great powers continually came into conflict.⁷⁶ Moreover, Greece's small size, economic weakness and 'exposed geographical location made her more easily amenable to coercion than any other country in Europe'.⁷⁷ This combination of motive and opportunity induced the powers to intervene frequently and persistently in Greece throughout the nineteenth century: indeed, this interference was institutionalised - and Greek sovereignty compromised - from the birth of the Greek state when Britain, France and Russia became 'protecting powers', charged with guaranteeing Greece's constitution

⁷⁴ Cassels, *Early Diplomacy*, pp.390-7 and *passim*.

⁷⁵ Azzi *HJ* 36 194,196-7,202-3.

⁷⁶ K.R.Legg, *Politics in Modern Greece* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1969), pp.62-78.

⁷⁷ N.Kaltchas, *Introduction to the Constitutional History of Modern Greece* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1940), p.4.

and independence.⁷⁸ This interference was intensified by the central importance in Greece of the Great Idea (Μεγάλη Ιδέα), the aspiration to encompass all Hellenes - and all territories inhabited by Hellenes - within the boundaries of the Greek state. This was the great legitimating national myth of the nascent Greece, endorsed by all Greeks even though there was intense disagreement as to the means to attain the ideal. It was always apparent, however, that given Greece's weakness the fulfilment of the Great Idea would depend on propitious international circumstances and the goodwill of the powers. Thus the sympathy of the powers secured the Ionian islands for Greece in 1864 and Thessaly and Arta in 1881, but when Greece struck out on her own in defiance of the powers and attacked the Ottoman empire in 1897, the result was a shattering and costly defeat. Foreign interference was still in evidence here, however, since the powers stepped in to preserve Greece's territorial integrity (even though the Greeks had been the aggressors) whilst at the same time imposing an International Financial Commission (IFC) to control Greek finances.⁷⁹ In these circumstances, the interests of the Greek political élite and of the powers combined to give those powers a measure of control over the success of Greek foreign policy and, indirectly, over Greek domestic politics and economic affairs.

Foreign interference was intermittently an important motif in Greek politics in the twentieth century as well, for instance during the civil war in the 1940s.⁸⁰ Of late,

⁷⁸ For overviews of the development of Greece in the nineteenth century, see D.Dakin, *The Unification of Greece 1770-1923* (London, Ernest Benn, 1972), pp.1-179 and R.Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp.1-76. The rights of the protecting powers derived from the treaties of London of May 1832, November 1863 and March 1864: see Sir James Headlam-Morley, *Studies in Diplomatic History* (London, Methuen, 1930), pp.126-45.

⁷⁹ T.A.Couloumbis, J.A.Petropoulos and H.J.Psomiades, *Foreign Interference in Greek Politics. An Historical Perspective* (New York, Pella, 1976), pp.15-73. For recent reflections on the nature and importance of the Great Idea for Greek national identity, see P.Kitromilides, "'Imagined Communities" and the Origins of the National Question in the Balkans', *European History Quarterly* 19(2) 1989 149-94. For the great powers and Greek finances, including the establishment of the IFC, see J.A.Levandis, *The Greek Foreign Debt and the Great Powers 1821-1898* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1944).

⁸⁰ There is a great deal of literature on this period in Greek history, not least because of the connexion between the civil war and the origins of the Cold War. For an introduction to the subject, see Couloumbis, Petropoulos and Psomiades, *Foreign Interference*, pp.103-46, and, for an analysis of the literature up to 1989, M.Sarafis, 'Contemporary Greek History for English Readers: an Attempt at

however, it has become a much less salient feature, and this has coincided with something of a revolution in Greek historiography: after the fall of the Colonels' junta in 1974, historical studies in Greece gradually escaped from the conservative stranglehold which for decades had prohibited any critical engagement with the recent past and began to flourish. Historians turned away from analysis of foreign influences and began to study the activities of the domestic political élite with new vigour. Social and economic history also flowered and, for the first time, 'the writing of Greek history in Greece itself ... undeniably seized the initiative from the writing of Greek history outside Greece'.⁸¹

Much of this work has focused on the first three decades of the twentieth century, and in particular the period following the rise to power in 1910 of the Cretan, Eleutherios Venizelos, indisputably the foremost Greek statesman of his generation.⁸² Venizelos was a consummate politician, opportunistic, eloquent and inspiring, who was considered a messiah by one half of Greece and Satan by the other.⁸³ The triumph of his Liberal party in 1910 swept away the old Greek political parties and inaugurated the modern age in Greek politics. During his first administration (1910-1915) he instituted a host of reforms to modernise the Greek political system and economy, established good relations with Britain and France (who sent technical missions to develop the Greek army and navy) and engineered a huge expansion of the Greek state with victories in the Balkan wars (1912-1913) that secured Epirus, Macedonia, Crete and numerous Aegean islands.⁸⁴ Venizelos' rise was once seen as signifying simply the triumph of the Greek bourgeoisie over an old aristocratic landowning élite, but it is more accurate to characterise it as marking the victory of a new

a Critical Analysis', in M.Sarafis and M.Eve (eds.), *Background to Contemporary Greece* (2 volumes, London, Merlin, 1990) I 123-52.

⁸¹ A.Kitroeff, 'Continuity and Change in Contemporary Greek Historiography', *European History Quarterly* 19(2) 1989 269-298; M.Mazower, *Greece and the Inter-War Economic Crisis* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1991), pp.3-5.

⁸² The least inadequate of the few biographies of Venizelos is D.Alastos, *Venizelos: Patriot, Statesman, Revolutionary* (London, Lund Humphries, 1942).

⁸³ Dakin, *Unification*, p.183; Clogg, *Concise History*, pp.104-5.

⁸⁴ Dakin, *Unification*, pp.180-200; Clogg, *Concise History*, pp.75-85.

'entrepreneurial bourgeoisie' over the established 'state bourgeoisie' (the military and bureaucratic élite) which had been in entrenched command of political power for decades.⁸⁵ Recent work has even questioned the utility of seeking the key to Venizelos' rise in social or economic forces, and has emphasised instead the significance of his populist style and rhetoric of national regeneration which struck a chord in a people desperate to lift Greece from the doldrums in which she had languished since 1897.⁸⁶

The First World War precipitated a collision between the forces Venizelos championed and those of Old Greece,⁸⁷ focused on the Greek king, Constantine I. Essentially, Venizelos, impressed by British naval power and dreaming of expansion at Turkish expense, favoured intervention on the side of the *Entente*, whilst the king, German-educated, married to the Kaiser's sister and in awe of the German army, advocated continuing the policy of strict neutrality Greece had declared at the outbreak of the war. On the surface, this was a dispute over foreign political strategy and a clash between two forceful and antagonistic personalities, but it also reflected a whole host of divisions within Greek society that were to split the country in two in the so-called 'national schism'. At stake were two radically different hegemonic projects and visions of Greece's future. On the one side stood Venizelos and his constituency - the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie, landless peasants and the Greeks of the new lands - and their vision of parliamentary democracy and 'pragmatic irredentism': the expansion of the state and of Greek economic power in the Near East. On the other stood Constantine and his supporters (known as Anti-Venizelists or royalists): the old élites in the army and bureaucracy, the petty bourgeoisie, landed peasants, most of Old Greece and all those whose interests were most threatened by economic,

⁸⁵ G.T.Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic. Social Coalitions and Party Strategies in Greece, 1922-1936*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1983), pp.121-7. This pioneering and brilliant work is the best guide in English to Greek politics between the wars.

⁸⁶ M.Mazower, 'The Messiah and the Bourgeoisie: Venizelos and Politics in Greece, 1909-1912', *Historical Journal* 35(4) 1992 885-904.

⁸⁷ In a geographical sense this term refers to Greece in its nineteenth century boundaries (the 'new lands' being those gained in and after 1912). It also connotes the political, economic and social values of the dominant élites in those territories. Whatever else the schism may have been, it was certainly a split in geographical terms between Old Greece and the new lands.

social and political change. Their vision involved 'the establishment of a traditionalist military-bureaucratic regime under the monarchy' (on the Prussian model) that would espouse a cautious, defensive patriotism and which 'projected into some unspecified future a romantic, utopian irredentism'. In 1910 Venizelos had set his face against the hidebound, parochial conservatism of Old Greece, but during the war the old élites and their allies hit back.⁸⁸

The schism, which was also to cause a recrudescence of foreign interference in Greece, erupted in 1915 when, unable to persuade Constantine to join the war, Venizelos resigned. The Allies were drawn into the domestic political quarrel because, shortly before Venizelos left office and at his invitation, they had despatched an expeditionary force to Salonica. This army was now menaced by the Germans and Bulgarians in the north and by a government of uncertain sympathies in the south; consequently during 1916 London and Paris intervened continually at Athens in order to try and secure its safety and to persuade the Greeks to join the war. The British were rather half-hearted about this, and it was the French, dreaming of a post-war domination of the Levant, who made the running in Allied policy. In September 1916 Venizelos, encouraged by the French, established a revolutionary provisional government at Salonica which, with the help of Allied troops, soon asserted its control over the north of the country. The British were not entirely enthusiastic about this, since they were fearful of France's far-reaching designs and did not consider Venizelos entirely trustworthy; but they acquiesced in French policy out of lassitude and a concern for Allied solidarity. During the winter of 1916-1917 Allied policy became increasingly oppressive, and the fall of the Russian monarchy and American entry into the war reduced still further Allied scruples about coercing neutral Greece. Eventually in June the Allies forcibly deposed Constantine and installed Venizelos in power. Constantine was succeeded by his second son, Alexander (the Crown Prince

⁸⁸ Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic*, pp.26-8,120-30,180-1,282-5 and *passim*. The best account of Greece's rôle in the diplomacy and military campaigns of the war is G.B.Leon, *Greece and the Great Powers 1914-1917* (Thessaloniki, Institute for Balkan Studies, 1974).

George being considered too pro-German), the administration and army were purged of royalist sympathisers, and on 27 June 1917 Greece entered the war.⁸⁹

The Greeks made a small but significant contribution to the Allied war effort in the southern Balkans,⁹⁰ and Venizelos approached the Paris peace conference confident of realising his vision of a Greater Greece: in February 1919 he laid claim to the whole of Thrace and a sizeable zone in Asia Minor around Smyrna, the chief city of the Greek population of Anatolia.⁹¹ Venizelos used all his diplomatic skill and charisma to woo the conference, and succeeded in becoming in the process that *rara avis*, a Balkan statesman admired in western Europe. The British delegation was broadly sympathetic to his claims: it was packed with philhellenes like Nicolson; and Lloyd George hoped to use a strengthened Greece as a British proxy in the eastern Mediterranean.⁹² The chief opponents of Greek aggrandisement, on the other hand, were the Italians, who feared the expansion of a regional rival.⁹³ Progress on the Turkish settlement was slow: although many experts doubted the wisdom of partition, extensive territorial revision was contemplated and there were numerous conflicting claims to consider. This proved time-consuming; and the settlement was in any case accorded a low priority in the work of the conference as a whole. In May 1919, however, the Italians - who had antagonised everyone by their truculence over Fiume - began to land troops in Asia Minor in order to lay claim to a zone of influence, and in response the Allies permitted the Greeks to occupy Smyrna. Ostensibly this was

⁸⁹ Leon, *Greece and the Great Powers*, *passim*; Dakin, *Unification*, pp.201-16; M.Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian Vision. Greece in Asia Minor 1919-1922* (London, Allen Lane, 1973), pp.35-61.

⁹⁰ Dakin, *Unification*, pp.217-20.

⁹¹ For Venizelos' rôle in peacemaking in 1919, see N.Petsalis-Diomidis, *Greece at the Paris Peace Conference (1919)* (Thessaloniki, Institute for Balkan Studies, 1978).

⁹² E.Goldstein, 'Great Britain and Greater Greece, 1917-1920', *Historical Journal* 32(2) 1989 339-56. Nicolson later wrote to his wife of Venizelos: 'he is my hero, dear old man in his skull cap and his charming Christ-like smile' (Lees-Milne, *Nicolson* I 155 and 109-140).

⁹³ This is a persistent theme in Petsalis-Diomidis, *Greece at the Paris Peace Conference*. Italian opposition blocked Greek claims in Epirus and delayed the transfer of western Thrace to Greece from Bulgaria.

purely provisional, but it was in fact understood to be a precursor to the award of Smyrna to Greece in the final settlement.⁹⁴

The peace settlement drafted during the spring of 1920 was finally signed at Sèvres on 10 August.⁹⁵ The terms were extremely severe on the Turks. They kept Constantinople, but the Straits were internationalised and Greece was awarded the whole of Thrace to the Chatalja lines, some strategically important Aegean islands and a large zone around Smyrna. Strict military and financial controls were imposed and by a separate tripartite agreement France and Italy gained extensive spheres of influence in Cilicia and Adalia respectively. The treaty was a triumph for Lloyd George, who secured his two main aims of opening the Straits and strengthening Greece. The French were less happy with the settlement but acquiesced for the sake of Allied solidarity and because they had made gains elsewhere in the Middle East; the Italians were dissatisfied but were largely ignored. In the event, however, Lloyd George's victory proved illusory: a harsh imperialist peace could have been imposed on Turkey in May 1919, but the Greek landings in Anatolia - and the conduct of Greek troops there - had stimulated a nationalist movement under Mustafa Kemal which had rapidly become the real power in Turkey and which vowed never to accept such a humiliating treaty. In these circumstances, although Venizelos had created his Greater Greece, its foundations were far from secure, as was perceived by the many in the *Entente* capitals who had questioned the wisdom of the treaty. A peace had now been signed, but it remained to enforce it on the nationalists, and this would depend

⁹⁴ M.L.Dockrill and J.D.Goold, *Peace without Promise. Britain and the Peace Conferences, 1919-1923* (London, Batsford, 1981), pp.181-99. This is the best general account of the peacemaking process. See also Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian Vision*, pp.62-101 and Goldstein, *Winning the Peace*, pp.242-51.

⁹⁵ P.C.Helmreich, *From Paris to Sèvres. The Partition of the Ottoman Empire at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919-1920* (Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 1974), *passim*; A.E.Montgomery, 'The Making of the Treaty of Sèvres of 10 August 1920', *Historical Journal* 15(4) 1972 775-87. For the text of the treaty, see *British and Foreign State Papers* (London, HMSO, 1841-)/113/652-776.

on future Allied solidarity, the continued ascendancy of Lloyd George and Venizelos and, ultimately, the strength of the Greek army.⁹⁶

Over the next two years the settlement collapsed since all these factors proved lacking. In October 1920 King Alexander died from blood poisoning after being bitten by a pet monkey. The following month Venizelos was resoundingly defeated in a general election - victim of his preoccupation with foreign affairs and the dictatorial tendencies of his lieutenants - and the new royalist government recalled Constantine to the throne. The French and Italians, increasingly impressed by the power of Kemal and disillusioned with Greek subservience to the British, took the return of the dreaded Tino as the last straw and henceforth considered themselves absolved of any obligations to Athens.⁹⁷ From now on, although the royalist Greek government continued Venizelos' policy of imposing Sèvres by force, it did so without any real assistance from the Allies and found the task increasingly beyond its means. The French and Italians, to the consternation of the British, gravitated more and more towards Kemal - supplying him with arms, for example, in the hope of securing economic concessions - whilst British policy was desperately confused: Lloyd George gave the Greeks some verbal encouragement but there was no consensus in London and in those circumstances no concrete assistance was forthcoming. The Turks, meanwhile, grew increasingly confident and resistant to Curzon's frantic attempts at mediation. Eventually, the Greeks were routed and on 9 September 1922 the Turks entered Smyrna, putting a great many of its inhabitants to the sword. The Chanak crisis which followed soon afterwards marked the final collapse of the Allied position

⁹⁶ Dockrill and Goold, *Peace without Promise*, pp.199-214; Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian Vision*, pp.102-29.

⁹⁷ Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian Vision*, pp.129-79. It is a moot point whether the return of Constantine was the cause or merely the occasion of the Franco-Italian change of policy. Llewellyn Smith inclines to the latter view, whereas Churchill, for one, believed that it was 'perhaps no exaggeration to remark that a quarter of a million persons died of this monkey's bite': W.S.Churchill, *The World Crisis. The Aftermath* (London, Butterworth, 1929) 385-90. At the time it was certainly believed that Constantine's return was the key factor (*DBFP/1/XVIII/287-8*) and the French were keen to maintain this impression: [Archives du] M[inistère des] A[ffaires] E[trangères Série Z Europe 1918-1940 Sous-série] Grèce [volume] 78 Marcilly (minister in Athens) to Q[uai d'] O[rsay] no.214 d.22 Sept.1924, no.216 d.27 Sept.1924, QO to Marcilly draft tel[egram] d.1 Nov.1924 and min[ute]s.

in the Near East sealing at one and the same time the fate of Greater Greece and of its last remaining architect, Lloyd George.⁹⁸

Peace was established in the Near East by the conference of Lausanne, which met in two phases, the first between 23 November 1922 and 5 February 1923 and the second from 23 April until the signature of the treaty on 24 July 1923.⁹⁹ The terms were much more realistic than those of Sèvres, since they took account of the actual balance of power in the region. Vansittart concluded of Curzon that at the conference 'he played a Yarboro with dignity - some said brilliance - while Turkey took the tricks',¹⁰⁰ but in fact, although the treaty certainly was a triumph for the Turks, it also suited British interests. Anatolia was restored to Turkey in its entirety, as was eastern Thrace, but Curzon secured the opening of the Straits, had the question of Mosul deferred to the League and split the Turks from their erstwhile ally, the Soviet Union. The fact that the young Turkish republic also joined the League indicated that it would develop into a force for stability in the region, which also accorded with British interests. The French and Italians, chiefly interested in economic and financial matters, were most disappointed with the treaty - perhaps understandably given their pro-Turkish attitude over the last two years. Curzon managed the conference so that these issues were dealt with last, and the Turks, extremely sensitive about their sovereignty in these respects, proved remarkably unyielding. Of course, this did nothing to improve Anglo-French relations which were deeply scarred by disagreements over the Near East.¹⁰¹ The treaty itself, however, proved to be a

⁹⁸ Dockrill and Goold, *Peace without Promise*, pp.214-36; Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian Vision*, pp.179-311. For the Chanak crisis, see D.Walder, *The Chanak Affair* (London, Macmillan, 1969), A.L.Macfie, 'The Chanak Affair (September-October 1922)', *Balkan Studies* 20(2) 1979 309-41 and J.G.Darwin, 'The Chanak Crisis and the British Cabinet', *History* 65(1) 1980 32-48.

⁹⁹ This period is fully documented in DBFP/1/XVIII. The proceedings of the first session of the conference and the draft treaty presented to the Turks at the end of it can be found in [*Parliamentary*] *C[om]m[an]d [Paper] 1814 [Turkey No.1 (1923) Lausanne Conference on Near Eastern Affairs 1922-1923. Records of Proceedings and Draft Terms of Peace* (London, HMSO, 1923)]. The Turks refused to sign this treaty but produced counter-proposals in March that were considered reasonable and which formed the basis for further discussion. The two drafts can be compared in DBFP/1/XVIII/990-1064. For the text of the final treaty, see BFSP/117/543-639.

¹⁰⁰ Vansittart, *Mist Procession*, p.298.

¹⁰¹ Dockrill and Goold, *Peace without Promise*, pp.236-52. The view of the conference as a triumph for Curzon is most forcibly advanced in H.Nicolson, *Curzon: the Last Phase 1919-1925. A Study in*

genuine accommodation between conflicting interests and laid the foundation for enduring peace in the region.¹⁰²

For the Greeks, the treaty set the seal on a resounding and catastrophic defeat - not a temporary setback, but the permanent collapse of the century-old Great Idea. This defeat was extremely hard for the Greeks to swallow, as their sometimes truculent attitude during the conference demonstrated,¹⁰³ but it was nevertheless final. By an agreement signed at Lausanne in January 1923 the Greek minority in Asia Minor was compulsorily exchanged with the Muslim Turkish population of Greece - this meant a net influx of almost a million souls to a country with a population of barely five millions. This exchange may well have been inevitable, since the conflict 'had destroyed beyond repair the possibility of the peaceful symbiosis of Greek and Turk',¹⁰⁴ and in the long term it contributed to stabilising relations between Greece and Turkey. In the short term, however, the collapse of Greek irredentism which it entailed, by making nation co-terminous with state, was a huge psychological blow and the settlement and integration of the refugees was a massive economic and social problem for a country weakened by a decade of war. Although the League of Nations assisted in this process - by establishing a Refugee Settlement Commission (RSC) in Greece and facilitating the raising of two foreign loans - it was a tremendous struggle for an underdeveloped country burdened with debt and it provoked great social, economic and political tensions. This was a wholly novel situation for Greek policy-

Post-war Diplomacy (London, Constable, 1934), pp.282-350. For the Straits question, see A.L.Macfie, 'The Straits Question: the Conference of Lausanne (November 1922 - July 1923)', *Middle Eastern Studies* 15(2) 1979 211-38. For the French, Lausanne was a 'peace of lassitude', since they had little enthusiasm for a prolonged diplomatic struggle. The irony was that it 'signified the wisdom' but 'not the victory' of French policy, and it left French prestige in the Near East at a very low ebb: H.H.Cumming, *Franco-British Rivalry in the Post War Near East. The Decline of French Influence* (London, Oxford University Press, 1938), pp.186-213.

¹⁰² H.J.Psomiades, *The Eastern Question: the Last Phase. A Study in Greek-Turkish Diplomacy* (Thessaloniki, Institute for Balkan Studies, 1968), pp.106-9 and *passim*.

¹⁰³ D.Dakin, 'The Importance of the Greek Army in Thrace during the Conference of Lausanne 1922-1923', Institute for Balkan Studies (ed.), *Greece and Great Britain during World War I* (Thessaloniki, Institute for Balkan Studies, 1985), pp.211-32. For the British, this army was both a useful means of pressure on the Turks and a perpetual headache, lest the Greeks unleash it on Constantinople.

¹⁰⁴ Clogg, *Concise History*, p.101.

makers who in the economic field faced problems of construction and development at least as great as those of reconstruction.¹⁰⁵

The defeat in Asia Minor also had a profound political impact on Greece. It utterly discredited the royalists, and a revolution in September 1922 inaugurated over a decade of Venizelist hegemony that was reinforced by the overwhelmingly Venizelist sympathies of the refugees.¹⁰⁶ This was not to say that the period was one of stability: royalist sentiment remained strong in Old Greece, and the Venizelist bloc dissipated a great deal of its energy in internecine feuding, particularly over the nature of the constitution, which resulted in the establishment of a precarious republic in 1924. Politics was also plagued by persistent interventions from the military, even if these represented the continuation of factional disputes by other means rather than serious attempts to supersede politics and establish dictatorship.¹⁰⁷ This instability obviously had its roots in the profound divisions within Greek society that had caused the schism: even if some divisions, such as those over irredentist policy, were no longer relevant, others had been exacerbated by the war and the violent swings of the political pendulum since 1915. Equally, it was intensified by the lack of any commanding political presences once Constantine died in 1923 and Venizelos adopted a low profile in domestic politics. The collapse of the Great Idea meant that this period was one where domestic politics were primary: foreign policy was now almost unanimously agreed to be simply a matter of ensuring security, territorial

¹⁰⁵ For the Greek economy in the inter-war period, see the excellent Mazower, *Greece and the Inter-War Economic Crisis*, pp.41-112. For the exchange of populations and refugee settlement, see D.Pentzopoulos, *The Balkan Exchange of Minorities and its Impact Upon Greece* (Paris, Mouton, 1962) and S.P.Ladas, *The Exchange of Minorities. Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey* (New York, Macmillan, 1932).

¹⁰⁶ Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic*, pp.182-225.

¹⁰⁷ For divisions between Old Greece and the new lands, see Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic*, pp.273-302. For military intervention, see Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic*, pp.304-9, N.P.Mouzelis, *Modern Greece. Facets of Underdevelopment* (London, Macmillan, 1978), pp.105-14 and T.Veremis, 'Some Observations on the Greek Military in the Inter-War Period, 1918-1935', *Armed Forces and Society* 4(3) 1978 527-41.

integrity, good relations with neighbours and facilitating reconstruction. There was no such consensus, however, where domestic politics were concerned.¹⁰⁸

The period from 1923 onwards was also marked by a very low level of great power interference in Greek politics: symbolic of this was the abolition of the rights of the protecting powers at Lausanne.¹⁰⁹ The reason for this was simply that, after Lausanne, the vital interests of the great powers were no longer engaged in the region. The abortive British attempt to use Greece as a regional proxy amounted more to a last spasm of war imperialism than a first crisis of decolonisation,¹¹⁰ and now Britain's imperial lifeline simply shifted southwards to run through Suez, Palestine and Iraq. The French, too, now had their interests focused to the north, in Danubian Europe, and in the south, in the Middle East. Italy, however, was a special case among the great powers since she was a regional rival of Greece, and, in fact, Italian ambitions alongside those of Greece's Balkan neighbours constituted a source of external interference which in part offset British and French detachment from Greece.¹¹¹

Even so, there was nothing like the direct external interference in Greek affairs which there had been in previous years, and this too was a function of the collapse of the Great Idea and Greek weakness: for Britain and France Greece was a 'normal' country in a peripheral area, albeit one that had been of great strategic importance in the past and might be again in the future. The British would not gratuitously neglect their influence or their economic interests there, and they had a general concern for Greek stability, but their interest in the country was limited. In London there was residual philhellenic sympathy, but this was coupled with an awareness that the average contemporary Greek statesman was no Pericles. Equally, the tradition of Anglo-Greek

¹⁰⁸ It is true that it took some time for the Greeks to adjust to the idea of a more limited foreign policy, and some mavericks, particularly in the military, still hankered after expansion. Moreover, some *terra irredenta* still remained, in the shape of northern Epirus, Cyprus and the Dodecanese, even if great power interests stood in the way of Greece acquiring them.

¹⁰⁹ *DBFP/1/XVIII/972-3*. The French were, however, reluctant to abandon their rights in the summer of 1923 because they were not sure that the Venizelist triumph would prove durable: MAE Grèce 78 pp.6-34.

¹¹⁰ Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p.108.

¹¹¹ Couloumbis, Petropoulos and Psomiades, *Foreign Interference*, pp.77-9,150.

co-operation could not gainsay the sound political reasons for steering clear of entanglements in Greece. The same was broadly true of the French who set great store by traditional ties and political, economic and cultural interests, although their exertions in or on behalf of Greece were always likely to be limited. Despite this, the Greeks, for their part, sought to retain the sympathy of all the great powers. This reflected the influence those states still had over Greece in the sense that as the dominant ones in the international system they could set the parameters of Greek policy, for example where the search for funds for reconstruction was concerned. The whole of Greek history, especially recent history, had also taught the Greeks the critical importance of great power support.

This study does not claim to be a comprehensive account of Greek internal politics between 1923 and 1926 - amongst other things, such an account would now need to draw on a huge corpus of material in Greek which has recently appeared. Rather, this is an examination of the perceptions of British, French and Italian policy-makers of events in Greece (although rather more attention is given to the views and policy of London than those of Paris or Rome). Equally, this is not a comprehensive account of Greek external policy. The most notable omission is any detailed examination of Greco-Turkish relations. These were crucially important for Greece but rather troubled, as the two powers sought to negotiate the many problems arising from the implementation of the Lausanne agreements. These problems, however, and the gradual *rapprochement* between the two countries during the 1920s, have already been examined elsewhere.¹¹² The focus here is on Greece's relations with Italy, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia and the responses these evoked from the powers (again giving prominence to Britain). These three case studies not only deal with some particularly knotty problems in the Balkans, but also set out to illuminate key issues in the international system of the 1920s, all of which touch on the central problem of its potential for stability and durability. This, then, is a study of relations between great powers and a small state in normal times, but may be, in its way, as illuminating

¹¹² See, for example, Psomiades, *The Eastern Question: the Last Phase*, *passim*.

of wider issues as studies concentrating on times of crisis and cardinal relationships.

Both, surely, are needed to provide a rounded assessment.

Part One

The Entente Powers and Greek Internal Affairs

Chapter One

Defeat and Revolution

September - December 1922

Lloyd George's policy of using the Greeks as Great Britain's proxy in the eastern Mediterranean was always opposed by Churchill, not least on the grounds that 'a little weak people like [the Greeks] kept all these years at full tension are definitely bound to break down under the load'.¹ When this breakdown occurred with the collapse of the Greek front in Asia Minor, it had serious political repercussions in Athens. Key figures in the defeated Greek army crossed the Aegean and forced the abdication of Constantine on 27 September 1922. The next day a revolutionary committee comprised of Colonels Plastiras and Gonatas and the naval captain Fokas 'definitely assumed control in the capital', supported by the rump of the Greek army which had reached Athens, and ordered the arrest of a large number of prominent royalists. A puppet civilian government was formed under the temporary leadership of Soteris Krokidas and Crown Prince George was installed as king in his father's place.² Although the revolutionary movement was not simply Venizelist, since it also encompassed many Anti-Venizelists who for patriotic reasons supported Constantine's removal (Gonatas, for example, was 'a capable Royalist officer'), it soon came to be dominated by leaders of Venizelist sympathies.³ Venizelos himself, whose influence clearly counted for much with the revolutionaries, was appointed as the head of the Greek delegation to the impending Lausanne conference and as the representative of the regime's interests abroad.⁴ The revolutionary government had high hopes that with Constantine gone and Venizelos as their ambassador, the British and French would immediately adopt a more favourable attitude towards Greece at Lausanne.⁵

These hopes were soon dashed, partly because Allied Greek policy between 1920 and 1922 had not been wholly dictated by hostility to Constantine, but also because the Allies intended to judge the revolutionaries by their deeds. In the realm of domestic politics these were far from pleasing to the Allies, for events moved rapidly towards a crisis as the revolutionaries began to avenge the last two years of Anti-Venizelist

¹ M.Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill* Volume IV (London, Heinemann, 1975) 498.

² *DBFP/1/XVIII/127-31*; Dakin, *Unification*, pp.237-8.

³ *DBFP/1/XVIII/127*; MAE Grèce 57 Marcilly to QO no.180 d.25 Oct.1922.

⁴ FO 371/7586 min. by Crowe d.11 Oct.1922.

⁵ *DBFP/1/XVIII/130-1*; Dakin, *Unification*, p.238.

oppression and to punish those deemed responsible for the national humiliation in Asia Minor. On 13 November a special military court began to try numerous royalist ex-ministers and military leaders on charges of high treason for having allowed Turkish troops to invade Greek territory (i.e. the Smyrna zone).⁶ The charges were a legal nonsense since the accused were guilty of nothing more than incompetence and political errors of judgement, but though the proceedings soon degenerated into a farcical show trial they were seen by the revolutionaries as a political necessity.⁷ It soon became clear that the revolutionaries intended to execute the accused in order to prevent their possible future return to power and to prove the serious nature of the revolution.⁸ Six men, ex-premier Gounaris, ex-ministers Stratos, Protopapadakis, Baltazzis and Theotokis and the late commander-in-chief of Greek forces in Asia Minor General Hadjianesti, were condemned to death on 28 November and shot by firing squad that same day.⁹

The British reaction to the revolution was one of extreme caution: there was no desire to interfere or to assume any responsibility for events in Athens, ostensibly because Greek internal politics were entirely the concern of the Greek people.¹⁰ Curzon stuck resolutely to this line despite pressure from Athens and London in favour of a more interventionist approach. The British minister in Athens, Francis Lindley, consistently advocated recognition of George II as king on the grounds that this would tame the revolution by prompting a coalition of moderate elements which would marginalise the influence of both republicans and extreme Anti-Venizelists. This, together with the elections which the revolutionaries were promising, would help stabilise the situation and prevent the establishment of a republic which would 'quickly fall into

⁶ *DBFP/1/XVIII/287-91*; Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian Vision*, pp.323ff.

⁷ A.F.Frangulis, *La Grèce. Son Statut International. Son Histoire Diplomatique* (2 volumes, Paris, [no publisher] 1934) II 461-558 presents the Anti-Venizelist case against the executions. For British assessments see FO 371/7589 Bentinck to FO no.690 d.1 Dec.1922 and *DBFP/1/XVIII/377-9*.

⁸ FO 371/7586 Lindley to FO tel.665 d.8 Nov.1922.

⁹ *DBFP/1/XVIII/342*; Dakin, *Unification*, pp.238-9.

¹⁰ FO 371/7585 FO to Lindley unno.tel. d.26 Sept.1922.

the condition of Portugal, or even Mexico' and leave Greece prey to aggression by her neighbours.¹¹

In London these arguments were repeated by the Greek minister, Kaklamanos, and also by senior figures in the Foreign Office.¹² Crowe, the permanent under-secretary, and Nicolson both favoured recognition, partly for the same reasons but also to avert chaos in Greece in case the Lausanne conference collapsed and the Kemalists renewed the offensive in Thrace.¹³ All this, however, was to no avail. Curzon was sceptical about the danger of a republican *coup* and in any case distrusted the advice of Lindley who seemed to have a predilection for Greek monarchs in general and who had in particular urged recognition of Constantine when he was on the throne.¹⁴

Lindley was permitted to enter into personal relations with George II, to show that Britain was not personally hostile to him, but Curzon was adamant that formal recognition must wait until the situation was clearer, in particular until after the new regime had adopted a satisfactory attitude over Thrace at Lausanne and held elections.¹⁵ Premature recognition of a sovereign who might be toppled, or whose government might pursue an aggressive policy, would only entangle Great Britain in the mess of Greek internal politics.

Despite this detachment from the broad development of events in Greece, the British did take steps to try and prevent the execution of the six, which it was felt would render internal pacification impossible and irreparably damage Greece's international standing and reputation as a civilised state.¹⁶ Immediately after the arrest of Gounaris and the others in September, only the energetic intervention of Lindley and the French minister Marcilly prevented their summary execution by the revolutionaries

¹¹ FO 371/7585 Lindley to FO tel.497 d.27 Sept.1922; FO 371/7586 Lindley to FO no.598 d.21 Oct.1922, tel.632 d.28 Oct.1922.

¹² FO 371/7586 mins. by Crowe and Curzon d.9 Oct.1922.

¹³ FO 371/7586 mins. by Crowe d.30 Oct.1922, Nicolson d.6 Nov.1922; FO 371/7587 min. by Nicolson d.14 Nov.1922.

¹⁴ FO 371/7586 mins. by Curzon d.30 Oct.1922, 8 Nov.1922.

¹⁵ FO 371/7585 Lindley to FO tel.516 d.29 Sept.1922, min. by Curzon d.29 Sept.1922, FO to Lindley tel.273 d.30 Sept.1922; FO 371/7586 mins. by Crowe and Curzon d.9 Oct.1922.

¹⁶ FO 371/7586 Lindley to FO tel.623 d.24 Oct.1922, tel.628 d.27 Oct.1922, min. by Nicolson d.9 Nov.1922; *DBFP*/1/XVIII/288.

and secured a promise that the prisoners would be tried in a civil court.¹⁷ On 23 October, however, in breach of this undertaking the revolutionary committee established a special court martial to conduct the trials and Lindley made a series of further representations to Politis, the *ad interim* foreign minister, stressing the deplorable effect such a trial would have in Greece and the dangerous precedent that would be set by executing ex-ministers in response to a clamour for vengeance from the army. Politis reassured Lindley that the civilian government would resign rather than see executions carried out, but there was, as Lindley told Curzon, no knowing what the military would do.¹⁸

Lindley's apprehensions proved well founded: on 8 November he reported that the decree establishing the military tribunal suspended the constitutional provisions which forbade the imposition of the death penalty for political offences.¹⁹ Curzon thereupon instructed Lindley to demand written assurances from the Greeks that capital punishment would not be inflicted, failing which London would invite the French government to join Britain in enforcing observance of the Greek constitution.²⁰

Although there was some doubt as to the continuing validity of Allied rights of guarantee over the Greek constitution, Lindley presented his official note to Politis on 14 November.²¹ His task was complicated, however, by confusion as to where power really lay at Athens: at one point Politis told Lindley that the revolutionary committee was the key to the whole situation, at another he warned Lindley that British insistence on written guarantees would provoke the real power in the land, the mass of extremist officers, to sweep both government and committee away and simply murder the prisoners.²²

¹⁷ *DBFP/1/XVIII/129-30.*

¹⁸ FO 371/7586 Lindley to FO tel.623 d.24 Oct.1922, tel.628 d.27 Oct.1922; *DBFP/1/XVIII/223-5.*

¹⁹ FO 371/7586 Lindley to FO tel.665 d.8 Nov.1922.

²⁰ *DBFP/1/XVIII/288.*

²¹ *DBFP/1/XVIII/289.* The guarantee is discussed in FO 371/7588 'Memorandum on the Rights and Obligations of H.M.G. respecting the guarantee of the Greek Constitution', various authors and dates. Nicolson warned Kaklamanos that if the Greeks were so foolish as to provoke British intervention its basis 'would be, as far as they were concerned, a perfectly incidental and academic matter' (FO 371/7586 min. by Nicolson d.11 Nov.1922).

²² *DBFP/1/XVIII/288-9.*

Meanwhile, Politis asked Lindley whether, to counter the fears of the revolutionaries that unless the accused were executed they might one day return to power and take revenge, the British government would undertake to guarantee that once exiled they would never return to Greece. This proposal was given short shrift in the Foreign Office since it was not clear how such a guarantee could in practice be given.²³

Further, in response to a warning from Politis of the grave consequences that might follow any intervention by London in Greek politics, Curzon told Kaklamanos that executions would adversely affect Greece's interests at Lausanne and even threatened to break off diplomatic relations. This last threat, superseding the one to enforce the Greek constitution, was expected to prove more effective than the guarantee proposed by Politis.²⁴

At Athens the crisis deepened. The government was quite unable to deliver the written assurances demanded despite Curzon's threats, and Politis told Lindley that the government would have to resign unless the friction with Britain could be resolved.²⁵ Although Lindley continued to recommend some British guarantee against the return of the ex-ministers, London remained adamant, simply repeating that the Greeks had been given, through Kaklamanos, an 'unequivocal warning' of the likely consequences of executions.²⁶ This hard line attitude had an immediate effect, though not perhaps the one intended. On 23 November the Greek government resigned and a new cabinet was formed, composed almost entirely of extreme Venizelists and members of the revolutionary committee, with only Plastiras staying outside as self-styled 'Leader of the Revolution'.²⁷ When on 24 November the revolutionary committee truculently told Lindley that the six must be punished and warned Great Britain not to interfere, things looked very black indeed for the prisoners; on 27 November Lindley reported that the military were determined to carry out executions

²³ *DBFP/1/XVIII/290-1,308.*

²⁴ FO 371/7587 note by Kaklamanos d.15 Nov.1922; *DBFP/1/XVIII/308.*

²⁵ *DBFP/1/XVIII/318-9.*

²⁶ *DBFP/1/XVIII/326.*

²⁷ *DBFP/1/XVIII/329; Dakin, Unification, p.239.*

and that the end was very near.²⁸ Curzon, now at Lausanne, authorised Lindley to obtain from the six an undertaking that they would in future abstain from involvement in politics or live in exile outside Greece - whichever would save their lives - , but his change of heart came too late: by the time his telegram reached Athens the six were already dead.²⁹ In response to this judicial murder Lindley left Greece that same day, entrusting British interests to Charles Bentinck as chargé, and having informed the Greeks that his departure 'signified a breach of diplomatic relations between Great Britain and Greece'.³⁰

This strenuous British intervention to secure clemency for the six might be thought surprising given Curzon's general attitude of reserve about involvement in Greek internal politics, but this was a special case since London felt executions would be both a blunder and a crime, with consequences prejudicial to British as well as to Greek interests. Nevertheless, despite the threat to sever diplomatic relations, British policy failed. This did not mean that British influence in Greece counted for nothing; it was simply that British influence alone could not determine the policy of the Greek government against certain countervailing forces. In a long despatch written after his departure from Greece, Lindley identified three main factors as the cause of his failure: the implacability of those in Greece who desired executions, the rôle played by Venizelos and the attitude of the French.³¹

The immense and perhaps irresistible pressure within Greece for the death penalty was probably the most significant factor in Lindley's list. This pressure must be seen in the context of Greek history since the rise of Venizelism in 1910, since when Greek politics had become a struggle between two diametrically opposed blocs, fighting to gain control of government and to realise their own vision and conception of Greece. In many ways this was a conflict in which in which no quarter could be

²⁸ *DBFP*/1/XVIII/330,339-40.

²⁹ *DBFP*/1/XVIII/341-2.

³⁰ *DBFP*/1/XVIII/342.

³¹ *DBFP*/1/XVIII/342-3.

given, and the persecution and repression of opponents practised by both blocs when in power only added to the bitterness of the schism.

Although at first the revolutionaries proclaimed their aim of uniting the country, gradually, in accordance with what Marcilly called a 'normal revolutionary phenomenon', the movement came to be dominated by its extremists, and assumed the character of a simple Venizelist backlash after two years of royalist maladministration.³² As Lindley observed *à propos* the trials: 'the Venizelists have obtained control of the machine and mean to use it to destroy their enemies'.³³ Political pressure from the Venizelists for the executions was motivated by fear of possible royalist revanche in the future and by a desire to secure their own political superiority by removing the chief Anti-Venizelist leaders. Although the more perceptive amongst them began to have doubts once the likely international consequences of executions became clear, it was by then 'too late to damp down the fire they had helped to light'.³⁴

Pressure also came from the military as a whole. The officer corps wanted to lay the blame for the disaster on the heads of the politicians, both to 'wipe out the memory of their own disgraceful conduct in the field' and to make an example of "'les grands coupables'" in order to enforce discipline in the army.³⁵ The key group in procuring the execution of the six was undoubtedly the extremist officers whom Politis claimed would sweep the revolutionary committee away and plunge the nation into anarchy unless their demands were met.³⁶ Plastiras and his colleagues did not feel strong enough to resist these elements, exemplified and organised by General Theodoros Pangalos, the chief prosecutor at the trial, and so were forced to acquiesce in the executions. Given this internal momentum behind the trials it is at least doubtful

³² MAE Grèce 57 Marcilly to QO no.180 d.25 Oct.1922.

³³ DBFP/1/XVIII/291.

³⁴ DBFP/1/XVIII/342-3; Dakin, *Unification*, p.239.

³⁵ DBFP/1/XVIII/343.

³⁶ DBFP/1/XVIII/357.

whether, even if all other things had been equal, British efforts to save the six could have succeeded.³⁷

Lindley's despatch identified a second factor obstructing British policy, namely Venizelos' refusal to intervene to prevent the executions. Venizelos had been entrusted with managing Greece's interests abroad by the new regime, and could obviously have influenced events at home given the political sympathies of the revolutionaries. On several occasions Lindley urged London to persuade Venizelos to speak out, but the latter always refused, insisting that he had no responsibility for the internal affairs of Greece and, indeed, - perhaps somewhat disingenuously - that he wished to dissociate himself entirely from Greek politics.³⁸ Venizelos subsequently refused to warn the Greek government of the possible external consequences of their actions, even when they asked his advice, which was indeed odd in view of his responsibilities as their external representative. This reticence certainly influenced events at Athens. Lindley reported that the Greeks interpreted Venizelos' silence as meaning that there would be no adverse international reaction to the executions and that the Allies were bluffing and would in any case continue to support Greece.³⁹ Admittedly, Venizelos, under extreme pressure from Curzon at Lausanne, did eventually send a warning to Athens, but only after the sentences had been pronounced, and it was anyway 'lukewarm' and arrived too late to have any effect.⁴⁰ It may be that once the civilian cabinet had resigned on 24 November and the revolutionary committee had assumed full control even Venizelos could have done

³⁷ Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian Vision*, p.321. In his memoirs Pangalos wrote that the six, though innocent of the crimes of which they were accused, were 'inevitable and necessary sacrifices on the altar of the motherland during those critical times' (quoted in L.P.Cassimatis, *American Influence in Greece 1917-1929* (Kent, Kent State University Press, 1988), p.88).

³⁸ *DBFP/1/XVIII/193-4,329,340*; MAE Grèce 57 St.Aulaire (ambassador in London) to QO no.[?] d.23 Oct.1922. St.Aulaire wrote how even as Venizelos spoke of his determination not to return to Greek politics 'as if to convince himself', his voice and eyes 'betrayed his incurable nostalgia for power ... '.

³⁹ *DBFP/1/XVIII/342,357*; Cassimatis, *American Influence*, p.84.

⁴⁰ *DBFP/1/XVIII/347-8*; Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian Vision*, p.329.

little to influence events; but by his refusal to speak out before that date he brought upon himself a share of the guilt for the murder of his political opponents.⁴¹

Venizelos' motive for keeping silent was the subject of some debate amongst the British. The Foreign Office was surprised by his attitude: he usually talked so frankly about internal affairs that his reluctance even to comment upon them, and his dark warnings that Britain had better not intervene, seemed curious.⁴² Lindley attributed his silence to a desire to encourage the republicans amongst the revolutionaries, perhaps even to the point of another *coup d'état*, since it was doubtful whether free elections would produce a Venizelist majority.⁴³ It was also true that Venizelos told the French ambassador in London, St.Aulaire, on 22 October that he believed 'the days of the monarchy are numbered' and that 'his preferences were now moving towards a republic'.⁴⁴ Furthermore, Poincaré affected to have learnt from secret sources that contrary to his public declarations Venizelos was urging the executions of three out of the six accused.⁴⁵

On the other hand, Venizelos gave no overt encouragement to the leading Venizelists who declared for a republic in late October, and the Athens press published telegrams, purporting to be from him, repudiating allegations of republican sympathies.⁴⁶

Whether Venizelos had in fact been converted to republicanism is unclear - he certainly tailored his language to suit his audience and was at heart a relatively unprincipled opportunist (rather than an ideologue) who shifted his position to suit the changing balance of forces within Greece.⁴⁷ It would hardly be warranted to accuse

⁴¹ DBFP/1/XVIII/342.

⁴² FO 371/7586 mins. by Lindsay d.25 Oct.1922, Nicolson d.9 Nov.1922.

⁴³ FO 371/7586 Lindley to Crowe p[rivate] tel. d.27 Oct.1922.

⁴⁴ MAE Grèce 57 St.Aulaire to QO no.[?] d.23 Oct.1922.

⁴⁵ MAE Grèce 57 QO to French Delegation Lausanne tel.46 d.29 Nov.1922.

⁴⁶ FO 371/7586 Lindley to FO tel.604 d.20 Oct.1922, min. by Curzon d.8 Nov.1922, but cf. Lindley to FO tel.663 d.8 Nov.1922. Dakin, *Unification*, p.238.

⁴⁷ Dakin describes Venizelos as being 'totally devoid' of principles (*Unification*, p.183), and the Cretan certainly took no consistent line on the constitutional question. During the First World War, for example, he at various times advocated a republic or a change of dynasty according to circumstances. Although he told St.Aulaire here that it was recent events which had convinced him of the need for a republic in Greece, as early as 1917 he had written that it might be necessary to institute a republic, 'for which the Greek people, in my opinion, is already mature' (Leon, *Greece and the Great Powers*, p.478). For further details, see S.V.Papacosma, 'The Republicanism of Eleftherios

him of encouraging a republican *coup* and the deaths of the six on the basis of an uncorroborated French secret service report, for his silence could simply have been due to the confusion reigning in Greece. In any event, Dakin argues that his aloofness from party conflict helped him as Greece's external representative to salvage as much as he could from the Asia Minor disaster.⁴⁸

The third factor which in Lindley's view had contributed to his failure was the attitude of the French. Almost all the foreign representatives at Athens had attempted to dissuade the Greeks from imposing death penalties on the six. The American chargé Caffrey had exploited the government's desire to win American friendship and financial assistance for the refugees by warning the Greeks that executions might cause 'the springs of charity' in the United States to dry up.⁴⁹ The Italian representative, Giulio Montagna, also made strong representations, warning that reprisals might produce 'extremely unpleasant' results for Greece at the Lausanne Conference.⁵⁰

Conspicuous by the absence of their protests, however, were the French. An attempt to produce a petition for mercy signed by the whole diplomatic corps at Athens was frustrated by the refusal of Marcilly to participate in it.⁵¹ Although he had joined energetically in the earliest remonstrances to Athens in favour of the ex-ministers and was personally opposed to any reprisals, he soon received instructions from the Quai d'Orsay restraining him from further action.⁵² Worse, other French representatives, chiefly the head of the French military mission, General Gramat, were rumoured to have actually encouraged the executions.⁵³ The Greeks naturally took note of France's

Venizelos: Ideology or Tactics?', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 7 1981 169-202, which is an account of the transition to a republic paying special attention to the rôle and attitude of Venizelos.

⁴⁸ Dakin, *Unification*, p.238.

⁴⁹ DBFP/1/XVIII/343; Cassimatis, *American Influence*, pp.81,85. For documents on United States policy towards the revolution in Greece and American relief efforts, see [*Papers Relating to the F[oreign] R[elations of the] U[nited] S[tates]* (Washington, United States Government Printing Office, 1862-)]/1922/II/410-52.

⁵⁰ DBFP/1/XVIII/290,343.

⁵¹ DBFP/1/XVIII/329,343.

⁵² DBFP/1/XVIII/129-30,224,343,357.

⁵³ DBFP/1/XVIII/357.

'complete reserve regarding [the] prisoners', which was interpreted - wrongly in Lindley's view - as meaning that the French government desired the executions.⁵⁴

Certainly this policy was popular with French public opinion: the Parisian press shed no tears for the ex-ministers and applauded the Quai d'Orsay's policy of non-intervention.⁵⁵ All in all Lindley argued that French policy had represented a major obstacle to his aims and a considerable encouragement to the Greek extremists.

Lindley's analysis of French policy was quite in line with the general Foreign Office perception of France's attitude towards Greece. Before the revolution London had believed that French policy was aiming at the reduction of Greece to impotence and chaos, using encouragement of the Venizelist opposition to this end. This was a natural complement to France's pro-Turkish Eastern policy, but was also motivated by hatred of Constantine and the royalists and by a desire to weaken what was seen as a British client state. When Lindley argued in July 1922 that the French were promoting the Venizelists in order to force Constantine out of Greece and to facilitate the establishment of a republic which France could then dominate, the Foreign Office did not dissent.⁵⁶ After the revolution Lindley again reported that Paris was working for a republic and a conspicuous refusal to intervene on behalf of the ex-ministers was certainly one very effective means of encouraging the republicans.⁵⁷ The prospect of a French dominated republic did not cause any panic in the Foreign Office; for one thing it was seen as a very distant possibility and for another there was confidence that any influence lost by Britain in the short term would eventually be regained.⁵⁸ However, the British did believe that France was in fact seeking to establish a republic in Greece and that French policy had been one of the chief reasons for the failure to prevent the execution of the six.

⁵⁴ *DBFP/1/XVIII/329*.

⁵⁵ FO 371/7587 Hardinge (Paris) to FO tel.631 d.29 Nov.1922, tel.634 d.30 Nov.1922.

⁵⁶ FO 371/7585 Lindley to FO no.340 d.1 Jul.1922, Bentinck to FO no.417 d.8 Aug.1922 and mins.

⁵⁷ FO 371/7586 Lindley to FO no.598 d.21 Oct.1922.

⁵⁸ FO 371/7586 Lindley to FO tel.604 d.20 Oct.1922 and mins., min. by Nicolson d.6 Nov.1922.

In reality, Poincaré's policy was not that dissimilar to Curzon's, except that he extended the policy of non-intervention to encompass the trial of the ex-ministers. Poincaré laid down this policy in late September after Marcilly had on his own initiative joined Lindley in making representations to prevent the summary execution of the ex-ministers and of Constantine. He instructed Marcilly that, while this purely humanitarian action was permissible, he must not intervene in Greek internal affairs nor do anything 'which could be interpreted as designed to hinder normal judicial inquiries'.⁵⁹ Even once it became clear that the trial was not normal and was likely to end with executions, Poincaré refused to let Marcilly make further representations, insisting that France must 'remain completely outside this affair'.⁶⁰ This did not, however, mean that Poincaré wanted the ex-ministers killed. On the contrary, he made much of the warning given him by the Greek minister in Paris, Romanos, that protests from the great powers would be counter-productive by making it harder for the Greek government to show clemency.⁶¹ This view was echoed by Marcilly, who sympathised with Politis' argument that if the Greeks conceded leniency under British pressure the royalists, feeling themselves to be under British protection, would be greatly heartened.⁶² Later, Marcilly went so far as to argue that without the very public intervention of the British only two or three of the ex-ministers would have been killed.⁶³ After the executions, when rumours were flourishing that the French had encouraged them, Poincaré reiterated that French policy had been motivated solely by a desire not to intervene in an internal matter, seeing that as the best way to save the six.⁶⁴

Whatever the British may have thought, Poincaré's adherence to this policy was not part of a scheme to establish a republic in Greece. True, he was not prepared to recognise George II and was reluctant to allow Marcilly to enter into even personal

⁵⁹ MAE Grèce 57 Marcilly to QO tels.439-43 d.29 Sept.1922, QO to Marcilly tel.548 d.29 Sept.1922.

⁶⁰ MAE Grèce 57 QO to Marcilly tel.715 d.18 Nov.1922.

⁶¹ MAE Grèce 57 QO to Marcilly tel.712 d.17 Nov.1922.

⁶² MAE Grèce 57 Marcilly to QO no.201 d.22 Nov.1922.

⁶³ MAE Grèce 58 Marcilly to QO no.207 d.3 Dec.1922, note by Peretti de la Rocca (director of political affairs at the Quai d'Orsay) d.2 Dec.1922.

⁶⁴ MAE Grèce 57 QO to French Delegation Lausanne tel.46 d.29 Nov.1922.

relations with him, but this was more or less Curzon's position too.⁶⁵ Although the French looked on the prospect of a republic with more equanimity than the British, especially if the transition could be effected constitutionally as Venizelos assured the Quai d'Orsay it could, the official line was that it was not for France to interfere nor to recommend the establishment of a particular form of government in Greece.⁶⁶

Marcilly agreed that this even-handed policy was the correct one: even though most Greek republicans were ardent francophiles, France should certainly not encourage their schemes, but equally should not disavow them altogether by recognising the king. If a republic was established, so be it, but in the meantime the French should keep in step with their Allies and await the result of elections (and the internal settlement of the constitutional question) before committing themselves.⁶⁷

Despite pressure from the Greek queen's relatives at Bucharest and the Romanian government, Poincaré stuck steadfastly to his policy of reserving judgement on the king and government.⁶⁸ This policy, far from encouraging moves towards a republic, was probably decisive in hindering them. Many of the revolutionaries were sorely tempted to institute a republic by force in order to safeguard themselves against the electoral revanche of the Constantinists and to confound (essentially monarchical) public opinion. So great was this internal pressure that any hint of interference from France would probably have tipped the balance.⁶⁹ As it was, French policy (and Greece's precarious international position) helped avert for the moment this constitutional upheaval.

In French eyes it was not they, but the British who were pursuing a self interested and partial Greek policy, departing from an attitude of non-intervention to support one faction in Greek politics. In discussing the motives behind British efforts to save the

⁶⁵ MAE Grèce 57 Marcilly to QO tels.452-4 d.1 Oct.1922, QO to Marcilly tel.559 d.2 Oct.1922, QO to Barrère (Rome) tel.1660 d.5 Oct.1922.

⁶⁶ MAE Grèce 57 QO to Marcilly tel.548 d.29 Sept.1922, tel.582 d.6 Oct.1922, no.[?] d.7 Nov.1922.

⁶⁷ MAE Grèce 83 Marcilly to QO no.186 d.30 Oct.1922.

⁶⁸ MAE Grèce 83 Daeschner (Bucharest) to QO no.228 d.21 Oct.1922. King George was married to Princess Elizabeth of Romania.

⁶⁹ MAE Grèce 57 Marcilly to QO no.180 d.25 Oct.1922, no.200 d.20 Nov.1922.

six, Marcilly wrote that, whilst it was impossible to discount altogether considerations of legality and fairness, the British had more personal reasons for interesting themselves in the fate of the members of the Gounaris cabinet:

as has been seen for the last two years, and as is shown even more by the facts cited during the trial, the Foreign Office encouraged the Greek ministry in its military venture in Asia Minor. It is conceivable that it seeks now to render this last service to the men whom it drove to ... disaster.⁷⁰

Another French observer, the military attaché, Captain de Colombel, speculated that the British, apart from feeling guilty at having egged on the Gounarists without adequately supporting them materially, feared that if driven into a corner Gounaris might make 'extremely compromising' revelations about British engagements towards Greece.⁷¹ Later, whilst reviewing the whole course of the trial, Marcilly argued that as guilty verdicts would have implicated the British indirectly in a criminal act, 'the honour of British policy was at stake'.⁷² Further, he believed that London was motivated by monarchical considerations, dreading the prospect of a republic, which was growing daily as Greece plunged into chaos, since it would mean the collapse of British influence in Greece.⁷³ British policy did not even have the saving grace of effectiveness: the tactic used by Curzon of taking an intransigent public stand left no room for compromise and sealed the fate of all six prisoners.⁷⁴

The accusation that British policy was motivated by monarchical considerations was given colour by British efforts to safeguard the Greek royal family; efforts which in contrast to the case of the six were successful. On two occasions, in September and in November, Curzon reluctantly offered first Constantine and then George II protection on board British warships and in the legation when their lives appeared threatened by the rising tide of republicanism within Greece. In both instances the precautions

⁷⁰ MAE Grèce 57 Marcilly to QO no.201 d.22 Nov.1922.

⁷¹ MAE Grèce 154 De Colombel report no.989 d.[?].

⁷² MAE Grèce 58 Marcilly to QO no.207 d.3 Dec.1922.

⁷³ MAE Grèce 83 Marcilly to QO no.186 d.30 Oct.1922.

⁷⁴ MAE Grèce 58 Marcilly to QO no.207 d.3 Dec.1922.

proved unnecessary since the threats receded before the offers were taken up.⁷⁵ More vigorous action was taken in the case of Prince Andrew, George II's uncle, who had been arrested in mid-October on a specious charge of disobeying orders in the field in Asia Minor. As the determination of the revolutionary committee to execute the six became apparent, fears grew that the prince might share their fate.

Accordingly, the British delegation at Lausanne sent Gerald Talbot, a former British naval officer, a philhellene and friend of Venizelos, to Athens to try and save all those at risk because of their alleged complicity in the Asia Minor disaster.⁷⁶ He arrived in Athens on 28 November, too late to save the six whose execution was in fact hurried on to anticipate his arrival, but by careful negotiation (or, if the French were to be believed, by offering financial inducements) he saved Prince Andrew from the firing squad. The prince instead was sentenced to perpetual banishment and left Greece on board *HMS Calypso* on 3 December.⁷⁷ Talbot secured from the revolutionaries a promise that there would be no more political executions, and British efforts were further rewarded when Plastiras, and even Pangalos, assured Bentinck that they had every intention of retaining the monarchy in Greece.⁷⁸

The idea that Curzon's policy towards the Greek royal family was designed to buttress the institution of monarchy was somewhat wide of the mark. True, George V took an active interest in the fate of his Greek relatives (mindful no doubt of the precedent of his Romanov cousins and his inaction over them) but he only ever acted through the correct constitutional channel of the Foreign Office and his suggestions only

⁷⁵ FO 371/7585 Lindley to FO tel.489 d.26 Sept.1922, FO to Lindley tel.258 d.27 Sept.1922, tel.266 d.29 Sept.1922, Lindley to FO tel.530 d.1 Oct.1922; *DBFP/1/XVIII/127,154,348-9*; Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian Vision*, p.315.

⁷⁶ FO 371/7587 Lindley to Crowe p.tel. d.23 Nov.1922; *DBFP/1/XVIII/346-7*; Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian Vision*, p.329. It is not clear who exactly sent Talbot to Athens. Venizelos subsequently tried to claim credit for the mission (FO 371/7590 min. by Lampson d.29 Dec.1922; *DBFP/1/XVIII/347*), although Talbot told Graham, the British ambassador in Rome, that Tyrrell had sent him from Lausanne (FO 371/7589 Graham to FO no.1121 d.7 Dec.1922). Nicolson's biographer claims that it was Harold Nicolson himself who was responsible, since Tyrrell, assistant under-secretary at the Foreign Office, was incapacitated in an 'alcoholic stupor' (Lees-Milne, *Nicolson*, I 187-8). At any event the decision was probably taken without Curzon's knowledge (H.Nicolson, *King George the Fifth. His Life and Reign* (London, Constable, 1952), p.372).

⁷⁷ MAE Grèce 154 De Colombel report no.989 d.[?]; *DBFP/1/XVIII/349,358*.

⁷⁸ *DBFP/1/XVIII/366-8*

reinforced and never dictated the direction of British policy.⁷⁹ For Curzon's part, his very determination not to recognise George II, lest his actions be interpreted as interference, gives ample proof of his cautious position *vis à vis* the Greek monarchy. He was prepared to act only to protect the royal family as individuals, not as political figures, and even this he did with some reluctance.⁸⁰ Of course, British policy was not simply altruistic: the murder of any members of this family would only have envenomed Greece's internal disputes, which would be in neither Greek nor British interests;⁸¹ and after all, as Lindley had observed in July, British interests demanded 'imperatively a stable and prosperous Greece'.⁸²

Normal conditions were certainly not restored in Greece before the end of the year. Admittedly, the shock of the executions had had a sobering effect and allowed the revolutionary committee to assert its control over the extremist officers.⁸³ The revolutionaries were even showing contrition over the murders, even if, as Bentinck noted, 'as in the case of Judas repentance has come too late'.⁸⁴ On the other hand, there was no immediate prospect of either elections or the formation of a civilian government and the only bulwark against anarchy was the revolutionary committee.⁸⁵ Prospects for the future were indeed uncertain. From afar Venizelos was urging that 'the revolution must make way for political democracy' but Plastiras and his colleagues were contemplating a lengthy dictatorship.⁸⁶ There was even the possibility of a resumption of the war against Turkey: the ruthless Pangalos had taken charge of the reorganisation of the army in Thrace and many of the revolutionaries

⁷⁹ FO 800/154 George V to Curzon unno.tel. d.30 Sept.1922, Curzon to George V unno.tel. d.30 Sept.1922; see also the interesting minutes in FO 371/7589 by Cadogan d.8 Dec.1922 and Lampson d.9 Dec.1922. This is also the verdict of George V's most recent biographer (K.Rose, *King George V* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1983), p.347).

⁸⁰ FO 371/7585 FO to Lindley tel.258 d.27 Sept.1922, tel.273 d.30 Sept.1922.

⁸¹ *DBFP/1/XVIII/288*.

⁸² FO 371/7585 Lindley to FO no.340 d.1 Jul.1922.

⁸³ MAE Grèce 58 Marcilly to QO no.217 d.7 Dec.1922; R.Clogg, *A Short History of Modern Greece* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp.119-20.

⁸⁴ *DBFP/1/XVIII/368*.

⁸⁵ FO 371/7589 Bentinck to FO no.690 d.1 Dec.1922; FO 371/7590 Bentinck to FO no.723 d.14 Dec.1922.

⁸⁶ Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian Vision*, pp.330-4.

believed an attempt on Constantinople might strengthen their position.⁸⁷ This disastrous policy was checked by the combined pressure of the Allies and Venizelos, although it remained a danger over the next eight months.⁸⁸

But there was no end to the revolutionary regime. Although elections were often mooted the likelihood of their taking place was slim since there was no guarantee that they would produce a Venizelist majority.⁸⁹ Perhaps the best hope for a return to civilian government lay with Alexandros Zaimis, a veteran moderate politician, who told Bentinck he might be able to persuade the revolutionaries to cede power to a civilian cabinet under his premiership if he could assure them that he had the support of the three *Entente* powers. This idea was in the air for some time but came to nothing since the powers were unwilling to give Zaimis the political and economic support, including recognition of George II, on which he insisted as a precondition of his forming a government.⁹⁰

Curzon refused to support Zaimis, which was not surprising as the wisdom of the cautious policy adopted in October had only been confirmed by events since. It was clearly impossible, he told Bentinck, for Britain to recognise a sovereign 'with whose existing government [we] have just been obliged to suspend relations because of a series of atrocious judicial murders'.⁹¹ '*Festinare lente*' was the policy prescribed by Miles Lampson, head of the Foreign Office Central Department: recognition and a resumption of diplomatic relations could not be considered until elections had been held and a stable government established.⁹² It was therefore of little comfort to the Greeks that Curzon now declared, despite his refusal to receive a Greek minister in

⁸⁷ MAE Grèce 57 Marcilly to QO tels.444-6 d.29 Sept.1922; MAE Grèce 58 Marcilly to QO no.221 d.15 Dec.1922; *DBFP/1/XVIII/420-1*.

⁸⁸ Dakin, *Greece and Great Britain*, pp.211-32.

⁸⁹ MAE Grèce 58 Marcilly to QO no.207 d.3 Dec.1922.

⁹⁰ *DBFP/1/XVIII/393-5*; Dakin, *Unification*, p.240. Zaimis continued his negotiations with the revolutionaries for almost a year, but things were rendered difficult by his tendency to discuss half a question then 'suddenly withdraw to fish at Aegina for weeks at a time' (FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 [enclosed in Bentinck to FO no.555 d.30 Aug. 1924] p.10. Page references for Annual Reports are from the Confidential Print copies filed in the FO 371 series).

⁹¹ *DBFP/1/XVIII/424-5*.

⁹² FO 371/7590 mins. by Lampson d.20 Sept.1922 and 29 Sept.1922.

London, that relations had not in fact been broken off. Rather, Lindley had been withdrawn 'as a mark of our displeasure' and Bentinck remained chargé d'affaires though without having official intercourse with cabinet ministers.⁹³

A measure of excitement in British public opinion was a further factor reinforcing Curzon's decision to adopt a wait-and-see policy. During his trial Gounaris had claimed in his defence that his policy of continuing the war in Asia Minor had been endorsed and encouraged by the British government, and in an attempt to prove it had produced papers, including a letter from Curzon. Curzon's domestic opponents seized on this alleged encouragement, questions were asked in both Houses and the press was alive with comment, speculation and demands for the publication of papers.⁹⁴ The furore died down after it had been shown that Curzon's letters to Gounaris had been approved by the cabinet; but his notorious sensitivity had been very wounded by the attacks.⁹⁵ On top of this controversy came a dispute about the government's rôle in the rescue of Prince Andrew and much comment about the decision to withdraw Lindley.⁹⁶ In these circumstances, 'when affairs of Greece are much discussed in [the] press and parliamentary questioners are particularly active', the Foreign Office was determined to do nothing to fan the flames of public interest.⁹⁷ Although the voice of

⁹³ FO 371/7588 mins. by Crowe d.7 Dec.1922, Curzon d.8 Dec.1922; FO 371/7589 min. by Troutbeck d.18 Dec.1922; *DBFP/1/XVIII/386*.

⁹⁴ Cassimatis, *American Influence*, pp.85-6; The Earl of Ronaldshay, *The Life of Lord Curzon. Being the Authorized Biography of George Nathaniel Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, KG*, Volume III (London, Ernest Benn [no date]) 329-31; Mosley, *Curzon*, pp.247-8. For the text of this letter of 6 March 1922 see *DBFP/1/XVII/646-9* and also 640-2.

⁹⁵ FO 800/154 Vansittart to Tyrrell p.tel. d.9 Dec.1922; *DBFP/1/XVIII/351-2,358-9,382-5*; [*Hansard. Volume*] 159 *H[ouse of] C[ommons Official Report. Parliamentary] Deb[ates] 5[th] s[eries]* (London, HMSO, 1909-1981) columns] 105ff.,1182-4,1989,2366-8,2376; [*Hansard. Volume*] 52 *H[ouse of] L[ords Official Report. Parliamentary] Deb[ates] 5[th] s[eries]* (London, HMSO, 1909-1981) columns] 337-47,349-56.

⁹⁶ FO 371/7588 Bentinck to FO tel.730 d.5 Dec.1922; FO 371/7590 Bentinck to FO no.709 d.9 Dec.1922; 159 *H.C.Deb.* 5s. 1180-2,1727-8,2365-8.

⁹⁷ FO 371/7588 min. by Lampson d.7 Dec.1922; FO 371/7589 Crowe to Hardinge p.tel. d.8 Dec.1922. This telegram was an attempt to prevent Prince Andrew travelling to England until the press was less agitated.

public opinion was not coherent, there were definite calls for non-intervention in Greek affairs, with which the Foreign Office was only too happy to comply.⁹⁸

French policy was in fact very similar. Poincaré laid down that recognition of George II must wait until he could be judged by his actions, and should in any case be postponed until after the conclusion of the Lausanne conference. Marcilly agreed that given the instability in Greece this policy was appropriate. Only if Poincaré wanted to flatter Romania, or promote French economic interests in Greece, should he deviate from his policy of 'systematic indifference'.⁹⁹ Marcilly told a Romanian representative, anxious about the fate of the monarchy, that although the French 'strongly desired' the restoration of tranquillity at Athens, it was vital to maintain an attitude of strict reserve until the party political conflict was over.¹⁰⁰

Although some British officials still suspected that the French were backing the republican extremists, this was not the case.¹⁰¹ Marcilly was at pains to reassure Paris that contrary to the many rumours circulating he had never encouraged the Greeks to proclaim a republic.¹⁰² The French were also frank with the British over the intelligence they had received from Venizelos. The latter had told Paris that the question of a republic was bound to be raised after the elections and that, if there was an overwhelming majority in favour, a republic would have to be set up. (However, Venizelos personally felt that if there was a substantial minority still in favour of the monarchy, it would have to be retained). With this in mind both governments agreed that they would look foolish if they recognised George only to see him immediately dethroned by a popular vote, and that recognition must be delayed.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ [Ministero degli Affari Esteri, *I*] *D[ocumenti] D[iplomatici] I[taliani]* (Rome, Libreria dello Stato, 1952-)/7/I/125.

⁹⁹ MAE Grèce 83 Marcilly to QO no.186 d.30 Oct.1922, no.220 d.15 Dec.1922, tels.544-5 d.17 Dec.1922, QO to Marcilly tel.300 d.22 Dec.1922, Marcilly to [?] p.l. d.31 Dec.1922.

¹⁰⁰ MAE Grèce 58 Marcilly to QO no.216 d.7 Dec.1922.

¹⁰¹ FO 371/7590 min. by Troutbeck d.29 Dec.1922.

¹⁰² MAE Grèce 83 Marcilly to QO tels.544-5 d.17 Dec.1922.

¹⁰³ MAE Grèce 83 St.Aulaire to QO no.536 d.22 Dec.1922; *DBFP*/1/XVIII/424-5.

The upshot of the whole affair had nevertheless been an increase of French influence within Greece relative to that of Britain, at least in the short term. The Greeks had learnt from experience over the decades that their country could not flourish without foreign support, and the revolutionaries had hoped that with the removal of Constantine political and economic assistance from the powers would be forthcoming.¹⁰⁴ This was not the case, for the motives behind great power policies were more complex than the Greeks realised. The French, for example, were still intent on winning the favours of Kemal at Lausanne, and this if nothing else would prevent them from pursuing a whole-heartedly pro-Greek policy. However, the Greeks felt that they needed the support of a great power and as Britain had broken off relations they concentrated on France, whom the inspired Athenian press flattered unceasingly.¹⁰⁵ This alarmed Bentinck, who was something of a francophobe, and indeed somewhat paranoid about the danger to British influence in Greece. He warned London that French influence, which had been nil in the summer, was steadily growing and that French representatives were making capital out of the contrast between French abstention and British intervention over the six.¹⁰⁶

This did not upset the Foreign Office. There, Lampson felt that the withdrawal of Lindley had had the desired effect of bringing the revolutionaries to their senses over executions, and in any case it was accepted as a general principle that British influence would ultimately prevail in Greece because of naval and geographical factors. Furthermore, while Britain's own Near Eastern interests were being discussed at Lausanne, decisions about Greece should be postponed until the situation was more stable.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ *DBFP/1/XVIII/130*: 'The whole idea of the Revolution was to be friendly to the Entente'; FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 pp.3-4.

¹⁰⁵ FO 371/7590 Bentinck to FO no.723 d.14 Dec.1922; *DBFP/1/XVIII/394*. Bentinck pointed out another consideration: 'While at heart ... the Greeks mistrust the French, they openly flatter them, and in many ways they take more trouble to please France than England. They consider that while the latter is, and always will be, their friend, the former must be placated, as she has a habit of making herself very disagreeable to her enemies' (FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 p.40).

¹⁰⁶ FO 371/7589 Bentinck to FO no.683 d.1 Dec.1922.

¹⁰⁷ FO 371/7589 min. by Lampson d.14 Dec.1922; FO 371/7590 mins. by Troutbeck d.19 Dec.1922, 29 Dec.1922.

Italian policy during this whole crisis followed a middle course, less interventionist than the British but more active than the French. That Rome followed this moderate policy was not surprising, since Mussolini only came to power on 29 October, just a month after the Greek revolution, and was still finding his feet. Already Montagna, the aggressive and irascible Italian minister at Athens, had been making representations to the Greeks about the possibility of executions, and he continued these on Mussolini's instructions.¹⁰⁸ In mid-November Mussolini proposed to London and Paris that the three powers should make a joint *démarche* at Athens, but this initiative came to nothing as the British had already made their own representations and as the French were determined to do nothing 'to hinder the Greek government's efforts to prevent the executions of the accused'.¹⁰⁹

Mussolini's motives were clear enough, and were perceived by the French: Italian interests demanded the prevention of the revival of Greece that the return of the Venizelists to power was likely to produce.¹¹⁰ Given the geographical proximity and conflicting ambitions of Italy and Greece their interests were bound to clash, and the Venizelists had always been more active and successful in pursuing Greek interests than the royalists. Consequently the return of the Venizelist system must be impeded at all costs.¹¹¹ To the same end Montagna advocated the recognition of George II to prevent Greece becoming a Venizelist republic and 'docile instrument of France'.¹¹² Mussolini, however, though conceding the strength of Montagna's argument, was reluctant to recognise a regime which had not yet consolidated itself, and in any case did not dare break ranks with France and Britain on this question.¹¹³ In the end, Mussolini's attempts to protect the Greek royalists were counter-productive given Italy's unpopularity in Greece, the widespread belief that Rome was financing the

¹⁰⁸ MAE Grèce 57 Marcilly to QO no.182 d.26 Oct.1922, no.201 d.22 Nov.1922.

¹⁰⁹ MAE Grèce 57 note by Peretti de la Rocca d.17 Nov.1922; FO 371/7587 min. by Osborne d.18 Nov.1922.

¹¹⁰ MAE Grèce 83 Marcilly to QO no.186 d.30 Oct.1922; MAE Grèce 154 De Colombel report no.989 d.[?].

¹¹¹ DDI/7/II/508-11; MAE Grèce 58 Charles-Roux (Rome) to QO tel.1454 d.2 Dec.1922.

¹¹² DDI/7/I/28.

¹¹³ DDI/7/I/43.

extreme royalist party of General Metaxas and Montagna's own 'violently anti-Venizelist' sympathies.¹¹⁴

In the aftermath of the executions and Lindley's withdrawal, Mussolini pursued a cautious but opportunistic policy. He asked his ambassador in London, Della Torretta, and the head of the Italian delegation at Lausanne, Garroni, whether in their opinion Britain's attitude towards Greece had substantially changed or whether Curzon had merely broken off relations to appease public opinion. Upon this point depended Italian policy, for if the Anglo-Greek *entente*, which since the war had created a very unfavourable situation for Italy, was really finished, then great opportunities might open up in the Balkans and eastern Mediterranean.¹¹⁵ He received conflicting answers. On the one hand, Della Torretta, always anxious to please his superiors, reported that according to his Foreign Office contacts there was an anti-Greek sea-change in British policy which would indeed create favourable conditions for Italy. On the other hand, Garroni, in touch with Curzon and Tyrrell at Lausanne, reported that recent events would make no real difference to Britain's line of conduct in the Near East.¹¹⁶

In view of this difference of opinion, Mussolini seems to have decided to take no further action beyond the instructions sent previously to his chargé in Greece to make his attitude conform to Bentinck's and to have no official relations with the Greek government.¹¹⁷ True, tension persisted between Italy and Greece: the revolutionaries, 'intoxicated with customary Venizelist Italophobia', used the inspired press to brand Italy as the 'sworn enemy' of Greece and the Italians responded in kind, furious at the

¹¹⁴ MAE Grèce 57 Marcilly to QO no.201 d.22 Nov.1922; MAE Grèce 154 De Colombel report no.989 d.[?]; FO 371/7586 Lindley to FO no.598 d.21 Oct.1922; *DBFP*/1/XVIII/128,224.

¹¹⁵ *DDI*/7/I/111-2.

¹¹⁶ *DDI*/7/I/117,124-5.

¹¹⁷ FO 371/7587 Bentinck to FO tel.714 d.30 Nov.1922; FO 371/7588 Graham to FO no.1109 d.1 Dec.1922; *DDI*/7/II/53-4.

self-abasement of the Greek press before France.¹¹⁸ For the time being, however, official Italian policy continued to be restrained.

¹¹⁸ *DDI/7/1/152,508-11; DDI/7/1/287-8*. This quietness was also partly due to Montagna's absence from Greece while he was representing Italy at Lausanne.

Chapter Two
The Monarchy on Trial
January - December 1923

In the first half of 1923 the Greek political scene continued to be in a state of flux as the various Venizelist factions and military leaders struggled to gain ascendancy.¹ New political groupings coalesced and disintegrated, rumours of imminent republican *coups* flourished and a flood of refugees poured in from Asia Minor, especially after the signature in January of the Greco-Turkish exchange convention at Lausanne.² Complementing this internal instability, Greece's problems with her neighbours were compounded by her isolation. Until the signature of the treaty of Lausanne on 24 July 1923, there was a real possibility of a resumption of the war against Turkey in Thrace, either as a result of Greek frustration at the unsatisfactory proceedings of the conference or through the actions of Pangalos, commander of the Greek army in western Thrace. Elsewhere, Greece was at odds with Yugoslavia over the vexed question of facilities for Yugoslav trade at Salonica and with Bulgaria over a range of political and economic issues.³ The Yugoslav-Bulgarian *rapprochement* symbolised by the Nis agreements published in May caused much anxiety in Athens, which abated only slightly with the fall of the Stamboliiski government in Sofia after the Tsankoff *coup* in June.⁴ Meanwhile, the continuing failure of the Greeks to realise

¹ FO 371/8826 Bentinck to FO no.11 d.9 Jan.1923; MAE Grèce 58 Marcilly to QO no.22 d.3 Feb.1923.

² Dakin, *Unification*, pp.242-5; Pentzopoulos, *Balkan Exchange*, pp.51-71; Ladas, *Exchange*, pp.335-52.

³ Greece's relations with Bulgaria and Yugoslavia are examined in chapters 9 - 12 below. Bulgaria was a traditional rival of Greece who now had additional grievances deriving from the 1919 peace settlement. Friction existed between the two on a whole host of issues, including the Bulgarian demand for an outlet on the Aegean, the status and treatment of the Slav minority in northern Greece and the activities of the Macedonian committees. Greece had been an ally of Serbia since 1913, but the alliance was in abeyance because the Yugoslavs felt the Greeks had betrayed them by not coming to their assistance in 1915 and that the terms were no longer appropriate now that Serbia had been transformed into Yugoslavia. The question of Yugoslav commercial interests at Salonica was the chief issue of contention between the two states, and it was serious enough to give rise to persistent rumours that the Yugoslavs might seize the port. It should be noted that until 1929 the official name of the Yugoslav state was the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. This was hardly euphonious: as Crowe observed in 1919, it was 'a national calamity for a new state to be burdened with such an elephantine designation' (FO 608/42 [? min.] by Crowe d.9 May 1919, quoted in A.Sharp, *The Versailles Settlement. Peacemaking in Paris, 1919* (London, Macmillan, 1991), p.210). During the 1920s British policy-makers referred indiscriminately to the state as either Yugoslavia, the SCS Kingdom or even Serbia, but I have consistently used Yugoslavia.

⁴ *DBFP/1/XXIV/561-2,593-4,639-41,701-3,707-9,713-8,764-5.*

their 'enduring and chimerical dream' of gaining admission to the Little *Entente* only underlined their isolation.⁵

True, the revolutionary government tried to consolidate its position internally, creating 'Leagues of National Safety' in January and vowing to bring about the political and economic revival of Greece. As the government seemed in practice incapable of solving Greece's pressing external and economic problems, however, public opinion grew increasingly disillusioned with it.⁶ Under pressure from liberal politicians who urged a return to democracy, Colonel Plastiras eventually found it politic to profess a desire to see Greece returned to normal democratic life under a constitutional monarchy.⁷ The threat persisted, however, from a substantial number of die-hard republicans. Led by the ambitious and unscrupulous Pangalos, who had much support in the army, they were unwilling to abandon their plans even in the face of public opinion,⁸ which was clearly not on the whole republican. Even when in April several prominent republican politicians had indicated their willingness temporarily to support George II in the interests of stability, the possibility of a *coup* from the left remained.⁹

Despite Plastiras' declarations of intent, no elections were forthcoming - chiefly because they would have returned a royalist majority which might have cost the revolutionaries their heads.¹⁰ In June an intended republican *coup*, prompted in part by developments at Lausanne, was only narrowly averted when its architect, Pangalos, fell ill at the crucial moment.¹¹ This left Plastiras in control, and, alarmed by Greece's parlous financial position and diplomatic isolation, he again began to consider handing over to a civilian government by means of elections. These plans

⁵ MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.232 d.27 Dec.1923; *DBFP*/1/XXIV/692-3,707-9,731-2,734,781,784,814-5.

⁶ MAE Grèce 58 Marcilly to QO no.22 d.3 Feb.1923; *DBFP*/1/XVIII/440-2.

⁷ *DBFP*/1/XVIII/520.

⁸ *DBFP*/1/XVIII/539-40.

⁹ *DBFP*/1/XVIII/672-4.

¹⁰ *DBFP*/1/XVIII/684-5,862.

¹¹ FO 371/8827 Bentinck to FO tel.225 d.5 Jun.1923, tel.230 d.8 Jun.1923, no.501 d.27 Jun.1923; *DBFP*/1/XVIII/763,843-5,861.

again came to nothing, partly because Zaimis dithered and refused to form an interim cabinet, and partly because of the rising popularity of Metaxas' Anti-Venizelist party.¹² Metaxas had been Constantine's chief of staff in the war and his party, composed largely of ultra-Constantinists, had been boosted by the death of the ex-king in January and the yearning of the Greek people for new political personalities. In addition, the royalists maintained intact the formidable electoral machine built up after the return of Constantine in 1920.¹³ But if the rise of Metaxas made the revolutionaries afraid to risk an election, the fact that the unconstitutional position was boosting his popularity provided a strong counter-argument for regularising the situation.¹⁴ Throughout the summer moderate opinion gained ground and the conclusion of peace at Lausanne seemed to open the way for the holding of elections.¹⁵ Debate as to the nature and timing of these elections was in full flow when the eruption of the Corfu crisis caused their further postponement.¹⁶

In these circumstances, with the situation in Greece still unstable and constitutional government still in abeyance, the Foreign Office saw no reason to change its policy on recognition. In January Bentinck, assailed in Athens by Greeks who felt their isolation keenly, and concerned at the reduction in his own and Britain's influence, suggested that Curzon should set conditions for the resumption of relations and recognition.¹⁷ Curzon angrily rejected this 'preposterous suggestion' which would 'involve an altogether unwarrantable interference' in Greek politics, and added that he was 'at a loss to understand the fatal miasma that overtakes every representative whom we send to Athens', causing them to continually advocate recognition.¹⁸ It was still too early to consider this question which could not be deemed urgent since 'the

¹² *DBFP/1/XVIII/674,684,844,861-2.*

¹³ FO 371/8826 Bentinck to FO no.745 d.27 Dec.1922; FO 371/12175 Lorraine (Athens) to FO no.80 d.26 Feb.1927; MAE Grèce 58 Marcilly to FO no.22 d.3 Feb.1923; *DBFP/1/XVIII/862.*

¹⁴ *DBFP/1/XVIII/862.*

¹⁵ FO 371/8827 Bentinck to FO no.585 d.25 Jul.1923; *DBFP/1/XVIII/520.*

¹⁶ FO 371/8827 Bentinck to FO no.630 d.10 Aug.1923, no.723 d.13 Sept.1923. The Corfu crisis is discussed in chapter 7 below.

¹⁷ FO 371/8823 Bentinck to FO tel.8 d.4 Jan.1923, tel.10 d.5 Jan.1923; FO 371/8826 Bentinck to Nicolson p.l. d.24 Jan.1923.

¹⁸ FO 371/8823 min. by Curzon d.7 Jan.1923.

very fact that the Greeks are so anxious to resume relations proves the efficacy of the policy adopted by His Majesty's Government'. Recognition could only follow confirmation of both king and government by popular election, and the removal from power of those responsible for the execution of the six.¹⁹ The onus was thus placed firmly on Athens. As Ronald McNeill, parliamentary under-secretary for foreign affairs, told the House on 11 April, the British government was not prepared to promise to resume relations with Greece on any particular terms: 'such resumption must rather await proof by experience of the stability and good faith of the Greek Government'.²⁰

This attitude was maintained throughout the summer. After Pangalos' abortive *coup* Bentinck again urged positive action to stabilise the situation, but he was rebuffed. Lampson felt that the policy of non-recognition had 'proved effective' and was 'proving increasingly so' since Greece's isolation was forcing Plastiras to consider holding elections soon; and Crowe and Curzon agreed that there was no need for any spontaneous declaration about conditions for recognition.²¹ To the Foreign Office the internal situation seemed to be improving, especially as the danger of a *coup* was now quite distant. All this moved Nicolson to grudging praise: 'apart from the initial blunder of the executions it must be admitted that the Revolutionary Government have acted with firmness and moderation'.²²

In fact the apparent improvement in the situation concealed the truth that a return to parliamentary government was still some way off. Although the revolutionaries wanted elections for external reasons they were still afraid that a fair poll would bring Metaxas and his Free Opinion party to power.²³ Consequently, they sought to

¹⁹ FO 371/8823 Curzon (Lausanne) to Bentinck tel.22 d.7 Jan.1923; *DBFP*/1/XVIII/444-5; *DBFP*/1/XXIV/811.

²⁰ 162 *H.C.Deb.* 5s. 1177. This statement was perhaps slightly disingenuous as Curzon's stipulations about elections and a constitutional government amounted to conditions, but they were never explicitly or officially stated to the Greeks since that would have amounted to interference (FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 p.27).

²¹ FO 371/8827 mins. by Nicolson d.8[? Jun.]1923, Lampson, Crowe and Curzon d.27 Jun.1923.

²² FO 371/8827 min. by Nicolson d.9 Aug.1923

²³ FO 371/8827 Bentinck to FO no.630 d.10 Aug.1923, min. by Nicolson d.22 Aug.1923. The literal, but misleading, translation of the name was 'Party of the Free Thinkers'.

manipulate the elections, firstly by vainly trying to persuade Zaimis to form a puppet interim cabinet through which they could control the ballot; then by devising new electoral districts so structured as to maximise the influence of Venizelist votes.²⁴ This gerrymandering, together with the very fragmented nature of the Greek parties, put the outcome of any election in some doubt.

The Foreign Office, however, continued to be unperturbed. Even the prospect of a victory for Metaxas, pro-German and neutralist during the war, was viewed with equanimity: Troutbeck argued that Britain should recognise a Metaxas government if it had been constitutionally elected.²⁵ What was important to Britain was the fact of the election, rather than its outcome. With Venizelos *hors de combat* there was little to choose between the Greek politicians who were, in Nicolson's view, 'one as bad as the other'.²⁶ The Foreign Office was still primarily concerned to see stable government established in Greece to stop it drifting into civil war; but a suggestion from Nicolson that Britain should perhaps adopt a more positive approach to the elections in order to ensure a constitutional outcome was not taken up by his superiors. The moment to abandon non-intervention had not yet arrived, Tyrrell wrote, and when it did 'let us think twice before we leap into the Greek mess'.²⁷ This attitude seemed even more prudent when the elections, which had been scheduled for 28 October, were postponed because of the Corfu crisis.²⁸

In contrast to the British, the French had decided by this point to take a positive step: in August Poincaré informed London that he was ready to recognise George II (even

²⁴ FO 371/8827 Bentinck to FO no.630 d.10 Aug.1923, no.723 d.13 Sept.1923, no.733 d.15 Sept.1923, no.751 d.20 Sept.1923. The various voting systems used in Greece between the wars are discussed in Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic*, pp.351-3. See also pp.30-1 and Cassimatis, *American Influence*, pp.92-3.

²⁵ FO 371/8827 Bentinck to FO no.531 d.4 Jul.1923, min. by Troutbeck d.18 Jul.1923. According to one authority, during the war Metaxas played a 'most sinister rôle' as one of Constantine's chief advisers and was 'fanatically attached to German ideals' all his life (Leon, *Greece and the Great Powers*, pp.61,68).

²⁶ FO 371/8827 min. by Nicolson d.22 Aug.1923.

²⁷ FO 371/8827 min. by Tyrrell d.23 Aug.1923.

²⁸ FO 371/8827 Bentinck to FO no.723 d.13 Sept.1923.

though the Corfu crisis in fact caused this recognition to be postponed).²⁹ French policy was not, however, all that dissimilar to Britain's. In February Poincaré had told Marcilly that as France sought a stable peace in the Near East as much as in Europe he was not prepared to encourage either the republicans or the Metaxists, who were both seeking French support, and was determined to stay out of Greek internal affairs. On principle, however, he favoured the retention of the monarchy in Greece since it was the legal regime there, liable to prove the most stable and because the dynastic ties binding the Greek to the Romanian and Yugoslav royal houses were likely to push Greek policy in a direction sympathetic to the *Entente*.³⁰

Over the next few months Marcilly supplied his own views on why France should recognise George after the conclusion of peace. Although Greece's political importance would be negligible for quite some time, France had important economic and moral interests there which could only be harmed by prolonging the unconstitutional situation. Furthermore there was no longer any reason to dread a hostile policy from the Greek royal family since all Greeks had learnt from recent events that they could achieve nothing in opposition to France and Britain. Lastly, recognition, as well as serving French interests, would prevent the republicans making political capital out of France's alleged hostility towards the monarchy.³¹ Poincaré's own inclination to recognise at a suitable opportunity was further reinforced by persistent pressure from the court at Bucharest in the same sense.³²

Accordingly, on 14 August, using a text drafted by Marcilly himself, Poincaré explained his intentions to St.Aulaire. He stressed how the Allies now had nothing to fear from the Greek monarchy (especially with Constantine dead), how Greece was predominantly monarchist and how the revolutionaries seemed to be striving for

²⁹ FO 371/8824 Phipps (Paris) to FO no.771 d.20 Aug.1923; MAE Grèce 83 note by Peretti de la Rocca d.13 Aug.1923, QO to St.Aulaire tel.2326 d.17 Oct.1923.

³⁰ MAE Grèce 58 QO to Marcilly no.[?] d.7 Feb.1923.

³¹ MAE Grèce 58 Marcilly to QO no.48 d.22 Mar.1923, no.55 d.8 Apr.1923, no.77 d.10 May 1923.

³² MAE Grèce 83 notes by Peretti de la Rocca d.13 Aug.1923 and 20 Aug.1923. It is also possible that French disappointment at the outcome of the Lausanne conference was a factor in this decision (Cassimatis, *American Influence*, p.91).

stability and a return to constitutional government. He was especially anxious that Britain should not be offended by the decision, and told St.Aulaire to emphasise to the Foreign Office how France had always acted loyally towards Britain in the Near East and how this present action was intended to make an eventual resumption of Anglo-Greek relations easier rather than more difficult. The British could obviously not recognise George until the revolutionaries had fallen from power, but the French, who had not broken off relations with Greece, were in a different position, and by recognising now could exert a pacifying influence and thus pave the way for eventual British recognition. In a postscript, Poincaré told St.Aulaire a further reason for recognition which was not for British consumption: the restoration of normal relations with Greece would allow the French to use their influence to prevent the return to power of those most obviously compromised by their attitude towards the Allies in the war. Given the recent rise of Metaxas and the growing likelihood that the elections would produce a royalist majority, this consideration may well have been uppermost in Poincaré's mind.³³

In the event, Poincaré's communication caused neither surprise nor offence in London.³⁴ Bentinck had reported as long ago as April that the French were resolved in principle to recognise once the Lausanne treaty was signed, and their motives had seemed eminently reasonable to him: despite his habitual mistrust of French policy, he had calmly declared that he had always found the French legation itself 'perfectly loyal' and opposed to a republic in Greece.³⁵ There, he said now, Poincaré's decision was welcomed, and it seemed likely to strengthen not only George's position but also that of the government against hot-heads like Pangalos, which was in British and French interests alike.³⁶

³³ MAE Grèce 83 Marcilly to [?] p.l. d.6 Aug.1923, QO to St,Aulaire no.1839 d.14 Aug.1923. The reference to compromised politicians must be to the Metaxists, elsewhere referred to as 'notorious Germanophiles' (MAE Grèce 83 note by Peretti de la Rocca d.10 Jul.1924).

³⁴ MAE Grèce 83 Montille (London) to QO tel.643 d.21 Aug.1923.

³⁵ *DBFP*/1/XVIII/672-3.

³⁶ FO 371/8824 Bentinck to FO tel.293 d.23 Aug.1923, no.660 d.24 Aug.1923.

In London, Poincaré's motives were correctly perceived, as was the fact that Britain's position was different: as Curzon said, Britain's attitude was based 'on grounds that do not affect France'.³⁷ There was certainly no call for Britain to follow suit, for the Foreign Office was still averse to any competition for influence with France in Greece.³⁸ This had been reiterated earlier in the year when Nicolson had gently warned Bentinck that his frantic warnings about the growth of French influence in Greece were out of place. Bentinck, who was perhaps over-influenced by the Greeks' own estimate of their significance in international affairs, was grateful to have been put straight: 'it is no good, as you say, talking about French influence becoming paramount, if nobody minds if it does'.³⁹

The calming effect of the French decision to recognise was in fact rather shortlived. On 20 September Bentinck warned London that there was no guarantee that the elections, if eventually held, would lead to greater stability. Indeed, they now looked like a straight fight between the Metaxists and the revolutionaries led by Gonatas, the success of either of whom could only lead to a perpetuation of the schism and renewed internal strife.⁴⁰ These ominous warnings were justified within a few weeks. In early October Plastiras fell ill - reportedly with consumption - and this, in conjunction with a cabinet crisis, plunged the government into turmoil leading to renewed rumours of a possible *coup*.⁴¹ The movement when it came was from the Anti-Venizelist right. Metaxas, alarmed by the dubious electoral regulations introduced by the government, took advantage of Plastiras' illness to attempt a *coup* on 21 October, starting with military risings in the Peloponnese and Macedonia.⁴² Not all the rebels were Metaxist partisans; many were simply opposed to the economic incompetence of the government and the overweening influence of extreme

³⁷ FO 371/8824 Phipps to FO no.771 d.20 Aug.1923, min. by Tyrrell d.21 Aug.1923, Bentinck to FO no.660 d.24 Aug.1923, FO to Bentinck tel.133 d.28 Aug.1923.

³⁸ FO 371/8824 mins. by Nicolson and Lampson d.21 Aug.1923, Curzon d.22 Aug.1923.

³⁹ FO 371/8826 Bentinck to Nicolson p.1. d.24 Jan.1923.

⁴⁰ FO 371/8827 Bentinck to FO no.751 d.20 Sept.1923, mins. by Nicolson d.26 Sept.1923 and Troutbeck d.3 Oct.1923.

⁴¹ FO 371/8828 Bentinck to FO no.789 d.6 Oct.1923, tel.454 d.15 Oct.1923, no.831 d.20 Oct.1923.

⁴² FO 371/8828 Bentinck to FO no.831 d.20 Oct.1923, no.848 d.26 Oct.1923.

republicans, especially Pangalos, at Athens, but Metaxas was the leading light of the revolt.⁴³ The declared aim of the rebels was to implement Metaxas' programme, namely the elimination of the revolutionary government and the holding of elections according to the pre-1922 electoral system.⁴⁴ However, the movement was easily suppressed by the forces of the government, led by Generals Georgios Kondylis and Pangalos, the army was purged of royalist officers and Metaxas fled to Italy.⁴⁵

The consequences of the *coup* were far reaching. The Metaxists, previously the only real opposition to the government, were crushed as a military and discredited as a political force, while radical republicans like Pangalos and Kondylis, whose influence had been on the wane, made a startling recovery.⁴⁶ Furthermore, by removing the common threat, the failed *coup* exacerbated the centrifugal tendencies within the Venizelist bloc and precipitated renewed conflicts over the nature of the regime.⁴⁷ Immediately after the suppression of the *coup*, republicans both civilian and military began a sustained campaign of agitation in favour of the immediate abolition of the monarchy, aided by persistent rumours that George II had sympathised and collaborated with the rebels, and by the almost open support given to the Metaxists by the hated Italian legation at Athens.⁴⁸ The king's position had seemed to improve during the summer, but now the *coup* provided the pretext the republicans had been looking for to put an end to his reign.⁴⁹

Almost the only restraint upon the extremists was Plastiras. Now a relative moderate and still loyal to the monarch he insisted that the elections - for a constituent assembly

⁴³ FO 371/8828 Bentinck to FO no.848 d.26 Oct.1923; MAE Grèce 58 Marcilly to QO no.196 d.30 Oct.1923, De Colombel report no.463 d.7 Nov.1923; FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 pp.16-18. See also Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic*, p.30: 'despite the heterogeneity of [their] participants and their motives, [the risings] essentially represented an Antivenizelist counteroffensive'.

⁴⁴ FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 p.16.

⁴⁵ FO 371/8828 Bentinck to FO no.848 d.26 Oct.1923, tel.484 d.27 Oct.1923; FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 pp.17-18.

⁴⁶ FO 371/8828 Bentinck to FO no.848 d.26 Oct.1923, min. by Troutbeck d.31 Oct.1923; MAE Grèce 58 Marcilly to QO no.194 d.5 Nov.1923.

⁴⁷ Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic*, p.30.

⁴⁸ FO 371/8828 Bentinck to FO tel.473 d.25 Oct.1923, no.848 d.26 Oct.1923, tel.483 d.27 Oct.1923, tel.492 d.30 Oct.1923.

⁴⁹ MAE Grèce 58 Marcilly to QO no.22 d.3 Feb.1923.

and now set for 2 December - would take place as planned and that any transition to a republic must be along democratic lines.⁵⁰ His position was strengthened by a communication from Venizelos (who in August had had published an incautious telegram stating that Greece was not 'unripe for a republic') warning that a republic founded on force would bring neither stability internally nor the foreign recognition and assistance that was vital for Greece.⁵¹ Plastiras, who enjoyed considerable personal popularity, rallied the moderate politicians and soldiers and staved off the danger of a *coup*. The republicans, however, were increasingly confident of victory without violence, and, putting all their energies into a propaganda campaign, struck a chord with public opinion. The mass of the people perhaps above all simply desired an end to internal strife; but in the aftermath of the counter-revolution public opinion had - albeit temporarily - become virulently anti-monarchical. At any rate at the end of November the debate centred more on how rather than whether a republic should be established.⁵²

The reactions of Bentinck and London to this crisis were very much of a piece with what had gone before. Bentinck reported the now real threat to the monarchy in a 'shower' of 'rather hysterical' telegrams, arguing that the preservation of the monarchy was the key to stability in Greece.⁵³ On 30 October he urged Curzon to state authoritatively that after the Greek elections Britain would recognise George II and give the Greeks economic assistance.⁵⁴ The Foreign Office, however, was not interested in Bentinck's recipe for averting a republican *coup*, feeling that it was 'no business of ours if Greece overthrows the dynasty or not'.⁵⁵ Any move towards recognition now would clearly be interference in Greek internal affairs, and

⁵⁰ FO 371/8828 Bentinck to FO no.831 d.20 Oct.1923, tel.472 d.25 Oct.1923, tel.497 d.31 Oct.1923.

⁵¹ FO 371/8828 Bentinck to FO tel.506 d.1 Nov.1923; FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 p.14.

⁵² MAE Grèce 58 Marcilly to QO tels.245-7 d.31 Oct.1923, no.194 d.5 Nov.1923; Cassimatis, *American Influence*, pp.96-8.

⁵³ FO 371/8828 mins. by Lampson and Nicolson d.2 Nov.1923.

⁵⁴ FO 371/8828 Bentinck to FO tel.492 d.30 Oct.1923, tel.494 d.30 Oct.1923.

⁵⁵ FO 371/8828 min. by Troutbeck d.30 Oct.1923.

consequently Bentinck was authorised to give only the mildest of warnings about Britain's attitude towards a further Greek revolution.⁵⁶

The Foreign Office maintained this standpoint even in the face of intervention from George V who suggested that recognising George II before the elections would surely strengthen his position.⁵⁷ Curzon felt that such 'hasty recognition' would only play into the hands of the extremists, and he was supported by Crowe who said that

it would ... be contrary to one of the most fundamental principles of traditional British policy for H.M.G. to intervene in the internal affairs of another government on the ground that the monarchical principle must be vindicated. However strongly H.M.G. hold the view that the maintenance of the monarchy in Greece is desirable, they cannot go so far as to prescribe the acceptance of this view to the Greek nation. The latter must settle that question for itself.⁵⁸

Consequently the king was placated with a letter from Curzon which dwelt on the wickedness of the revolutionary government, recognition of whom would be implied in any recognition of their sovereign.⁵⁹

The reluctance of the Foreign Office to intervene in Greece was not surprising. After all, Britain had secured her strategic interests in the Near East at Lausanne, and meddling in Greek affairs was unlikely to bring much profit. When Bentinck repeated his calls for a 'definite and unequivocal statement' that Britain would renew her former friendly relations with Greece provided there was no revolution there, Nicolson pointed out how Bentinck had forgotten that 'public opinion in this country is now passionately anti-Greek and that any such pronouncement would give Lords Rothermere and Beaverbrook the chance of their lives'.⁶⁰ The only small concession made to Bentinck was that he was allowed to act to remove false impressions about Britain's attitude, for example to make it known that Britain was not, as the

⁵⁶ FO 371/8828 FO to Bentinck tel.194 d.30 Oct.1923., min. by Lampson d.30 Oct.1923.

⁵⁷ FO 371/8828 Stamfordham to Crowe p.1. d.29 Oct.1923.

⁵⁸ FO 371/8828 mins. by Curzon d.29 Oct.1923, Crowe d.30 Oct.1923. Greeks on the left of the political spectrum would find this ironic, since they believe that Britain did indeed act contrary to this 'fundamental principle' in the Second World War. See Sarafis, *Background To Contemporary Greece* I 130.

⁵⁹ FO 371/8828 Curzon to Stamfordham p.1. d.30 Oct.1923.

⁶⁰ FO 371/8828 Bentinck to FO tel.504 d.31 Oct.1923, tel.511 d.1 Nov.1923, min. by Nicolson d.2 Nov.1923.

republicans claimed in their propaganda, personally hostile to George II.⁶¹ This might count for something in view of the continuing anglophilia of many Greeks (who also realised that Britain was the only likely source of economic assistance) but it was very far from what Bentinck wanted.⁶²

At the Quai d'Orsay Poincaré, though as sensitive as Curzon to the possibility of an accusation of interference, did what he could to exert a calming influence.

Recognition was clearly inappropriate in the midst of such a crisis, but Marcilly was authorised to tell the Greeks that France was opposed to the establishment of a republic by force, and could only view with grave concern the prospect of a revolution which would compromise French economic interests and the peace of the Balkans.⁶³ On 2 November, when the position of George II was most precarious, Marcilly allowed Plastiras to publish these views, which, together with a similar statement from Bentinck, did much to ease the situation.⁶⁴

Poincaré also exercised restraint at Belgrade. The Yugoslavs had been dropping menacing hints that if a revolution broke out and produced disorders in Macedonia, they might have to intervene to protect their interests at Salonica. On 3 November Poincaré drew Belgrade's attention to the more reassuring news from Athens and pointed out that external pressure would only excite nationalist sentiment and make a revolution more likely.⁶⁵ Marcilly felt that France had earned the gratitude of her Allies in this crisis, since the least word from Paris in favour of a republic would probably have been decisive in ushering in a new revolution. In fact, even though the

⁶¹ FO 371/8828 FO to Bentinck tel.199 d.3 Nov.1923.

⁶² FO 371/8828 Bentinck to FO tel.509 d.1 Nov.1923 and mins., FO to Bentinck tel.198 d.2 Nov.1923.

⁶³ MAE Grèce 58 Marcilly to QO tels.223-6 d.12 Oct.1923, QO to Marcilly tel.322 d.14 Oct.1923, tel.328 d.[?] Nov.1923.

⁶⁴ FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 pp.5,18-19.

⁶⁵ MAE Grèce 58 Marcilly to QO tels.243-5 d.30 Oct.1923, Japy (Bucharest) to QO tel.100 d.31 Oct.1923, QO to Clement Simon (Belgrade) tels.288-90 d.3 Nov.1923.

French press was less circumspect, and continually gave succour to the extremists,⁶⁶ the British Foreign Office was quite satisfied with French policy at this stage.

It was far less satisfied with Italian policy. Relations between Athens and Rome had been poor since Mussolini's seizure of power, and Greece was the natural target for the Duce as he began to flex his diplomatic muscles.⁶⁷ An Italian move on Corfu had been foreseen in the Foreign Office as early as April 1923, and there were also persistent rumours, which caused disquiet in London, that Mussolini planned formally to annex the Dodecanese, contrary to several international undertakings.⁶⁸ Even after the Corfu crisis proper was over these rumours continued, to Curzon's concern, and exacerbated the hostility between Greece and Italy.⁶⁹

Given this mutual antagonism and conflicts of interest it is not surprising that Italy supported the Metaxas *coup* attempt, or that this support helped precipitate the dynastic crisis in Greece.⁷⁰ The arch-villain of this piece was Montagna, with his 'rabid hatred of the existing Greek regime'.⁷¹ Rumours were rife in Greece that Montagna, either with or without the connivance of Rome, had aided the Metaxists financially, and his incautious outbursts about the need to reduce Greece to nothing did little to stabilise the situation at Athens.⁷²

Montagna's evident desire to topple the Greek revolutionary government caused some consternation in London.⁷³ Lampson felt it was a scandal that 'such a fire-brand'

⁶⁶ MAE Grèce 58 Marcilly to QO tels.245-7 d.31 Oct.1923, no.194 d.5 Nov.1923; FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 p.5.

⁶⁷ J.Barros, *The Corfu Incident of 1923. Mussolini and the League of Nations* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1965), pp.297ff.; Cassels, *Early Diplomacy*, pp.22-44,88-126.

⁶⁸ FO 371/8824 min. by Nicolson d.25 Apr.1923; *DBFP/1/XXIV/770-1,779-81,788,792,798,800,804-6*; *DDI/7/II/106-7*. The Dodecanese question is discussed in chapters 6 and 8 below.

⁶⁹ [India Office Library and Records, Curzon Papers] MSS EUR F112/232 Curzon to Graham p.1. d.9 Oct.1923.

⁷⁰ FO 371/8828 min. by [?] d.29 Oct.1923.

⁷¹ FO 371/8828 min. by Crowe d.24 Oct.1923; Barros, *Corfu*, pp.35-7.

⁷² FO 371/8828 SIS no.CX/2155/1A d.24 Oct.1923, Bentinck to FO tel.473 d.25 Oct.1923, tel.486 d.29 Oct.1923.

⁷³ FO 371/8828 Bentinck to FO tel.473 d.25 Oct.1923; *DDI/7/II/288*. Montagna felt that the revolutionary government should have resigned straight after the murder of 'our brave officer', Tellini.

should be in Greece at this moment, and suggested that Mussolini should be given a hint that 'these pernicious activities ... should be curbed'. Crowe, however, mindful of Mussolini's notorious propensity to take offence, vetoed this: the Duce was probably encouraging Montagna, and Crowe was 'not in favour of our giving advice to M. Mussolini'.⁷⁴ Bentinck was also concerned. From Athens he reported the widespread fear that another Italian *coup*, analogous to the Corfu occupation, was imminent, and suggested the despatch of a 'fairly powerful' British naval squadron to Greek waters to 'serve as a gentle and tactful reminder at Rome'.⁷⁵

This proposal went too far for the Foreign Office. On the one hand, it was doubtful that a fresh Italian move was planned; although Mussolini had been boasting about defying the League, it was unlikely that he would try and do so again so soon afterwards, especially as he had 'now read the Covenant which he had not done a couple of months ago'. On the other hand, the despatch of a squadron might only encourage Mussolini to act, counting on Britain doing nothing, in order thereby to gain 'a first class diplomatic success over Great Britain'. Unless Britain was prepared to use force, the fleet should be kept away, and in any case if a conflict arose Britain would have plenty of time to act, in the first instance at Geneva.⁷⁶ Curzon felt Bentinck's idea to be a 'little wild', and told him that the despatch of a squadron would be simply an unjustified and ineffective political demonstration.⁷⁷ This whole episode, however, reinforced the apparent lesson of the Corfu crisis, that Britain was unwilling or unable to control the intrigues of a revitalised Italy in the eastern Mediterranean.

Within Greece Plastiras and the government had regained control of the situation to the extent that by 3 November a republican *coup* seemed unlikely.⁷⁸ The new tactic of the 'immediate republicans', such as Pangalos and Papanastasiou, the leader of the

⁷⁴ FO 371/8828 mins. by Lampson d.31 Oct.1923, Crowe d.31 Oct.1923.

⁷⁵ FO 371/8828 Bentinck to FO tels.493 d.30 Oct.1923, tel.500 d.31 Oct.1923.

⁷⁶ FO 371/8828 min. by Troutbeck d.31 Oct.1923.

⁷⁷ FO 371/8828 min. by Curzon d.31 Oct.1923, FO to Bentinck tel.202 d.4 Nov.1923.

⁷⁸ FO 371/8829 Bentinck to Lampson p.l. d.4 Nov.1923.

Republican Union, was to demand a plebiscite on the issue of a republic immediately, before the passions aroused by the counter-revolution cooled. Plastiras and the moderates opposed this scheme, and insisted that free elections must be held before any decision on the nature of the regime.⁷⁹ This broad division in fact concealed a great fragmentation in Greek politics, which for lack of any commanding personalities or coherent parties, was producing in effect a chaotic, anarchical situation.

It was in these circumstances that Venizelos, now in Paris, began to exert a greater influence on Greek politics. In early November he confirmed to Nicolson that he had lost all confidence in the institution of monarchy in Greece and now favoured a republic. However, because sympathy for the monarchy was so deep-rooted there would probably only be a small majority for a republic now, and it would be fatal to introduce so grave a constitutional change on such a slender basis. Consequently, he favoured postponing any decision until after the death of King George.⁸⁰

Venizelos' views had already filtered back to Greece and strengthened Plastiras' resolve to maintain the *status quo* until after the elections.⁸¹ The government sent an official emissary to Paris to ascertain Venizelos' definitive opinions, and on 17 November these were published in the Athens press.⁸² Although he reiterated his decision never to return to Greek politics, he laid out a clear programme, stating his opposition to any forcible change of regime or plebiscite before the elections (since, being held under a revolutionary government, it would be 'pure comedy'). He stressed that such developments would ruin Greece's hopes of western assistance and adversely affect her security. His message was not, however, free from ambiguity:

⁷⁹ FO 371/8829 Bentinck to FO no.874 d.5 Nov.1923; FO 371/8830 Bentinck to FO no.914 d.16 Nov.1923. The Republican Union was the main republican political party, founded in 1922 as a left wing off-shoot of the Venizelist Liberal Party (Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic*, pp.29-30,88-90).

⁸⁰ FO 371/8829 min. by Nicolson d.6 Nov.1923. See also Papacosma *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 7 187-8 for more details of Venizelos' views.

⁸¹ FO 371/8829 Bentinck to FO tel.543 d.10 Nov.1923.

⁸² FO 371/8829 Bentinck to FO tel.553 d.16 Nov.1923.

although he attacked the idea of undemocratic change he again confirmed that personally he was now a republican.⁸³

The publication of Venizelos' message, susceptible as it was to various interpretations, had an immediate effect. Although the government was apparently strengthened, the Liberal party was split: yielding to the demands of the officers, and in apparent accord with Venizelos' views about the redundancy of the monarchy, Plastiras insisted that the Liberals should adopt a definite republican programme at the forthcoming elections.⁸⁴ This plunged moderate Venizelists into despair, and produced precisely the disarray in the Liberal camp which Venizelos had hoped to avert. He hastened to explain that he had not intended his followers to make an issue of the republic at the elections, but Plastiras, claiming to conform absolutely to Venizelos' views, had now become an out-and-out republican.⁸⁵

The situation was indeed confused. Plastiras was still promising that the elections would be free, but the institution of a republic was now proclaimed to be government policy and the elections were again postponed until 16 December. Meanwhile, the bulk of the Liberals had decided to follow Venizelos' advice and not make an issue of the regime, although a significant minority remained in the 'immediate republican' camp.⁸⁶ The Anti-Venizelists, for their part, had chosen to use the traditional tactic of Greek political parties suffering from mass unpopularity, and to abstain from the elections claiming that they would be rigged.⁸⁷ The result of the elections, if indeed they were held, seemed likely therefore only to lead to further constitutional strife.

⁸³ FO 371/8829 Bentinck to FO tel.556 d.17 Nov.1923.

⁸⁴ FO 371/8829 Bentinck to FO tel.557 d.17 Nov.1923, tel.559 d.18 Nov.1923; FO 371/8830 Bentinck to FO no.921 d.19 Nov.1923.

⁸⁵ FO 371/8829 Bentinck to FO tel.560 d.19 Nov.1923, tel.562 d.20 Nov.1923, tel.564 d.21 Nov.1923; FO 371/8830 Bentinck to FO no.930 d.24 Nov.1923; FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 pp.20-1.

⁸⁶ FO 371/8829 Bentinck to FO tel.567 d.22 Nov.1923; FO 371/8830 min. by Nicolson d.5 Dec.1923.

⁸⁷ MAE Grèce 58 Marcilly to FO no.199 d.19 Nov.1923; FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 pp.21-2. The Venizelists had used this tactic in December 1915. On this occasion there was some justification for it given the new electoral regulations and Plastiras' professed republican sympathies (FO 371/8829 Bentinck to FO tel.564 d.21 Nov.1923; FO 371/8830 Bentinck to FO no.909 d.16 Nov.1923, no.930 d.24 Nov.1923).

With Greek politics assuming an ever more labyrinthine complexity, the Foreign Office did not deviate from its policy of detachment. Curzon saw no need for positive action, especially now that a *coup* had been averted, and would only issue a vague warning to the Greeks, which he caused to be inserted into a speech by prime minister Baldwin on 9 November, that revolutions or changes of dynasty were not the way for states to find internal stability or, therefore, foreign financial assistance.⁸⁸ When Bentinck reported that the desire of the 'immediate republicans' to expel the king before holding any plebiscite might place George's life in danger, Curzon arranged with the Admiralty for a ship to be held ready to rescue him if necessary, but this, as in 1922, was a purely humanitarian gesture without political connotations.⁸⁹ The Foreign Office's desire to steer clear of potential entanglements in Greek politics was also demonstrated by a refusal to accord Prince Andrew an interview in London, efforts to prevent the fugitive Metaxas entering Britain, and the rebuffing of attempts by Greek legitimists in English royal circles to elicit some official action over the electoral regulations introduced by the revolutionary government.⁹⁰

At the centre of the maelstrom, Bentinck was perplexed as to the motives which led London to pour cold water on all his suggestions for action. On 10 November he privately informed Lampson that he had hitherto assumed that the British government would regret the expulsion of the dynasty, but would accept it if it was clearly the will of the majority of the Greek people. In conclusion he asked to be informed whether after all the government's interest in the maintenance of the dynasty was 'more than

⁸⁸ FO 371/8829 mins. by Nicolson d.6 Nov.1923, Curzon d.7 Nov.1923; Bentinck to FO tel.549 d.14 Nov.1923 and mins.; *Times*, 10 Nov.1923. Baldwin's comments were also made with an eye to recent upheavals in Germany.

⁸⁹ FO 371/8829 Bentinck to FO tel.530 d.5 Nov.1923; FO 371/8830 Admiralty to FO no.MO/1401/23 d.30 Nov.1923 and encls. and mins. Earlier in the year George V had apparently assured Constantine's anxious widow that a British ship could always rescue her sons from Athens if needs be (FO 800/156 Dering to Vansittart p.l. d.21 Mar.1923).

⁹⁰ FO 371/8829 Kerr to Crowe p.l. d.31 Oct.1923, Crowe to Kerr p.l. d.3 Nov.1923, Bentinck to FO tel.526 d.4 Nov.1923 and mins., min by Crowe d.6 Nov.1923, Stamfordham to Crowe p.l. d.21 Nov.1923 and encl. and mins., Stamfordham to Crowe p.l. d.22 Nov.1923, Crowe to Stamfordham p.l. d.24 Nov.1923; FO 371/8830 Stamfordham to Crowe p.l. d.26 Nov.1923. Metaxas had taken refuge in Paris, where he was being kept under police surveillance (MAE Grèce 58 note by Peretti de la Rocca d.24 Nov.1923).

academic'.⁹¹ Nicolson sympathised with Bentinck's plight and identified the cause of his discontent with the Foreign Office: 'Anglo-Hellenic relations loom so very large at Athens, that it is difficult for him to realise that they are of very third-rate importance in London'.⁹²

In an effort to enlighten Bentinck, a lengthy telegram was sent to him on 13 November, setting out Britain's attitude. (This telegram was also intended to enlighten the Greeks: it was encoded in a simple cypher so that they might read it). In this, Curzon stated that the creation of a republic would be a very great misfortune for Greece and would ruin her political and financial credit abroad. However, as British public opinion would not countenance interference in Greek affairs, all Bentinck was authorised to do was to warn the republicans of the likely consequences of their policy, for which they alone would be responsible. 'If Greece chooses to bring isolation upon her own head, we cannot stop it. But let her do it with her eyes open'. Finally, Bentinck was told to stop advocating any positive steps by Britain, since such measures were 'really out of the picture'.⁹³ This policy was quite in accord with Britain's interests, since if a republic was established and proved disastrous ('a septic tangle' as Nicolson had earlier put it) Britain would be free from responsibility for it, but if a republic evolved in a constitutional manner and flourished, there would be nothing to stop Britain recognising it 'should altered circumstances render such a course politically expedient'.⁹⁴

The French, too, were unwilling to commit themselves in this confusing situation. At Athens Marcilly made no further statements of France's attitude, and the Greek chargé in Paris, Melas, was told that Poincaré could make no promises as to his attitude towards any future Greek republic.⁹⁵ The shrewd observations of Marcilly must have

⁹¹ FO 371/8829 Bentinck to Lampson p.tel. d.10 Nov.1923.

⁹² FO 371/8829 min. by Nicolson d.12 Nov.1923. In contrast, Marcilly was always aware of Greece's relative unimportance (MAE Grèce 78 Marcilly to [?Du Sault] p.l. d.18 Mar.1924).

⁹³ FO 371/8829 FO to Bentinck tel.208 d.13 Nov.1923.

⁹⁴ FO 371/8829 mins. by Nicolson d.12 Nov.1923 [quoted] and 22 Nov.1923, and Selby d.22 Nov.1923 [quoted].

⁹⁵ MAE Grèce 58 Marcilly to QO tels.255-6 d.10 Nov.1923, notes by Peretti de la Rocca d.28 Nov.1923 and 29 Nov.1923.

contributed to this reserve in Paris: he reported that the lack of political courage in Greece meant that any show of force was guaranteed at least a temporary success, and that whilst it would be easy to overthrow the dynasty, it would be much harder to create a viable republic. It was this which explained the dithering of the Venizelists: at heart they were all republican, like their mentor, but they were afraid to come out openly as such for fear of either alienating public opinion or playing into the hands of the military extremists.⁹⁶

Unfortunately for the Quai d'Orsay, the policy of detachment born of its grim prophecies was undermined by the attitude of the French press. This was vociferously pro-republican, and continually encouraged the Greek extremists: an example was the scare which erupted early in November when an article appeared in *Le Temps* disavowing Marcilly's published views and claiming that France would never help George II against the republicans.⁹⁷ Such articles only undid the work of the legation in dispelling the illusion that France was intriguing for a republic.⁹⁸

British Foreign Office officials were on the whole little exercised by such press scares; not least because secret service intercepts of communications between Melas and Athens seemed to confirm that the French were not meddling in Greece and were encouraging only constitutional, democratic change.⁹⁹ The one exception at this point was Nicolson: he believed there were many in France who would like to see a republic in Greece, 'knowing that it would mean the end of that unfortunate country and the disappearance of our last foothold on the continent'. Moreover, the collapse of Greece 'would lead eventually to a Serbian descent upon Salonica, a development

⁹⁶ MAE Grèce 58 Marcilly to QO no.194 d.5 Nov.1923, Marcilly to [?] p.l. d.9 Nov.1923, Marcilly to QO no.199 d.19 Nov.1923.

⁹⁷ *Le Temps*, 6 Nov.1923; FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 p.19. Successive Greek governments in the inter-war years tried to influence the French press, including *Le Temps*, mainly by financial subsidies. See D.Kitsikis, 'Les Rapports du "Temps" avec le Gouvernement Grec dans L'Entre-Deux-Guerres', *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine* 15(3) 1968 512-34.

⁹⁸ MAE Grèce 58 Marcilly to QO no.206 d.28 Nov.1923; FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 p.41. One reason advanced by Marcilly for the tone of the French press was that the Agence Havas was supplied by the Agence d'Athenes, and had its views coloured by that source. In addition, many French journalists were inspired by philhellenic and republican convictions (MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.217 d.13 Dec.1923).

⁹⁹ FO 371/8830 SIS report no.015140 d.25 Nov.1923, report no.015116 d.29 Nov.1923.

which the French would encourage and we be unable to oppose'.¹⁰⁰ This was strong stuff, but Nicolson was rather over-fond of these wide-ranging, apocalyptic predictions, and in this instance he was certainly out of line with his colleagues, both as regards his estimate of Greece's importance to Britain and his assessment of the threatening intentions of France.¹⁰¹

The fact was that although, as in 1922, Britain and France were following roughly similar policies, elements on both sides were capable of imputing quite Machiavellian intentions to the other. In this respect Nicolson's counterpart was the French military attaché, Captain de Colombel. His opinions were closer to those of *Le Temps* than to those of Marcilly, and his reports provide an interesting sidelight on French semi-official and military views. On this occasion he wrote to Paris with his explanation of why the British were so anxious about the Greek situation - so anxious, indeed, that despite France's reserved policy, one British diplomat 'very prominent at Athens' roundly blamed the French for the rise in Greek republicanism. The British disapproved of dictators who did not respect tradition, and London watched with displeasure 'this blooming of *condottieri* who, from Madrid, Rome, Sofia and elsewhere, threaten to convert the whole of Europe little by little to democratic ideas'. This was, of course, hardly the basis of the Foreign Office's dislike of the prospect of a Greek republic under the presidency of General Pangalos. De Colombel was perhaps nearer the mark when he argued that Britain's hostility to a republic was rooted in her economic interests: obviously Britain had 'an interest in seeing calm re-established in that Hellas whose political instability threatens at every moment the successful outcome of English financial and commercial endeavours'.¹⁰² British economic interests in Greece were not all that substantial, but the restoration of

¹⁰⁰ FO 371/8829 min. by Nicolson d.7 Nov.1923.

¹⁰¹ FO 371/8829 min. by Lampson d. 11 Nov.1923. Nicolson was, as noted earlier, a confirmed philhellene. Although his opinions were somewhat flexible (or even erratic), between 1920 and 1921 he wrote several memoranda urging the support of Greece against the Turks and the upholding in essence of the treaty of Sèvres as the best means of maintaining Britain's position in the eastern Mediterranean. He clearly took longer to abandon this idea than the rest of the Foreign Office (Lees-Milne, *Nicolson* I 155,157-60; and for examples of the memoranda, *DBFP*/1/XII/514-9,550-3 and *DBFP*/1/XVII/7-9,13-19).

¹⁰² MAE Grèce 58 De Colombel report no.463 d.7 Nov.1923.

stability to facilitate economic prosperity was of course one of the key aims of British foreign policy in general in this period.

The Italians meanwhile seemed to be abstaining from muddying the waters in Greece; although this was probably a reflection of how low their influence had sunk after the failure of the counter-revolution rather than of any change of heart on the part of Mussolini. The British ambassador in Rome, Sir Ronald Graham, informed the Foreign Office in November that there was no proof of any Italian involvement with Metaxas, and that Italians on the whole seemed indifferent to events in Greece.¹⁰³ Graham, however, was always inclined to put the best possible gloss on Italian actions, and was decidedly pro-fascist in his sympathies. In fact, Italy's inactivity was probably due simply to the fact that Montagna had been hospitalised with phlebitis.¹⁰⁴

At the start of December the situation in Greece was still obscure. The elections were now a straight fight between the Venizelists and the republicans, but it was difficult to determine quite what each side stood for, as the conflict was as much about personalities and the struggle for power as ideologies.¹⁰⁵ Certainly, a main aim of the Venizelists was to persuade their chief to return to Greece, and he, while still insisting that he would not re-enter the political arena, began to intimate that he might change his mind if the Greek people overwhelmingly desired his return.¹⁰⁶ It was at this juncture that a new element flitted briefly across the scene, namely the idea of a change of dynasty rather than the introduction of a republic. But this movement, which really aimed at the accession of an English prince (Prince Arthur, the Duke of Connaught and even the Duke of York were the names improbably canvassed), was of course totally out of tune with British policy and never amounted to much.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ FO 371/8829 Graham to FO no.968 d.2 Nov.1923.

¹⁰⁴ FO 371/8831 Bentinck to Lampson p.l. d.8 Dec.1923.

¹⁰⁵ MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.210 d.5 Dec.1923

¹⁰⁶ FO 371/8830 Bentinck to FO no.944 d.30 Nov.1923; FO 371/8831 Bentinck to FO no.981 d.13 Dec.1923.

¹⁰⁷ FO 371/8830 Bentinck to FO no.944 d.30 Nov.1923, min. by Nicolson d.12 Dec.1923; FO 371/8831 Bentinck to Lampson p.l. d.8 Dec.1923; FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 p.5.

As election day (16 December) approached, the position of King George became ever more precarious, especially after government troops opened fire on a well attended Anti-Venizelist rally in Athens, killing several people.¹⁰⁸ In a last desperate throw on the very eve of the elections, the king attempted to telegraph to Venizelos, imploring him to return to Greece and save the dynasty and the country; but it was now too late.¹⁰⁹ The telegram was held up by republican military officers, and the elections were held as planned, passing off 'with absolute order for the first time within memory'.¹¹⁰

The election results reflected the fact that despite government intimidation, republican sympathy was not that widespread in Greece: only 127 out of the 398 members returned were avowed republicans, and the vast majority (250) belonged to that section of the Liberal party which had not made an issue of the regime at the elections.¹¹¹ Even so, the republicans had done better than many observers had anticipated, and at first the meaning of the results was obscure.¹¹² Pressure from the military again proved the decisive factor: Plastiras felt compelled to yield to the clamour of the republican officers for the departure of the king, and on 17 December he asked George to leave Greece while the constitutional question was settled.¹¹³ Plastiras explained to Bentinck that he had been compelled to make this request: the officers were ready to oust George by force, and would certainly have prevented any orderly or peaceful debate on the future of the monarchy, and had he refused and resigned his restraining influence would have been lost.¹¹⁴ On 19 December, the third

¹⁰⁸ FO 371/8830 Bentinck to FO tel.586 d.10 Dec.1923; FO 371/8831 Bentinck to FO no.981 d.13 Dec.1923; MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.217 d.13 Dec.1923.

¹⁰⁹ FO 371/8830 Bentinck to FO tel.597 d.16 Dec.1923.

¹¹⁰ FO 371/8830 Bentinck to FO tel.599 d.17 Dec.1923; FO 371/8831 Colonial Office to FO no.[?61376/22] d.22 Dec.1923.

¹¹¹ Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic*, p.31, cf. Dakin, *Unification*, p.240.

¹¹² FO 371/8830 min. by Nicolson d.18 Dec.1923. Marcilly advanced several reasons for the unexpected success of the republicans: firstly, they had exploited the joint lists with the Venizelists which were formed in many areas and secondly they had won a large proportion of the refugee vote; thirdly, many republicans were returned in Macedonia and Thrace, areas under the military rule of Pangalos and Kondylis (MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.223 d.20 Dec.1923, no.232 d.27 Dec.1923)

¹¹³ FO 371/8830 Bentinck to FO tel.600 d.17 Dec.1923, tel.602 d.17 Dec.1923.

¹¹⁴ FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 p.23.

anniversary of Constantine's return to Athens, the king left Greece for Romania aboard a Greek yacht and under a government guarantee of safe passage, ostensibly on leave.¹¹⁵ The next day, to the chagrin of the republicans who wanted no further debate on the constitutional question, a regent was sworn in.¹¹⁶ The post was entrusted, as in 1920, to Admiral Pavlos Koundouriotis, a veteran Venizelist who was well respected but widely believed to be suffering from senile decay.¹¹⁷ The situation was now finely balanced: the outcome of the elections was still unclear and the threat of a republican *coup* was ever present.¹¹⁸

In this bewildering situation the Greek people once again turned to Venizelos. On 21 December the revolutionary government invited him to return to Greece, at first on condition that he accept the deposition of the Glücksburg dynasty and then, when he refused those terms, unconditionally.¹¹⁹ Further pleas and invitations were sent by numerous military and civilian figures from most parts of the political spectrum, and the widespread feeling in Greece that Venizelos alone could save the nation was reflected by his election *in absentia* in nineteen separate constituencies.¹²⁰ Venizelos announced that although he had intended not to return lest he prove unable to restrain the extremists from imposing a republic by force, Plastiras' appeal, sent in the name of the army, had persuaded him to return and that he would leave for Greece on 29 December.¹²¹

In Paris, Venizelos set out his programme to the representatives of the powers. He planned to return to Greece for just a few months, and would seek to dissolve the

¹¹⁵ FO 371/8830 Bentinck to FO tel.600 d.17 Dec.1923, tel.605 d.18 Dec.1923, tel.612 d.19 Dec.1923.

¹¹⁶ FO 371/8830 Bentinck to FO tel.616 d.20 Dec.1923.

¹¹⁷ FO 371/8830 Bentinck to FO tel.609 d.19 Dec.1923, tels.616-7 d.20 Dec.1923 ('Admiral is generally reported to be gaga.');

Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic*, p.319.

¹¹⁸ MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.232 d.27 Dec.1923. Various groupings were claiming a majority in the Assembly, and the government was very slow to release actual voting figures.

¹¹⁹ FO 371/8830 Bentinck to FO tel.621 d.21 Dec.1923, tel.622 d.22 Dec.1923, tel.623 d.24 Dec.1923; Dakin, *Unification*, pp.240-1; Cassimatis, *American Influence*, pp.99-100.

¹²⁰ FO 371/8830 Bentinck to FO tel.624 d.24 Dec.1923. This figure is disputed but comes from the Athens press. Venizelos had specifically asked not to be nominated as a candidate (FO 371/8830 SIS report no.015156 d.11 Dec.1923).

¹²¹ FO 371/8831 memorandum by Sir G.Talbot d.23 Dec.1923; FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 pp.24-5.

military leagues and form a civilian government from the majority party in the Constituent Assembly. He was determined to accept neither the premiership nor the leadership of the Liberal party, but wanted to persuade his followers to elect a new leader to form a government in which he would take a temporary portfolio. As regards the vital question of the nature of the regime, he hoped to hold a plebiscite a few months after the abolition of military rule, and to involve all parties in the organisation of it so as to ensure universal acceptance of its outcome. The plebiscite was to offer three options: the maintenance of the existing dynasty, the substitution of a new one or the creation of a republic. Venizelos was adamant that unless he could guarantee a fair plebiscite, carried out by a civilian administration, he would wash his hands of the situation and withdraw from Greece.¹²²

This plan was ambitious, aiming as it did at reconciling all the forces in Greek political life to a final settlement of the issue of the regime, and it was by no means assured of success. Venizelos had hesitated about returning to Greece, aware that, given the intractable hatreds existing there, his presence might do more harm than good unless there was an all-party consensus behind his programme.¹²³ Although the many invitations he had received seemed to indicate that this existed, the majority of republicans did not welcome his return, since they wanted power for themselves and were ready to attain it by any means possible.¹²⁴ Venizelos apparently realised that the transition to a republic must be effected constitutionally if the new regime was to win the support of the powers. This was 'an indispensable condition for the security and existence' of the Greek state; for financial assistance from Britain and diplomatic support from France (especially as regards influencing the attitude of Yugoslavia and Romania towards the new regime) would be desperately needed.¹²⁵ The crux of Venizelos' task would be to remove the military from the political arena and to fend

¹²² FO 371/8831 memorandum by Sir G. Talbot d.23 Dec.1923; MAE Grèce 59 note by Peretti de la Rocca d.24 Dec.1923. Venizelos told the English and the French much the same thing, except that he emphasised to the French his conviction that the plebiscite would produce a republic.

¹²³ MAE Grèce 58 Marcilly to QO no.200 d.20 Nov.1923, no.206 d.28 Nov.1923; MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.224 d.20 Dec.1923.

¹²⁴ MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.224 d.20 Dec.1923.

¹²⁵ MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.219 d.14 Dec.1923.

off the demands of the 'immediate republicans' for long enough to ensure a transition to a republic which was sufficiently legal and democratic to be acceptable to the powers.¹²⁶ In principle he was a republican, but not so blinded by fanaticism as the likes of Pangalos; and he could not ignore the external dangers a republic based on shaky foundations would face.

The views of the Foreign Office as the elections approached would not have given Venizelos any comfort. On 12 December Curzon had gloomily predicted: 'I suppose the sequence will be: plebiscite. Vote for a republic. Expulsion of the king. Chaos'.¹²⁷ When the crisis broke on 16-17 December the Foreign Office as usual authorised the despatch of a warship to ensure George II's safety if necessary, but was not prepared to give him any political help whatsoever.¹²⁸ On 16 December the young king, by now in something of a panic, had begged the British government to use its influence to induce Venizelos to return to save the situation, but this request had been rebuffed. It was impossible, Nicolson had argued, for London to intercede with Venizelos: 'He saved the Greek dynasty in 1908 [*sic*] and may possibly do so again. But whatever happens the responsibility for his actions must be his alone: if we beg him to go back we shall be obliged to back him if he does so'.¹²⁹ Personal considerations also played a part in this policy; Crowe wrote acidly on 18 December: 'the King is showing such pusillanimity that it is difficult to retain much sympathy with him'.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.224 d.20 Dec.1923, no.232 d.27 Dec.1923. This account of Venizelos' thinking is based on Marcilly's analysis, which subsequently proved to be correct.

¹²⁷ FO 371/8830 min. by Curzon d.12 Dec.1923.

¹²⁸ FO 371/8830 Bentinck to FO tel.593 d.15 Dec.1923, tel.595 d.16 Dec.1923, memorandum by Shone d.16 Dec.1923, mins. by Lampson d.16 Dec.1923, Bentinck to FO tel.601 d.17 Dec.1923, FO to Bentinck unno.tel. d.17 Dec.1923. George II's marshal of court asked Bentinck to have a ship made ready, and George V prompted the Foreign Office in the same sense. In the event it was not needed and nor was the Foreign Office called upon to put into practice the decision taken in principle to let George reside in England.

¹²⁹ FO 371/8830 Bentinck to FO unno.tel. d.16 Dec.1923, min. by Nicolson d.17 Dec.1923.

Nicolson's was referring to the events of 1909-1910 which had marked the beginning of Venizelos' involvement in mainland Greek politics. A military revolt with distinctly anti-monarchical overtones had broken out in Athens demanding reform, and Venizelos had placed himself at the head of this movement and tamed it before becoming prime minister. See Dakin, *Unification*, pp.180-6.

¹³⁰ FO 371/8830 min. by Crowe d.18 Dec.1923.

French and Italian policies around the time of the elections were similarly cautious. Poincaré was determined to make no comment about the Greek situation until the constitutional question was settled.¹³¹ When Venizelos came to the Quai d'Orsay on 24 December, angling for support for his plans, Emmanuel Peretti de la Rocca, the director of political and commercial affairs, told him that France would probably be sympathetic to a republic in Greece. Poincaré, who did not trust Venizelos to keep such information to himself, angrily over-ruled Peretti de la Rocca and told Venizelos that France had no opinions on questions affecting Greek internal sovereignty.¹³² The Italians stuck to the same line. Although their ambassador in Paris, Romano Avezana, momentarily perturbed at the prospect of an English prince being put on the Greek throne, had earlier in December talked of Italy and France having to support George II in order to forestall this, their avowed policy was to watch events closely but take no action.¹³³

The return of Venizelos to Greece made no difference to the attitudes of Poincaré and Mussolini, but it did herald a significant change in Curzon's policy. At first, after the elections, the official British line was that they did not reflect the will of the people, and Bentinck was instructed to continue to abstain from official contact with whatever government came to power.¹³⁴ However, once it became clear that Venizelos might take charge in Greece, the British attitude changed. True, Venizelos was no longer held in such high esteem in London as he had been during the war, and his faults were recognised - Curzon for one felt that in his efforts to dictate the policy of the Liberal party by telegram from Paris he had not exercised either a 'wise or a pacifying influence'.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, London realised how influential he was, and perceived that he was the one man who might be able to produce a government with

¹³¹ MAE Grèce 59 note by Peretti de la Rocca d.8 Dec.1923, Barrère (Rome) to QO tel.1083 d.19 Dec.1923, QO to Barrère tel.2266 d.20 Dec.1923, Marcilly to QO no.224 d.20 Dec.1923

¹³² MAE Grèce 59 note by Peretti de la Rocca d.24 Dec.1923, min. by Poincaré d.24 Dec.1923, min. by [?Peretti de la Rocca] d.24 Dec.1923, QO to Marcilly no.384 d.31 Dec.1923.

¹³³ MAE Grèce 59 note by Peretti de la Rocca d.11 Dec.1923, Barrère to QO tel.25 d.7 Jan.1924.

¹³⁴ FO 371/8830 Bentinck to FO tel.612 d.19 Dec.1923, FO to Bentinck tel.238 d.24 Dec.1923; FO 371/8831 Colonial Office to FO no.[?61376/22] d.22 Dec.1923.

¹³⁵ FO 371/8830 min. by Curzon d.5 Dec.1923 ('What a wretched country!').

which Britain could do business and prevent a Greek republic from collapsing into anarchy.¹³⁶

Once it was announced that Venizelos was to return to Greece, the Foreign Office, while remaining wary of making any commitment, was keen to learn of his plans,¹³⁷ and these in fact received a very enthusiastic reception. Nicolson termed them 'admirable', but argued that as they might be very difficult to put into practice Britain should strengthen Venizelos' hand by resuming official relations with Greece. Crowe heartily endorsed this suggestion: 'I agree that we ought to seize a really favourable moment for recognition of a properly constituted Greek government'. Consequently, Curzon told Bentinck on 29 December that he sympathised with Venizelos' intentions and was ready to recognise any government representing a majority in the assembly and containing none of those responsible for the 1922 executions. Bentinck was thus authorised to confer with Venizelos on the delicate question of when would be the right moment to resume relations.¹³⁸

This was a significant development, but its importance should not be over-emphasised; after all Britain was simply putting relations with Greece back on a normal footing and not making any great positive commitment. Venizelos' policy was to form a government which met the conditions for recognition which Curzon had formulated in 1922, and it also seemed that he might recreate stable, normal conditions in Greece which would suit Britain's economic interests in Greece and general European policy. Recognition was therefore natural. However, although a measure of political support for Venizelos might be forthcoming, the financial assistance which Venizelos had earlier hinted might be a pre-requisite for his returning to Greece was not.¹³⁹ London felt that financial aid to Greece was out of the

¹³⁶ FO 371/8829 mins. by Nicolson d.7 Nov.1923 and 22 Nov.1923.

¹³⁷ FO 371/8830 min. by Nicolson d.22 Dec.1923. Sir Gerald Talbot went to Paris to confer with Venizelos and Nicolson asked Talbot to inform him privately of exactly what was said, and warned him not to give Venizelos any hint as to Britain's attitude.

¹³⁸ FO 371/8831 mins. by Nicolson and Crowe d.27 Dec.1923, FO to Bentinck tel.239 d.29 Dec.1923

¹³⁹ FO 371/8830 Bentinck to FO tel.621 d.21 Dec.1923, tel.623 d.24 Dec.1923. To the annoyance of London various other powers insisted that it was up to Britain to give Venizelos the wherewithal (in

question, given her instability, and Bentinck was instructed, in the event of Venizelos raising the issue, to adopt an 'absolutely non-committal attitude' and to speak only of the primary importance of the refugee stabilisation loan being organised by the League of Nations.¹⁴⁰ In sum, although Britain was prepared to do something to bolster Venizelos' position, there was no overwhelming commitment either to him or to Greece, and this, given the expectations of the Greeks, was bound to affect Venizelos' chances of success.

The British attitude towards financial assistance to Greece was of a piece with British policy towards the economic reconstruction of Europe as a whole. Whereas the Greeks felt that reconstruction could only come about with massive financial assistance from the powers, the British believed that it was first up to the Greeks to put their financial affairs in order. The attitude of the Greeks was natural given their traditional dependence on the powers in political and economic affairs, but London felt that reconstruction ought not to be financed by governments; rather 'private finance had not only the resources but greater expertise' for this task.¹⁴¹ Consequently, it was up to the Greeks to balance their budget and restore their international credit and thereby attract private capital for reconstruction. Throughout 1923 this had caused friction between Britain and Greece, for given the lamentable state of Greek finances and Athens' notorious profligacy with borrowed money, there was very little chance of a market loan being raised for Greece; and yet the Greeks, who could not really understand the motives behind British policy, still believed that salvation lay not in putting their own house in order but in winning the political and with it the economic support of Britain.¹⁴²

the shape of financial assistance) to complete his task (FO 371/8831 Bentinck to FO tel.627 d.26 Dec.1923).

¹⁴⁰ FO 371/8830 min. by Selby d.26 Dec.1923; FO 371/8831 FO to Bentinck tel.239 d.29 Dec.1923.

¹⁴¹ A.Orde, *British Policy and European Reconstruction after the First World War* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.325 and *passim*.

¹⁴² Orde, *Reconstruction*, pp.284-5; FO 371/8834 file 732 *passim*.

The British, for their part, were by no means prepared to loan the Greeks money: as one Foreign Office official observed 'the Chancellor would rather commit suicide'.¹⁴³ In fact, the British were most insistent on the need to increase international control over Greek finances in order to enforce strict budgetary discipline on Athens. In their view it was the lack of such discipline which was the chief cause of Greece's economic plight, and a restoration of discipline would help both to stabilise the Balkans and facilitate the eventual repayment of Greece's war debt to Britain.¹⁴⁴ Apart from the control the IFC at Athens had over many Greek revenues, Britain, France and the United States also had a veto by virtue of an agreement with the Greeks in 1918 on the assignment of any security by the Greeks to an external loan.¹⁴⁵ A further set of controls on the Greek economy had been introduced in September 1923 when a protocol was signed at Geneva under the auspices of the League establishing the autonomous Refugee Settlement Commission (RSC) which was to control the practical work of settlement in Greece. This protocol also provided for the eventual raising by the Greek government of a refugee loan, the proceeds of which were to be placed at the disposal of the RSC; and it bound the Greeks not only to refrain from creating any charge on their revenues by way of security for any loans not intended for productive purposes, but to undertake to balance their budget as soon as possible.¹⁴⁶ Similar conditions had been imposed when the Bank of England advanced the Greeks £1,000,000 in November strictly for the purposes of refugee settlement - in fact to allow the RSC to begin its work.¹⁴⁷ British involvement in this

¹⁴³ FO 371/8834 min. by Lindsay d.10 Feb.1923.

¹⁴⁴ There were also many outstanding claims against the Greek government from British firms and private individuals who had had goods requisitioned during the war. See FO 371/8833 file 635 *passim*.

¹⁴⁵ The text of the 1918 agreement is printed in Cassimatis, *American Influence*, pp.213-5; see also pp.33-43. The continued validity of this veto was disputed by the Greeks, who claimed that due to a subsequent agreement with Britain in 1921 London's veto at least had been cancelled (FO 371/8834 Melas to Vansittart p.l. d.30 Jan.1923; Orde, *Reconstruction*, p.285).

¹⁴⁶ For the text of this protocol see [League of Nations,] *L[eague of] N[ations] O[fficial] J[ournal]* (Geneva, League of Nations, 1920-1940) 1923 1506-8. There is a great deal of literature on the evolution of the RSC. See, for example, Cassimatis, *American Influence*, pp.135-49; Pentzopoulos, *Balkan Exchange*, pp.75-92; Ladas, *Exchange*, pp.618-28; C.A.Macartney et al., *Survey of International Affairs 1925* Volume II (London, Oxford University Press/Humphrey Milford, 1928) 272-5. For the rôle of the United States, see *FRUS/1923/II/318-80*.

¹⁴⁷ FO 371/8840 FO memorandum by Central Department d.6 Dec.1923.

loan ran counter to general economic policy, but it was seen as a special case: both a pressing humanitarian necessity and a problem 'so large as to affect the financial stability of the country' which it was clearly beyond Greece's resources to solve.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, Britain's strong influence over the Financial Committee of the League which oversaw the scheme had ensured that these strict controls on expenditure were indeed introduced.¹⁴⁹

Some aspects of these financial questions throw a particularly interesting light on relations between the Allies themselves. In November, as the Bank of England advance was being negotiated, news had reached London of an ambitious Greek naval programme, for which contracts were to be placed either in Britain or France, whichever would provide the most generous credit terms.¹⁵⁰ The Treasury and Foreign Office had seen immediate objections to this scheme: it was unnecessary from a naval point of view, since Greece had parity with the Turks and could never hope to attain it with the Italians; financially extravagant and inexcusable when Greece still owed large sums to the British government and British firms; and likely to wreck the whole refugee settlement scheme since it contravened the terms of the Geneva protocol. On the other hand, if the Greeks were determined to press on with the programme and Britain held aloof the contracts would go to France. In the Admiralty view this was undesirable, and at least one cabinet minister felt that given the state of British unemployment and the imminent election, news that the contracts had gone to France would be politically damaging.¹⁵¹ Curzon had taken a very critical view of the attitude of the French, who had apparently encouraged the Greeks to develop the scheme and were prepared to offer generous credit terms for the

¹⁴⁸ Orde, *Reconstruction*, pp.284-7.

¹⁴⁹ Orde, *Reconstruction*, p.310: 'by 1927 it was widely believed in Europe that Britain controlled the Financial Committee and used it to further its own financial imperialism in Europe'.

¹⁵⁰ FO 371/8832 Bentinck to FO no.891 d.12 Nov.1923; *DBFP/1/XXIV/879*; Orde, *Reconstruction*, pp.286-7.

¹⁵¹ FO 371/8832 min. by Nicolson d.12 Nov.1923, Treasury to FO no.F6172/3 d.13 Nov.1923, Joynson-Hicks to Curzon p.l. d.20 Nov.1923, min. by Nicolson d.21 Nov.1923; *DBFP/1/XXIV/879,890-2*. The Admiralty believed Britain must obtain the orders to maintain her predominance in Greek naval affairs (FO 371/8832 Admiralty to FO no.[?] d.19 Nov., no.[?] d.5 Dec.1923).

contracts.¹⁵² He was 'opposed to the methods by which the French are now arming Central Europe', both because this 'frantic armament' of small countries was a threat to peace and because it ill behoved the French to lavish money on their 'protectorates' when their own debts to Britain were unsettled.¹⁵³ The French, however, despite the obvious political connotations of such arms contracts, had professed to see the whole affair as a purely business transaction.¹⁵⁴

In the event the scheme had come to nothing. Both the 1918 agreement and the refugee settlement protocol in fact prevented the Greeks contracting any external indebtedness for this purpose, and it turned out that the whole programme had been little more than, in Nicolson's words, a 'try-on'.¹⁵⁵ It had been evolved by the Greek soldiers and sailors behind the back of the finance minister and was really designed to tempt Britain and France into recognising the Greek revolutionary regime. The Foreign Office had all along suspected that this might be the case, and congratulated itself on having avoided falling into the trap.¹⁵⁶ As Nicolson wrote, Hadjikyriakos, the extreme republican minister of marine, 'by the bird lime of naval contracts, wants to catch us and attach us to his Republic. We won't be caught'.¹⁵⁷ The programme had been drastically reduced, and some small orders, to be paid for out of the normal budget, were placed with British firms.¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the strenuous efforts made by the Foreign Office to prevent the French funding the Greek programme are illustrative both of the government's sensitivity to the general climate of hardship, and of the sometimes difficult nature of political and economic relations within the *Entente*.

¹⁵² DBFP/1/XXIV/880,886,898-90.

¹⁵³ FO 371/8832 min. by Curzon d.21 Nov.1923; DBFP/1/XXIV/890-2.

¹⁵⁴ MAE Grèce 50 *passim*; DBFP/1/XXIV/928-9.

¹⁵⁵ FO 371/8832 mins. by Nicolson d.21 Nov.1923 and 27 Nov.1923; DBFP/1/XXIV/892,898-900,928-9. The matter was discussed by the Cabinet on 13 November, when it was decided to press the Greeks to abandon the programme and, failing that, to try and ensure that the orders all went to British firms (Cab[inet Papers series] 23/46/54(23)).

¹⁵⁶ FO 371/8832 mins. by Nicolson d.12 Nov.1923 and 12 Dec.1923; DBFP/1/XXIV/900.

¹⁵⁷ FO 371/11345 Extract from Nicolson to [?] p.l. d.[?] 1923 enclosed in Dept. of Overseas Trade to FO no.14901FE d.25 May 1926.

¹⁵⁸ FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 pp.61,68; FO 371/10771 Annual Report, Greece, 1924 [enclosed in Cheetham to FO no.153 d.15 May 1925] p.43; DBFP/1/XXIV/892.

Chapter Three
The Transition to a Republic
January - April 1924

The Greek constituent assembly met on 2 January 1924, and Plastiras officially dissolved the revolutionary government before making a valedictory speech justifying and praising its policy and achievements. Venizelos returned to Greece two days later, was elected president of the chamber on 5 January, and laid out his plans for constitutional reform and a plebiscite to be held in three months time.¹ The attempts of his lieutenants Roussos and Danglis² to form cabinets, however, foundered owing to the unwillingness of either wing of the Liberal party to accept the leadership of the other; and Venizelos was reluctantly compelled to form a cabinet under his own leadership which took office on 12 January.³ He soon reiterated his position: though personally a confirmed republican, he wanted the constitutional question settled by an impartial plebiscite so that reconciliation between the parties could be achieved and the nature of the regime would no longer be a cause of conflict.⁴ In order to promote reconciliation Venizelos consulted both royalist and republican leaders to secure their co-operation in the organisation of the plebiscite. However, he met strong opposition: the fact that he had declared himself a republican made him too extreme (and too biased) for the royalists, while his determination to hold a plebiscite made him too timid for the republicans. Certainly, he was, as in 1920, out of touch with Greek party politics;⁵ and he was constantly heckled and attacked by the republicans in the chamber. In the event the pressure of these stormy scenes proved too much for Venizelos, who had for some time been suffering from heart trouble.⁶ On 4 February he resigned.

Venizelos was succeeded, amid growing rumours of an imminent military *coup*, by one of his protégés, Georgios Kafandaris, leader of the 'Progressive', centre-right

¹ FO 371/9878 Bentinck to FO tel.8 d.7 Jan.1924, no.21 d.10 Jan.1924; Dakin, *Unification*, p.241.

² Roussos was the leader of the liberal republicans, the most extreme faction still within the Liberal party, Danglis belonged to the most moderate.

³ FO 371/9878 Bentinck to FO tel.10 d.11 Jan.1924, no.32 d.14 Jan.1924, tel.25 d.19 Jan.1924, min. by Nicolson d.23 Jan.1924; MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.15 d.16 Jan.1924.

⁴ *DBFP/1/XXVI/60*.

⁵ FO 371/9878 Bentinck to FO no.50 d.24 Jan.1924; MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.29 d.31 Jan.1924, no.40 d.10 Feb.1924; FO 371/10771 Annual Report, Greece, 1924 pp.4-5.

⁶ MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.29 d.31 Jan.1924; FO 371/9878 Bentinck to FO no.25 d.10 Jan.1924; FO 371/9879 Bentinck to FO no.101 d.9 Feb.1924.

faction of the Liberals.⁷ Kafandaris was considered honest and intelligent, and declared his intention to adhere absolutely as regards the plebiscite to the programme of Venizelos, who continued to exercise much influence behind the scenes.⁸ The new premier faced the same problem as his patron: although he personally believed in the necessity of a republic, he knew that it must be legally established in order to be credible to the outside world. For this reason he opposed the insistent demands of the republicans for the proclamation of a republic by decree.⁹ As February wore on Kafandaris' position appeared to be strengthening when he won a vote of confidence and secured the defeat of several republican motions.¹⁰ Venizelos, meanwhile, was adopting an increasingly ambiguous attitude. On the one hand, he attacked the republicans in the press, arguing that a republic instituted on the basis of force would be a 'still-born republic' that would leave Greece prey to internal dissent and the external dangers consequent upon isolation.¹¹ On the other hand, he began privately to press Kafandaris to concede the idea of the proclamation of a republic before a plebiscite in order to retain control of the situation and tame the extremists. Kafandaris refused to do this, but Venizelos' intervention had only confused the situation further and given encouragement to the republicans.¹² Exasperated with Kafandaris the military republicans began to assert themselves, and put pressure on the regent Koundouriotis to dismiss him. The upshot was the precipitate resignation of the premier, who declared the situation to be 'the negation of the parliamentary system', as the minority in the assembly had called in the army to defeat the government.¹³

⁷ FO 371/9878 Bentinck to FO tel.36 d.4 Feb.1924; Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic*, p.32.

⁸ FO 371/9879 Bentinck to FO tel.41 d.6 Feb.1924, tel.50 d.8 Feb.1924, tel.53 d.12 Feb.1924; FO 371/12175 Loraine to FO no.80 d.26 Feb.1927.

⁹ FO 371/9879 Bentinck to FO tel.57 d.16 Feb.1924, no.101 d.9 Feb.1924.

¹⁰ FO 371/9879 Bentinck to FO tel.66 d.27 Feb.1924, tel.67 d.28 Feb.1924.

¹¹ FO 371/9879 Bentinck to FO tel.60 d.21 Feb.1924, no.127 d.21 Feb.1924.

¹² MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.52 d.29 Feb.1924, no.55 d.6 Mar.1924, no.62 d.14 Mar.1924; FO 371/10771 Annual Report, Greece, 1924 p.6; Papacosma *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 7 198-9.

¹³ FO 371/9879 Cheetham to FO tel.71 d.7 Mar.1924, tel.73 d.8 Mar.1924, no.170 d.7 Mar.1924; MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.62 d.14 Mar.1924.

The only politician willing or able to form a government in these circumstances was Alexandros Papanastasiou, the leader of the Republican Union.¹⁴ He was an ideologue and thinker, sometimes out of touch with political reality but always prepared to suffer for his beliefs.¹⁵ As Venizelos pointed out, however, his government rested on no real majority and was ultimately dependent on a military clique determined to impose a republic by force if necessary. On 10 March, while Papanastasiou was still forming his cabinet, Venizelos left the country, vowing never again to return to Greek politics, as he had threatened the previous December to do if the military again interfered in politics.¹⁶ He had been able neither to reconcile the parties nor to unite the Venizelist bloc and had in fact weakened the moderate cause at a crucial moment.¹⁷ As news of his departure reached London, Ramsay MacDonald, since 22 January British foreign secretary, minuted somewhat cryptically: 'thus ends a shadow to whom we tried in vain to give substance'.¹⁸

Perhaps this was an allusion to Britain's recent attempts to bolster up Venizelos' government by resuming normal diplomatic relations with Greece. On 10 January Bentinck was instructed to renew his consultations with Venizelos about a possible resumption, and Venizelos in turn had indicated that he would be very disappointed if London showed any hesitation on this issue.¹⁹ Bentinck himself, certainly no Venizelist partisan, urged that a resumption of relations would buoy up Venizelos, who was now Greece's last hope of salvation, as well as strengthening British influence there.²⁰ When Venizelos formed a cabinet in accord with Curzon's conditions which held out hope for a return to stable government in Greece the last

¹⁴ MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO tel.15 d.8 Mar.1924.

¹⁵ MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.210 d.5 Dec.1923; FO 371/12175 Loraine to FO no.80 d.26 Feb.1927. Papanastasiou was imprisoned by the Constantinists in 1921 for his republican views, and later deported by General Pangalos in 1926.

¹⁶ FO 371/9879 Cheetham to FO no.170 d.7 Mar.1924; *DBFP/1/XXVI/137-8*.

¹⁷ FO 371/10771 Annual Report, Greece, 1924 p.6; Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic*, p.32.

¹⁸ FO 371/9879 min. by MacDonald d.21 Mar.1924. Elections had been held in Britain on 6 December 1923 and the first Labour government was formed on 22 January.

¹⁹ FO 371/9878 FO to Bentinck tel.2 d.10 Jan.1924, Bentinck to FO tel.14 d.13 Jan.1924.

²⁰ FO 371/9878 Bentinck to FO tel.16 d.14 Jan.1924. In 1923 Bentinck had written to Nicolson: 'You call yourself ... a Venizelist. That I can call myself no longer' (FO 371/8826 Bentinck to Nicolson p.1. d.24 Jan.1923).

obstacle was removed. Bentinck was authorised to tell him that Britain had every confidence in his person and his government and was ready to resume normal diplomatic relations at once.²¹ On 15 January this was done, to the delight of Venizelos, the Greek foreign ministry and almost the whole Greek press, although it was ominous that each political faction interpreted Britain's action as approval of its own particular policy.²² Sir Milne Cheetham, formerly chargé in Paris and minister at Berne, was sent to Athens as minister and arrived in late February, while Kaklamanos was reappointed Greek minister in London.²³ Despite the growth of republican feeling in Greece, London insisted that Cheetham should be formally accredited to George II and that Kaklamanos should be given letters of credence drawn up in that monarch's name.²⁴

Marcilly saw this as significant, since it would clearly be interpreted as 'a demonstration in favour of maintaining the monarchy'.²⁵ Indeed, his view of the British resumption of relations was that it was something of a confidence trick perpetrated by Venizelos on the Foreign Office.²⁶ Marcilly knew that Venizelos used very different language in the French and British legations: in the former he emphasised his own republican convictions and belief the plebiscite would produce a republic, in the latter he stressed how the plebiscite would be completely fair.²⁷ Assuming the Foreign Office to be motivated by monarchical considerations, Marcilly suggested that Venizelos had exploited these feelings (and the British

²¹ *DBFP/1/XXVI/48-50*.

²² FO 371/9878 Bentinck to FO tel.20 d.16 Jan.1924; *DBFP/1/XXVI/48-50*.

²³ *DBFP/1/XXVI/47*; *Times*, 7 Jan.1938.

²⁴ FO 371/9878 Bentinck to FO tel.17 d.14 Jan.1924, mins. by Nicolson d.15 Jan.1924, Bland d.15 Jan.1924, Crowe d.15 Jan.1924; Kollas (Greek chargé in London) to FO no.190 d.16 Jan.1924, mins. by Nicolson d.17 Jan.1924, Lampson d.17 Jan.1924, Crowe d.17 Jan.1924, Curzon d.17 Jan.1924, Kaklamanos to Nicolson p.l. d.21 Jan.1924; *DBFP/1/XXVI/47*. Bentinck had pointed out that it would be embarrassing if Cheetham was accredited to the regent and the plebiscite then resulted in the establishment of a republic. Nevertheless the Foreign Office and George V felt that Greece was still a monarchy and George II was still its sovereign. The Greeks, desperate for recognition, were happy to comply with Britain's condition. Ironically, Cheetham presented his letters of credence to the regent on the very day the republican government took office.

²⁵ MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO tels.5-6 d.15 Jan.1924.

²⁶ MAE Grèce 78 Marcilly to QO no.92 d.24 Apr.1924.

²⁷ MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.15 d.16 Jan.1924, no.40 d.10 Feb.1924; MAE Grèce 83 Marcilly to QO no.14 d.16 Jan.1924.

concern that their economic interests were suffering in Greece) to win recognition by promising to do all he could to maintain the monarchy, although he had no intention of doing so.²⁸ Marcilly speculated that Venizelos' recent public declarations of republican faith would therefore have depressed London since they would have dispelled any illusions about the imminence of a republic.²⁹ Venizelos' published programme, which the British supported, in fact concealed a hidden agenda, namely the establishment of a republic by sufficiently legal means to ensure that it would have the support of Britain.³⁰

In this instance the Italian interpretation of British motives was nearer the truth. In London, Della Torretta argued that although the British, and especially Curzon, wanted the Greek monarchy maintained, they were not prepared to intervene to achieve this. Rather the British would support whatever solution to the constitutional question was achieved by Venizelos, to whom they were still very sympathetic. This was the best way to achieve a stable regime in Greece, which was London's real desire; and in any case Greece would continue to be the foundation stone of British policy in the eastern Mediterranean, whatever her internal situation, because of her geographical position.³¹ Despite its over-estimation of the importance of Greece in British policy, this analysis was essentially correct. In any event, after the British resumption of relations, Mussolini, who had previously taken his cue from London in these matters, decided that Italy should follow suit, and Italian representatives in Athens resumed official contact with the Greek government.³² Venizelos and Kafandaris, who were keen to improve relations with Italy, welcomed this

²⁸ MAE Grèce 83 Marcilly to QO no.14 d.16 Jan.1924. Marcilly's analysis is understandable: he was probably impressed by Bentinck's passionate support for the Greek monarchy and perhaps understandably found it strange that Britain should recognise a government resulting from elections which London knew did not reflect the will of the people (MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.22 d.22 Jan.1924). Other French observers really believed that Venizelos had returned to Greece to do Britain's bidding and avert a republic (MAE Grèce 59 Army Intelligence report no.789 d.24 Jan.1924).

²⁹ MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.22 d.22 Jan.1924.

³⁰ MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.40 d.10 Feb.1924.

³¹ *DDI/7/II/371,399-400.*

³² *DDI/7/II/396-403.*

development, but despite mutual expressions of cordiality, political differences between the two countries were still too great to allow for any real *rapprochement*.³³

The fall of Venizelos showed that the *kudos* he gained from securing British recognition could not enable him to prevail over the internal forces working to frustrate his plans. The Foreign Office was dismayed by this turn of events, not so much because the monarchy now seemed doomed, but because a military dictatorship and anarchy now seemed imminent.³⁴ Given this pessimism, it was unlikely that London would deviate from Curzon's policy of non-intervention, especially now that MacDonald, the great internationalist, was at the helm of the Foreign Office. Indeed, in Greece the republicans rejoiced at the advent of a Labour government which seemed to them to guarantee that there would be no pressure from Britain to retain the monarchy.³⁵ That MacDonald did indeed have strong objections to the notion of interfering in the internal affairs of another state was demonstrated by his attitude towards a dispute that arose at this time between Bentinck and Henry Morgenthau, the American president of the RSC.

Morgenthau, an ex-ambassador at Constantinople and inveterate self-publicist, had arrived in Greece in November 1923.³⁶ He had immediately perceived that without political stability subscriptions would not be forthcoming for the big refugee loan which was to be negotiated to provide funds for settlement once the Bank of England advance had been used up.³⁷ However, although Morgenthau had told the Foreign Office in October that he would consider the establishment of a republic in Greece to be a 'fundamental blunder', as soon as he reached Athens he set out, by his own account, to 'give sympathetic co-operation to the liberal elements in their evolution

³³ MAE Grèce 78 Marcilly to QO no.48 d.22 Feb.1924; *DDI/7/II/400-1,442-3*; *DBFP/1/XXVI/60*.

³⁴ FO 371/9879 mins. by Nicolson d.2 Feb.1924, McEwen d.5 Feb.1924, Nicolson d.4 Mar.1924, McEwen d.11 Mar.1924.

³⁵ MAE Grèce 78 Marcilly to QO no.48 d.22 Feb.1924.

³⁶ Cassimatis, *American Influence*, p.104; H.Morgenthau, *An International Drama* (London, Jarrolds, 1930), pp.104-9. An earlier edition of these memoirs had the title 'I Was Sent to Athens', giving a flavour of Morgenthau's egocentricity.

³⁷ Cassimatis, *American Influence*, pp.101-2; Morgenthau, *International Drama*, pp.113-4.

from monarchy to republic'.³⁸ Morgenthau was sincere - he believed that the Greek people wanted a republic - but he was also naive, and his co-operation in fact amounted to gross interference in Greek politics.³⁹ Bentinck soon developed a personal animus against Morgenthau, and was outraged that his control over the distribution of the British advance meant that it led not to a growth of British influence but to 'the glorification of an American Jew'.⁴⁰ Bentinck persistently reported Morgenthau's pro-republican public statements and activities, and argued that his actions could only frustrate the plans of the moderates.⁴¹ The Foreign Office at first disregarded these complaints on the grounds that although Morgenthau was indiscreet, he had been appointed in order to attract American investors to the refugee loan, in which respect he was 'a great asset'.⁴²

Morgenthau's intrigues continued, however, and soon involved Britain directly. At the end of January, he was persuaded by the leading extremists (by whom he was charmed and manipulated) that Greek public opinion overwhelmingly desired the immediate declaration of a republic, and that the only doubt about this course of action concerned the likely response of the powers, since if it were hostile the whole refugee settlement scheme might collapse. At the instigation of the Greeks Morgenthau therefore sounded the British government unofficially through his personal friend, Montagu Norman, the governor of the Bank of England. On 30 January he telegraphed Norman to ask what the British government's attitude would be towards the promulgation of a Greek republic by decree, for which public opinion was clamouring. Somewhat rashly, and without consulting the Foreign Office, Norman - doubtless misled by Morgenthau as to the strength of republican opinion in Greece - replied the next day that assuming such action 'would insure domestic settlement and political stability, we consider you may expect sympathy here'.⁴³ These

³⁸ FO 371/8842 min. by Selby d.31 Oct.1923; Morgenthau, *International Drama*, p.113.

³⁹ Cassimatis, *American Influence*, pp.101-2; Morgenthau, *International Drama*, pp.113-27.

⁴⁰ FO 371/9887 Bentinck to Lampson p.l. d.19 Jan.1924.

⁴¹ FO 371/9878 Bentinck to FO tel.24 d.18 Jan.1924, no.40 d.19 Jan.1924.

⁴² FO 371/9878 mins. by Nicolson d.19 Jan.1924 and 4 Feb.1924.

⁴³ Cassimatis, *American Influence*, pp.102-3; Morgenthau, *International Drama*, pp.128-33.

telegrams were published in the Athens press on 6 February and caused a storm. As they seemed to show British support for the extremists, they removed one of the chief objections to a republic and gravely weakened the moderate Kafandaris government.⁴⁴

Bentinck was furious that Britain was being dragged into Greek internal affairs because of Morgenthau's inability to refrain from meddling. The Foreign Office did not share this anger and bitterness towards Morgenthau, however, and instructed Bentinck to co-operate loyally with him in implementing the League's scheme. But MacDonald had been made uncomfortable by the episode, and his own convictions were highlighted in the emphatic telegram he sent Bentinck on 8 February as a general restatement of Britain's attitude.

Our desire is to adopt an attitude of absolute neutrality and in no way to intervene in [the] internal affairs of Greece. Greek public men must study their own public opinion and be responsible to it for their policy. You should give no advice whatsoever to present Greek government regarding internal affairs. You can say that the only wish of His Majesty's Government is to see Greece regaining her former stability.

Bentinck disavowed Norman's views to Kafandaris, and reiterated Britain's neutral attitude, but by then, he reported, the damage had been done.⁴⁵

The advent of the Papanastasiou government signalled the triumph of the 'immediate republicans' who were determined that the nature of the regime should be settled by the assembly rather than the people. They claimed that the December elections had given them a mandate to introduce a republic; the truth was that public opinion was still a very uncertain factor.⁴⁶ The manner of Kafandaris' fall had shown that real power now lay with the military triumvirate of Pangalos, Kondylis and Hadjikyriakos, all of whom were in Papanastasiou's cabinet. The other ministers were

⁴⁴ FO 371/9879 Bentinck to FO tel.40 d.6 Feb.1924, tel.43 d.6 Feb.1924; *DBFP/1/XXVI/74*; Morgenthau, *International Drama*, pp.133-7.

⁴⁵ FO 371/10771 Annual Report, Greece, 1924 p.5; *DBFP/1/XXVI/74-5*; Cassimatis, *American Influence*, p.103. The second sentence in the above quote was added by MacDonald himself to the draft version, now filed in FO 371/9879.

⁴⁶ FO 371/9879 Bentinck to FO tel.41 d.6 Feb.1924; MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.62 d.14 Mar.1924.

all nonentities, extreme republicans new to office and little known.⁴⁷ On the morning of 12 March these men took the oath in the presence of the regent "'to country" but not to king', and marked their attitude by refusing to wear the high hats customary on this occasion.⁴⁸

This, however, was merely a point of style, and the substance of Papanastasiou's actions seemed initially more reassuring. First, he declared that he would govern by parliamentary methods, asking the assembly to declare the establishment of a republic which would then be ratified by plebiscite.⁴⁹ Secondly, the government made a conciliatory gesture to the royalists which seemed to indicate that contrary to Venizelos' dire warnings the republicans were seeking a national rather than a party basis for the republic. Papanastasiou announced that if George II would abdicate, the government would give him a generous financial settlement, promulgate a general amnesty and guarantee royalist participation in the government of the republic with the prospect of free elections before the end of the year.⁵⁰ In the circumstances, this offer was as generous as it was unexpected and caused a frenzied debate in the royalist camp.⁵¹

In the end, however, the tentative negotiations between government and royalists were broken off when, just days later, the government announced that it would pursue its republican policy without royalist co-operation, that there would be no concessions and that measures would be taken against the king. Cheetham believed that Papanastasiou had withdrawn his offer under pressure from the military extremists who would brook no compromise.⁵² Be that as it may, and even if Papanastasiou himself was sincere in wanting all party co-operation and a generous settlement with

⁴⁷ FO 371/9879 Cheetham to FO tel.82 d.12 Mar.1924; MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.62 d.4 Mar.1924; *DBFP/1/XXVI/143-4*. At first Pangalos was excluded from the cabinet, perhaps as a sop to Britain, but soon he was given the newly created post of minister for legal order (FO 371/10771 Annual Report, Greece, 1924 p.7).

⁴⁸ FO 371/9879 Cheetham to FO no.197 d.19 Mar.1924; *DBFP/1/XXVI/143-4*.

⁴⁹ FO 371/9879 Cheetham to FO tel.75 d.10 Mar.1924.

⁵⁰ FO 371/9879 Cheetham to FO tel.85 d.17 Mar.1924.

⁵¹ MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.68 d.22 Mar.1924; FO 371/10771 Annual Report, Greece, 1924 pp.6-7.

⁵² FO 371/9879 Cheetham to FO tel.91 d.21 Mar.1924.

the royalists, the actual effect of his offer had been to split the royalist opposition.⁵³ Moderates had been tempted by the prospect of a return to office, whilst the die-hards continued to insist that the question must be settled by the people.⁵⁴ As for the republicans, they exploited the failure of the negotiations to claim that George II had now put himself completely out of court and that a vote for constitutional monarchy at the plebiscite would mean the establishment of a new dynasty.⁵⁵

With the opposition divided the government pressed on. On 24 March a motion was put to the assembly constituting Greece as a parliamentary republic (subject to later ratification by plebiscite), providing for the expropriation of royal property and appointing Koundouriotis as 'arbitrator of the regime' until the elaboration of a republican constitution. On 25 March, the anniversary of the outbreak of the Greek war of independence, the motion was passed overwhelmingly: among the Venizelists, most supported it in the interests of avoiding civil strife and only Kafandaris' supporters abstained.⁵⁶ Despite natural suspicions that the republicans would avoid putting the issue to the people a plebiscite was scheduled for 13 April, and it was apparent that the royalists had not altogether given up hope.⁵⁷ From Romania George II issued a manifesto to the Greek people reserving his rights as constitutional monarch, and there was even an attempted royalist *coup*, although this was a counter-productive fiasco.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, Metaxas, given an amnesty by the government, returned to Greece on 8 April, and announced that the royalists would contest the plebiscite in order to establish the sovereignty of the people.⁵⁹ This was done when the plebiscite was held 'in perfect order' on 13 April, giving victory to the republicans

⁵³ FO 371/9879 Cheetham to FO no.211 d.22 Mar.1924., no.216 d.22 Mar.1924.

⁵⁴ FO 371/9879 Cheetham to FO no.216 d.22 Mar.1924; MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.68 d.22 Mar.1924; FO 371/10771 Annual Report, Greece, 1924 pp.6-7.

⁵⁵ FO 371/9879 Cheetham to FO no.249 d.5 Apr.1924.

⁵⁶ FO 371/9879 Cheetham to FO tel.99 d.25 Mar.1924; FO 371/10771 Annual Report, Greece, 1924 p.7.

⁵⁷ FO 371/9879 Cheetham to FO no.249 d.5 Apr.1924.

⁵⁸ FO 371/9879 Dering (Bucharest) to FO tel.[?39] d.8 Apr.1924, Cheetham to FO tel.119 d.10 Apr.1924, tels.123-4 d.12 Apr.1924.

⁵⁹ FO 371/9879 Cheetham to FO no.249 d.5 Apr.1924; FO 371/10771 Annual Report, Greece, 1924 p.7.

who secured almost seventy per cent of the votes cast.⁶⁰ Consequently on 15 April the Greek government officially declared the end of the monarchy and the creation of a parliamentary republic.⁶¹

The plebiscite result was 'undoubtedly valid' and was generally accepted in Greece.⁶² The polling was considered fair, by Balkan standards, and even Metaxas admitted that the republican majority was too large to have been wholly due to fraud. The royalists attributed their defeat rather to their own lack of initiative and organisation, and to a lack of enthusiasm for George II, who had done little to make himself popular.

Another important, if not decisive, factor, especially in the new lands, was the refugee vote which was overwhelmingly republican and which swamped the small royalist majority in Old Greece.⁶³ Finally, many moderates voted for the republic because they believed that any other decision would mean disaster, as the military chiefs would impose their will by force if necessary. Most Greeks now simply yearned for an end to internal dissension, and voting for the republic - which after 25 March meant the *status quo* - seemed the most likely way to secure it. Papanastasiou had undoubtedly done well to restrain the military extremists thus far and moderates hoped that with the republic secure he would continue to prevail over unconstitutional forces and even give effect to his promises to involve all parties in the government.⁶⁴

These developments in Greece produced pessimism in the Foreign Office. In the first place, the very existence of the Papanastasiou government was an embarrassment for Britain since it was hardly representative of a majority in the assembly and contained at least two individuals with direct responsibility for the 1922 executions.⁶⁵ No-one in the Foreign Office, however, felt that this fresh violation of Curzon's conditions

⁶⁰ FO 371/9879 Cheetham to FO tel.127 d.14 Apr.1924. Mavrogordatos gives the voting figures as 758,742 (69.99%) for the motion and 325,322 (30.01%) against it: *Stillborn Republic*, p.32.

⁶¹ *DBFP/1/XXVI/186*.

⁶² Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic*, p.32; FO 371/9879 Cheetham to FO tel.131 d.16 Apr.1924.

⁶³ FO 371/9880 Cheetham to FO no.267 d.19 Apr.1924, no.303 d.3 May 1924; FO 371/10771 Annual Report, Greece, 1924 p.9.

⁶⁴ FO 371/9879 Cheetham to FO no.249 d.5 Apr.1924; FO 371/9880 Cheetham to FO no.267 d.19 Apr.1924, no.303 d.3 May 1924; MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.89 d.16 Apr.1924.

⁶⁵ FO 371/9879 Cheetham to FO tel.75 d.10 Mar.1924, min. by Nicolson d.13 Mar.1924.

should occasion any action by Britain. As Crowe bluntly explained in reply to an inquiry from George V as to the Foreign Office's attitude towards such a government, continual intervention in Greek affairs was 'highly undesirable on grounds of general policy'.⁶⁶ Nicolson supported him, arguing that 'we cannot play fast and loose with Greek internal politics Greece is entering upon a prolonged period of civil war and foreign danger. The less we intervene the better'.⁶⁷ Ramsay MacDonald endorsed this view, and on 14 March defined British policy for Cheetham: Britain could not, now that relations were restored, contend that the Greeks had to maintain the fulfilment of Curzon's conditions in perpetuity. The British government intended 'to assume no responsibility, even of the most indirect nature, for Greek party jealousies'. In future Cheetham should stress British indifference to the composition of the Greek cabinet and say only that, although the existing British government shared the abhorrence of its predecessors for the judicial murderers of 1922, 'all that His Majesty's Government feel now is that if the Greek people desire to be governed by men of these antecedents it is their affair'.⁶⁸

Nor was London impressed by the policy of the Papanastasiou government. Its conciliatory overtures to the royalists, for example, were seen not as hopeful signs of possible future stability but rather as utterly futile gestures: 'offers such as these are of little use as neither side believes a word the other says'. And Nicolson, who nevertheless thought that 'the king would be well advised to accept them' had to admit that 'unfortunately now that he is at Bucharest, he is *not* well advised'.⁶⁹ The Central Department accurately perceived that the schism in Greece was so profound that mere expressions of goodwill would not be sufficient to heal it. In this atmosphere it was hardly surprising that MacDonald should wish to abstain not only from interference in Greek affairs but even from commenting on them.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ FO 371/9879 Crowe to Stamfordham p.l. d.13 Mar.1924.

⁶⁷ FO 371/9879 min. by Nicolson d.13 Mar.1924.

⁶⁸ FO 371/9879 min. by MacDonald d.13 Mar.1924; *DBFP*/1/XXVI/143-4.

⁶⁹ FO 371/9879 mins. by McEwen d.18 Mar.1924, Nicolson d.18 Mar.1924.

⁷⁰ FO 371/9879 Cheetham to FO tel.90 d.21 Mar.1924, FO to Cheetham tel.29 d.24 Mar.1924, min. by McEwen d.27 Mar.1924.

With the holding of the plebiscite, the mood in the Foreign Office improved somewhat, and this was reflected by its decision to recognise the republican regime. This was partly due to surprise that a plebiscite had been held at all; in March it had seemed that the republicans would let the idea 'die away gradually through a series of postponements'.⁷¹ The actual holding of the plebiscite, however, together with its overwhelming result that was apparently little disputed by the royalists, persuaded London that the republic might indeed prove relatively stable.⁷² Nicolson argued that most Greeks had voted for a republic out of a desire for 'peace at any price' and that Britain should 'accept this verdict in the spirit in which it is given, - and help the Greek people towards their hope of seeing stable internal conditions established in their country'. Any delay would only 'encourage the Greek royalists (who are apt to grasp at straws) to imagine that the Republic is being cold-shouldered in London'.⁷³ MacDonald agreed with this view, and was anyway inclined 'to regard the whole thing as a purely Greek matter which does not concern us'.⁷⁴ Accordingly, on 23 April Cheetham was instructed to inform the Greeks that Britain recognised the new regime as representing the will of the people, although the issuing of new letters of credence was to be deferred pending the passing of a new constitution and the election of a president.⁷⁵ This decision was taken with no great enthusiasm but it reflected both a belief that the republic could be durable and a fear that in the circumstances refusing recognition would be a greater act of interference than granting it. The decision was also reinforced by French recognition of the new republic.⁷⁶

⁷¹ FO 371/9879 min. by McEwen d.26 Mar.1924.

⁷² The apathy of the general public towards the result seemed to indicate acceptance, and clearly royalist acquiescence in the outcome was likely to be an important factor promoting the stability of the new regime. However, although Metaxas accepted the result, Tsaldares, the leader of the People's party, the major royalist faction, did not follow suit until 1932 (FO 371/9879 Cheetham to FO tel.128 d.15 Apr.1924; Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic*, pp.32-3).

⁷³ FO 371/9880 min. by Nicolson d.16 Apr.1924; FO 371/9879 min. by Nicolson d.17 Apr.1924.

⁷⁴ FO 371/9880 min. by MacDonald d.18 Apr.1924. At the senior level MacDonald and Tyrrell both favoured recognition given the apparent stability of the regime, and Lampson, who advocated a wait-and-see policy, was the sole dissenter (FO 371/9880 min. by Lampson d.16 Apr.1924; FO 371/9879 mins. by Lampson d.17 Apr.1924, Tyrrell d.17 Apr.1924, MacDonald d.18 Apr.1924).

⁷⁵ DBFP/1/XXVI/186-7.

⁷⁶ DBFP/1/XXVI/187.

French recognition came promptly after the plebiscite result became known. In the early months of 1924 Marcilly had been told that there could be no question of his presenting letters of credence until the constitutional question was settled, and Poincaré was also unwilling to recognise the republic until after the plebiscite.⁷⁷ Marcilly concurred, on the grounds that Papanastasiou's government, even if it was continually lauded by the Parisian press, was dominated by the military and very undemocratic.⁷⁸ However, on 16 April when the republican victory in the plebiscite was clear, Poincaré urgently instructed Marcilly to recognise the new regime immediately, adding that it was desirable that France should be the first power to take this step.⁷⁹ The French also took the lead in the question of letters of credence, since they were the first power to give their representative credentials made out to the provisional president of the republic, Koundouriotis, without waiting for the passing of a new constitution.⁸⁰ Marcilly presented these credentials on 15 May in an atmosphere of great Franco-Greek cordiality, and the general impression was that France's haste to recognise the new republic had greatly improved her standing in Greece.⁸¹

The motives for this haste on the part of the French seem to have been more economic than political. France had certainly done little in 1924 to encourage the republicans. True, Papanastasiou had made political capital out of the fact that Poincaré had refused to see Venizelos before he left Paris for Greece, claiming that it proved France favoured an 'immediate republic', but Poincaré's action was open to a variety of interpretations.⁸² The most likely was that Venizelos had not actually

⁷⁷ MAE Grèce 83 QO to Marcilly no.84 d.14 Mar.1924, tel.14 d.24 Mar.1924; FO 371/9878 Bentinck to FO tel.32 d.31 Jan.1924.

⁷⁸ MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO tel.17 d.23 Mar.1924, no.79 d.3 Apr.1924, no.80 d.3 Apr.1924; MAE Grèce 78 Marcilly to [?Du Sault] p.l. d.18 Mar.1924.

⁷⁹ MAE Grèce 59 QO to Marcilly tel.23 d.16 Apr.1924.

⁸⁰ FO 371/9880 Cheetham to FO tel.149 d.16 May 1924.

⁸¹ MAE Grèce 78 Marcilly to QO no.108 d.16 May 1924; MAE Grèce 83 QO to Marcilly no.165 d.30 Apr.1924, note by Du Sault d.4 Jun.1924.

⁸² FO 371/8831 Bentinck to FO tel.631 d.29 Dec.1923; FO 371/9891 Bentinck to FO no.97 d.9 Feb.1924. Other interpretations were that the French had altogether lost interest in Greece or that Poincaré supported Venizelos but did not want him to appear as a French puppet (FO 371/9878 Bentinck to FO no.22 d.10 Jan.1924). Papanastasiou, like the majority of the republicans, was very

sought an interview with him, not for political reasons but because of some personal animosity between the two men dating from a heated argument over suspended Greek credits some years previously.⁸³ Throughout the spring of 1924, although they were less reluctant than their British counterparts to accept that the balance of forces within Greece meant that a republic would be established, the French took a quite neutral and passive line on the constitutional question.⁸⁴

The French were more active, however, in consolidating and extending their economic influence in Greece. After the Papanastasiou government came to power, Marcilly told the premier, who was angling for some expression of sympathy, that French support for him would not be automatic, but would depend rather on satisfaction being given to the many outstanding claims of French subjects against the Greek government.⁸⁵ At the same time he urged on his home government that, even though the republicans were francophiles, these old claims should be settled as proofs of goodwill before French political support was forthcoming, especially as the Greek government was so undemocratic.⁸⁶ Poincaré entirely agreed, and authorised Marcilly both to make some progress on the settlement of these claims a condition of French recognition of the new regime, and to indicate to Papanastasiou that the award of government contracts to French firms could only improve Franco-Greek relations.⁸⁷ Whether Marcilly did this is unclear, but on 17 May, two days after he presented his credentials and stressed the traditional friendship between France and Greece, the Greek government awarded a contract to build two submarines to Schneider-Creusot. Marcilly noted that this was concrete evidence of Papanastasiou's desire to reciprocate the goodwill shown by the French over recognition.⁸⁸

much a francophile and sensitive to the opinion of France (FO 371/8831 Bentinck to FO no.976 d.14 Dec.1923).

⁸³ FO 371/9891 Bentinck to FO no.97 d.9 Feb.1924; MAE Grèce 59 note by Peretti de la Rocca (where it is stated that Venizelos turned up at the Quai d'Orsay unexpectedly) d.24 Dec.1923.

⁸⁴ MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.29 d.31 Jan.1924, no.79 d.3 Apr.1924.

⁸⁵ MAE Grèce 78 Marcilly to QO no.69 d.24 Mar.1924.

⁸⁶ MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.80 d.3 Apr.1924.

⁸⁷ MAE Grèce 78 QO to Marcilly no.138 d.11 Apr.1924.

⁸⁸ MAE Grèce 78 Marcilly to QO no.108 d.16 May 1924, no.129 d.6 Jun.1924. The contract was one of the few left over from the now truncated Greek naval programme of November 1923. Marcilly

In the competition for this submarine contract the unsuccessful tenders had been submitted by British firms, and London was very annoyed at the success of Schneider-Creusot. Indeed, Cheetham had been told to insist that in view of 'the close relations which had existed for so long between the Greek and British navies, and the financial obligations of the Greek government' to Britain, the contract should be awarded to a British firm, but the instructions arrived too late to prevent the acceptance of the French tender, which was by far the lowest.⁸⁹ The French were not, however, attempting to use their political muscle to exclude the British from all such contracts. In January Marcilly had argued that one motive behind British recognition had been a fear that Britain's aloof attitude was leaving the field free for French firms. British influence would now increase, but it was unlikely that any Greek government would be blind to the lesson of history that Greece needed the support of both Britain and France to flourish.⁹⁰ Later, he advocated a policy of continued loyal co-operation with Britain in Greece: Britain and France had separate and distinct interests there, and a public *entente* would prevent the Greeks from playing the one power off against the other.⁹¹ In the Foreign Office, although the loss of the submarine contract rankled, French policy was not at the moment seen as threatening. The French were clearly trying 'to regain some of their prestige in Greece' which was 'now suffering an eclipse' by giving Marcilly new credentials, but they were 'doubtless actuated more by commercial than by political considerations' and British policy need not be altered.⁹²

The very fact that the British made such a distinction between commercial and political considerations was only contributing to French success in the matter of

lamented, however, that despite this award the Greeks were reluctant to give satisfaction over the claims. He found, as British representatives did, that the Greeks viewed promises as a substitute for action.

⁸⁹ FO 371/10771 Annual Report, Greece, 1924 p.43. The French tender was £108,000 lower than the cheapest British one.

⁹⁰ MAE Grèce 83 Marcilly to QO no.14 d.16 Jan.1924. See also MAE Grèce 78 Marcilly to QO no.48 d.22 Feb.1924: '... the memory of recent years where Greek policy had to be based solely on England and the mediocre benefits gained from this experience confirm the principle that Greece must have two protectors in agreement to assist her'.

⁹¹ MAE Grèce 78 Marcilly to [?Du Sault] p.l. d.18 Mar.1924.

⁹² FO 371/9880 mins. by Howard Smith d.13 May 1924, Nicolson d.13 May 1924; DBFP/1/XXVI/187.

contracts in Greece. Whereas the British saw commercial and economic matters as relatively autonomous and the concern of business, the French, as Orde argues, 'took it for granted that finance was used for political ends'. British political influence in east-central Europe was genuinely disinterested, and was rarely used to further British economic interests;⁹³ and whereas British representatives in Greece were hamstrung by the lack of any coherent commercial policy, the French were extremely energetic in pushing the interests of French firms,⁹⁴ at the expense of the British, and seizing the opportunity offered by the rise to power of francophile republicans. All this went hand in hand with an increase in political influence and closer relations with Greece, a development which perhaps only really became possible, given French public opinion, with the creation of a republic. Indeed the French were at this time trying to reinforce their influence in the Balkans generally, partly, perhaps, in response to wider European considerations, such as a desire after the failure of the Ruhr occupation to strengthen ties with allies and potential clients in eastern Europe, and a fear that the Pact of Rome of January 1924 might transform Yugoslavia into a stalking horse for Italian ambitions in the Balkans.⁹⁵

Italian policy towards Greece in fact continued much as before. On the positive side, Mussolini replaced the obnoxious Montagna and swiftly recognised the outcome of the plebiscite and the new Greek regime;⁹⁶ and he followed the French line and accredited Italy's representatives to the provisional president in May without waiting

⁹³ Orde, *Reconstruction*, pp.310-2 and 329: 'British financial and commercial policy in the 1920s was possibly too internationalist for the good of the British economy: a greater effort [to facilitate reconstruction] in Europe might have led to an even earlier decline'. The use made by the French of economic levers (and military missions) to extend their political influence in potential allied states in eastern Europe, especially Poland and Czechoslovakia, and the relation between private commercial interests and the Quai d'Orsay, are discussed in P.S.Wandycz, *The Twilight of French Eastern Alliances, 1926-1936. Franco-Czechoslovak-Polish Relations from Locarno to the Remilitarization of the Rhineland* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988), pp.5-8.

⁹⁴ FO 371/10771 Annual Report, Greece, 1924 pp.30-1,38-45. Cheetham complained that because the Greek assembly controlled naval contracts, superior British products were rejected against the advice of the relevant technical advisers. The Greeks can hardly be blamed, however, for preferring the French products which, because of the exchange rate, were significantly cheaper.

⁹⁵ W.I.Shorrocks, *From Ally to Enemy. The Enigma of Fascist Italy in French Diplomacy, 1920-1940* (Kent, Kent State University Press, 1988), pp.41-6. France's relations with the Little *Entente* powers had been damaged by her cynical support of Italy in the Corfu crisis which seemed to threaten the security of all small states which relied on the League.

⁹⁶ FO 371/10771 Annual Report, Greece, 1924 pp.19-20; *DDI/7/III/96,99*.

for the passing of a new constitution.⁹⁷ By June, however, the aftermath of the Matteotti murder was to paralyse Italian diplomacy for some months, and altogether conflicting political interests and intense mutual suspicion continued to preclude really cordial relations between Italy and Greece. The Dodecanese question remained an obstacle and Athens suspected the Italians of supporting the Greek royalists and of intriguing with the Yugoslavs for a possible advance on Salonica and seizure of the Ionian islands in the event of disorder in Greece.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ FO 371/9880 Cheetham to FO tel.149 d.16 May 1924, Graham to FO no.452 d.14 May 1924.

⁹⁸ MAE Grèce 78 Marcilly to QO no.48 d.22 Feb.1924; MAE Grèce 59 note by Laroche (from mid-1924 director of political affairs) d.7 Feb.1924, notes by Peretti de la Rocca d.13 Feb.1924 and 1 Apr.1924; FO 371/10771 Annual Report, Greece, 1924 p.19; Cassels, *Early Diplomacy*, pp.228-30 (Cassels here surely over-estimates the supposed readiness of the Greeks to join in an attack on Turkey and, indeed, the extent of Mussolini's plans at this time).

Chapter Four
Stillborn Republic
April 1924 - June 1925

After April 1924 Greek internal politics were marked by great instability and by the very conflicts between civilian and military authorities which Venizelos and the Foreign Office had predicted would follow the establishment of a republic by decree. For example, when Papanastasiou, in an effort to reduce military influence in the government, attempted to replace Admiral Koundouriotis, the *ad interim* president, with the veteran Zaimis, he was vigorously opposed by the 'extremist triad' of Pangalos, Kondylis and Hadjikyriakos.¹ Papanastasiou's manoeuvres eventually failed, not least because the majority which had brought him into office and the republic into being was starting to disintegrate.² This was largely because after the resolution of the constitutional question the personal and ideological differences between the left and right wings of the Venizelist bloc, exacerbated by economic difficulties and social unrest, became more acute.³ Now many politicians who would normally have supported the premier against the military appeared more afraid of Papanastasiou's supposedly advanced socialist views and radical plans for the economy than of a renewed military dictatorship.⁴

In these circumstances, the government, far from being able to forge a consensus against militarism, was assailed from all sides by the attacks of various interest groups. Within the assembly Papanastasiou came under fire from a group of Epirote deputies, complaining at the government's acquiescence in unfavourable decisions of the Paris Ambassadors' conference regarding the delimitation of the Greco-Albanian border; and from the refugee deputies who felt that the government was not tackling their problems with sufficient vigour.⁵ Outside the assembly the government was challenged by an upsurge of industrial unrest, sparked off by the seamen of Athens, and the subsequent possibility of a general strike. Although Papanastasiou forced the

¹ FO 371/9880 Cheetham to FO tel.142 d.28 Apr.1924 and mins., no.300 d.2 May 1924 and mins.

² FO 371/9880 Cheetham to FO no.373 d.31 May 1924.

³ Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic*, p.33.

⁴ FO 371/9880 Cheetham to FO no.399 d.14 Jun.1924; J.K.Campbell and P.O.A.Sherrard, *Modern Greece* (London, Ernest Benn, 1968), p.133.

⁵ FO 371/9880 Cheetham to FO no.373 d.31 May, no.399 d.14 Jun.1924, Bentinck to FO no.457 d.11 Jul.1924. For the Albanian border question see *DBFP/1/XXVI/107,213-5,218-20,237-9,241-3,276-7,281,287-8,360-4*.

strikers back to work, his nonchalance about the whole affair precipitated a crisis when Kondylis seized on the general atmosphere of discontent to bring the military's quarrel with the prime minister to a head by resigning as minister of war on 9 June.⁶ This triggered a cabinet crisis when the foreign and finance ministers also resigned and for a while it looked as if the government would fall.⁷

Even when, after several anxious days, Papanastasiou succeeded in constructing a new cabinet - the key appointment being that of Konstantinos Rentis as foreign minister - it seemed unlikely that it would last. Although there was a chance that, Kondylis 'having shot his bolt', the military would remain quiet for a time and although there was no obvious successor to Papanastasiou, the difficulty he had had completing his cabinet had illustrated the disunity of the Venizelists. The government limped on into July but was soon faced with a new threat, namely a strike by naval officers. This movement was entirely independent of general politics, being directed rather against the favouritism of Hadjikyriakos, the minister of marine, in the matter of promotions. Although the minister was compelled to resign - which of itself was not displeasing to Papanastasiou - the officers made further demands to which the government could not yield.⁸ This crisis, compounded by continuing attacks by Epirote and refugee deputies and a heat wave in Athens, led to the defeat of the government on a motion of confidence on 20 July amidst tumultuous scenes in the chamber - including fist fights between deputies. On the following day Papanastasiou resigned.⁹

Papanastasiou was succeeded by the archaeologist Themistokles Sofoulis, a centrist Venizelist, who eventually constructed a cabinet of concentration, excluding only the

⁶ FO 371/9880 Cheetham to FO no.399 d.14 Jun.1924, tel.160 d.10 Jun.1924; FO 371/9891 Cheetham to FO no.401 d.14 Jun.1924.

⁷ MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.151 d.26 Jun.1924.

⁸ FO 371/9880 Cheetham to FO no.399 d.14 Jun.1924 [quoted], tels.166-7 d.19 Jun.1924, no.422 d.28 Jun.1924, Bentinck to FO no.457 d.11 Jul.1924, tel.180 d.16 Jul.1924.

⁹ FO 371/9880 Bentinck to FO tel.184 d.21 Jul.1924, no.481 d.26 Jul.1924.

Republican Union and including five military figures.¹⁰ Although his avowed policy was cautious and pragmatic - economy at home and moderation in foreign affairs - and won general assent in the assembly, his position was always tenuous.¹¹ He solved the problem of the naval strike by conceding the officers' demands and allowing them to resume their posts without punishment; but this display of weakness only provoked a backlash from the minority of non-striking naval officers led by Captain Kolialexis, commander of the Greek flagship *Averoff*.¹² By 21 August this section of the navy was in open mutiny, and for some time it looked as though all the larger ships would join the revolt. Sofoulis now panicked and called in Hadjikyriakos, protector of the rebels, to mediate.¹³ The admiral managed to persuade the mutineers to submit to the government's authority, largely by promising them leave, but Sofoulis' position had been weakened. It was now clear that he owed his survival only to the army leaders, who had chosen to remain loyal, and to Hadjikyriakos himself - an impression which was confirmed by the exceptionally mild punishments handed out to the mutineers in September.¹⁴ The obvious inadequacy of Sofoulis' government in the face of these problems led to demands within the Venizelist bloc for an all-party government to settle the fundamental problems of the Greek economy and administration, confronted with which Sofoulis resigned on 1 October.¹⁵

With the question of recognition settled, British and French diplomats in Athens had only to observe the course of Greek politics in these months. Both Cheetham and Marcilly had hoped at first that the new republic might prove stable; the disappearance of iconic figures like Venizelos and Constantine, who had always impeded reconciliation, might make possible a general *entente* of all political factions

¹⁰ FO 371/9880 Bentinck to FO no.482 d.26 Jul.1924; Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian Vision*, p.342; Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic*, pp.26,33. Marcilly states that there were only four military members (MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.173 d.1 Aug.1924).

¹¹ FO 371/9880 Bentinck to FO no.513 d.8 Aug.1924.

¹² FO 371/9880 Bentinck to FO no.513 d.8 Aug.1924, no.534 d.20 Aug.1924.

¹³ FO 371/9880 Dunbar (Athens) to FO tels.199-201 d.23 Aug.1924 and mins., Knight (consul at Corfu) to FO tel.8 d.23 Aug.1924, tel.9 d.24 Aug.1924, Bentinck to FO no.545 d.25 Aug.1924.

¹⁴ FO 371/9880 Bentinck to FO no.545 d.25 Aug.1924, no.578 d.6 Sept.1924; MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.193 d.25 Aug.1924.

¹⁵ FO 371/9880 Cheetham to FO no.632 d.1 Oct.1924.

based on acceptance of and participation in the new regime.¹⁶ However, these hopes were soon dashed, and both men reported with gloom the failure of the politicians to emancipate themselves from the influence of the military and to create a legitimate foundation for the republic. Papanastasiou's majority was so uncertain, given the squabbles of the factions in the assembly, that no progress could be made towards elaborating a constitution or holding elections, and the cabinet seemed only to follow events rather than govern.¹⁷ Worse, it was clear that Pangalos and Kondylis, far from having abandoned political intrigue, were both scheming to wrest power from the politicians when an opportunity arose.¹⁸ Marcilly identified a deeper malaise: the naval strike had arisen purely because of the officers' concern for their personal advantage, and pointed to a total absence of any public or civic spirit in Greek society.¹⁹

The naval mutiny had provided an illustration of another Greek characteristic: dependence on foreigners. At the height of the crisis, with Kolialexis threatening to turn the *Averoff's* guns on Athens, the Greeks approached both the British and French legations separately, asking them to send warships to Phaleron bay to disarm the mutineers and arrest Kolialexis by force. Naturally, this request was refused, but it seemed to London to demonstrate how the military was making 'any political government impossible'.²⁰ When Sofoulis was later attacked in the press for these actions he saw fit to issue an official *démenti* which confirmed Bentinck's impression that the government had 'completely lost their heads' and 'in true Greek style foreign and especially British intervention was requested to settle an entirely internal affair'.²¹

¹⁶ FO 371/9880 Cheetham to FO no.422 d.28 Jun.1924; MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.89 d.16 Apr.1924.

¹⁷ FO 371/9880 Cheetham to FO no.300 d.2 May 1924; MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.95 d.24 Apr.1924, no.151 d.26 Jun.1924, no.171 d.30 Jul.1924; FO 371/10771 Annual Report, Greece, 1924 pp.9-10.

¹⁸ MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.208 d.16 Sept.1924; FO 371/9880 Bentinck to FO tel.178 d.14 Jul.1924.

¹⁹ MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.193 d.25 Aug.1924.

²⁰ FO 371/9880 Bentinck to FO no.578 d.6 Sept.1924, Dunbar to FO tels.199-200 d.23 Aug.1924, FO to Bentinck tel.86 d.23 Aug.1924, min. by Nicolson d.23 Aug.1924 [quoted]; MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.193 d.25 Aug.1924.

²¹ FO 371/9880 Bentinck to FO no.578 d.6 Sept.1924.

None of these proceedings fostered optimism in the Foreign Office about the future of Greece.

Despite the political chaos in Greece, and general Allied indifference to it, there was still a certain amount of manoeuvring for influence between the British and the French. In July, Bentinck, acting as chargé while Cheetham was on leave,²² reported his fears that the Greek government was about to ask Paris to send a new military mission to Greece. The previous foreign missions to Greece had been terminated by the revolutionaries in 1923 as an economy measure, and Bentinck believed the request for a mission might portend a re-orientation of Greek foreign policy. Although recent Greek governments had sought to maintain a balance between Britain and France, he recalled the strenuous efforts made by the revolutionaries to win back the friendship of France ('whose hostility was a more potent factor than British friendship') and pointed to the recent appointments to key positions of notable francophiles (such as the new minister in Paris and new director general of the foreign ministry) as signs that the Greeks might throw Britain over altogether.²³

Bentinck's fears perhaps arose from his own francophobia, and his despatch caused no undue alarm in the Foreign Office. Nicolson did not think it mattered 'overmuch to us whether the French do or do not flirt with Greece'. He trusted

that we shall not be inveigled into any competitive action. The Greeks would dearly love to play off France against ourselves and thereby to receive increased attention and assistance from both. But Greece, during the next few years, will remain in a very unstable and nervous condition and no harm will be done if the close relations which have so long existed between us are temporarily, and pending Greece's revival, relaxed. In the last resort she will, as a maritime nation, pay more attention to us than she will to France. Meanwhile we can wait and watch.²⁴

²² Cheetham was on leave from 1 July to 14 September 1924.

²³ FO 371/9891 Bentinck to FO no.468 d.17 Jul.1924. The new Greek minister in Paris was said by Bentinck to be 'more French than Greek'.

²⁴ FO 371/9891 min. by Nicolson d.6 Aug.1924. This minute was approved by Crowe.

This confidence in Britain's position was all the more striking as it was expressed by Nicolson, who in 1923 had been the most concerned in the Foreign Office at supposed French intrigues in Greece.

This policy prescription was on the whole consistently pursued, but it soon transpired that in certain circumstances, especially where wider policy considerations were involved, the British would act to exert their influence in Greece. In September, the Greeks asked London to send a British admiral to Athens to report on the condition of the Hellenic navy and to prepare the way for a permanent naval mission, and made an analogous request in Paris regarding the Greek army.²⁵ The response of the Foreign Office was entirely favourable, and in a memorandum to the cabinet of 30 September Crowe set out the arguments for meeting the Greek request. In general terms, such missions brought a 'considerable advantage to British political and strategic interests', but in this instance there were more powerful considerations. The French government, who were 'endeavouring to bring [Greece] within their own orbit' had already agreed to the Greek request, and if Britain refused the Greeks would turn to them for help in reorganising their navy also. This would be both 'generally undesirable' and

particularly inconvenient at a moment when we are endeavouring to discourage these small states from all unnecessary armament programmes. The French have already managed to induce the Greek government, in spite of our opposition, to purchase two submarines, and it is to be feared that if our influence in Greek naval matters is to be superseded by French influence, the Greek government will be encouraged to place further orders in France and build up a navy in excess of their actual needs.²⁶

In other words this was a special case, where Nicolson's policy prescription did not apply. The presence of a British naval mission was desirable not to win contracts for British firms or to block French influence, but rather to hinder the militarism which

²⁵ FO 371/9891 Kaklamanos to FO no.2737.I.24 d.24 Sept.1924; MAE Grèce 26 Melas (Paris) to QO no.4231 d.8 Sept.1924.

²⁶ FO 371/9891 draft memorandum by Crowe d.30 Sept.1924 enclosed in Nicolson to Hankey p.1. d.2 Oct.1924. Crowe's contention that the British opposed the Greek plan to buy two submarines was extremely disingenuous.

French influence would have encouraged. In this instance, intervention was more likely to secure Britain's long term goals of peace and stability than abstention.

In Athens Cheetham had his own rather more parochial reasons for supporting the idea of a new naval mission. Recently he had found the promotion of British trading interests in Greece an increasingly difficult task; throughout 1924 British firms, and especially armament firms, had been very unsuccessful in winning orders, almost all of which went to French firms whose prices were lower owing to government subsidies and the depreciation of the franc.²⁷ It was particularly galling that the French were now even securing naval contracts, which had hitherto been a British preserve. For Cheetham this was a matter of prestige as much as anything else, but he felt that a British naval mission would ensure that the contracts would go to British firms, even if their tenders were not the lowest.²⁸ The Foreign Office accepted Cheetham's arguments that a French monopoly of such contracts was undesirable, and agreed that unless a naval mission was sent it would be difficult to persuade the Greeks to buy British *matériel* against pressure from their French advisers.²⁹ Although Crowe had emphasised broader considerations of principle to the cabinet, these rather more self-interested motives pointed in the same direction.

The cabinet discussed the matter on 6 October and agreed, in view of the unanimous opinion of the Foreign Office and Admiralty, to grant the Greek request, with the proviso that the admiral selected should be careful to stress the importance of financial stringency to the Greeks.³⁰ Eventually, Vice-Admiral Sir Richard Webb was selected as the British adviser, and he arrived in Athens on 8 December to prepare the way for the permanent naval mission which was sent the next year.³¹

²⁷ FO 371/10764 Cheetham to FO no.740 d.19 Dec.1924 and mins.

²⁸ FO 371/9891 Cheetham to FO no.613 d.22 Sept.1924.

²⁹ FO 371/9891 mins. by Bateman, Howard Smith and Nicolson d.30 Sept.1924.

³⁰ CAB 23/48/52(24).

³¹ FO 371/9891 Admiralty to FO no.M.01848/24 d.7 Nov.1924, Cheetham to FO no.729 d.8 Dec.1924.

In fact, the ultimate aim of French policy was not all that inimical to British interests. True, the French hoped to use a new military mission to increase their political and economic influence: even though earlier in the year they had begun to use political pressure over contracts they were as exasperated as the British over financial matters - although many important orders had been placed with French firms, Marcilly had had no more luck than Cheetham in persuading the Greeks to settle outstanding claims, and it was hoped that the presence of the mission might help to remedy this. For Marcilly, however, the essential point was that the Greek army was in such a pitiful state as actually to constitute a threat to Balkan peace, since Greece was a standing temptation to her powerful and ambitious neighbours. It was therefore essential that the army be reorganised, if only as a means of consolidating that peace in the Balkans which French interests demanded.³² A military mission was eventually sent early in 1925 under General Girard, and although it did aim at expanding French economic and political influence in Greece,³³ in so far as it also aimed at promoting stability, it was not in conflict with British interests.

In the event, the British continued to fall behind in the competition for arms contracts, even after the naval mission was sent. The Greeks continued to award contracts to the more competitive French firms, which were also strongly supported by Paris. In contrast, the Department of Overseas Trade discouraged British firms from investing in Greece, because of the high risk involved, and the Trade Facilities Act was inapplicable to arms contracts.³⁴ In Athens, too, whereas French representatives aggressively promoted their national firms, sometimes by rather underhand methods, British policy was hamstrung by conflicting considerations. On the one hand, London

³² MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.173 d.1 Aug.1924; MAE Grèce 26 Marcilly to QO no.4 d.9 Jan.1924. The French had heard rumours in January that the Greeks would seek another military mission, and it was then that Marcilly had made these comments. Paris took steps in settling the details of the new military mission to ensure that it should not end up entangling the French in Greek internal politics, which was felt to be a real danger given the political activities of many Greek generals (MAE Grèce 26 note by Laroche d.8 Sept.1924, QO to Ministère de Guerre no.1811 d.9 Sept.1924, note by Laroche d.16 Sept.1924).

³³ MAE Grèce 27 note by Du Sault d.22 Jan.1925, Chambrun to QO tel.23 d.19 Feb.1925.

³⁴ FO 371/10764 Cheetham to FO no.740 d.19 Dec.1924 and mins.; FO 371/11345 FO to Cheetham no.387 d.3 Jun.1926.

depreciated Greece buying arms at all, because of the effect on the feeble Greek economy and the dangers of militarism; on the other hand, the prospect of lucrative contracts was tempting given economic conditions at home. This led to inconsistencies, which were seized on by the French. For example, Cheetham might one day be enjoining strict economy on the Greeks, and the next urging them to buy British torpedoes. London swung between wanting to prevent the Greeks purchasing any arms, and trying to ensure that if they were determined to buy them they should do so from Britain. The net result was that British policy fell between two stools and French firms stepped in and won the majority of arms contracts. In 1926 Foreign Office officials debated this issue and tried to lay down a coherent policy on arms sales to Greece, but in the face of these conflicting considerations resigned themselves to continuing to treat each case on its own merits.³⁵

In the case of contracts for reconstruction and development work, the British were slightly more successful, even though here they faced stiff competition also from American firms.³⁶ For instance, in 1925 a group of British firms won a contract for the supply of electric power and light to Athens and its environs, and it was significant that this group was given political support by the British government and backed financially by the Trade Facilities Committee.³⁷ However, all such contracts could be affected by the vagaries of Greek internal politics, as successive governments sought to cancel or amend contracts awarded by their predecessors.³⁸ One notorious case occurred in 1923 when the contract to rebuild Piraeus harbour, which had been promised to a British firm, was eventually awarded to a French one.³⁹

³⁵ For this debate see FO 371/11345 Dept. of Overseas Trade to FO no.14901FE d.25 May 1926 and encls. and mins., FO to Cheetham no.387 d.3 Jun.1926. See also FO 371/11351 mins. by Harvey d.7 May 1926, Howard Smith d.7 May 1926.

³⁶ The rôle of American capital in Greece is discussed in Cassimatis, *American Influence*, pp.150-200. See also FO 371/10771 Annual Report, Greece, 1924 pp.41-5 and FO 371/11357 Annual Report, Greece, 1925 [enclosed in Cheetham to FO no.183 d.6 May 1926] pp.45-6,54-6.

³⁷ FO 371/11357 Annual Report, Greece, 1925 pp.54-5. The British Treasury were guarantors of the bond capital of this project.

³⁸ This in fact happened to the electrical contract in 1926 when the Pangalos government fell from power: FO 371/12178 Annual Report, Greece, 1926 [enclosed in Loraine to FO no.155 d.14 Apr.1927] pp.10-11.

³⁹ FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 pp.60-1.

In the questions of outstanding claims and legislation adversely affecting foreign subjects in Greece, the British had less cause for complaint, if only because the Greeks treated every other state in an equally shabby manner. Ceaseless representations were made by British, French and Italian diplomats regarding these matters, but although the Greeks always received them sympathetically little progress was apparent. In part this could be explained by a genuine lack of funds, but British diplomats were always amazed that given their weak and isolated situation the Greeks were so unwilling to give satisfaction on these points.⁴⁰

In a sense it was the very even-handedness and fairness of British policy which led to disappointments in the economic field. As one Foreign Office official wrote early in 1925, it was precisely because the British had proved so helpful over organising and funding the refugee loan that the Greeks 'felt assured ... that we love them & so they concentrate their energies on attempting to convert others, of whose feelings they are less certain, to the same happy state'.⁴¹ This conviction that British goodwill could be taken for granted made the Greeks more susceptible to the blandishments and inducements offered by the French,⁴² especially when the British were sometimes reluctant to use the levers they did possess. In 1925, for example, the Greeks sought British consent, under the 1918 financial agreement, to the assignment of security to a loan for the development of the Athens water supply. The Treasury wanted to make this consent dependent upon the early settlement of the Greek war debt and outstanding British claims, but the Foreign Office refused to agree to this 'blackmail', not least because of the obvious humanitarian necessity of the water scheme.⁴³

Similarly, in 1927, when a second refugee loan was mooted, the Treasury proposed

⁴⁰ FO 371/10764 Cheetham to FO no.740 d.19 Dec.1924 and mins.; FO 371/10771 Annual Report, Greece, 1924 pp.38-9,44-5; FO 371/11357 Annual Report, Greece, 1925 p.5; FO 371/12178 Annual Report, Greece, 1926 pp.47-8. An example of such legislation was a decree expropriating without indemnity land held by foreign subjects upon which refugees were then settled.

⁴¹ FO 371/10764 min. by McEwen d.7 Jan.1925.

⁴² FO 371/10764 Cheetham to FO no.740 d.19 Dec.1924.

⁴³ FO 371/10764 Treasury to FO no.F.6172 d.28 May 1925 and mins., min. by Nicolson d.5 Jun.1925 [quoted], Nicolson to Leith-Ross (Treasury) no.(C7241/114/19) d.15 Jun.1925. The Foreign Office was also nervous about blocking this loan because of doubts over the continuing validity of the 1918 agreement and because the loan was to be made by an American firm who would doubtless be supported by the State Department. This was indeed the case: *FRUS/1925/II/286-93*.

holding it up until after a war debt settlement, but Chamberlain again demurred.⁴⁴ On all these occasions Britain's desire to see Greece reconstructed, stable and prosperous - in line with Britain's long term policy aims - over-rode more short term, self-interested considerations and produced frustration.⁴⁵

By the time Vice-Admiral Webb arrived in Greece, Sofoulis' successor, Andreas Michalakopoulos had been in power for just two months. Michalakopoulos, a lawyer from Patras, leader of the conservative republicans and the most articulate figure of the Venizelist right, had formed his cabinet on 7 October, excluding only the Republican Union.⁴⁶ Of all Venizelos' possible heirs, he was the least objectionable to the royalists and the most likely to achieve some measure of reconciliation. Initially he was well received by the Greek press, which argued that his experience as Greece's delegate to the League had inculcated him with western values and a regard for the constitution. His declared programme was limited and gave cause for optimism: he sought to complete the drafting of the republican constitution and then to hold elections.⁴⁷

Michalakopoulos' position soon deteriorated, however. On 19 November a projected military *coup* was thwarted before it began but it served as an ominous reminder of the continuing threat to civil government.⁴⁸ Worse, the debates in the assembly on the constitution proceeded very slowly, hampered by interminable quarrels between the various republican factions.⁴⁹ Further threats to the government came from abroad. In September the Greeks signed a protocol with the Bulgarians at Geneva, intended to reduce the friction caused by the perennial problems of refugees, minorities and terrorist bands. However, the Yugoslavs seized on this as a pretext to press on the

⁴⁴ Orde, *Reconstruction*, pp.287-8,297-8.

⁴⁵ In this context one could perhaps qualify the characterisation of British policy as disinterested - this seems rather to be a case of long-term goals taking precedence over short-term advantage, not pure disinterest.

⁴⁶ FO 371/9880 Cheetham to FO no.652 d.15 Oct.1924, no.660 d.16 Oct.1924.

⁴⁷ FO 371/9880 Cheetham to FO no.660 d.16 Oct.1924; MAE Grèce 59 Marcilly to QO no.224 d.9 Oct.1924.

⁴⁸ FO 371/9880 Cheetham to FO tel.251 d.21 Nov.1924, no.712 d.25 Nov.1924.

⁴⁹ FO 371/9880 Cheetham to FO no.704 d.14 Nov.1924, no.713 d.25 Nov.1924, no.727 d.5 Dec.1924.

Greeks a whole host of issues relating to their free zone at Salonica and in November denounced the Greco-Yugoslav alliance. This only made Greece's diplomatic isolation more acute.⁵⁰

True, Michalakopoulos could claim some successes. In December the League refugee loan was finally raised, providing £12,300,000 for long term settlement. This scheme had nearly come to grief earlier in the year when political instability and rumours that Papanastasiou, under pressure from the military, was to embark on extravagant armament expenditure had alarmed the international financiers. However, because of the obvious humanitarian need for the loan and thanks to the tireless work of Morgenthau, a second Bank of England advance was secured in May, and after lengthy negotiations between the powers and at Geneva the loan was offered to the public in December. Unfortunately for Michalakopoulos even this achievement did not help his position. The terms of the loan were considered onerous and began to attract much criticism in the Greek press, where the alien presence of the RSC was also resented.⁵¹ Consequently, by the end of the year Michalakopoulos had still not really established himself in office, nor made much progress with his limited programme for the consolidation of the republic, and his government's majority in the assembly was distinctly unstable.⁵²

In London, too, there had been a change of government when Baldwin's second cabinet took office in November, with Austen Chamberlain as foreign secretary. This did not, however, herald any change of policy towards lowly Greece, just as the advent of Edouard Herriot's government in France in June had not affected French Greek policy. The mood in the Foreign Office was generally one of pessimism - in December it was clear that 'we are yet a long way from solid government in Greece' -

⁵⁰ *DBFP/1/XXVI/85-6,289,292-4,310,322-6,330,349-50,376-7,398-404,409-14,422-3,433-6,445,461-3,466-8*. These subjects are dealt with in more detail in chapters 9 - 11 below.

⁵¹ For this whole issue, see FO 371/9887 file 545 *passim*, and FO 371/9888-9890 file 1900 *passim*; Morgenthau, *International Drama*, pp.161-211; Cassimatis, *American Influence*, pp.135-65; Pentzopoulos, *Balkan Exchange*, pp.85-92; Ladas, *Exchange*, pp.633-5; League of Nations, *Greek Refugee Settlement (Translation) II Economic and Financial 1926 II 32* (Geneva, League of Nations, 1926) pp.7-12,198-200.

⁵² FO 371/9880 Cheetham to FO no.713 d.25 Nov.1924.

and French observers agreed that the government was still not very democratic but that all foreign governments could do was watch and wait.⁵³ The British and French were at least on reasonably good terms with Greece, whereas Italo-Greek relations were still frosty. The concrete political issue of the Dodecanese remained as an obstacle to *rapprochement*, and all the overtures of the Italian minister Brambilla were rebuffed.⁵⁴

One problem which caused some concern in the Foreign Office at this time was the apparent spread of communism in Greece. Industrial unrest, the handmaiden of economic dislocation, had been widespread in Greece ever since the Asia Minor disaster but in the latter part of 1924 such unrest, according to Cheetham's reports, seemed to be increasingly communist-inspired.⁵⁵ Activists of the Greek communist party, the KKE, were apparently agitating with much success amongst the trade unions, reservist leagues and the refugee communities, and there was a suspicion that their activity was being co-ordinated by the Soviet legation in Athens, established after diplomatic relations were restored in June 1924.⁵⁶ The legation, with a staff of seventy-eight, 'entirely out of proportion to the ordinary diplomatic interests of Russia', could in Cheetham's eyes 'only be regarded as a Soviet centre for the conversion of Greece'.⁵⁷ There was some truth in this, for in 1924 the Comintern did indeed redouble its efforts in the Balkans, and the KKE was purged of dissidents and subjected to thorough 'bolshevisation'. The Comintern's efforts met with most success in Bulgaria, but also had some effect in Greece.⁵⁸

⁵³ FO 371/9880 min. by McEwen d.9 Dec.1924; MAE Grèce 78 Marcilly to QO no.216 d.27 Sept.1924.

⁵⁴ FO 371/10771 Annual Report, Greece, 1924 pp.19-20.

⁵⁵ FO 371/9891 Cheetham to FO no.700 d.12 Nov.1924. See also the sections devoted to communism in FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 pp.25-6 and FO 371/10771 Annual Report, Greece, 1924 pp.21-2.

⁵⁶ FO 371/9891 Cheetham to FO no.734 d.11 Dec.1924. For the history of the KKE in this period see D.G.Kousoulas, *Revolution and Defeat. The Story of the Greek Communist Party* (London, Oxford University Press, 1965), pp.1-72. On the question of Greco-Soviet relations, see B.Kondis, 'The Re-establishment of Greek-Soviet Relations in 1924', *Balkan Studies* 26(1) 1985 151-7 and A.L.Zapantis, *Greek-Soviet Relations, 1917-1941* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1982), pp.1-146.

⁵⁷ FO 371/9891 Cheetham to FO no.700 d.12 Nov.1924.

⁵⁸ Kousoulas, *Revolution*, pp.12-21; Zapantis, *Greek-Soviet Relations*, pp.140-80.

At first the Foreign Office discounted Cheetham's warnings on the grounds that Greece, as a nation of rabid individualists, would never be a fertile field for Soviet propaganda; but by November information from Russian sources indicated that 'the Bolsheviks have more or less abandoned their activities in Germany (as unprofitable) and are now concentrating on the Balkans'.⁵⁹ By December the rumours had reached the proportions of a scare, and Crowe conceded that the situation in Greece was 'getting serious'.⁶⁰ Although Greece was not herself ripe for a communist take-over, activists there would probably paralyse the bourgeois government in the event of a communist rising in Bulgaria.⁶¹

The problem for London was that, although on one level the threat of communist subversion seemed serious, the Balkan governments were always ready to use the communist bogey as a cover for ulterior motives. For example, the Bulgarians throughout 1924 tried to persuade the powers to sanction an increase in the size of their army (strictly limited by the treaty of Neuilly) in order to meet the threat of a supposedly imminent communist uprising. Despite evidence of the growth of communism in Bulgaria, London always responded sceptically and in the event the revolt never materialised.⁶² Another danger was that Balkan statesmen would use communism as an excuse to oppress their political opponents or ethnic minorities. During the scare in December itself, Chamberlain noted that the Yugoslav foreign minister, Nincic, was 'greatly concerned about Bolshevik activities in the Balkans', but that he seemed 'to find a Bolshevik wherever he saw an opponent'; Radic, the leader of the Croats, was often tarred with this brush.⁶³ All in all, London was disinclined to take any action about these troubles in the Balkans, beyond instructions to all British legations there to observe carefully and report any developments.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ FO 371/9891 mins. by McEwen d.1 Oct.1924, Lampson d.27 Nov.1924 [quoted], Howard Smith d.19 Dec.1924.

⁶⁰ FO 371/9891 min. by Crowe d.20 Dec.1924.

⁶¹ FO 371/10771 Annual Report, Greece, 1924 p.22.

⁶² For Bulgarian efforts in this direction, see chapter 9 below. They raised the issue again during this December scare (*DBFP*/1/XXVI/441-3).

⁶³ *DBFP*/1/XXVI/432.

⁶⁴ *DBFP*/1/XXVI/425-8.

As far as Greece was concerned, Lampson was correct in his view that the government there had 'the situation in hand'.⁶⁵ Over the next few years, thanks partly to government repression (Pangalos was to outlaw the KKE in 1926) and partly to the organisational deficiencies of the KKE itself, communism remained a very minor political force in Greece.⁶⁶ Indeed, its real significance was that for governments it was 'a good dog to beat': government repression was really aimed at working up a scare about communist subversion to rally bourgeois elements, and in private politicians admitted that the communist threat was negligible.⁶⁷

Meanwhile, as 1925 started, Michalakopoulos' position remained uncertain. In January Roussos, the foreign minister, resigned as a scapegoat for the Bulgarian minorities protocol which had caused so much trouble with Belgrade.

Michalakopoulos offered the post to Athos Romanos, a noted royalist, in a move interpreted as an advance towards moderate opinion. Romanos, however, refused the post and the premier temporarily assumed the portfolio himself in view of the impending negotiations with Yugoslavia for the renewal of the alliance. It was not until March that Michalakopoulos succeeded in forming his first complete cabinet, and only then did his position begin to look reasonably secure.⁶⁸

Unfortunately, Michalakopoulos' attempts to deal with Greece's internal and external problems in a spirit of moderation were obstructed by vested interests and the chronic weakness of the Greek economy and political system. The negotiations with Yugoslavia, begun in February, soon became deadlocked because the Yugoslavs advanced exorbitant demands concerning access to Salonica. Indeed, these demands

⁶⁵ FO 371/9891 min. by Lampson d.26 Dec.1924.

⁶⁶ FO 371/11357 Annual Report, Greece, 1925 pp.26-8; FO 371/12178 Annual Report, Greece, 1926 pp.20-2; Kousoulas, *Revolution*, pp.17-22,50-3,62-3. Kousoulas puts the relative failure of the KKE in the 1920s down to its stand on the Macedonian question (where it supported Macedonian autonomy) and a 'blind attachment to communist slogans forced on [it] by the Comintern' (*Revolution*, p.40).

⁶⁷ FO 371/11346 Cheetham to FO no.10 d.7 Jan.1926, min. by Harvey d.19 Jan.1926 [quoted], Cheetham to FO no.120 d.23 Mar.1926.

⁶⁸ FO 371/10768 Cheetham to FO no.31 d.19 Jan.1925, no.92 d.9 Mar.1925; FO 371/11357 Annual Report, Greece, 1925 p.2. Romanos had been Greek minister in Paris in 1924 but had resigned when the plebiscite result became known (MAE Grèce 59 note by Peretti de la Rocca d.1 Apr.1924).

aroused fears that Belgrade aspired to annex Salonica and much of Greek Macedonia, and negotiations were adjourned *sine die* on 1 June, leaving Greco-Yugoslav relations in a state of some tension.⁶⁹ Relations with Turkey were equally problematical: earlier in the year a long standing dispute over the status of the Greek Patriarchate at Constantinople had plunged Greco-Turkish relations to a new low.⁷⁰ At the same time, Michalakopoulos' attempts to cope with the nation's economic ills were provoking internal opposition. His prudent attempts, following British advice, to cut military expenditure and to direct funds to reconstruction were annoying the army, whilst continuing financial dislocation was alienating middle class opinion which increasingly began to lay the blame for Greece's economic troubles on the parliamentary system itself.⁷¹ There was some justice in this, since the constituent assembly had now been sitting since January 1924 but had still not devised a new constitution; and the fact that the prime minister could not secure the passing of even such vital legislation reflected both inter-factional squabbling and his own lack of authority.⁷²

These circumstances, together with continuing industrial unrest, combined to produce the perfect climate for a military *coup*.⁷³ On 10 June the resignation from the cabinet of the republican strongman Kondylis fatally weakened the premier's position; and on 24 June, in a not unexpected move, General Pangalos took control of Athens with the

⁶⁹ DBFP/1/XXVII/27-31,52-4,113,138-9,176-8,189-92,196-200,205-9. See also chapter 11 below.

⁷⁰ For this question in general, see FO 371/11357 Annual Report, Greece, 1925 pp.14-23; A.P.Alexandris, 'The Expulsion of Constantine VI: the Ecumenical Patriarchate and Greek-Turkish Relations, 1924-1925', *Balkan Studies* 22(2) 1981 333-63; Psomiades, *The Eastern Question: the Last Phase*, pp.87-105. According to the convention of 1923, Greek inhabitants of Constantinople were to be exempted from the exchange of minorities, provided that they had been resident there since before 1918. The Turks tried to argue that almost all the members of the synod of the Patriarchate did not come into this category and were therefore liable to be exchanged: in January 1925 the Patriarch himself was expelled from Turkey on this basis. For a while afterwards the situation was very tense, and in February the Greeks appealed to the League. By June, however, a compromise agreement was reached, a new Patriarch - less objectionable to the Turks - was elected and the threat to the Patriarchate receded.

⁷¹ FO 371/10768 Colonial Office to FO no.6417/25 d.2 Jul.1925; Campbell and Sherrard, *Modern Greece*, pp.133-4.

⁷² FO 371/10768 Cheetham to FO no.214 d.8 Jul.1925; MAE Grèce 60 Chambrun to QO no.56 d.8 May 1925.

⁷³ H.J.Psomiades, 'The Diplomacy of Theodoros Pangalos, 1925-1926', *Balkan Studies* 13(1) 1972 1-2.

assistance of Hadjikyriakos and the navy, on the next day compelling the government to resign.⁷⁴ So inured were the Greek people to military intervention in politics and so discredited had the politicians become that the *coup*, though 'confessedly a military *pronunciamento*' and in no sense a popular revolution, was quietly accepted throughout Greece.⁷⁵

The British mourned Michalakopoulos' passing, if only, as Cheetham argued, because his government had been in power a comparatively long time. He had acted with moderation in internal politics and had also looked likely to gain the confidence of Europe.⁷⁶ By the same token, Nicolson was concerned at 'the low moral and intellectual quality' of the men now likely to come to power: Pangalos had 'for long been a thorn in the side of civil government', Kondylis was 'ignorant, violent and unscrupulous' and Hadjikyriakos was 'a little mad'. Nicolson was especially worried that the *coup* had come at a time when Greece was menaced from abroad, since it was possible that 'these hot-heads will mobilize and place some divisions on the Vardar: this may well give M.Nincic the excuse which he has long been waiting for' to march on Salonica. Even if such foreign adventures were avoided, the British would have to try and prevent the generals embarking on extravagant spending sprees for armaments which would of themselves threaten peace and wreck the fragile Greek economy.⁷⁷

Others in the Foreign Office were less certain about Pangalos' motives or intentions. In McEwen's view, despite his high profile in recent years, his political opinions were hard to define: 'he is bitterly anti-royalist & he has overthrown a republican cabinet'. Personal rather than political ambition might be his motive and probably 'it would be nearest the truth to say that he believes in a strong gov[ernment]t first & foremost with himself as the source of its strength'.⁷⁸ In any event, there was no need for Britain to take any action. Nicolson suggested warning Pangalos that he could not claim

⁷⁴ FO 371/10768 Keeling (chargé at Athens) to FO tel.100 d.11 Jun.1925, Cheetham to FO no.195 d.22 Jun.1925, tel.107 d.25 Jun.1925, unno.tel. d.26 Jun.1925.

⁷⁵ FO 371/10768 min. by Nicolson d.25 Jun.1925; *DBFP*/1/XXVII/209.

⁷⁶ FO 371/10768 Cheetham to FO no.214 d.8 Jul.1925

⁷⁷ FO 371/10768 mins. by Nicolson d.25 and 26 Jun.1925.

⁷⁸ FO 371/10768 min. by McEwen d.26 Jun.1925.

financial liberty for Greece nor ignore her existing international obligations, but Chamberlain preferred simply to wait and see how the situation developed.⁷⁹

The French pursued a similar policy. Their influence had been growing in Greece during 1925 after the replacement in January of Marcilly. (According to Cheetham, admittedly no admirer of Marcilly, the late envoy's hectoring, high-handed manner and unsociability had apparently begun to alienate the Greeks.)⁸⁰ His successor, Comte Charles de Chambrun, who had previously served in Turkey and the United States and as head of the news department at the Quai d'Orsay, rapidly set out to win the confidence of the Greeks.⁸¹ These efforts bore fruit in the shape of a steady flow of armaments contracts for French firms. Indeed, Chambrun took it upon himself to become 'the general adviser of the Greek Government, especially in Balkan affairs', although his conduct here gave the British no real cause for complaint.⁸² His immediate reaction to the *coup* was a cautious one, given its undemocratic nature,⁸³ and this attitude was approved by Briand, who had become French foreign minister in April.

The Italians, too, had improved their position in Greece. Brambilla's overtures had always been rebuffed in 1924, as Greek public opinion was resolutely hostile to Italy. However, after the Yugoslav denunciation of the alliance and the growth of tension with Turkey, Michalakopoulos felt it prudent not to alienate Italy.⁸⁴ True, the Greeks had no illusions about the Italian policy: Rome was strongly suspected of interfering in the Greco-Yugoslav negotiations in order to prevent any understanding being

⁷⁹ FO 371/10768 mins. by Nicolson, Tyrrell and Chamberlain d.26 Jun.1925.

⁸⁰ FO 371/11346 Cheetham to FO no.148 d.6 Apr.1926; FO 371/11357 Annual Report, Greece, 1925 p.24; MAE Grèce 78 Chambrun to QO no.10 d.31 Jan.1925. In fact, Marcilly's reports indicate that he was efficient, realistic, perceptive and quite successful at protecting French interests.

⁸¹ FO 371/11346 Cheetham to FO no.148 d.6 Apr.1926; FO 371/11357 Annual Report, Greece, 1925 p.24; Comte Charles de Chambrun, *Traditions et Souvenirs* (Paris, Flammarion, 1952), pp.68-91. Chambrun later served in Italy during the crises of the 1930s, and this clearly over-shadowed his experiences in Greece when he wrote his memoirs. He devotes only five pages to them, one of which contains the text of a speech by himself!

⁸² FO 371/11357 Annual Report, Greece, 1925 pp.24,32-4,55.

⁸³ MAE Grèce 60 Chambrun to QO no.85 d.9 Jul.1925; Chambrun, *Souvenirs*, pp.92-3.

⁸⁴ FO 371/10765 Cheetham to FO no.115 d.2 Apr.1925; FO 371/10765 Annual Report, Greece, 1925 pp.24-6; *DDI/7/III/444*; *DBFP/1/XXVII/208*.

reached; and Michalakopoulos felt that Mussolini wished to prevent any *ententes* between Balkan states in general and to isolate Greece specifically as a means of inducing her to fall in with his ambitions for expansion in Asia Minor.⁸⁵ There may have been some truth in this, even though Italian policy remained somewhat ambiguous. At any rate, when the Pangalos *coup* occurred, the Italians seem to have developed hopes of advancing such plans, and Brambilla, on Mussolini's instructions, hurried to greet Greece's new rulers.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ *DBFP*/1/XXVII/91-2,196-200,205,207-9; *DDI*/7/III/535.

⁸⁶ MAE Grèce 60 Chambrun to QO no.85 d.9 Jul.1925.

Chapter Five
The Pangalos Dictatorship
June 1925 - August 1926

In the immediate aftermath of the *coup*, Pangalos was forced to tread warily, for he had no developed programme or power base within either the army or the assembly. On 27 June he formed a cabinet, with himself as premier and Hadjikyriakos as *ad interim* foreign minister, inaugurating a regime like that of Plastiras after the 1922 revolution. He did not declare an outright dictatorship, partly from a lack of confidence, but also perhaps because he was not a political ideologue, and never repudiated democracy *per se*, only the form it had taken recently in Greece. Instead, by 28 June, he was presenting his position as constitutional, claiming that after a simple cabinet crisis president Koundouriotis had asked him to form a government; and he announced his intention of meeting the assembly on 30 June to seek a majority.¹

In this delicate situation, Papanastasiou, whom Pangalos had earlier considered installing as prime minister, offered to deliver the support of the Republican Union deputies (thus securing for Pangalos a working majority) if Pangalos would abide by certain conditions. Such an arrangement would be of mutual benefit: Pangalos would be secure and would not have to resort to outright dictatorship whilst Papanastasiou would be able to exert some moderating influence over him and ensure the retention of at least the form of parliamentary democracy. After initially jibbing at any restriction of his authority, Pangalos agreed and thereby secured a crushing majority in the chamber in the early hours of the morning of 1 July.²

The collaboration between military and civilian forces was precarious, and this was reflected in the conditions to which Pangalos agreed. These terms comprised the programme of the Republican Union, aiming at a swift return to normal parliamentary life, and there were three main points: firstly, a committee of deputies was to finish drafting the constitution (which would be amended and ratified by the assembly in October) and new electoral laws; secondly, the assembly was to be converted into an

¹ FO 371/11357 Annual Report, Greece, 1925 p.3; FO 371/10768 Cheetham to FO unno.tel. d.26 Jun.1925, tel.110 d.28 Jun.1925; Psomiades *Balkan Studies* 13 2.

² FO 371/10768 Cheetham to FO tel.107 d.25 Jun.1925, unno.tel. d.26 Jun.1925, tel.112 d.30 Jun.1925, tel.113 d.1 Jul.1925.

ordinary (as opposed to constituent) assembly on 1 November, with elections to follow soon after; and thirdly, the government was authorised to issue laws by decree during the summer recess, subject to the consent of a special parliamentary commission. Although these conditions appeared to tie Pangalos' hands, he insisted on a concession on the last point whereby in certain special cases laws could be issued by decree without reference to the commission, and these special cases were so loosely drafted as to leave Pangalos in theory with almost dictatorial powers.³

Although there was no question of *de iure* recognition, Cheetham established formal relations with Pangalos' government which was clearly the *de facto* authority in Greece.⁴ The Foreign Office consensus was that Pangalos would not last long, and yet he was not without his apologists in London.⁵ Kaklamanos voiced the opinion of many Greeks when he told Nicolson on 2 July that he was 'much relieved' by recent developments. The deputies in the constituent assembly had become totally irresponsible, prolonging their endless discussions in order to draw indefinitely the large salary attached to their functions; but Pangalos had forced them to vote their own demise in the near future with elections to follow and a good chance of the constitution being implemented in the meantime. Greek politics had been 'becoming a vicious circle, - and to that extent the change was for the good'. The civilian finance minister, Kofinas, could be relied upon to block any extravagant expenditure, and the appointment on 2 July of Konstantinos Rentis as foreign minister in succession to Hadjikyriakos meant that even the admittedly grave danger of foreign complications had now receded.⁶

For the rest of the summer, Pangalos sought to widen the base of his support and elaborate his policy. As the majority of Venizelists were hostile to him he began to

³ FO 371/10768 Cheetham to FO no.214 d.8 Jul.1925; MAE Grèce 60 Chambrun to QO no.85 d.9 Jul.1925.

⁴ FO 371/10768 min. by Nicolson d.26 Jun.1925. In this respect it was all to the good that Cheetham had not yet presented new credentials, since the previous policy of waiting for a constitution and the election of a president could be consistently maintained.

⁵ For a sceptical view see FO 371/10768 mins. by McEwen d.26 and 29 Jun.1925.

⁶ FO 371/10768 min. by Nicolson d.2 Jul.1925, FO to Cheetham no.402 d.3 Jul.1925.

conciliate the royalists by appointing Anti-Venizelists to key government positions and attacking the liberal press, perhaps in an effort to secure his own safety in the event of a future royalist return to power.⁷ The royalists were wary, however, and Pangalos seemed to be leaving several alternative courses of action open, including the proclamation of a dictatorship.⁸ Certainly, little could be gleaned about his future intentions from his policy pronouncements which consisted chiefly of harangues against the iniquities of the old parties and vague (and mutually exclusive) promises to restore financial soundness and to build up the army and navy.⁹ By September the government was obviously in difficulties and the widespread belief was that Pangalos would soon be removed and replaced by Kondylis whose popularity in the army was rising; if he failed to summon the assembly in October he would be ousted by a *coup* and if he did face the chamber he would be voted out and supplanted by Kondylis by constitutional means.¹⁰

At first Pangalos seemed by no means unwilling to face the assembly. By mid-September the committee drafting the constitution had completed its labours and Pangalos said he would submit it to the chamber for ratification, with elections to follow according to Papanastasiou's July timetable.¹¹ However, in the space of a fortnight Pangalos made a complete *volte face*. On the night of 29 September at a special ministerial council Koundouriotis was prevailed upon to sign the constitution, which had been amended by Pangalos, and it was published and entered into force immediately. A decree law was also issued dissolving the constituent assembly forthwith, new elections being scheduled for March 1926.¹² The effect of these actions, which came as a 'complete surprise', was that the government would rule by

⁷ FO 371/10769 Cheetham to FO no.226 d.18 Jul.1925.

⁸ FO 371/10769 Keeling (chargé at Athens) to FO no.260 d.20 Aug.1925.

⁹ FO 371/10769 Keeling to FO no.265 d.28 Aug.1925.

¹⁰ FO 371/10769 Keeling to FO no.289 d.11 Sept.1925; FO 371/11357 Annual Report, Greece, 1925 p.4.

¹¹ FO 371/10769 Keeling to FO no.293 d.15 Sept.1925.

¹² FO 371/10769 Keeling to FO tels.150-1 d.30 Sept.1925. Pangalos suppressed various articles he disliked which had been inserted by Papanastasiou relating to proportional representation, the enfranchisement of women and the organisation of the senate (MAE Grèce 60 Chambrun to QO no.115 d.25 Sept.1925, tel.130 d.29 Sept.1925).

decree without an assembly for at least six months.¹³ Pangalos justified himself by arguing that the assembly had lost all prestige in the eyes of the people and that since it represented only a fraction of the population (owing to royalist abstention from the 1923 elections) it was an impediment to that reconciliation of the parties which was the cornerstone of the government's policy.¹⁴

Public opinion was deeply divided in its response. The Anti-Venizelists were jubilant, viewing the decrees as another olive branch, like Pangalos' recent agreement in principle to the return of Constantine's ashes to Greece; whereas the republicans were furious at his tampering with the constitution which they had always regarded as 'their own pet lamb'. Moderate Venizelists declared Pangalos' action to be a virtual *coup d'état*, and were little mollified when he promised that the amended constitution would eventually be submitted to the new assembly for revision and ratification.¹⁵ The general had at last flexed his dictatorial muscles, but his position remained obscure. Although he seemed intent on alienating the republican Venizelists - witness his continuing persecution of the liberal and republican press by means of the authoritarian Defence of the Regime Act - he was unwilling or unable to throw in his lot with the royalists. Rather his declared policy was to dissolve the old party system and to create a new mass party drawn from both sides of the schism.¹⁶ In the meantime, however, he remained completely dependent on his supporters in the army and there were signs that, despite his recent show of strength, his flirtation with the royalists was generating disillusion amongst them.¹⁷

¹³ FO 371/10769 Keeling to FO tels.150-1 d.30 Sept.1925.

¹⁴ FO 371/10769 Keeling to FO no.307 d.1 Oct.1925.

¹⁵ FO 371/10769 Keeling to FO no.265 d.28 Aug.1925, tel.151 d.30 Sept.1925, no.307 d.1 Oct.1925 [quoted].

¹⁶ FO 371/10769 Keeling to FO no.307 d.1 Oct.1925, no.322 d.16 Oct.1925; Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic*, p.33. This act had been introduced in April 1924 and was intended to suppress any subversive agitation and prevent the revival of past political passions (Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic*, p.98). Pangalos had amended and strengthened the act after coming to power (FO 371/11334 Cheetham to FO no.36 d.27 Jan.1926). As amended it was 'a monstrous piece of work' which 'if enforced would have soon brought nearly the entire population of Greece into prison' (FO 371/11334 min. by Greenway d.10 Feb. 1926).

¹⁷ FO 371/11357 Annual Report, Greece, 1925 p.4; FO 371/10769 Keeling to FO no.307 d.1 Oct.1925; MAE Grèce 60 Duchesne (consul at Salonica) to QO no.35 d.7 Sept.1925.

In the Foreign Office the events of 29 September provoked a good deal of comment. The Greek assembly was the only body empowered to ratify the constitution and now it had been dissolved; Koundouriotis who was only *ad interim* president pending elections on the basis of the new constitution could hardly sign and proclaim that constitution himself. According to Nicolson the whole situation was 'highly unsatisfactory': 'what can be the point of a constitution which is unconstitutional passes my comprehension'. The consensus was that Pangalos would be overthrown by a military *coup*, either in the near future or after 'a long spell of unlimited power ... à la Mussolini'. There was certainly no question of Cheetham being issued with credentials addressed to an authority constituted in such a purely arbitrary and illegal way.¹⁸ In a memorandum of 24 October reviewing the Greek political scene, Harvey drew attention to Pangalos' aspirations to imitate the Italian Duce, but concluded that 'there is nothing to lead us to believe that General Pangalos is a man of the calibre of Signor Mussolini'.¹⁹

French and Italian reactions were, by contrast, far less reserved. As far as Italy was concerned, the *rapprochement* which Mussolini had begun to contemplate earlier in the year intensified once the like-minded strongman Pangalos took charge in Greece.²⁰ For the Greeks, now menaced by their northern neighbours, Italy might after all prove a source of support, whereas for Mussolini the exercise of influence over Greece was part and parcel of his new active Balkan policy.²¹ In Albania particularly, Mussolini was seeking to maximise Italian influence and exclude that of Britain, and he was also intent on wooing Yugoslavia.²² Indeed, Italian representatives began to assert that as Britain was preoccupied with the Far East and France with Morocco it was natural for Italy to play a leading rôle in the Balkans.²³ The overall thrust of Mussolini's policy was difficult for contemporaries to assess; the

¹⁸ FO 371/10769 mins. by Harvey [quoted] and Howard Smith d.1 Oct.1925, Nicolson n[o]d[ate].

¹⁹ FO 371/10769 memorandum by Harvey d.24 Oct.1925.

²⁰ FO 371/10765 Cheetham to FO no.376 d.24 Nov.1925; Cassels, *Early Diplomacy*, p.306.

²¹ MAE Grèce 60 Duchesne to QO no.35 d.7 Sept.1925.

²² Italian activities in Albania are amply documented in *DBFP/1/XXVI-XXVII/chapters 1 and DDI/7/III-IV passim*. See also Cassels, *Early Diplomacy*, pp.241-8.

²³ *DBFP/1/XXVII/215*, cf. *DDI/7/IV/59*.

only consistency lay in the search for advantage and Mussolini tended always to speak in several senses and leave various courses of action open.²⁴ There was, consequently, a great proliferation of rumours about Italian intentions, and these were sometimes a cause of concern both to the British, who were alive to any threat to peace and stability in south eastern Europe, and to the French, who had their own position to maintain in central Europe and the Balkans.²⁵

Signs of a Greco-Italian *rapprochement* were not, in fact, far to seek. Soon after Pangalos' accession to power, Dino Grandi, the recently appointed under-secretary of state for foreign affairs, visited Athens and spoke of the common interests of Italy and Greece in the eastern Mediterranean.²⁶ The Italians were subsequently awarded several important contracts, including one for 100,000 rifles and another to run an air service between Rome, Athens and Constantinople. Pangalos meanwhile made strenuous efforts to suppress any anti-Italian sentiment in the Greek press, and the Italian press responded in kind with sympathetic articles.²⁷

These developments all seemed to be coming to a head late in September when rumours spread that a substantial Greco-Italian agreement, perhaps directed against Turkey, was in the offing.²⁸ As it had long been apparent that the Italians saw Asia Minor as a possible outlet for their surplus population,²⁹ these rumours worried the British. Indeed, Chamberlain was moved to warn the Greeks that if anything more than a settlement of outstanding differences was contemplated - for instance if the

²⁴ For a discussion of this tactic of Mussolini's, see D.Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire* (London, Longman, 1976), pp.3-5,21.

²⁵ The French were especially concerned about Italian policy as their own relations with Italy were deteriorating (Shorrocks, *Ally to Enemy*, pp.46-9,52-4 and Cassels, *Early Diplomacy*, pp.353-76). The efforts of Britain and especially France to deal with Italian policy are discussed in more detail in chapter 12 below.

²⁶ *DBFP/1/XXVII/212-3*.

²⁷ FO 371/10765 Keeling to FO no.259 d.15 Aug.1925, Cheetham to FO no.321 d.16 Oct.1925, no.376 d.24 Nov.1925; FO 371/11357 Annual Report, Greece, 1925 pp.25-6. For the rifles contract, see also *DDI/7/III/365-6* and *IV/78-9*.

²⁸ FO 371/10765 Keeling to FO tel.148 d.24 Sept.1925; *DBFP/1/XXVII/247*; *DDI/7/IV/93*.

²⁹ *DBFP/1a/I/700-2*. Graham here writes of Italian over-population: 'I have harped on this subject ... ever since I came here ... but it does seem to me the crux of the situation'. For a discussion of this issue in general, and the connection between emigration and fascist foreign policy, see P.V.Cannistraro and G.Rosoli, 'Fascist Emigration Policies in the 1920s: an Interpretative Framework', *International Migration Review* 13(4) 1979 673-92.

agreement was to be directed against a third party or to involve the assignment of zones of influence in Anatolia - then Britain could not remain indifferent.³⁰

Chamberlain's warning was perhaps prudent given Pangalos' well known detestation of the treaty of Lausanne, but in the event the negotiations did not come to much, largely because of the continuing obstacle of the Dodecanese question. The Italians considered this resolved, and probably ultimately intended to use the islands as a base for immigration into Anatolia, but the Greeks still had hopes of acquiring some of them - thus an Italian decision in October to oblige Dodecanesians to become Italian subjects inflamed Greek public opinion.³¹ The general Foreign Office view was that 'Britain should walk very warily over this' since the islands, whatever Britain's interest in them, were *de iure* Italian possessions by virtue of Lausanne.³² On the wider issue of possible Italian aggression against Turkey, Chamberlain now concluded, like Graham, British ambassador in Rome, that it could be discounted as an immediate danger.³³ This was also in line with Chamberlain's general policy towards Mussolini, of seeking to work with him in a fairly close *entente* which would help restrain his more aggressive tendencies.³⁴

French activity in Greece caused Britain less concern. Chambrun was trying to exercise his influence on Pangalos, who was known to be a francophile, to keep him within constitutional bounds. This was partly an attempt in Greece's interests (and in accord with French economic interests too) to promote a stable, legal government in Athens and partly an attempt to prevent Pangalos falling too much under Mussolini's sway. In June at the time of the *coup* Chambrun worked closely with Koundouriotis

³⁰ DBFP/1/XXVII/247.

³¹ FO 371/10765 min. by Nicolson d.26 Sept.1925, Cheetham to FO no.321 d.16 Oct.1925, no.333 d.27 Oct.1925, min. by Harvey d.27 Oct.1925 ('A rapprochement will always break down on this Dodecanese question'), Cecil to Tyrrell p.l. d.4 Nov.1925 and encls.; FO371/11357 Annual Report, Greece, 1925 pp.25-6.

³² FO 371/10765 mins. by Harvey d.9 Nov.1925, Howard Smith d.10 Nov.1925 [quoted], Lampson d.10 Nov.1925.

³³ DBFP/1a/1/292-4; Cassels, *Early Diplomacy*, p.307.

³⁴ Cassels, *Early Diplomacy*, pp.310-5. On this point see also two articles by P.G.Edwards, 'Britain, Mussolini and the "Locarno-Geneva System"', *European Studies Review* 10(1) 1980 1-16 and 'The Austen Chamberlain - Mussolini Meetings', *Historical Journal* 14(1) 1971 153-61.

to ensure that Pangalos took power in accordance with legal forms, in order 'to prevent the accession of another Mediterranean dictator who would not fail to fall under the influence of Rome and launch Greece into an adventure'.³⁵

The French also used their influence to try and settle the Greeks' major foreign policy problem, that of relations with Yugoslavia. The suspended negotiations with Belgrade for the renewal of the alliance involved a whole complex of questions regarding the economic and political relations between the two states. One of the most important was that of the inefficient running by the Greeks of the railway line between Salonica and the Yugoslav frontier, a deficiency which was allegedly having a grievous effect on Yugoslav trade. In July the French tried to break the deadlock in the negotiations by suggesting the formation of an international company with French participation to administer the line. Such an arrangement could be expected to benefit French economic interests and increase French influence over both states, as well as constituting 'a powerful tie between [the two] and a new guarantee of Balkan peace'.³⁶

This French initiative is at least partly explained by the growing fear in Paris that the Italians were seeking to usurp France's influence in the Balkans and over the Little *Entente*. Certainly this was how the French initiative was seen in Rome: the Italians worked to frustrate any French-brokered settlement of the Greco-Yugoslav dispute; Mussolini wanted to keep both states friendly towards Italy but mutually hostile, and to prevent any Balkan pacts or agreements being negotiated except under Italian auspices.³⁷ In the event there was no solution to this particular dispute by the end of the year, partly because of Italian intrigue but also because of the intractability of both Athens and Belgrade.

This increase in French and Italian activity at Athens perhaps reflects the fact that Greek internal politics and foreign policy were becoming increasingly intertwined.

³⁵ MAE Grèce 60 Chambrun to QO no.85 d.9 Jul.1925, no.119 d.1 Oct.1925.

³⁶ MAE Yougoslavie 52 QO to Grenard (Belgrade) tels.134-8 d.11 Jun.1925. French activity in this question is discussed in chapter 12 below.

³⁷ DDI/7/IV/45,59,79-80,91-4,101-2,105,109.

This was further demonstrated in October when Pangalos embarked on precisely the sort of reckless foreign adventure which London had anticipated. The crisis began on 19 October when the pacifically inclined foreign minister Rentis resigned owing to disagreements with Pangalos on internal policy. Consequently, when news reached Athens soon afterwards of a clash between Greek and Bulgarian frontier guards at the border post of Demir-Kapu, there was no experienced diplomat at the head of the foreign ministry to give counsels of moderation to Pangalos - indeed quite the opposite was the case as Hadjikyriakos had replaced Rentis. Greco-Bulgarian relations had been deteriorating sharply over the last two years, and Pangalos was convinced that the incident presaged a full-scale Bulgarian invasion. Therefore, on 21 October, he sent an ultimatum to Sofia and the next day ordered his troops into Bulgaria where they occupied a zone several kilometres in depth.³⁸

This action caused an international crisis, but one which was swiftly resolved, and which provided the League of Nations with its greatest success of the decade. There were two main reasons for this: firstly, the Bulgarians behaved absolutely correctly and refused to be provoked, which allowed the powers to apportion blame very easily; secondly, no vital great power interests were at stake, and in the euphoric post-Locarno atmosphere all states felt that they had an interest in checking this naked aggression. As these special conditions applied - in contrast to the Corfu incident - the machinery of the League was able to work effectively. At first Pangalos was recalcitrant: having committed his troops he felt his prestige to be at stake, which was especially important as public opinion was extremely excited and municipal elections were scheduled for 24 October. However, it was obvious that Greece could not resist the united will of the powers for long, especially in the face of threatened sanctions, and on 28 October Athens informed the League Council that Greek troops were being withdrawn.

³⁸ Unless otherwise indicated, this section is based on the comprehensive and solid work by J.Barros *The League of Nations and the Great Powers. The Greek Bulgarian Incident, 1925* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1970) and FO 371/11357 Annual Report, Greece, 1925 pp.11-14.

In November, a League commission of inquiry, headed by Sir Horace Rumbold, British ambassador in Madrid, visited Greece and Bulgaria to report on the incident and to recommend a punishment. To the chagrin of the Greeks Rumbold finally decided on an indemnity of £45,000. Furious Greek lobbying to have this sum reduced was in vain, for the powers frowned upon such quibbles and suspected that Pangalos was merely afraid that the publication of an unfavourable commission report would lead to his own downfall. Although the powers consented to certain minor textual modifications in the report to protect Greek *amour propre*, the Greek delegates at the League still feared that their public opinion would find it unpalatable. However, they could do no more, and at a Council meeting on 14 December the final report was adopted by the League.³⁹

In fact, the Greco-Bulgarian incident did nothing to weaken Pangalos' hold on power.⁴⁰ On the contrary, his hard line attitude towards 'the hereditary foe' won almost universal praise, and this popular feeling was also reflected in the municipal election results. Furthermore, he dealt decisively with Plastiras, his old rival and guiding light of the 1922 revolution, who had recently returned to Greece to plot against him, by deporting him to Italy on 25 October.⁴¹ By now Pangalos' rule was a quasi-dictatorship, since he and Hadjikyriakos between them controlled all the key ministries. Even the threat from Kondylis - who was rumoured to be plotting a *coup* - was removed when he was put under such close surveillance that he had to abandon his intrigues.⁴²

Pangalos' attempts to promote reconciliation also continued. On 23 November a conference attended by most of the party leaders saw the beginning of negotiations to help heal the schism, which had some success when the royalist leaders promised not to make an issue of the regime at the forthcoming elections nor for three years

³⁹ For Rumbold's rôle see also M. Gilbert *Sir Horace Rumbold. Portrait of a Diplomat, 1869-1941* (London, Heinemann, 1973), pp.306-10.

⁴⁰ FO 371/10701 Rumbold (Geneva) to Chamberlain unno.1. d.1 Dec.1925.

⁴¹ FO 371/10769 Cheetham to FO no.334 d.28 Oct.1925.

⁴² FO 371/10769 Cheetham to FO no.338 d.30 Oct.1925, tel.183 d.4 Nov.1925, no.357 d.12 Nov.1925.

thereafter. This seemed to bode well for a return to more normal conditions, as did Pangalos' announcement that elections for the senate (the upper house envisaged by the new constitution) would be held on 10 January.⁴³ Furthermore, on 4 December he restored relative freedom of speech to his opponents by suspending the draconian Defence of the Regime Act. This slackening of Pangalos' authoritarianism gave a further impetus to reconciliation when the political parties began to negotiate to create a common front to contest the elections in opposition to Pangalos' candidates.⁴⁴

Any hopes of an imminent return to parliamentary government were soon dashed, however, for Pangalos showed himself temperamentally unsuited to tolerating freedom of speech. The publication of the Rumbold commission report, though not provoking the *coup* that was expected, did unleash a chorus of disapproval at the government's handling of foreign policy, a chorus that was swelled by complaints about the elections and the ever deteriorating economic situation. All this proved too much for Pangalos who on 30 December banned the press from reporting any statements by the Venizelist or republican leaders. This seemed to indicate two things: that Pangalos was aligning himself ever more closely with the royalists (who had also attacked him in the press but who were excluded from the banning order) and that he could not really live with any real measure of democracy.⁴⁵

The inconsistency of Pangalos' behaviour made it difficult for British representatives to form an opinion of him. At the end of the year Cheetham pointed out how, contrary to all expectation, Pangalos had survived numerous crises and now looked relatively secure. Nevertheless most competent observers were still quite at a loss to understand what his real objective was: most of his policy seemed to be dictated by mere impulsiveness and a desire to conciliate the royalists to ensure his own personal

⁴³ FO 371/10769 Cheetham to FO no.375 d.24 Nov.1925, no.386 d.2 Dec.1925, but cf. Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic*, p.33 on the leaders' promises.

⁴⁴ FO 371/10769 Cheetham to FO no.397 d.10 Dec.1925.

⁴⁵ FO 371/10769 Cheetham to FO tel.216 d.9 Dec.1925, no.397 d.10 Dec.1925, min. by Harvey d.10 Dec.1925, Cheetham to FO tel.234 d.30 Dec.1925; MAE Grèce 60 Chambrun to QO no.140 d.22 Dec.1925.

safety.⁴⁶ In London, opinions about Pangalos, in so far as there were any, were beginning to soften. Although the recent Greco-Bulgarian incident had shown him to be a 'dangerous petty-Mussolini', the prospect of his being toppled by a new military *coup* was not viewed with any relish. Any successor was unlikely to be better, and a further military *pronunciamento* would only render a return to normal government 'more difficult and remote'.⁴⁷ Foreign Office reaction to the fall of Michalakopoulos had shown the value it placed on the longevity of Greek administrations, and as Pangalos continued to weather various storms London began to see him as the least bad option for Greece.

The early months of 1926 were a critical period for Pangalos. On 5 January, sensing that opinion might be turning against him, he declared himself dictator, concentrating all constituent and legislative power in his own hands, and postponed the senatorial elections indefinitely. His justification was that the reactionary and subversive tendencies of the Venizelist and republican politicians were making government impossible, and he promised to pursue his original programme of consolidating the republic and re-establishing normal parliamentary life as soon as possible.⁴⁸ His action precipitated the resignations of the minister of marine, Hadjikyriakos, and of the minister of national economy. The former had disagreed with Pangalos' methods of rule for some time, and also had no desire to become 'a mere tool of his more ambitious colleague'; and although he said that he would continue to support Pangalos, his resignation undoubtedly weakened the dictator's position.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, as dictator, Pangalos ruled with a 'fine, arbitrary zeal', and struggled to cope with the complex problems bedevilling the Greek economy.⁵⁰ In November

⁴⁶ FO 371/11334 Cheetham to FO no.423 d.28 Dec.1925.

⁴⁷ FO 371/10769 min. by Harvey d.5 Nov.1925, cf. mins by Harvey d.10 Dec.1925, Howard Smith d.10 Dec.1925.

⁴⁸ FO 371/11334 Cheetham to FO tel.3 d.5 Jan.1926; MAE Grèce 60 Blondel (chargé) to QO tel.4 d.6 Jan.1926, no.4 d.7 Jan.1926, Chambrun to QO no.45 d.14 Apr.1926. Blondel wrote that no-one in Greece was relishing the prospect of elections since Pangalos' policy of *rapprochement* with the royalists had made their outcome extremely uncertain.

⁴⁹ FO 371/11334 Cheetham to FO no.7 d.7 Jan.1926.

⁵⁰ Campbell and Sherrard, *Modern Greece*, p.134.

1925 he had sought to counter bureaucratic corruption by hanging several civil servants for embezzlement - in contravention of the constitution and with very limited success.⁵¹ Again, in January 1926, in an attempt to shore up the drachma and reduce the budget deficit, he introduced a forced loan, by means of cutting all large denomination bank-notes in two, but again this had only a temporary effect.⁵² In the long term, Pangalos' inability to solve these chronic problems was a serious threat to his position. The passive acquiescence of the people in the dictatorship was conditional upon his appearing to rule efficiently and in line with Greece's interests; when these problems persisted opinion began to blame them on the high-handedness of the dictator rather than as previously on the excesses of the politicians.⁵³

In the meantime, Pangalos set about attacking the opposition with renewed vigour. In the middle of February rumours of a *coup* began to circulate and he seized the opportunity to arrest Kondylis (who was in fact intriguing), and Papanastasiou and Kafandaris (who were totally innocent).⁵⁴ On 17 February he announced that they would all be deported, not because there was any evidence of their complicity in the rumoured *coup* but 'merely to put an end to disquieting rumours'; as if that was not enough he then had them transported to Santorin, an active volcanic island.⁵⁵ Later it transpired that Pangalos had no intention of putting the accused on trial, but had simply wanted them out of the way for a while.⁵⁶ The net effect was to alienate the politicians further from the dictatorship.

For the moment, Pangalos did not tighten the authoritarian screw any further, probably because he did not feel secure enough to be totally ruthless. Early in March president Koundouriotis talked of resigning in protest at Pangalos' arbitrary and inept

⁵¹ FO 371/10769 Cheetham to FO no.375 d.24 Nov.1925, no.386 d.2 Dec.1925.

⁵² T.Veremis, 'The Greek State and Economy during the Pangalos Regime, 1925-1926', *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 7(2) 1980 45-6. For this unusual expedient, see also A.F.Freris, *The Greek Economy in the Twentieth Century* (London, Croom Helm, 1986), pp.58-61.

⁵³ FO 371/11334 Cheetham to FO no.63 d.11 Feb.1926; FO 371/12178 Annual Report, Greece, 1926 p.2; MAE Grèce 60 Blondel to QO no.31 d.20 Feb.1926: the apathy of the public was 'astonishing'.

⁵⁴ MAE Grèce 60 Blondel to QO tel.27 d.19 Feb.1926, no.31 d.20 Feb.1926.

⁵⁵ FO 371/11334 Cheetham to FO tel.38 d.18 Feb.1926, no.76 d.18 Feb.1926.

⁵⁶ FO 371/11334 Cheetham to FO no.82 d.24 Feb.1926.

government, voicing a concern which was apparently widespread throughout the armed forces. Pangalos responded by reconstructing his cabinet and announcing on 11 March his plan to return Greece to normal political life: there were to be presidential elections in the near future, followed by the revision of the constitution by a committee of experts and elections for both chambers of the assembly in October. This looked like a great step towards democracy, but the nature of Pangalos' tactical manoeuvring became clear when he announced that he would himself stand in the presidential election and that afterwards the constitution would be amended to increase presidential power at the expense of the assembly.⁵⁷ Clearly Pangalos intended to use the elections to bring some semblance of legitimacy to his personal rule.⁵⁸

In the Foreign Office the declaration of a dictatorship by Pangalos was seen as a confession of weakness.⁵⁹ His dictatorial methods also came in for some criticism. According to Harvey, the arrest and deportation of the opposition leaders was 'a pretty stiff proceeding' and showed that Pangalos must either be very nervous indeed about his position or 'even a more petty tyrant than we supposed'.⁶⁰ Howard Smith, however, put matters in perspective, arguing that the logic of dictatorship was not to permit opposition of any kind, and that in any case this seemed 'no worse than M.Mussolini's action against the "Aventine" and less brutal'.⁶¹

The advent of dictatorship in Greece was never likely of itself to have much impact on British policy there, if the example of Italy was anything to go by. In Foreign Office eyes, the unstable and immature nature of parliamentary democracy in both states was such that governments there must either be dictatorships or ineffectual, and the former might well prove more stable. Similarly, Chamberlain maintained a close

⁵⁷ FO 371/11334 Cheetham to FO tel.47 d.1 Mar.1926, no.103 d.10 Mar.1926, no.104 d.10 Mar.1926, Crow (consul at Salonica) to FO unno.tel. d.25 Mar.1926. The intention was apparently to create a system approximating to that of the United States.

⁵⁸ MAE Grèce 60 Blondel to QO tel.46 d.19 Mar.1926.

⁵⁹ FO 371/11334 mins. by Harvey d.4,5,6 and 12 Jan.1926.

⁶⁰ FO 371/11334 mins. by Harvey d.19 Feb.1926, 2 Mar.1926.

⁶¹ FO 371/11334 min. by Howard Smith d.2 Mar.1926.

and cordial relationship with Mussolini despite the latter's savage oppression of his opposition, claiming that Italy's internal affairs were none of his concern and that Mussolini 'is the Government and it is my business to get on with him'.⁶²

Pangalos' announcement in March of a timetable for returning the country to normal parliamentary life was welcomed in the Foreign Office. Greenway was perhaps the most sanguine: 'it really looks as though there were a chance of Greece settling down to "normal" political life - "normal" in the Western & not in the Greek sense'.

Although Harvey felt compelled to moderate this exuberance - "'normal" rather in the Italian sense' - he too felt that prospects were improving.⁶³ Although it was still impossible to say for sure how long Pangalos would last, it seemed at least possible that he would continue to prevail over whatever opposition arose.⁶⁴

Suspicious that Pangalos intended to manipulate the presidential elections were soon confirmed. The law issued on 18 March formulating the electoral regulations created a voting system susceptible to army intimidation and laid down conditions, such as an age limit, which automatically excluded most of his likely opponents from the contest.⁶⁵ Koundouriotis, who had meanwhile decided to remain in office until his successor was elected, resigned immediately in protest, and the political parties began negotiations to select a joint candidate to stand against Pangalos on the issue of constitutional government.⁶⁶

Even at such a critical point, the politicians found it difficult to overcome their differences and the candidate they eventually nominated, Konstantinos Demertzis, a

⁶² The issue of Foreign Office attitudes towards fascism in Italy is discussed by P.G.Edwards in 'The Foreign Office and Fascism 1924-1929', *Journal of Contemporary History* 5(2) 1970 153-61. Many of the assumptions about Mussolini held by Foreign Office officials which Edwards highlights were equally held about Pangalos. For Chamberlain's views on Mussolini quoted here see *DBFP/1a/II/925*, and also Mack Smith, *Roman Empire*, p.14.

⁶³ FO 371/11334 mins. by Greenway d.23 Mar.1926, Harvey d.24 Mar.1926.

⁶⁴ FO 371/11334 mins. by Greenway d.23 Mar.1926, Harvey and Howard Smith d.26 Mar.1926.

⁶⁵ FO 371/11335 Cheetham to FO no.121 d.23 Mar.1926.

⁶⁶ FO 371/11335 Cheetham to FO no.125 d.23 Mar.1926; Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic*, pp.33-4.

moderate Anti-Venizelist, was a relative nonentity.⁶⁷ Moreover, when nominations closed on 31 March with only Pangalos and Demertzis as candidates, the former did everything possible to hamper his opponent, for instance by prohibiting publication of his election address.⁶⁸ The last straw for the political coalition came when Pangalos postponed the elections in half of Greece until 11 April, so that only his strongholds would vote on the original date of 4 April (clearly hoping that the early results would influence the later ones). Since the prospects of a fair result were remote, Demertzis withdrew from the contest on 3 April and, although for the sake of appearances Pangalos tried several times to secure their participation, the coalition thereafter took no part in the elections.⁶⁹

The outcome was now a foregone conclusion, a fact confirmed by Pangalos on 6 April when, pre-empting the election results, he assumed the presidential powers and amended the constitution by decree to strengthen them.⁷⁰ An attempted *coup* at Salonica on 9 April failed to ruffle the dictator's feathers and the final election results revealed that Pangalos had gained ninety-three per cent of the votes cast.⁷¹ On 18 April he took the presidential oath announcing that this 'marked the return of Greece into normal paths', and that he intended immediately to promulgate the new constitution which had been approved by the people at the election and to remain also as premier for the time being. As a magnanimous gesture he pardoned the politicians still incarcerated on Santorin, and commuted to life imprisonment the death sentences which had been passed on the ringleaders of the recent *coup*.⁷² Pangalos had at last secured some electoral basis for his rule, but the best that could be said for the recent election was that it was 'probably not entirely falsified'.⁷³

⁶⁷ FO 371/12178 Annual Report, Greece, 1926 p.4; MAE Grèce 60 Chambrun to QO no.45 d.14 Apr.1926.

⁶⁸ FO 371/11335 Cheetham to FO tel.77 d.2 Apr.1926.

⁶⁹ FO 371/11335 Cheetham to FO tel.79 d.3 Apr.1926, tel.80 d.5 Apr.1926, no.152 d.9 Apr.1926.

⁷⁰ FO 371/11335 Cheetham to FO tel.81 d.8 Apr.1926, no.151 d.9 Apr.1926.

⁷¹ FO 371/11335 Crow to FO no.17 d.10 Apr.1926, Cheetham to FO no.159 d.15 Apr.1926; Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic*, p.33.

⁷² FO 371/11335 Cheetham to FO no.159 d.15 Apr.1926, no.164 d.19 Apr.1926.

⁷³ Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic*, p.33.

The Foreign Office view of Pangalos' machinations reflected the more charitable attitude towards him which London was adopting. From Athens Cheetham reported events with a very critical eye, and consistently declared that Pangalos would never win a fair election.⁷⁴ In London, however, opinions were different, and Pangalos was coming to be seen as an element of stability rather than disorder. Greenway believed the election results accurately reflected Greek public opinion and that despite Pangalos' uneasy character he was 'a great influence in the country - and an influence for good at least so long as he is not seriously thwarted'. Howard Smith similarly argued that whether the Greeks did or did not approve of Pangalos they were certainly 'sick and tired of the politicians of all parties'.⁷⁵ Although their superior Lampson dissented and said that Pangalos was unlikely to last much longer, there was a grass roots view in the Foreign Office that the Greeks would give Pangalos a fair chance in office.⁷⁶

This attitude was illustrated by the resolution of two questions raised by Pangalos' election, namely that of official recognition and that of Cheetham's credentials. Since his arrival in Greece in March 1924 Cheetham had been accredited to Koundouriotis as regent, and after the April plebiscite it had been decided to wait for the election of a president and the passing of the republican constitution before issuing new letters of credence. Now, Kaklamanos urged the Foreign Office to issue these fresh credentials so as to regularise Anglo-Greek relations, arguing that by their recent votes the Greek people had both elected Pangalos and approved the constitution as amended by him.⁷⁷ The Foreign Office was not in the least convinced that Pangalos' position was constitutionally correct, but decided to consider the question from a wider political standpoint. Since he was the *de facto* authority in Greece and seemed likely to remain so it was sensible to consolidate British influence there by recognising him as president 'on grounds of political expediency and in the general interests of our

⁷⁴ FO 371/11335 Cheetham to FO no.129 d.26 Mar.1926, tel.72 d.30 Mar.1926.

⁷⁵ FO 371/11335 mins. by Greenway d.13 Apr.1926, Howard Smith d.13 Apr.1926.

⁷⁶ FO 371/11335 min. by Lampson d.22 Apr.1926.

⁷⁷ FO 371/11335 note by Howard Smith d.22 Apr.1926.

diplomacy'.⁷⁸ Accordingly, Cheetham was asked for his opinion on Kaklamanos' appeal and as to whether consultation with France and Italy was necessary before recognition.⁷⁹

In the meantime, the question of recognition was raised 'in a most acute form' at the end of May when Pangalos wrote to George V announcing his assumption of the presidency.⁸⁰ The formal acknowledgement customary in these circumstances would amount to official recognition of Pangalos as president, but it was eventually decided that one should be sent: the decision to recognise had been taken in principle and any other course of action would be illogical and damaging to British prestige in Greece.⁸¹ The way was cleared for this when Cheetham's reply was received. It revealed that only he was in an anomalous position since all his colleagues had presented credentials after March 1924 and were therefore accredited to Koundouriotis as provisional president and not as regent. This obviated the need for consultations with France and Italy, and Cheetham's recommendation gave the final impetus for recognition.⁸² In early July George V replied to Pangalos and Britain recognised him as president of the Hellenic Republic.⁸³

As regards credentials, the Foreign Office at first decided not to send fresh ones to Cheetham, who was to be replaced in a few months, but rather to accredit his successor to Pangalos. This would have the advantage of giving London a few more months 'to make sure that Pangalos is a permanency'.⁸⁴ Cheetham, however, pointed out that this course dodged the issue of to whom his letters of recall should be addressed.⁸⁵ As recognition had already been conceded in principle and since Britain

⁷⁸ There was a long discussion in the Foreign Office on this question: FO 371/11335 mins by Greenway d.26 Apr.1926, Howard Smith d.28 Apr.1926, Adam d.8 May 1926, Howard Smith d.13 May 1926, Sargent d.14 May 1926, Lampson d.14 May 1926, Tyrrell d.15 May 1926, Chamberlain d.17 May 1926. The quoted phrase is taken from FO 372/2282 min. by Harvey d.8 Jun.

⁷⁹ FO 371/11335 FO to Cheetham no.363 d.20 May 1926.

⁸⁰ FO 372/2282 Kaklamanos to FO no.1286/SI(2)/26 d.28 May 1926, min. by Harvey d.8 Jun. 1926.

⁸¹ FO 372/2282 mins. by Light d.5 Jun. 1926, Harvey and Lampson d.8 Jun.1926, Tyrrell d.9 Jun.1926.

⁸² FO 372/2282 Cheetham to FO tel.130 d.12 Jun.1926.

⁸³ FO 372/2282 min. by Chisholm d.14 Jun.1926, FO to Cheetham no.474 d.7 Jul.1926.

⁸⁴ FO 372/2282 min. by Lampson d.15 Jun.1926, FO to Cheetham no.436 d.18 Jun.1926.

⁸⁵ FO 371/11335 Cheetham to FO no.243 d.16 Jun.1926.

had no wish to slight Pangalos ('indeed we are anxious to bring him a little more into our orbit') Chamberlain decided in July to send Cheetham fresh credentials addressed to Pangalos.⁸⁶ This was in line with the previous pragmatic attitude of the Foreign Office, which believed that it was worth flattering Pangalos, whatever the irregularity of his position, for the sake of British prestige in Greece.

The attitude of France towards Pangalos was similar. Despite Pangalos' flirtations with the royalists, and France's desire to see constitutional government re-established in Greece, Chambrun was pleased at the outcome of the presidential elections.

Victory for Demertzis, a man of 'ill-defined opinion but royalist tendencies', could have signalled an Anti-Venizelist revanche and possibly have led to a restoration; in those circumstances a continued dictatorship was 'the lesser evil'. The French were confident of Pangalos' francophilia: he had trained in France, was an ardent republican and expressed his pro-French sentiments regularly in the press.⁸⁷ The continuing conspicuous success of French firms in the award of arms contracts seemed also to provide concrete proof of these sympathies.⁸⁸ As regards foreign policy the French were fairly certain that despite his bombastic speeches, Pangalos' intentions were pacific.⁸⁹ Although he had definitely moved much closer to Italy, he was reported to have told Mussolini that he could never pursue a foreign policy contrary to that of Britain.⁹⁰ The French view was that whilst sentiment attracted Pangalos to France and calculation drew him towards England, only necessity impelled him towards Italy.

If the French were confident about Pangalos' intentions, they were certainly not so about those of Mussolini. During 1926 Franco-Italian relations deteriorated sharply, as the two states clashed over continental and colonial issues with increasing

⁸⁶ FO 371/11335 mins. by Harvey d.29 Jun.1926 [quoted], Sargent d.2 Jul.1926, Chamberlain d.3 Jul.1926.

⁸⁷ MAE Grèce 60 Chambrun to QO no.45 d.14 Apr.1926, note by Mantoux d.21 Apr.1926; MAE Grèce 79 Chambrun to QO tels.65-7 d.21 Apr.1926; Chambrun, *Souvenirs*, pp.93-4.

⁸⁸ MAE Grèce 79 Blondel to QO no.19 d.3 Feb.1926, Chambrun to QO tels.65-7 d.21 Apr.1926.

⁸⁹ MAE Grèce 60 QO to Chambrun tel.3 d.4 Jan.1926, Blondel to QO tel.4 d.6 Jan.1926, no.4 d.7 Jan.1926, tel.46 d.19 Mar.1926.

⁹⁰ MAE Grèce 60 note by Mantoux d.21 Apr.1926.

rancour.⁹¹ One result of this was that the French became more concerned to hold on to their position in Greece, as was shown when in May 1926 Pangalos announced that for reasons of economy the British naval and French military missions would be terminated.⁹² The British viewed this decision with equanimity: economy was definitely required and in any case the mission had not produced the expected commercial advantages for British firms.⁹³ Once Kaklamanos had assured London that no other power - i.e. Italy - would be invited to send a naval mission, the Foreign Office concluded that Britain's 'political position is so strong in Greece for general reasons' that the mission could safely be withdrawn.⁹⁴

The French reacted far more vigorously: Chambrun protested strongly to Pangalos about the decision, pointing to the clause in the mission's contract (inserted by the French) stating that premature termination of the mission was subject to the consent of both governments.⁹⁵ In these circumstances the Greeks were forced to accept the continuation of the mission, although they hoped its size could be reduced.⁹⁶

Although Chambrun was partly trying to protect the economic advantages the mission brought France, he was chiefly motivated by a fear that if the mission was ended France's position would be usurped by Italy.⁹⁷

It was certainly true that in early 1926 the Greco-Italian *rapprochement* was continuing apace. In March, foreign minister Roufos visited Rome on his way to a meeting of the League and had frank and friendly talks with Mussolini on political

⁹¹ Early in the year the two quarrelled over a scheme for a tripartite pact also involving Yugoslavia; which reflected a wider struggle for influence in south-eastern and central Europe. The other main bones of contention were Tangiers, Tunisia and the *fuorisciti* (Italian exiles in France). See *DDI/7/IV/157-443 passim* and *DBFP/1a/1/chapters II-IV passim*; Cassels, *Early Diplomacy*, pp.353-76; Shorrocks, *Ally to Enemy*, pp.46-58. For Italian policy between 1925 and 1928, see G. Carocci, *La Politica Estera dell'Italia Fascista (1925-1928)* (Bari, Editori Laterza, 1969), especially pp.41-112.

⁹² FO 371/11340 Cheetham to FO tel.102 d.12 May 1926, no.193 d.13 May 1926.

⁹³ FO 371/11340 min. by Harvey d.14 May 1926.

⁹⁴ FO 371/11340 note by Howard Smith d.31 May 1926, min. by Lampson d.18 May 1926.

⁹⁵ MAE Grèce 27 Chambrun to QO tel.88 d.13 May 1926, no.65 d.14 May 1926.

⁹⁶ FO 371/11340 Cheetham to FO tel.112 d.18 May 1926; FO 371/11357 Cheetham to FO tel.104 d.13 May 1926, tel.118 d.25 May 1926; MAE Grèce 27 Chambrun to QO tel.97 d.26 May 1926.

⁹⁷ MAE Grèce 27 Chambrun to QO no.65 d.14 May 1926; FO 371/11340 Cheetham to FO nos.193-4 d.13 May 1926; FO 371/11357 Leith Ross to Lampson p.l. d. 4 Jun.1926.

and economic issues of common interest.⁹⁸ This was followed in June by the visit to Greece of the Prince of Savoia-Aosta, which occasioned great festivities and which, though devoid of real political significance, symbolised the warmer relations between the two states.⁹⁹ There were also persistent rumours that large Greek armament contracts were to be placed in Italy, that the Italians were to make a big loan to Greece and that some substantial political agreement was in the offing.¹⁰⁰

This last rumour again aroused fears that Mussolini was trying to inveigle Pangalos into aggression against the Turks, and although these fears were to persist throughout the year they reached a peak in the spring. In March Briand urged Chamberlain to watch Mussolini, who he feared was planning some new thrust either in the Balkans or against Asia Minor, and in April De Fleuriau, the French ambassador in London, repeated the warning.¹⁰¹ Certainly, the Turks for their part were becoming extremely anxious, and showing 'a marked nervousness, amounting to latent panic, over Italy's alleged aggressive tendencies', and they began to prepare their defences.¹⁰² Reports came flooding into the Foreign Office from various knowledgeable if unofficial sources, indicating that plans for an attack were at an advanced stage.¹⁰³ These fears were compounded by the actions of the two dictators. In a conversation with Sir Eric Drummond, secretary general of the League, Pangalos remarked that the Turks must realise that 'their possession of their European territories was very precarious', and it became ever more obvious that he harboured designs on eastern Thrace.¹⁰⁴ In April

⁹⁸ FO 371/11337 Cheetham to FO tel.48 d.1 Mar.1926, Graham to FO no.224 d.12 Mar.1926, Lampson to Howard Smith p.l. d.17 Mar.1926, Cheetham to FO no.114 d.17 Mar.1926; *DDI/7/IV/183-4*.

⁹⁹ FO 371/12178 Annual Report, Greece, 1926 p.20.

¹⁰⁰ FO 371/11346 Graham to Tyrrell p.l. d.15 Jan.1926, p.l. d.28 Jan.1926, Treasury to FO no.F6172/01/4 d.24 Feb.1926, FO to Cheetham no.165 d.3 Mar.1926, Graham to FO no.218 d.11 Mar.1926, Cheetham to FO tel.60 d.17 Mar.1926, FO to Treasury no.(C3456/704/19) d.22 Mar.1926; FO 371/11356 Cheetham to FO no.126 d.23 Mar.1926, no.165 d.22 Apr.1926, Graham to Lampson p.l. d.25 Jun.1926, Lampson to Graham p.l. d.30 Jul.1926.

¹⁰¹ *DBFP/1a/I/495-7,651-4*. The rumours were still circulating in a muted form in October (FO 371/11533 Hoare (Constantinople) to FO no.531 d.6 Oct.1926).

¹⁰² FO 424/264 Lindsay (Constantinople) to FO no.181 d.14 Apr.1926; *DDI/7/IV/215-8*.

¹⁰³ FO 371/11533 min. by Greenway d.22 Apr.1926; FO 371/11356 Cheetham to FO no.126 d.23 Mar.1926.

¹⁰⁴ FO 371/11356 Cheetham to FO no.170 d.24 Apr.1926, mins. by Howard Smith d.8 Apr.1926, Harvey d.4 May 1926; FO 371/11533 Cheetham to FO no.172 d.25 Apr.1926.

Mussolini toured Tripoli and made several wild speeches about Italy's imperative need for outlets for her population, and these had 'a very perturbing effect'.¹⁰⁵

These alleged plans were of particular interest to London because of the poor state of Britain's own relations with Turkey, embittered by the long running dispute over the territory of Mosul, claimed by both Turkey and British-mandated Iraq.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, it was precisely this Anglo-Turkish tension which Mussolini intended to exploit to further his own ambitions in Asia Minor.¹⁰⁷ Chamberlain, however, gave Mussolini no encouragement. True, he was sympathetic to Mussolini's claims on Anatolian territory, and recognised that the questions were in a sense linked: Italy's attitude might force the Turks to give in over Mosul;¹⁰⁸ and, if the Turks attacked Iraq, it was unlikely that Britain would restrain Italy. However, 'it was a very different thing to contemplate an unprovoked breach of the peace', and this pacific British public opinion would bitterly oppose.¹⁰⁹ Chamberlain took his cue from Graham in Rome, who argued that despite Mussolini's bluster and whatever his wild dreams he was for the moment too preoccupied with internal consolidation to think of rash adventures. The warm personal friendship Chamberlain had built up with Mussolini was another factor Chamberlain felt would restrain the Duce from committing aggression.¹¹⁰

In the event the Italian attack never materialised. The very prospect of an Anglo-Italian combination was sufficient to terrify the Turks, who in late April suddenly made great concessions over Mosul which led to a settlement in June.¹¹¹ This *volte face* effectively blocked whatever plans Mussolini may have had, for he was warned

¹⁰⁵ FO 800/259 Chamberlain to Graham p.l. d.21 Apr.1926; FO 421/310 Dodds (consul at Tripoli) to FO no.21 d.16 Apr.1926; Cassels, *Early Diplomacy*, p.307.

¹⁰⁶ A.J.Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs 1925*, Volume I (London, Oxford University Press/Humphrey Milford, 1927) 471-531 (especially 526-7). For developments between October 1925 and June 1926 see also *DBFP/1a/I/760-845 passim*.

¹⁰⁷ Psomiades *Balkan Studies* 13 1-11 discusses the connexion between the two issues, but perhaps exaggerates the extent of Greco-Italian plans for aggression.

¹⁰⁸ FO 800/259 Chamberlain to Graham p.l. d.21 Apr.1926; *DBFP/1a/I/927*; Edwards *HJ* 14 158-9.

¹⁰⁹ *DBFP/1a/I/608,652-3*.

¹¹⁰ *DBFP/1a/I/608,700-2*; D.Mack Smith, *Mussolini* (London, Granada, 1983), pp.176-7; Edwards *ESR* 10 10-13.

¹¹¹ FO 800/259 Lindsay to Chamberlain p.l. d.24 Apr.1926, Churchill to Chamberlain p.l. d.14 May 1926; *DBFP/1a/I/832-6,838,845*.

by Della Torretta that however sympathetic Chamberlain was to Italy's aspirations, Britain's interests meant he could not sanction open Italian aggression.¹¹² There is room to doubt, in fact, how real Mussolini's alleged intentions to attack Turkey had been: throughout the first half of the year his policy towards Turkey had been contradictory, at times aggressive, at other times thinking about agreements; and by April he seems to have heeded the advice of his ambassador at Constantinople that hostility was counter-productive.¹¹³ Certainly he would have taken action if (as was considered possible at the time) Turkey disintegrated, but in April he was reassuring Ankara that his intentions were friendly.¹¹⁴ This behaviour - pursuing several contradictory policies at once and waiting to see which would be the most profitable - was typical of Mussolini. In the event, the idea of negotiations with Turkey fizzled out, for after the Mosul settlement the Turks had little incentive to come to terms, and Mussolini soon concentrated his attention back on the Balkans and Europe, where he had also been intriguing throughout the year.¹¹⁵

If the Mosul settlement thwarted Mussolini, this was doubly the case for Pangalos, who was even less able to act alone. In fact, although Pangalos undoubtedly dreamed of expansion at Turkey's expense, he seems to have realised that as a weak power Greece would have to wait on circumstances. Thus, like Mussolini, he tempered his hostility with reassurance: on 22 April foreign minister Roufos assured Cheetham that Greece had 'so great a need of peace and rest that she could not entertain any aggressive intentions'.¹¹⁶ It was Greece's relative weakness which convinced the Foreign Office that the immediate danger from Pangalos was slight: he was hardly likely to embark on adventure when Greece was at her wits' end for money and seeking foreign loans, on very bad terms with Yugoslavia and militarily

¹¹² *DDI/7/IV/232-4*. Della Torretta also warned Mussolini that Britain would never entirely throw over Greece for Italy's sake (*DDI/7/IV/275-7*).

¹¹³ *DDI/7/IV/167-71, 177, 181-2, 187-8, 211-2, 215-8, 221, 227-8, 230, 241, 257-8*.

¹¹⁴ FO 424/264 Graham to FO tel.95 d.21 Apr.1926; *DDI/7/IV/218, 237-8*.

¹¹⁵ For Cassels' account of this whole episode, see *Early Diplomacy*, pp.303-14.

¹¹⁶ FO 371/11356 Cheetham to FO no.165 d.22 Apr.1926 cf. no.195 d.13 May 1926. The French consul at Salonica felt, however, that Pangalos had been intending to fight right up until the Mosul settlement was reached (MAE Grèce 79 Duchesne to QO no.44 d.7 Jun.1926).

unprepared.¹¹⁷ Cheetham felt that Pangalos was adjusting himself more and more to the Venizelist foreign policy tradition of friendship with Britain and France and that the *rapprochement* with Italy was purely a marriage of convenience rooted in Yugoslav hostility; and London agreed that Pangalos would not act contrary to British wishes.¹¹⁸

Once the prospect of joint action against Turkey receded, relations between Greece and Italy cooled somewhat. Chambrun gleefully pointed out to Paris in June how both states were losing their enthusiasm for the *entente* - the Italians had not gained the economic advantages they had expected and Greek public opinion was again turning against Italy.¹¹⁹ The Dodecanese were also still an obstacle: in June a declaration by Mussolini that they were 'Italian for all time' provoked fury, as did Rome's brutal Italianisation policy in the islands.¹²⁰ Although negotiations went on between Athens and Rome for most of the year, apparently with an eye to concluding an arbitration treaty, all that transpired was by November was a commercial treaty,¹²¹ and even this caused friction as the Italians revived an old claim to cabotage in Greece which Athens fiercely resisted.¹²²

These wider diplomatic developments had some impact on Britain's policy towards Pangalos. For example, in June the Foreign Office decided to send the Mediterranean fleet to Greece during its annual cruise later in the year.¹²³ Partly this was to influence Pangalos who had now been in power a year and seemed fairly secure: like Mussolini

¹¹⁷ FO 371/11356 min. by Harvey d.4 May 1926; FO 371/11533 min. by Dashwood d.14 May 1926.

¹¹⁸ FO 371/11356 Cheetham to FO no.176 d.28 Apr.1926, min. by Harvey d.11 May 1926.

¹¹⁹ MAE Grèce 60 Chambrun to QO no.79 d.10 Jun.1926.

¹²⁰ FO 371/11357 Cheetham to FO no.237 d.9 Jun.1926, no.387 d.25 Oct.1926; FO 371/12178 Annual Report, Greece, 1926 p.20; Mack Smith, *Mussolini*, p.177.

¹²¹ FO 371/11337 SIS report no.024187 d.19 Sept.1926 and mins., Sargent to Cheetham pl. d.18 Oct.1926, Cheetham to FO tel.247 d.26 Oct.1926 and mins., Sargent to Wingfield (Rome) no.C11416G d.28 Oct.1926; FO 371/11356 Lampson to Graham p.l. d.21 Jun.1926, Graham to Lampson p.l. d.25 Jun.1926, Lampson to Graham p.l. d.30 Jul.1926; FO 371/11359 Graham to FO no.1000 d.25 Nov.1926.

¹²² FO 371/11337 min. by Howard Smith d.3 Aug.1926; FO 371/11359 MacKillop (chargé at Athens) to FO no.284 d.20 Jul.1926 and mins.

¹²³ FO 371/11358 min. by Harvey d.8 Jun.1926

he was a vain and impulsive man who would respond to such flattery.¹²⁴ More importantly, the visit would be an exercise in showing the flag, and would also make a point to other powers. As Lampson wrote, 'it will be no bad thing that the world at large in the Mediterranean should realise that we have not entirely disinterested ourselves in Greece. I fancy the Italians are rather prone to think so'.¹²⁵ Given the recent past and Pangalos' apparently good prospects it was important that Britain should retain some influence over him.

Whilst the Foreign Office was relatively content with Pangalos' political activities, however, his economic policies were a source of continual friction between the two governments, and particularly irritated the British Treasury. Indeed, the Annual Report for 1926 states that Anglo-Greek relations up until August 'steadily deteriorated' for this very reason.¹²⁶ The Foreign Office, at Treasury insistence, pressed the Greeks to make economies and to balance their budget. These efforts, however, were hampered by the reluctance of France and Italy, both eager to flatter Pangalos and to win arms contracts, to make similar representations.¹²⁷ In April Pangalos was persuaded to cancel several large arms contracts, but the damage to the budget from excessive military expenditure had already been done.¹²⁸ When in July the Greeks contracted a £1,000,000 loan from a Swedish company to help meet this budget deficit, in defiance of their obligations under the 1918 agreement and the refugee protocol, this only further enraged the Treasury.¹²⁹ Other irritants were the

¹²⁴ FO 371/11358 min. by Harvey d.1 Jun.1926; FO 421/310 'Notes on a Visit to Jugoslavia and Greece, April 1926' by Harvey d.6 May 1926.

¹²⁵ FO 371/11358 mins. by Lampson d.9 Jun.1926, d.5 Aug.1926. The Italians were in fact well aware of Britain's interest in Greece where naval matters were concerned (*DDI/7/IV/275-7*).

¹²⁶ FO 371/12178 Annual Report, Greece, 1926 p.9.

¹²⁷ FO 371/11352 Cheetham to FO tel.64 d.20 Mar.1926, Roussin (British representative on the IFC) to FO unno.l. d.24 Mar.1926, Treasury to FO no.F1091/01/3 d.27 Mar.1926, Cheetham to FO no.150 d.8 Apr.1926, Crewe (Paris) to FO no.899 d.13 May 1926, Graham to FO tel.123 d.29 May 1926, Cheetham to FO tel.124 d.31 May 1926, tel.125 d.31 May 1926. The British were by now more or less resigned to winning no more arms contracts; for this issue see also FO 371/11345 file 535, FO 371/11351 file 1807 and FO 371/11354 file 2617 *passim*.

¹²⁸ FO 371/11352 Roussin to FO unno.l. d.28 [?Mar.] 1926; FO 371/11533 Cheetham to FO no.172 d.25 Apr.1926; but cf. FO 371/11356 min. by Howard Smith d.28 Apr.1926 ('I think we should take [Pangalos'] remarks about arms with a grain of salt').

¹²⁹ FO 371/11359 Niemeyer to Lampson p.l. d.5 Jul.1926, Treasury to FO no.F7980/04 d.17 Jul.1926 and file 7572 *passim*.

continued non-settlement of British claims, and the application of the forced loan of January to British subjects in Greece, contrary to the terms of the 1886 Anglo-Greek commercial treaty.¹³⁰ The Foreign Office tried to link satisfaction on this latter point with the signature of a new commercial treaty in July, but with only limited success.¹³¹

By far the most serious economic point at issue between the two countries was that of the Greek war debt. Preliminary negotiations led to the despatch of a Greek delegation, headed by Venizelos, to London in June. However, despite the Treasury offering relatively lenient terms the Greeks were stubborn and appeared to be seeking virtual cancellation of the whole debt.¹³² The Treasury, an official told Lampson, was used to debtors arguing

that their claims upon us are sacred obligations to be paid in full while their own cash obligations were merely paper promises which we should in no circumstances expect to be honoured; but never has this argument been put forward with such effrontery as by Monsieur Venizelos.¹³³

Negotiations were resumed later in the year, but proceeded at a very slow pace, and no agreement was signed until April 1927.¹³⁴ In the meantime the Greeks were seeking a further refugee loan, as the funds of the RSC were almost exhausted. This was a remote enough prospect, given the political and economic instability prevailing in Greece, but the Treasury made it even more so by attempting to make the new loan conditional on Greece's settling her war debt.¹³⁵ At moments of high exasperation the

¹³⁰ For the question of claims see FO 371/11348 file 747 *passim* and FO 371/12178 Annual Report, Greece, 1926 p.48. For the forced loan see FO 371/11350 file 988 *passim* and FO 371/12178 Annual Report, Greece, 1926 p.9.

¹³¹ FO 371/11350 memorandum by Harvey d.18 Jun.1926 and mins. by Lampson d.18 Jun.1926, Tyrrell d.18 Jun.1926, Chamberlain d.21 Jun.1926 and Lampson d.21 Jun.1926, MacKillop to FO no.425 d.3 Dec.1926, mins. by Harvey d.17 Dec.1926, Hurst d.23 Dec.1926, Sargent d.29 Dec.1926, FO to Loraine no.14 d.4 Jan.1927. The commercial treaty was signed on 16 July 1926 (FO 371/11338-9 file 108 *passim*).

¹³² FO 371/11342 file 352 *passim*.

¹³³ FO 371/11352 Treasury to FO unno.1. d.1 Jul.1926.

¹³⁴ FO 371/11343 file 352 *passim*; Orde, *Reconstruction*, p.298; Mazower, *Greece and the Inter-War Economic Crisis*, pp.102-3.

¹³⁵ FO 371/11340 Lampson to Howard Smith p.l. d.16 Mar.1926, League of Nations C.349.1926.II d.7 Jun.1926, note by Lampson d.6 Aug.1926, Treasury to FO unno.1. d.10 Aug.1926, Kaklamanos to Lampson p.l. d.13 Aug.1926; FO 371/11341 Niemeyer to Tyrrell p.l. d.14 Dec.1926.

Foreign Office considered consenting to this, but when the crunch came Chamberlain refused to link the two issues. This was not because of concern for Britain's position in Greece or on grounds of principle, but because the refugee loan was a humanitarian necessity which Britain could hardly veto for selfish purposes. Moreover, Chamberlain felt the British had a special responsibility because of the encouragement they had given the Greeks in Asia Minor, a contributory cause of the refugee influx in the first place. The second refugee loan was finally raised in January 1928.¹³⁶

Meanwhile, in May 1926, Pangalos seemed to be more secure than ever. Soon after taking the presidential oath he moved into the former royal palace, previously only used for state occasions, and appeared to have prevailed over both military and political opponents.¹³⁷ However, despite his recent election he still lacked any solid power base, and the difficulties he was having in acquiring one were reflected in his search for a prime minister to head the cabinet he was constructing. Having alienated the political parties he searched in the ranks of the military, and settled on General Paraskevopoulos, a 'bluff, nationalist soldier' of little political experience but Venizelist sympathies who had been living in Paris for some years.¹³⁸ Pangalos intended Paraskevopoulos to play a very subordinate rôle, with little freedom on matters of policy or personnel; consequently he was much surprised when Paraskevopoulos, even before he reached Athens, published a detailed political programme providing for free elections and the implementation of the constitution without Pangalos' amendments.¹³⁹ On Paraskevopoulos' arrival, Pangalos, supported by his entourage, was quite intransigent and publicly spelled out the 'rigidly

¹³⁶ FO 371/11340 min. by Howard Smith d.20 Aug.1926; FO 371/11341 mins by Harvey d.17 Dec.1926, Howard Smith d.20 Dec.1926, Sargent d.20 Dec.1926; FO 371/11341 min. by Lampson d.7 Aug.1926; FO 371/11342 mins. by Chamberlain d.28 Feb.1926, Howard Smith d.6 Jul.1926; Orde, *Reconstruction*, pp.287-8,297-8.

¹³⁷ FO 371/11335 Cheetham to FO no.180 d.4 May 1926, no.186 d.6 May 1926.

¹³⁸ FO 371/11335 Cheetham to FO no.202 d.19 May 1926; MAE Grèce 60 note by Corbin d.15 May 1926; Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian Vision*, p.341 [quoted].

¹³⁹ FO 371/11335 Cheetham to FO no.202 d.19 May 1926, no.209 d.25 May 1926, no.216 d.26 May 1926; MAE Grèce 60 Chambrun to QO tel.98 d.30 May 1926, tel.100 d.2 Jun.1926.

secondary rôle' he expected his premier to play. Paraskevopoulos refused to form a government on these terms and quickly returned to France.¹⁴⁰

In July, Pangalos tried twice more to form a cabinet. His first premier elect was Konstantinos Zavitsianos, a well known Corfiote conservative politician, who at least had the merit of being a civilian. However, the main parties refused to co-operate with him, believing that his government would manipulate the elections to provide Pangalos with a docile assembly. Zavitsianos therefore refused to form a cabinet, which was a setback for Pangalos as it implied that his pledges of support carried less weight with potential premiers than the hostility of the political parties.¹⁴¹ Next, Pangalos asked the president of the court of appeal, Zilimon, to form a cabinet d'affaires to oversee elections, and declared that he was willing to relinquish some of his dictatorial powers and play a more constitutional rôle.¹⁴² Despite this concession by Pangalos the parties again frustrated him, and refused to co-operate with Zilimon. Thereupon Pangalos, worried by his deteriorating position, 'abandoned his attempts at conciliation and decided to "passer outre"'.¹⁴³

On 17 July he arrested and deported to Naxos the leading Venizelist and republican politicians and arranged the formation of a political cabinet under a respected economics expert, Eftaxias.¹⁴⁴ This was a bold stroke, but one born out of desperation as Pangalos knew his military supporters were deserting him; furthermore, his delegation to the new cabinet of executive and legislative powers formerly vested in himself was viewed as proof of his weakness. The government faced serious difficulties and needed some immediate tangible success to counteract the effects of economic crisis and foreign isolation.¹⁴⁵ Unfortunately, despite Eftaxias' sensible and

¹⁴⁰ FO 371/11335 Cheetham to FO no.209 d.25 May 1926, tel.123 d.29 May 1926, no.231 d.8 Jun.1926; MAE Grèce 60 Chambrun to QO no.79 d.10 Jun.1926.

¹⁴¹ FO 371/11335 MacKillop to FO tels.149-50 d.12 Jul.1926, no.276 d.14 Jul.1926.

¹⁴² FO 371/11335 MacKillop to FO no.276 d.14 Jul.1926, tel.153 d.16 Jul.1926, no.279 d.17 Jul.1926; FO 371/12178 Annual Report, Greece, 1926 p.4.

¹⁴³ FO 371/11335 MacKillop to FO tel.154 d.17 Jul.1926, no.283 d.20 Jul.1926.

¹⁴⁴ FO 371/11335 MacKillop to FO tel.156 d.19 Jul.1926, no.283 d.20 Jul.1926; MAE Grèce 60 Chambrun to QO no.90 d.17 Jul.1926.

¹⁴⁵ FO 371/11335 MacKillop to FO no.283 d.20 Jul.1926; FO 371/12178 Annual Report, Greece, 1926 pp.4-5.

conservative financial policy there was no quick fix available for the crippled Greek economy, and indeed, because of general uncertainty, the drachma fell by ten per cent within a week of the government's taking office. Late in July Pangalos was compelled by his minister of the interior to release those detained on Naxos, but they had spent their incarceration planning a campaign to oust him and on their return launched a concerted onslaught on his regime.¹⁴⁶

In the first weeks of August two attempted *coups* - one in Crete and one in Chalkis - were crushed, but Pangalos' position was now desperate.¹⁴⁷ The economic situation deteriorated, and the government's remedy of cancelling various arms contracts further alienated the army, as did rumours that Pangalos was planning to restore the monarchy.¹⁴⁸ The last straw proved to be Pangalos' capitulation to the Yugoslavs in the long running negotiations for the renewal of the alliance. On 17 August, in his desperation for a political success, he accepted the Yugoslav terms, but the resulting treaty was exploited by the opposition who claimed it betrayed Greek national interests.¹⁴⁹ It came as little surprise thereafter when on 22 August Pangalos' old adversary Kondylis launched an almost bloodless military *coup* that toppled the government against a background of indifference from the general public. Pangalos, who was taking an ill-advised holiday at Spetsai, made a bid for freedom, but was soon captured and imprisoned on the rocky (though not volcanic) island of Aegina.¹⁵⁰ Meanwhile, in Athens Kondylis assumed the premiership and invited Koundouriotis

¹⁴⁶ FO 371/11335 MacKillop to FO no.285 d.21 Jul.1926, no.295 d.24 Jul.1926, no.298 d.28 Jul.1926, no.311 d.5 Aug.1926.

¹⁴⁷ FO 371/11335 MacKillop to FO tel.169 d.11 Aug.1926, no.318 d.12 Aug.1926, tel.174 d.17 Aug.1926.

¹⁴⁸ FO 371/11335 MacKillop to FO no.311 d.5 Aug.1926; FO 371/11336 min. by Howard Smith d.30 Aug.1926; MAE Grèce 60 Chambrun to QO tel.149 d.22 Aug.1926. Veremis, however, says that Pangalos tried to placate the military with pay rises (*Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 7 43,47). The Eftaxias cabinet contained several royalist ministers. Pangalos assured Chambrun that he could trust them because he had watched them personally to make sure that they took the oath to the republic 'without flinching' (FO 371/11335 MacKillop to FO no.295 d.24 Jul.1926; MAE Grèce 60 Chambrun to QO no.90 d.17 Jul.1926).

¹⁴⁹ MAE Grèce 60 Chambrun to QO tel.139 d.12 Aug.1926, tel.149 d.22 Aug.1926, no.103 d.27 Aug.1926; Psomiades *Balkan Studies* 13 13-14.

¹⁵⁰ FO 371/11335 Crow to FO tel.6 d.22 Aug.1926; FO 371/11336 MacKillop to FO no.331 d.26 Aug.1926; FO 371/12178 Annual Report, Greece, 1926 p.5.

to resume the presidency, making the by now very familiar promise to return the country to democracy at the earliest possible moment.¹⁵¹

During Pangalos' last months in power, the Foreign Office had continued to put a favourable gloss on his actions. Throughout May and June his attempts to find a prime minister were applauded as heralding a possible return to normality. Harvey believed he genuinely wanted elections in order to reduce his dependence on the military, and that the danger was that a *coup* would topple him before he succeeded.¹⁵² Even Chamberlain shared these positive attitudes, reporting Sir Eric Drummond's favourable impression of Pangalos: 'he thought him a man to get things done & possessed of a sense of humour - as shown by his sending the principal opposition leaders to carry on their political discussions on an active volcanic island!'¹⁵³ In July, when the politicians twice frustrated Pangalos' attempts to construct a cabinet, Greenway, who believed Pangalos would be victorious in free elections, was scathing in his criticism: the dictatorship was 'infinitely preferable to the stupid bickering & vacillations of the political parties. The latter have been the ruin of Greece'.¹⁵⁴

This irritation with the political parties was understandable given London's assumptions that Pangalos was popular and sincerely trying to free himself from military influence - in such circumstances it was the politicians who were blocking a return to democracy and encouraging a *coup*. After the formation of the Eftaxias cabinet Greenway was still optimistic:

the change from dictatorship to constitutional gov[ernmen]t can only take place gradually ... but General Pangalos is ... a man of very considerable ability - and "straight", and if only he can keep the army reasonably quiet, he should attain his ends and bring back to Greece at least a certain measure of tranquillity.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ FO 371/11335 MacKillop to FO tel.184 d.24 Aug.1926, tel.186 d.25 Aug.1926; FO 371/11336 MacKillop to FO no.333 d.1 Sept.1926.

¹⁵² FO 371/11335 mins. by Harvey d.4,19,26 and 1 Jun.1926.

¹⁵³ FO 371/11335 min. by Chamberlain d.14 Jun.1926.

¹⁵⁴ FO 371/11335 mins. by Greenway d.12 Jul.1926, d.19 Jul.1926.

¹⁵⁵ FO 371/11335 min. by Greenway d.5 Aug.1926.

As the Greek economic situation deteriorated, this optimism waned.¹⁵⁶ The resignation of the secretary general of the foreign ministry on 12 August in protest at the concessions being made to Yugoslavia was identified as an ominous sign, and on the eve of the *coup* Howard Smith realised that a crisis was coming and that everything now depended on whether the troops would stay loyal to Pangalos or defect to Kondylis.¹⁵⁷

It fell to Greenway in a long minute after the *coup* to sum up the dictator's record. Pangalos' faults were 'not great' and although he was 'highly dictatorial in his methods', 'to a certain extent he was justified by the circumstances of the time'. Various groups had contributed to his downfall: the politicians could not forgive his economic mismanagement and the army and navy resented his aloofness from the 'permanent intrigues' that were 'sapping the hearts of those two forces'. The Greek people, too, were responsible, for they were impetuous and impatient and appeared to expect 'the performance of miracles at a moment's notice'. Nevertheless, Pangalos' achievements were 'not small' and his record was 'surprisingly good'. One had to despair of the Greeks who allowed 'their hopes of prosperity to be continually frustrated by the selfish ignorance of the party factions'. With luck Pangalos might return to power one day, but in the meantime Greece would 'once again relapse into the party factions which have ruined her finance and hampered her progress'.¹⁵⁸ Greenway clearly believed that, despite Anglo-Greek tension over economic issues, the peace and stability in Greece which British interests demanded was more likely to be realised under a dictatorship than a democratic government.

The response of the French to the *coup* also illustrated their priorities. France's concerns, which had been manifested throughout the summer, were to ensure the continuation of republican and francophile government in Greece and to improve

¹⁵⁶ FO 371/11335 mins. by Howard Smith d.6 Aug.1926, Greenway d.10 Aug.1926.

¹⁵⁷ FO 371/11335 mins. by Bateman d.13 Aug.1926, Howard Smith d.13 and 19 Aug.1926.

¹⁵⁸ FO 371/11335 min. by Greenway d.23 Aug.1926. In the autumn Greenway visited Greece and had his opinions confirmed. The Greeks, he felt, needed a unifying idea like fascism, although fascism itself would never take root in Greece (FO 371/11360 memorandum by Greenway d.12 Oct.1926).

Greece's relations with Yugoslavia.¹⁵⁹ Immediately after the *coup*, when there was talk of an ecumenical cabinet, Chambrun pressed Koundouriotis to constitute instead a purely republican cabinet 'favourable to the Serbian alliance and determined to proceed to elections'. Soon, just such a cabinet was formed under Kondylis, who, Chambrun noted with satisfaction, was of all Greek politicians 'the most attached to the republic and to France'.¹⁶⁰ Chambrun badgered Kondylis over the Yugoslav treaty, which France felt was so favourable to Balkan peace and French interests, and eventually secured a promise that it would be ratified if possible.¹⁶¹ The French were pleased at the conclusion of this treaty which was clearly a victory for French Balkan policy over that of Italy. The Italians were annoyed, for one thing because the treaty lessened the Greeks' fear of isolation. Although the new Greek foreign minister spoke warmly to the Italian minister of his feelings for Italy, the passing of Pangalos was a severe blow to the Greco-Italian *rapprochement* he had pioneered.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ MAE Grèce 60 note by Corbin d.15 May 1926; MAE Grèce 79 QO to Chambrun tel.111 d.21 May 1926. Chambrun put Pangalos' intransigence towards the francophile Paraskevopoulos down to the machinations of the Italian inspired Greek royalist press (MAE Grèce 60 Chambrun to QO no.79 d.10 Jun.1926).

¹⁶⁰ MAE Grèce 60 Chambrun to QO no.103 d.29 Aug.1926.

¹⁶¹ MAE Grèce 60 Chambrun to QO tels.150-1 d.25 Aug.1926, tel.153 d.27 Aug.1926; MAE Grèce 79 note by Labouret d.17 Sept.1926; MAE Yougoslavie 53 QO to Chambrun tels.182-3 d.24 Aug.1926.

¹⁶² MAE Yougoslavie 53 Roger (chargé at Rome) to QO tels.486-7 d.26 Aug.1926, Grenard to [?Rome] tel.222 d.28 Aug.1926; *DDI/7/IV/312-3,316-7*.

Part Two

The Entente Powers and Greek External Affairs

Chapter Six

Great Britain, Italy and the Dodecanese Question

1912 - 1923

The revolutionary government established in Athens in 1922 faced immense problems in the realm of foreign policy. The success or failure of Greek foreign policy had always been dependent to a large extent upon factors beyond Greek control, but now Greece was defeated, penniless, isolated, racked by internal dissent and consequently dealing with other states from a position of great weakness. Chief amongst Greece's foreign difficulties was the question of a settlement with Turkey, which preoccupied Greek diplomacy for almost a year and in which Greece's most vital interests were at stake. However, this question was also of vital concern to the great powers and Greece was a relatively minor player at Lausanne, her interests being subsumed and to some extent sacrificed in the Allied pursuit of peace and security for their own strategic and economic interests. In another area, moreover, over the next few years Greece had to cope not simply with her interests being neglected, but with the virtual, and at one point the actual, hostility of one of the great powers. That power was Italy, a near neighbour who viewed Greece with some suspicion as a potential rival and who as a consequence had actively connived at Greece's defeat in Asia Minor. Indeed, Turkey apart, relations with Italy were until the middle of 1924 the chief preoccupation of Greek diplomacy, and certainly the aspect of it which attracted most attention from the powers.¹

Greek and Italian interests were potentially in conflict over a whole range of issues, but the point where they most acutely clashed in 1922 was over the fate of the Dodecanese. This group of islands, situated off the south-western tip of Anatolia and including Rhodes, had an ethnically Greek population but had been occupied by the Italians since the end of their war with Turkey in 1912. The question of their ultimate fate had been complicated by the diplomacy of the Great War, and now they formed part of a complex of issues over which the Italians, obsessed with the idea of a

¹ An alternative candidate for the chief preoccupation of Greek diplomacy could be the quest for international help in settling the refugees. As mentioned in the introduction above, Greece's troubled relations with Turkey (which were mostly concerned with the legacy of the war and the implementation of the peace settlement) were an important aspect of Greek foreign policy which is not treated in detail here. Greece's relations with Bulgaria and Yugoslavia were also somewhat tense, but again the problems involved did not become acute until 1924 and in any case they were certainly not as threatening to European peace as the possibility of conflict with Italy.

'mutilated victory' long before Mussolini came to power, sought satisfaction. The history of this question, in which Britain took an active part, illustrates the restless, discontented character of Italian policy in this period, the existence of a certain amount of continuity in foreign policy between Mussolini and his predecessors and also the protracted nature of the process of settlement after the war once the victorious coalition had fallen apart.

Under article 2 of the treaty of Ouchy of 1912 between Italy and the Ottoman empire, the Italians undertook to evacuate the Dodecanese as soon as Turkish forces left Tripoli and Cyrenaica. However, a delay in this latter evacuation meant that Italy was still in occupation of the islands at the outbreak of the war. Subsequently, by the treaty of London in April 1915, by which Britain, France and Russia secured Italian adherence to the *Entente* war effort, the Allies promised that at the peace the islands would be awarded to Italy. By the time of the peace conference, however, it was apparent that the United States would never agree to this clause of the treaty of London in view of the Hellenic character of the Dodecanesians and their desire to be united with Greece. The Italian foreign minister, Tittoni, therefore signed an agreement with Venizelos on 29 July 1919 whereby the Greeks were to acquire the Dodecanese (with the exception of Rhodes) and to have their position in Smyrna recognised in return for concessions to the Italians over Albania.²

By 1920 the Italians had begun to doubt the wisdom of this agreement, and negotiations were opened for a new settlement. By August these were almost complete, and they were brought to a close after Curzon pressed the Italians to concede similar terms to those of the 1919 agreement, warning Rome that Great Britain would refuse to sign the treaty of Sèvres unless the Italians were conciliatory

² FO 371/8413 'Memorandum respecting Questions outstanding between England and Italy' by Nicolson d.4 Apr.1923, Annex II; *DBFP/1/XXIV/24*; C.J.Lowe and F.Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy, 1870-1940* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), pp.172-4,185-8. For the text of the treaty of Ouchy see *BFSP/106/1100-3*, of the treaty of London *BFSP/112/973-7* and of the Tittoni-Venizelos agreement, Frangulis, *Grèce* II 93-8. For the pre-war history of this question see A.M.De Fabo, *The Aegean Island Question and Greece. A Diplomatic History, 1911-1914* (unpublished PhD thesis, Washington, 1981). Also useful is P.J.Carabott, *The Dodecanese Question, 1912-1924* (unpublished PhD thesis, London, 1991).

on this point. This was a serious threat, for the Tripartite agreement which formed part of the Sèvres settlement assigned to Italy a large zone of influence in Anatolia around Adalia. Consequently, on 10 August 1920 a Greco-Italian agreement (the Bonin-Venizelos agreement) was signed in tandem with the treaty of Sèvres. Article 122 of the latter bound Turkey to cede the Dodecanese to Italy, whilst in accordance with the Bonin-Venizelos agreement Italy was pledged to hand the islands over to Greece (again with the exception of Rhodes, which was to be retained by Italy under certain conditions).³

There the matter would have rested, but for the reversal of fortune which subsequently occurred in the Near East. The Bonin-Venizelos agreement never became operative, for its coming into force was linked to the ratification of Sèvres which never took place. In February 1922 the Italians told the British that they no longer considered themselves bound by the Bonin-Venizelos agreement: the situation in the Near East had now completely changed, and as Sèvres was to be revised, so the fate of the Dodecanese must be reconsidered. This view was hotly disputed by Curzon, who told the Italians on 10 February that the 1920 agreement 'must still constitute the basis of the settlement of the Dodecanesian question' even though it was not juridically operative. Great Britain's signature of Sèvres and the Tripartite agreement had been conditional upon the simultaneous signature of the Greco-Italian agreement, and this gave to the latter 'an importance and a solidity greater than its merely juridical value'. Although the agreement would have to be reaffirmed before it could enter into force, it constituted a 'moral obligation' upon Italy, while the British, who had taken a 'very direct interest' in its signature, could not 'now remain indifferent to its execution'.⁴

The issue was next raised in June, when the Italian foreign minister, Schanzer, visited London for talks. His ultimate goal was to create an Anglo-Italian *entente*, especially

³ *DBFP/1/XXIV/23-25*. For the text of the treaty of Sèvres, see *BFSP/113/652-776*, of the Bonin-Venizelos agreement *BFSP/113/1078-80* and the of Tripartite agreement *BFSP/113/797-803*.

⁴ *DBFP/1/XXIV/25-6*.

concerning economic questions in the eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea, where the two powers would 'lend reciprocal support' to the fulfilment of their respective ambitions. In the short term, he submitted in a memorandum a list of issues (mostly concerned with Africa) upon which Italy sought satisfaction from Great Britain.⁵ The Italians believed that they had been ill-rewarded at the peace conference for their efforts in the war, and felt that they were entitled to compensation in Africa and the Near East, partly because they had been denied a share in Germany's colonies and partly as compensation for the now moribund Tripartite agreement.⁶ Schanzer also saw that detaching England from Greece and establishing an *entente* in the Mediterranean would be of immense value to Italian policy,⁷ and he hoped to capitalize on the close relations he had established with the British at the recent Genoa conference, and the assistance that Italy had rendered England there, which had 'proved of very practical value'.⁸

Before Schanzer's arrival the Foreign Office discussed the notion of an Anglo-Italian *entente* in some detail but without much enthusiasm, for the Italians had neglected to include anything of benefit to Britain in their proposals. Crowe urged wariness with regard to any formula proposed by Schanzer, for otherwise the Italians would seek to invoke British support for all kinds of selfish and ill-judged policies, although this would probably not restrain Italy from 'playing us false and intriguing against British interests everywhere in the East as she has consistently done hitherto'.⁹ A

⁵ DBFP/1/XXIV/1-2,11-12.

⁶ The Italians' claim that they had been cheated of their just rewards rang a little hollow where Europe was concerned: they had acquired territory in the Trentino, Alto Adige (despite the principle of national self-determination), Istria and Trieste, established a defensible frontier and seen their hereditary enemy, Austria-Hungary, dismembered. All this, however, was obscured by the nationalist *furor* aroused by the claim to Fiume, a question that was still not settled (D.Mack Smith, *Italy and its Monarchy* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989), p.238). In the colonial field, the Italians had more grounds for complaint: Germany's colonies had been parcelled out while Italy was absent from the peace conference, and Italy was therefore justified in asking for the 'equitable compensation' foreseen in the treaty of London in the event of Anglo-French colonial expansion (Lowe and Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy*, pp.169-72; Shorrocks, *Ally to Enemy*, pp.12-13).

⁷ The Italians had attempted to detach the British from the Greeks and to persuade them to join in an actively pro-Turkish policy in 1921. Curzon had rebuffed that move, being unwilling to abandon the Greeks (DBFP/XVII/54-6), but in 1922 the Italians may have felt that with the Greeks in desperate straits in Anatolia the omens were auspicious for a renewed initiative.

⁸ DBFP/1/XXIV/v,2.

⁹ DBFP/1/XXIV/1.

memorandum prepared by the Foreign Office for the cabinet struck an equally sceptical note. A formal understanding with Italy would bring almost no tangible gains to Britain but immense benefits to the Italians who, having escaped their present friendless isolation, would feel free to adopt more forceful policies towards Albania and Yugoslavia, to make commercial agreements with Germany and the Soviet Union and to antagonise the French. Equally and most importantly, an *entente* would strengthen Italy's hand against the 'hereditary and national obstacle to [her] expansion in the Levant', Greece. This would amount in effect to Britain's abandoning Greece for Italy and the Italians would probably expect to be allowed to keep the Dodecanese and to receive economic concessions in the Near East and frontier rectifications in Africa. Britain therefore must tread warily: a substantial agreement would be one-sided and damaging but even the adoption of some vague formula would be exploited by the Italians with adverse consequences for British prestige.¹⁰

The talks began on 26 June and lasted almost a fortnight. A wide range of subjects was discussed, but in essence the Italians were seeking economic concessions and recognition of their status as a great power equal to Great Britain. Although the British were prepared to make some concessions, the talks became deadlocked on two linked points: the Dodecanese and Jubaland.¹¹

The British territory of Jubaland, situated between Kenya and Italian Somaliland, had long been earmarked by the British as suitable compensation for Italy in lieu of a share of Germany's colonies. Detailed discussions had started between the two governments in September 1919, and by April 1920 a broad measure of agreement had been reached as to the area to be given to Italy. At the same time, the British colonial secretary, Lord Milner, made clear to the Italians that since this area was substantially greater than the frontier rectification provided for in the treaty of London, the agreement on Jubaland 'could only become effective as part of a general settlement of all the issues raised at the Peace Conference'. Although talks continued

¹⁰ DBFP/1/XXIV/2-10.

¹¹ DBFP/1/XXIV/26-126 *passim*.

on the fine details of the agreement, these had not been settled by the time Schanzer reached London.¹² In the minds of the Foreign Office, however, the link between the Jubaland cession and a general settlement was firm. In a memorandum previewing the talks with Italy, it was argued that in view of the 'growing tendency' of Italy to recede from her engagements to Greece over the Dodecanese made 'as part of the general settlement', Britain should 'continue to hold up' the Jubaland cession until the Mediterranean settlement was 'made secure'.¹³

The divergence of view between the two governments soon became apparent, as did the grasping nature of Schanzer's demands. The British insisted that the Jubaland cession could only be made as part of a wider settlement, including the execution of the promises over the Dodecanese made by the Italians in 1920. Schanzer retorted that the two questions were entirely separate: Jubaland must be handed over immediately as compensation for Italy's sacrifices in the Allied cause, but he could promise only to make some future agreement with the Greeks, probably on terms less favourable than those conceded in 1920.¹⁴ Both sides supported their arguments - the Italians with rather more justification - by claiming that their hands were tied by public opinion.¹⁵

British motives were rather more complex than those of the Italians. While the Admiralty was very uneasy about the prospect of Italian naval bases in the Dodecanese, Lloyd George was concerned with broader issues, principally the fact that Schanzer was asking him to 'give Greece away in her absence, and to support the Italians in a demand for something which was quite contrary to all the principles of

¹² FO 371/8413 'Memorandum respecting Questions outstanding between England and Italy' by Nicolson d.4 Apr.1923, Annex I; *DBFP/1/XXVI/131-3*. The interpretation of article 13 of the treaty of London was much disputed by the British and Italians: the former emphasised the words 'frontier rectification', the latter the term 'equitable compensation'.

¹³ *DBFP/1/XXIV/16-17*.

¹⁴ *DBFP/1/XXIV/27-8,32,50-2*.

¹⁵ Lloyd George claimed that as Jubaland was 'a very good colony' there would be much trouble in parliament over its loss and so it would be better to create a larger package deal. Schanzer, whose domestic position was much more precarious, given the volatility of Italian nationalist feeling, said that 'if he was obliged to go back to Italy without obtaining anything it would be a very bad thing for his policy' (*DBFP/1/XXIV/51,58-62,68-9*).

[the] Treaties of Peace'.¹⁶ There was more to it than principle, however. The continuing importance of the Mediterranean for communications with India meant Britain had a concrete interest in keeping on good terms with both Italy and Greece, and since an amicable settlement of the Dodecanese question on the lines previously agreed by the Italians would obviously help in this respect, Lloyd George felt that he must use Jubaland as a lever to promote a settlement satisfactory to Greece.¹⁷

Moreover, Lloyd George still seems to have believed that the Sèvres policy of placating Britain's allies at Turkish expense was still viable. Certainly he had not yet given up hope that the Greeks might prevail - he 'doubted if the Turks could hold on'¹⁸ - and on 6 July he stated that he favoured 'a complete understanding between Italy and Greece' on the Asia Minor question.¹⁹ Given the recent thrust of Italian policy and the strength of the Kemalists in Turkey, the idea that Italy should relinquish the Dodecanese in return for an understanding with Greece over Anatolia was, if seriously intended, clearly unrealistic, but Lloyd George's policy in the Dodecanese was conditioned by his fundamental misperception of the situation in the Near East.

Deadlock on the Dodecanese question - according to the British 'politically the most important' between Britain and Italy - killed off what slim chance there had been of any substantive agreement during the Schanzer talks.²⁰ The sides were so far apart that a mere colourless communiqué was issued, stating that the two countries were united in a desire to promote their common interests and peace and reconstruction in Europe.²¹ This result was not far from what the Foreign Office had expected, or even

¹⁶ *DBFP/1/XXIV/73-4,106-7*. Lloyd George used the self-determination argument in private with Balfour as well as with the Italians.

¹⁷ *DBFP/1/XXIV/61,67,73,107*.

¹⁸ *DBFP/1/XXIV/67*.

¹⁹ *DBFP/1/XXIV/104*.

²⁰ *DBFP/1/XXIV/12*.

²¹ On 1 July the Italians submitted a draft treaty (*DBFP/1/XXIV/74-9*) which was discussed by the British on 3 July (*DBFP/1/XXIV/69-74*). The Colonial Office discussed the treaty with the Italians (*DBFP/1/XXIV/79-101*) before a British counter-draft was presented on 5 July (*DBFP/1/XXIV/111-7*). This counter-draft was discussed with the Italians on 6 July (*DBFP/1/XXIV/101-11*); Schanzer was disappointed that this 'document did not come up to his expectations' (*DBFP/1/XXIV/101*) and so it was decided only to issue a vague communiqué (*DBFP/1/XXIV/103-4*). For the text of the communiqué see *DBFP/1/XXIV/126*.

hoped for, but Schanzer left London 'a bitter and disappointed man',²² with his 'political reputation ... destroyed'.²³

The basic lines of this dispute between Britain and Italy - which was not settled until the summer of 1924 - were now fixed and remained so for many months. The transformation of the situation in the Near East by the final rout of the Greeks in Asia Minor and the revolution in Athens did nothing to bridge the gulf between the British and the Italians on the Dodecanese question or cause them to alter their positions. On 9 October the Italians again informed the Foreign Office that they regarded the Bonin-Venizelos agreement as having lapsed, only to receive on 15 October the usual testy response from Curzon: this question could not be 'decided by unilateral action' on the part of Italy or 'detached from the general settlement', and such action would 'logically and inevitably entail the cancellation of the other engagements into which, as part of the general settlement,' Great Britain had entered.²⁴

Equally, the rise to power of Mussolini on 28 October (in part facilitated by discontent with the disastrous foreign policy of his liberal predecessors including the failure of Schanzer's talks in London²⁵) did not at first herald any change in Italian policy. Curzon had feared that Mussolini - a notorious anglophobe - might not be prepared to join in a united Allied front at the forthcoming Near Eastern peace conference,²⁶ but the Duce's moderate tone in his first interviews with Graham was extremely reassuring. Mussolini was adamant that his policy would be pacific and one of co-operation and accord with his Allies, and even announced that he was 'prepared to negotiate an immediate agreement to embrace [the] Dodecanese and Jubaland'.²⁷

²² C.Fink, *The Genoa Conference. European Diplomacy, 1921-1922* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1984), p.303; Carabott, *Dodecanese Question*, pp.257-8.

²³ *DBFP/1/XXIV/696*.

²⁴ FO 371/8413 'Memorandum respecting Questions outstanding between England and Italy' by Nicolson d.4 Apr.1923, Annex II; *DBFP/1/XVIII/829-30*; Lowe and Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy*, pp.189,396-7. For Italian thinking at this time, see Carabott, *Dodecanese Question*, pp.265-7.

²⁵ C.Fink, 'Italy and the Genoa Conference of 1922', *International History Review* 8(1) 1986 53-5.

²⁶ Mussolini had recently written that it was in Italy's interest 'to collaborate in [the] destruction' of the British empire (*DBFP/1/XVIII/218-9*). See also Cassels, *Early Diplomacy*, pp.310-1.

²⁷ *DBFP/1/XVIII/220-1*. See also G.Rumi, *Alle Origini della Politica Estera Fascista (1918-1923)* (Bari, Editori Laterza, 1968), pp.268-73.

This initial impression that Mussolini might in fact be more accommodating than his predecessors over the Dodecanese seemed to be confirmed by his reply (dated 3 November) to Curzon's recent note. Whilst he reiterated that the Bonin-Venizelos agreement could not be considered valid after the collapse of the Sèvres settlement, he conceded that it was 'the result of an agreement between the Allies' and that Italy was 'disposed to re-examine with them the problem in its entirety in order to arrive at a new settlement'. The Foreign Office chose to interpret this as a direct and distinct admission that the Dodecanese question was one which could not be settled by Italy unilaterally. However, from the context in which this admission was made, it is clear that the Italians meant only that the question might be included in the inter-Allied discussions of the whole Near Eastern situation which were to precede the Lausanne peace conference and that if the Allies satisfied Italy's long-standing requests for colonial compensation, economic concessions in the Levant and a share in their mandated territories they might be prepared to negotiate the cession of some of the islands to Greece.²⁸

During the talks between Curzon, Mussolini and Poincaré held at Territet and Lausanne between 19 and 21 November to concert Allied policy this misunderstanding was perpetuated. The three agreed that the Turks would be deprived of all rights over the Dodecanese and that the fate of the islands would be decided by the Allies. However, whilst Curzon believed that Mussolini had thereby admitted the legitimacy of Britain's interest in the question, the latter claimed that Curzon had tacitly accepted that the future of the islands was now ruled by the treaty of London and that they would be retained by Italy.²⁹

This difference of opinion only failed to emerge because it was overshadowed by a more serious misunderstanding. During the same talks Mussolini gained the mistaken impression that Curzon was prepared to meet Italy's demands for a share in the

²⁸ FO 371/8413 'Memorandum respecting Questions outstanding between England and Italy' by Nicolson d.4 Apr.1923, Annex II; *DDI/7/1/32-5,46,49,54,294*; *DBFP/1/XVIII/830*; Lowe and Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy*, pp.189-90.

²⁹ *DBFP/1/XVIII/310,317*; *DDI/7/1/86-8,93*.

administration of the mandated territories.³⁰ When the Italians attempted to formalise this 'agreement' with the British they received a rude shock, the more so as the Italian note implied that their co-operation at Lausanne was dependent upon the granting of such concessions. Curzon angrily rejected this attempt at blackmail, warning that if it continued Britain and France were prepared to go on at Lausanne alone.³¹ Mussolini was thus denied the striking diplomatic victory he thought he had achieved, and, once his anger had abated, he had little option but to toe the Allied line at Lausanne in the hope of extracting concessions from England later.³²

Thanks to this contretemps, the precise position of the Dodecanese was somewhat obscured. On 25 November when the question came up for discussion Curzon prevented its being raised with the Turks - for which he was apparently warmly thanked by the Italians - and subsequently the issue was kept off the agenda.³³ The draft treaty drawn up in January 1923 reproduced, as article 15, article 122 of the treaty of Sèvres whereby Turkey ceded sovereignty over the islands to Italy. The Italians hoped that this would be the last word on the subject, but chose not to contradict Curzon when he expressed his own, different view³⁴ - namely, that he would never have consented to the introduction of article 15 had he not received (in addition to Mussolini's 'formal promise' of 3 November) 'verbal assurances' from the Italian delegation that the Dodecanese question would be made 'the subject of a further discussion and a final settlement between the Italian and British governments'.³⁵

Although this decision about the fate of the islands rested, therefore, upon an equivocation, there was no further discussion of the Dodecanese at Lausanne, and

³⁰ DBFP/1/XVIII/317,323-4,362-5; DDI/7/I/87-8,91-2.

³¹ DDI/7/I/91-4,96,98,100,105-6,122-3,130-3; DBFP/1/XVIII/352-3,362-4,376-7

³² DBFP/1/XVIII/362-5,376-7; DDI/7/I/123,135-7,139-40,162; Lowe and Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy*, pp190-1; Cassels, *Early Diplomacy*, pp.24-31.

³³ DBFP/1/XVIII/336-7,364; DDI/7/I/98,111,278.

³⁴ DDI/7/I/292-4,375-6.

³⁵ FO 371/8413 'Memorandum respecting Questions outstanding between England and Italy' by Nicolson d.4 Apr.1923, Annex II; DBFP/1/XXVI/5.

article 15 appeared in the final treaty of 24 July unamended.³⁶ This was perhaps not surprising. There had been far more dramatic questions at stake; and Curzon had in any case always insisted that, to minimise the possibility of inter-Allied disharmony, only matters relating directly to the peace with Turkey should be discussed at the conference. The Dodecanese question was left to become an element in Anglo-Italian and Italo-Greek relations in their wider sense.³⁷

Anglo-Italian relations in the spring and summer of 1923 were somewhat troubled. Although Mussolini had not pursued in power the anglophobe policy he had preached in opposition, he was, in British eyes, capricious and inconsistent. On the German question his policy was satisfactory, since although he initially supported France in the Ruhr occupation he on the whole followed the British line; as he did in the matter of Hungarian reparations and reconstruction.³⁸ However, he obstructed Britain's and the League's attempts to stabilise Austria, and also intrigued more directly against British interests.³⁹ Rumours that he was plotting with Indian revolutionaries against the British position in the subcontinent were eventually dismissed by the Foreign Office, but a plan which he floated in January for an anti-Anglo-Saxon continental bloc encompassing Italy, France, Belgium, Germany and eventually the Soviet Union was distinctly worrying.⁴⁰ This scheme was soon abandoned but, although it had been designed mainly to safeguard Italian economic interests in the event of French success

³⁶ The future of Castellorizzo, also occupied by the Italians and dealt with in article 15, was the subject of some discussion, but it was not strictly one of the Dodecanese (*DBFP/1/XVIII/692-4,721-5,773,812,838,995*).

³⁷ *DDI/7/1/375-6*.

³⁸ FO 371/8413 FO memorandum by [?] d.19 Apr.1923; *DBFP/1/XXIV/viii-x*; Cassels, *Early Diplomacy*, pp.47-79; Shorrocks, *Ally to Enemy*, pp.28ff.; S.Marks, 'Mussolini and the Ruhr Crisis', *International History Review* 8(1) 1986 56-69; F.Charles-Roux, *Souvenirs Diplomatiques. Une Grande Ambassade à Rome. 1919-1925* (Paris, Fayard, 1961), pp.231-4. By May Lampson was writing of the 'apparent loyalty' of Italy over reparations (FO 371/8889 min. by Lampson d.8 May 1923). In fact, as Marks demonstrates, Mussolini's Ruhr policy was to put off taking sides irrevocably and to promise all things to all men in the hope that both France and Britain would be grateful for his support.

³⁹ *DBFP/1/XXIV/vii-viii*.

⁴⁰ FO 371/8889 Crowe to Graham p.l. d.11 Jun.1923, Lampson to Graham p.l. d.21 Aug.1923, Graham to Lampson p.l. d.19 Sept.1923. Tyrrell believed that the rumours about Indian intrigues should be taken '*cum grano salis*' (min. by Tyrrell d.16 Aug.1923). For the continental bloc plan, see *DDI/7/1/218-9,225-6,230-1,240,242-4*.

in the Ruhr and was less anti-British than the enthusiastic Italian press made out, it had produced a painful impression in Britain.⁴¹

The one identifiable theme behind Mussolini's policies was the search for a striking foreign policy success to allay growing discontent with his domestic policy and to justify fascist rhetoric.⁴² The rebuff over mandates, failure to mediate successfully in the reparations question and the deadlock over Fiume (despite Mussolini's moderate line) all made the Duce keen to expedite settlement of the Dodecanese and Jubaland questions.⁴³ In March he urged Della Torretta to test the water in London to see if an agreement could not be reached before the visit of George V to Rome in May.⁴⁴

When the ambassador approached Curzon, however, with the suggestion that the Jubaland cession should be separated from the Dodecanese question and executed 'without delay as a *beau geste* on the part of England' in order to improve relations in the run up to the royal visit, he received the by now standard response: the Dodecanese, Jubaland and all other questions arising from the war must be settled together as part of a general arrangement after the conclusion of peace with Turkey.⁴⁵ Della Torretta therefore urged caution on Mussolini, arguing that as Anglo-Italian relations, though improving, were still somewhat delicate it would be better to postpone any initiative pending a further *rapprochement*, such as might be expected after the royal visit.⁴⁶

In fact the situation between England and Italy was approaching an impasse, each side being unwilling to retreat from its interpretation of the transactions of recent years.

Mussolini was in fact persuaded by Della Torretta to be patient over Jubaland, and

⁴¹ FO 371/8889 Graham to FO no.123 d.2 Feb.1923 and mins., no.125 d.3 Feb.1923, tel.20 d.3 Feb.1923 and min. by Cadogan d.5 Feb.1923, Graham to Lampson p.l. d.5 Feb.1923, Graham to FO no.201 d.23 Feb.1923; *DDI/7/1/230-1*; *DBFP/1/XXI/29-32*; Lowe and Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy*, pp192-3.

⁴² *DBFP/1/XXI/30-1*.

⁴³ FO 371/8889 Graham to FO no.123 d.2 Feb.1923; Marks, *IHR* 8 56-8.

⁴⁴ *DDI/7/1/350,420*.

⁴⁵ FO 371/8413 'Memorandum respecting Questions outstanding between England and Italy' by Nicolson d.4 Apr.1923, Annex I; [K.Bourne and D.C.Watt (general eds.),] *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print* (Washington, University Publications of America, 1983-)/[part] II/[series] F/5/320-2.

⁴⁶ *DDI/7/1/440-1*.

tried to dampen false hopes and to prevent any undue speculation appearing in the Italian press about possible concessions in connexion with the royal visit;⁴⁷ and the visit itself, which passed off smoothly between 7 and 12 May, perhaps did something to improve Anglo-Italian relations.⁴⁸ However, the Palazzo Chigi officials who in their anxiety that Mussolini was drifting too far from a traditional pro-British foreign policy had encouraged the visit, were to be disappointed in their hope for concrete political gains.⁴⁹ The British, although they were 'always ready to show every goodwill and friendship', were simply not interested in concluding any general agreement for political co-operation with the Italians, who had little to offer, and there was no chance of spontaneous concessions.⁵⁰ Curzon was especially reluctant to change his stance over Jubaland, since, in the offers already made, Britain had shown Italy 'exceptional generosity'.⁵¹

These views were more forcefully stated in June. Nicolson had encapsulated the British position in a memorandum in April, outlining the history of 'the two most important questions at issue between ourselves and Italy' and reiterating that Jubaland was the only lever likely to get the Italians out of the Dodecanese.⁵² In the aftermath of the royal visit, Graham wrote a long despatch from Rome in which he challenged this Foreign Office orthodoxy and urged that the warm feelings engendered by George V's trip should be reinforced by a change of heart on the Jubaland question: Rome could be very helpful to Britain in European affairs, but, as Italian policy was 'frankly opportunistic and egotistic', Mussolini might be forced, unless some concrete advantage was forthcoming, to turn from Britain towards France, or might even be overthrown. Graham then subjected Nicolson's memorandum to a detailed critique

⁴⁷ FO 371/8413 Graham to FO no.421 d.4 May 1923; FO 371/8889 Graham to FO no.443 d.12 May 1923; *DDI/7/II/8*.

⁴⁸ FO 371/8889 Graham to FO tel.91 d.7 May 1923, tel.94 d.12 May 1923; MSS EUR F112/230 Graham to Curzon p.l. d.12 May 1923; *DBFP/1/XXIV/695-6*.

⁴⁹ Lowe and Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy*, pp193-4.

⁵⁰ FO 371/8413 FO memorandum by [?] d.19 Apr.1923; FO 371/8889 mins. by Nicolson, Lampson and Crowe d.8 May 1923.

⁵¹ FO 371/8889 mins. by Curzon d.7 and 11 Apr.1923.

⁵² FO 371/8413 'Memorandum respecting Questions outstanding between England and Italy' by Nicolson d.4 Apr.1923.

from an Italian point of view, hoping to produce 'a more sympathetic disposition' within the Foreign Office towards Italian claims. His despatch amounted to a heartfelt plea for a reconsideration of British policy, in order to remove the Italians' sense of injustice and 'consolidate Anglo-Italian friendship for some time to come'.⁵³

Graham's exposition of the Italian point of view was reasoned and logical, but his arguments met with a decisive rejection. Not surprisingly, London disagreed with the specifics of the Italian interpretation of what had passed over Jubaland and the Dodecanese; however, as Nicolson pointed out, it would be both 'unprofitable and undignified' to engage in a public dispute over those. More to the point were doubts as to the actual value of Italy's friendship, something which Graham seemed to take for granted in advocating British concessions.⁵⁴ Although Lampson urged that 'the cooperation of Italy in the councils of Europe' would be cheaply bought 'at the price of a few thousand miles of barren African scrub',⁵⁵ Crowe heartily disagreed. His view was the same as it had been at the time of the Schanzer visit: 'I do not believe that whatever price we pay to Italy, we shall in return get her loyal support in any single question. I wholly mistrust their governments, from whatever party chosen'.⁵⁶ With both Rome and London so unyielding there seemed little prospect of an Anglo-Italian settlement of the Dodecanese or Jubaland questions.

At this juncture the possibility arose of an Italo-Greek settlement of the Dodecanese dispute. Previously, the Greeks had played only a minimal rôle, not least because the British were fighting their cause with Mussolini, and they were in any case preoccupied with the wider settlement with Turkey. The official Greek attitude had been stated by Venizelos in January in response to the draft treaty of Lausanne: Greece welcomed the cession of the islands to Italy by Turkey, but reserved her rights under the admittedly non-ratified treaty of 1920 and counted on the Italians for a

⁵³ *DBFP/1/XXIV/695-700*.

⁵⁴ FO 371/8889 min. by Nicolson d.13 Jun.1923.

⁵⁵ FO 371/8889 min. by Lampson d.14 Jun.1923.

⁵⁶ FO 371/8889 min. by Crowe d.14 Jun.1923.

solution in line with the principle of nationalities and previous engagements.⁵⁷ Later, however, the Greeks took the initiative. On 28 May Venizelos wrote privately to Nicolson asking whether the British would object to the Greeks' raising the Dodecanese question bilaterally with Rome.⁵⁸ After some discussion within the Foreign Office, Nicolson replied that the British would not insist upon the question being settled solely by England and Italy, despite their long-standing and continuing interest in it. On the contrary, 'they would welcome it' if Greco-Italian talks were to produce a solution which they 'could accept as a fair and equitable' one.⁵⁹

Venizelos' inquiry had been prompted by the imminence of a visit to Rome by the Greek foreign minister, Apostolos Alexandris. The initiative for this visit had come from the Greeks, who were understandably anxious to escape from their isolation, and who planned to offer the Italians economic concessions in return for recognition and diplomatic support.⁶⁰ In particular, the Greeks were very alarmed by rumours that the Italians were encouraging Yugoslav designs on Salonica at a time when the issue of the Yugoslav free zone there was the subject of delicate negotiation; and they hoped for concessions over the Dodecanese question, about which Greek public opinion was very excited.⁶¹

From the beginning the visit was ill-starred. Alexandris annoyed the Italians by claiming that they had initiated it, and at Lausanne Montagna poured heavy scorn on the idea of a *rapprochement* with Greece.⁶² More significantly, the Greeks were negotiating from a position of weakness and had little of substance to offer the Italians. A long Palazzo Chigi minute argued that although a *rapprochement* might deliver a solution to the Dodecanese problem and help Italy in her relations with

⁵⁷ DDI/7/I/341-3. After the Asia Minor defeat the previously relatively neglected Dodecanese question was given much more attention by the Greeks (Carabott, *Dodecanese Question*, pp.269-73,295-7).

⁵⁸ FO 371/8822 Venizelos to Nicolson p.1. d.28 May 1923.

⁵⁹ DBFP/1/XVIII/829-30; FO 371/8822 mins. by Nicolson and Crowe d.1 Jun.1923.

⁶⁰ DDI/7/II/38,61-2.

⁶¹ DDI/7/II/61-2; DBFP/1/XXIV/561-2,613-7,642-3,863-4.

⁶² DDI/7/II/38,57-60,70. Montagna was even more ill-disposed towards the Greeks than usual in May because the Athens press had attacked him for his work at Lausanne (DDI/7/II/32).

Yugoslavia, the balance of advantages was against it. Such a *rapprochement* might offend England and would in any case be ephemeral, given the Venizelist (and therefore anti-Italian) views of those in the ascendancy in Greece. It concluded that any *rapprochement* must be subordinated to the delivery of concrete advantages to Rome in the settlement of the many political and economic questions pending between Italy and Greece.⁶³ Contarini, the secretary general of the Palazzo Chigi, therefore insisted in a circular despatch to Italy's ambassadors that the visit should not be interpreted as signalling any change in Italy's attitude towards either Greece or the existing Greek government.⁶⁴

Alexandris arrived in Rome on 21 June, and his talks with Mussolini were singularly unproductive. Economic questions were discussed - principally the likelihood of Italy being granted concessions in Greece - and Italy recognised the utility of an eventual restoration of normal diplomatic relations; but when Alexandris raised the Dodecanese question Mussolini cut him off, insisting that no such 'question' existed. To make matters worse, on his return home Alexandris allowed exaggerated accounts of his visit to circulate - including the statement that the Italians had agreed to recognise George II - in order to strengthen the domestic position of the revolutionary government. This only aroused the ire of Mussolini who demanded apologies for such gross misrepresentation.⁶⁵ Although the Greeks could fairly claim, considering that for seven months the Italians had had nothing to do with the revolutionary government, that it was a success for Alexandris to have been received at all, Italo-Greek relations had scarcely been improved by the visit.

The failure of the Alexandris visit illustrated Mussolini's decision not to conciliate the Greeks, and in fact he now began to see in them, and the Dodecanese question, a possible source of the propaganda victory he had so far been denied. On 17 July Contarini told the British chargé in Rome, Kennard, that Mussolini 'was personally

⁶³ DDI/7/II/53-5.

⁶⁴ DDI/7/II/62-3.

⁶⁵ DDI/7/II/63-67; DBFP/1/XXIV/735-6,746-8; MAE Grèce 78 Marcilly to QO no.107 d.2 Jul. 1923.

anxious to proclaim the annexation of all these islands to Italy without any preliminary communication to His Majesty's Government', but that so far the Palazzo Chigi had managed to restrain him from this 'precipitate action'.⁶⁶ In fact, rumours had been current earlier in the year that the Italians were preparing to annex the Dodecanese and they had caused quite a stir in the Greek press.⁶⁷ It was now obvious that Mussolini was strongly tempted by the propaganda value of formally sealing Italy's ownership of the islands in this way.

Although Contarini, warned explicitly by Kennard on 17 July that any one-sided settlement of the Dodecanese question would have a 'lamentable effect' on Anglo-Italian relations, had indeed promised to continue to endeavour to restrain Mussolini,⁶⁸ his sincerity was not beyond question, and the Foreign Office was in fact becoming seriously worried.⁶⁹ On 25 July Lampson minuted that now, after the signature of the Lausanne treaty and the failure of Alexandris' attempts to negotiate terms with the Italians, the Dodecanese question was likely to come up 'in acute form'.⁷⁰ Curzon agreed, and instructed Crowe to give 'a serious warning' to Della Torretta.⁷¹ On 30 July Crowe did so, reminding the ambassador of Mussolini's various undertakings on this subject and of Britain's 'direct interest' in it.⁷² Throughout August, rumours about Italian intentions intensified, partly because of increased military activity in the islands, and Kennard was instructed to renew his warnings to Contarini.⁷³ The British also gave warnings to the Dodecanesians who, Bentinck reported from Athens, were planning some action against the Italian occupation forces. Bentinck told their spokesman that this would be disastrous, as it would

⁶⁶ *DBFP/1/XXIV/770-1*, cf. Barros, *Corfu*, p.68.

⁶⁷ *DDI/7/II/387*; FO 371/8822 Kennard to FO no.279 d.15 Mar.1923. Kennard was chargé between 11 July and 13 September 1923.

⁶⁸ *DBFP/1/XXIV/770-1*.

⁶⁹ For Contarini's trustworthiness see FO 371/8822 Kennard to Lampson p.l. d.10 Aug.1923, *DBFP/1/XXI/32* and *DBFP/1/XXIV/771*.

⁷⁰ FO 371/8822 min. by Lampson d.25 Jul.1923.

⁷¹ FO 371/8822 min. by Curzon d.28 Jul.1923.

⁷² *DBFP/1/XXIV/788*; *DDI/7/II/106-7*.

⁷³ *DBFP/1/XXIV/798.800-1*; FO 371/8822 Kollas (Greek chargé in London) to Oliphant no.2678 d.8 Aug.1923, Kennard to Lampson p.l. d.10 Aug.1923.

definitely provoke the Italians into annexing the islands, and he was confident that for the moment they would not act.⁷⁴

Despite this, the Foreign Office realised that it was necessary to clarify Britain's position on the Dodecanese question, and this was done by Nicolson in a memorandum of 4 August. He argued that it was necessary to select carefully the arguments upon which the British attitude was based: irritation with the 'perfidious opportunism' of the Italians must be cast aside, the ethnical argument would have to be discarded as double-edged and the naval balance of power argument could not be openly avowed. Only the contractual argument - that the Italians were still bound by the spirit of their two agreements with Venizelos to cede the islands - remained. Basing itself upon this, Britain must try to avoid three dangerous possible outcomes: 'a full dress diplomatic contest' with Italy; the *fait accompli* of an immediate annexation; or a complete impasse where the 'Dodecanese would become Italian and ... Jubaland would remain rather aridly British'. Britain must therefore proceed 'very tentatively' along one of two paths. If Mussolini annexed the islands Britain would have to 'take it lying down' and hope that he could be held to his promise of 3 November 1922 to discuss further with London their ultimate fate. If, on the other hand, he showed restraint, the British, rather than opening negotiations themselves, should encourage Greco-Italian talks, making it clear to the Greeks how far they would go in supporting them and to the Italians that the cession of Jubaland depended on a satisfactory settlement being reached.⁷⁵

This memorandum illustrated the problem posed by Italian restlessness: if Mussolini chose in defiance of all his promises to annex the islands there was very little the British could do. Curzon's policy at Lausanne of arranging the cession of the islands to Italy on the understanding that he would be consulted as to their eventual fate was dependent for its success upon Mussolini's good faith and on the Italians' attaching a greater value to Jubaland than to the Dodecanese. Moreover, as Nicolson wrote, 'the

⁷⁴ DBFP/1/XXIV/779-81,798,805.

⁷⁵ DBFP/1/XXIV/790-3.

essential difficulty is that the Italians are established in the islands, and short of war, we cannot turn them out'.⁷⁶ In Foreign Office discussions on Nicolson's memorandum doubts were even raised as to whether Britain should even try to get the Italians out. Lampson deprecated any British initiative now when the reparations question was 'to the fore ... ; for to some extent we count upon Italian support in our discussions with France'.⁷⁷ Curzon, however, was more bullish: it was not a question of engagements between Italy and Greece, but of the 'repeated promises' made by Italy to Britain that 'the future of these islands can only be determined by Allied Agreement'. On the other hand, there was no reason for Britain to 'fight the battles of Greece' if she did not mind losing the islands. Consequently he instructed Nicolson to write privately to Venizelos 'to ascertain what the Greeks really want'.⁷⁸

On 10 August therefore, Nicolson outlined for Venizelos' benefit the difficult position London was in: Britain maintained her interest in the islands but did not want them used as a pretext for a general discussion of Anglo-Italian relations 'which, in present circumstances, we desire to avoid'. The British were therefore anxious to facilitate direct Greco-Italian negotiations, but before doing so wanted Venizelos' opinion on the prospects for such negotiations and on what the Greek government's maximum and minimum terms would be.⁷⁹ Venizelos' vague reply of 15 August simply stating that he would consult Athens on the issue did 'not advance matters'. All London could therefore do was wait.⁸⁰ There was at this stage little optimism about the possibility of a Greco-Italian settlement in the Foreign Office, where Lampson was worried that the Greeks might only stiffen their attitude once they knew London was taking a renewed interest in the question: "*Timeo Danaos*", even when they are looking for, [and] not bearing, gifts - as in the present case'.⁸¹

⁷⁶ DBFP/1/XXIV/792.

⁷⁷ FO 371/8822 mins. by Lampson and Cadogan d.4 Aug.1923.

⁷⁸ DBFP/1/XXIV/793.

⁷⁹ DBFP/1/XXIV/804-5.

⁸⁰ DBFP/1/XXIV/805-6,812.

⁸¹ DBFP/1/XXIV/806.

The question of the Dodecanese, however, just as it had earlier been overshadowed by the mandates question at Lausanne, was soon again to be overshadowed by more momentous events. Throughout the summer Mussolini had adopted an increasingly truculent attitude on the question, encouraged no doubt by reports from Athens that the Greeks were becoming increasingly obstructive of Italian interests.⁸² On 6 August he told Della Torretta, in response to Crowe's chiding, that Italy's position was that all previous promises had been superseded by article 15 of the treaty of Lausanne and that Anglo-Italian relations would be much improved if Britain would cease meddling in the Dodecanese.⁸³ Mussolini's inclination to annex the islands was shared by certain members of his cabinet, and by late August, with the expected Greek and Turkish ratifications of the Lausanne treaty, an opportunity for action began to loom.⁸⁴

One of the supporters of annexation was the minister of marine, Thaon di Revel, who like Mussolini wanted to raise Italian prestige. He believed, however, that an annexation of the Dodecanese would be bound to provoke uproar from the Greeks. Consequently he held talks with Palazzo Chigi officials in July and August in order to decide on possible measures of reprisal in the event of Greek protests after an annexation. The coercive measures eventually settled upon consisted of naval movements against Athens and the occupation of Corfu, and Di Revel stipulated that all preparations were to be completed in secret by the end of August. The extent of Mussolini's knowledge of these plans is unclear, but all units had been ordered to full readiness to implement the planned naval operations when, on 27 August, news reached Rome that the entire Italian delegation on the Greco-Albanian frontier delimitation commission had been slain on Greek territory by assassins unknown.⁸⁵

⁸² DDI/7/II/91.

⁸³ DDI/7/II/108-9.

⁸⁴ DBFP/1/XXIV/800; DDI/7/II/111. The Turkish assembly voted draft laws ratifying the treaty on 23 August, and the Greeks ratified it on 25 August. British ratification was delayed until 15 August 1924 and that of France until 27 August 1924. The treaty entered into force on 6 August 1924 (DBFP/1/XVIII/972).

⁸⁵ Barros, *Corfu*, pp.33,68-70; Lowe and Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy*, pp.194-5. Barros' source is a memoir (published in 1953) by Captain Antonio Foschini, chief of the general staff of the Italian

The murder of General Enrico Tellini and his comrades in Epirus provided the pretext for the previously mooted occupation of Corfu and sparked off the Corfu crisis.⁸⁶ Had it not been for these killings, it is probable that some sort of crisis would still have arisen, but rather in connexion with the annexation of the Dodecanese. (This is not certain, however. Kennard believed Mussolini, who always kept his options open, might consider recognising the Greek government in exchange for their complaisance over the annexation).⁸⁷ As it was, Mussolini seized on Tellini's death to achieve his propaganda victory, and the ensuing crisis was very much shaped by its origins in Epirus (for example, in a crisis arising from the annexation of the Dodecanese, the conference of Ambassadors would never have become involved and the Anglo-Italian confrontation would probably therefore have been more direct). However, the context in which the crisis occurred was marked by the previous deterioration in Anglo-Italian relations that owed a great deal to the deadlock over the Dodecanese. Neither side had been willing to compromise on this question, with the result that suspicion and mistrust already abounded, producing accusations of perfidy and betrayal. Most importantly, Curzon's refusal to satisfy Mussolini's fervent desire for a propaganda victory had left the latter deeply frustrated - which does something to explain the violence and rapidity of his reaction to the Tellini murder. In this respect, the British had already made a significant contribution to the crisis that was about to break over Corfu.

navy in 1923. Foschini played a key rôle in the occupation of Corfu by Italian forces (DBFP/1/XXIV/963-8) and was presumably in a position to know of Thaon di Revel's plans. As Cassels notes, Foschini is perhaps 'not the most reliable witness' (Cassels, *Early Diplomacy*, p.98), but most historians writing on the subject have accepted the veracity of his account.

⁸⁶ Cassels argues that either the Janina murders were 'one of the most remarkable coincidences in history' or Mussolini had a hand in them; the latter, however, has never been proved (Cassels, *Early Diplomacy*, p.101).

⁸⁷ FO 371/8822 Kennard to Lampson p.l. d.10 Aug.1923; DBFP/1/XXIV/950.

Chapter Seven
The Corfu Crisis
August - September 1923

The Corfu crisis was a significant milestone in international relations between the wars, even if it is perhaps too much to claim, as Barros does, that it was 'the first in a series of retreats by the powers which culminated with the German annexation of the Sudetenland, fifteen years later'.¹ It represented a searching examination of the commitment of Great Britain and France to upholding the new international order theoretically established at Versailles, and was the first real test of the practicability of collective security as enshrined in the Covenant of the League of Nations. It also illustrated the danger to the *status quo* posed by a great power unwilling to 'play the game' and prepared to use naked aggression to further national interests. As well as illuminating these aspects of great power relations, the crisis was a salutary reminder to the Greeks (and to other small powers) that despite the guarantees supposedly offered by the Covenant and the League, their interests were ultimately as much as ever prey to the whims and priorities of the great powers.

Tellini and his colleagues were murdered on the morning of 27 August when, as they were surveying the frontier, their car was ambushed on the Janina-Kakavia road near Zepi.² The next day Montagna had a stormy interview with Alexandris in which he protested vehemently about the murders and insisted upon immediate exemplary punishment of the guilty.³ Meanwhile, Mussolini began to formulate a series of demands for reparation to be presented to the Greek government.⁴ These were embodied in a note presented by Montagna on the evening of 29 August. In sum Mussolini made seven demands: that a full and official apology should be delivered to

¹ Barros, *Corfu*, p.296. The Corfu crisis has generated a good deal of literature, and most accounts of international relations in the 1920s have something to say about it. Barros' work is comprehensive and has stood the test of time well considering that the Foreign Office and Quai d'Orsay archives on the crisis were not accessible to the author. Information drawn from these sources has now appeared in various articles and books which supplement Barros' earlier work. From the British angle there is P.J. Yearwood, "'Consistently with Honour"; Great Britain, the League of Nations and the Corfu Crisis of 1923', *Journal of Contemporary History* 21(4) 1986 559-79 and from the French side J. Blatt, 'France and the Corfu-Fiume Crisis of 1923', *The Historian* 50 1988 234-59 and Shorrocks, *Ally to Enemy*, pp.37-44. A good selection of British documents has also been published in DBFP/1/XXIV/936-1115. Further references can be found in Blatt *Historian* 50 234.

² For an account of the incident and a discussion of the various theories as to who was responsible for the crime, see Barros, *Corfu*, pp.20-32.

³ DDI/II/125-7, 129-30; DBFP/1/XXIV/939-40.

⁴ DDI/II/128; Barros, *Corfu*, pp.35-40.

Montagna; that a funeral service, attended by the whole Greek government, should be held at Athens; that the Greek fleet should salute the Italian flag; that a full inquiry supervised by the Italian military attaché should be instituted; that capital punishment should be inflicted upon the guilty; that an indemnity of 50,000,000 lire should be paid; and that military honours should be paid to the corpses on their embarkation onto an Italian ship.⁵ The Italian note, essentially an ultimatum, demanded a reply within twenty-four hours, and the next evening this was delivered to the Italian legation. After contesting the Italian implication that the Greek government bore responsibility for the murders, the reply accepted in essence four of the Italian demands but rejected the fourth, fifth and sixth of them as incompatible with Greek sovereignty.⁶

There is no doubt that the Italians were genuinely outraged by the Kakavia murders, and this was reflected in the violence and emotion of the language used by Italian diplomats and the Rome press. It was no surprise that Montagna reacted with great excitement to the incident but Italian diplomats in Paris exhibited similar feelings.⁷ The Italian press reflected public opinion in reacting very strongly to the murders and giving 'vent to their deep-seated hatred of Greece'. Press, diplomats and Mussolini himself were from the outset convinced that the assassinations were the result of 'Greek political intrigues', and discounted any idea that they could be the work of renegade Epirote or Albanian bandits.⁸ In context this reaction was understandable, for the crime was a great blow to Italian national pride, already battered by failure to achieve satisfaction in the post-war settlement, and this was exacerbated by its being delivered by the hated Greeks. Thus Kennard argued that the 'extreme nationalist elements are well pleased to make the most of the opportunity to show the world that Italy is a strong Mediterranean power who will tolerate no offence at the hands of her

⁵ *DDI/7/II/133-4,137; DBFP/1/XXIV/943.*

⁶ *DDI/7/II/139-41,144-6; DBFP/1/XXIV/943-5; Barros, Corfu, pp.56-9,65-7.*

⁷ *DDI/7/II/125-7; DBFP/1/XXIV/941-2.* Marcilly reported how Montagna's conduct and 'megalomania' during the crisis revolted the Athens diplomatic corps, and attributed them 'to his temperament and his grudges against the Greeks' and to the fact that as a late convert to fascism he wanted to prove himself to Mussolini (MAE Italie 130 Marcilly to QO no.170 d.27 Sept.1923).

⁸ *DBFP/1/XXIV/950; Barros, Corfu, pp.54-6.*

neighbours'.⁹ Although Mussolini made the most of the incident to implement his designs on Corfu - he decided right from the outset that the island should be occupied 'as a measure of reprisal' - Italian indignation was by no means wholly contrived.¹⁰

In response to the Greek reply the Italian fleet - working to the plans previously drawn up in relation to the Dodecanese - arrived off Corfu in the mid-afternoon of 31 August. The operation to occupy the island was then comprehensively bungled. The Greek authorities were given insufficient time to telegraph Athens for instructions and, despite the fact that no resistance was offered by the islanders, the Italians bombarded the citadel of Corfu town where masses of refugees from Armenia and Asia Minor had taken shelter. The Greek prefect immediately surrendered but by then sixteen people had been killed.¹¹ This use of force was apparently contrary to Mussolini's orders, and the effect of it was to transfer the sympathy of world opinion from the Italians to the Greeks.¹² At five o'clock Montagna presented a note to the Greek government announcing the occupation of Corfu 'in a pacific and temporary capacity', and warning it to do nothing to alter 'the pacific nature of these measures'.¹³

The reactions of Britain and France took some time to become apparent. Initially both refused Mussolini's adjurations to make direct representations at Athens, arguing that as the dead men were agents of the conference of Ambassadors (i.e. the body sitting in Paris established in 1919 to settle questions of detail - as opposed to those of principle - arising from the implementation of the peace treaties) it was for that organ rather than individual governments to take action.¹⁴ Indeed, the conference despatched a note to Athens on 31 August, protesting at the murders and reserving the right to demand reparations later.¹⁵ Mussolini adhered to this note of protest, whilst

⁹ *DBFP/1/XXIV/950*.

¹⁰ *DDI/7/II/128*; Barros, *Corfu*, pp.39-40.

¹¹ *DBFP/1/XXIV/947,963-8*; *DDI/7/II/144,153-4,270-2*; Barros, *Corfu*, pp.74-9.

¹² Barros, *Corfu*, pp.74,79-80. Italian intelligence had revealed the presence of the refugees and the bombardment was later criticised by the minister of marine (*DDI/7/II/271*).

¹³ *DDI/7/II/143-4,148*; *DBFP/1/XXIV/946-7*.

¹⁴ *DDI/7/II/127,129,132-3,137-9*; *DBFP/1/XXIV/936-8,940-3*. For the history of the Ambassadors' conference, see Barros, *Corfu*, pp.3-19.

¹⁵ *DBFP/1/XXIV/937-8,945-7*; *DDI/7/II/148-9*.

insisting that the conference's undoubted right to reparation did not detract from Italy's own (already exercised) right to demand redress for a wrong committed against her nationals.¹⁶

British policy took a decisive turn after the Italian ultimatum and the occupation of Corfu. Curzon felt that Italy's demands for reparation were 'extravagant - much worse than the ultimatum after Sarajevo, and I can hardly conceive any self respecting Gov[ernmen]t acceding to them'. Tyrrell recognised that Mussolini would 'of course exploit this outrage to his greatest glory' and that at any moment a new Ruhr question might arise in the Adriatic in the shape of the occupation of Corfu.¹⁷ The Greeks had decided to appeal to the League about the minatory attitude of Italy even before the occupation of Corfu - and in fact laid the matter before the Council on 1 September¹⁸ - and the instinctive reaction of the Foreign Office was to support the League.¹⁹ On 1 September Curzon told Cecil that the Italians' actions had 'placed them definitely in the wrong' and that he desired 'to support [the] League on the first occasion on which a small power has appealed to it against [the] high-handed action of a great power'.²⁰

This decision reflected the recent poor state of Anglo-Italian relations and the fact that the British saw no reason to conciliate Mussolini or to treat this question other than on its own merits. From the first, however, London was aware that the attitude of the French might prove decisive: on 1 September the Foreign Office asked Cecil whether he could be sure that London's advocacy of a League solution might not 'lead to a fiasco owing to imposition of veto by other Council members'.²¹ This anxiety was well founded. Poincaré soon adopted a more pro-Italian policy, precisely because, unlike the British, the French wanted Italian support for their wider diplomatic

¹⁶ DDI/7/II/138-9,142-3; DBFP/1/XXIV/943-4; Barros, *Corfu*, pp.60-5.

¹⁷ DBFP/1/XXIV/943-4.

¹⁸ DBFP/1/XXIV/947,955-6,987; DDI/7/II/147-8,150,154-6,160-2; Barros, *Corfu*, pp.80-1,90-8. The League Council was in session from 31 August to 29 September, and the Assembly was sitting simultaneously. Plastiras had at first wanted to resist the Italian occupation of Corfu by force, but wiser counsels prevailed in Athens.

¹⁹ Yearwood *JCH* 21 561-3; Barros, *Corfu*, pp.86-7.

²⁰ DBFP/1/XXIV/954.

²¹ DBFP/1/XXIV/952-4,958-9; Yearwood *JCH* 21 564. In his reply Cecil strongly advocated full British support for the League but evaded the direct question he had been asked.

objectives, particularly in the Ruhr and over Fiume. In the Ruhr, Italian support, though equivocal and inconsistent, was considered vital by the French and was likely to prove increasingly so as the reparations crisis moved into an acute phase. Similarly, the Quai d'Orsay feared that if the League tried and condemned Mussolini over Corfu, a precedent would be set for it to judge France over the Ruhr occupation. Fiume was a factor of a slightly different kind. Throughout 1923 relations between Italy and Yugoslavia had been deteriorating as an impasse was reached on the future of the city, and this created a dilemma for the Quai d'Orsay, which wanted good relations with both states. It was, therefore, clearly in France's interest to avoid alienating Mussolini and to influence him towards moderation in this thorny question; and, in any case, Yugoslavia was far more important to France than was Greece.²²

Indications of the French attitude were soon forthcoming. On 1 September Poincaré telegraphed to the French representative on the League Council, Hanotaux, that he now favoured a solution *via* the Ambassadors' conference.²³ The French press also changed its tune: at first it had denounced Mussolini's action but on 1 September the *mot d'ordre* went out from the Quai d'Orsay 'to be friendly to Italy in articles on her present conflict with Greece as France required Italy's support'.²⁴ Mussolini did not fail to notice this, and drew attention to it in his protests to London about the attitude of the British press.²⁵ Meanwhile, Kennard noted how the French in Rome were 'clearly making every effort to worm their way into the goodwill of these people again, and fall over themselves in their desire to be the first to condole or congratulate, which ever the case may be'.²⁶

²² Barros, *Corfu*, pp.87-8; Shorrock, *Ally to Enemy*, pp.33-9; Blatt *Historian* 50 243-4,249-50. For developments in the Fiume question in 1923, see *DBFP/1/XXIV/516-8,526-8,546-8,556-7,569-70,703-4,757,761,768,771-2,801-2,816,823,830-6*.

²³ Charles-Roux, *Grande Ambassade*, p.240; Shorrock, *Ally to Enemy*, p.38.

²⁴ *DBFP/1/XXIV/948-9; DDI/7/II/149-50; MSS EUR F112/312* Imperial conference, notes of sixth meeting, 11 October 1923, speech by Curzon; Barros, *Corfu*, pp.86. The French and British press (with the sole exception of the *Daily Mail*) had unanimously condemned Mussolini's threats and the occupation of Corfu.

²⁵ *DBFP/1/XXIV/957,960; DDI/7/II/155,178*.

²⁶ *DBFP/1/XXIV/951,962*.

The next few days were occupied by hectic diplomacy as the powers struggled to contain and resolve the crisis *via* meetings of both the League Council and the Ambassadors' conference.²⁷ The attitudes of the various powers were now clear. Mussolini was adamant that the League had no jurisdiction in this case since Italian national honour was at stake, no act of war had been committed and the question was before the Ambassadors' conference. Antonio Salandra, Italy's representative on the Council, had adopted this attitude on 1 September and was instructed to maintain it two days later and authorised to threaten Italian withdrawal from the League if this was not accepted.²⁸ The French, both in Paris and Geneva, broadly supported these Italian contentions.²⁹ Curzon, on the other hand, continued to favour a League solution and in his instructions to Crewe in Paris emphasised that the functions of the Ambassadors' conference were 'definite, but circumscribed'.³⁰ Although that body was entitled to examine the circumstances of the Kakavia murders, it had 'no title to investigate [the] wider problem which has now been referred to [the] League' as a result of Italy's action, 'which ought not to pass without being explained and if possible vindicated'.³¹

Although Curzon was still resolute, others had begun to look for compromise solutions which might be facilitated by Greece's willingness to accept the jurisdiction of both the Ambassadors' conference and the League.³² One such scheme was

²⁷ The League Council met on 4, 5 and 6 September, the Ambassadors' conference on 5 September. See, Barros, *Corfu*, pp.124-187.

²⁸ *DDI/7/II/147-8,150,154-6,159-62,169-71,173-4,179-82; DBFP/1/XXIV/955-6,958,961,968-9,975-7; Barros, Corfu*, pp.90-8,105-7,112,125-6.

²⁹ For example, in the meetings of the League Council and Ambassadors' conference held on 5 September (*DDI/7/II/184-8,196-7; DBFP/1/XXIV/988-92; Barros, Corfu*, pp.132-57).

³⁰ *DBFP/1/XXIV/983*.

³¹ *DBFP/1/XXIV/973*. Curzon expressed similar sentiments in an interview with Della Torretta on 3 September. He explained that the 'almost unprecedented severity' of the Italian ultimatum which was delivered before guilt was established, coupled with the refusal to accept League intervention, had united British public opinion behind the government's policy, namely to uphold the Covenant. The interview was quite friendly and Curzon sympathised with Della Torretta's position in that, as the ambassador put it, 'Mussolini having put his foot down could not possibly take it up again either as regards ultimatum or the League' (*DBFP/1/XXIV/971-3; DDI/7/II/177-8*).

³² The Greeks, in their reply to the Ambassadors' conference note of 31 August, had on 2 September agreed that if their responsibility for the murders was proved they would make whatever reparations the conference deemed equitable (*DDI/7/II/174-5; DBFP/1/XXIV/961-2,969-71*). The decision of Athens to accept the right of the Ambassadors' conference to reparation angered Politis, who felt it made his job at Geneva of pressing for the competence of the League much harder. It also 'made it

developed by Kennard in Rome, who feared that Britain's championing of the League would ruin Anglo-Italian relations, and that Mussolini, a prisoner of ultra-nationalist sentiment might, if thwarted, 'take some rash and impulsive step'.³³ (Later Kennard characterised Mussolini 'as a mad dog who may do infinite harm before he is despatched')³⁴. On 4 September he made a purely personal suggestion to Mussolini that as a way out of the impasse the League Council might declare itself competent in theory but concede that, as the Ambassadors' conference was already dealing with the matter, it would take no action. Mussolini promised to consider this idea, but London was not enthusiastic. Curzon was in fact angered that Kennard was complicating the situation and considered sending Graham back to Rome forthwith: 'whenever a crisis occurs our Ambassadors always seem to be shooting or holidaying'.³⁵

In Paris, Poincaré was seeking a compromise formula, for he too was in a rather delicate position. On the one hand he was still anxious to conciliate Mussolini - he promised 'to support Italy loyally and unconditionally' until her interests were satisfied³⁶ - but on the other hand he had to consider the fact that the Little *Entente* powers and other small states, which had an important place in French diplomacy and which regarded the League 'as their salvation', were vociferously supporting Geneva and would not take kindly to any French-brokered solution which humiliated the League.³⁷ Poincaré therefore set out to secure reparation for Mussolini for the murders *via* the Ambassadors' conference, thus achieving an Italian evacuation of Corfu and avoiding the question of the League's competence becoming acute.³⁸ He

easier for France and Italy to take the case from the friendlier atmosphere of Geneva to the secret meetings of the Ambassadorial Conference in Paris' (Barros, *Corfu*, pp.119-22).

³³ DBFP/1/XXIV/951,957-8,960,975-6,983-4.

³⁴ DBFP/1/XXIV/996.

³⁵ DBFP/1/XXIV/978-80. This was rather unfair of Curzon who had himself been on holiday in France when the crisis erupted and had not returned to London until 2 September. This had contributed to the initially extremely cautious response of the Foreign Office to the crisis (DBFP/1/XXIV/936-8,943,951,954). Furthermore, Baldwin was away at Aix-les-Bains from 25 August and did not hurry back to England, a fact which attracted criticism from George V (Barros, *Corfu*, pp.180-1).

³⁶ DDI/7/II/158-9,171-2,176; Barros, *Corfu*, pp.113-6.

³⁷ DBFP/1/XXIV/972,974-5; MSS EUR F112/229 Cecil to Curzon p.l. d.4 Sept.1923; Blatt *Historian* 50 240; Shorrocks, *Ally to Enemy*, p.39.

³⁸ DBFP/1/XXIV/974-5,977-8.

instructed Hanotaux in Geneva and the French chargé in Rome, Charles-Roux, in this sense on 4 September, explaining that he wanted the League Council not to go into the question of competence but simply to state the facts of the case, including Italy's avowed intention to evacuate Corfu once satisfaction for the murders was obtained, and to recommend that the matter be settled as soon as possible by direct negotiations between the interested powers under the auspices of the Ambassadors' conference.³⁹

On 6 September the League Council made real progress towards a compromise settlement along these lines, although the prime mover in this was not Poincaré but Cecil. He believed that in the circumstances the best hope for a solution lay in co-operation between the League and the conference, so that Mussolini could claim to have submitted to the latter whilst the Greeks would have secured a discussion of their case by the former.⁴⁰ His plan was that the Council should send to the conference a list of proposals - essentially comprising those Italian demands which the Greeks had accepted on 30 August together with some proposals made by the Greek representative in Geneva, Politis, on 4 September⁴¹ - as a basis for the demands for reparation to be made of Greece. If the conference accepted the proposals, then the immediate crisis would soon be settled and, once the Italians were out of Corfu, the League could discuss the question of its own competence.⁴² At the Council meeting in the afternoon, a slight hitch arose when Salandra objected that the communication amounted to a declaration of competence. This was overcome when Cecil proposed that rather than sending the proposals officially a mere anodyne acknowledgement should be given to the most recent note from the Ambassadors'

³⁹ Charles-Roux, *Grande Ambassade*, pp.242-3; Shorrocks, *Ally to Enemy*, pp.39-40. Charles-Roux welcomed this plan as he, like Kennard, feared that with Italian national honour at stake Mussolini would never back down (Charles-Roux, *Grande Ambassade*, pp.244-5; Blatt *Historian* 50 241). On 5 September he put the plan to Mussolini who declared it in essence acceptable (*DDI/7/II/188-90*).

⁴⁰ *DBFP/1/XXIV/997-9*; Barros, *Corfu*, pp.157-8.

⁴¹ On 4 September Politis had proposed that the League should appoint some neutral representatives to supervise the investigations already underway in Greece and to form part of an international commission of inquiry; that a group of jurists should be selected to decide the indemnity that Greece should pay; and that Greece should immediately deposit 50,000,000 lire in a Swiss bank in order to guarantee payment of this indemnity (*DDI/7/II/178-9*; *DBFP/1/XXIV/981-2*; Barros, *Corfu*, pp.128-9).

⁴² *DBFP/1/XXIV/993-4,998*.

conference and the minutes of the day's meeting - which included his list of proposals - should be sent to Paris under cover of that. This was agreed, in the teeth of continued opposition from Salandra.⁴³

This scheme, though ingenious, was clearly a retreat from the full-blooded support for the League which Cecil and the Foreign Office had previously favoured. Cecil was, however, no blind zealot, and he could see the need for flexibility and could distinguish between means and ends. On 4 September he had written to Curzon that he was 'quite ready' to save Mussolini's face, 'provided we really secure what seems to me the essential thing, namely the evacuation of Corfu and the limitation of the indemnity to something reasonable'.⁴⁴ In other words, he was prepared for the League and the conference to work together for a peaceful settlement even though this meant that Mussolini would evacuate Corfu not in obedience to the League but, rather, having gained his ostensible aim of reparation for the murders.⁴⁵

The Foreign Office had its own motives for falling in with Cecil's plan. Various government departments had been asked to study the feasibility of imposing sanctions on Italy in accordance with article 16 of the Covenant and none was enthusiastic. The Treasury was 'seriously perturbed at the consequences of a literal application of the article', which would mean, in effect, 'creating a state of war'. Equally, the Admiralty was uneasy about the practicability of physically blockading Italy, given Britain's limited naval strength in the Mediterranean; and it was doubtful whether any sanctions would prove effective without the co-operation of France and the United States.⁴⁶ Cecil's plan thus made perfect sense: if the assertion of the League's

⁴³ DBFP/1/XXIV/1002-3; Barros, *Corfu*, pp.158-76.

⁴⁴ MSS EUR F112/229 Cecil to Curzon p.l. d.4 Sept.1923.

⁴⁵ DBFP/1/XXIV/997-9,1003,1011,1013; Yearwood *JCH* 21 565-7. Yearwood notes how Cecil was as keen as the Foreign Office on maintaining the Anglo-French *entente*, chiefly because of his desire to see the draft treaty of Mutual Assistance adopted: 'no major British politician had more to lose in being forced to choose between support for France and support for the League of Nations'.

⁴⁶ DBFP/1/XXIV/986-7; Yearwood *JCH* 21 564. Article 16 provided that if a member state resorted to war without first seeking a peaceful method of resolving a dispute, all other members would sever all financial, commercial and personal relations with it, and the Council might recommend military action against the recalcitrant state. For the text of the Covenant, see *BFSP*/112/13-23. Doubts about England's ability to impose sanctions on Italy were also responsible for London's rejection of Cecil's

competence could be postponed until after the crisis had been settled *via* the Ambassadors' conference then the League would be vindicated but at minimal cost. For an awareness of the practical difficulties in the way of imposing sanctions did not lessen the conviction of Cecil and the Foreign Office that the League must eventually assert its competence. On the contrary, as Tyrrell wrote on 6 September, the simple evacuation of Corfu after the Greeks had made reparation would not settle the whole incident: 'the Covenant has been challenged, and it is a cardinal point in our policy that the Covenant should be upheld'; and so it was essential for Britain to prevent Poincaré 'in his passion for saving faces, from doing so at the expense of the League'.⁴⁷

The Ambassadors' conference deliberated for almost eight hours on 7 September, attempting to reconcile their own ideas about reparation with those of the Italian government. Eventually seven demands were agreed upon and embodied in a note to be presented to the Greek government. It demanded that the Greek military authorities should formally apologise to the Allied representatives at Athens for the murders; that a funeral service be held in the Catholic cathedral at Athens; that the Greek fleet should salute the flags of the Allied powers; that military honours should be rendered to the corpses on their embarkation onto an Italian ship; that the Greeks should 'undertake to ensure in all the desirable conditions of celerity the search for and the exemplary punishment of the culprits'; that a commission of British, French and Italian delegates with a Japanese president should inquire into the murders on the spot, completing their work by 27 September; and that the Greeks should agree to pay an indemnity to be fixed by the Permanent Court of International Justice at The Hague, the amount in no case to exceed the sum of 50,000,000 lire which was to be deposited by the Greeks in a Swiss bank as a surety. These proposals, the Foreign

suggestion of 6 September that the fleet should be concentrated at Malta as a warning to Italy (DBFP/1/XXIV/1012; Barros, *Corfu*, pp.178-81).

⁴⁷ Curzon papers, Tyrrell to Crewe p.l. d.6 Sept.1923, Tyrrell to Curzon p.l. d.6 Sept.1923, quoted in Barros, *Corfu*, pp.184-6.

Office noted, followed 'nearly identically' the suggestions made by Cecil the previous day.⁴⁸

Although these demands were agreed relatively quickly, the same could not be said for the concluding paragraphs of the note. In these, Crewe wished to include an undertaking from the Italian ambassador, Avezzana, that Greek acceptance of the note would lead to an immediate evacuation of Corfu. Avezzana would not give so categorical an assurance without instructions, and it was only after lengthy discussion that a compromise formula devised by the French was agreed upon. This noted that Italy's occupation of Corfu was only the taking of a pledge, stated that the demands of Italy were 'covered' by those of the conference and invited the Greeks to communicate their acceptance.⁴⁹ Crewe was firmly convinced that this formula left 'no possible excuse' for the Italians to remain in Corfu, since it had been made 'abundantly clear' to Avezzana that 'extreme concessions' had been made to Italy over the demands in order to secure her immediate evacuation. Avezzana had not specifically agreed with this, but he had promised to telegraph his government on the point, adding that he was sure it would be met. The conference took this 'as an undertaking that Corfu would be evacuated on the acceptance by Greece of the note'.⁵⁰

This apparent settlement was greeted with varying degrees of warmth in the Foreign Office. Nicolson, a League enthusiast who had adopted a stridently anti-Italian position throughout the crisis,⁵¹ regretted that although this 'admirable settlement' was really due to the pressure of the League, public opinion would believe that 'the weakest of the Great Powers' had 'flagrantly defied the League at one of the rare moments when that body was in full Assembly'.⁵² Tyrrell, rather more of a

⁴⁸ *DBFP/1/XXIV/1004-7*; Barros, *Corfu*, pp.188-97,209-10.

⁴⁹ Barros, *Corfu*, pp.197-201.

⁵⁰ *DBFP/1/XXIV/1007-8*.

⁵¹ On 2 September Nicolson had written that Italy was now 'really dangerous' and that if she retained Corfu she would have all the Balkans 'at her mercy' (*DBFP/1/XXIV/955*). See also Yearwood *JCH* 21 562-3,567-8 and Barros, *Corfu*, pp.108-9.

⁵² *DBFP/1/XXIV/1008*.

traditionalist where Geneva was concerned, was more positive: time had been of the essence, and any delay would only have envenomed the situation, jeopardised a settlement and led to 'the wrecking of the League'. Curzon agreed: the solution reached was reasonably fair, the proposals 'if anything, pro-Greek rather than pro-Italian in their complexion', and peace had been secured without prejudice to either the League or British interests.⁵³

In Athens, Bentinck - who had strongly favoured a League solution⁵⁴ - advised the Greeks to accept the demands of the Ambassadors' conference since they seemed to represent a compromise.⁵⁵ Similar advice was tendered by Greek diplomats abroad, who urged that anything other than unequivocal acceptance would give Mussolini a pretext to remain in Corfu. Although the Greek government was a little put out that penalties were now being imposed before an inquiry had established Greek guilt, all this advice was taken to heart. Accordingly, on 9 September the Greeks accepted the demands of the Ambassadors' conference and reiterated their request that it ensure that the evacuation of Corfu should take place as soon as possible.⁵⁶

The French might have been expected to be well pleased with a settlement which was in line with Poincaré's compromise solution and which Nicolson termed 'a signal triumph'. After all, Poincaré appeared to have reconciled the conflicting pressures upon himself, gained the gratitude of Italy and Greece and 'demonstrated that no European question can be solved unless France plays the leading part'.⁵⁷ However, others saw matters differently: from Geneva British diplomats reported the widespread opinion that 'France has lost a tremendous amount of prestige amongst the

⁵³ *DBFP/1/XXIV/1008-9*.

⁵⁴ Kennard, ever anxious for a compromise that would give Mussolini the foreign policy success he needed to satisfy domestic public opinion, warned London on 6 September that if such a solution were not forthcoming Mussolini might be toppled and replaced by either an ineffective liberal administration or a military dictatorship. Bentinck had retorted that the issue of Mussolini's prestige or his fall from power was 'surely a trifle' compared with the possibility of the 'collapse of [the] law of nations' which a check to the League could entail (*DBFP/1/XXIV/995-6,999*). He later attacked the League for its 'supineness' (*DBFP/1/XXIV/1039*).

⁵⁵ *DBFP/1/XXIV/1013-4*.

⁵⁶ *DBFP/1/XXIV/1014,1016*; Barros, *Corfu*, pp.205-7.

⁵⁷ *DBFP/1/XXIV/1008*.

smaller states'.⁵⁸ That the French were aware of this discontent was made clear by Avezzana in his reports to Rome. He warned Mussolini that the Quai d'Orsay expected him to accept the settlement and evacuate Corfu, for they feared that otherwise Geneva would open up a discussion of the whole Italo-Greek question in which France might have to withdraw from supporting Italy.⁵⁹

Mussolini rejected this advice. On 9 September the Italian government issued a communiqué stating that although Italy accepted the Ambassadors' conference demands as satisfying her own, Corfu would only be evacuated after the Greeks had 'given full and final execution' to those demands.⁶⁰ In a telegram to Avezzana Mussolini made clear that he had no intention of leaving Corfu simply because the Greeks accepted the note, since 'acceptance does not mean execution'. He drew attention especially to the fifth demand, and stated that the capture and punishment of the assassins would have to precede evacuation.⁶¹ This qualified acceptance, communicated to the Ambassadors' conference the next day, was likely to stir up a hornets' nest, for it could only lend credence to growing suspicions that the occupation was intended to be anything but temporary.⁶² Indeed, it might, as the French had feared, serve as a pretext for the League to re-examine the Corfu question.⁶³

The challenge facing Britain and France now was to restrain the League from challenging Mussolini until they had tied him down to evacuating Corfu. On 10 September the League Council met, but the question of competence was not discussed, at least in part because of British awareness that this would only envenom Italo-Greek relations and delay evacuation. Cecil, however, communicated to London the unease of the small powers - which he shared - about the continued Italian

⁵⁸ *DBFP/1/XXIV/1011-3.*

⁵⁹ *DDI/7/II/207-9.* Salandra spoke in the same sense. He represented the Ambassadors' conference solution as a victory in substance for Italy which, if accepted, would close the incident; if it were rejected, Italy would be left totally isolated (*DDI/7/II/209-10*).

⁶⁰ *DDI/7/II/210-1; DBFP/1/XXIV/1014-5.*

⁶¹ *DDI/7/II/211.*

⁶² *DBFP/1/XXIV/984,1017.*

⁶³ *DDI/7/II/213.*

occupation: the Czechs and Yugoslavs were convinced 'that this is only the first of several troubles that Italy and Mussolini may cause us in the near future', and other sources indicated that the Italians were determined to hold the island 'until they have succeeded in forcing a settlement of the Fiume question on Italian lines down the throats of the Yugo-Slavs'.⁶⁴ This concern was shared in London, where Tyrrell felt that Mussolini was 'quite incapable of playing the game', and argued that the essential point was to secure the evacuation of Corfu - and this before the Assembly broke up, so that the question could be fully debated there and the competence of the League reaffirmed.⁶⁵ In the meeting of the Ambassadors' conference also held on 10 September there was, however, no progress towards this. Avezzana explained Italian suspicions that if Corfu were evacuated immediately the Greeks would have no incentive to catch and punish the guilty, whereupon the conference was adjourned until 12 September so that he could receive more precise instructions from Rome.⁶⁶

These turned out, in a sense, to be conciliatory. Although Mussolini insisted that Italy would not have gained satisfaction until the culprits were identified and punished, he did allow that if the inquiry concluded that the offenders could not be found Italy would evacuate Corfu in return for other reparations, such as the payment by Greece of the full 50,000,000 lire indemnity.⁶⁷ On 12 September when the Ambassadors' conference met, Avezzana informed the British and French of this, and the search was then on for a formula that would reconcile their desire to tie the Italians down to a definite date for evacuation with Mussolini's desire to remain in Corfu until he was assured of satisfaction. The discussions were long and heated, and hampered by Avezzana's repeated admissions that he might very well be exceeding his instructions and could be disavowed by Mussolini. No agreement was possible, and in the evening the meeting was adjourned so that Avezzana could refer to Rome.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ DBFP/1/XXIV/1017-8; Barros, *Corfu*, pp.217-9.

⁶⁵ DBFP/1/XXIV/1018.

⁶⁶ DBFP/1/XXIV/1019-1022,1024; Barros, *Corfu*, pp.221-5.

⁶⁷ DDI/7/II/222-3.

⁶⁸ DBFP/1/XXIV/1026-31; DDI/7/II/223,225-6; Barros, *Corfu*, pp.230-9.

The deadlock for a time seemed ominous, especially for Anglo-Italian relations, and a conflict between the two powers loomed large.⁶⁹ Curzon's attitude was quite uncompromising. On 11 September he had authorised Crewe to use the threat of a debate in the League Assembly to force the Italians to set a definite date for the evacuation of Corfu.⁷⁰ He proceeded to turn the screw on both Mussolini and Poincaré, who had been so keen to save Mussolini's face by a compromise, by the same means. If Avezzana would not pledge Italy to evacuate Corfu by 27 September (the date set for the end of the commission of inquiry's investigations), Crewe was to see Poincaré and suggest joint Anglo-French representations at Rome to make clear to Mussolini that they would not prevent the matter being discussed at Geneva, where they would 'give their fullest support to the decisions which the majority of the nations assembled [there] may accept'. If Poincaré was unwilling to make these representations, Britain would in any case be unable to prevent the matter coming before the Assembly.⁷¹

In the event, a solution came in sight when Mussolini decided to stage a minor retreat.⁷² On 13 September when the conference reconvened, Avezzana announced that although Mussolini could not accept any of the formulae proposed the previous day, he would agree a date for evacuation on the understanding that if the culprits were not found, Italy would be awarded the whole 50,000,000 lire as an indemnity. This seemed to offer the basis for a solution, for it would get the Italians out of Corfu by 27 September, which Curzon had insisted to Crewe was the essential point. However, in their eagerness to reach a settlement the ambassadors accepted a declaration by Avezzana that the full indemnity would be given to Italy if the inquiry failed to establish 'that the Greek Government has not committed any negligence' in its hunt for the murderers. This skilfully-worded phrase, which put the onus firmly on

⁶⁹ The Italian naval attaché in Paris reported that the situation would become 'very serious' if some agreement was not reached (*DDI/7/II/226*), and the Italian navy was already making contingency plans for facing an Anglo-Greco-Yugoslav combination (*DDI/7/II/229-31*).

⁷⁰ *DBFP/1/XXIV/1023*. Barros, following Nicolson's monograph on Curzon, incorrectly states that Curzon backed down over the League on 10 September (Barros, *Corfu*, pp.214-5).

⁷¹ *DBFP/1/XXIV/1031-3*.

⁷² *DDI/7/II/226-8*.

the Greeks to prove themselves innocent of any negligence or complicity in the crime, in effect doomed them to pay the full indemnity, essentially as a bribe to get Italy out of Corfu.⁷³

Initially this was not appreciated by the ambassadors, who despatched a note to the Greeks detailing how the demands decided upon were to be carried out - for example, the funeral service was to be on 19 September, and the commission of inquiry was to begin work on 17 September. Once a preliminary report was received by the conference, it would decide whether the Greeks had conducted a satisfactory search for the criminals. If they had not, then further sanctions, notably the award of the indemnity, would be taken.⁷⁴

Foreign Office reaction to this settlement was on the whole favourable. Nicolson, who foresaw some of the difficulties raised by Avezzana's declaration (though not its full implications) was the least enthusiastic: he feared that the Italians might be able to avoid facing the Assembly by tergiversating until it stopped sitting, and regretted that the League had played such a subdued rôle. Even so, he had to admit that a settlement had been reached which would get the Italians out of Corfu and preserve peace in Europe. Tyrrell was more positive: he had never expected the Italians to set a specific date for evacuation and was 'agreeably surprised' when they did so, since it meant that Mussolini had 'retreated considerably from the position he took up 10 days ago'. Curzon shared his relief: his instructions to Crewe had been based on the firm expectation that 'no settlement would be obtained at all'.⁷⁵

Amongst Italians, opinions were mixed. Avezzana represented the settlement as a victory, in that, with French help, Italy's proposals had been substantially accepted despite the opposition of Crewe.⁷⁶ Mussolini, however, was far from happy. He too failed to grasp the full implications of Avezzana's declaration, and feared that the

⁷³ DDI/7/II/233-5; DBFP/1/XXIV/1035-6; Barros, *Corfu*, pp.244-7.

⁷⁴ DBFP/1/XXIV/1034-5.

⁷⁵ DBFP/1/XXIV/1036-8; Yearwood *JCH* 21 569-70.

⁷⁶ DDI/7/II/233,238.

resounding and public victory he needed might not be forthcoming. His instructions had posited two alternatives: either the guilty must be caught and punished or Italy would receive the 50,000,000 lire indemnity. The recent settlement, however, left open the 'monstrous' possibility that the Greeks would be unable to catch the assassins but be absolved of negligence, leaving Italy to evacuate Corfu without receiving any money.⁷⁷ Avezzana pointed out that he could hardly have asked the conference to exclude 'the case of the absolute innocence and diligence of the Greek government', but Mussolini would not be mollified.⁷⁸ Contarini warned Avezzana that to placate Mussolini it was 'absolutely indispensable' to obtain the full indemnity if the Greeks did not apprehend the murderers.⁷⁹

The Greeks were very happy with the settlement, believing that they would escape the indemnity while securing the liberation of Corfu.⁸⁰ Indeed, a report from Montagna that the Greeks considered it a victory that they were to give reparations to the Allies rather than to Italy alone, and that they credited England with having secured this triumph, was quoted to Avezzana by Mussolini as proof that Italy had been duped.⁸¹ The funeral service, the saluting of the flags and the delivery of the Greek official apology all passed off smoothly, and by 19 September Bentinck was confident that the 'unfortunate incident' was 'well on the way to a peaceful settlement' and that 'the moral defeat which Italy has undoubtedly suffered will prove a salutary lesson in the future to men like Messieurs Mussolini and Montagna'.⁸²

Bentinck was unduly optimistic. The League had in fact not yet been vindicated. Indeed, on 14 September Sir Eric Drummond wrote that its moral authority had been much weakened by recent events, since a powerful state had 'with impunity, some might even say with an increase of prestige' refused to abide by the Covenant.⁸³ In

⁷⁷ DDI/7/II/237,250.

⁷⁸ DDI/7/II/239.

⁷⁹ DDI/7/II/250.

⁸⁰ MAE Italie 130 Marcilly to QO tels.191-2 d.15 Sept.1923.

⁸¹ DDI/7/II/248-50.

⁸² DBFP/1/XXIV/1052-5.

⁸³ League of Nations archives, memorandum by Drummond d.14 Sept.1923, quoted *in extenso* in Barros, *Corfu*, pp.317-20, cf.DBFP/1/XXIV/1041-2.

view of this, Cecil warned on 12 September, the small states would not 'remain indefinitely quiescent' to facilitate a settlement as they had hitherto.⁸⁴ Curzon responded on 13 September that he was still 'determined not to allow the competence of the League to be in any way impaired by the action of Italy' and he supported a plan of Cecil's to refer various questions raised by the crisis - such as whether states could be held responsible for political crimes committed on their territory - to the Permanent Court at The Hague.⁸⁵ It soon became apparent, however, that the need not to offend the Italians until they left Corfu would be a severe obstacle to asserting the League's competence. By 15 September the League had already decided to submit to the court only abstract questions rather than ones specifically relating to this dispute,⁸⁶ and on the same day, Della Torretta told Tyrrell that if the League made any attempt to reconsider the settlement then the Italians 'would consider themselves justified in resuming their liberty of action'.⁸⁷

Mussolini's truculence still governed events. On 16 September the Duce delivered a long rant to Graham, insisting on the guilt of the Greeks and warning that he could always reoccupy Corfu or seize other places. Moreover, if Geneva continued to meddle, he would 'leave without regret a League which placed Haiti and Ireland on equality with great powers, which showed impotence in questions of Greco-Turkish conflict, Ruhr or Saar and reserved its activities for encouraging socialist attacks on Fascisti Italy'. Graham warned London that Italian public opinion was in 'a perilous frame of mind' and would welcome a further 'dramatic and sensational stroke' from Mussolini if the League reopened the question.⁸⁸ The reaction of the Foreign Office was revealing. Nicolson took a hard line view, arguing that Mussolini would 'defy everything except force', and that the issue was 'simply and solely whether we shall or shall not be forced to retreat from the position of upholding the Covenant and the

⁸⁴ *DBFP/1/XXIV/1024*.

⁸⁵ *DBFP/1/XXIV/1033*.

⁸⁶ *DBFP/1/XXIV/1040-2*; League of Nations archives, memorandum by Drummond d.14 Sept.1923, quoted in Barros, *Corfu*, pp.318-9.

⁸⁷ *DBFP/1/XXIV/1042-3*; *DDI/7/II/231*. See also *DDI/7/II/241,243-4*.

⁸⁸ *DBFP/1/XXIV/1043-6*.

public Law of Europe'. Great Britain must either be 'prepared to go the whole length' in support of the League or should 'retreat at once' and allow Mussolini his triumph. Curzon did not explicitly accept these alternatives, but he clearly recognised their validity. Although he declared that he was 'not at all disposed to yield to the threats' of Mussolini, the upshot was a British retreat. Curzon decided that Crewe should see Poincaré 'and endeavour to secure concerted action at Geneva', and in the meantime Cecil should try and postpone any debate on the Corfu affair in the Assembly and, in Tyrrell's words, 'show the utmost moderation'.⁸⁹

Poincaré hardly needed prompting from London to take a cautious line over the League's competence. On 19 September he told Crewe that any declaration should be postponed and then only made in an abstract form in order 'to avoid any needlessly wounding expressions'.⁹⁰ Cecil, too, accepted that the League would have to forgo a public victory for the time being. On 17 September he adopted an extremely conciliatory tone in the League Council, and on 21 September a meeting of the Assembly passed off quietly with an acceptance of the Ambassadors' conference settlement, largely because the British delegation used all its influence to restrain it 'from action and even from criticism'.⁹¹

Ultimately, a combination of the need to implement the settlement - which the League had done much to shape - and Italian obstinacy entirely precluded that ringing declaration of the League's competence which both Cecil and the Foreign Office had originally envisaged. The Council and the Assembly at first agreed, after some deliberation, to submit the various questions of competence raised by the crisis to the Permanent Court of Justice at The Hague; but when Salandra objected to the whole notion of a reference to such an international body⁹² it was agreed on 29 September to

⁸⁹ DBFP/1/XXIV/1046-8. Tyrrell similarly denounced 'the ravings of this disappointed filibusterer' but advocated compromise.

⁹⁰ DBFP/1/XXIV/1049-52.

⁹¹ DBFP/1/XXIV/1048-50,1056,1064; Barros, *Corfu*, pp.256-7. On 17 September Cecil argued that it would have been contrary to the spirit of the League for the Council to have discussed its competence instead of bringing the disputing parties together.

⁹² DBFP/1/XXIV/1048,1050,1056-8,1073.

refer the questions to a committee of jurists to be nominated by Council members, and the Council merely reaffirmed its competence 'to deal with any dispute arising between members of the League likely to lead to a rupture'.⁹³ By the time the jurists delivered their verdict in the spring of 1924 the damage to the League's prestige had already been done, and the Italians even managed to smother attempts to have the jurists' responses debated.⁹⁴

For the moment, however, the incompatibility between practical imperatives and considerations of principle was obscured by the immediate question of whether Mussolini could be kept to his promise to evacuate Corfu on 27 September. On 19 September Graham wrote that although Mussolini's recent excited pronouncements doubtless 'contained [the] usual element of bluff',

with a man of his type one cannot feel too sure. Much will depend on [the] outcome of [the] Janina enquiry. If guilt can be established and somebody punished or failing that if Greece can be made to pay, feeling here will be satisfied. Otherwise there may be trouble.⁹⁵

The outcome of the crisis now turned on the inquiry in Epirus. The commission began its work on 17 September, although its effectiveness was hampered by disagreements between its members. The Italian, Colonel Beaud, was determined to pin the blame for the crime on the Greeks, and by playing 'the rôle of prosecuting counsel' he clashed with the British representative, Major Harenc, whose impartiality he took for an attempt to shield the Greeks from punishment.⁹⁶ The Frenchman, Colonel Lacombe, attempted to conciliate between these two extremes,⁹⁷ whilst the Japanese president of the commission, Colonel Shibouya, was completely ineffectual.⁹⁸

⁹³ *DBFP/1/XXIV/1081-2.*

⁹⁴ Barros, *Corfu*, pp.257; J.Barros, *Office Without Power. Secretary-General Sir Eric Drummond 1919-1933* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1979), pp.271-3,275-6.

⁹⁵ *DBFP/1/XXIV/1051.*

⁹⁶ *DBFP/1/XXIV/1059,1107-9.* Harenc, 'a man of tact, experience and character', had been instructed by London simply 'to spare no effort to ascertain the truth' (*DBFP/1/XXIV/1020,1039-40*). His report to the Foreign Office is printed in *DBFP/1/XXIV/1106-15*. It had been widely expected that the Italians would try and use the inquiry to complicate the settlement of the dispute (MAE Italie 130 Marcilly to QO tels.191-2 d.15 Sept.1923; *DBFP/1/XXIV/1039*).

⁹⁷ Harenc found Lacombe generally supportive, but he complained to Paris that Harenc seemed to have been instructed 'to exculpate the Greek government' (MAE Italie 130 Lacombe to QO tel.[?])

Problems came to a head on 22 September, when the commission had to draw up its preliminary report for the Ambassadors' conference. Beaud apart, the commissioners were agreed that in the circumstances the Greeks had, a few minor mistakes apart, done their utmost to catch the assassins.⁹⁹ The Italian, however, threatened to resign if his colleagues persisted in this opinion,¹⁰⁰ whereupon Harenc agreed for the sake of solidarity to water down the telegram to Paris so that it could receive Beaud's concurrence. He did this with some misgivings, but was persuaded by Lacombe and Beaud that it would still be read by the ambassadors as exculpating the Greeks.¹⁰¹ The report as sent stated that whilst the Greek investigations were clearly 'open to the reproach of negligence in some respects', only one of the commissioners felt that this made the Greeks culpable.¹⁰² On its arrival in Paris, Crewe immediately observed that the Italians and French would argue that it constituted sufficient evidence for imposing the 50,000,000 lire fine on Greece.¹⁰³ Whether Lacombe or Beaud had been aware of, or understood the implications of, Avezzana's declaration of 13 September is not clear, but Harenc was obviously ignorant of them, since he would never have allowed the sending of a telegram which did not reflect the views of the majority of the commissioners if he had realised that it would leave open the possibility of the Greeks being forced to pay the full indemnity.¹⁰⁴

Before the Ambassadors' conference met on 25 September Mussolini made further attempts to influence his allies. He complained to the Foreign Office about Harenc's

d.24 Sept.1923; MAE Italie 131 note by Laroche d.15 Oct.1923; *DBFP/1/XXIV/1108-10*). Lacombe was apparently instructed by Poincaré to support Beaud (*Blatt Historian* 50 242).

⁹⁸ For Barros' account of the inquiry, see Barros, *Corfu*, pp.258-64.

⁹⁹ Barros, *Corfu*, pp.262-3. The special circumstances included the mountainous terrain in Epirus and the general inefficiency of the Greek police. The Greeks had, Harenc felt, 'taken all steps which are to be expected of an immature administration' (*DBFP/1/XXIV/1071*).

¹⁰⁰ *DBFP/1/XXIV/1059,1109*. Beaud insisted 'that he was there to prove that the Greek Government was guilty on all counts'.

¹⁰¹ *DBFP/1/XXIV/1070,1109-10*.

¹⁰² *DBFP/1/XXIV/1058-9*; Barros, *Corfu*, pp.263-4. The commissioners could not discover who had perpetrated the murders, which they felt were either politically motivated or the result of a vendetta against Tellini.

¹⁰³ *DBFP/1/XXIV/1059*.

¹⁰⁴ The Foreign Office, being ignorant of its implications, had not informed Harenc of the importance of the declaration. He implies that Lacombe and Beaud were as surprised as he when they realised what interpretation the Ambassadors' conference placed on their report (*DBFP/1/XXIV/1071,1114*).

attitude, arguing that it amounted to a breach of the pledge to hold an impartial inquiry, and warned that he would not evacuate Corfu unless the full indemnity was promptly awarded;¹⁰⁵ Contarini delivered the same message to Graham, who warned London again that Mussolini's foreign policy was 'for home consumption' and that he would risk complications abroad to strengthen his domestic position.¹⁰⁶ Mussolini's bluster, however, had no effect on Curzon. The Greeks, he wrote to Crewe, had a right to expect that the size of the indemnity would be fixed by the court at The Hague, as the conference had decided on 7 September. If the ambassadors were to decide on the basis of a mere preliminary report that the full fine should be imposed 'it would be difficult to justify their decision, which would in reality be a bribe to induce Italy to adhere to her promise of evacuation'.¹⁰⁷

When the Ambassadors' conference met on 25 September it soon became apparent that the British would not prevail against a united Italy and France. Avezzana drew attention to the terms of his own declaration of 13 September and on the basis of this demanded immediate payment of the 50,000,000 lire to Italy. He argued that his declaration had put the onus on the Greeks to provide proof that they had not been negligent, and the preliminary report, far from providing such proof, pointed to specific instances of Greek negligence. Consequently, unless the ambassadors fulfilled their pledge of 13 September and awarded the fine, Italy would regard herself as having regained her liberty of action over Corfu. Crewe secured an adjournment until the next day and reported to London that in view of this threat, and the fact that the French had wholeheartedly supported the Italian thesis, he saw no option but to agree to imposing the fine if Corfu was to be evacuated.¹⁰⁸

Crewe's telegram came like a bombshell in London, where the implications of Avezzana's declaration had never been appreciated. Only upon re-reading it did

¹⁰⁵ *DBFP/1/XXIV/1061-2; DDI/7/II/259-63.*

¹⁰⁶ *DBFP/1/XXIV/1062-3, 1067.* Harenc, Contarini argued, had lost 'no opportunity of preventing Colonel Beaud from establishing Greek guilt'.

¹⁰⁷ *DBFP/1/XXIV/1063-4.* Cecil shared Curzon's view that any fine should depend on the commission's final report.

¹⁰⁸ *DBFP/1/XXIV/1065-6; DDI/7/II/263-4; Barros, Corfu, pp.268-80.*

Curzon realise that the ambassadors had in fact sold the pass two weeks previously with the result that the Greeks would be compelled to pay the full fine without any reference to the Permanent Court.¹⁰⁹ Avezzana's arguments, he told Crewe, were 'inconsistent with [the] equities of [the] case', for the Greeks were to pay the maximum penalty even though no evidence of their complicity in the crime had been forthcoming. Nevertheless, in the circumstances there was no alternative but to 'defer to [the] Italian contention' since otherwise responsibility for the continuance of the occupation and the crisis 'would be cast upon our shoulders alone'.¹¹⁰ Accordingly, on 26 September Crewe informed the Ambassadors' conference that the British government agreed to the imposition of the 50,000,000 lire penalty, and Avezzana declared that the evacuation of Corfu would begin forthwith.¹¹¹

The remaining loose ends were tidied up over the next few months. The Ambassadors' conference despatched a note to the Greeks, delivered on 27 September, instructing them to pay the full penalty, which with some reluctance the Greeks agreed to do, on 29 September, the money being transmitted soon after.¹¹² In the meantime, the Italian forces left Corfu and the commission of inquiry was somewhat peremptorily wound up.¹¹³ On 30 October the Ambassadors' conference considered the final report of the commission which had been completed a month previously and which contained a proposal that a neutral expert should be appointed to help the Greek and Albanian authorities in their further investigations. This eminently sensible proposal was, however, thwarted by the Italians, who contended that an Italian expert should also be appointed, thus threatening to reopen the whole crisis and cause endless complications.¹¹⁴ On 29 November when the conference next discussed the issue the proposal was, at Crewe's suggestion, dropped, and it was decided simply to communicate the commission's final report to both the Greek and

¹⁰⁹ Barros, *Corfu*, pp.281-2.

¹¹⁰ DBFP/1/XXIV/1066-7.

¹¹¹ DBFP/1/XXIV/1067; Barros, *Corfu*, pp.283-5.

¹¹² DBFP/1/XXIV/1068-9,1077,1082-4.

¹¹³ DBFP/1/XXIV/1069,1071-3,1076.

¹¹⁴ DBFP/1/XXIV/1093-5,1099-1103; Barros, *Corfu*, pp.292-4.

Albanian governments.¹¹⁵ With this, it was agreed the whole Corfu question was to be considered as 'definitely settled'.¹¹⁶

The verdict of the Ambassadors' conference 'caused a painful surprise' in Greece, the more so as reports from Janina had indicated that the inquiry would exonerate the Greeks.¹¹⁷ Bentinck was appalled by the outcome and echoed the Greek view that peace had been purchased

at the cost of justice. Greece, impoverished by a war originally entered upon on the side of the Entente ... has once more been sacrificed for the peace of Europe. Europe [has] become morally poorer, and the high principles for which men fought and died in the Great War are forgotten.¹¹⁸

Marcilly, on the other hand, was less downcast. Italian animosity was a fact of life for the Greeks but in this crisis world opinion had been united behind them and a dangerous confrontation contained. Moreover, the whole crisis seemed to show that Greek territory was effectively guaranteed by the powers.¹¹⁹ These views were to an extent shared by Greece's leaders who, though disgruntled by the size of the indemnity, realised that, Mussolini's determination being what it was, they had had a narrow escape.¹²⁰

Italian public opinion expressed 'keen satisfaction' at the decision of the Ambassadors' conference, and felt that Corfu could now be evacuated with dignity. The moral was also drawn that England had opposed Italy to the end but had been forced to retreat in the face of Italian firmness.¹²¹ Mussolini proclaimed the crisis as a great success, which, indeed, it was, if one accepts his assertion that the occupation of Corfu was only ever a temporary measure. There is, however, some evidence that his real intention was to annex the island, and make the Adriatic a veritable *mare clausum*,

¹¹⁵ DBFP/1/XXIV/1103-4; Barros, *Corfu*, pp.294-6.

¹¹⁶ DBFP/1/XXIV/1104.

¹¹⁷ DBFP/1/XXIV/1077; MAE Italie 131 Marcilly to QO no.177 d.3 Oct.1923.

¹¹⁸ DBFP/1/XXIV/1079.

¹¹⁹ MAE Italie 130 Marcilly to QO no.170 d.27 Sept.1923.

¹²⁰ DBFP/1/XXIV/1077-8.

¹²¹ DBFP/1/XXIV/1070-1.

and in that he had been well and truly thwarted by the international community.¹²² At any rate his animosity towards the League was intensified by the crisis: he told the French ambassador, Barrère, on 5 October that pacifism led to war, that the League was 'the quintessence of pacifism' and that he did not see how a great power could ever submit to such a collection of small states.¹²³ Mussolini's reputation as a firebrand was also now established. Montagna had bragged in Athens during the crisis that 'the time had come for the small Balkan nations to learn to fear Italy', and to some extent this had happened.¹²⁴

The predominant feeling in London at the end of the crisis was one of disgust.

Nicolson's view, if extreme, was not untypical. He expressed his frustration in his diary:

I tried in vain to get [my superiors] to see the issue in wider proportions and to realise that we had a chance of calling the new world into being in order to redress the balance of the old. They would not see it: Tyrrell because he is for an arrangement at any price, and had no intellectual principle or moral stability: Curzon because his inordinate vanity was affected by the Harmsworth press attacks and by a certain jealousy of Lord R.Cecil. The result was that we killed the League and fortified Poincaré. Terribly distressed by this lack of strength and guidance.¹²⁵

Nicolson turned the anger that his disgust engendered on Crewe, whom he blamed - somewhat unfairly - for having let Avezzana's declaration - a 'deplorable formula' - pass unchallenged on 13 September.¹²⁶ A more germane criticism was that Crewe did not inform the Foreign Office of the implications of Avezzana's declaration, even

¹²² Mack Smith, *Mussolini*, pp.84-5 ('Italian postage stamps over stamped "Corfu" were already on sale and the issue had to be withdrawn abruptly'); Lowe and Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy*, p.198; Cassels, *Early Diplomacy*, p.124.

¹²³ MAE Italie 131 Barrère to QO tels.881-3 d.5 Oct.1923. Simultaneously Mussolini was seeking to increase Italian representation in the League Secretariat (Barros, *Office Without Power*, pp.274-9).

¹²⁴ MAE Italie 130 Marcilly to QO no.170 d.27 Sept.1923; MAE Italie 131 note by Laroche d.10 Oct.1923; Barros, *Corfu*, p.313.

¹²⁵ Nicolson papers, Nicolson diary, d.[?19] Sept.1923, quoted in Lees-Milne, *Nicolson* I 208. Nicolson's diary entries tended to be quite emotional, but this one, it seems, was written even before the final Ambassadors' conference decision. It should be noted that Nicolson never got on with Tyrrell (Lees-Milne, *Nicolson* I 40-1,227,233) and that Curzon had been heavily attacked by the *Daily Mail* as a warmonger for his initial support of the League (Barros, *Corfu*, p.86).

¹²⁶ *DBFP*/1/XXIV/1076,1086-7; Yearwood *JCH* 21, 570-2. Curzon also attacked Crewe's 'serious error of judgement' here, although the Foreign Office would probably have ultimately had to accept the Avezzana formula in any case.

though he later claimed to have been aware that after its acceptance there was only 'the most slender chance' of the Greeks escaping payment of the indemnity.¹²⁷ Had he done so, the Foreign Office could have ensured that the preliminary report of the commission was quite unequivocal, and a more lenient settlement might have been achieved. (Crewe's reticence on this point could have been due to his unwarranted belief that the Greek government knew who the assassins were).¹²⁸

Other British observers were dismayed at the outcome of the crisis. Crewe, who had at first been not unsympathetic to the Italian case (as he said, if five British officers had been murdered delimiting the Mosul frontier British public opinion would probably have demanded more than simply redress through the League), saw it as a 'sorry instance of the low-level which post-war morality has reached ... in every country of Europe without exception'.¹²⁹ It was all very well for Avezzana to quote the Don Pacifico affair as a precedent for Italian action, but the truth was that what Palmerston did had 'no more bearing on current situations than the acts of Oliver Cromwell or Cardinal Richelieu' since after the war states were supposedly 'going to attempt to move on a higher plane of conduct'.¹³⁰ Curzon was sorely tempted to publish a blue book on the crisis even though it could not but expose the 'perfidy of the Italians and the connivance of the French' (indeed, that was the rationale behind it). 'Are we', he asked rhetorically, 'in everything to kowtow to our Allies[?]' In the end, however, he decided that it would be better not to 'revive the dispute' or disrupt the *Entente* any further.¹³¹

The crisis pointed up many paradoxes about the place of the League in British policy: peace was secured, but only because the League did not to assert itself; similarly the force of public opinion as focused in the Assembly had been shown to be effective,

¹²⁷ DBFP/1/XXIV/1074-5; MSS EUR F112/201 Crewe to Curzon p.l. d.26 Sept.1923, p.l. d.27 Sept.1923.

¹²⁸ DBFP/1/XXIV/1036-7,1057,1060-1,1075.

¹²⁹ MSS EUR F112/201 Crewe to Curzon p.l. d.13 Sept.1923, p.l. d.27 Sept.1923. The Italians had ruined their case, Crewe argued, by the 'mad act of occupying Corfu'.

¹³⁰ MSS EUR F112/201 Crewe to Curzon p.l. d.30 Sept.1923.

¹³¹ DBFP/1/XXIV/1086-8,1091.

but only if it was not actually used. The crisis also highlighted the gulf within the Foreign Office between collectivists like Nicolson - who emphasised the importance of the League - and rather more pragmatic traditionalists like Tyrrell. Little serious thought, however, was given to the fundamental question of whether the British had been wrong to adopt a pro-League policy in the first place or wrong to abandon it when its potential high cost became clear.¹³²

Nor did the Corfu crisis do much to eliminate the illusions of League enthusiasts in Britain; they did not, as one Foreign Office official hoped, come to see 'the League not as an ideal or a religion but as a piece of machinery always capable of improvement'.¹³³ The LNU 'kept saying that it would all be easy and that there was nothing wrong with the League system',¹³⁴ and the real lessons of Italy's challenge to the international order were not faced, enthusiasts preferring to shelter in the 'meaningless evasion' that the setback was due not to any inherent failings of the League, but rather to the failure of statesmen to make the League work.¹³⁵ Cecil, who throughout the crisis had been realistic and practical, now defended the League's action, either in an attempt to put on a brave face or out of complacency, claiming that it had fulfilled its wider mission of promoting peaceful settlement.¹³⁶ By the time he came to write his memoirs he was quite deluded about the lessons of the crisis and he unfairly blamed the setback for the League purely on Curzon's supposed decision to save Italy's face on 26 September by agreeing to the payment of the full indemnity.¹³⁷

Curzon's reflections on the crisis were vouchsafed to the Imperial conference which met in London in October. The net result of the dispute had been that Greece had

¹³² Yearwood *JCH* 21 572-4. The distinction between collectivists and traditionalists derives from A. Wolfers, *Britain and France between Two World Wars. Conflicting Strategies of Peace from Versailles to World War II* (New York, Norton, 1966), pp.223-8,331-43.

¹³³ FO 371/9456 min. by Yencken nd., cited in Yearwood *JCH* 21, 572.

¹³⁴ Birn, *League of Nations Union*, p.48.

¹³⁵ Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, p.40. Carr makes this point about the League generally, but it certainly applies to the Corfu crisis.

¹³⁶ MSS EUR F112/312. Imperial conference, notes of sixth meeting, 11 Oct.1923, speech by Cecil.

¹³⁷ Viscount Cecil of Chelwood, *A Great Experiment* (London, Cape, 1941), pp.149-51; Viscount Cecil of Chelwood, *All the Way* (London, Hodder and Staughton, 1949), p.179.

suffered a 'grave injustice', the League had been dealt a 'considerable shock', and Europe had escaped 'a renewed conflagration' by means 'which I cannot myself applaud'.¹³⁸ However, as he made clear elsewhere, he would not accept any blame for the part played by Britain or the Foreign Office in the crisis.¹³⁹ Rather, the regrettable outcome was due to the support France gave Italy and the ineptitude of the Ambassadors' conference, which had created a situation wherein Curzon had to concede to the Italians 'in order to maintain what I have always held to be the cardinal principle of European policy at this moment, namely the *entente* between ourselves and our allies'.¹⁴⁰ Given that this was the over-riding principle of British policy, the only surprise was that incidents like the Corfu crisis were not more common. For, as Crowe told Della Torretta on 2 October, whereas Britain always aimed 'to arrive at a just settlement of every case on its merits', her allies preferred 'to see them decided on purely political considerations, in which the view of what was just and right did not necessarily play a prominent part'.¹⁴¹

It was surprising that Curzon did not draw out the implications for British policy of attempting to maintain an *entente* with allies whose attitudes were so divergent from his own. After all, he was fully aware of the nature of Mussolini's policy which, he told the conference on 5 October, was guided by 'realist principles' which left 'no room for treaties or other obligations', such as those contracted over the Dodecanese or the Covenant. Mussolini was 'a law unto himself', but also 'hardly master of his movements', since he had whipped up a popular enthusiasm which he could not control and which he lacked the force or vision to channel towards peace or retrenchment. Above all, Italian policy was

conducted exclusively on the bargaining principle - that they do nothing except for a return, and that, while they are willing to take anything as a gift, they are also willing to extort anything by blackmail. We have no desire to be

¹³⁸ MSS EUR F112/312. Imperial conference, notes of sixth meeting, 11 Oct.1923, speech by Curzon.

¹³⁹ DBFP/1/XXIV/1088-9.

¹⁴⁰ MSS EUR F112/312. Imperial conference, notes of sixth meeting, 11 Oct.1923, speech by Curzon.

¹⁴¹ DBFP/1/XXIV/1085.

other than friends with Italy, but we object to being called upon to pay through the nose on each occasion that we are reminded of that privileged position.¹⁴²

In the event, despite these frank words Curzon's discontent with the Italians was short-lived. During the crisis Anglo-Italian relations had certainly been rather rocky, as evidenced by the vituperation of both the London and Rome press,¹⁴³ but in the aftermath Curzon decided that for reasons of wider policy it would be better to let bygones be bygones and he was anxious to make known that his policy was not personally antagonistic towards Mussolini or Italy.¹⁴⁴ It was necessary to 'wipe the matter off the slate', so that Britain and Italy could resume co-operation on 'the bigger issues' such as reparations and the Ruhr.¹⁴⁵ To a degree, Mussolini reciprocated this goodwill, and on 18 October told Graham that, on reflection, he realised British policy 'had not been animated by any feeling of hostility to Italy'. Indeed, perceiving that larger European questions might provide an opportunity for renewed Anglo-Italian co-operation, he went on to attack Poincaré's policy in terms that would certainly have appealed to Curzon: 'France was endeavouring to establish her hegemony in Europe and her policy of encircling Germany with her small satellite States, whom she financed and armed, was also a menace to peace'.¹⁴⁶

It was one of the ironies of the Corfu crisis that whereas the rift in Anglo-Italian relations was soon healed, and Mussolini's violent behaviour soon forgiven, Curzon bore a more long-standing grudge against the French. Indeed, he singled out their failure to work with Britain during the crisis for a solution 'in accord with justice and right' as the key reason for the final outcome.¹⁴⁷ Mussolini's policy, though objectionable, could perhaps be interpreted as an isolated occurrence, forced on him by Italian public opinion; Poincaré's actions, however, seemed to be of a piece with

¹⁴²MSS EUR F112/312. Imperial conference, notes of third meeting, 5 Oct.1923, speech by Curzon.

¹⁴³ MSS EUR F112/230 Graham to Curzon p.l. d.28 Sept.1923.

¹⁴⁴ *DBFP*/1/XXIV/1089-92.

¹⁴⁵ MSS EUR F112/312. Imperial conference, notes of sixth meeting, 11 Oct.1923, speech by Curzon.

¹⁴⁶ *DBFP*/1/XXIV/1095-7.

¹⁴⁷ MSS EUR F112/312. Imperial conference, notes of seventh meeting, 11 Oct.1923, speech by Curzon.

his whole policy of late. In his statement to the Imperial conference reviewing British foreign policy over the past two years, Curzon argued that Britain's 'main difficulty' had been 'the frequent desertions and the almost chronic lack of loyalty in great emergencies' of the French. Although he had striven to maintain the *Entente*, he had received few concessions in return, and their policy seemed 'far from being favourable to the recovery of the world'.¹⁴⁸ Curzon was obviously predisposed to make the most of France's unsatisfactory behaviour in the crisis, which formed another item in the catalogue of grievances and accumulated resentments that he had amassed in recent years and which provided another reason for making up with Mussolini.

The French for their part, while they had antagonised Curzon, found that their pandering to Mussolini produced few concrete gains in return from Rome. True, Italian help in the final stages of the Ruhr crisis was of some value to France, but co-operation between the two states on this question and over Corfu did not lead, despite French efforts, to any close *entente*.¹⁴⁹ Mussolini was always conscious that French help was cynical and self-interested: on 2 September he had told Kennard that he 'fully realised [the] reasons for [the] friendliness of France who wished to make trouble between Italy and England and secure Italian support as regards the Ruhr question'.¹⁵⁰ Charles-Roux had similarly warned in September that British unpopularity in Italy would probably only be temporary, and was certainly not as deep-rooted as Italian francophobia; moreover, both Britain and France should now be careful since, having flexed his muscles, Mussolini would henceforth be much harder to control.¹⁵¹ Given these warning signs the Quai d'Orsay should perhaps not have been surprised when Barrère reported with some alarm in November that in a

¹⁴⁸ MSS EUR F112/312. Imperial conference, notes of third meeting, 5 Oct.1923, speech by Curzon.

¹⁴⁹ Poincaré wrote to Barrère on 20 October, pointing out the help the two states had given to each other on these issues and declaring his readiness 'to continue to give M.Mussolini similar proofs of our good will' (MAE [?] Poincaré to Barrère no.[?] d.20 Oct.1923, quoted in Shorrock, *Ally to Enemy*, p.41. See also Blatt *Historian* 50 251).

¹⁵⁰ DBFP/1/XXIV/960.

¹⁵¹ MAE Italie 130 Charles-Roux to QO no.425 d.17 Sept.1923, cf. Charles-Roux, *Grande Ambassade*, p.242.

speech to the Italian senate Mussolini had spoken of France and England in the same breath as powers which Italy had overcome in the Corfu crisis.¹⁵²

The area where France might have expected to work with Italy was over Fiume, a question which had assumed greater importance for France in view of the widespread dismay in the small states of Europe at French policy over Corfu. Instead, the Quai d'Orsay was comprehensively outmanoeuvred by the Palazzo Chigi. The Italians held out the bait of an accord *à trois* between Italy, France and Yugoslavia to stabilise the *status quo* in the Adriatic, and the French were immediately attracted to the idea: it offered a possible resolution of their dilemma of how to keep on good terms simultaneously with both the Little *Entente* states and Italy, and would also allow France to thwart any expansionist designs harboured by either of her potential partners. The Italians were, however, acting in totally bad faith, raising the prospect of a tripartite agreement so that France would not hamper the conclusion of an Italo-Yugoslav settlement of the Fiume question. After stringing the French along for several months, and as soon as the Italo-Yugoslav agreement was signed on 27 January 1924 on terms very favourable to Italy, the Italians dropped the idea in a trice.¹⁵³

The Corfu crisis may have seen the apogee of French conciliation of Italy, but the Quai d'Orsay's pursuit of the chimerical accord *à trois* indicated how illusory were any French hopes of consistently working with Italy on the major European questions of the day, and how incompatible French and Italian interests were in the long run.¹⁵⁴ The upshot of the Corfu crisis was almost wholly negative for France. The Little *Entente* and Britain had been affronted, the League - the potential value of which was never fully appreciated by French policy-makers - had been weakened and Mussolini,

¹⁵² MAE Italie 131 Barrère to QO tel.999 d.19 Nov.1923.

¹⁵³ Shorrocks, *Ally to Enemy*, pp.41-6; Charles-Roux, *Grande Ambassade*, pp.250-61; M.Poulain, 'L'Italie, la Yougoslavie, la France et le Pacte de Rome de Janvier 1924; la Comédie de l'Accord à Trois', *Balkan Studies* 16(2) 1975 93-118.

¹⁵⁴ Blatt *Historian* 50 249-52.

whom the Quai d'Orsay felt had finally emancipated Italy from British tutelage in this crisis, showed himself little inclined now to follow a French lead.

Chapter Eight

The End of the Dodecanese Question

October 1923 - July 1924

Mussolini's public triumph over Corfu could not fail to have an impact on the biggest issue at stake between Italy and England - that of the Dodecanese - especially as the Duce had been planning to annex the islands at the moment Tellini was killed. At first, the British clearly felt that in his new mood of truculence Mussolini would never relinquish any of them. Curzon minuted on 1 September: 'I am afraid, as the Scotsman remarked in another context, "Bang go the Dodecanese"'.¹ Similarly, after the acute phase of the crisis, Graham reported that Mussolini, under pressure from extreme fascists and despite the advice of the Palazzo Chigi, intended to annex the islands with very little warning, in order to cover up his difficulties in internal affairs. This, Graham warned, was of course likely to subject Anglo-Italian relations to fresh strain.² Curzon replied that such action would cause him 'the greatest consternation', and instructed Graham to warn Mussolini that it would hinder the re-establishment of friendly Anglo-Italian relations.³

These apprehensions soon proved to be misplaced. On 10 October when Curzon raised the question of the Dodecanese with Della Torretta, the latter 'expressed his emphatic disbelief' that Mussolini was contemplating annexation.⁴ Further reassurance came on 18 October when Graham found Mussolini, who was now far more relaxed than he had been during the crisis, 'more conciliatory ... than I had expected'. Mussolini assured him that he did not have in mind any move concerning the Dodecanese and that he was ready 'to throw in this question with others for discussion' in order to reach a settlement and consolidate Anglo-Italian relations. Later, Graham spoke to Contarini who, upon being told that 'any solution which satisfied Greece would also be satisfactory' to Britain, suggested as his own personal

¹ *DBFP/1/XXIV/944*. The reference is to a cartoon of 1868 in *Punch/54/235*, where a Scotsman, complaining about the high cost of living in London, relates woefully that no sooner had he arrived than "'Bang - went saxpence"'.
² MSS EUR F112/230 Graham to Curzon p.l. d.28 Sept.1923.

³ *DBFP/1/XXIV/1088-90*.

⁴ *DBFP/1/XXIV/1092*.

opinion that Italy might be willing to give up those islands nearest to Greece 'while those adjacent to the Turkish coast might be retained by Italy'.⁵

This accommodating spirit, coming so hard on the heels of a period of unmitigated stubbornness, was symptomatic of the way fascist foreign policy was to develop: Mussolini oscillated between flirting with revisionism and loyally following the *Entente* line, making it difficult for his allies to anticipate his attitude. In this instance, there were probably several reasons for Italian complaisance. Mussolini had, after all, just won a substantial propaganda victory, and for the time being could afford to soft pedal on other issues. It is also possible that the Corfu crisis had revealed to the Italian navy that the Dodecanese were a military liability and of dubious value.⁶ Equally, at a time when the Fiume question was still unsettled, Mussolini may have feared that annexation of the islands could have sparked off a hostile coalition of Greece and Yugoslavia, possibly backed by the small League states or even Britain.⁷ A fourth possibility was that, given 'the internal convulsions in Greece which they are helping to promote',⁸ the Italians were hoping that 'with a collapse in Greece the ripe fruit will fall into [their] mouth'.⁹ The key reason, however, was probably a desire to mend fences with England. By the time of his interview with Graham, Mussolini had had time to digest a report from Della Torretta recommending that he curb press attacks on Curzon in order to ensure that the crisis in Anglo-Italian relations would be only temporary and to facilitate a settlement of outstanding questions.¹⁰

No progress was made towards initiating discussions until December, when British domestic politics exerted an influence on foreign policy. The general election of 6

⁵ *DBFP/1/XXIV/1095-9*.

⁶ Barros, *Corfu*, pp.67-8; Lowe and Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy*, pp.198-9. Barros mentions the argument advanced by some Italians that the islands would be useful only if Italy constructed a powerful naval force to operate solely in the eastern Mediterranean. Otherwise, they would be a liability because Italy's existing naval forces would have to be stretched to protect the islands in addition to the Italian mainland, which would leave Italian lines of communication vulnerable to the British.

⁷ *DBFP/1/XXIV/xi*.

⁸ FO 371/8822 min. by Troutbeck d.24 Oct.1923.

⁹ FO 371/8822 min. by Cadogan d.24 Oct.1923. The counter-revolution had broken out in Greece on 21 October.

¹⁰ *DDI/7/II/285*.

December made it very probable that when parliament met in January a Labour government would be formed. The prospect of a Labour foreign secretary imbued with internationalist and pacific principles clearly worried Curzon. He wrote to Crewe that Poincaré might well regret having committed 'the gross error of quarrelling with the only British government that was likely to be well disposed towards him', and that the French might be 'the better for reflecting' what it would mean for them to have a man like E.D. Morel at the Foreign Office.¹¹ Soon after the election Curzon confided to Della Torretta his fears for the future of the *Entente* under a Labour government, arguing that given the unremitting hostility of the Labour press towards fascism Anglo-Italian relations would especially be at risk.¹² He thus suggested that the two powers should take advantage of the time before the advent of the new government to settle the major questions pending between the two countries. Della Torretta reported to Mussolini that Curzon had always been 'a warm supporter' of the *Entente* and seemed genuinely anxious that a Labour government might destroy it, and that there was a much greater chance of resolving the outstanding questions with him than with his likely successor.¹³

Curzon had no intention of attempting to settle 'all the complicated issues' which Schanzer had raised in 1922, but did hope to resolve both the Dodecanese and Jubaland questions.¹⁴ A few days later Della Torretta called with a purely personal suggestion for a three-stage process to resolve the Dodecanese problem: first, the British would admit that all the islands were *de iure* Italian possessions (to allow any subsequent cession by Italy to appear as an act of spontaneous generosity to Greece); second, Britain and Italy would agree how many of the twelve islands should be returned to Greece (Della Torretta felt Mussolini would want to retain three); and

¹¹ MSS EUR F112/201 Curzon to Crewe p.l. d.11 Dec.1923, p.l. d.12 Dec.1923, Crewe to Curzon p.l. d.14 Dec.1923.

¹² DDI/7/II/339. The Labour press had initially adopted an ambiguous attitude towards the fascist experiment; the Corfu crisis led to the first strong and unanimous criticism of Mussolini, and the Matteotti murder in 1924 confirmed its hostility towards him. See C. Keserich, 'The British Labour Press and Italian Fascism, 1922-25', *Journal of Contemporary History* 10(4) 1975 579-90.

¹³ DDI/7/II/339-40.

¹⁴ FO 371/8822 min. by Curzon d.11 Dec.1923.

third, once a decent government was established in Athens, Italy would conclude an arrangement with Greece along those lines. Curzon accepted this as a possible basis for agreement, although he was worried that it left a loophole for the Italians to demand further compensation from Greece when they came to negotiate the return of the nine islands. Nevertheless he told Della Torretta that if such an arrangement could be arrived at, Britain would be willing to cede all the territory in Jubaland agreed in 1920, and he suggested that the first step should be for Italy formally to propose a settlement of the Dodecanese question on the lines indicated by Della Torretta.¹⁵

The Foreign Office busied itself in elaborating a procedure for a settlement, but things were not as simple as they seemed.¹⁶ On 21 December Graham struck a warning note, pointing out that the claim for the retention of a mere three islands by Italy seemed remarkably moderate, and speculating that the negotiations were 'being conducted by Torretta and Contarini without Mussolini's knowledge and approval'. The fact that Contarini was known to be 'extremely anxious for a settlement' only reinforced the notion that the Palazzo Chigi was trying to guide Mussolini onto a more anglophile path.¹⁷ This certainly complicated the negotiations, for Della Torretta began to doctor Curzon's views in order to make them more palatable to Mussolini and was reluctant to disclose to Curzon quite how obdurate Mussolini was. In his reports to Rome, for example, Della Torretta implied that the new proposal for settling the Dodecanese question was more Curzon's than his own, and recommended that it be favourably considered; after all, Italy was unlikely to get better terms from a Labour government especially if, as seemed possible, the internal upheaval in Greece resulted in a government under Venizelos that had British sympathy.¹⁸ Mussolini, however, was not very interested in the bargain. He still refused to admit any connection between the Dodecanese and Jubaland questions, simply insisting that the

¹⁵ *DBFP/1/XXIV/919-21*; FO 371/8822 mins. by Nicolson and Curzon d.15 Dec.1923.

¹⁶ FO 371/8822 min. by Nicolson d.15 Dec.1923.

¹⁷ MSS EUR F112/230 Graham to Curzon p.1. d.21 Dec.1923.

¹⁸ *DDI/7/II/347-50,356-8*. For Torretta's unwillingness to be the bearer of ill-tidings to Mussolini, cf. *DBFP/1/XXVII/100-3*.

British owed Jubaland to Italy by virtue of the treaty of London, while the Dodecanese were incontrovertibly Italian by virtue of the treaty of Lausanne.¹⁹

Although talks went on in London until the formation of the Labour government on 22 January, no progress was made. All Della Torretta's sophistry could not hide the fact that Mussolini was not prepared to compromise and that the gulf between the two countries was as wide as ever. On 3 January Della Torretta put Mussolini's views to Curzon and demanded in addition a larger share of territory in Jubaland than had been agreed in 1920 and more compensation still.²⁰ He subsequently began to argue that if, after the cession of Jubaland, Italy handed any of the Dodecanese over to Greece, 'further compensation' would be payable by both Greece and Britain.²¹ If Curzon found this whole line of argument totally unreasonable, Mussolini found the British view equally unpalatable, minuting on one of Della Torretta's telegrams that Curzon expected Italy to surrender some of the Dodecanese without any compensation, and that on this basis 'agreement is impossible'.²² The depth of feeling aroused by this issue, and the conviction on both sides that the other was breaking its pledged word, was demonstrated by the willingness of both Curzon and Mussolini to threaten the publication of documents.²³

The Foreign Office was becoming extremely exasperated by the entire Italian approach. When Della Torretta put forward his claim for more of Jubaland, Curzon confessed that he 'almost gasped' at his audacity; the ambassador, he told Graham, reminded him of the ex-prime minister of Poland who 'bore the significant name of Grabski', for such was 'the attitude which he invariably takes up'.²⁴ Crowe had a similar experience, when at the same time he tried to enlist Italian co-operation on the

¹⁹ *DDI/7/II/352-4,362-3.*

²⁰ *DBFP/1/XXVI/3-8; DDI/7/II/367-71.* The Foreign Office was not surprised by Della Torretta's attitude as the secret service had intercepted his instructions (FO 371/9881 min. by Nicolson d.2 Jan.1924).

²¹ *DBFP/1/XXVI/26-8; DDI/7/II/376-8,385-8.*

²² *DDI/7/II/371.*

²³ *DBFP/1/XXVI/27-8; DDI/7/II/377-8,387.*

²⁴ *DBFP/1/XXVI/6.*

Reparations commission to ensure that its French president ceased to use his casting vote on matters of political importance. Della Torretta 'talked in a roundabout way' for almost an hour before making clear that Mussolini had refused to co-operate unless Britain made concessions over the Dodecanese, even though Italian interests in the reparations question were identical to those of Britain. Crowe rejected 'this whole idea of perpetual bargaining' as 'foreign to British tradition and practice', and lamented that Anglo-Italian co-operation would never be possible 'if on every occasion where there was a community of interests the Italian government demanded to be paid for acting in pursuance of their own interests ...'.²⁵ Della Torretta was himself uncomfortable with the instructions he had to carry out, and indicated to Curzon on 11 January 'that he was in the hands of a master who was reluctant to give his assent to any arrangement which did not demonstrate to the entire world that Italy had achieved a great diplomatic triumph'.²⁶

Curzon had a final interview with Della Torretta on 21 January, the very eve of his departure from office. Della Torretta had instructions, since no accord seemed possible, to end the negotiations with a declaration of Italy's views, albeit in a friendly form. He was also to say that they could only be resumed if the British government gave proof of its good faith by executing the Jubaland cession.²⁷ Della Torretta added that Italy would also require British recognition of Italian sovereignty over the Dodecanese, only four of which, moreover, was she prepared even to consider handing over ultimately to the Greeks. Curzon replied that he could not have accepted these terms even if he had continued in office. After all, the number of islands definitely to be retained by Italy had now risen from the three proposed by Della Torretta in December to eight, and Britain was supposed to surrender the maximum she had ever offered in Jubaland in return for a vague promise that the Italians would

²⁵ *DBFP*/1/XXVI/12-14.

²⁶ *DBFP*/1/XXVI/28. Della Torretta wrote to Contarini privately, putting the British case as expounded by Curzon in an attempt to influence Mussolini indirectly (*DDI*/7/II/391-2).

²⁷ *DDI*/7/II/401-2.

initiate negotiations with Greece at a later date, when they would doubtless expect further compensation.²⁸

In a note to his successor, Curzon recommended that the next move should be up to the Italians: either Della Torretta would submit his proposals in a written form or the negotiations would lapse. If the latter happened, he feared that the Italians would annex the islands and urged that in that case Britain should withdraw all but the minimum cession in Jubaland and publish a despatch prepared by Nicolson which put the blame for the rupture on the Italians and recapitulated their various breaches of faith.²⁹ Ramsay MacDonald, who was under great pressure of work upon his arrival at the Foreign Office, agreed that for now London need do nothing.³⁰ Meanwhile, Della Torretta wrote to Mussolini that he intended to start pressing the new government forthwith to adopt a more flexible attitude and to separate the Dodecanese and Jubaland questions. He also planned to lobby the British press to try and work up sympathy for the Italian position.³¹ Despite his efforts, however, few people expected that the new Labour government 'would go out of its way to provide cheap diplomatic victories for a Fascist regime'.³² This seemed to be confirmed when on his assumption of office MacDonald annoyed the Italians by writing a personal communication to Poincaré but not to Mussolini.³³

Since England and Italy had taken charge of the Dodecanese question, the Greeks had been forced to take a back seat. They still constituted, however, one element in Curzon's thinking: on 23 January he wrote that Britain must not behave 'unfairly towards the Greeks, in whose interests we are really acting; and we must on no account allow Signor Mussolini first to dupe us and then to bully or squeeze them'.³⁴ Although it was not true, as the Italians continued to suspect, that he was pledged by

²⁸ *DBFP/1/XXVI/54-6; DDI/7/II/405.*

²⁹ *DBFP/1/XXVI/56; FO 371/9881 mins. by Curzon d.21 Jan.1924, Nicolson d.23 and 24 Jan.1924.*

³⁰ *FO 371/9881 min. by MacDonald d.23 Jan.1924.*

³¹ *DDI/7/II/406.*

³² *Cassels, Early Diplomacy, pp.221-2.*

³³ *DDI/7/II/423-4.*

³⁴ *DBFP/1/XXVI/56.*

some secret agreement with the Greeks over the Dodecanese, he did feel that they should not be forced to abandon their claims.³⁵ He kept Venizelos informed of the progress of negotiations and sought his views privately on the Italian offer to cede a mere four islands to Greece eventually. Venizelos naturally was hardly enthusiastic about this idea, and insisted that Mussolini could not deny the existence of a Dodecanese question between Greece and Italy. The minimum solution he believed the Greek assembly might accept was the cession of six islands to Greece, and even in that event he hoped that those islanders left under Italian rule would be granted some measure of autonomy.³⁶

During the first two months of MacDonald's government it seemed unlikely that any settlement would be reached. MacDonald took his time formulating a policy on the Dodecanese and Jubaland, partly because of pressure of work but also because of the complexity of the problem and the Foreign Office conviction that Britain had nothing to gain by restarting negotiations with the Italians.³⁷ In the meantime, Anglo-Italian relations deteriorated. Ponsonby, the new parliamentary under-secretary for foreign affairs, upset Rome greatly when in an unguarded moment he referred to the two questions as 'connected' and averred that there was no prospect of 'an immediate settlement'; MacDonald produced a similar effect when he spoke of the islands as ethnologically Greek.³⁸ A further row arose over the recognition of the Soviet Union: Mussolini had been determined to be the first head of state to take this step, and when MacDonald anticipated him he flew into 'one of his fits of ungovernable rage', his prestige greatly wounded.³⁹ Lastly, the clear improvement in Anglo-French relations when MacDonald's assumed power - he was determined to work with the French to

³⁵ *DBFP/1/XXVI/29-30*; FO 371/9881 min. by Nicolson d.22 Jan.1924.

³⁶ *DBFP/1/XXVI/53-4*; FO 371/9881 Bentinck to Lampson p.l. d.23 Jan.1924, Graham to FO no.83 d.25 Jan.1924.

³⁷ FO 371/9881 min. by Crowe d.25 Feb.1924; FO 800/219 MacDonald to Graham p.l. d.25 Feb.1924.

³⁸ 169 *HC Deb* 5s 1718-9; 170 *HC Deb* 5s 28-9; *DBFP/1/XXVI/103*; *DDI/7/II/454-5*; *DDI/7/III/18*; FO 371/9881 Graham to FO no.197 d.29 Feb.1924. The Italian press pointed out that it ill-behoved MacDonald to make an issue of this ethnic question considering the ethnic background of the inhabitants of Cyprus, Malta and Gibraltar.

³⁹ FO 800/219 Graham to MacDonald p.l. d.8 Feb.1924, p.l. d.22 Feb.1924; Cassels, *Early Diplomacy*, pp.189-193; Mack Smith, *Mussolini*, p.110.

solve the reparations question - greatly worried the Italians. The Foreign Office put this 'morbid Italian susceptibility and conceit' down to the realisation 'that Italy counts for little intrinsically and that she can only play the rôle of a Great Power if she can act as a make-weight in the disputes between other Great Powers: that she can only fish with profit in troubled waters'.⁴⁰

This was hardly the best climate for solving complex questions. Mussolini was convinced that Britain was ignoring Italian interests, and cited uncertainty about MacDonald's intentions towards Italy and Europe as the main cause of the troubled situation on the continent.⁴¹ This conviction only drove him to new heights of obstinacy over the Dodecanese and Jubaland. Throughout February and March he was absolutely adamant that 'it is not possible for me to change my fundamental point of view' on those questions.⁴² Della Torretta, anxious to reach a settlement, hoped progress could be made if Italy simply made a vague promise to cede some of the islands to Greece in the future, but Mussolini was suspicious of any concession smacking of retreat.⁴³ With the Italians in this mood there was little chance of a settlement, for although the Foreign Office had no wish to slight Mussolini it was equally reluctant to pander to him.⁴⁴

This was especially true of MacDonald, whose attitude at first was exactly what the Italians had feared. Although he stressed that his policy towards Rome would contain 'no speck of hostility' and that he wanted 'the most friendly relations' with Mussolini, he told Graham that he would not stand idly by if the Duce pursued 'a policy of dictatorial imperialism' or attempted 'to terrorise or to boss Europe'.⁴⁵ True, MacDonald was keen for 'a complete settlement' with Italy, but he was repelled by 'all these pettifogging bargains' and wanted 'to deal with such matters on a higher level'.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ FO 371/9881 mins. by Nicolson d.25 Feb.1924, 5 Mar.1924.

⁴¹ MAE Italie 131 Charles-Roux to QO tels.184-6 d.1 Mar.1924; *DDI/7/III/2-4*.

⁴² *DDI/7/III/28*.

⁴³ *DDI/7/III/12-13,16-17,22-4,28,31-2,47-50,52; DBFP/1/XXVI/118-9,121-2*, FO 371/9882 Della Torretta to FO no.650 d.6 Mar.1924.

⁴⁴ FO 371/9881 mins. by Nicolson d.25 Feb.1924, 5 Mar.1924.

⁴⁵ FO 800/219 MacDonald to Graham p.l. d.13 Feb.1924.

⁴⁶ FO 800/219 MacDonald to Graham p.l. d.25 Feb.1924.

He was also very disturbed by rumours that Mussolini was intriguing against Britain at Paris and, after he had had time to go over all the Jubaland and Dodecanese papers, confessed that he was appalled at Italian policy. He would not accept extravagant Italian demands just so that Mussolini could 'gain political kudos amongst his Fascisti following', and would, 'if driven to it by the Italian Government', publish the papers despite the grave consequences this would have: 'if European public opinion is decent Italian diplomacy would be discredited for a generation and no Power would trust it for a long time to come'.⁴⁷

Graham laboured assiduously to try and change the prevailing opinion of Italy in the Foreign Office. In his private letters to MacDonald he strove to present Mussolini in the best possible light, contending that although he was 'absurdly sensitive of real or imaginary slights' he was nevertheless a 'remarkable man'.⁴⁸ He also reiterated the arguments - consistently rejected by Curzon - that any connexion between Jubaland and a general settlement should be 'rendered impalpable', that a comprehensive agreement with the Italians was 'advisable', and that Britain should be sympathetic to Mussolini's domestic problems and his need for a propaganda victory.⁴⁹

These pleas were followed by a definite proposal on 6 March. After warning that Mussolini was increasingly 'inclined to throw up Jubaland altogether and announce his intention of annexing the whole of [the] Dodecanese', Graham suggested that MacDonald should hand over Jubaland forthwith, and that Mussolini should then reply, using a pre-arranged text, spontaneously acquainting MacDonald with his intentions over the Dodecanese, which would be at some future point to hand over the majority to Greece. This would permit the British to discharge their debt of honour over Jubaland, placate the Italians and possibly improve Anglo-Italian relations.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ FO 800/219 MacDonald to Graham p.l. d 10 Mar.1924.

⁴⁸ FO 800/219 Graham to MacDonald p.l. d. 1 Mar.1924.

⁴⁹ FO 800/219 Graham to MacDonald p.l. d. 22 Feb.1924, p.l. d.1 Mar.1924.

⁵⁰ *DBFP*/1/XXVI/122-4.

Graham made little impression on London: too often he seemed, according to Crowe, to be 'making himself the mouthpiece of Mussolini's desires, whilst admitting that we gain nothing by conceding them'.⁵¹ MacDonald felt that Graham's plan would involve a repudiation of the policy of his predecessors and an admission that Britain had no real interest in the Dodecanese. Furthermore, he perhaps naively continued, it ignored 'the moral issue', which was that the Greek islanders would resent being placed under Italian sovereignty and that 'since Italy signed a treaty with Greece when the latter was victorious and influential, she ought to abide by the spirit of that treaty now that Greece is defeated and abandoned by her other allies'. The only point of agreement between MacDonald and Graham was that it was useless to employ Della Torretta as the conduit for further negotiations since he lacked the courage to report truthfully to Mussolini and seemed equally unable to say what the Duce proposed to do.

Consequently, MacDonald proposed to address a private letter to Mussolini which would offer the basis for an agreement, although it would take some time to decide exactly what that should be.⁵²

A private letter from MacDonald to Mussolini was, indeed, eventually to form the basis for a settlement of these two questions. However, it was redrafted many times before it was despatched, and in its final form it approximated very closely to the letter suggested by Graham - and rejected by MacDonald - on 6 March.⁵³ This came about not solely because of Graham's constant badgering, but also because in the space of a few weeks the Foreign Office lost all confidence in the tenability of the policy it had been pursuing for four years and decided that it was no longer logical to

⁵¹ FO 371/9882 min. by Crowe d.19 Mar.1924.

⁵² *DBFP/1/XXVI/135-6*. Graham had warned MacDonald early on that Della Torretta distorted his reports because he was 'mortally afraid of Mussolini' (FO 800/219 Graham to MacDonald p.l. d.8 Feb.1924). MacDonald's decision was reinforced after Della Torretta submitted a memorandum detailing what had passed concerning the Dodecanese when Curzon was in office. MacDonald asked Curzon for his comments on this, and Curzon replied that Della Torretta's account was 'prejudiced and incorrect' and his arguments 'disingenuous and immoral' (MSS EUR F112/245 MacDonald to Curzon p.l. d.18 Mar.1924, Curzon to MacDonald p.l. d. 19 Mar.1924). MacDonald later made clear to Della Torretta his displeasure at this behaviour (FO 371/9882 MacDonald to Della Torretta p.l. d.11 Apr.1924; *DDI/7/III/87-9*).

⁵³ The first draft of the letter was prepared by Nicolson on 10 March (FO 371/9882 mins. by Nicolson d.7 Mar.1924, 10 Mar.1924) and can be compared with the final text dated 1 April (*DBFP/1/XXVI/167-8*; *DDI/7/III/76-7*).

use Jubaland as a lever over the Dodecanese. It was not, as Cassels has argued, that MacDonald 'began to show signs of freedom from Foreign Office restraint'; the Foreign Office itself completely changed its mind and MacDonald followed suit.⁵⁴

This shift is best observed in the views of Nicolson. In February he began to show some qualms about the line hitherto followed. Although the Italians had behaved with 'great meanness and insincerity' and were occupying the islands contrary to all notions of justice and national self-determination, he noted that British public opinion was growing uneasy that Britain was not playing the game and was holding up the Jubaland cession on a quibble. This impression was being fostered by the Italian press and by sections of the British press, including the *Times*, which had been worked on by the Italians.⁵⁵ Still the deadlock persisted: Nicolson suggested privately to the Italian first secretary on 28 February that if only the Italians would promise ultimately to give up eight or so islands to Greece, Britain would hand over Jubaland and allow Mussolini to portray that act as a triumph. However, on 5 March Della Torretta told Crowe that he could not go beyond Mussolini's last proposal, namely that Britain immediately cede an enlarged Jubaland in return for the vague promise that 'some' islands might be ceded to Greece later.⁵⁶ In view of this, Nicolson's misgivings multiplied: on 11 March he mused that after dealing with Italian tergiversation on this question for so long 'it is quite possible that we do not any longer see the wood for the trees, and that we are unduly embittered and resentful'.⁵⁷

Nicolson developed this idea on 13 March in response to another letter from Della Torretta which simply recapitulated the maximum Italian claim. It was necessary, he wrote, to establish the premises of the British argument, for although he believed Britain was on totally sure ground morally (that is, in believing that the Greeks should get at least some of the islands) he was not so confident about the legal or political position (that is, whether the British could or should insist on having a say in the

⁵⁴ Cassels, *Early Diplomacy*, p.223; Carabott, *Dodecanese Question*, pp.306-7.

⁵⁵ FO 371/9881 min. by Nicolson d.23 Feb.1924, min. by Crowe nd.; *DDI/7/III/7*.

⁵⁶ *DBFP/1/XXVI/109-111,121-2*.

⁵⁷ FO 371/9882 min. by Nicolson d.11 Mar.1924.

disposal of them). Italian public opinion genuinely believed that Italy had been betrayed by her allies, and the pressure of surplus population - and thus Italy's need for colonial expansion - was intense. More to the point, Mussolini was in occupation of the islands, and would only leave if paid or forced to do so, and even if the price he demanded was too high, the use of force was out of the question. Worse, the Jubaland lever was now not really effective, since Mussolini cared less and less for it, and British public opinion deprecated the British government's failure to execute its promises. Nicolson viewed with such apprehension the prospect of resuming general negotiations with the Italians - since they would demand more and more compensation and then place the onus for rupture on Britain - that he suggested it would be better 'to cut the gordian knot and to liquidate the situation'. Firstly, MacDonald should execute the 1920 Jubaland agreement and then publicise Britain's views on what had passed over the Dodecanese. Thus the British would have fulfilled their obligations, stated that the future of the Dodecanese depended on Italian good faith and put themselves 'completely in the right'. Nicolson knew this might mean Italy remaining in the Dodecanese for good, but then he feared 'that she will do so in any case'.⁵⁸

Nicolson's argument met with a mixed response. Lampson heartily endorsed it, and claimed that he had never favoured making the settlement of the two questions dependent upon one another.⁵⁹ MacDonald, on the other hand, was unsure of the best way forward, for he still felt that a general settlement with Italy might be possible, or at least should be offered to the Italians.⁶⁰ Graham meanwhile kept up his pressure from Rome, urging an agreement basically upon Italian terms.⁶¹ On 19 March Nicolson recapitulated his argument that the British should spontaneously give up

⁵⁸ FO 371/9882 min. by Nicolson d.13 Mar.1924. It was also true that whereas the Dodecanese had once had some importance from the point of view of imperial communications (see above pp.172-3), after the Lausanne peace settlement and the shifting of Britain's imperial lifeline southwards this was no longer the case.

⁵⁹ FO 371/9882 min. by Lampson d.13 Mar.1924. Lampson had never mentioned his opposition to this policy before.

⁶⁰ FO 371/9882 min. by MacDonald d.16 Mar.1924; *DBFP*/1/XXVI/139-40.

⁶¹ *DBFP*/1/XXVI/146-7,151-3.

Jubaland: hesitation to do so only weakened the moral case and in the political sphere its retention was no longer an asset.⁶² MacDonald now declared that his mind was 'pretty well made up'. A private letter would be sent to Mussolini offering either a general political settlement or the separation of the two questions and negotiations over them on a strictly legal basis, possibly involving arbitration. If Mussolini chose the former, general negotiations could begin, if he chose the latter then Jubaland could be ceded within the original (minimum) 1920 boundaries and a Dodecanese policy - possibly including publication - could be formulated.⁶³

The final shape of the letter to Mussolini was further much influenced by Graham's comments on the Foreign Office draft. On 28 March he wrote that although he welcomed the idea of separating the two questions, he felt that the tone of the letter was not really cordial enough: 'in dealing with intelligent, susceptible and sensitive people like the Italians (Mussolini himself possesses these characteristics in most marked degree) tone ... is often just as important as ... tenour' [*sic*]. He argued that better results would be obtained if the note were recast so as to simply offer Mussolini the 1920 area in Jubaland and to reiterate Britain's interest in the ultimate fate of the Dodecanese. Graham believed that then 'within a comparatively brief period' Mussolini 'could be induced to cede 8 islands to Greece', since MacDonald's generosity 'would render it easier for him to reciprocate by an equally generous act in the sense we desire'.⁶⁴

A palpable mellowing of MacDonald's attitude had already been detected by Della Torretta, and the Foreign Office took Graham's advice to heart.⁶⁵ The final letter to

⁶² FO 371/9882 min. by Nicolson d.19 Mar.1924.

⁶³ FO 371/9882 min. by MacDonald d.19 Mar.1924.

⁶⁴ FO 371/9882 Graham to MacDonald p.tel. d.28 Mar.1924.

⁶⁵ *DDI/7/III/47-8,63,70-1,73*. MacDonald had made a conciliatory speech in the Commons on 27 March about his desire for agreement with Italy (171 *Hc Deb* 5s 1605-7). In the Foreign Office Nicolson endorsed Graham's suggestions, though admitting they involved a risk, on the grounds that 'Jubaland is now no lever whatsoever, and that by discarding it we lose nothing and may gain a solution on the other tack' (FO 371/9882 min. by Nicolson d.28 Mar.1924). On 31 March MacDonald minuted that he was 'not prepared to do this straightaway', but evidently later changed his mind (FO 371/9882 min. by MacDonald d.31 Mar.1924). For another account of this episode, see Lees-Milne, *Nicolson* I 217-8.

Mussolini, dated 1 April, bore a striking resemblance to what Graham had always advocated. In it MacDonald first flattered Mussolini, then turned to the two questions which most troubled Anglo-Italian relations. He suggested 'that we should meet each other's view and that, without making the settlement of one depend on the other, we should come to an understanding on both concurrently'. To this end MacDonald was willing to begin forthwith negotiations for the transfer of Jubaland and asked only to be informed of Italian intentions over the Dodecanese so that he could 'study them with a sincere desire to settle the whole matter apart from this offer of mine and on its own merits'.⁶⁶ There was no mention of a general settlement or of conditions: as a consequence of the re-think in the Foreign Office MacDonald had abandoned the Jubaland lever and admitted, effectively, that Greek claims to any of the islands were unlikely to be made good.

Graham was unable to present MacDonald's letter to Mussolini until 11 April, for the Italians were in the middle of an election campaign and the work of the government was all but paralysed.⁶⁷ In the meantime the situation was confused by a new proposal from Athens. Whereas Venizelos had in January held out for the cession of six islands to Greece, the Greeks, fearful that they might be left in a face to face confrontation with the Italians, now changed tack and proposed to allow the Italians to annex all the islands without complaint, provided that they would grant them 'a special regime of autonomy analogous to that enjoyed by dominions in order to preserve their national character and to assure their position for the future as in the past'. They hoped that this autonomous regime would be guaranteed by Britain and France and that Britain might establish a similar regime in Cyprus as an encouragement to the Italians.⁶⁸ This scheme, Cheetham observed, should 'be regarded as a *pis aller* ... rather than as real objective of Greek wishes'.⁶⁹ The rationale behind it was to maintain the territorial

⁶⁶ DBFP/1/XXVI/167-8.

⁶⁷ FO 800/219 Graham to MacDonald p.l. d.3 Apr.1924; FO 371/9882 Graham to FO tel.76 d.11 Apr.1924; DBFP/1/XXVI/171.

⁶⁸ DBFP/1/XXVI/169-71; FO 371/9882 Cheetham to FO no.201 d.20 Mar.1924, Graham to FO no.328 d.4 Apr.1924, min. by Nicolson d.7 Apr.1924.

⁶⁹ DBFP/1/XXVI/174.

unity of the archipelago and to keep alive the possibility of its union with Greece in the long term; for under any partition scheme some of the islands at least would definitely become Italian territory.⁷⁰

The Greek proposal also had to be seen in the context of Greco-Italian relations. To some extent, these had improved. The Greeks, all too aware of their weakness, especially in these turbulent months before and during the establishment of the republic, had refrained from antagonising the Italians on the Dodecanese question and had spoken in general terms of their desire for better relations.⁷¹ The Italians, for their part, had, according to the Greeks, put out feelers at Athens with a view to 'joint action and particularly ... cooperation in commercial and economic exploitation of Asia Minor'. These tentative overtures, however, could do little to counteract the intense fear and suspicion which still permeated Greco-Italian relations. The Greeks knew of Italy's 'most far-reaching designs in Asia Minor' and 'did not desire to be entangled' in them; consequently they had devised their Dodecanese plan 'in apprehension of Italian pressure which they would be unable to resist'.⁷² Moreover, they recognised the importance the Italians attached to the Dodecanese as a stepping stone for the colonisation of Asia Minor and the need to be prepared for Italian annexation if it came.⁷³ The Greek proposal was intended to face the possibility that Britain might disinterest herself in the Dodecanese and leave the Greeks at the mercy of the Italians and to avoid involvement in any new disastrous adventure in Anatolia.

The Foreign Office doubted the practicality of the Greek scheme. Nicolson was sceptical that the Italians would 'refrain from imposing "italianità" upon the twelve Islands' after annexation and felt that the prospect of an Allied guarantee of Dodecanese autonomy was 'extremely uninviting'; the raising of the Cyprus question was also unhelpful.⁷⁴ Lampson warned more generally that neither Italians nor Greeks

⁷⁰ FO 371/9882 min. by Nicolson d.7 Apr.1924.

⁷¹ DDI/7/III/15-17,55-6; DBFP/1/XXVI/60; FO 371/9881 Bentinck to FO tel.62 d.25 Feb.1924.

⁷² DBFP/1/XXVI/169-70.

⁷³ DBFP/1/XXVI/174. The Greek foreign minister told Cheetham that he realised that the 'permanent acquisition' of the Dodecanese 'ranks as a major object of Italian policy'.

⁷⁴ FO 371/9882 mins. by Nicolson d.1 and 7 Apr.1924.

were trustworthy: 'Do not let us be pinched between the two'.⁷⁵ More to the point, the Greek proposal brought into doubt the whole British strategy of negotiating with Italy on the basis of partitioning the islands: as Graham observed, there was no point pressing the Italians to accept a solution 'which while unpalatable to them is even more distasteful to the Greeks'.⁷⁶ MacDonald, however, was untroubled by all this. The Greek proposal simply reinforced his decision to separate the two questions and did not really complicate matters, he told Graham, since the British had not made any proposals themselves but were only eliciting Mussolini's intentions.⁷⁷ The wisdom of this attitude was demonstrated when on 11 April the Greek foreign minister withdrew the proposal 'in favour of any scheme which would afford Greece some security against Italian claims'.⁷⁸ As Cheetham had perceived, the proposals had simply been a *ballon d'essai*, designed to test how much support Greece could expect from Britain or France 'in the event of drastic action on the part of Italy'.⁷⁹

Mussolini's reply to MacDonald's letter was somewhat slow in coming. Graham's contacts in the Palazzo Chigi hinted that Mussolini was struggling to reconcile his inclination to be reasonable and on good terms with Britain with the need to impress his domestic supporters. Nevertheless, one hopeful sign came on 14 April when Mussolini intimated that he might eventually consider cession of the five islands farthest from Turkey to Greece, a division which Nicolson admitted would be 'not really such a bad one'.⁸⁰ No such detailed proposal, however, was contained in Mussolini's official reply to MacDonald of 2 May. This was vague and somewhat confusing but consisted in essence of an acceptance of the offer of Jubaland and a rather argumentative repetition of some old Italian assertions about the Dodecanese. Mussolini laid great stress on the offence that would be caused to Turkey by cession of any of the islands to Greece, and tried to claim that continued Italian occupation of

⁷⁵ FO 371/9882 min. by Lampson d.7 Apr.1924.

⁷⁶ DBFP/1/XXVI/171-2,175.

⁷⁷ DBFP/1/XXVI/176; FO 371/9882 min. by MacDonald d.10 Apr.1924.

⁷⁸ DBFP/1/XXVI/179-80.

⁷⁹ DBFP/1/XXVI/173; FO 371/9882 mins. by Nicolson d.14 Apr.1924 and Crowe d.14 Apr.1924.

⁸⁰ DBFP/1/XXVI/181-3; FO 371/9882 min. by Nicolson d.17 Apr.1924.

the islands would therefore be an act of altruism that would preserve peace in the eastern Mediterranean. He was prepared, however, to consider eventually handing over some 'islands in which Italy has lesser interest' to Greece, but this could only be as part of a wider settlement in the eastern Mediterranean and would in any case necessitate 'adequate guarantees and compensation' for Italy.⁸¹

Some of the ambiguities in the Italian reply were cleared up in a conversation between Graham and Mussolini on 3 May. Mussolini assured Graham 'that there was no question of exacting guarantees or advantages from anyone but [the] Greeks', and that the compensation he would seek 'was not territorial but of a political and economic character'. What he envisaged was a cession of some islands as 'part of a general settlement ... such as that recently concluded between Italy and Yugoslavia', comprising a pact of friendship and the restoration of good relations. In reporting this conversation Graham painted a familiar picture, claiming that Mussolini had stood out against the unanimous recommendation of his cabinet that Italy should immediately annex the whole archipelago, and urged that Mussolini's reply be considered in this context.⁸²

In fact, the reply was received in the Foreign Office with neither enthusiasm nor surprise; after all it had been expected that Mussolini would accept Jubaland whilst making no more than qualified promises about the Dodecanese. Nicolson doubted the value of his undertakings to open negotiations with the Greeks, but argued that in view of wider considerations it would be wise to give him the benefit of the doubt.⁸³ Lampson agreed, arguing that 'psychologically the moment is a good one for a settlement with Italy. In the coming negotiations [over reparations] their assistance

⁸¹ *DBFP/1/XXVI/196; DDI/7/III/102-4*. The Italians had previously intimated to Graham that they feared cession of any islands to Greece would disrupt Italo-Turkish relations (*DBFP/1/XXVI/172*).

⁸² *DBFP/1/XXVI/195-7; DDI/7/III/139*.

⁸³ FO 371/9883 min. by Nicolson d.6 May 1924.

(independible [*sic*] though it may be) will undoubtedly be of value. A prompt settlement of Jubaland would seem polite'.⁸⁴

In fact, regardless of the desire to secure Italian co-operation in larger European questions, the British, having already retreated so far, and having lost any levers they had once possessed, had no option but to accept Mussolini's uncompromising response. This was done on 20 May when MacDonald instructed Graham to inform Mussolini of his willingness to conclude the Jubaland convention forthwith and to express pleasure at Mussolini's 'decision to discuss with Greece the conclusion of a direct and equitable agreement' and a hope that this would not be long delayed.⁸⁵

The Jubaland convention was soon settled. Italian negotiators visited London between 30 May and 7 June and the agreement - ceding to Italy the area in Jubaland agreed in 1920 - was initialed then and formally signed on 15 July.⁸⁶ On the Dodecanese question there was, predictably, less progress. On 7 June, Guariglia, head of the North African and Near Eastern Department of the Palazzo Chigi and one of the Italian negotiators, told Nicolson that although Mussolini 'was really anxious' for a settlement with Greece, he could make no move for some time, or Italian public opinion 'would say that M.Mussolini had lied when he claimed to have induced us to separate the two questions'. Moreover, the initiative for opening the negotiations would have to come from the Greeks, since Mussolini had 'declared repeatedly that the Dodecanese question had been closed forever'. With this in mind Guariglia suggested that at some point in the future Britain should act as a mediator between the two countries, intimating to Greece that negotiations should be initiated and acting during them as 'a sort of invisible umpire'.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ FO 371/9883 min. by Lampson d.6 May 1924. The Dawes report had been submitted to the Reparations commission on 9 April and negotiations were underway to arrange a conference on the reparations question. For this issue, see A.J.Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs 1924* (London, Oxford University Press/Humphrey Milford, 1928), pp.266-399.

⁸⁵ *DBFP*/1/XXVI/204; *DDI*/7/III/108,128.

⁸⁶ *DBFP*/1/XXVI/229; *DDI*/7/III/130,221; Toynbee, *Survey 1924*, pp.467-70. For the text of the convention, see *BFSP*/119/433-7.

⁸⁷ *DBFP*/1/XXVI/229-30.

This suggestion was not well received by the British who had only just extricated themselves from an untenable and even dangerous position over the Dodecanese. MacDonald had no desire to be involved in negotiations over the future of the islands, although he expected to be kept informed by Mussolini of any progress in that direction for the sake of form.⁸⁸ As Lampson put it, Britain had 'at last got back onto the right lines (it has taken us four years to do it), & I do trust that we shall not get drawn back into the mess again'. He accepted that it was somewhat 'inglorious' for Britain to wash her hands of the matter now, but pointed again to the reasons why Britain had had to perform a *volte face* over the Dodecanese and abandon Curzon's policy:

it is merely fatuous to "talk big" if you are not genuinely prepared to act up to your words when the crisis comes. Mussolini will at once "call the bluff", for he is a man of autocratic power & can mobilise the whole of Italian public feeling at a moment's notice on the Dodecanese. Does anyone suppose that H.M.G. could do the same with British public opinion regarding the remote Mediterranean islands?⁸⁹

As over Corfu, Mussolini's stubbornness had forced the British to retreat by revealing the inconsistency and impracticality of their position.

No Italo-Greek negotiations on the Dodecanese ever materialised. During 1924 the Italians consolidated their position in the islands and showed no inclination to make any overtures towards the Greeks about them, despite the occasional promptings of Graham.⁹⁰ Various excuses for this were forthcoming, for example the uncertain internal political situation in Greece or the preoccupation of the authorities in Rome with the aftermath of the Matteotti murder, but they were rather unconvincing.⁹¹ The Greeks were, of course, not happy with this situation, and from time to time grumbled to the British about it, but there was nothing either could do.⁹² In August, after the

⁸⁸ FO 371/9883 min. by MacDonald d.11 Jun.1924.

⁸⁹ FO 371/9883 min. by Lampson d.8 Jun.1924.

⁹⁰ DBFP/1/XXVI/240-1,379-81; DDI/7/III/255-6,258-9; FO 371/9883 Crowe to Graham p.l. d. 14 Jun.1924.

⁹¹ DBFP/1/XXVI/183,321; FO 371/9883 Graham to Crowe p.l. d.19 Jun.1924; Cheetham to FO no.719 d.28 Nov.1924.

⁹² DBFP/1/XXVI/320-2,335-6; DDI/7/III/444; FO 371/9883 FO to Cheetham no.376 d.16 Jun.1924, Cheetham to FO no.708 d.20 Nov.1924.

ratification of the Lausanne treaty, it looked as if the Italians would formally annex the islands, but Mussolini pulled back from this step, fearful of its likely impact on international opinion.⁹³ The British, who had long ago realised that they would not shift the Italians from the islands, accepted that they could not now prevent formal annexation of what was in fact already *de iure* Italian territory, and tried to placate the Greeks by claiming that 'there was no implication that [the Italians] would refuse thereafter to come to some amicable arrangement with Greece'.⁹⁴ This was hopeful to say the least, but from now on it was British policy to do nothing whatsoever about the islands and to await an initiative from Italy.

The Dodecanese and Jubaland imbroglio, which had loomed so large in Anglo-Italian relations for so many years, was thus to all intents and purposes resolved by the summer of 1924. Various assessments of the outcome are possible. On the one hand, it can be portrayed as a victory for Mussolini: by stubborn repetition of an uncompromising view he eventually bludgeoned the British into submission and gained Jubaland whilst securing recognition of Italy's sovereignty over the Dodecanese. On the other hand, it was difficult to portray these results as 'unalloyed Fascist triumphs': Italy gained no new territory in the Dodecanese and had to be content in Jubaland with less than the maximum claim that had been staked since 1922. One motive behind the change of British attitude had been a realisation that Jubaland was of relatively little value, and even the Dodecanese were useful only as a stepping stone to further advances in the eastern Mediterranean such as Italy was not yet strong enough to make. In the summer of 1924 the Turks began to express fears about possible Italian aggression, fuelled by fire-breathing speeches from Mussolini, but the crisis following the Matteotti murder ended the possibility of an Italian

⁹³ *DBFP/1/XXVI/315-6; DDI/7/III/262,277,283-4,291-2,297; FO 371/9883 Kennard to FO tel.215 d.27 Aug.1924.*

⁹⁴ *DBFP/1/XXVI/335; FO 371/9883 min. by Nicolson d.28 Aug.1924.* The British talked, somewhat oddly, of 'annexation' even though the islands already belonged to the Italians. They presumably meant a formal declaration of annexation with much pomp and ceremony and, perhaps, a naval demonstration (see, for example, *DBFP/1/XXVII/220*) which would certainly have inflamed Greek opinion.

attack.⁹⁵ Similarly, in 1926 when Mussolini appeared to be moving in the same direction the Anglo-Turkish agreement over Mosul ensured that he was restrained.

British policy can likewise be interpreted in two different ways. On the one hand it suffered a clear defeat, since goals which had been pursued for four years or more were precipitately abandoned simply because Mussolini refused to acquiesce in them. The Corfu crisis had shown, and this episode reaffirmed, that the British were unable or unwilling to oppose Mussolini even where very important interests were concerned, chiefly because of the overriding concern for peace and stability which made them reluctant to countenance a showdown and more inclined to retreat. Furthermore, the Foreign Office can be accused of tactical mistakes in both instances, in that they adopted untenable policies at the outset which could not be maintained since they had no basis in practical political logic. Over the Dodecanese the further charge could be made that the British were too ready - for example, at Lausanne in January 1923 - to rely on verbal assurances from Italians whom they knew from experience could not be trusted.⁹⁶

On the other hand, a more favourable interpretation is possible. The Foreign Office was flexible and realistic in coming to realise that perhaps the game was no longer worth the candle and in taking the opportunity of the accession to power of a new ministry to change the direction of policy. When the Foreign Office began to lose confidence in the bases of its position - because of the attitude of public opinion to Britain's obligations and doubts as to the value of Jubaland as a lever - policy was adjusted in order to fit this new perception, and this awareness of weakness and of the limitations of British capabilities was in fact a strength. British policy-makers at this time acted towards Italy on the assumption that though her friendship was worth little her enmity could be inconvenient, and here they realised that as they could not force Mussolini out of the Dodecanese it was not worth antagonising Italy any further for

⁹⁵ Cassels, *Early Diplomacy*, pp.225-30.

⁹⁶ On 27 March 1924 MacDonald discussed in the House how reliance on such verbal 'understandings' could cause difficulties (171 *HC Deb.* 5s 1606). For the Dodecanese question at Lausanne, see above pp.175-7.

the sake of Greek interests. The *froideur* in Anglo-Italian relations was a worry to many observers - Sir Eric Drummond for example wrote privately to MacDonald about it ⁹⁷- and there can be little doubt that this settlement did something to alleviate it, and thus contributed to the improved international atmosphere that facilitated the reparations settlement of the summer. But it was not simply, as Cassels has it, that MacDonald was 'dedicated to international conciliation in all circumstances'; the change in British policy also reflected hard-headed, pragmatic thinking.⁹⁸

Anglo-Italian relations generally improved after the solution of these two intractable problems, especially when later in 1924 Baldwin and the Conservatives returned to power. The attitudes of British Labour politicians towards Mussolini were always imbued with a certain coolness deriving from ideological antipathy, but the same was not true of British Conservatives, whose mild reaction to the Matteotti murder had set the tone for international opinion and given succour to Mussolini when his domestic position was very delicate.⁹⁹ More importantly, whereas neither Curzon nor MacDonald had seen any real rôle for Italy in their policy, Chamberlain had the definite goal of trying to coax Italy into behaving responsibly in the international system and of co-opting her into the settlement of the security question which he was trying to fashion.¹⁰⁰ This was achieved in no small part thanks to the series of meetings between the two men, during which although Mussolini made the customary demands for concessions Chamberlain managed to resist in such a way as to moderate Italian ambitions whilst yet flattering Mussolini.¹⁰¹ The *rapprochement* took some time to develop, and went through some rocky patches - for example early in 1925 when the two countries quarrelled over concessions in Albania - but it also produced tangible results like a settlement of the Jarabub question and the agreement of

⁹⁷ Barros, *Office Without Power*, pp.279-80.

⁹⁸ Cassels, *Early Diplomacy*, p.224.

⁹⁹ Cassels, *Early Diplomacy*, pp.248-55,310-2.

¹⁰⁰ Edwards *ESR* 10 9-13.

¹⁰¹ Edwards *HJ* 14 153-64; Cassels, *Early Diplomacy*, pp.312-3.

December 1925 over respective interests in Ethiopia.¹⁰² Although the *rapprochement* broke down in the later 1920s, and although it could never have begun without Chamberlain at the Foreign Office, the Dodecanese and Jubaland settlement arrived at by MacDonald was a necessary pre-requisite for it.

Whether this settlement is seen as a victory or a defeat for Mussolini, and whether it is taken as proof of British sagacity and realism or as evidence of British weakness and irresolution, the main losers were of course the Greeks. A minority of them, including Kaklamanos, believed that Greece should bow to *force majeure* and accept that as Italy was more powerful she would retain the islands.¹⁰³ The majority, however, were not prepared to resign themselves to this, and continued to aspire to obtain some of the islands. The grievance over the Dodecanese was kept alive by the vocal activities of expatriate islanders and pressure groups in Athens, and the islands continued to present a major obstacle to any Italo-Greek *rapprochement*.¹⁰⁴ The continued weakness and instability of Greece was reason enough for Mussolini not to move towards the general political settlement that he had spoken of to Graham, and enduring mutual suspicion meant that even when relations improved - for example during the rule of Pangalos - they still lacked cordiality. In any event the 'solution' of the Dodecanese and Jubaland dispute, roughly coinciding with the apparent settlement of the constitutional debate in Greece in favour of the republic, marks a definite break in Greek foreign policy. The preoccupation with Turkey remained, but distractions from internal affairs were now fewer. Moreover, with the Dodecanese question off the agenda, relations with Italy moved somewhat into the background and Greece's relations with her more immediate neighbours came into prominence.

¹⁰² For the quarrel over Albanian oil concessions in February 1925 when the Italians went so far as to accuse Chamberlain of duplicity and bad faith before backing down, see *DBFP/1/XXVII/60-130 passim* and Cassels, *Early Diplomacy*, pp.247-8. For the practical effects of the Anglo-Italian *entente* in the colonial sphere, see Cassels, *Early Diplomacy*, pp.288-314.

¹⁰³ FO 371/9883 FO to Cheetham no.376 d.16 Jun.1924.

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, *DBFP/1/XXVII/143-4*.

Chapter Nine

Greece, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria after the Treaty of Neuilly

1919 - 1926

Greek aspirations in the Dodecanese were, Cyprus and northern Epirus apart, the last remnant of the Great Idea: otherwise after 1923 Greece was a satisfied power whose interests lay in internal consolidation and reconstruction and retaining the territory she already possessed. The position of her north-eastern neighbour, Bulgaria, could hardly have been more different, for Sofia was the focus of revisionism in the Balkans during the 1920s. Both Greece and Bulgaria had come close in recent years to realising the wildest limits of their national aspirations, the former in Asia Minor after 1919 and the latter in Macedonia, Thrace and the Dobrudja during the First World War. However, whereas the Greeks suffered a shattering defeat in Anatolia and, shocked by the scale of their rout and the massive influx of refugees from Turkey, were largely prepared to abandon their expansionist dream, the Bulgarians were much less resigned.¹ They had capitulated in the war before their troops could be routed in the field and their territory had barely been invaded by the time of the armistice on 30 September 1918; consequently they were not at all inclined to accept the reality of their defeat,² or the, in their eyes, unjustifiably harsh, terms of the treaty of Neuilly of 27 November 1919.

For much of the 1920s Bulgarian statesmen used all their considerable ingenuity to agitate for revision of various aspects of the peace settlement. This was a difficult task, considering the restrictions imposed by Neuilly, the increased strength of Bulgaria's neighbours and the preponderance of *status quo* powers: major territorial changes were really out of the question and Bulgaria's policy was necessarily one of little steps.³ The Greeks and the Yugoslavs were generally pitted against the Bulgarians, although the triangular relationship between them was complex. The

¹ The point should be reiterated that with the inclusion of the vast majority of the Greek race within the Greek state after the exchange of populations the Great Idea lost its rationale; the Bulgarians, on the other hand, were apt to see a Bulgarian minority wherever there were Slav populations on their borders. On the other hand, despite their defeat by the Turks and the massive refugee problem, the Greeks were still net gainers territorially compared to 1914, since they acquired western Thrace from Bulgaria.

² H.W.V. Temperley (ed.), *A History of the Peace Conference of Paris*, Volume IV (London, Oxford University Press, 1921) 412.

³ At times the Italians encouraged the Bulgarians in their revisionist efforts, but this assistance was inconsistent and capricious.

traditional rivalry between the three races had recently become even sharper: the conflicts between their ambitions had been exacerbated by the war and now the victors faced the vanquished in defending the settlement that had resulted from it. All this created a delicate problem for the great powers who in managing the states system sought to preserve peace and stability in the Balkans. On the one hand, Bulgarian revisionism had to be contained rather than indulged. On the other, the zeal and aggression which Athens and Belgrade sometimes showed in seeking to uphold the peace treaty were also a threat to peace that had to be contained.

The terms of the treaty of Neuilly were considered extremely harsh by almost all Bulgarians.⁴ Whereas the Allies viewed Bulgaria as the Prussia of the Balkans who, by the manner in which she entered the war and the barbarous methods by which she conducted it, had put herself completely beyond the pale, the Bulgarians felt that they had been treated most unjustly.⁵ After the armistice a pro-*Entente* government had taken power in Sofia, the pro-German King Ferdinand had been replaced by his son, Boris, and the Bulgarians had argued that their belligerency had been a mistake, dictated by a pro-German minority which had misled the country - a situation, they pointed out, not dissimilar to that which had prevailed in Greece.⁶ Basing themselves on these premises and, as the British minister in Sofia observed, naively continuing to believe in the 'innate justice of their cause', the Bulgarians had approached the peace conference not humbly penitent, but armed with a list of territorial claims against their neighbours that they justified on ethnological grounds and Wilson's fourteen points.⁷

They were to be disappointed. Although some of their ethnological arguments were plausible and at times supported (albeit for very different reasons) by the United

⁴ *BDF A/II/1/10/166-75.*

⁵ Dockrill and Goold, *Peace without Promise*, pp.93-5; Sharp, *Versailles Settlement*, pp.142-3; H.Nicolson, *Peacemaking 1919* (New York, Grosset and Dunlap, 1965), pp.34-5; *BDF A/II/1/10/160-1*. The Allies in fact adopted the Greek view of Bulgaria, and their hostility to the Bulgarians was in part simply a consequence of their support for Greece.

⁶ Petsalis-Diomidis, *Greece at the Paris Peace Conference*, pp.85-93.

⁷ *BDF A/II/1/10/148-52,169*; Temperley (ed.), *Peace Conference IV* 449-50.

States and Italy, the Anglo-French view prevailed that Bulgaria must be punished, and should certainly gain nothing. The final treaty rejected Bulgaria's claims in the southern Dobrudja and eastern Thrace, and deprived her of western Thrace and some small but strategically important areas on her western border which were awarded to Yugoslavia. In addition, she was to pay £90,000,000 in reparations and her armed forces were limited to 33,000 men, who had to be recruited voluntarily on a long term basis.⁸ These terms genuinely shocked the Bulgarians, who had seen their prodigious and costly military efforts since 1912 come to virtually nothing - indeed worse than nothing in view of the aggrandisement of their neighbours. Not surprisingly, Neuilly left Bulgaria 'an angrily revisionist state'.⁹

The Bulgarian elections of August 1919 brought to power the leader of the Peasants' Union, Stamboliiski, 'an authentic, if somewhat demagogic, agrarian radical'.¹⁰ He immediately began implementing his vision of imposing the dictatorship of the village upon Bulgaria and destroying the dominant power of the cities. To this end he introduced radical measures of land reform and compulsory labour service, expanded the education system and attacked the 'social parasites' of the merchant classes and the professions.¹¹ In foreign affairs, although he was hardly happy with Neuilly, he was less obsessed with narrowly nationalist aims than the bourgeois parties: he placed his faith in the ultimate triumph of a 'Green International' of fellow peasant parties and in an eventual confederation between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. This partial abjuration of territorial expansion won him some plaudits in the west, but brought him into conflict at home with the powerful, and after 1919 fiercely embittered, Macedonian lobby. Macedonians in Bulgaria were a well-organised, cohesive group who had acquired an influence in the administrative, political and military élites of the country

⁸ Dockrill and Goold, *Peace without Promise*, pp.95-101; Sharp, *Versailles Settlement*, pp.143-4; Temperley (ed.), *Peace Conference IV* 166-70, 411-5, 444-61 and V (London, Oxford University Press, 1924) 39-50. For the text of the treaty, see *BFSP/112/781-896*.

⁹ J.Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars* (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1974), pp.323-5; Dockrill and Goold, *Peace without Promise*, pp.100-1.

¹⁰ Rothschild, *East Central Europe*, p.334.

¹¹ Rothschild, *East Central Europe*, pp.334-8; R.J.Crampton, *A Short History of Modern Bulgaria* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp.87-91.

quite disproportionate to their numbers. In their view, the loss of the greater part of Macedonia to Greece, and especially to Yugoslavia, could never be accepted, and in addition to exercising pressure through legitimate organisations they made use of a military arm, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (IMRO). This group (or rather groups, for there were several Macedonian *comitadji* organisations) pursued a two-pronged policy of intimidating governments in Sofia and of launching military raids into 'occupied' parts of Macedonia to agitate for an autonomous state.¹²

For some time, Stamboliiski's policies were fruitless: he harassed the Macedonian organisations but could not, or would not, crush them, and the Yugoslav government showed little interest in his overtures.¹³ In June 1922, a recrudescence of *comitadji* activity, not only in Greek and Yugoslav Macedonia but also in the Dobrudja, led the Greek, Yugoslav and Romanian governments to protest to Sofia, who promptly appealed to the League, asking for an international inquiry into the Macedonian situation and claiming that the military clauses of Neuilly rendered Bulgaria incapable of controlling the Macedonians. Insofar as the League merely advised the four governments to come to some agreement on the subject by negotiation, the outcome was a success for the Bulgarians who at one point had been facing the threat of 'measures of active coercion' from their neighbours.¹⁴ But the Foreign Office had looked askance at the Bulgarian appeal to the League believing it to be part of a revisionist campaign by the 'sly and unreliable' Stamboliiski, designed to pick holes in

¹² Crampton, *Modern Bulgaria*, pp.91-3; Rothschild, *East Central Europe*, pp.326-7,335-6. The rationale of agitating for an autonomous state was, at least for some of the *comitadjis*, a hope that it would eventually be absorbed by Bulgaria as eastern Rumelia had been in the nineteenth century. Some Macedonians more explicitly favoured federation with Bulgaria, but they were defeated by the autonomists in Spring 1923 (DBFP/1/XXIV/146-7,500-1,625-6,663). A broadly sympathetic portrait of Stamboliiski and his domestic and foreign policies is contained in J.D.Bell, *Peasants in Power. Alexander Stamboliski and the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union, 1899-1923* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1977), pp.154-207.

¹³ DBFP/1/XXIV/146-7; Crampton, *Modern Bulgaria*, p.92; Rothschild, *East Central Europe*, p.335. The murder of the minister of the interior, Dimitroff, by Macedonians in October 1921 (DBFP/1/XXIV/147) was doubtless a powerful personal incentive for Stamboliiski to avoid a showdown with IMRO.

¹⁴ DBFP/1/XXIV/225-7,230-4,254-5,264-6,281,283-4,288,309-10,333,336,344-5,369-70.

the military clauses of Neuilly and to pillory the Yugoslavs for maladministration in Macedonia.¹⁵

In fact, Stamboliiski genuinely wanted more positive relations with the Yugoslavs and Romanians, and later in the year as the forthcoming Lausanne conference approached engaged in a concerted propaganda campaign to win their support for Bulgarian aspirations. These feelers met with a warmer response than hitherto in Belgrade, not least because the seizure of power by Mussolini in Italy confronted the Yugoslavs with 'the suddenly-opened abyss of a possible challenge to war from the Italian Fascisti'.¹⁶ A visit to Belgrade by Stamboliiski in November led to a considerable improvement in relations and an agreement to establish a mixed commission to regulate points at issue between the two states.¹⁷ When the Bulgarian premier went on to announce to the press 'that he considered the fate of Macedonia as definitely and finally settled', it seemed that he had decided to throw the Macedonians over altogether and to work wholeheartedly for *rapprochement* with Yugoslavia.¹⁸

Although *comitadji* bands continued to operate in Macedonia and Thrace and reached a new pitch of activity in the spring,¹⁹ the Yugoslav-Bulgarian mixed commission began to meet at Nis from early March 1923 to discuss co-operation over frontier security, and the Yugoslavs, aware of Stamboliiski's delicate position, forebore to make any official protest.²⁰ Negotiations were complete within a few weeks when a package of measures was agreed for suppressing the *comitadjis*. As these were not at first made public for fear of compromising Stamboliiski,²¹ however, the secrecy involved began to fuel the suspicions of the Greeks that the negotiations were a cover for some far-reaching political agreement between the two states for mutual support for their respective aspirations for territory on the Aegean. In particular, Athens

¹⁵ DBFP/1/XXIV/275-9.

¹⁶ DBFP/1/XXIV/384-5,389-90.

¹⁷ DBFP/1/XXIV/414-8.

¹⁸ DBFP/1/XXIV/410-1.

¹⁹ DBFP/1/XXIV/421-2,434-5,500-1,548-9,555-6.

²⁰ DBFP/1/XXIV/548-9,555-6.

²¹ DBFP/1/XXIV/558-61,581.

feared that with Macedonia lost the Bulgarians would concentrate all their revisionist energies on western Thrace and Dedeagatch,²² and the publication of the Nis agreements in May did little to ease these fears. As for the comitadjis, although the British thought that Stamboliiski's adherence to the Yugoslav-Bulgarian agreement was insincere and intended only for domestic political effect, the Macedonians continued to orchestrate a campaign of protest against his supposed treachery.²³

The Macedonians were but one of the groups growing dissatisfied with Stamboliiski's rule. Members of the professional classes, urban workers, civil servants, demobilised soldiers and bourgeois politicians had all been steadily alienated from his regime, and a secret military league of reservist officers had begun to plot his overthrow. The increasingly violent methods used by Stamboliiski to maintain the Peasants' Union in office and his manipulation of the April elections to ensure a pliant Sobranie only advanced the scheme, and the premier's growing detachment from reality and megalomania served to cement together the diverse coalition he had unwittingly created.²⁴ In the early hours of 9 June 1923 the opposition launched a *coup* that met with little resistance and soon swept the country.²⁵ Stamboliiski himself eluded his opponents for some days but on 15 June the government announced 'that after capture yesterday [he] was rescued and in subsequent pursuit was killed'.²⁶ In fact he had been

²² DBFP/1/XXIV/560-2,580,582,586. Such an agreement would certainly have been welcomed by many in Bulgaria (FO 371/8562 Erskine to FO no.55 d.7 Mar.1923), and the Romanians were almost as perturbed as the Greeks (FO 371/8562 Erskine to FO no.66 d.27 Mar.1923). Despite the many rumours, the British were convinced that the Nis negotiations had no ulterior motive (FO 371/8562 min. by Nicolson d.5 May 1923). The fears of the Greeks were given piquancy by their continuing negotiations with Yugoslavia over a free zone at Salonica, and their conviction that the Italians were already urging the Serbs towards Salonica so as to distract them from Fiume (see, for example, FO 371/8832 Bentinck to FO tel.103 d.27 Mar.1923, no.322 d.21 Apr.1923). Equally, peace had not yet been signed at Lausanne. These issues are examined more closely in chapters 11 and 12 below.

²³ DBFP/1/XXIV/593-7,599-600,608-9,613-7,624-6,639-41,663. For Britain's views see FO 371/8562 mins. by Nicolson d.5,17 and 31 May 1923.

²⁴ Crampton, *Modern Bulgaria*, pp.93-9; Rothschild, *East Central Europe*, pp.338-41.

²⁵ DBFP/1/XXIV/701-3,705-7,713-8.

²⁶ DBFP/1/XXIV/716-7.

dealt with by his bitterest enemies in IMRO: his body was discovered on 14 June after the Macedonians had removed the ears, hands and head.²⁷

A new government was quickly established under Alexander Tsankoff, a professor of economics, comprising representatives from all the bourgeois parties but depending chiefly on military support.²⁸ Tsankoff soon created a loose confederation of these parties, the Democratic Concord, which had no coherent ideology and served 'little purpose other than to guarantee the government a dependable majority'.²⁹ At first the regime pursued a conciliatory policy, but in September the Bulgarian communists, prodded by Moscow, launched a large-scale though ill-prepared insurrection which gave Tsankoff the chance to pose as a bulwark against bolshevism (which could serve as a useful pretext for seeking changes in the military restrictions of Neuilly).³⁰ The white terror which followed was later criticised by Austen Chamberlain as

one of the blackest pages in the history of Bulgaria since her liberation from the Turkish yoke. It was a regime of pure repression, M. Tsankov's sole idea of government being to classify all his political opponents as Communists and to clap them into prison, where all were tortured and many disappeared forever.³¹

The next two years saw terrorist action escalate *pari passu* with the ferocity of government repression, culminating in a bomb outrage during a state funeral in Sofia cathedral in April 1925 which left well over a hundred people dead.³² Meanwhile, as the agrarians and communists battled with the government, Macedonian violence, both inside and outside the country, continued unabated and, at least in part, with the connivance of the state.³³

The reaction of Bulgaria's neighbours to the *coup* was conditioned by its effect on the Macedonian question. The fact that Tsankoff had come to power as a representative

²⁷ Crampton, *Modern Bulgaria*, p.98. For the growth of opposition to Stamboliiski and the *coup*, see also Bell, *Peasants in Power*, pp.208-41.

²⁸ DBFP/1/XXIV/701,706-7,714-5.

²⁹ Crampton, *Modern Bulgaria*, p.100.

³⁰ Crampton, *Modern Bulgaria*, pp.100-2; Rothschild, *East Central Europe*, pp.342-4. For an account of the September uprising, see FO 371/8570 War Office to FO no.0169/43 M.I.2 d.15 Oct.1923.

³¹ DBFP/1a/II/942.

³² DBFP/1/XXVII/147-8.

³³ Crampton, *Modern Bulgaria*, pp.101-2.

of the pro-Macedonian factions made his position very delicate: if he openly sanctioned the Macedonian cause the Yugoslavs might well take aggressive action against Sofia; but if he stood up to IMRO he could expect the same fate as Stamboliiski. Consequently, relations between the government and the Macedonians were always ambiguous and obscure.³⁴ The initial reactions of Yugoslavia and Greece to the *coup* differed greatly. Whilst the former deeply regretted the return to power of traditional Bulgarian nationalists - and even massed troops on the frontier - the latter was much relieved that 'the much dreaded flirtation between Bulgaria and Serbia' appeared to be over.³⁵ At any rate, Greece, Romania and Czechoslovakia restrained Yugoslavia, and in July all four states implicitly recognised the new government with notes hoping for the 'continuance of good relations'.³⁶ Nevertheless, the Yugoslavs clearly had no confidence in Tsankoff,³⁷ and in September fears grew in Belgrade that large scale *comitadji* action was imminent, orchestrated by Rome and designed to embarrass Yugoslavia at a time when the Fiume question was most acute. This led to a further massing of Yugoslav troops on the frontier, although again Yugoslavia was restrained by her neighbours and by Britain and France.³⁸ Relations improved slightly later in the year, and the mixed commission renewed its sittings; however, it could never hope to extirpate the *comitadji* problem, and, indeed, after the September revolt a new irritant arose in the shape of agrarian and communist refugees, fleeing government repression to take shelter over the border in Yugoslavia.³⁹

The British also treated Tsankoff with circumspection. The British minister at Sofia, William Erskine, at first assumed that he should enter into official relations with the new government, since King Boris had 'either approved or acquiesced in [the] coup'.⁴⁰

³⁴ FO 371/8563 min. by Troutbeck d.15 Sept.1923.

³⁵ DBFP/1/XXIV/703,705-10,717-8,723.

³⁶ DBFP/1/XXIV/718,723,736,764.

³⁷ DBFP/1/XXIV/778,787.

³⁸ DBFP/1/XXIV/787,836-8,845-7; FO 371/8563 min. by Lampson d.4 Sept.1923, mins. by Nicolson d.15,17 and 19 Sept.1923, St.Aulaire to FO unno.1. d.19 Sept.1923, Young to FO no.354 d.20 Sept.1923, Barber to FO no.192 d.20 Sept.1923, Dering to FO no.545 d.22 Sept.1923; FO 371/8559 min. by Nicolson d.7 Sept.1923.

³⁹ DBFP/1/XXIV/850-2,856,874,895-7; FO 371/9665 Erskine to FO no.44 d.19 Feb.1924.

⁴⁰ DBFP/1/XXIV/702-3,706-7,715-6,739-40.

Curzon, however, instructed him to limit his relations with Tsankoff's government 'to what is strictly necessary' to make clear that formal recognition was not being accorded, and to warn Sofia that any failure to observe the treaty of Neuilly could 'only involve Bulgaria in the gravest difficulties'.⁴¹ In October the Bulgarian foreign minister, Kalfoff, was received by Curzon in London, albeit reluctantly and only after Poincaré had received him in Paris. Curzon warned him frankly that he should not alienate Yugoslavia by fostering the Macedonians and also admonished him for his regime's treatment of its political opponents, particularly the leaders of the Peasants' Union who were being treated in jail not as political prisoners but as common criminals.⁴² (This, perhaps, is a further indication that British action concerning the trial of the six in Greece in 1922 was motivated more by considerations of principle - a conviction that such persecution was not conducive to peace and stability - than by partiality for the royalist ex-ministers themselves). Erskine laboured to try and ensure the safety of leading agrarians (or at least those who had not already been assassinated by the Macedonians) in Sofia, but he gained the impression that the government was mortally afraid of incurring Macedonian displeasure.⁴³ London also continued to endeavour to ensure Tsankoff's compliance with the peace treaty, and dismissed a Bulgaria plea for a relaxation of the military restrictions of Neuilly in order to deal with a supposedly imminent communist uprising: this, Erskine believed, was simply a subterfuge to facilitate more political persecution.⁴⁴

In 1924 relations between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria scarcely improved. In January, a tactless reference by Tsankoff in the Sobranie to a 'Bulgarian minority' in Yugoslav Macedonia mollified Macedonian nationalists in Bulgaria but inflamed Belgrade.⁴⁵ The sensitivity of the Yugoslavs on this subject was further illustrated by their hostile reaction to the publication by the *Times* of an interview with one of the leaders of

⁴¹ DBFP/1/XXIV/721-2,724-5,756.

⁴² DBFP/1/XXIV/860-2. See also FO 371/8570 file 16977 *passim*. The Foreign Office had also taken similar action when Stamboliiski had persecuted his opponents (DBFP/1/XXIV/597-8).

⁴³ DBFP/1/XXIV/887-8.

⁴⁴ DBFP/1/XXIV/893-4.

⁴⁵ DBFP/1/XXVI/10-2,22-4,41.

IMRO, Todor Alexandroff, and to remarks advocating Macedonian autonomy allegedly made by Lord Thomson, minister for aviation in the new Labour government, at a meeting of the Near and Middle Eastern Association. The Yugoslav view was that, were it not for *comitadji* activity, the inhabitants of Yugoslav Macedonia (or, as they termed it, southern Serbia) would settle down and become good Yugoslavs. IMRO's aim, on the other hand, was to foster and perpetuate disorder in the region so as to provoke European intervention, and it would only be encouraged by declarations of support from prominent figures in the west.⁴⁶ (The Foreign Office concurred, and was most put out by these unauthorised ministerial pronouncements, which also caused concern to the king.⁴⁷) Yet while the Yugoslavs believed that the Bulgarians were conniving at IMRO's activity, the Bulgarians claimed that the Yugoslavs, having freed their hands by reaching a settlement with Italy, were planning to provoke disturbances in Macedonia as a pretext for an invasion.⁴⁸ The British tried to exercise a calming influence at both capitals, and to persuade the two governments to co-operate against the *comitadjis*.⁴⁹

Early in March, fearing further trouble with Athens and Belgrade, the Bulgarians organised a crackdown on the Macedonians, ostensibly to emancipate themselves from their influence and to prevent any large-scale band activity in the spring. Several hundred Macedonian activists were arrested, but although the Yugoslavs at first welcomed this apparent change of heart by Sofia, they were disillusioned when it became obvious that none of the leading Macedonian terrorists had been caught. Indeed, the Belgrade press represented Bulgaria's actions as merely 'an attempt to throw dust into the eyes of the Great Powers'. After gentle persuasion by Britain, however, the Yugoslav government agreed to accept the arrests in good faith and to let the matter rest; and although rumours of imminent *comitadji* attacks continued to

⁴⁶ DBFP/1/XXVI/41-4,62-3,75-6,86-92; FO 371/9659 Young to FO no.61 d.14 Feb.1924.

⁴⁷ FO 371/9659 mins. by Nicolson and Crowe d.11 Feb.1924, MacDonald d.12 Feb.1924.

⁴⁸ DBFP/1/XXVI/26,43-4,67-70,115-7; FO 371/9663 min. by Lampson d.21 Feb.1924, Stancioff (Bulgarian minister in London) to FO no.192 d.25 Feb.1924.

⁴⁹ DBFP/1/XXVI/99-100,108,117,145-6.

circulate throughout the spring, this ensured that there was no conflict between the two powers.⁵⁰

Throughout the summer the Bulgarians, in an attempt to be allowed to recruit men to the colours beyond the limits set by Neuilly, assiduously worked up a scare about an imminent rising by a rag-bag alliance of communists, agrarians and Macedonians; and at the end of July over 3,000 men were indeed called up in defiance of the treaty. This placed the powers in a quandary. On the one hand, they were reluctant to sanction this breach of the treaty, especially as the army was already being used by the government to persecute its political opponents. On the other hand, so long as there was some danger of an uprising and powers were loath to render the Sofia government impotent in the face of it. In the end, however, when the uprising failed to materialise, the powers ordered the Bulgarians to disband the recently recruited men.⁵¹

The possibility of a Soviet-inspired uprising nevertheless continued to worry the British, especially as other Balkan governments began to share Sofia's fears. These worries became particularly acute in December 1924, and the Foreign Office instructed British representatives in the Balkans to report any important developments pertaining to this threat. At the same time, especially after Tsankoff visited both Belgrade and Bucharest late in December, Yugoslav-Bulgarian relations improved somewhat. Although no detailed discussions took place at Belgrade, the two countries agreed in general terms to co-operate against the communist menace and against *comitadji* activity. The British viewed this development with mixed feelings: although they welcomed 'anything tending to loyal cooperation between the Balkan states', they also feared that in this instance co-operation against the bolshevik menace might in practice mean 'a pre-arranged campaign by the local governments concerned against their political opponents, conveniently dubbed "Bolsheviks" for the purpose'.⁵²

⁵⁰ DBFP/1/XXVI/85-6,92-4,99-100,104-5,108,115-7,120-1,124,142,144-6,148-9,153-4,156,159-60,194-5,205-6.

⁵¹ DBFP/1/XXVI/250-2,286-7,291-2,297-303,310-4; FO 371/9663 Dering to FO no.401 d.19 Jul.1924, min. by Howard Smith d.30 Jul.1924.

⁵² DBFP/1/XXVI/341-2,357-60,390-1,425-8,431-2,441-3,444-5,457-8,460-3; DBFP/1/XXVII/1-5,37-9,50-2; FO 371/9663 Lampson to Young p.1. d.22 Dec.1924 [quoted], Erskine to FO no.177 d.1

Nicolson expressed another fear, namely that the talks might be the first steps towards a Yugoslav-Bulgarian federation which would lead to Slav domination of the Balkans, the collapse of Greece and the destruction of Britain's strategic position in the Near East, but this was viewed as unduly alarmist by all his superiors.⁵³

In 1925 the Bulgarians renewed their efforts to use the communist menace to evade the military restrictions imposed upon them. In February rumours again began to circulate that some Comintern inspired uprising was about to take place in Bulgaria, and in March the Bulgarians asked the powers to sanction the raising of an extra 4,000 militiamen to meet this threat. Erskine recommended that this request should be refused, on the grounds that the danger of a revolt was even less than in 1924, when the government had in any case purposely exaggerated its fears. The Foreign Office shared this view, but the Allied military authorities were inclined to favour the Bulgarian pleas. Consequently, early in April the Bulgarians were permitted to raise an additional 3,000 militiamen, on condition that they were all volunteers and that they were demobilised by 31 May.⁵⁴

Shortly after this the bomb outrage occurred in Sofia cathedral, apparently providing confirmation of the Bulgarian government's fears. It certainly provided them with a propaganda opportunity: for some time the Bulgarians had been complaining about raids onto their territory by bands of agrarian refugees who were concentrated just over the border around Nis - a particularly large raid had taken place in February - and now they began to insinuate that these agrarians, with the connivance of Belgrade, had been responsible for the Sofia massacre. Although they may only have been hoping to arouse international pressure to force the Yugoslavs to stop harbouring the refugees, in the event, they provoked a very angry response from Belgrade and were forced to publish an apology on 28 April.⁵⁵ The British were hard

Oct.1924, Young to FO tel.162 d.28 Dec.1924, tel.163 d.28 Dec.1924, Cheetham to FO tel.277 d.30 Dec.1924; FO 371/10663 Young to FO no.466 d.31 Dec.1924, no.467 d.31 Dec.1924.

⁵³ *DBFP*/1/XXVI/462-3.

⁵⁴ *DBFP*/1/XXVII/108-9,120-4,126-7,130,132,135-7,141-2,144-5.

⁵⁵ FO 371/10667 Erskine to FO no.27 d.10 Feb.1925, Young to FO tel.37 d.22 Apr.1925, Drummond to Cadogan p.l. d.21 Apr.1925, Young to FO no.133 d.23 Apr.1925, Erskine to FO tel.31 d.27

put to it to choose between the Bulgarians and Yugoslavs in these exchanges, since neither side was entirely honest. Lampson argued that it was 'a safe axiom to mistrust all these Balkan nations equally', and Chamberlain agreed, whilst remarking that "Caesar & Pompey are very much alike, especially Pompey". I distrust both equally & the Serb a little more'.⁵⁶ In any event Lampson trusted that British representatives in the area could be relied upon to follow the usual line in these squabbles and dispense 'grand-motherliness to all concerned'.⁵⁷

The Bulgarians predictably used the latest terrorist incident to press for a further temporary increase - of an additional 10,000 militiamen - in their armed forces, hoping thereby to win the argument in principle that existing numbers were inadequate to keep order in the country. Initially, the British were not inclined to give way, not least because Erskine argued that they would be used for savage reprisals against the government's opponents and that the cathedral bomb seemed to have been an isolated act rather than the beginning of a concerted terrorist campaign.⁵⁸ The French and Italians, however, felt that the Bulgarian request was reasonable and so the British agreed to grant it, subject to the condition that these troops too should be demobilised by 31 May. This in turn provoked strong and menacing protests from Athens and Belgrade, and Britain again had to exercise a calming influence at both capitals, emphasising that the extra troops would indeed be demobilised by the end of May.⁵⁹ Chamberlain then turned his attention to Sofia, where the government was beginning to agitate for an extension of the time limit. In view of the fact that he had 'no sort of confidence in the past or present wisdom or justice of the Bulgarian government', he concerted with France and Italy to create a united Allied front to hold the Bulgarians to the agreement.⁶⁰ Kalfoff, who embarked on a tour of European capitals to present Bulgaria's case in person, was told in no uncertain terms in London

Apr.1925, Young to FO tel.46 d.28 Apr.1925, no.135 d.30 Apr.1925, Erskine to FO tel.40 d.3 May 1925.

⁵⁶ FO 371/10667 mins. by Lampson d.30 Apr.1925, Chamberlain d.1 May 1925.

⁵⁷ FO 371/10667 min. by Lampson d.28 Apr.1925.

⁵⁸ DBFP/1/XXVII/147-50.

⁵⁹ DBFP/1/XXVII/150-2,155-6,158-9,166-7.

⁶⁰ DBFP/1/XXVII/157-61,167-71.

on 18 May that the extra troops must be disbanded, and that the cause of Bulgaria's troubles was not so much communist subversion as the misguided and repressive policy of the government. The French and Italians supported this view and so the Bulgarians were forced to acquiesce in the will of the powers.⁶¹

The unsettled situation in Macedonia continued to worry the Balkan states throughout the summer, and this was the background to the Greek-Bulgarian incident of October 1925, when the Greeks invaded Bulgaria after a frontier skirmish, only to be reined in by the united great powers and the League. The Bulgarians used the incident to try to gain credit with the powers maintaining, according to the British representative in Sofia at the time, an attitude that was 'correct throughout', whilst using the opportunity 'to spread their anti-Greek propaganda far and wide'.⁶²

This incident, together with the despatch of the Rumbold commission of inquiry, caused some British officials to give some thought to the wider aspects of the Macedonian question. Kennard, who since 25 May had been minister in Belgrade, suggested privately to Lampson on 30 October that a League commission should be sent to the area, and this idea received some tentative support in the Foreign Office.⁶³ Lampson, however, was wholly against the idea, since it would be 'either a farce or possibly the undoing of the League', and deprecated any notion of Britain's raising the Macedonian or *comitadji* questions. The former would 'automatically cease to exist' after ten more years of Serbianisation in Yugoslav Macedonia, and the latter was best left to the Yugoslavs themselves to deal with.⁶⁴ These views were reiterated in a Foreign Office memorandum of 26 November which argued that the 'present partition of Macedonia' was 'probably as good a practical arrangement as can be devised' and

⁶¹ DBFP/1/XXVII/168,171-5,178-82,184-6,188-96,204; FO 800/258 Chamberlain to Worthington-Evans (minister of war) p.l. d.3 Jun.1925.

⁶² FO 371/10673 Stevenson (chargé in Sofia) to FO no.231 d.28 Oct.1925.

⁶³ FO 371/10667 Kennard to Lampson p.l. d.30 Oct.1925; FO 371/10673 min. by Bateman d.3 Nov.1925.

⁶⁴ FO 371/10673 min. by Lampson d.3 Nov.1925; FO 371/10667 Lampson to Kennard p.l. d.7 Nov.1925.

that the *comitadji* bands were dissipating themselves in internecine feuding and 'given an era of comparative peace in the Balkans' would 'probably die a natural death'.⁶⁵

The studied correctness of the Bulgarians' attitude during the crisis in fact won them little applause from the British. London was far more impressed by the strictly neutral attitude of the Yugoslavs during the affair and drew the lesson that a repeat of 1914 was unlikely since conflicts in the Balkans could now easily be contained by the League provided that Yugoslavia acted with 'common sense and moderation'.⁶⁶ By the end of the year the Tsankoff government was in fact almost totally isolated: its brutal domestic policy was provoking increasing resistance from the opposition and Kalfoff searched in vain for a foreign policy triumph to shore up the beleaguered regime.⁶⁷ The last straw for the government, however, was Great Britain's declared readiness - because of distaste for Tsankoff's methods of rule - to block a League refugee loan which Sofia desperately needed. Consequently on 3 January 1926 Tsankoff resigned and the government was reconstructed. The new premier, Liapcheff (a Macedonian), eased the severity of Tsankoff's rule and allowed the Peasants' Union to function, although one consequence of this was that the communists and Macedonians were also more free to agitate.⁶⁸

The rise to power of Liapcheff did not have any dramatic impact upon Bulgaria's relations with her neighbours. Towards the end of 1925 there was much talk in the Balkans about the possibility of the conclusion of a Balkan pact, or of bilateral agreements between various countries which might act as precursors for a general pact, and rumours flourished about the prospect of a Yugoslav-Bulgarian accord.

⁶⁵ FO 371/10667 'The Macedonian Question and Komitaji Activity', memorandum by the Central Department, d.26 Nov.1925.

⁶⁶ FO 371/10673 min. by Bateman d.8 Dec.1925; FO 371/10667 'The Macedonian Question and Komitaji Activity', memorandum by the Central Department d.26 Nov.1925.

⁶⁷ FO 371/11223 Annual Report, Bulgaria, 1925, [encl. in Erskine to FO no.29 d.11 Feb.1926] Parts I and III; *DBFP/1/XXVII/250-2*.

⁶⁸ Crampton, *Modern Bulgaria*, pp.102-4; Rothschild, *East Central Europe*, p.344; *DBFP/1a/II/942-3*. For the refugee loan, which was eventually raised in December 1926, see Orde, *Reconstruction*, pp.289-91 and Ladas, *Exchange*, pp.594-7. It is perhaps telling that it was in the case of Bulgaria rather than of Greece that the British were willing to use these financial levers to influence internal politics.

Information reached London in October that the Bulgarians favoured such a deal but that Belgrade was less keen, being unwilling to adopt a wholeheartedly anti-Greek policy.⁶⁹ (In December the Yugoslav foreign minister, Nincic, seemed to confirm this when he denied that any *rapprochement* with Sofia was contemplated.⁷⁰) In the new year the rumours continued, and the more compliant attitude of Liapcheff towards the peace treaties seemed to bode well for an agreement. Indeed, in the spring the Yugoslavs finally declared that they hoped to sign an arbitration treaty with the Bulgarians, and negotiations began in April.⁷¹ All this soon came to nothing, however, as it became clear that Nincic was demanding that the Bulgarians pledge themselves to even stronger action against IMRO than Stamboliiski had accepted at Nis in 1923. This was obviously unacceptable to Sofia, and London concluded that Nincic's whole policy was insincere and designed solely to put pressure on the Greeks in the negotiations for renewal of their alliance which were at a delicate stage.⁷² For the rest of 1926 relations between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia improved little and the durability of the problems and animosities in the region was demonstrated in August when, as on so many previous occasions, a series of *comitadji* raids caused Athens, Belgrade and Bucharest to insist, in a collective note of protest to Sofia, that the Bulgarians crack down on the Macedonian organisations.⁷³

Equally durable was the Bulgarian grievance against the Greeks over to the question of access to the Aegean through western Thrace. This region, which contained several potentially valuable ports, including Dedeagatch, had been Bulgarian since 1913 when it had been captured from the Turks in the Balkan wars, fulfilling Bulgaria's long-standing aspirations for an outlet on the Aegean.⁷⁴ At the Paris peace conference

⁶⁹ FO 371/10794 FO to Kennard no.484 d.17 Oct.1925.

⁷⁰ FO 371/10794 Kennard to FO no.476 d.16 Dec.1925.

⁷¹ FO 371/11217 Erskine to FO no.275 d.31 Dec.1925, Kennard to FO tel.55 d.23 Apr.1926, no.161 d.23 Apr.1926, Erskine to FO tel.21 d.27 Apr.1926; FO 421/310 Erskine to FO no.11 d.20 Jan.1926, no.24 d.4 Feb.1926, no.43 d.4 Mar.1926.

⁷² FO 371/11217 Erskine to FO no.75 d.27 Apr.1926, min. by Bateman d.28 Apr.1926, Erskine to FO no.78 d.5 May 1926, tel.22 d.11 May 1926, tel.28 d.1 Jun.1926, memoranda by Drummond d.24 and 27 May 1926.

⁷³ Barros, *Office Without Power*, pp.285-6; FO 371/12178 Annual Report, Greece, 1926, p.17.

⁷⁴ Temperley (ed.), *Peace Conference* IV 456-8.

the British and French sought to award it to Greece, but were thwarted by the Americans who wanted it to become part of the projected Constantinople mandate or to enjoy some form of autonomy. This complication, and the need to settle Bulgaria's borders promptly and definitively, shaped article 48 of the treaty of Neuilly wherein Bulgaria ceded western Thrace to the Allied powers who were to decide its fate later. To sugar this pill, the Allies undertook to ensure, by some future arrangement, 'the economic outlets of Bulgaria to the Aegean Sea'. This was theoretically achieved when, simultaneously with the treaty of Sèvres, the Allies signed a Thracian treaty with Greece. This last awarded western Thrace to Greece, but articles 4-16 provided for the freedom of transit for Bulgarian trade in the region, a lease in perpetuity of a free zone in Dedeagatch and, in anticipation of Greek obstruction, the establishment of an international commission to ensure the execution of these clauses. As the ratification of the Thracian treaty was, however, tied to that of the treaty of Sèvres it remained inoperative.⁷⁵

The British representative in Sofia had warned in 1919 that if western Thrace was awarded to Greece, 'we shall have only repeated the error of 1903 and created a second but minor Macedonian question'.⁷⁶ Bulgaria's continuing designs on the region and Greece's determination to thwart their realisation did indeed cause much trouble over the next few years. In part this manifested itself over the issue of minorities,⁷⁷ but the Aegean outlet question was also a cause of friction, as the Bulgarians tried to keep alive the issue of their access in the hope of re-opening the question of the award of western Thrace to Greece. The Bulgarians tried - albeit in vain - to have the question placed on the agenda of the London conference of February-March 1921 and on that of the Near Eastern conference proposed by Curzon in November 1921.⁷⁸ In the meantime, rumours flourished of intrigues between the Kemalists and the

⁷⁵ FO 371/9669 memorandum by Nicolson d.9 Apr.1924. For the inter-Allied negotiations over Thrace, see Petsalis-Diomidis, *Greece at the Paris Peace Conference*, pp.85-93,153-72,256-90, Helmreich, *From Paris to Sèvres*, pp.39-46,85,153-8, 164-5,265-6 and *BDF A/II/I/10/148-53,157-61,165-70*. For the text of the Thracian treaty of 10 August 1920, see *BFSP/113/479-85*.

⁷⁶ *BDF A/II/I/10/167*.

⁷⁷ See chapter 10 below.

⁷⁸ *DBFP/1/XXII/6-9,55,646*.

Macedonian and Thracian committees of Bulgaria for joint action in Thrace if Greece suffered reverses in Anatolia, and Stamboliiski was warned by Britain not to give such schemes any encouragement.⁷⁹ By March 1922 the Bulgarians had begun to argue that the Thracian treaty was but an annex to the treaty of Sèvres and that as the latter was to be revised, so the status of Thrace should be reconsidered; and they claimed that France and Italy shared this view.⁸⁰ There was no truth in these assertions, but the Bulgarians kept up a relentless campaign and, as the Lausanne conference approached, cast round for support from their neighbours.⁸¹ Although the powers did not support all Bulgaria's arguments concerning her rights in western Thrace, there was nevertheless a feeling that as Greece was now weaker perhaps the previous arrangements should be modified.⁸² This was especially true of the British, who regretted the fact that the outlet promised in 1920 had not yet materialised; and Curzon had the Bulgarians invited to Lausanne to state their case, apparently fully prepared to contemplate the 'creation of a neutral zone to provide railway access for Bulgaria to the Aegean'.⁸³

On 23 November Stamboliiski presented Bulgaria's case to the territorial commission of the Lausanne conference, pleading for western Thrace to be constituted into a neutral zone, and adding that it was 'not only impossible but psychologically inadmissible that the access to the Bulgarian outlet on the sea should pass across Turkish or Greek territory'.⁸⁴ A sub-commission was appointed to consider this question, and it reported to the territorial commission the next day, recommending the creation of an international commission to construct a free port at Dedeagatch and to supervise the running of the railway between the port and Bulgaria. The Bulgarian representative on the sub-commission continued to insist, however, that it was 'only by direct possession of the territory in the neighbourhood of the railway and the port,

⁷⁹ *DBFP/1/XXII/57,72-3,218-22,227-35,258-61,275-8,284-5,301,304-6,389,589,624,628-9,639,645.*

⁸⁰ *DBFP/1/XXIV/156-60,174-7,191,231; FO 371/11223 memorandum by Bateman d.2 Mar.1926.*

⁸¹ *DBFP/1/XXIV/384-5,389-91,401; DBFP/1/XVIII/244-5.*

⁸² *FO 371/9669 memorandum by Nicolson d.9 Apr.1924.*

⁸³ *DBFP/1/XVIII/237-8,273; DBFP/1/XXIV/231,390.*

⁸⁴ *Cmd.1814 pp.29-39; DBFP/1/XVIII/325-6.*

or by placing that territory under a completely autonomous regime ... that the port of Dedeagatch can be constructed, controlled and developed in accordance with the economic interests of Bulgaria'.⁸⁵ When the main commission discussed the report in the afternoon what Curzon termed 'a merry encounter' took place between Venizelos and Stamboliiski 'who belaboured each other with good natured fury to the great delight of the committee'.⁸⁶ In the end, Curzon spoke firmly to the Bulgarian premier - as he reported to London: 'at bottom we all know his petition for Dedeagatch as an economic outlet is sham and will never materialize and that what he wants is a jumping off place for the recovery of Western Thrace'; and he told Stamboliiski that he should be grateful that the powers were ready to accord Bulgaria the effective economic outlet she craved and that article 48 of the treaty of Neuilly in no way justified the claim for the constitution of western Thrace as an autonomous zone.⁸⁷

Nevertheless, Curzon continued to try 'to fix up something better for Bulgaria', in order to meet Stamboliiski's objections and 'to absolve the Allied Governments from the reproach of having evaded the promise given by them' in 1919.⁸⁸ Informal talks continued between the delegations during which the Bulgarians argued that Dedeagatch was in fact unsuitable as a port, that the site they wanted was some six kilometres to the west, and that the administration of the port should be placed entirely in Bulgarian hands and the railway between the port and Bulgaria be under international control.⁸⁹ Venizelos made what concessions he could to meet these new demands, both to test the sincerity of the Bulgarians and to try and remove a cause of friction, but the indications from Sofia were that Stamboliiski himself would not accept any new scheme, believing that the longer the question remained unsettled, the greater was Bulgaria's chance of securing an autonomous regime for western

⁸⁵ *Cmd.1814* pp.63-4,79-80; *DBFP/1/XVIII/331*.

⁸⁶ *DBFP/1/XVIII/331*; *Cmd.1814* pp.62-76.

⁸⁷ *DBFP/1/XVIII/331-2*.

⁸⁸ FO 371/8557 min. by Curzon d.5 Jan.1923; *DBFP/1/XVIII/497*.

⁸⁹ *DBFP/1/XVIII/497-8*; *Cmd.1814* p.457; FO 371/11223 memorandum by Bateman d.2 Mar.1926.

Thrace.⁹⁰ The sub-commission convened on 28 January to make a formal offer to the Bulgarians of a ninety-nine year lease at the site of their choice for a port under their administration (but Greek sovereignty) with all possible international guarantees for freedom of transit. This offer, together with another made by Venizelos for trade facilities at Salonica (which he considered the natural economic outlet for western Bulgaria) identical to those accorded to Yugoslavia, the Bulgarians rejected.⁹¹ This confirmed Curzon in his view that Sofia was actuated by 'political and territorial ambitions' in this question, and that, having made these offers, the powers had fulfilled their obligations and could return to the terms of the 1920 Thracian treaty which would be ratified with the treaty of Lausanne.⁹²

The powers having washed their hands of the matter, the question of the outlet was now a purely Greco-Bulgarian one: for the guarantees embodied in the 1920 treaty to become operative a convention would have to be signed, but the Bulgarians were not at all inclined to do this.⁹³ In 1924 the Greeks made a further effort to settle the question through the mediation of one De la Barra, a South American official of the international tribunal at The Hague, who had played a part earlier in the year in mediating between France and Great Britain over the Ruhr and who in May visited the Balkans in his capacity as president of the Greco-Bulgarian arbitral tribunal

⁹⁰ *DBFP/1/XVIII/498; DBFP/1/XXIV/459-60; FO 371/11223 memorandum by Bateman d.2 Mar.1926.*

⁹¹ *Cmd.1814 pp.457-64.*

⁹² *DBFP/1/XVIII/498-9.* In the interval between the first and second phases of the Lausanne conference, Venizelos continued to work to reach a settlement. He proposed, *via* the Yugoslav minister at Sofia, Rakic, an exchange of territory whereby Greece would give Bulgaria a strip along the western bank of the Maritza river, including Dedeagatch, in return for a strip equal in area from that part of western Thrace left to Bulgaria in the treaty of Neuilly. This scheme was first mooted in February and was under discussion for some months; but it came to nothing as Stamboliiski would not consider ceding any Bulgarian territory, and in any case it was a purely personal suggestion by Venizelos which might well have been rejected by the Greek assembly (FO 371/8557 Erskine to FO no.44 d.16 Feb.1923 and mins., no.49 d.26 Feb.1923, min. by Nicolson d.20 Mar.1923, min. by Lampson d.4 Apr.1923, min. by Tyrrell d.4 Apr.1923, Stancioff to Lampson no.384 d.7 Apr.1923; *DBFP/1/XXIV/682-4*). The Bulgarians then made several attempts, both before and after the Tsankoff *coup*, to have the issue put on the agenda at the second session of the conference, but ultimately they were no more successful than before (*DBFP/1/XXIV/582,682-4; FO 371/8557 min. by Curzon d.5 Apr.1923, min. by Adam d.12 Apr.1923, min. by Curzon d.13 Apr.1923, min. by Nicolson d.30 May 1923, Rumbold (Lausanne) to FO tel.187 d.12 Jun.1923, tel.210 d.19 Jun.1923*).

⁹³ *FO 371/11223 min. by Bateman d.11 Mar.1926.*

dealing with a variety of questions at issue between the two governments.⁹⁴ The Greek foreign minister, Roussos, gave De la Barra a memorandum containing a new offer for a free zone for the Bulgarians at either Salonica, Kavalla or Dedeagatch. Cheetham ascribed this new and 'remarkable' offer to Greece's feelings of isolation and weakness and the 'wish for support against Italian pressure which is the determining influence in Greek foreign policy'.⁹⁵ Whatever the motive, Greece's overtures were not well received in Sofia. Kalfoff claimed that the offer was less favourable than those made at Lausanne and that for fear of a nationalist backlash his government could not publicly renounce its designs on Thrace.⁹⁶ The Greek proposal was officially rejected on 6 June, and Erskine was unable to elicit from Kalfoff 'an indication of the minimum which would satisfy the Bulgarian government'.⁹⁷ In the Foreign Office, Nicolson commented that, as in 1923, the Bulgarians had 'once again placed themselves completely in the wrong'.⁹⁸

There were no new developments in this question over the next few years, except for a further Greek offer in 1926 for a free zone in Salonica, which was again rejected.⁹⁹ The transparency of the arguments used by Sofia in rejecting the various proposals made to them since 1922 was such as to remove any doubts that the Bulgarians were playing a waiting game, hoping to turn any future trouble in the region to their advantage and in the meantime refusing to renounce their claims.¹⁰⁰ It was even arguable whether their demands for an outlet made economic sense: with the Straits opened after 1923 Varna and Bourgas on the Black Sea coast were ample to handle Bulgaria's trade and the opening of an Aegean outlet would only diminish their prosperity.¹⁰¹

⁹⁴ *DBFP/1/XXVI/238-9,586-7.*

⁹⁵ FO 371/9669 Cheetham to FO no.372 d.31 May 1924.

⁹⁶ FO 371/9669 Erskine to FO no.107 d.3 Jun.1924.

⁹⁷ *DBFP/1/XXVI/239.*

⁹⁸ FO 371/9669 min. by Nicolson d.17 Jun.1924.

⁹⁹ FO 371/11223 Cheetham to FO no.85 d.24 Feb.1926, min. by Bateman d.11 Mar.1926, min. by Drummond d.27 May 1926.

¹⁰⁰ FO 371/11223 memorandum by Bateman d.2 Mar.1926.

¹⁰¹ FO 371/9669 Erskine to FO no.25 d.2 Feb.1924; FO 371/11223 Erskine to Bateman p.1. d.29 Apr.1926.

The Bulgarians' motives in sticking to a revisionist policy were not hard to appreciate: Nicolson wrote in 1924 that this policy was the 'one which I should certainly adopt myself if I were a Bulgarian'.¹⁰² Nevertheless, it proved fairly fruitless in the 1920s: apart from a lessening of the reparations burden the treaty of Neuilly was maintained and enforced virtually in its entirety.¹⁰³ This was at least in part due to the tactics the Bulgarians were driven to adopt. Outright, sullen revisionism was clearly not feasible given their weakness and isolation, and dutiful compliance was not a viable option given, for example, the enduring power of the Macedonian organisations. Consequently the Bulgarians had to adopt a middle course - maintaining publicly that they were loyally executing the terms of the treaty whilst in fact refusing to abandon their claims or privately conniving against the peace settlement. This strategy in turn forced them into some manifestly false positions - as in the case of the Aegean outlet - which were hardly calculated to win the confidence of the powers (who were prejudiced against them anyway) and which neither concealed their real intentions nor won them any benefits. The same was true regarding IMRO, where the proximity of the *comitadjis*' aim of preventing the quiet integration of Yugoslav Macedonia into Yugoslavia to traditional Bulgarian state aspirations cast doubt on the Bulgarians' protestations that they were willing but unable to control the bands. The tergiversation of the Bulgarians on this issue sullied their image in the west and made the powers less inclined to accord Sofia the benefit of the doubt when (admittedly ingenious) requests came for revision of the military restrictions of Neuilly to meet the communist threat. Given the unpopularity of the Bulgarians with the powers it was questionable whether they could have succeeded in revision in any circumstances; as it was, the particular strategy they employed only increased the irritation and suspicion with which they were viewed and only hindered their policy even more.

¹⁰² FO 371/9659 min. by Nicolson d.5 Mar.1924.

¹⁰³ For the reparations question, see Orde, *Reconstruction*, pp.288-9. This issue and also Bulgaria's attempts to evade the disarmament clauses of the treaty of Neuilly are covered in *DBFP/1/XXII,XXIV,XXVI,XXVII*.

Chapter Ten

Greece, Bulgaria and their Minorities

1923 - 1926

The greatest cause of friction between Greece and Bulgaria in the early and mid-1920s was the question of minorities, specifically the status and treatment of the ethnic Greek minority in Bulgaria and of the Slav minority in Greece claimed by Sofia as Bulgarian. This question was connected with the *comitadji* question, with the issue of the Aegean outlet and, indeed, with Bulgarian revisionism as a whole, but in the interests of clarity it would be well to consider it separately. The history of this issue and the conflicts it caused is instructive, both as a further example of the problematic nature of relations between victorious and vanquished powers in the Balkans and as an illustration of the intractability of minority questions in a region where ethnic groups were hopelessly intermingled. Moreover, the attitudes and policies of the powers, and especially Great Britain, towards these conflicts are pertinent, considering that at the Paris peace conference the powers attempted for the first time to establish a systematic regime for the protection of minority rights in eastern and central Europe.

Even before the peace conference convened, the Allies had realised that some sort of provision would have to be made for the protection of minority rights. Given the racial jumble in eastern Europe the successor states were bound to contain large numbers of ethnic minorities and, apart from the moral responsibility of the Allies who were to sanction the creation of these states, it was clearly also in the Allies' own interests to reduce the likelihood of combustible inter-racial conflicts that could threaten the peace.¹ Thus the powers devised minority treaties which were foisted upon the successor states - and other states where it was deemed necessary - in an

¹ Temperley (ed.), *Peace Conference V* 112-21. There is a dearth of modern scholarly work on the origins and workings of the inter-war minorities treaties. The best general accounts are still C.A. Macartney, *National States and National Minorities* (London, Oxford University Press/Humphrey Milford, 1934), L.P. Mair, *The Protection of Minorities. The Working and Scope of the Minorities Treaties under the League of Nations* (London, Christophers, 1928) and P. de Azcárate, *The League of Nations and National Minorities. An Experiment* (Washington, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1945). There is also an extremely useful essay by A. Sharp, 'Britain and the Protection of Minorities at the Paris Peace Conference 1919', in A.C. Hepburn (ed.), *Minorities in History* (London, Edward Arnold, 1977), pp. 170-88. I have also drawn upon an unpublished paper given at a Leeds University research seminar on 18 November 1991 by C. Fink, entitled 'The Paris Peace Conference and Minority Rights'.

attempt to guarantee equal treatment and full civil and political rights for all nationals belonging to 'racial, religious or linguistic minorities', especially as regards education and religion. The first such treaty was that signed by Poland on 28 June 1919, which formed the model for later treaties signed by Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Rumania, Greece, Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary and Turkey.² The treaties were placed under the guarantee of the League of Nations, whose responsibility it therefore became to enforce them. However, the actual procedure adopted by the League fell far short of what the minorities desired. Although the minorities were allowed to petition the League about their grievances, the Council could only act if it was formally apprised of an infraction by a member government. As this rarely happened in practice, the system was in effect weighted heavily in favour of the new states and against the minorities.³

Although the powers were no doubt sincere in their attempts to provide protection for minorities, it could not be claimed that the system they established was very effective in eliminating this cause of international disputes.⁴ Indeed, the weaknesses of the system reflected and contributed to the flaws and inconsistencies of the whole Versailles settlement. For one thing, there was the basic problem of defining nationality, and a divergence between the Anglo-Saxon view of nationality as essentially state-based and the east European view based on cultural or racial unity.⁵ There were also contradictions inherent in any attempt to re-draw borders paying some regard to national self-determination: clearly, given the need to create viable

² For the evolution of the treaties, see Mair, *Protection of Minorities*, pp.37-59, Macartney, *National States*, pp.212-72 and Sharp, *Minorities in History*, pp.170-5. For the text of the Polish treaty, see Macartney, *National States*, pp.502-6.

³ For the involvement of the League with the treaties, see Mair, *Protection of Minorities*, pp.60-75, Macartney, *National States*, pp.295-423 and Azcárate, *League of Nations*, pp.92-136,161-209.

⁴ A.Cobban, *The Nation State and National Self-Determination* (London, Collins, 1969), p.89. Azcárate, a former director of the Minorities Section of the League, argues, with no little sophistry, that the League and treaties were not trying to end the oppression of minorities but rather simply to stop that oppression provoking international disputes (Azcárate, *League of Nations*, pp.15-6).

⁵ Macartney, *National States*, pp.30-91,280-4; Sharp, *Minorities in History*, p.178; Cobban, *Nation State*, pp.49-50,57-76,107-8. Generally speaking, while west Europeans looked for objective tests and proofs of nationality, east Europeans believed it to be much more a question of subjective, personal perception.

states, 'the disintegrating process of self-determination had to be stopped at some point or other', but this meant according the right of self-determination to some groups while denying it to others.⁶ A further problem was the attitude of the governments of the new states who bitterly resented the imposition of the minorities treaties as a violation of their newly won and jealously guarded sovereignty. They felt that they should have a wholly free hand in their internal affairs even if this meant 'before they have hardly leapt into the light of freedom, beginning to oppress other races than their own'.⁷

There was little doubt about the aims of the British policy-makers involved in framing the minorities treaties. They had no intention of creating states within states, providing autonomy for minority groups or endeavouring to secure privileged, as opposed to equal, treatment for them. Indeed, they actually took pains to prevent any excessive infringement of the sovereignty of the new states, for example by ensuring that the minorities could not appeal directly to the League: such an arrangement would in any case have created too many problems for the western powers who possessed extensive overseas colonies inhabited by 'minorities'. 'The underlying British assumption throughout was that the Versailles settlement represented a final and permanent solution to the problems of eastern Europe'. The British felt that to allow the minorities to retain their cultural identity would in fact facilitate their assimilation into the new states: in other words the system of protecting minorities was envisaged only as a temporary expedient on the road to integration. The new states, however, were weak and insecure, and feared that such a system would in fact perpetuate the existence of distinct, aloof and alienated groups whose allegiances were deeply suspect, and so they were reluctant to treat them generously. In some cases this suspicious attitude was indeed justified: many of the minorities were by no

⁶ Cobban, *Nation State*, pp.57-84; Macartney, *National States*, pp.272-80; Sharp, *Minorities in History*, pp.176-7.

⁷ Cobban, *Nation State*, pp.85-8; Macartney, *National States*, pp.284-94. Cobban quotes this despairing remark made by Lloyd George about the attitudes of the successor states to their minorities. Polish maltreatment of minorities in the early part of 1919 was a crucial factor in determining the powers to impose minority treaties at the peace conference (Fink, 'Paris Peace Conference').

means content to accept the new frontiers as final or to allow themselves to be assimilated. They endeavoured to use the treaties to keep alive their grievances, and many allowed themselves to be exploited by neighbouring kin states for their own ends.⁸

It is difficult to speak with certainty about the exact size of the minority populations of Greece and Bulgaria, for Balkan population statistics of the time are notoriously unreliable, representing as they did tools in the propaganda wars between the various states.⁹ Moreover, from the Balkan wars up to the 1920s the picture was further complicated by the many migrations of populations fleeing either warfare or persecution.¹⁰ However, in 1919 there were roughly 30,000 ethnic Greeks resident in Bulgaria, mainly concentrated on the Black Sea coast around Bourgas and Varna.¹¹ In Greece, the largest ethnic minority in 1919-20 was Turkish, but the next largest was Slavic, inhabiting western Thrace and Macedonia and estimated in 1920 as numbering 139,000.¹² This minority was claimed by Sofia as Bulgarian, but its identity was perhaps the most hotly disputed of any European minority and represented a political problem that was at the heart of the continuing Macedonian question.¹³

The Yugoslavs had their own substantial Macedo-Slav population and heatedly denied that it constituted a Bulgarian minority or, indeed, a distinct ethnic group of any kind. Rather they claimed that 'there is no distinction between the Macedonian and the Serb', and that the Macedo-Slavs whom they were desperately and brutally trying to integrate into Yugoslavia were not a racial, religious or linguistic minority

⁸ Sharp, *Minorities in History*, pp.179-84.

⁹ This problem once 'led a Commission of Inquiry of the Carnegie Foundation to remark cynically with respect to a Yugoslav demographer that "the ethnographic notions of Mr. Cvijic vary ... with the development of ... Serbian political aspirations"' (Pentzopoulos, *Balkan Exchange*, p.133). See also Pentzopoulos, *Balkan Exchange*, pp.128-9 and Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic*, pp.227-8.

¹⁰ Ladas, *Exchange*, pp.10-23,121-2; Macartney, *National States*, pp.430-5.

¹¹ Ladas, *Exchange*, p.122.

¹² Pentzopoulos, *Balkan Exchange*, p.128. This figure includes those Bulgarians resident in eastern Thrace.

¹³ Azcárate, writing from personal experience, points to the wider political context of this identity problem: the bitter dispute between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia as to the nature of the Macedonian dialect was 'relegated to the peaceful sphere of philological investigation' when relations between them were going through a cordial phase (Azcárate, *League of Nations*, pp.4-5,48-51).

falling within the purview of the minorities treaties.¹⁴ The Greeks, conversely, stubbornly refused to admit that their Slavs were either Serbian or Bulgarian, but usually claimed that they were slavophone Greeks whose Slavic language did not preclude them from possessing Greek national consciousness.¹⁵ The British view was more detached and can be taken to represent the consensus of educated western opinion: *viz.*, that these people were 'a section of the South Slav race intermediate between the Bulgarians and the Serbs' and that there was little more difference between 'the Slav of Macedonia and the Slav of Serbia than between an inhabitant of Yorkshire and an inhabitant of Devon'.¹⁶ They spoke 'a dialect understood by both Serbs and Bulgars, but slightly more akin to the Bulgarian tongue than to the Serbian', and it was 'incorrect to refer to them as other than Macedo-Slavs'.¹⁷ Nevertheless, all three Balkan states constructed their arguments about the identity of this minority in order to buttress their own position in Macedonia (and in Bulgaria's case to keep alive expansionist goals), and precisely because the issue so clearly related to that of territorial integrity, all three states were extremely sensitive over it.

The Bulgarians were bound by articles 49 - 57 of the treaty of Neuilly to protect the rights of their minorities.¹⁸ The Greeks, however, did not sign a minorities treaty until the time of the Sèvres settlement, and this treaty remained inoperative until the treaty of Lausanne came into force in August 1924.¹⁹ There was, however, another

¹⁴ FO 371/9659 min. by [? Baillie] d.18 Feb.1924 [quoted], min. by Nicolson d.5 Mar.1924.

¹⁵ Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic*, pp.228,246-9.

¹⁶ FO 371/9659 mins. by Nicolson d.19 Feb.1924, 5 Mar.1924.

¹⁷ FO 371/10667 'The Macedonian Question and Komitaji Activity', memorandum by the Central Department, d.26 Nov.1925. The British view was thus that the Macedo-Slavs constituted a distinct ethnic group. It is difficult, however, to see how those who had a Bulgarian national consciousness can be distinguished from Bulgarians - to see, for example, what difference there was in practice between the Macedo-Slavs of Greek Macedonia who opted to emigrate to Bulgaria and the Slavic, 'Bulgarian' population of western Thrace (although this is not to say that all Macedonians were Bulgarian). Macartney refers to the Macedo-Slavs as 'Bulgaro-Macedonians', 'an intermediate race, akin in some respects to the Serbs, in many more respects to the Bulgars, and with many peculiarities entirely their own' (Macartney, *National States*, pp.528,530). Mavrogordatos argues that for the Macedo-Slavs 'identification with Bulgaria, although prevalent, competed with separate national identity and aspired statehood' (Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic*, p.228).

¹⁸ BFSP/112/794-6.

¹⁹ For the text of this treaty, see BFSP/113/471-9. Yugoslavia also signed a minorities treaty, on 10 September 1919. For the text, see BFSP/112/514-23.

instrument dealing with Greek and Bulgarian minorities. On 27 November 1919, simultaneously with the signature of the treaty of Neuilly, the Greeks and Bulgarians had signed an agreement allowing for a reciprocal and voluntary exchange of their minority populations. This exchange convention had been suggested by Venizelos, who saw that it was in Greece's interest to Hellenize her northern territories, especially as a substantial minority of the Slavic population of Macedonia and western Thrace, regardless of Greek propaganda, clearly possessed Bulgarian national consciousness and would only be a source of friction with Bulgaria if left *in situ*. The Bulgarians had little choice but to accept the scheme which the powers seized on with alacrity as likely 'to help a permanent settlement of the troubles which have so long affected the Balkans'.²⁰ The exchange was to be supervised by a mixed commission comprised of a Greek, a Bulgarian and two neutral delegates appointed by the League (eventually a New Zealander, Colonel Corfe, and a Belgian, Commandant de Roover, were selected).²¹ This commission had two main functions; firstly, to facilitate the exchange of populations and the liquidation of property left behind, and, secondly, to prevent the exercise of pressure to emigrate on either minority, which would have detracted from the voluntary nature of the exchange.²²

The exchange convention was hardly an unalloyed triumph. In the first place, the fundamental principle behind it was at odds with that of the minorities treaties, since it was designed to coax the minorities into emigrating, while the minorities treaties were intended to protect their rights *in situ*. This was reflected in the detailed terms of the two instruments. The convention provided that those emigrating, whilst being allowed to take their movable property with them, had to abandon their immovable property which the mixed commission would then liquidate, the idea being that all links with the old country would be cut. However, the Greek minorities treaty of

²⁰ Minutes of the thirty-eighth meeting of the New States committee, 25 July 1919, quoted in Ladas, *Exchange*, pp.29-30. For the origins of the convention, see Ladas, *Exchange*, pp.27-48 and Macartney, *National States*, pp.435-9. For the text, see *BFSP*/112/997-1000.

²¹ For the composition, duties and workings of the mixed commission, see Ladas, *Exchange*, pp.49-74.

²² Azcárate, *League of Nations*, p.19.

August 1920, in common with all the minorities treaties, contained a clause allowing members of the Slavic minority in territories to be transferred to Greece to opt for Bulgarian nationality whilst retaining their immovable property in Greece. Although such people had to move to Bulgaria within a year, the inconsistency was a clear encouragement to them to refuse to take advantage of the convention and to retain their property in Greece in the hope that the territory in question might one day revert to Bulgaria. At the same time, those Slavs habitually resident in western Thrace were equally free under the minority treaty to opt for Greek nationality and to remain living there, even if in fact they were strongly pro-Bulgarian in sympathy. Such a provision was, of course, indispensable if the rights of minorities in transferred territories were to be protected and if the exchange was to remain voluntary, but it was hardly conducive to 'clearing up the inextricable intermingling of the two racial elements in these territories and establishing a racial homogeneity therein'.²³ The Bulgarians, who were in any case eager for economic reasons to be rid of those refugees from Macedonia and western Thrace who had by 1919 flooded over the border, seized on and exploited the contradiction between the aims of the exchange convention and the minority treaty to keep alive their revisionist claims on Greek territory.²⁴

The process of exchange was always very much influenced by the refugee situation in Greece. From late 1922, when the mixed commission first began to function, until June 1923, very few people of either minority showed much willingness to emigrate, although the Greeks in Bulgaria who were threatened by Stamboliiski's agrarian legislation were slightly more enthusiastic. The situation changed drastically, however, once the Greek refugees began to flood in from Asia Minor. These refugees were billeted on Bulgarian as well as Greek villages in Thrace and Macedonia and this pressure, together with a certain measure of Greek government harassment,

²³ Ladas, *Exchange*, pp.40-1; Macartney, *National States*, pp.436-9.

²⁴ Macartney, *National States*, pp.436-9. Macartney argues that 'the idea of persons choosing Greek nationality but remaining Bulgarian in sympathies does not seem to have occurred to the Committee [on New States] which was presumably misled by the Allies' propaganda into under-estimating the pro-Bulgarian feeling in Macedonia'.

compelled large numbers of Bulgarians to flee or emigrate across the border. These people in turn settled themselves on Greek villages in Bulgaria and forced their inhabitants to move to Greece. These pressures, together with that exerted by Sofia and IMRO on Bulgarians in Greece to stay put, meant that the exchange was voluntary in name only. The mixed commission functioned until 1932, but it was estimated that the vast majority of those who emigrated 'were in reality refugees who fled during the troubled period of 1923-4'.²⁵ In all, the mixed commission dealt with 154,691 persons, 101,800 of whom were Bulgarian and 52,891 of whom were Greek. Of these, however, 40,000 Bulgarians and over 20,000 Greeks had emigrated before the convention came into force, and several thousand more did not officially avail themselves of its provisions. In total roughly 55,000 Bulgarians and 30,000 Greeks were official emigrants under the terms of the convention. The net result of this was that Bulgaria was almost free of Greeks, but 82,000 Slavs, of uncertain sympathies, remained in Greece (in 1928), mostly in western Macedonia.²⁶

Considering that the exchange convention was really designed to shift the Slavic population out of Greece, this outcome could be seen as a failure, certainly from the Greek point of view. However, Macedonia was in these years more or less Hellenized, and the Slavic population in the western region was separated from Bulgaria by a compact mass of Greeks. Moreover, western Thrace, where Bulgarian irredentist ambitions were chiefly focused, was entirely cleared of its Bulgarian population.²⁷ The mixed commission itself bore the brunt of much criticism for the problems that arose in the implementation of the exchange. Certainly, sloth was one of its chief characteristics: it took two years to even begin functioning and was very tardy in liquidating the property of the emigrants.²⁸ The neutral members of the

²⁵ Macartney, *National States*, pp.439-41; Ladas, *Exchange*, pp.101-21.

²⁶ Macartney, *National States*, pp.440-1; Ladas, *Exchange*, pp.122-3. Accurate figures are again difficult to ascertain; those quoted are from Macartney, those of Ladas differ slightly.

²⁷ Macartney, *National States*, pp.441,530; Pentzopoulos, *Balkan Exchange*, pp.129-30.

²⁸ Macartney, *National States*, p.441. The work of the mixed commission was in three phases: a preparatory period lasting until December 1922; the period spent supervising the emigration which lasted until 1925; and the time spent liquidating immovable property until 1932 (Ladas, *Exchange*, pp.62-4). For the drawn out process of liquidation, see Ladas, *Exchange*, pp.124-331.

commission were particularly criticised: both Corfe and De Roover were military men with little experience of legal or economic matters. Corfe was accused of prejudice against the Greeks, and when De Roover resigned in 1926, the Foreign Office noted that he 'had shown neither energy nor conscientiousness ... , and so indirectly brought much undeserved discredit on the League'.²⁹ On the other hand, the legal, financial and technical problems involved in the exchange were immense, and the neutral members received little assistance from the Greek or Bulgarian representatives.³⁰ Indeed, both governments continued to obstruct the work of the commission. For example, during 1926 they both hampered the work of liquidation: the Greeks because having 'got rid of the Bulgarophones ... they do not intend to pay up',³¹ and the Bulgarians because 'so long as the Macedonian emigrants in Bulgaria hold claims still unsettled the Macedonian question will remain open'.³²

In the long run, the exchange of populations, however imperfect, probably improved Greco-Bulgarian relations by diminishing one cause of friction between them.³³ In the short term, however, the actual mechanics of the exchange, the process of the transfer of populations and associated problems, were a massive irritant. Equally, whereas in the long term the exchange did help to prevent the recurrence of the age-old Macedonian problem by intensifying the Hellenic character of Greek Macedonia, in the short term the future of Macedonia and the territorial arrangements there continued to be uncertain.³⁴ For example, the Foreign Office certainly believed it possible in the mid-1920s that if Greece plunged further into chaos the Yugoslavs

²⁹ Ladas, *Exchange*, pp.52-3; FO 371/11223 'Memorandum on Graeco-Bulgarian Minorities in Macedonia' by Harvey d.25 May 1926.

³⁰ Macartney, *National States*, pp.441-3; Ladas, *Exchange*, pp.53-4; FO 371/8562 Bentinck to FO no. 536 d.6 Jul.1923.

³¹ FO 371/11223 'Memorandum on Graeco-Bulgarian Minorities in Macedonia' by Harvey d.25 May 1926.

³² FO 371/11223 Harvey to MacKillop p.l. d.26 Jul.1926 and file 2061 *passim*. Harvey concluded that the Greeks were on balance more obstructive than the Bulgarians.

³³ Ladas, *Exchange*, p.724.

³⁴ Pentzopoulos, *Balkan Exchange*, pp.129-30,136-40. During the Second World War the Bulgarians attempted to re-colonise Macedonia and Thrace, but were pushed back after the Axis defeat. In the Greek civil war, Pentzopoulos states, many slavophones aided the communists and after their defeat many emigrated to Yugoslavia or Bulgaria, reducing the Slav minority in Greece still further. He concludes, somewhat optimistically, that thus Greece's 'Northern provinces were removed from the arena of Balkan power politics'.

might seize Salonica, perhaps in alliance with the Bulgarians, and felt that the Hellenization of Greek Macedonia only increased the temptation for Belgrade to act before it was too late³⁵ - a view that was also echoed by some French observers.³⁶ In other words, these minority questions were of much more than academic concern to the states involved, and continuing political and territorial instability provides the context within which disputes over minorities took place. The friction between Greece and Bulgaria over the exchange was most intense between 1923 and 1925 when the larger part of the physical transfer of populations was taking place, and reached such a pitch in 1924 that the League of Nations had to intervene. During this period the whole system for the protection of minorities was a cause of great friction between Greece and Bulgaria, and appeared, paradoxically, almost as a threat to peace.

In the spring of 1923 Greek maltreatment of the Slav minority in western Thrace aroused severe protests from Sofia. Towards the end of March the Bulgarians complained to the powers that the Greeks were deporting large numbers of Macedo-Slavs to the Greek islands and Thessaly and were installing refugees from Asia Minor in their houses in 'a systematic policy of exterminating the Bulgarian elements' there. The Bulgarians argued that by this the Greeks had shown themselves unfit to rule western Thrace and urged the powers to take it from them and to establish a regime there 'that will enable the inhabitants to live in peace and prosperity'.³⁷ The initial British reaction to these complaints was dismissive: the accusations were 'probably immensely exaggerated' and 'mainly inspired by a desire to work up a case against Greece' in order to win the Bulgarians a sympathetic hearing over western Thrace at Lausanne.³⁸ Consequently, the British did not intervene in the question - except for tactfully drawing Greece's attention to the suffering being inflicted on some of the

³⁵ FO 371/9897 min. by Nicolson d.16 Dec.1924; FO 371/11337 'Memorandum on Serbian "Minorities" in Greek Macedonia' by Bateman d.3 Mar.1926; *DBFP*/1/XXVI/462-3.

³⁶ MAE *Bulgarie* 45 Marcilly to QO no.201 d.9 Sept.1924.

³⁷ *DBFP*/1/XXIV/563-4; FO 371/8564 Stancioff to Curzon no.346 d.3 Apr.1923.

³⁸ FO 371/8564 min. by Troutbeck d.6 Apr.1923, min. by Nicolson d.6 Apr.1923; *DBFP*/1/XXIV/563-4.

deportees who were short of food - and accepted the Greek argument that the deportations had been necessary because the Slavs had been colluding with *comitadjis* to disrupt Greek communications in the sensitive frontier zone at a time when tension with Turkey was acute.³⁹ Furthermore, the Greeks soon replied to the Bulgarian complaints with an assurance that the deportees would be allowed home once peace was concluded.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, the Bulgarians appealed to the League Council, which discussed the question on 19 and 21 April. The Bulgarians demanded that in the short term the deportees be allowed to return home and that an international inquiry be instituted, but they revealed their real intentions by urging that western Thrace should be placed under League mandate. The Greeks replied that the root cause of the problem in western Thrace was not Greek policy, but *comitadji* activity, over which the Bulgarians should have exercised some control.⁴¹ These were familiar arguments, but the British felt these counter-accusations 'were so unreliable that it was ... better to give them no encouragement'.⁴² Accordingly the Council took no drastic action, but adopted a resolution instructing Drummond to pass on all the relevant documentation to the Allies (still the legal sovereigns of western Thrace until the 1920 Thracian treaty was ratified) and to express the hope that the future status of western Thrace could be settled quickly.⁴³ The Bulgarians seized on this admission that western Thrace was not yet juridically Greek and renewed their pleas to the powers to protect the Slav minority there,⁴⁴ but again they were politely rebuffed. The British viewed

³⁹ *DBFP/1/XXIV/564,566-7.*

⁴⁰ *DBFP/1/XXIV/572.*

⁴¹ FO 371/8565 Drummond to Curzon p.l. d.26 Apr.1923 plus encls..

⁴² *DBFP/1/XXIV/589-91.* The French agreed with the British that intervention at Athens was undesirable (FO 371/8565 St.Aulaire to Curzon unno.l. d.11 Apr.1923). The Italians, though keener to act in response to Bulgaria's pleas, also seem to have taken no action (*DBFP/1/XXIV/572,590; DDI/7/1/480-1*).

⁴³ FO 371/8565 'Memorandum respecting the Deportation of Bulgarians from Western Thrace' by Troutbeck d.1 Jun.1923.

⁴⁴ FO 371/8565 Stancioff to Curzon no.518 d.27 Apr.1923.

the Council's decision as 'very sensible', and hoped that the eventual ratification of the Thracian treaty would put an end to agitation in the area.⁴⁵

Meanwhile, however, the situation had deteriorated. During April and May, large numbers of destitute refugees from western Thrace had arrived in Bulgaria, some after expulsion by the Greek authorities, others simply fleeing to avoid deportation or the pressure caused by the influx of refugees from Asia Minor. The Bulgarians protested vigorously at this new influx, claiming that they could not support more refugees, and peace in the region was clearly threatened: the refugees were venting their anger and hatred on the Greek villagers living in frontier regions in Bulgaria and the Sofia government threatened to expel these Greeks in order to settle the refugees on their properties.⁴⁶ The Bulgarians also renewed their propaganda offensive and having appealed to the League for an international commission of inquiry they asked the powers to support their request.⁴⁷ The French were quite sympathetic, and asked the British if they would support a *démarche* at Athens and an inquiry by the mixed emigration commission into the Bulgarian accusations.⁴⁸ London was unenthusiastic: the Bulgarians had 'a great weakness' for commissions of inquiry, and the institution of one in this instance would only serve to stir up the whole Thracian question.⁴⁹ In any case, news soon reached the Foreign Office that the dispute had been settled directly by the Greeks and Bulgarians as the former had declared that they would facilitate the return of the refugees to Thrace.⁵⁰ The Foreign Office was therefore reinforced in its belief that the powers should take no action pending the settlement of the Thracian question at Lausanne, whereupon the status of the minorities in Thrace

⁴⁵ FO 371/8565 min. by Nicolson d.3 May 1923, 'Memorandum respecting the Deportation of Bulgarians from Western Thrace' by the Foreign Office d.1 Jun.1923.

⁴⁶ *DBFP*/1/XXIV/635-6,659,665-6; FO 371/8565 Bentinck to FO no.377 d.12 May 1923.

⁴⁷ FO 371/8565 Petroff (Bulgarian chargé in London) to FO no.551 d.15 May 1923, St.Aulaire to Curzon p.l. d.14 May 1923, Drummond to FO no.11/28338/27553 d.15 May 1923.

⁴⁸ FO 371/8565 St.Aulaire to Curzon unno.l. d.14 May 1923, unno.l. d.24 May 1923.

⁴⁹ FO 371/8565 mins. by Nicolson d.17 and 24 May 1923.

⁵⁰ *DBFP*/1/XXIV/654,659.

would come under the auspices of the League by virtue of the Greek minorities treaty.⁵¹

For a time the Bulgarians persisted in their appeal to the League, which was due to consider the question on 29 June.⁵² In the meantime harrowing reports were coming out of Bulgaria about the vast numbers and pitiable condition of the refugees who continued to arrive there and, although these appeared to be exaggerated, the Foreign Office now admitted that 'prima facie there seems a pretty strong case against the Greeks'.⁵³ Although the earlier deportations had been justified on the grounds of military necessity, the Greeks had exceeded their legal rights in settling refugees in the houses of the deportees and this had in turn contributed to the flight of refugees to Bulgaria. Accordingly the British now decided not to oppose the idea of an inquiry by the League and to draw attention to the illegality of the refugee settlement methods being adopted by the Greeks.⁵⁴ The Bulgarians, however, in view of the Greek promise to allow the refugees to return to their homes, withdrew their appeal to the League on 9 June and so no inquiry was instituted.⁵⁵ With that decision the immediate political crisis caused by the minorities was resolved, although clearly a major problem remained. During the rest of the year the powers kept up constant though discreet pressure on the Greeks to ensure the eventual return of the deportees and their good treatment in the meantime,⁵⁶ and the mixed commission also took a close

⁵¹ *DBFP/1/XXIV/681-2*.

⁵² FO 371/8565 min. by Troutbeck d.6 Jun.1923.

⁵³ FO 371/8565 Erskine to FO no.119 d.21 May 1923, no.122 d.23 May 1923, min. by Lampson d.3 Jun.1923 [quoted], min. by Nicolson d.6 Jun.1923. There was also some pressure in Parliament for action to be taken over the plight of the Thracian minorities. See, for example, 163 *HC Deb.* 5s 1343-4, 2323-4.

⁵⁴ FO 371/8565 'Memorandum prepared for the British Representative on the Council of the League of Nations on the Question of Alleged Oppression of Bulgarians in Western Thrace by the Greek Authorities' by Troutbeck d.21 Jun.1923. The Foreign Office did not hold the Greeks directly responsible for the flight of refugees into Bulgaria. Nicolson argued that, a few exceptions apart, the Greeks wanted to prevent such a movement which would inevitably cause hardship to the Greek minority in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian government or IMRO, he went on somewhat obscurely, were more likely to be responsible (FO 371/8565 min. by Nicolson d.6 Jun.1923).

⁵⁵ FO 371/8565 Avenol to FO no.11/29053/27553 d.20 Jun.1923.

⁵⁶ *DBFP/1/XXIV/744,760,812,815-6*; FO 371/8565 Bentinck to FO no.454 d.4 Jun.1923 and mins., no.487 d.21 Jun.1923; FO 371/8566 Bentinck to FO no.532 d.4 Jul.1923, no.544 d.10 Jul.1923, min. by Rendel d.1 Aug.1923, Bentinck to FO no.649 d.20 Aug.1923, 'Report on the Work of the High Commission for Refugees' by Dr.F.Nansen d.4 Sept.1923 (A.30.1923 XII).

interest in these matters. At the end of the year, however, the situation was still far from satisfactory. Corfe reported that the Greeks did not extend to their minorities the rights accorded in the (as yet unratified) Greek minorities treaty, and that the Bulgarians consequently refused to give their minorities the protection theoretically afforded by the treaty of Neuilly. The treaties were thus routinely breached, and their non-application was, in Corfe's opinion, the cause of 'a very large part of the unrest in the Balkans today'.⁵⁷

During 1924 the situation deteriorated further. Both Greece and Bulgaria exerted pressure on their respective minorities to emigrate, with the complication that whereas Athens was willing to receive ethnic Greeks from Bulgaria, Sofia and IMRO wanted the Macedo-Slavs to stay put.⁵⁸ By the summer, the harassment of both minorities, accompanied by a virulent press war, had become so bad that the mixed commission was forced to suspend acceptance of declarations of intent to emigrate 'made in the time of excitement and fright' caused by the persecution.⁵⁹ It was in this troubled atmosphere, aggravated by an upsurge in *comitadji* activity in Macedonia,⁶⁰ that an incident occurred on 27 July at Talis, a slavophone community near the Bulgarian border in which a considerable number of Asia Minor refugees had been billeted. A large group of Macedo-Slav villagers had been arrested by the authorities there, suspected of collusion in terrorist activity in the region, and was being led away bound together with ropes and accompanied by an escort of Greek troops. According to the commander of these troops, this group was then attacked by *comitadjis*, and in the subsequent engagement several of the Slavs were killed by

⁵⁷ DBFP/1/XXIV/914-5; FO 371/8562 Barber (chargé in Sofia) to FO no.178 d.30 Aug.1923 and encls.

⁵⁸ FO 371/10771 Annual Report, Greece, 1924 pp.15-16; FO 371/9669 Erskine to FO no.126 d.2 Jul.1924, no.136 d.16 Jul.1924, Kaklamanos to FO no.2270 d.1 Aug.1924, Erskine to FO no.145 d.4 Aug.1924; MAE Bulgarie 44 Picot (minister in Sofia) to QO tels.37-8 d.5 Aug.1924, Marcilly to QO no.182 d.8 Aug.1924.

⁵⁹ Ladas, *Exchange*, p.110.

⁶⁰ DBFP/1/XXVI/289,292-4; FO 371/9661 Cheetham to FO no.402 d.14 Jun.1924, Kaklamanos to FO no.2204 d.26 Jul.1924, Bentinck to FO no.491 d.31 Jul.1924; FO 371/9669 Erskine to FO no.142 d.30 Jul.1924.

cross-fire. In fact, the Greek troops opened fire on their prisoners without any provocation, and shot just under twenty of them in cold blood.⁶¹

To the delight of the Bulgarians and the chagrin of the Greeks, the mixed emigration commission at once instituted an inquiry into this incident. The Greeks felt that the problem was a terrorist and not an emigration one, but nevertheless co-operated.⁶²

The inquiry was completed by 16 August and concluded that the action of the Greeks was 'inexcusable'.⁶³ De Roover told Erskine that there was no proof of *comitadji* activity in the area and that he was convinced that the incident leading to the original arrests 'was engineered by the Greek Military Authorities as a pretext for the brutal massacre which ensued' - the only bright spot being that despite the complicity of the local authorities it was evident that the Athens government 'were in no way implicated'.⁶⁴ Corfe, too, declared that the episode was a typical, if extreme, example of the sort of persecution habitually suffered by the Slav minority in northern Greece which could easily escalate into a full-scale Greco-Bulgarian conflict.⁶⁵

The Talis incident certainly did raise the tension between the two states who in the immediate aftermath embarked upon an acrimonious exchange of correspondence and cast around for support from other powers.⁶⁶ This continued after the publication of the mixed commission's report: on 22 August the Bulgarians addressed a very uncompromising note to the Greeks demanding exemplary punishment of the delinquents (something the Greeks had already promised) and adding that only if this were effected could Sofia accept the commission's exoneration of the Greek government. The Greeks thereupon - in a note which 'indicated very clearly that in the

⁶¹ *DBFP/1/XXVI/289,292-3*; FO 371/9661 Bentinck to FO no.491 d.31 Jul.1924, Erskine to FO no.155 d.19 Aug.1924, Bentinck to FO no.551 d.29 Aug.1924; Mair, *Protection of Minorities*, pp.177-9; Α.Τουντα-Φεργαδη, *Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικες Μειονοτητες, Πρωτοκολλο Πολιτη-Καλφωφ, 1924-1925* (Thessaloniki, Institute for Balkan Studies, 1986), pp.45-7. The Bulgarians claimed that nineteen Macedo-Slavs were killed, although the report of the mixed commission inquiry gave a figure of seventeen.

⁶² *DBFP/1/XXVI/289,292-4*.

⁶³ *DBFP/1/XXVI/310*.

⁶⁴ FO 371/9661 Erskine to FO no.155 d.19 Aug.1924.

⁶⁵ FO 371/9661 Bentinck to FO no.551 d.29 Aug.1924.

⁶⁶ Τουντα-Φεργαδη, *Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικες Μειονοτητες*, pp.47-51.

opinion of the Greek Government Bulgaria was a semi-civilised country' - formally repudiated the Bulgarians' right to interfere in a purely internal affair. Both states then dragged in other unconnected issues and accusations in a correspondence which was both a 'good illustration of the intensity of the suspicion and hostility which exists between the two countries'⁶⁷ and a 'childish exchange of fatuities'.⁶⁸ This hostility rendered stillborn a new mixed commission of Greek and Bulgarian officers which the two states had sought to establish to prevent similar incidents near the frontier; it also provoked the British to exert a calming influence at both capitals. The Bulgarians, who Howard Smith felt were 'as usual ... doing all they can to spoil a good case by infuriating the Greeks', were told to stop trying to make capital out of the affair, while the Greeks were warned that unless they adequately punished the officers responsible they would doubtless be brought before the League Council for contravening the 1920 minorities treaty which had been in force since 6 August.⁶⁹

The Talis incident and the subsequent recriminations demonstrated that the existence of the minorities treaties was not reducing friction between Greece and Bulgaria. On the contrary, either because of the inadequacies of the treaties or their non-application, the minorities concerned were suffering from a systematic infringement of their rights. These circumstances reinforced a current of thinking in League circles that action was necessary to strengthen the minority protection system and to ensure the effective execution of the minorities treaties.⁷⁰ A leading proponent of this view was Gilbert Murray, Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford University, a dedicated internationalist and a leading light of the League of Nations Union.⁷¹ Murray attended the League Assemblies of 1921 and 1922 as a South African delegate at the invitation

⁶⁷ DBFP/1/XXVI/322-6; FO 371/9661 Mischeff (minister in London) to FO unno.1. d.4 Sept.1924; Τουντα-Φεργαδη, Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικες Μειονοτητες, pp.51-2.

⁶⁸ FO 371/9661 min. by Howard Smith d.18 Sept.1924.

⁶⁹ DBFP/1/XXVI/292-3,322-3,326,330; FO 371/9661 min. by Howard Smith d.10 Sept.1924. The commander of the Greek troops received a fifteen year prison sentence in January 1925 (FO 286/916 Cheetham to FO no.23 d.16 Jan.1925).

⁷⁰ For this current of thinking about reform of the League protection system, see Macartney, *National States*, pp.356-69.

⁷¹ For Murray's involvement with the League and the LNU, see D.Wilson, *Gilbert Murray OM. 1866-1957* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1987), pp.244-56,283-310.

of Cecil, and proposed, at the former session, the creation of a permanent minorities commission to be in general control of the execution of the minorities treaties, and, at the latter, the appointment of resident agents of the League to monitor the observance of the treaties in 'some localities of mixed population'.⁷² Neither of these proposals was implemented, largely because of opposition from the states concerned, who looked askance at anything smacking of the 'establishment of a permanent organisation for the supervision of their internal government'.⁷³ This in turn reflected a general problem that dogged the whole history of the minorities treaties, namely that of reconciling effective international guarantees with the prevalent doctrine of the primacy of national sovereignty and the right of states to conduct their internal affairs as they pleased.⁷⁴

Murray certainly made his general proposals with an eye to the Balkans. According to Kaklamanos, he was a 'fanatical Bulgarophil',⁷⁵ and he wrote to his wife in 1921 from Geneva of his sympathy for a race which was 'suffering horrors from the Serbs in Macedonia'.⁷⁶ Similarly, he was much affected by the propaganda of advocates of Macedonian autonomy: 'their solution would have been the best, but it is now impossible. All we can do is to try to enforce the Minority Protection clauses. These, they say, are a dead letter'.⁷⁷ In 1923 his general ideas were revived by those tackling minority problems on the spot in the Balkans. After the difficulties caused by the deportations of Slavs in the spring, Corfe suggested in August that the mixed

⁷² Wilson, *Gilbert Murray*, pp.285-6, 291-2; F.West, *Gilbert Murray. A Life* (London, Croom Helm, 1984), pp.188-192; Mair, *Protection of Minorities*, pp.63-7; Macartney, *National States*, pp.358,366-7; Azcárate, *League of Nations*, pp.131-2, 188-90.

⁷³ Mair, *Protection of Minorities*, p.64.

⁷⁴ In his assessment of the protection system, Macartney wrote: 'so long as the majority nations which have assumed command of the different states persist in their theoretically absurd and unattainable endeavour to make of those states the exclusive instruments of their own national ideals and aspirations, so long will the minorities be placed in a position which no system of international protection can render tolerable' (Macartney, *National States*, p.421). See also the discussion of self-determination and sovereignty in Cobban, *Nation State*, pp.74-84, especially pp.81-2.

⁷⁵ Greek foreign ministry archives, Kaklamanos to Athens no.3225 d.15 Nov.1924, quoted in Τουρντ α-Φεργαδη, *Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικές Μειονότητες*, p.77.

⁷⁶ Murray papers, Gilbert Murray to Mary Murray p.l. d.12 Sept.1921, quoted in Wilson, *Gilbert Murray*, p.285.

⁷⁷ Murray papers, Gilbert Murray to Mary Murray p.l. d.9 Sept.1921, quoted in Wilson, *Gilbert Murray*, pp.285-6.

emigration commission should be given the additional function of supervising the application of the provisions protecting the rights of Greek and Bulgarian minorities so as to ensure that any emigration would be truly voluntary.⁷⁸ Although this proposal clearly owed much to that of Murray concerning resident agents, it was better received. The Greeks were more reluctant than the Bulgarians, it was true, but they were feeling their international isolation keenly (after the onset of the Corfu crisis) and did not feel confident enough to oppose such an apparently unobjectionable proposal.⁷⁹ However, although both governments accepted the idea in principle, the matter was shelved for the time being on the quite reasonable grounds that the Greek minorities treaty was unratified and therefore not in force.⁸⁰

The idea of a permanent commission to regulate problems between Greece and Bulgaria was again resurrected at the time of the De la Barra mission in June 1924. The Greek proposals put to Sofia *via* De la Barra contained a suggestion for a 'permanent commission to deal with any other differences between the two countries', the operation of which would, if possible, be extended to include Yugoslavia.⁸¹ Although this proposal came to nothing because of Bulgarian obstinacy over the Aegean outlet, it clearly made an impression on De la Barra. In mid-August he told the Quai d'Orsay that such a commission, which it was implied would encompass minorities questions, was the key to peace in the region, and asked whether France would take the initiative in suggesting such an accord to the Balkan governments concerned.⁸²

In early September the French minister in Sofia observed that the Bulgarians would probably welcome such an initiative: it was an article of faith for them to try and draw international organisations and foreign powers into their disputes with their

⁷⁸ FO 371/8562 Barber to FO no.178 d.30 Aug.1923 and encls.

⁷⁹ Τουντα-Φεργαδη, Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικές Μειονότητες, pp.55-67.

⁸⁰ Mair, *Protection of Minorities*, p.177.

⁸¹ DBFP/1/XXVI/239; MAE Bulgarie 44 QO to Marcilly no.172 d.9 May 1924, Picot to QO no.101 d.31 May 1924 and encls. For De la Barra, see above pp.265-6.

⁸² MAE Bulgarie 44 QO to Marcilly no.299 d.21 Aug.1924.

neighbours, whom they feared to face alone.⁸³ Marcilly was less enthusiastic: although the Greeks would be well advised to accept some international safeguard against the claims of their northern neighbours, the work of a permanent commission would throw an unwelcome light on the brutal Hellenization of Macedonia and Thrace, much of which was carried on by local military authorities who would brook no interference. In any case, he doubted the wisdom of France's proposing such a commission, since the burden of enforcing its decisions would fall upon her, and involve her in making invidious choices between the rival claims of Greece and Yugoslavia.⁸⁴ The French minister in Belgrade shared this caution. Yugoslavia, he warned, was unlikely to accept anything smacking of a restriction on her sovereignty, and was certain to refuse a minority protection regime which would hinder the Serbianisation of Yugoslav Macedonia.⁸⁵ The probable opposition of Yugoslavia proved the decisive factor in Paris: on 26 September the Quai d'Orsay told Marcilly that there was no sense in France's proposing a scheme that was doomed to fail.⁸⁶

In the meantime, however, a scheme very similar to De la Barra's had been evolved at Geneva where, during September, the fifth Assembly of the League was in session. This scheme was the culmination of all the previous attempts to reform the minority protection regime, and had been given its final impetus by the lamentable effect of the Talis incident on Greco-Bulgarian relations and the coming into force of the Greek minorities treaty on 6 August. In this atmosphere the Greeks were forced to accept the utility of some arrangement along the lines of that proposed by Corfe and de Roover in 1923 to ensure the application of the minorities treaties.⁸⁷ Consequently, during September, negotiations took place to this end between the Greek delegate to the League, Politis, the Bulgarian foreign minister and delegate, Kalfoff, the head of the League Minorities Section, Erik Colban, and Gilbert Murray, attending at Geneva as

⁸³ MAE Bulgarie 45 Picot to QO no.155 d.8 Sept.1924.

⁸⁴ MAE Bulgarie 45 Marcilly to QO no.201 d.9 Sept.1924, no.242 d.15 Nov.1924.

⁸⁵ MAE Bulgarie 45 De Billy to QO no.310 d.9 Sept.1924.

⁸⁶ MAE Bulgarie 45 QO to Marcilly no.331 d.26 Sept.1924.

⁸⁷ The Greeks were also induced to co-operate in this scheme because negotiations for the refugee loan were still at a very delicate stage (*Times*, 12 Mar.1925).

a substitute British delegate. The main point at issue in these discussions was whether it should be the whole mixed commission or simply its neutral members who would be given the supervisory task. Eventually the Greeks were successful in their attempts to ensure that the Bulgarian commissioner would have no say in their internal affairs, and the second alternative was adopted.⁸⁸

On the morning of 29 September, in the League Council, Politis and Kalfoff made identical proposals inviting the neutral members of the mixed commission to assist their governments in the application of the minorities treaties on behalf of the League of Nations. Corfe and de Roover were to advise each government on the execution of the provisions of the treaties, and were to be entitled to receive petitions from the minorities and to suggest remedies for the grievances in question to the government concerned. They were also to be allowed to undertake investigations into the condition of the minorities and were to submit reports to the secretary general of the League every six months. These proposals were welcomed by the Council and were put into the form of two distinct protocols, signed by the representative of the government concerned, the president of the Council and the secretary general (that is to say, there was no agreement between Greece and Bulgaria; both states undertook an identical obligation *vis à vis* the League).⁸⁹ The final clause of each protocol provided that it was to come into force as soon as it was approved by the Council. Gilbert Murray, *rapporteur* to the Council on this question, hailed the protocols as a distinct advance, modelled on his own earlier proposals for resident agents and a permanent commission, which he was sure would help to resolve a problem that was 'one of the bitterest in Europe'.⁹⁰

The Bulgarians regarded the signature of the Politis-Kalfoff protocol as a victory for their diplomacy which, their propaganda made clear, would be used to consolidate

⁸⁸ Τουντα-Φεργαδη, *Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικές Μειονότητες*, pp.67-76.

⁸⁹ Henceforth, these two documents were known as the Politis-Kalfoff protocol or simply (and confusingly) as the Geneva protocol.

⁹⁰ *DBFP/1/XXVI/349-50*; Τουντα-Φεργαδη, *Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικές Μειονότητες*, pp.76-83; Ladas, *Exchange*, pp.110-2; Mair, *Protection of Minorities*, pp.179-80.

their claims in Greek Macedonia and western Thrace.⁹¹ On 18 October Kalfoff thanked Erskine warmly for the support of the British delegation in Geneva, and particularly Murray who had 'contributed greatly' to the minorities settlement.⁹² The Bulgarians regarded the settlement as 'an important step in advance',⁹³ and they were eager for the neutral commissioners to begin their new tasks.⁹⁴ Their objectives became clearer during the meetings of the mixed commission in October, when their representative Robeff, argued that those slavophones who had already opted for emigration should be given a chance to change their minds since, after the signature of the protocols, many 'regretted their declarations of emigration, expecting a new era for the minorities'.⁹⁵ Whatever the justice in this contention, the Bulgarian attitude showed the Greeks, who had hitherto evinced little interest in the protocol, that it might yet be the cause of much trouble.⁹⁶

Greek apprehensions were well founded, although Belgrade was to be an even greater source of trouble than Sofia. Relations between Greece and Yugoslavia had been poor for some time, the chief Yugoslav grievance being an economic one - namely, the maladministration of the railway line running between Salonica and the Yugoslav frontier and Greek obstructiveness over the Yugoslav free zone at that port. The tardiness of the Greeks in giving satisfaction over these points had sharpened Yugoslav dissatisfaction with the alliance of 1913, which seemed in any case to have been rendered undesirable and obsolete by the subsequent aggrandisement of Serbia and the past unreliability and present impotence of the Greeks.⁹⁷ The signature of the Politis-Kalfoff protocol gave the Yugoslavs another grievance: in October they complained to the Greeks that it had been negotiated without their knowledge and

⁹¹ Τουντα-Φεργαδη, *Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικές Μειονότητες*, pp.87-90,165; FO 371/10663 memorandum by Melas (Greek chargé in London) d.4 Mar.1925; *Times*, 12 Mar.1925.

⁹² *DBFP/1/XXVI/376*.

⁹³ FO 371/9669 Erskine to FO no.184 d.23 Oct.1924.

⁹⁴ FO 371/9669 Barber to FO no.206 d.22 Nov.1924.

⁹⁵ Ladas, *Exchange*, pp..114-5; Τουντα-Φεργαδη, *Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικές Μειονότητες*, pp.88-9.

⁹⁶ Τουντα-Φεργαδη, *Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικές Μειονότητες*, pp.84-6,90,107-8.

⁹⁷ MAE Yougoslavie 51 Marcilly to QO no.245 d.21 Nov.1924; Τουντα-Φεργαδη, *Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικές Μειονότητες*, pp.90-6. Greco-Yugoslav relations are discussed in more detail in chapters 11 and 12 below.

that, by referring to a 'Bulgarian minority' in Greece, it would encourage Macedo-Slavs to declare themselves Bulgarian rather than Serbian in the hope of profiting from its protection.⁹⁸ These warning shots were soon transformed into something more concrete: on 14 November the Yugoslavs formally denounced the alliance with Greece, giving as their chief reasons the troubles over Salonica and the Greek recognition of the Macedo-Slavs as Bulgarian in the protocol. The Yugoslavs claimed that it was impossible to 'reconcile the attitude adopted by the Greek Government in these matters with the obligations inherent in their capacity as allies of the Serbs'.⁹⁹

The root cause of the rupture between Yugoslavia and Greece was much debated.¹⁰⁰ At one time the Yugoslavs stressed the minorities problem and at another the Salonica railway question but their real aim was hard to discern. The Foreign Office believed that the economic grievance was at the heart of Yugoslavia's action, but also recognised that Belgrade found the Politis-Kalfoff protocol objectionable. After all, by recognising the Macedo-Slavs in Greece as Bulgarian, the Greeks were both fuelling Bulgaria's irredentist aspirations in Yugoslav Macedonia and simultaneously destroying the basis of Yugoslav claims to Greek Macedonia.¹⁰¹ It was also possible that the Yugoslavs were actuated by internal political considerations, simple pique at the sight of a Greco-Bulgarian *rapprochement* or a desire to end years of Greek vacillation and force a re-negotiation of the Greco-Yugoslav alliance by bringing matters to a head.¹⁰² More ominously, the Foreign Office feared that the denunciation of the alliance might possibly be a portent of some far-reaching Italo-Yugoslav

⁹⁸ MAE Bulgarie 45 Marcilly to QO no.231 d.23 Oct.1924.

⁹⁹ *DBFP/1/XXVI/398-401*; Τουντα Φεργαδη, *Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικές Μετανοότητες*, pp.96-101.

¹⁰⁰ Τουντα Φεργαδη, *Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικές Μετανοότητες*, pp.101-4.

¹⁰¹ *DBFP/1/XXVI/398-401*, 409-14, 425-6, 433-6; FO 371/9669 min. by Nicolson d.3 Dec.1924; FO 371/9897 min. by Howard Smith d.26 Nov.1924, min. by Nicolson d.9 Dec.1924, min by Howard Smith d.16 Dec.1924, min. by Nicolson d.16 Dec.1924; FO 371/9670 Cadogan to Nicolson unno.1 d.29 Dec.1924 and encls.; FO 800/257 memorandum by Nicolson d.6 Jan.1925.

¹⁰² *DBFP/1/XXVI/399,401*; MAE Yougoslavie 51 Marcilly to QO no.245 d.21 Nov.1924.

agreement whereby 'Serbia, in return for being allowed to annex Salonika, would let Italy swallow Albania - a very Bismarckian plan'.¹⁰³

Whatever the root cause of Yugoslavia's action, to the already isolated Greeks the loss of their main ally was a severe blow,¹⁰⁴ and for the next twenty months Greek diplomacy was focused on trying to come to terms with Belgrade. In the short term, the Greeks determined to abrogate the Politis-Kaloff protocol, an instrument with which they had already begun to grow unhappy and which they now claimed to be the main reason for the rupture. Early in December, Cheetham reported that the Greeks would try and wriggle out of the protocol, and that the Athens press was falsely reporting that the agreement was not binding until ratified by the Greek assembly. Behind this lay both a desire to placate Yugoslavia and a fear that the work of Corfe and de Roover would stimulate the growth of Bulgarian national consciousness amongst the Macedo-Slavs.¹⁰⁵ This latter fear was certainly being exacerbated by Corfe, who was pressing the Greeks to adhere to the protocol and who, in Cheetham's words, did not 'conceal his extreme partiality for Bulgarians'.¹⁰⁶ As December wore on, demand intensified for a debate on the subject in the Greek assembly, but they were resisted by Michalakopoulos who argued that such a discussion would be contrary to the national interest. It was obvious that opinion in Greece was strongly against the protocol, but the Greeks were pledged to the League and Michalakopoulos wanted to arrive at a revised arrangement while in the meantime avoiding any public controversy which might envenom relations with both Yugoslavia and Bulgaria.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ FO 371/9897 min. by Crowe d.26 Nov.1924. This use of Serbia to connote Yugoslavia, although probably simply the product of habit, had some justification where these particular questions were concerned. Not only did the Serbs have the whip hand over the other nationalities in the kingdom (certainly in the formulation of foreign policy), but these Macedonian questions were of far more direct interest - owing to tradition and geography - to Serbs than to Croats or Slovenes.

¹⁰⁴ 'Every Greek knows perfectly well that his country's tenure of Southern Macedonia and Western Thrace would not be worth a moment's purchase in the event of Serb hostility or of a Turco-Bulgarian offensive alliance which Greece was condemned to resist alone. It is easy to criticize Greek policy [in seeking to annul the protocol], but recent events in the Near East explain and largely justify its realism' (*Times*, 12 Mar.1925).

¹⁰⁵ FO 371/9669 Cheetham to FO tel.256 d.2 Dec.1924.

¹⁰⁶ FO 371/9669 Cheetham to Lampson p.tel. d.2 Dec.1924.

¹⁰⁷ FO 371/9670 Cheetham to FO no.725 d.4 Dec.1924; FO 371/10663 Cheetham to FO no.744 d.23 Dec.1924; MAE, Bulgarie 45 Marcilly to QO no.253 d.10 Dec.1924.

To this end, in intensive discussions with League representatives, the Greeks submitted various suggestions for the modification, postponement or annulment of the protocol.¹⁰⁸ These negotiations took place largely during the meeting of the League Council at Rome in December, which was attended by most of those concerned with this particular minorities problem. The Greeks expanded on their objections to the protocol: it was largely responsible for the friction with Yugoslavia, and Greek public opinion resented the idea of the establishment of a permanent foreign presence and interference in Greece's internal affairs. Their ideal solution, therefore, would be for the protocol to be considered annulled, whereupon they would pass laws establishing minorities offices in regions of mixed population to oversee and ensure the application of the minorities treaties within Greece. This was by no means acceptable to Colban and Drummond, however, who pressed the Greeks to implement the protocol and to meet Yugoslav objections by extending its scope to embrace all minorities in Greece, not just the 'Bulgarians'. In the longer term it was open to the Greeks to make the protocol redundant by actually ensuring that the minorities treaties were being observed - at the moment this was clearly not the case, and if the Greeks rejected the protocol the League might have to take stronger action.¹⁰⁹ There was little chance of compromise between these two positions, and by the end of the year there was deadlock, with both sides believing that important principles were at stake.¹¹⁰

In this impasse, the British were inclined to support the Greeks. At first the Foreign Office had looked favourably on the protocol, considering it to be a 'good proposal' and a 'great accomplishment',¹¹¹ but all that changed after the denunciation of the alliance. The Greeks emphasised to London that the protocol was the chief cause of the rupture with Yugoslavia, and also made much of the influence of Gilbert Murray

¹⁰⁸ FO 371/9670 Cheetham to FO no.725 d.4 Dec.1924, tel.269 d.21 Dec.1924. An account of these negotiations is given in Τουντα-Φεργαδη, *Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικες Μειονοτητες*, pp.105-20, although it rather plays down the difference of opinion between the Greeks and the League.

¹⁰⁹ FO 371/9670 Cadogan to Nicolson unno.l. d.29 Dec.1924 and encls.

¹¹⁰ FO 371/9670 Drummond to Cadogan unno.l. d.27 Dec.1924 and encls.

¹¹¹ FO 371/9669 min. by Nicolson d.2 Oct.1924, min. by Bateman d.7 Oct.1924.

in persuading them to fall in with it. This was slightly embarrassing for the British since Murray 'had made the proposal without the instructions or knowledge of the Foreign Office, and we had only heard of it after it had been made and adopted'.¹¹² However, apart from a feeling of responsibility arising from the part played by Murray, there were sound practical reasons for the Foreign Office to assist the Greeks out of their predicament: as a memorandum of 4 December put it, given the possible existence of an Italo-Yugoslav understanding, pressure on Greece to ratify the protocol could 'only increase the tension at present existing and may lead to a highly dangerous situation which Bulgaria will be the first to exploit'. In view of this, the Foreign Office recommended to Chamberlain that if the question came up for discussion at the Rome Council meeting it should be shelved, and that 'it would be better if the Greeks were allowed quietly to escape from the obligations to which M.Politis pledged them'.¹¹³

Although for the time being the Foreign Office was content with this pragmatic response, Murray's rôle in the evolution of the protocol provided food for thought. As Nicolson noted on 3 December, Murray's proposal had nearly caused a war, and was 'illustrative of the danger which exists in dabbling in Balkan minority questions'.¹¹⁴ The Foreign Office was already aware of the potentially malign influence of enthusiastic amateurs in foreign policy. In February, when tension between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria over the *comitadji* question had been acute, the Foreign Office had been greatly irritated by the activities of the Near and Middle East Association. Crowe had written that, by its advocacy of the cause of an autonomous Macedonia, it seemed to be 'doing its best ... to promote the outbreak of war in the Balkans'.¹¹⁵ Lampson had concurred, arguing that although 'the Macedonian settlement was not one of the strong points of the Peace Treaties', the treaties had

¹¹² DBFP/1/XXVI/422-3; FO 800/256 min. by Tyrrell d.1 Dec.1924; FO 371/9897 min. by Nicolson d.9 Dec.1924, Barber to FO tel.40 d.16 Dec.1924; MAE Bulgarie 45 De Fleuriau (French ambassador in London) to QO no.729 d.26 Dec.1924.

¹¹³ DBFP/1/XXVI/422-3.

¹¹⁴ FO 371/9669 min. by Nicolson d.3 Dec.1924.

¹¹⁵ FO 371/9659 min. by Crowe d.21 Feb.1924. See also p.256 above.

nevertheless been signed and had to be enforced: to encourage Bulgarian irredentism as the association did would do Sofia no favours, for it would only provoke the Yugoslavs to attack Bulgaria.¹¹⁶ The presence in the British government of a 'leaven of pro-Bulgars' (mainly Lord Thomson, minister for aviation, and Noel Buxton, minister for agriculture and fisheries), however, acted as a spur to Bulgarian agitation, and encouraged, for example, the autonomist Macedonians to act whilst they might still hope to receive some sympathy from Britain.¹¹⁷ Buxton certainly dabbled in these minority questions- if less publicly - by sending memoranda to the Foreign Office. In February 1924, for example, he recommended representations at Belgrade to ensure the observance of the minorities treaties, and a full-scale League inquiry, by resident agents, into the administration of Macedonia. The problem with all this, Crowe noted rather wearily, was that Buxton assumed 'facts to be as he hears them reported in Bulgaria'.¹¹⁸

Whilst these enthusiasms remained private, they could do little harm. A more important point raised by Murray's activities, however, was that of British representation at the League. As Tyrrell wrote on 1 December, the fact that Murray had devised the protocol without consulting the Foreign Office or even, apparently, Lord Parmoor, the head of the British delegation in Geneva, was 'another instance of the very false position we have drifted into abroad by being represented by delegates who are not really speaking and acting on behalf of the Government'.¹¹⁹ Previous British governments had had problems on this score: Curzon had argued at length with Cecil about the latter's rôle in British foreign policy;¹²⁰ and MacDonald had objected to Parmoor's original choice of Noel Buxton as a British delegate to the September 1924 Assembly on the grounds that his views on foreign policy were highly contentious and not necessarily those of the government.¹²¹ Chamberlain had

¹¹⁶ FO 371/9659 min. by Lampson d.28 Feb.1924.

¹¹⁷ FO 371/9660 Young to Lampson p.l. d.20 Mar.1924.

¹¹⁸ FO 371/9659 Buxton to Ponsonby p.l. d.29 Feb.1924 and encl., min. by Crowe d.6 Mar.1924.

¹¹⁹ FO 800/256 min. by Tyrrell d.1 Dec.1924; FO 800/257 memorandum by Nicolson d.6 Jan.1925.

¹²⁰ MSS EUR F112/229 *passim*.

¹²¹ PRO 30/69/200 MacDonald to Parmoor p.l. d.11 Aug.1924, Parmoor to MacDonald p.l. d.12 Aug.1924, MacDonald to Parmoor p.l. d.13 Aug.1924.

been determined to seize control of British League policy for the Foreign Office, and had relegated Cecil to a very subordinate rôle as soon as he assumed office.¹²² The experience of the problems caused by Gilbert Murray was a salutary lesson which reinforced this tendency, and the Politis-Kalfoff protocol incident was the final impetus for Chamberlain's 'somewhat revolutionary' decision to attend all subsequent League Councils and Assemblies in person.¹²³

For the present, British efforts were concentrated on assisting the Greeks. By January 1925 the Politis-Kalfoff protocol had become a 'highly controversial issue in Greek politics': Michalakopoulos had decided to submit it to the assembly for ratification (and, in effect, rejection), taking the line that as his government had not been responsible for negotiating it, it need not be bound by it. (This attitude had already caused the resignation on 19 January of his foreign minister, Roussos, who had also been foreign minister in the previous government and who had thus been technically responsible for the signature of the protocol.¹²⁴) Although the final clause of the protocol stipulated that it should come into effect upon approval by the League Council, Michalakopoulos was able to defend his decision to put the protocol before the assembly by citing the Bulgarians who, rather unwisely and in an attempt to embarrass the Greeks, had submitted it to the Sobranie for approval in December.¹²⁵ His scheme - that Greece should first unilaterally abrogate the protocol and then square matters with the League - had been evolved, after the failure of his earlier talks with Geneva, with the help of Venizelos, who also submitted his views to the Foreign Office in London *via* Kaklamanos. Venizelos argued that, even without the friction with Yugoslavia, Greece would be right to reject a protocol that provided for

¹²² McKercher *IHR* 6 570-91, especially 575-6; FO 800/256 min. by Crowe d.20 Nov.1924, Chamberlain to Cecil p.l. d.21 Nov.1924.

¹²³ McKercher *IHR* 6 576-7; MAE Bulgarie 45 De Fleuriau to QO no.729 d.26 Dec.1924. McKercher seems to miss the parallel point that this incident became so grave because Politis, too, failed to keep his government totally *au courant* with his activities.

¹²⁴ *DBFP*/1/XXVII/10-11; FO 371/10768 Cheetham to FO no.31 d.19 Jan.1925.

¹²⁵ FO 371/9670 Drummond to Cadogan unno.l. d.27 Dec.1924 and encls., Cadogan to Nicolson unno.l. d.29 Dec.1924 and encls.; Τουντα-Φεργαδη, Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικές Μειονότητες, pp.113-4,166-7.

permanent foreign control over part of her internal affairs and would lay the foundations for an autonomous Macedonia; that the Greeks had broken no obligations since (as Politis had not been empowered to bind the Greek government) they had not assumed any; and that in any case they had no intention of ignoring the minorities treaties.¹²⁶

The fact that Venizelos' arguments were, to Nicolson's mind, 'somewhat specious' did not alter British policy.¹²⁷ As Nicolson himself put it in a memorandum on 6 January, the Greeks were rightly furious with Politis who had placed them in an invidious position where they were bound to offend either Yugoslavia or the League. Moreover, the Bulgarians could 'be counted on to exploit the present impasse to the best of their ability' and to refuse to 'allow the matter to die a natural death'. Britain for her part, since it was Murray who 'with the best intentions placed Greece in this serious quandary', 'should endeavour to limit the damage done' by restraining both the Bulgarians and 'our own League enthusiasts' and keeping the pressure off the Greeks so as to facilitate an improvement in their relations with Yugoslavia.¹²⁸

The Politis-Kalfoff protocol was submitted to the Greek assembly on 28 January, and there followed three days of heated debate. The main point at issue was whether Politis had been empowered to insert into the protocol the clause stating that ratification by the Greek parliament was unnecessary. The opposition claimed that Politis had introduced this clause without reference to Athens, and this provided Michalakopoulos with a legal argument for rejecting the protocol.¹²⁹ Finally, on 3 February, after an all-night sitting, the assembly refused to ratify the protocol.¹³⁰ The reasons for this rejection were explained in a letter of 11 February from the Greek government to Drummond in which the Greeks asked that the question of the protocol

¹²⁶ FO 371/10663 note communicated by Kaklamanos d.14 Jan. 1925. For the evolution of the Greek decision to submit the protocol to the assembly, the rôle of Venizelos and the attitude of the League, see Τουντα-Φεργαδη, *Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικές Μετανοσότητες*, pp.106-20, 166-7, 190-6.

¹²⁷ FO 371/10663 min. by Nicolson nd.

¹²⁸ FO 800/257 memorandum by Nicolson d.6 Jan. 1925.

¹²⁹ Τουντα-Φεργαδη, *Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικές Μετανοσότητες*, pp.120-9, 167.

¹³⁰ *DBFP/1/XXVII/37*.

be put on the agenda of the next League Council meeting. The Greek assembly had decided that the provisions of the protocol were at variance with those of the Greek minorities treaty since they institutionalised interference in Greek internal affairs and 'far from assuring a period of peace, constitute a source of conflicts and continual friction'.¹³¹

The actions of the Greeks greatly displeased the Bulgarians who, as Nicolson had perceived, were doing all they could to keep the protocol alive. On the one hand, they petitioned the mixed emigration commission to conduct an inquiry into the treatment of minorities in both countries, in order to put the Greeks in an awkward position 'by perpetuating international interest in the question'.¹³² The Greeks were reluctant to cooperate with this inquiry, and placed various procedural obstacles in its path, not least because they now strongly doubted Corfe's impartiality.¹³³ On the other hand, the Bulgarians sought support from the great powers, in the first instance to prevent a Greek rejection of the protocol and then to try and secure assistance in opposing the Greeks at the Council meeting due in March. Kalfoff spoke eloquently of the danger posed to stability in Bulgaria by the continuing influx of refugees from Greece, and contrasted Bulgaria's loyal execution of her obligations with Greece's flouting of her own, but to no avail. Although for a short time it appeared that the Italians might help Sofia, the British and French were never in doubt that the Greeks were right to concentrate on improving their relations with Yugoslavia, even at the expense of those with Bulgaria.¹³⁴

Indeed, the British now began to render more active assistance to the Greeks. The acting secretary general of the League, Joseph Avenol, suggested on 11 February that

¹³¹ FO 371/10663 League of Nations C.54.M.32. 1925 I note by Drummond and encls. (also printed in Τουντα-Φεργαδη, Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικές Μειονότητες, pp.197-8).

¹³² FO 371/10663 Barber to FO no.5 d.14 Jan.1925, min. by Nicolson nd. [quoted].

¹³³ FO 371/10663 Cheetham to FO no.25 d.16 Jan.1925, Erskine to FO no.16 d.29 Jan.1925; FO 371/10664 Colban to Cadogan unno.1. d.31 Mar.1925 (enclosing a report by Corfe and De Roover d.2 Mar.1925), min. by Bateman d.14 Apr.1924, min. by Howard Smith d.15 Apr.1925.

¹³⁴ *DBFP*/1/XXVII/37-8,71-2; FO 371/10663 mins. by Bateman d.4 Feb.1925, FO to Erskine no.42 d.6 Feb.1925, min. by Bateman d.17 Feb.1925, min. by Howard Smith d.17 Feb.1925; Τουντα-Φεργαδη, Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικές Μειονότητες, pp.129-32.

Chamberlain should act as *rapporteur* for the minority protocol question when it came before the Council. This idea was welcomed by the Foreign Office, on the grounds that only the British knew all the intricacies of the question and that in any case 'as we are responsible for this muddle, we should assume a leading part in clearing it up'.¹³⁵ As Chamberlain himself put it: 'Bother! or words to that effect, but Yes'.¹³⁶

Accordingly, in early March the Foreign Office drew up a draft report for Chamberlain to present to the League Council. This began by rejecting the Greek contention that no contract had ever existed between Greece and the League without Greek ratification of the protocol, and then went on to challenge the Greek assembly resolution of 3 February, specifically the claim that the protocol was at variance with the minorities treaties and constituted an unwarrantable interference in Greek internal affairs. The report went on, however, to concede that, given the internal problems the protocol had caused in Greece, and the friction it had engendered with Yugoslavia, it would be in the best interests of peace for the Council to release Greece from her obligations. Lastly, the report posited the conditions upon which this should be done, which were intended to ensure that 'the indirect interests of the Bulgarian Government, as well as the more direct interests of the Slavophone minorities, are not thereby sacrificed'. Greece was to be asked three questions about her treatment of minorities: what had been done since September 1924 to execute the minorities treaties; what did the Greeks plan to do in the future to this end; and what were the needs of the Slav minority regarding education and religion, and what measures did Greece intend to take to satisfy them. The League's consent to releasing Greece from her obligations was to be made dependent on her answers to these questions.¹³⁷

In its criticism of the Greeks this report was, in Lampson's words, 'very outspoken'.

This, however, was inevitable, for although the Greeks had to nullify the protocol to

¹³⁵ FO 371/10663 Avenol to Cadogan unno.l. d.11 Feb.1925, min. by Nicolson d.18 Feb.1925 [quoted], min. by Lampson d.19 Feb.1925.

¹³⁶ FO 371/10663 min. by Chamberlain d.20 Feb.1925.

¹³⁷ FO 371/10663 draft report by Nicolson d.[?] Mar.1925.

improve their relations with Yugoslavia, the face of the League had also to be saved, and this could only be at Greek expense:

the prestige of the League is worth more than that of the Greeks: and though the Greeks are to some extent to be humiliated, they get out of the Protocol, the Bulgars get protection (to which they are entitled by treaty) and, ultimately, everyone ought to be satisfied. A very ingenious way out in fact!¹³⁸

In any case, the Foreign Office had no desire to create unnecessary problems for the Greeks. True, when on 4 March the Greek chargé in London presented Nicolson with a memorandum espousing the Greek case, Nicolson warned him that the Greeks 'could not expect to be let off easily' and that they would find Chamberlain's report 'somewhat severe'.¹³⁹ However, at the same time he helped him by outlining the contents of the report, which enabled Athens to begin planning its riposte well before the meeting of the Council.¹⁴⁰

The League Council discussed the protocol on 14 March, but before then there were further negotiations between British and Greek representatives at Geneva to modify Chamberlain's report. The main objection of the Greeks, as expressed by Venizelos, their chief delegate, in a letter to Chamberlain on 11 March, was to the contention that Greece had in fact been bound by the protocol. Venizelos reiterated the Greek argument that, although Politis had kept Athens *au fait* with the general tenor of his negotiations at Geneva the previous September, he had introduced the clause providing for its immediate entry into force on his own initiative, and so Greece was entitled to regard the protocol as void. Chamberlain went some way to meet these objections, and watered down his report by making several textual alterations, the most important of which accepted that Politis had exceeded his instructions in signing the protocol.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ FO 371/10663 min. by Lampson d.2 Mar.1925.

¹³⁹ FO 371/10663 pro memoria communicated by Melas d.4 Mar.1925, min. by Nicolson d.5 Mar.1925.

¹⁴⁰ Τουντα-Φεργαδη, Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικές Μειονότητες, pp.132-3.

¹⁴¹ FO 371/10664 FO memorandum by Cadogan d.18 Mar.1925 and annexes.

Chamberlain opened the Council meeting on the morning of 14 March by reading his now modified report, concluding with the three questions which were to be put to the Greeks about the treatment of minorities. Venizelos then replied with an accomplished speech, firstly admitting that the Greek assembly resolution of 3 February had perhaps been unfortunately worded and then giving some preliminary answers to Chamberlain's questions. He then contended that the Greek assembly had done 'a great service' to the League by putting an end to an arrangement that, though inspired by laudable intentions, ignored political realities and would otherwise have caused nothing but friction and created a permanent problem for Geneva. Finally, he alluded to the recent abortive attempts to establish a tighter system of collective security:

in conclusion, because I am an old man, I would like to make a recommendation to the secretariat of the League of Nations. It would be best, perhaps, for the future, whenever an agreement is being concluded before or by the League of Nations, to avoid the word 'protocol'; it seems to bring bad luck.¹⁴²

Chamberlain's report was thereupon approved by the Council, and embodied in a letter from Drummond to the Greeks on 2 April.¹⁴³

This outcome was obviously unwelcome to the Bulgarians. They had fought a vain rearguard action at Geneva in favour of the protocol, and now could only draw some crumbs of comfort from the condemnation of Athens contained in Chamberlain's report: they claimed as a 'moral success' the fact that he had supported Bulgaria's right 'to interest herself in the lot of the Bulgarian minority' in Greece.¹⁴⁴ In Britain, a motley assortment of bulgarophils and League enthusiasts continued to agitate in parliament and the press to ensure that the Greeks did not evade their obligations under the minorities treaties, but it was difficult for them to attack the Geneva

¹⁴² FO 371/10664 'Extract from the minutes of the Eleventh Meeting (Public) of the Thirty-Third Session of the Council of the League of Nations' d.14 Mar.1925; Τουντα-Φεργαδη, Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικες Μειονοτητες, pp.134-7,199-210.

¹⁴³ Τουντα-Φεργαδη, Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικες Μειονοτητες, pp.137-8,211-2.

¹⁴⁴ FO 371/10664 Kalfoff to Chamberlain p.l. d.12 Mar.1925 and encl., Erskine to FO no.55 d.18 Mar.1925 [quoted].

settlement which was in theory designed to achieve the same end as the Politis-Kalfoff protocol, namely the protection for the slavophone minority.¹⁴⁵

In formulating their replies to the League's questions, the Greeks were subjected to conflicting pressures. On the one hand, Colban suggested early in April that the Greek reply should be ready by mid-May, so as to allow the question to be dealt with at the June Council meeting. As to the content of the reply, he intimated that the third question - relating to the specific cultural needs of the Slav minority and the steps the Greeks would take to meet them - was the most important, and that the reply should 'give as exactly as possible the actual position of the Slav minorities in Greece, with an indication of their geographical distribution and material conditions', as well as details of their demands 'in respect to schools and religious matters' and 'the programme of the Greek Government for satisfying these demands'.¹⁴⁶ This was hardly music to the ears of the Greeks, who by this time were in the middle of negotiations at Belgrade for the renewal of the Yugoslav alliance. They would have preferred to postpone any discussion of the sensitive minorities question until after the conclusion of these negotiations; much less did they want to embark on a detailed exposition of the situation of the minorities such as Colban envisaged, since this was certain to envenom relations with the Yugoslavs given their notorious sensitivity on the question of the Macedo-Slavs.¹⁴⁷

Eventually, the need for the Greeks to remain on good terms with the League ensured that their replies were ready by the end of May; but the necessity of not offending Belgrade meant that the content of the replies was an uneasy compromise. In their covering note the Greeks first responded in a conciliatory tone to the Council's criticism of the resolution of 3 February, but went on to rebut the contention that the

¹⁴⁵ 181 *HC Deb.* 5s 922-3, 2242-3; 183 *HC Deb.* 5s 910; PRO 30/69/1170 Tchitchovsky to MacDonald p.l. d.3 Mar.1925, Noel Buxton to MacDonald p.l. d.23 Mar.1925. This volume also contains a number of press clippings critical of Greece taken, for example, from the *Manchester Guardian*.

¹⁴⁶ FO 371/10664 Colban to Cadogan unno.l. d.1 Apr.1925 and encls.; Τουντα-Φεργαδη, *Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικές Μειονότητες*, p.138.

¹⁴⁷ Τουντα-Φεργαδη, *Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικές Μειονότητες*, pp.138-9.

protection of the Slav minority in Greece was of even indirect interest to Bulgaria; on the contrary, minority questions were internal ones which involved only the state concerned and the League. In response to the League's first question, the Greeks said that as the minorities treaty had only come into force the previous August, no legislative action had yet been taken to ensure the protection of minorities; and that the case of the Slav minority was further complicated by the voluntary exchange that was still being effected. Nevertheless, the existing Greek constitution and laws already accorded full rights to all minorities. The response to the second question - about the future intentions of the Greek government in this area - was equally vague and stated only that it would take any action necessary to ensure the rights of minorities.

The reply to the crucial third question was equally nebulous, stating merely that the needs of the slavophone minority were no different from those of any other minority, and that these needs were guaranteed by the minorities treaties and Greek law.

However, the Greek government was prepared to consider in a friendly spirit any requests made to it for the opening of slavophone schools or for the use of the Slav dialect in church services. Lastly, the Greeks promised not to discriminate against the slavophone minority, but warned that they would not allow the schools or churches of the minority to be used for propaganda against the Greek state.¹⁴⁸

The Greek reply was formally delivered to the League on 29 May. But already before this, when its contents had been discussed by Colban and the Greek chargé at Berne, Dendramis, the dissatisfaction of League circles had become manifest. In Colban's view, the third reply was far too vague; it implied that the Greeks would not enforce the minorities treaty unless requested to do so; and it was unlikely to be accepted by the Council without prolonged discussion. Dendramis pleaded in reply that even in its present vague form the Greek reply risked offending Yugoslavia. In the alliance negotiations Belgrade had been pressing for the signature of a bilateral protocol

¹⁴⁸ FO 371/10664 Colban to Cadogan unno.l. d.29 May 1925 and encls.; Τουντα-Φεργαδη, *Ελλην ο-Βουλγαρικες Μειονοτητες*, pp.139-40, 212-7.

similar to the Politis-Kalfoff protocol, by which the Macedo-Slavs would be recognised as Serbs. Greece's insistence that minority questions concerned only individual states and the League was therefore objectionable to the Yugoslavs who had claims on minorities in Greece and resented any League interference with their own. If the League was to launch a detailed investigation into the position of the Macedo-Slavs, Greece's relations with her neighbours would be even more inflamed. Colban took note of Greece's difficulties, but warned Dendramis that the final decision rested with the *rapporteur*, Chamberlain, who he felt sure would be unable to close the matter on the basis of the Greek note.¹⁴⁹

In fact, the British, who took a broader view of the issue, were more sympathetic to the Greeks than Colban, who after all was concerned much more specifically with the welfare of the minorities. Nicolson argued on 4 June that the Greek replies were 'not wholly unsatisfactory when we consider what a difficult course the Greeks had to steer between their own public opinion on the one hand, and on the other the menaces of the S.C.S. Government'. The Greeks were 'not by nature inclined to persecute their minorities', and their assurances could be accepted 'as being made in perfectly good faith', subject to a supplementary assurance being given that they would fulfil their obligations under the treaties irrespective of whether they were petitioned to do so or not.¹⁵⁰ Chamberlain agreed, and in the end decided that the incident could be closed, provided the Greeks gave the further assurance stipulated by Nicolson.¹⁵¹

Any potential clash between the priorities of the British and those of Geneva was averted, when circumstances conspired to ensure that the question was disposed of quickly. On 1 June the negotiations between Greece and Yugoslavia were adjourned *sine die*, largely because of Greece's refusal to accept Yugoslavia's exorbitant demands. As regards minorities, the Greeks were well within their rights to refuse to sign a protocol with the Yugoslavs, since their contention that such matters concerned

¹⁴⁹ FO 371/10664 Colban to Cadogan unno.l. d.29 May 1925 and encls., cf. Τουντα-Φεργαδη, Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικές Μειονότητες, pp.140-1.

¹⁵⁰ FO 371/10664 min. by Nicolson d.4 Jun.1925.

¹⁵¹ FO 371/10664 min. by Chamberlain d.5 Jun.1925.

only themselves and the League was, as Chamberlain recognised, correct.¹⁵² Furthermore, the suspension of the negotiations produced a general disposition to avoid resuscitating controversy in the minorities question. On his journey to Geneva, Chamberlain received Venizelos in Paris on 6 June, and assured him that he would accept the Greek replies.¹⁵³ Briand, ever-anxious to compose Greco-Yugoslav differences, told Politis in Paris that he too would support the Greeks at Geneva, and even the Italians, who had latterly been working to hinder a *rapprochement* between Athens and Belgrade, agreed not to make trouble. This spirit also apparently permeated the Minorities Section of the League: Dendramis reported that Colban now believed that the question had become a political one, and that the preservation of peace in the Balkans was the highest imperative.¹⁵⁴

The Council considered the Greek reply on 10 June, by which time the contents of a supplementary Greek statement had been arranged between Chamberlain and the Greek delegate, Kaklamanos.¹⁵⁵ Accordingly, after Chamberlain had read the Greek replies, Kaklamanos made a speech, refuting accusations of vagueness, and detailing the administrative measures that were in hand to meet the educational and religious needs of the slavophone minority in accordance with articles 8 and 9 of the Greek minorities treaty. Chamberlain expressed the hope that the Council would find these statements satisfactory as proof 'that the Greek Government realised its obligations and was prepared to meet them' - to which the Council unanimously assented. It was agreed that no further action was required and the Politis-Kalfoff protocol was thereby laid to rest.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² FO 371/10664 min. by Chamberlain d.5 Jun.1925. For the breakdown of negotiations, see *DBFP/1/XXVII/176-8, 189-92,196-200,205-9* and chapter 11.

¹⁵³ Τουντα-Φεργαδη, *Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικες Μειονοτητες*, pp.141-2; FO 800/258 Crewe to Chamberlain p.l. d.2 Jun.1925, Chamberlain to Crewe p.l. d.3 Jun.1925, Crewe to Chamberlain p.l. d.4 Jun.1925. Chamberlain urged Crewe to take steps beforehand to prevent 'that eminent person who is also an excessively loquacious gentleman from taking up too much of my time'.

¹⁵⁴ Τουντα-Φεργαδη, *Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικες Μειονοτητες*, pp.142-3,168.

¹⁵⁵ Τουντα-Φεργαδη, *Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικες Μειονοτητες*, p.143.

¹⁵⁶ FO 371/10664 Extract from Chamberlain's report on the thirty-fourth session of the League Council d.6 Jul.1925; Τουντα-Φεργαδη, *Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικες Μειονοτητες*, pp.144,218-20.

In some respects, British policy during this affair was untypical. Usually, the British government preferred to operate by means of general statements of principle and exhortations to moderation and compromise, and always preferred joint Allied action to unilateral steps.¹⁵⁷ On this occasion, however, Chamberlain - albeit reluctantly - felt compelled to intervene directly in the dispute and took various initiatives without consulting France and Italy. It was, on the other hand, quite typical that while Chamberlain's action was channelled through the League, he still saw that body not as a potentially autonomous institution but as an instrument of policy to be used by the powers as and when they wished.¹⁵⁸ It suited Chamberlain in this instance to mask the prominence of his own rôle and to use the League to negate a policy because it did not fit with British interests; but what seemed to be a League achievement was in fact a British one.

British policy during this affair was also symptomatic of British policy in the Balkans in general at this time. The ultimate British goal of preserving peace demanded that, once the Yugoslavs had taken umbrage at the protocol, London should opt to work with the Greeks to secure its annulment - a decision which was only reinforced by the fact that a British representative had largely been responsible for the contentious protocol in the first place. Yet this did not reflect any particular partiality for the Greeks. It simply demonstrated once again Britain's overwhelming concern for the restoration of stable conditions in Europe, something which certainly also overrode abstract notions of principle to do with minority protection.

In working to reconcile Greece with Yugoslavia, the British were of course accepting the perpetuation of a lesser evil, namely conflict between Greece and Bulgaria over their minorities. In this respect, the League settlement certainly did not bring peace since, notwithstanding the fact that the Greek minorities treaty was now in force, the

¹⁵⁷ *DBFP/1/XXVI/v*.

¹⁵⁸ For a discussion of Chamberlain's view of the function of the League and its rôle in British policy, see P.J.Beck, 'From the Geneva Protocol to the Greco-Bulgarian dispute: the development of the Baldwin government's policy towards the peacekeeping rôle of the League of Nations, 1924-1925', *British Journal of International Studies* 6(1) 1980 52-68.

elimination of the protocol only re-established the troubled situation that had prevailed the previous summer. The provisions for the protection of minorities continued to go unobserved in both countries and continued to envenom relations between them. In late July, the Greek mayor of the village of Stanimaka in Bulgaria was murdered, and this incident, together with other alleged instances of pressure upon Greeks to emigrate and of *comitadji* action, was used as a pretext by the volatile Pangalos, now in charge in Athens, to reinforce Greece's frontier troops.¹⁵⁹ The Greek press did not help matters by hinting that these reinforcements 'might even be used to occupy a strip of Bulgarian territory as a means of pressure on the Bulgarian government', and tension between the two was very high.¹⁶⁰ Kalfoff tried to be conciliatory, but lamented that the real cause of trouble was the influx of refugees to Greece, which created pressure on the Bulgarian minority there and a consequent refugee problem in Bulgaria.¹⁶¹ The Greek government for its part continued as the summer wore on to make accusations of varying degrees of plausibility against Sofia about the persecution of Greeks in Bulgaria.¹⁶²

In these circumstances - with Pangalos at the helm in Greece and long-standing bitter disputes rumbling on - the outbreak of the Greco-Bulgarian incident in October 1925 hardly came as a surprise. Once the fighting was over, the report of the League of Nations Rumbold commission underlined the contribution that this minority problem made to the instability of the Balkans. The main problem, the commission argued, was the large number of Slavs previously resident in Greece who had opted for Greek nationality - as they were entitled to do by the Greek minorities treaty - but had been forced to flee to Bulgaria leaving behind property in Greece which had been occupied by incoming Greek refugees. These people formed a seething mass of discontent in Bulgaria, since they were largely destitute, susceptible to the wiles of IMRO and hostile to the ethnic Greeks remaining in Bulgaria. The commission recommended

¹⁵⁹ *DBFP/1/XXVII/227-8*; FO 286/916 Keeling to FO no.246 d.5 Aug.1925.

¹⁶⁰ FO 371/10664 Erskine to FO no.173 d.6 Aug.1925 [quoted], min. by Bateman d.11 Aug.1925.

¹⁶¹ FO 286/916 Keeling to FO tel.132 d.6 Aug.1925, Erskine to FO no.178 d.13 Aug.1925.

¹⁶² FO 371/10664 Stevenson to FO no.208 d.1 Oct.1925.

that they should either be allowed to avail themselves retrospectively of the provisions of the exchange convention - in which case their properties in Greece would be liquidated and compensation awarded - or be induced to renounce their claim to opt for Greece (and their theoretical right to return there and oust the incoming refugees from their former homes) in return for generous compensation. This was but one of a package of measures recommended by the commission to iron out the inconsistencies between the minorities treaties and the exchange convention, to effect a more complete exchange and to speed up the work of liquidation so that those who had emigrated should lose their ties with their former country of residence.¹⁶³

The Rumbold commission report thus posited a realist political solution to the minorities problem which the Politis-Kalfoff protocol had addressed from a more idealistic perspective. The protocol had emphasised the minorities treaties rather than the exchange convention, and was intended in practice to discourage emigration by according to the minorities as full an international protection as possible. Conversely, the Rumbold commission accepted that in the circumstances prevailing in the Balkans it was better to persuade the minorities to emigrate, to have Slavs on one side of the frontier and Greeks on the other, than to try and ensure protection of their rights in their original countries.¹⁶⁴ This in turn illustrates the two contradictory impulses underlying the approach of the great powers and the international community to the problem of the existence of non-dominant minorities after the war. On the one hand, there was the liberal idea that guaranteeing the rights of minorities and ending their maltreatment was the best way to eliminate the minority problem as a source of international friction. This gave birth to the minorities treaties and the whole League protection system; but it brought with it the problem, however, that interference with the internal affairs of states did not sit well with the primacy of national sovereignty

¹⁶³ Mair, *Protection of Minorities*, pp.185-7; Ladas, *Exchange*, pp.91-3; Τουντα-Φεργαδη, *Ελληνο-Βουλγαρικές Μειονότητες*, pp.159-61.

¹⁶⁴ Ladas, *Exchange*, pp.92-3, 113-4.

as enshrined in the post-war peace settlement. On the other hand, there was a pragmatic, realist view that given the political circumstances prevailing in eastern and south-eastern Europe, and whatever the hardship and suffering caused by exchanges of populations, friction might best be removed by eliminating the minorities themselves. This countervailing impulse produced, most traumatically, the Greco-Turkish compulsory exchange, but also the voluntary exchange between Greece and Bulgaria. This particular corner of the Balkans, where both these contradictory strategies for dealing with minorities problems were employed simultaneously, presents, perhaps, an interesting case study; and the outcome of the conflict between the two strategies would seem to point clearly to the greater effectiveness of exchange as a means of securing the peace and stability which the interests of the great powers demanded.

In the Greco-Bulgarian case, the outcome of these twin processes by the late 1920s was something of a messy compromise. The very fact that two contradictory instruments had been established in 1919-20 made this likely, and the added complication of the influx of refugees from Asia Minor - which was the root cause of a large amount of *de facto* compulsory emigration between Greece and Bulgaria - made it certain. At first the Greeks obstructed the implementation of the Rumbold commission report, and then the Bulgarians made little effort to induce their refugees to avail themselves of the benefits of the exchange convention. The results, therefore, were disappointing. Although the flotation of the Bulgarian refugee loan eased the situation there somewhat, many residual claims lingered on as a source of resentment, quite apart from the numbers of Slavs who actually remained resident in Greece.¹⁶⁵ Still, this whole episode was testament to the difficulties faced by minority groups by virtue of the fact that states, and ultimately the great powers, defined the nature of the 'problem' posed by their existence and imposed solutions in their own state interests. Overall, the shabby treatment meted out to both Greek and Bulgarian minorities in these years by Balkan states, great powers and even, perhaps, in the case of the

¹⁶⁵ Ladas, *Exchange*, pp.93-4,591-617; Mair, *Protection of Minorities*, pp.186-90.

Politis-Kalfoff protocol, by the League, provides a good illustration of the fact that although the powers introduced the minority protection system to help preserve peace, it was just as likely that minority rights would be sacrificed in pursuit of that same end.

Chapter Eleven

Greece and Yugoslavia: an Alliance in Abeyance

1922 - 1925

The Politis-Kalfoff protocol affair, although in part a product of Greco-Bulgarian antagonism over minority issues, was also a function of the troubled relationship between Greece and Yugoslavia. The haste of the Greeks to rid themselves of the protocol reflected the central importance which restoring cordiality with Belgrade occupied in Greek external affairs until the end of the Pangalos dictatorship (and indeed beyond). The points at issue were complex and varied, ranging from economic grievances over Salonica, through the minority problem of the status of the Macedo-Slavs, to a point of prestige concerning the lands of a Serbian monastery on Mount Athos.¹ Forever looming behind these ostensible issues, however, lay the spectre of Yugoslav territorial claims to Greek Macedonia, and especially Salonica, and the alliance negotiations were also an attempt to register and quantify the changed balance of power between the two states since 1913. The great powers, too, were involved: the Italians perhaps most directly (because of their pretensions to dominate their neighbours), but also the British, concerned for Balkan stability, and the French, because of economic interests and the key rôle of Yugoslavia in their security system. Equally, the negotiations reflected the wider course of international relations in Europe. After Locarno, they became enmeshed in the search for a Balkan security pact and helped both to frustrate its achievement and to demonstrate why it was always a remote prospect.

The external relations of Yugoslavia in this first decade of its existence were complex and multi-faceted. A corollary of the large size of the state was that it faced foreign policy problems at all points of the compass. As the inheritor of a large part of the Habsburg lands in the north, Yugoslavia was an integral member of the Little *Entente*, committed to working with Romania and Czechoslovakia to contain and control the revival of Austria and, more particularly, Hungary. As a state constructed around the nucleus of Serbia, Yugoslavia also shared the more specifically Balkan orientation of that kingdom: the cold rivalry with Bulgaria, the troubled friendship with Greece and the attempt to establish a *modus vivendi* with the infant Albania. This

¹ DBFP/1/XXVI/398-400.

last involved not only the ongoing delimitation of the border between the two states, but also a certain measure of Yugoslav interference in Albanian internal politics: Belgrade, for example, certainly had a hand in the return to power of Ahmed Zogu Bey in December 1924.² This concern for influence in Albania was in turn one of the issues which involved Yugoslavia in friction with her great power neighbour, Italy. Rome viewed Belgrade with suspicion as a regional rival, and although the resolution of the Fiume question and the conclusion of the Pact of Rome in January 1924 in theory marked the achievement of an accommodation between the two states, in practice their relations continued to be equivocal. Moreover, as an integral part of France's network of alliances and influence in eastern Europe, Yugoslavia was a key element in the Franco-Italian struggle for pre-eminence in central Europe and the Balkans which intensified during and after 1925.

The domestic political foundations upon which Yugoslav foreign policy was based were characterised by both stability and profound divisions. For most of this period Yugoslav politics were dominated by the Serbs, and especially the Radical party headed by the veteran statesman Pasic. He was prime minister continuously (except for the brief period from July to October 1924) from the first Yugoslav elections in 1920 until April 1926. This apparent stability, however, belied the profound divisions that split Yugoslav society and politics: antagonism between the Serbs and Croats was intense, and centred on the issue of nature of the new state. On the whole, Serbs tended to see the new state as a Greater Serbia, and consequently to favour unitary, centralised political arrangements, whereas the Croats preferred to think of it as a union of equals and to argue for a federal, decentralised political structure. The diversity and fragmentation of the opposition parties allowed the Radicals to fashion the state in their own image in the early 1920s, and by 1925 the Croats had abandoned their more extreme demands for autonomy, accepted the constitution and monarchy and joined a coalition government with the Radicals. This consensus was,

² Albanian issues are amply documented in *DBFP/1/XII, XXII, XXIV, XXVI and XXVII*. An (admittedly tendentious) account of Albanian politics in this period can be found in K. Frasher, *The History of Albania (A Brief Survey)* (Tirana, [no publisher] 1964), pp.213-41.

however, always uneasy and once death removed the commanding presence of Pasic in December 1926 Yugoslav democracy became increasingly unworkable, leading King Alexander to establish a royal dictatorship in 1929.³

This domestic instability hardly crippled Yugoslav diplomacy, but it did at times exert an influence upon it. Although Pasic was in office almost constantly, the Radical party never achieved an absolute majority in the Skupstina, and its dominance was due in large part to a mastery of the intricacies of coalition politics. The need to win votes or to buy off particular interest groups in these circumstances was bound to affect foreign policy to a certain extent. In April 1923 during a cabinet crisis, when Pasic was attempting to rebuild his government, rumours began to circulate that the Serbs would seek 'foreign adventures as a relief to the complications at home'. Nincic, however, rebutted these tales, arguing that domestic instability was in fact a great incentive for Belgrade to pursue a pacific foreign policy.⁴ More substantively, in the winter of 1924-5, Nincic's campaign against the bolshevik menace - his *rapprochement* with Bulgaria and his activities in Albania - was conducted with at least one eye on the internal political situation and the Radicals' desire to dish the Croats.⁵ After the *rapprochement* between Serbs and Croats in 1925, the Croats were able to exercise a more direct influence on policy: they obstructed the ratification of the Nettuno conventions of July 1925 with Italy, for example, and this contributed to Mussolini's drive to isolate Yugoslavia which later bore fruit in Italian agreements with Albania and Hungary.⁶

In the early 1920s Greco-Yugoslav relations were cordial enough but nevertheless tinged with unease and suspicion. In 1923 at Lausanne the Yugoslavs were generally supportive of Greece (although not to the point of encouraging the war party there to

³ For accounts of Yugoslav politics up to 1929, see Rothschild, *East Central Europe*, pp.201-35 and A.N.Dragnich, *The First Yugoslavia. Search for a Viable Political System* (Stanford, Hoover Institution Press, 1983), pp.1-73, especially 14-42.

⁴ DBFP/1/XXIV/580,586,599-601.

⁵ DBFP/1/XXVI/439-40,450,460; Dragnich, *First Yugoslavia*, pp.35-6. See also pp.127,257-8 above and pp.322-3 below.

⁶ Rothschild, *East Central Europe*, pp.227-8.

re-open hostilities) and after the conference the Greeks 'professed the profoundest gratitude' for this assistance.⁷ Equally the Yugoslavs were sympathetic during the Corfu crisis and, whilst maintaining an interest in the personal safety of King George, adopted a benevolent attitude during Greece's constitutional convulsions.⁸ On the other hand, Belgrade took a leading part in obstructing the adhesion of Greece to the Little *Entente*, on the grounds that Athens had no interest in central Europe, and although the Greeks accepted this rebuff they felt it keenly.⁹ Moreover, rumours persistently arose about Yugoslav intrigues with one or other power hostile to Greek interests: in March and April there was talk of a possible separate peace or secret political agreement between Belgrade and the Turks;¹⁰ the Yugoslav-Bulgarian *rapprochement* symbolised by the Nis negotiations caused the Greeks concern throughout the spring,¹¹ and there was also at the same time a resurgence of perennial fears in Athens of a potential Italo-Yugoslav agreement directed against Greece.¹² There was little of substance in any of these fears and rumours, but the fact that Athens gave them credence betrayed not only the Greeks' sense of isolation but also their uncertainty about the reliability of their northern ally.

In theory the alliance of 1913 still governed relations between the two powers: the Greeks referred to it as 'the pivot' of their foreign policy and the Yugoslavs spoke of the links of 'friendship and alliance' which bound them to Athens.¹³ The validity of the alliance was, however, in some doubt given the momentous changes that had occurred in the Balkans since its signature, and this was reflected in the most

⁷ FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 p.43; *DBFP/1/XXIV/708*. The Yugoslavs had their own interest in the achievement of a peace settlement of course, even though they eventually refused to sign the treaty of Lausanne with all the other powers in protest at the provisions dealing with the partition of the Ottoman debt (*DBFP/1/XVIII/777,789,919-20,947,954-5,972*).

⁸ FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 pp.42-3.

⁹ *DBFP/1/XXIV/692-3,707-9,731-2,734,781,784,814-5*; FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 p.43; FO 371/8841 file 10117 *passim*.

¹⁰ *DBFP/1/XVIII/597-8,670-1*.

¹¹ See pp.251-2 above.

¹² FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 p.42; FO 371/8832 Bentinck to FO no.322 d.21 Apr.1923.

¹³ FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 pp.42-3. For the text of the alliance, see *BFSP/108/686-9*.

prominent political issue existing between Greece and Yugoslavia, that of the Yugoslav free zone at Salonica and related questions. In one sense this was simply a hangover from pre-war days: in article 7 of the 1913 alliance the Greeks had undertaken to provide facilities for Serbian trade at the port, but the convention of May 1914 to implement this promise remained unratified at the outbreak of the war.¹⁴ On the other hand, when the Yugoslavs took up this question again after the Greek defeat in Asia Minor, the context had completely changed: Serbia had been immeasurably strengthened by transformation into Yugoslavia and Greece relatively much weakened. The Yugoslav demands for satisfaction on the Salonica question thus also reflected a desire to establish a new *modus vivendi*, more in keeping with the present balance of power between the two states than the 1913 alliance.¹⁵

In November 1922 the Greek foreign minister, Politis, visited Belgrade to seek Yugoslav support for the forthcoming peace conference. To this end, the Greeks offered to improve the harbour at Salonica, to ratify the 1914 convention and to conclude a new commercial treaty. The Yugoslavs, however, were looking for much more from Athens than this (which was little more than they had secured in 1914), and early in January Nincic declared that 'there could be no question of any political conversations with Greece' until 'a more satisfactory agreement' was reached regarding Salonica.¹⁶ Later in the same month a report came from Athens that

¹⁴ FO 371/8832 memorandum by Troutbeck d.19 Jan.1923. For the text of the 1914 convention, see *BFSP*/112/1097-1108.

¹⁵ There seem to have been no detailed discussions between Athens and Belgrade on the Salonica question before the Greek defeat. The question was, indeed, only raised in the context of Yugoslav denials of territorial ambitions there. See, for example, *DBFP*/1/XXII/128-9,185-7,218-21,258-61,267,284-5,287-8,290,301. Article 10 of the 1913 alliance had stipulated that it was to last for at least ten years ('Il ne pourra être dénoncé avant l'expiration de dix années': *BFSP*/108/689), and so it was not surprising that the Yugoslavs should have turned their attention to it and the Salonica question in the winter of 1922-3, quite apart from the fact that Greece was now weak and the war in Anatolia over. There seems in fact to have been a widespread belief or understanding, despite the actual wording of the treaty, that after ten years some positive act of renewal would be necessary. Pasic said as much in July 1921 (*DBFP*/1/XXII/287-8,290) and in November 1924 Marcilly spoke of the treaty as having lapsed eighteen months earlier and having been tacitly prolonged ever since (*MAE Yougoslavie* 51 Marcilly to QO no.245 d.21 Nov.1924). In fact, there could be no doubt that juridically the treaty would still be in force until one of the contracting parties denounced it.

¹⁶ *DBFP*/1/XXIV/384-5,390-1,401,456; FO 371/8832 memorandum by Troutbeck d.19 Jan.1923. These proceedings were tinged with comedy: originally the Yugoslavs accepted the Greek offer of November because they mistook a copy of their own draft proposals of 1914 for the signed definitive convention. When it became clear that the latter document was rather less favourable the Yugoslav

Yugoslavia had asked Greece for a territorial corridor some fifteen kilometres wide stretching from Salonica to the Yugoslav border and encompassing the rail line linking the two states. Although the Yugoslavs later denied making any such demand, it nonetheless indicated the drift of their ambitions.¹⁷

The Greeks recognised the necessity of conciliating their ally and by March both powers had submitted drafts for a new convention. These were agreed on the basic point of a free zone for the Yugoslavs at Salonica, but there were 'differences big enough to cause considerable controversy' between them over the details of the management of the port and the overall division of authority there, issues which the Greeks regarded as impinging upon their sovereignty.¹⁸ Negotiations rumbled on, and in April the Greeks made further concessions, recognising that at a moment when the Turkish situation was so delicately balanced they could not afford to antagonise Belgrade: the Yugoslav-Bulgarian *rapprochement* and rumours of a secret Italo-Yugoslav political agreement (whereby Rome would induce Belgrade to abandon designs on the Adriatic in favour of expansion southwards) also contributed to Greek acquiescence.¹⁹ The final Greek climbdown came on 10 May when a convention was signed in Belgrade giving the Serbs a free zone in Salonica of some 94,000 square metres leased for fifty years.²⁰ Negotiations continued throughout the summer on the texts of various protocols to be attached to the convention to regulate its application with regard to rail transit, veterinary precautions and customs matters. Eventually, four protocols were agreed on 28 August and signed on 6 October.²¹ This, it seemed

minister in Athens was hastily instructed not to proceed with the exchange of ratifications (DBFP/1/XXIV/456).

¹⁷ DBFP/1/XXIV/465,540.

¹⁸ FO 371/8832 min. by Troutbeck d.22 Mar.1923; FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 pp.42-3; DBFP/1/XXIV/539-40.

¹⁹ FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 p.43; DBFP/1/XXIV/561-2,580,586,593-4,599,601,613-7.

²⁰ DBFP/1/XXIV/642-3,863-4; FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 p.43; FO 371/8832 Bentinck to FO no.968 d.11 Dec.1923; A.J.Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs 1920-1923* (London, Oxford University Press/Humphrey Milford, 1927), pp.340-343. For the text of the convention, see BFSP/118/599-615.

²¹ DBFP/1/XXIV/642-3,863-4; FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 p.43; FO 371/8832 Bentinck to FO no.672 d.25 Aug.1923, min. by Troutbeck d.6 Sept.1923; Toynbee, *Survey 1920-*

to the Foreign Office, was 'a real step forward' in relations between the two states,²² since 'an important stumbling-block to friendly relations' between them had been removed.²³

The agreements were not, however, of themselves sufficient to put Greco-Yugoslav relations on a really cordial footing. Indeed, it soon became apparent that they would satisfy neither Yugoslavia's narrow economic needs at Salonica nor its wider desire for a redefinition of relations with Greece. In December, Athens was perturbed to learn that Yugoslav capitalists, with the connivance of the government in Belgrade, had been buying up shares in the Oriental Railway Company which controlled the line between Salonica and the Yugoslav border station at Ghevgheli. Although it seemed that this acquisition of rights of exploitation over the line could not affect Greek sovereign rights over it, the fact that the Yugoslavs had gone behind the backs of the Greeks in their efforts to increase their control over the railway was ominous.²⁴ This was doubly embarrassing since commercial traffic on the railway was a complete shambles - the line was only single-tracked and was run by the Greeks with neither speed nor efficiency - and the Yugoslavs began to voice complaints that tariffs were high, traffic was most irregular and that their economic interests were suffering real damage as a result.²⁵ Equally, 'no practical steps were being taken to develop the Serbian free zone', since Belgrade was unable to come to terms with the French company which owned the land, and the Greeks, rather rashly, were developing their

1923, p.343. There is some confusion as to when the convention and protocols were finally ratified, but the most likely date seems to be 30 May 1924.

²² FO 371/8832 min. by Nicolson d.7 Sept.1923.

²³ FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 p.43.

²⁴ *DBFP/1/XXIV/913*; FO 371/9896 Annual Report, Greece, 1923 p.43; FO 371/8832 Bentinck to FO tel.580 d.6 Dec.1923, mins. by Nicolson d.8 and 10 Dec.1923, Young to FO no.464 d.13 Dec.1923, tel.153 d.18 Dec.1923, no.467 d.18 Dec.1923, mins. by Aveling d.20 Dec.1923, Nicolson d.20 Dec.1923, Aveling d.29 Dec.1923; FO 371/9884 Bentinck to FO no.1018 d.27 Dec.1923, min. by Aveling d.9 Jan.1924, Young to FO no.49 d.6 Feb.1924.

²⁵ FO 371/9884 Dept. of Overseas Trade to FO ref.14255 F.E. d.14 Nov.1924, ref.14255 F.E. d.15 Dec.1924. Detailed reports from the consul in Salonica, Crow, on economic activity at that port can be found in FO 371/9894 file 6098 *passim*.

own free zone, totally encompassing the Yugoslav one and evidently designed to monopolise Salonica's trade.²⁶

It was no surprise, therefore, that stories about Yugoslav annexationist ambitions continued to emerge from the Balkan rumour mill. In June 1924 a particularly extravagant report arose detailing an alleged Yugoslav-Bulgarian plot to seize Salonica, Dedeagatch and Kavalla with the tacit support of Italy. This tale was soon denied by all concerned. Mussolini, for instance, assured Graham that it would be 'absolutely contrary to Italian interests' for him to shake 'the tottering edifice of Balkan peace', whilst Kalfoff told Erskine that his own efforts to improve Bulgaria's position would always be constrained by the limits of Neuilly. Nincic, too, was categorical in his denials: he was quite satisfied with what Yugoslavia had already obtained at Salonica and he had 'no desire to add one inch' to Yugoslav territory. The British minister, Young, was convinced that the Pasic government was concerned only with internal consolidation.²⁷

Yugoslav disavowals of any immediate territorial designs on Salonica may perhaps have been sincere, but they did not preclude longer term or less far-reaching ambitions. In early August Marcilly reported that the Yugoslavs had delivered a strongly worded note to the Greeks demanding satisfaction in the long-standing question of the nationality of about 300 individuals resident in Salonica but originating from districts transferred to Serbia after the Balkan wars. This issue appeared innocuous enough, but demonstrated that Yugoslavia would not neglect anything that might 'strengthen its interests and its position at Salonica'. Moreover, behind this issue lurked the question of the Greek Macedo-Slav population which Belgrade was eager to claim as its own. In sum, the Yugoslavs were prepared to continue the alliance with Greece, but only on making the Greeks pay a heavy price for it.²⁸ In this context the signature of the Politis-Kalfoff protocol, with all it implied

²⁶ FO 371/10771 Annual Report, Greece, 1924 p.14.

²⁷ DBFP/1/XXVI/266-8. For an earlier assurance by Nincic in the same vein, see DBFP/1/XXVI/148-9.

²⁸ MAE Grèce 78 Marcilly to QO no.176 d.2 Aug.1924.

for Yugoslav aspirations in Macedonia, must have appeared to Belgrade not so much as the last straw than as a golden opportunity, and on 14 November Belgrade denounced the alliance with Greece. The Greeks professed their 'complete surprise',²⁹ but Marcilly took this as proof of either disingenuousness or unwisdom: the Yugoslavs had been making demands of the Greeks on a whole host of issues for months, but the Greeks had as usual procrastinated - a dangerous proceeding, Marcilly observed, when the state concerned was 'a neighbour conscious of its strength and of the weakness of its opponent'.³⁰

At first, there was confusion as to the exact motive behind the denunciation and as to whether it was part of some wider intrigue. On 18 November Nincic provided Young in Belgrade with a catalogue of grievances: the Politis-Kalfoff protocol and the Hellenization of Greek Macedonia, the mismanagement of the Salonica railway and free zone, the question of the Slav families in Salonica referred to by Marcilly in August and, 'a culminating act of unfriendliness', 'the dispossession of the Serbian monastery of Saint Sava on Mount Athos of its lands'. Young was uncertain whether the denunciation was an electoral manoeuvre - an act of firmness to distract attention from internal problems - , a genuine attempt to make the Greeks more amenable in the pending questions, or the result of some Italo-Yugoslav combination. At any rate, despite Nincic's reassurance that he had no designs on Salonica and that he would renew the alliance, Young feared that the denunciation was so brusque that it must be more than simply the 'denouement of a series of unremedied grievances'.³¹ By 27 November, however, he was calmer, and had become convinced that the Politis-Kalfoff protocol was 'the real offence'. The Greeks, who of course had their own reasons for dissatisfaction with the protocol, reinforced this message, and assured London that there was no 'danger to Balkan peace'. Young's fears of an Italo-

²⁹ *DBFP/1/XXVI/398-401*. For the text of the Yugoslav note of 17 November formally denouncing the alliance and the Greek reply of 18 November, see FO 371/9897 Cheetham to FO no.716 d.27 Nov.1924. According to the treaty, six months notice had to be given for the denunciation of the alliance; failing that it would remain in force for a year from the date it was denounced (*BFSP/108/689*).

³⁰ MAE Yougoslavie 51 Marcilly to QO no.245 d.21 Nov.1924.

³¹ *DBFP/1/XXVI/398-400*; FO 371/9897 Young to FO tel.120 d.20 Nov.1924.

Yugoslav intrigue, though not dispelled entirely, also receded: the Italian minister in Belgrade, General Bodrero, an indefatigable intriguer, might have tried to get some such scheme off the ground, but there was certainly no concrete evidence of any agreement.³²

The possibility that Yugoslavia's action presaged some wider upheaval instigated by Rome had been the initial concern of the Foreign Office.³³ This worry had hardly been assuaged when Mussolini had told Graham on 20 November that he believed the alliance would never be renewed and that 'not immediately, but sooner or later, Serbia would attempt to carry into effect the designs she had always cherished regarding Salonica'; and had given the impression that Rome would not discourage this.³⁴ On the other hand, London was always sceptical about the possibility of any genuine agreement between Yugoslavia and Italy - two powers which 'hate one another like poison'³⁵ - and noted that the realisation of their designs on Albania and Salonica would involve breaking solemn treaties which was now 'no longer so simple a matter as formerly'.³⁶

The question of Italian involvement aside, the Foreign Office had firm ideas as to the root cause of Yugoslavia's action. Although London was of course to assist the Greeks in the abrogation of the Politis-Kalfoff protocol, the Foreign Office believed that 'the main cause of friction ... probably really is over the question of Salonica'.³⁷ This view was most forcefully articulated by Lampson who, spending his leave in the Balkans in October, had gained first-hand and painful experience of the condition of the Ghevgheli-Salonica railway: the whole line had been congested with goods

³² *DBFP/1/XXVI/400-1*. For Bodrero's 'accustomed bluff irresponsible manner', see, for example, *DBFP/1/XXVI/267-8* and FO 371/9897 min. by Howard Smith d.22 Nov.1924.

³³ FO 371/9897 min. by McEwen d.20 Nov.1924.

³⁴ *DBFP/1/XXVI/402*; FO 371/9897 mins. by Howard Smith d.25 Nov.1924, Lampson d.26 Nov.1924. The Romanian minister at Athens told Cheetham that, although he did not believe Italy and Yugoslavia 'were acting in concert', 'he suspected Italian instigation at Belgrade' (*DBFP/1/XXVI/403-4*). There were other indications of Italian involvement: see, for example, FO 371/9897 Young to FO tel.121 d.20 Nov.1924, min. by McEwen d.21 Nov.1924, Young to FO no.433 d.27 Nov.1924.

³⁵ FO 371/9897 min. by Lampson d.22 Nov.1924.

³⁶ FO 371/9897 min. by Crowe d.26 Nov.1924.

³⁷ *DBFP/1/XXVI/409*.

traffic, and a sixty kilometre journey on an express train had taken three and a half hours.³⁸ From the outset Lampson argued in his minutes that this was 'one of the chief bones of contention' in the dispute and that since Salonica was the natural economic outlet for the whole of Yugoslav Macedonia the Greeks would be well advised actually to provide the adequate facilities which they had promised in May 1923.³⁹ While he had no desire to interfere in Greek affairs, he feared that if this problem was not dealt with 'the trouble will ultimately not be confined to the railway question alone' and might produce 'a really critical situation ... which might even affect the peace of the Balkans'. His assessment evidently impressed Chamberlain who suggested an informal approach to the Greeks intimating that they should get a 'first class railway manager', perhaps appointed by the League, to put their railways in order; and on 27 November Lampson suggested to Cheetham in a private letter that he might wish to put the idea to Michalakopoulos informally.⁴⁰ In the event, Cheetham took no action because Michalakopoulos and Roussos were totally preoccupied with the parliamentary crisis caused by the Politis-Kalfoff protocol.⁴¹ But, on 27 November, he reported reassuringly that the Greeks were optimistic about the possibility of an agreement over Salonica and consequently the renewal of the alliance, which might even be extended to include Romania.⁴²

In the meantime the general situation in the Balkans had been temporarily disturbed by a serious communist scare, in part triggered by the recrudescence of troubles in Albania. This raised all sorts of complicated issues for London since it was not clear whether the Albanian unrest was further evidence of collusion between Yugoslavia or Italy or rather likely to set the two at odds. In addition, it was difficult to assess how far communism, either in Albania or elsewhere in the Balkans, was a genuine

³⁸ *DBFP/1/XXVI/399,409-10.*

³⁹ FO 371/9897 mins. by Lampson d.21 Nov.1924, 22 November 1924.

⁴⁰ *DBFP/1/XXVI/409-11; FO 371/9897 min. by Chamberlain d.23 Nov.1924.* A despatch from Cheetham, also of 27 November, gave details of the present state of the Salonica free zone and railway. The zone was 'at present partly under water' and inconveniently walled off from the rest of the port, whilst the railway was still afflicted by high tariffs and excessive delays (*DBFP/1/XXVI/411-4*).

⁴¹ FO 371/9897 Cheetham to Lampson p.l. d.11 Dec.1924.

⁴² *DBFP/1/XXVI/411-2.*

menace: after all, there was some evidence that Nincic was merely using the communist bogey as a pretext for intervention in Albania and for the suppression of domestic opponents.⁴³ In the end this crisis was contained: in late December there was indeed a revolution in Albania as Ahmed Zogu Bey, ousted in May 1924, returned to power, but although he did so with Yugoslav assistance the Italians, though discomfited, took no action. The communist scare also faded away after giving rise to some measure of *rapprochement* between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria symbolised by the visit of Tsankoff to Belgrade.⁴⁴

To all these events, the British reacted in their usual fashion, instructing their representatives to monitor developments closely and urging restraint on all concerned.⁴⁵ In connexion with these wider developments, there was some disagreement in London as to the implications of the Greco-Yugoslav dispute. In a circular despatch to ministers in the Balkans on 8 December Crowe explained hopefully that the Yugoslavs were actuated primarily by the 'essential grievance' of the Salonica free zone and railway and that they intended merely to remake the alliance on more favourable terms. He conceded, however, that some 'more serious and extensive object' might underlie Belgrade's action and thus urged extreme vigilance.⁴⁶ Young was unable to throw much light on this: he reported a conversation with Pasic of 10 December which consisted chiefly of a diatribe on the minorities issue, and reaffirmed his belief that the Yugoslavs did have designs, albeit long-term and at present dormant, on Greece's Aegean coast.⁴⁷

⁴³ *DBFP/1/XXVI/418-476 passim; DDI/7/III/353ff; FO 371/9897 file 17537 passim.*

⁴⁴ *DBFP/1/XXVI/452-66,468-476; DBFP/1/XXVII/1-14,37-9,50-2.* For Italo-Yugoslav relations over Albania, see also Carocci, *Politica Estera*, pp.32-40.

⁴⁵ See, for example, *DBFP/1/XXVI/419-20,424-8,448-9* and *FO 371/9897* Lampson to Fotic p.l. d.1 Jan.1925. Fotic was a Yugoslav diplomat who had once served in London but was now working in the Belgrade foreign ministry who had been Lampson's guide during his recent tour of Macedonia.

⁴⁶ *DBFP/1/XXVI/425-8.* The Yugoslav chargé in London had told Lampson on 2 December that Belgrade's 'main grievance' was Salonica, but his remarks left Lampson with the impression that the Yugoslavs were 'preparing the way for something drastic as regards both Albania and Bulgaria, but principally the former'.

⁴⁷ *DBFP/1/XXVI/433-6.*

The most alarmist view of Yugoslav intentions at the end of 1924 was taken by Nicolson, who did not 'for a moment agree that the real root of the quarrel is the bad management of Salonica'; what the Yugoslavs really wanted was 'Salonica itself. And one day they will get it'.⁴⁸ In response to a report that the Yugoslav minister in Paris had been talking up the existence of a communist conspiracy in the Balkans which might necessitate Yugoslav action, he wrote that it was 'impossible to resist the conclusion that Italy has given M.Pasic a free hand in the Balkans'.⁴⁹ His apprehensions culminated in the new year in a series of long minutes about the imminent prospect of a possible Yugoslav-Bulgarian confederation, encouraged by Italy, which would dominate the southern Balkans. This bloc would be impervious to British influence or naval pressure and would soon deprive Greece of her northern territories; moreover, it would leave British imperial communications in the eastern Mediterranean vulnerable to Italy. This apocalyptic vision was, however, not shared by his superiors: a joint Slav descent on Salonica might indeed be detrimental to British interests, but it did not seem at all likely in the near future.⁵⁰

Although Nicolson and his colleagues might disagree as to the underlying implications of the Greco-Yugoslav dispute, they were at one as regards the desirability of a speedy resolution of the Salonica transit question to eliminate Yugoslavia's ostensible grievance.⁵¹ It cannot be said, however, that their efforts to resolve the railway question met with much success. On 19 December Cheetham was again instructed to suggest the appointment of a railway adviser to the Greeks, but nothing came of this since Roussos either wilfully or accidentally missed the point, maintaining that 'difficulty is one of rolling stock, particularly engines' and raising the red herring of possible Greek purchases of locomotives from Britain.⁵² London decided that to ask the Yugoslavs to raise the possibility of a neutral railway manager

⁴⁸ FO 371/9897 min. by Nicolson d.16 Dec.1924.

⁴⁹ *DBFP*/1/XXVI/444-5; FO 371/9897 min. by Nicolson d.17 Dec.1924.

⁵⁰ *DBFP*/1/XXVI/461-3.

⁵¹ FO 371/9897 min. by Nicolson d.22 Dec.1924.

⁵² *DBFP*/1/XXVI/445,467-8; FO 371/9897 mins. by Lampson d.18 Dec.1924, Crowe d.18 Dec.1924, Howard Smith d.22 Dec.1924, Lampson d.22 Dec.1924, Crowe d.23 Dec.1924, Chamberlain d.25 Dec.1924.

with Athens might prove counter-productive, and Lampson contented himself with another letter to Cheetham.⁵³

It was with some relief, therefore, that London learned at the turn of the year that Greco-Yugoslav relations seemed to have begun to improve of their own accord. Nincic had assured Chamberlain when they met at the League Council in Rome in early December that he meant to renew the alliance with Greece,⁵⁴ and later he told Young that he would not demand anything from Greece that would infringe her sovereignty.⁵⁵ Better still, on 30 December Kaklamanos announced in the Foreign Office that preliminary discussions about the renewal of the alliance had taken place in Paris between Nincic and Venizelos. The Greeks had shown a willingness to make some concessions over Salonica and as a result of these 'most cordial' talks the two governments had decided to open formal negotiations for a new Salonica agreement and the renewal of the alliance early in the new year.⁵⁶

The French were as keen as the British to see a settlement between Greece and Yugoslavia, for the latter was still a key element in French Balkan and European policy. There was as yet no French security system in the institutionalised sense in eastern Europe, and France as yet had no formal links with the states of the Little *Entente* beyond the Franco-Czechoslovak treaty signed on 25 January 1924; France had, however, generally encouraged co-operation between these states, was interested in ties with them and recognised their potential as weapons in her anti-German and anti-revisionist armoury.⁵⁷ The Corfu crisis had pointed to a possible contradiction

⁵³ FO 371/9897 Fotic to Lampson p.l. d.18 Dec.1924, mins. by Lampson d.23 Dec.1924, Chamberlain d.25 Dec.1924, Howard Smith d.29 Dec.1924, Lampson d.30 Dec.1924, Chamberlain d.30 Dec.1924, Lampson to Fotic p.l. d.1 Jan.1925.

⁵⁴ FO 371/9897 min. by Chamberlain d.25 Dec.1925.

⁵⁵ *DBFP/1/XXVI/458-60*.

⁵⁶ *DBFP/1/XXVI/466-7*; FO 371/10771 Annual Report, Greece, 1924 pp.14-15; MAE Yougoslavie 51 QO to Grenard (Belgrade) tels.270-1 d.20 Dec.1924. The Greeks had already taken steps to lower tariffs on the railway line and to improve facilities at Salonica.

⁵⁷ The Franco-Czechoslovak treaty was quite limited, providing only for consultation over matters of joint interest and the maintenance of the peace treaties. The French had wanted also to conclude a military agreement but the Czechs had flatly refused - despite this the treaty still aroused fears of French militarism (*DBFP/1/XXIV/869-71,932-4*; *DBFP/1/XXVI/2-3,16-17,31,38-41*). The Italians responded to this French step by announcing the Pact of Rome (*DBFP/1/XXVI/25-6*) and then in July by the conclusion of a similarly anodyne Italo-Czechoslovak pact (*DBFP/1/XXVI/44-6,78,109,202-*

between this policy and French attempts to work closely with Italy, and French enthusiasm for the tripartite agreement with Italy and Yugoslavia mooted by Rome during the winter of 1923-1924 was at least partly derived from a hope that such a treaty might overcome these contradictions. The collapse of the tripartite agreement after the Pact of Rome left the French suspicious of Italy, fearful of her ambitions to undermine their influence in eastern Europe, but at the same time unwilling to abandon altogether the idea of Franco-Italian co-operation. The Pact of Rome also retarded moves towards a formalisation of Franco-Yugoslav relations: in the summer of 1924 the French prepared a draft treaty analogous to the Czechoslovak one, but the Yugoslavs would not sign it for fear of alienating the Italians, with whom they felt they could not afford to quarrel.⁵⁸ After this rebuff French enthusiasm for a bipartite agreement with Yugoslavia also waned, especially after the formulation of the Geneva protocol which held out the possibility of general security arrangements, and

3). The French eastern alliance system only really came into existence after Locarno, with the conclusion of a military convention with Czechoslovakia in October 1925 and treaties with Romania and Yugoslavia in June 1926 and November 1927 respectively (Shorrocks, *Ally to Enemy*, pp.48,300; Hovi, *Quest for Stability*, pp.120-2). These complemented the political and military arrangements which France had made with Poland during 1921 (Hovi, *Quest for Stability*, pp.119-21). It should be noted, however, that this systematisation of French links with the east was motivated at least in part by worries (or an awareness) that Locarno signified a French retreat from support for the east European settlement: see N.Jordan, 'The Cut Price War on the Peripheries: The French General Staff, The Rhineland and Czechoslovakia', in Boyce and Robertson (eds.), *Paths to War*, pp.129-31. The overall conclusion of the two key works by P.S.Wandycz, *France and Her Eastern Allies 1919-1925. French-Czechoslovak-Polish Relations from the Paris Peace Conference to Locarno* (Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press, 1962) and *Twilight of French Eastern Alliances*, is that France's attempts to create an effective eastern barrier or cohesive alliance system failed, not least because of conflicts of interest between Poland and the Little Entente and because for France this was always only one strategy amongst many for attaining security. He cites 1923-4 as the heyday of French attempts to make the alliance system a reality by forging links (especially military ones) between the Little Entente and Poland. Once this failed, France turned to Great Britain which led to Locarno and limitations upon France's commitment to eastern Europe. More work needs to be done on relations between France and the Little Entente, especially Yugoslavia and Romania, both generally and in connection with what might loosely be termed 'security policy'. Wandycz admits this in a useful article which outlines the existing literature and formulates the questions which still need to be addressed: 'The Little Entente: Sixty Years Later', *Slavonic and East European Review* 59(4) 1981 548-64. A useful Foreign Office summary of the treaties in force in eastern Europe in January 1925 is printed in *DBFP/1/XXVII/273-80*.

⁵⁸ Shorrocks, *Ally to Enemy*, pp.41-7. Shorrocks intends his work to stand as a corrective to the alleged view that after the failure of the Anglo-American guarantee France immediately turned to the small states of eastern Europe for her security; this, he argues, overlooks the strenuous efforts France made to work with Italy in the 1920s (Shorrocks, *Ally to Enemy*, pp.32-58 *passim*). Hovi agrees that these eastern alliances were of lesser importance to the French than potential ones with the United States, Great Britain, Belgium or Italy (Hovi, *Quest for Stability*, pp.123-5).

Paris concluded that although an alliance with Belgrade might still be desirable, it was now up to the Yugoslavs to take the initiative. It went without saying, however, that despite their doubts about a formal alliance the French were concerned to maintain their influence in Yugoslavia and to make Belgrade's policy conform 'to the interests of French policy, that is to say to the general interest of Europe and to the consolidation of peace'.⁵⁹

After the denunciation of the Greco-Yugoslav alliance the French moved quickly to pour oil on troubled waters. On 17 November the Greek minister in Paris informed the Quai d'Orsay of the 'small cloud' that had arisen in Greco-Yugoslav affairs, as a result of the Politis-Kaloff protocol, and requested French intervention at Belgrade.⁶⁰ The next day the Quai d'Orsay instructed Marcilly to mediate in a dispute between the Greeks and the French Salonica port company which was delaying the transfer of the free zone to the Yugoslavs and, more importantly, told the chargé in Belgrade to remind the Yugoslavs of the interest Paris attached 'to the maintenance and even to the tightening of the bonds between Yugoslavia and Greece, and the desire that we have to see promptly vanish the misunderstanding that has just arisen between these states'.⁶¹ In a long despatch Marcilly analysed the causes of the dispute and defined the French interests at stake in it. He placed the Politis-Kaloff protocol, the immediate cause of Yugoslavia's action, in the context of growing Yugoslav dissatisfaction over a long period with the terms of the alliance and Greek disregard for Yugoslav interests. The Greeks might profess to be sanguine about the prospects for a renewal of the alliance, but in reality they were 'profoundly troubled' and would have to pay a high price for a new treaty. From the French point of view, such a treaty was clearly desirable: a Salonica settlement would protect the general interest

⁵⁹ MAE Yougoslavie 51 QO to Grenard unno.tel. d.6 Dec.1924, note for the president of the council d.17 Dec.1924.

⁶⁰ MAE Grèce 78 note by Laroche d.17 Nov.1924.

⁶¹ MAE Yougoslavie 51 QO to Henry (Belgrade) tels.243-5 d.18 Nov.1924 (repeated to Athens tels.136-8).

'that we attach to safeguarding, for every eventuality, the freedom of communications through this port with the states of central Europe'.⁶²

This last consideration represented a direct and particular French interest in the dispute that was qualitatively different from the general British interest in peace and stability. The Yugoslavs certainly seem to have been aware of this. Although at one point the assistant foreign minister told the French chargé that the minorities protocol was the real cause of the dispute, a few days later Nincic himself emphasised the Salonica issue: this port was of paramount importance to the whole Little *Entente* and Poland, since in a new conflict with Germany it would be a vital supply line. By bringing matters to a head with the Greeks in order to settle this issue the Yugoslavs were, Nincic asserted, serving French interests as well as their own.⁶³ In its initial instructions in early December to the new French minister in Belgrade, Grenard, the Quai d'Orsay underlined the importance of this issue: Grenard's chief task was to work for the preservation of peace (an interest of France and Yugoslavia alike) and to consolidate French economic and political influence in Belgrade even though, for the moment, an alliance was out of the question. However, the restoration of amicable Greco-Yugoslav relations was also considered essential, for those states, for the peace of the Balkans and for France. Indeed, in view of the rôle played by Salonica in the last war, the settlement of the port and railway questions was 'an absolute necessity'.⁶⁴

To French pleas for moderation, Pasic and Nincic responded with assurances that their policy was both francophile and pacific.⁶⁵ This did not, however, remove all French anxieties, not least because for Paris the spectre of Italian intrigue always hung over Yugoslav questions. The French chargé in Belgrade, reporting rumours that Rome was stiffening the Yugoslavs against Athens, opined that the Yugoslavs

⁶² MAE Yougoslavie 51 Marcilly to QO no.245 d.21 Nov.1924; MAE Grèce 78 Marcilly to QO tel.59 d.20 Nov.1924.

⁶³ MAE Yougoslavie 51 Henry to QO no.359 d.27 Nov.1924, no.361 d.2 Dec.1924, note by Laroche d.4 Dec.1924.

⁶⁴ MAE Yougoslavie 51 QO to Grenard unno.tel. d.6 Dec.1924.

⁶⁵ MAE Yougoslavie 51 Henry to QO no.361 d.2 Dec.1924, Grenard to QO tel.106 d.15 Dec.1924.

undoubtedly coveted their own outlet on the Aegean.⁶⁶ These worries were only fuelled when in mid-December Nincic travelled for talks with Mussolini at Venice, where Italian and Yugoslav negotiators had been trying to agree a commercial treaty since October: the suspicion was that some far-reaching Adriatic-Aegean agreement covering Albania and Salonica was in the offing. The public outcome of these talks was a communiqué detailing discussions over Fiume and containing a mutual affirmation of the principle of non-intervention in Albanian affairs, but Nincic felt it politic to proceed immediately to Paris⁶⁷ to convince the French that they had no reason for anxiety. Although Herriot still suspected that the discussions had been more intimate than Nincic would admit,⁶⁸ Grenard's assessment at the end of the year was that Yugoslav policy gave no real cause for alarm. True, the activity in Albania, talks with Italy and even the visit of Tsankoff were all motivated (internal electoral considerations aside) by a desire to put pressure on Greece, but the Yugoslavs knew that their security was ultimately linked to that of France.⁶⁹

In January the Greeks continued outwardly to be hopeful that the rift with Yugoslavia would soon be healed. The Politis-Kalfoff protocol was well on the way to abrogation,⁷⁰ and information coming from Belgrade seemed more positive: Nincic's latest utterances were conciliatory and looked forward to the rapid liquidation of existing problems.⁷¹ Although negotiations could not begin until February - after the arrival of the new Yugoslav minister, Gavrilovic, in Athens and the Yugoslav elections set for 8 February - and even though the Greeks appeared ignorant of what precise demands the Yugoslavs were likely to make, they seemed confident of a successful outcome.⁷² On 29 January Kaklamanos, who was on the point of leaving for Athens to represent Greece in the negotiations, spoke cheerfully to Lampson about

⁶⁶ MAE Yougoslavie 51 Henry to QO no.359 d.27 Nov.1924.

⁶⁷ *DBFP/1/XXVI/419-20,423,425-8,431-3,436,458,460*. These negotiations were continued in Florence in 1925 and culminated in the signature at Nettuno on 20/21 July 1925 of conventions relating to the execution of the peace treaties and the Fiume settlement (*DBFP/1/XXVII/199*).

⁶⁸ MAE Yougoslavie 51 QO to De Fleuriau tel.2724 d.26 Dec.1924.

⁶⁹ MAE Yougoslavie 51 Grenard to QO tels.123-5 d.30 Dec.1924, no.384 d.31 Dec.1924.

⁷⁰ *DBFP/1/XXVII/10-11*.

⁷¹ FO 371/10767 Cheetham to FO no.19 d.12 Jan.1925.

⁷² FO 371/10767 Cheetham to FO no.13 d.8 Jan.1925; *DBFP/1/XXVII/27-8*.

the attitude Greece would adopt in the talks, remarking as he left him 'that he hoped to be back before the end of March with his treaty with Serbia in his pocket'.⁷³

This optimism ignored two substantial clouds on the horizon. In the first place, it seemed very probable that the question of the Salonica-Ghevgheli railway would prove far more intractable than the Greeks anticipated. The British proposal for the appointment of a neutral railway manager had sunk without trace in the Greek bureaucracy, and in any case, as Venizelos told Nicolson on 22 January, 'the introduction of the League at Salonica would be considered an "outrage" by the Serbian government'. Nevertheless, the Greeks recognised the necessity of improving conditions at the port and on the line. This was doubly urgent, Venizelos believed, if the Yugoslavs really did have aspirations to supplant Greece at Salonica: the next five or ten years of Hellenization and modernisation would be crucial in securing Greece's hold on her northern provinces and it was important to give the Yugoslavs no cause for complaint during this time.⁷⁴

Meanwhile, Kaklamanos told Lampson that Greece would guarantee to improve the railway line provided the Yugoslav company which held shares in it would sell them to the Greeks in order to remove any doubts about its ownership and control. He was confident that, so long as the Greeks offered a sufficiently generous sum for the shares, the Yugoslavs would prove amenable.⁷⁵ Rumours from Belgrade, however, indicated that the Yugoslavs were in fact likely to demand administrative control over the railway even though it was in Greek territory.⁷⁶ A Foreign Office investigation into the legal position arising from Yugoslav ownership of the shares concluded that although the situation was very complex and obscure, the Yugoslavs probably derived no concrete rights from them. Nevertheless, the lengths to which they had gone to

⁷³ *DBFP/1/XXVII/52-4.*

⁷⁴ *DBFP/1/XXVII/27-31.* As Nicolson put it, the Yugoslavs did 'not want the League to be represented in any quarters which they consider to be a Serb preserve' (FO 371/10766 min. by Nicolson d.12 Jan.1925).

⁷⁵ *DBFP/1/XXVII/52-3.*

⁷⁶ FO 371/10766 Young to FO no.15 d.14 Jan.1925, tel.11 d.23 Jan.1925; MAE Yougoslavie 51 Grenard to QO no.4 d.15 Jan.1925.

acquire them pointed to a determination to control the line, with ominous implications for Greece, and Young predicted that this would 'form the crucial point of the negotiations'.⁷⁷ Nicolson asked Venizelos what he would do if the Yugoslavs made the renewal of the alliance conditional on the cession of the railway. Venizelos at first dismissed this possibility, but then 'looked glum, and murmured something about Greece not being a vassal of Serbia'.⁷⁸

The second potential difficulty was the attitude of Italy and the state of Italo-Yugoslav relations. This relationship was important, because of its implications for the extent of Yugoslav ambitions at Salonica, but also unfathomable, because of conflicting accounts emanating from the parties involved. When Nincic met Venizelos in Paris late in December, he apparently admitted that the Italians had been trying to direct the Yugoslavs towards Salonica and to arrange a partition of Albania. The Yugoslavs had, of course, resisted these enticements but, for the sake of Italian susceptibilities, had agreed that the new treaty with Greece would not 'in any form be aimed against Italy' and would therefore apply only to the Balkans. Venizelos had accepted this, not least because he too desired good relations with Italy, Greece's 'powerful and unscrupulous neighbour'.⁷⁹ The Italians, for their part, protested their innocence to the British: early in January, for example, General Bodrero confided in Young his shock at Yugoslavia's recent recklessness in Albania and his alarm at Yugoslav intentions towards Greece in general and Salonica in particular.⁸⁰

This plot thickened later in the month. In a long conversation with Young at the annual Saint Sava ball on 27 January, King Alexander spoke of his recent trip with

⁷⁷ FO 371/10766 Young to FO tel.8 d.10 Jan.1925 and mins., FO to Crewe no.179 d.14 Jan.1925, Young to FO no.15 d.14 Jan.1925 [quoted] and mins., Cheetham to FO no.40 d.30 Jan.1925, Phipps (Paris) to FO no.273 d.2 Feb.1925, Cheetham to FO no.75 d.20 Feb.1925 and mins. This legal question was complex because it involved a whole host of treaties and agreements dating back to the original railway concessions granted by the Porte in the 1860s. The information was eventually collated in a memorandum which went through various drafts during the year. See, for example, FO 371/10766 memorandum by Harvey d.2 Oct.1925.

⁷⁸ FO 371/10766 min. by Nicolson d.24 Jan.1925.

⁷⁹ *DBFP/1/XXVII/29*. It goes without saying that the veracity and sincerity of any statement supposedly uttered by Nincic and then reported by Venizelos to a third party is open to question.

⁸⁰ FO 371/10766 Young to FO no.5 d.5 Jan.1925.

Nincic to Paris, asserting that Romano Avezana had 'made proposals ... to the effect that the time was coming, or was very near, for a partition of Albania'. The king described this as 'a rank breach of faith', and emphasised his determination 'to allow no non-Balkan state to set foot in the Balkans' and to maintain Albania as an independent and viable state.⁸¹ Young's report hardly tallies, however, with Avezana's record of his conversation with Alexander, according to which it was the king who had raised this controversial subject and given a 'discreet hint' as to the desirability of an Albanian partition.⁸² Later, the king changed his story and claimed that it was General Bodrero who had suggested this move, but again the Italian record of the conversation concerned casts the king himself in the rôle of agitator against Albania.⁸³

This was not the only manifestation of disingenuousness on the part of the Yugoslav sovereign. It was perhaps only to be expected that the Yugoslavs, as part of their balancing act between France and Italy, should speak in very different tones to representatives of each about their fundamental sympathies, but the king's fulsome evocation of Italo-Yugoslav intimacy in his talks with Avezana and Bodrero would certainly have caused raised eyebrows at the Quai d'Orsay.⁸⁴ More to the point, Alexander's conversations with the Italians cast a different light on the nature of Yugoslavia's ambitions in the Aegean. On a previous visit to Paris in December 1923, he had already, while giving the 'most satisfactory assurances in regard to Salonica' to the French, taken no pains to hide his aspirations there from Avezana;⁸⁵ so now, in

⁸¹ *DBFP/1/XXVII/46-8.*

⁸² *DDI/7/III/410-2.*

⁸³ *DBFP/1/XXVII/60; DDI/7/III/412-5.* King Alexander certainly seems to have relished diplomatic intrigue. Later on at the Saint Sava ball he repeated to Bodrero the fears he had expressed to Young about Italian ambitions in Albania, but this time he presented them as Young's own views! Bodrero reported this to Rome, which caused Contarini to protest to Graham at the imputation of Italian bad faith. Young regretted that the Italians could not be told all without 'giving the King away and his little game', but Alexander evidently realised that he had placed Young in a predicament since he later apologised (*DBFP/1/XXVII/46-9,56-7,59-60; DDI/7/III/426-7*).

⁸⁴ *DDI/7/III/410-5.* The usual Yugoslav line with France was that the interests of Paris and Belgrade were so close that a formal alliance was unnecessary. See, for example, MAE Yougoslavie 51 Grenard to QO tels.51-3 d.3 Mar.1925.

⁸⁵ *DBFP/1/XXVI/36,436; DDI/7/II/334-7.*

talking to Bodrero he had explicitly stated Yugoslavia's intention 'to expand [*tendere*] towards the Aegean'.⁸⁶

Certainly, the realisation of these ambitions would require Italian acquiescence if not support, but it was by no means clear that this would be forthcoming. Early in February the British intercepted a report from the Czech minister in Belgrade, who was considered to be particularly well informed, pointing to the existence of

a policy of double dealing in the Balkans on the part of Italy. On the one hand, in anticipation of future conflicts with Greece, Italy is making every effort to force Yugoslavia to direct her attention on Salonica, while, on the other hand and with a view to complicating the Balkan situation in her own interests, she is recommending Greece to take all precautionary measures to resist Yugoslav Imperialism.

Bodrero, the Czech minister reported, was confident that he had 'succeeded in his task and declared that in the near future Yugoslavia would undoubtedly develop a 'Vardar' policy towards the Aegean'.⁸⁷ The Foreign Office gave much credence to this analysis of the essentially ambiguity of Italian policy:

The Italians are of course strongly anti-Greek: it is a question of competition in the Mediterranean: at the same time they are really anything but pro-Serb, as is almost inevitable in view of their aspiration to make the Adriatic an Italian lake.

In Lampson's words, 'any true Italo-Serb cooperation is unlikely'.⁸⁸

The auguries for the negotiations, meanwhile, were far less favourable than Greek optimists imagined. Even if Yugoslav aspirations towards Salonica were for the moment merely projects in King Alexander's mind, it was evident that the Yugoslavs were conscious of Greek weakness - as Alexander put it, the alliance would in effect be an 'exclusively unilateral obligation' - and would demand a heavy price for a new

⁸⁶ *DDI/7/III/411,413*. This was not in their conversation at the ball, but in a talk they had had some time earlier in Venice, when Alexander had been met by Bodrero as he returned from his visit to Paris.

⁸⁷ *DBFP/1/XXVII/91-2*.

⁸⁸ FO 371/10796 min. by Lampson d.10 Feb.1925. Bateman added his own opinion that Bodrero was 'an unscrupulous and indiscreet individual who exerts a sinister influence both on King Alexander and the Serb Gov[ernmen]t' (min. by Bateman d.10 Feb.1925).

treaty. It was also increasingly apparent that the Salonica-Ghevgheli railway would be the focus of their claims.⁸⁹ At the same time, it seemed that the Italians, even if their attitude was still obscure, were very unlikely to be helpful. Precisely how they would meddle was not obvious, but it was almost certain that meddle they would. In the spring of 1925 Italian foreign policy was moving into a new, more active phase after Mussolini's successful reassertion of his authority within Italy in the wake of the Matteotti affair. An inkling of this trend came with an Anglo-Italian quarrel over oil concessions in Albania in February⁹⁰, and it was scarcely possible that a reassertion of Italian policy abroad would leave Greece and Yugoslavia unaffected.

A preliminary round of Greco-Yugoslav negotiations in Athens in late February-early March passed off smoothly enough, but only because the crucial issues were not addressed. A draft military convention - aimed essentially against Bulgaria and Turkey and limited to the Balkans - was easily agreed, and the Greeks also conceded a key Yugoslav demand for the 'right of importing arms and munitions of war through Greek territory in case of hostilities not involving [the] casus feoderis'. The general question of the Salonica-Ghevgheli railway was not, however, discussed: the Greeks had simply announced that they could not allow their 'full rights' in the line to be questioned, and Gavrilovic, evidently reluctant to show his hand, had said that 'he could not define his attitude at the present stage since experts at Belgrade must first be consulted'. This was ominous, but the very inconclusiveness of the talks permitted continued optimism. While Gavrilovic stressed Yugoslavia's vital need for a Salonica settlement, he insisted that Greek sovereignty would not be wounded and that Belgrade would seek only 'reasonable concessions ... in return for alliance vital to

⁸⁹ *DDI/7/III/411*; MAE Yougoslavie 51 Grenard to QO no.4 d.15 Jan.1925. It is, of course, possible that Alexander's exposition of Yugoslavia's Aegean ambitions to the Italians was itself merely a tactical manoeuvre.

⁹⁰ Cassels, *Early Diplomacy*, pp.241-8,259-61,315-9. For Mussolini's move onto the offensive on the domestic front, including his key speech of 3 January 1925, see Mack Smith, *Mussolini*, pp.92-108. Albanian matters, including the question of oil concessions, are documented in *DBFP/1/XXVII/60-247 passim* and *DDI/7/III/434ff. passim*. See also pp.244-5 above. The Italians recovered from the initial shock of Ahmed Zogu's seizure of power in Albania by adopting a forward policy and working very hard in 1925 to draw both him and his country into their orbit: see, for example, *DBFP/1/XXVII/235-7* and *DBFP/1a/I/291*.

Greece'. Kaklamanos remained wildly optimistic as usual, telling Cheetham that the Yugoslavs 'had no objection to purchase of shares of Ghevgheli line by Greeks' and that the negotiations 'might even be concluded this month'.⁹¹

In fact, the negotiations were not resumed until late April, and in the meantime the Yugoslav attitude hardened. For a while this was obscured when the Romanians floated the idea of a tripartite Balkan bloc in which they would participate with the Greeks and Yugoslavs: apparently they hoped to gain access to the facilities of Salonica, to cement the territorial *status quo* in the region and to place an obstacle in the way of any future German *Drang nach Osten*. However, although this scheme was never really a viable prospect, the fact that Nincic opposed it because he felt that it would 'accord too great an importance' to Greece⁹² was indicative of a general stiffening of views in Belgrade. In mid-March, Gavrilovic gave an optimistic statement to the press, predicting the conclusion of the negotiations by April and the accession of Greece to the Little *Entente*, but he was immediately forced by his chief to issue a *démenti*.⁹³ At the same time, Nincic told the Belgrade correspondent of the *Times* that the Yugoslavs could never think of selling their rights in the Salonica rail line, so vital was it for their economic existence and as a supply route for war *matériel*.⁹⁴ This attitude was maintained into April, and on the eve of the re-opening of the negotiations Nincic's deputy told Young that Yugoslav control of the line was now a minimum *sine qua non* if Greece wished to enjoy the benefits of a defensive alliance with Yugoslavia.⁹⁵ An impasse thus seemed almost inevitable, since the

⁹¹ DBFP/1/XXVII/113-4.

⁹² DBFP/1/XXVII/138-40; FO 371/10767 Young to FO no.128 d.16 Apr.1925 and mins.; MAE Grèce 78 De Billy to QO no.59 d.19 Mar.1925, QO to Ministère de Guerre no.668 d.21 Mar.1925 [quoted], Chambrun to QO tel.40 d.2 Apr.1925; MAE Yougoslavie 51 Grenard to QO tel.68 d.17 Mar.1925, De Billy to QO no.68 d.29 Mar.1925. According to Grenard, the Romanians also wanted to prevent Greece falling too much under Yugoslav influence, but the scheme collapsed because they demanded a restoration of the monarchy in Greece as the price for their support (MAE Yougoslavie 51 Grenard to QO tels.103-4 d.25 Apr.1925.

⁹³ FO 371/10767 Young to FO no.96 d.19 Mar.1925; MAE Yougoslavie 51 Grenard to QO tel.68 d.17 Mar.1925.

⁹⁴ FO 371/10767 Young to FO no.96 d.19 Mar.1925.

⁹⁵ FO 371/10767 Young to FO tel.34 d.20 Apr.1925.

Greeks were still adamant that they could never admit Yugoslav pretensions to control the railway.⁹⁶

The Greeks' worst fears were realised when the negotiations proper began in Belgrade on 27 April. At first the Greek government tried to forestall the Yugoslavs by explicitly declaring that it had to retain control over the administration of the line, but the reluctance of the Yugoslavs to respond was more ominous than reassuring. Kaklamanos 'foresaw that the obnoxious demand would be made', especially as the Yugoslavs had already unexpectedly asked for 'the enlargement of the Salonica free zone by an area of no less than 38,000 square metres'.⁹⁷ For a fortnight, continued Yugoslav reticence permitted a slight raising of Greek spirits,⁹⁸ but by the end of the month all illusions had been dispelled. On 26 May Nincic told the new British minister in Belgrade, Kennard, that the Yugoslavs had claimed the administration of the railway and that there was 'no likelihood of an early conclusion of the negotiations'.⁹⁹ In fact, the Yugoslavs had demanded not merely administrative control over the line - including all stations and personnel - but also 'the right of supplying police and customs officials on the land traversed by the railway'. In other words, this land 'would be considered as Serbian territory, the station at Salonica thus becoming a frontier station'. The Greeks considered this demand for a territorial corridor - which went far beyond the economic concessions they were prepared to grant - to be totally incompatible with their sovereign rights, and on 1 June the negotiations were adjourned *sine die*.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ FO 371/10766 Cheetham to FO no.129 d.16 Apr.1925 and mins.

⁹⁷ DBFP/1/XXVII/176-8; FO 371/10767 Young to FO tel.52 d.6 May 1925; A.J.Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs 1926* (London, Oxford University Press/Humphrey Milford, 1928), p.168.

⁹⁸ FO 371/10767 Cheetham to FO tel.83 d.12 May 1925, no.154 d.15 May 1925; MAE Yougoslavie 51 Grenard to QO tels.131-3 d.17 May 1925.

⁹⁹ DBFP/1/XXVII/190-3. Kennard took up his post on 25 May 1925.

¹⁰⁰ DBFP/1/XXVII/196-200; Toynbee, *Survey 1926*, pp.168-170. The Yugoslavs embodied their demands in a draft railway convention (FO 371/10767 Kennard to FO no.186 d.5 Jun.1925 and encl.). This, McEwen argued, could leave the Greeks with no 'illusions as to the nature of Serb aspirations respecting Salonika', and Nicolson felt that the Yugoslav demands were ones which 'no Greek government or Greek Assembly could possibly grant without sacrificing their independence'(FO 371/10767 min. by McEwen d.10 Jun.1925, min. by Nicolson d.11 Jun.1925).

In retrospect this outcome was wholly predictable: during May Nincic had become increasingly frank about his desire to redefine Greco-Yugoslav relations to reflect more accurately the strength of the respective parties. On 5 May he told Grenard that the Greeks had nothing to offer as allies - they would 'always turn their backs on danger'¹⁰¹ - and on 26 May he made a similar point to Kennard: 'Serbia had no need of Greek military assistance' which in any case would not amount to much, but 'must have some tangible *quid pro quo* for the military assistance which [she] would have to render to Greece under any new alliance'.¹⁰² It was Nincic's desire to see the balance of power between Greece and Yugoslavia reflected in the alliance which was really at stake in the negotiations, and in a sense the specific points at issue were simply the means by which he hoped to achieve this end. He had good reason to emphasise the railway question: the lamentable condition of the line was universally acknowledged, and the interest of other states of eastern Europe in its traffic meant that Yugoslav stubbornness could be portrayed as altruism.¹⁰³ This was certainly the best issue to bring the negotiations to a head: the Greeks had conceded on every minor issue and had very good reasons¹⁰⁴ to reject the Yugoslav demand for the signature of a minorities convention analogous to the Politis-Kalfoff protocol. At any event, whether the Yugoslavs had sought to engineer the adjournment of the talks or not, it was obvious that they were in no real hurry 'to renew the alliance unless they obtain the concessions they desire'.¹⁰⁵ They were determined to exact what they saw as a fair price, and it remained a matter of speculation whether, as part of a deal, they in fact intended ultimately 'to get Salonika'.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ MAE Yougoslavie 51 Grenard to QO tels.114-6 d.5 May 1925.

¹⁰² DBFP/1/XXVII/191-2.

¹⁰³ After the breakdown of negotiations, Kennard wrote that the general impression amongst his colleagues was that 'the Jugoslav delegates have opened their mouths somewhat too wide', but that they were 'fully justified' in seeking to improve trade links with Salonica, for their own sake and for that of Romania, Czechoslovakia and Poland (DBFP/1/XXVII/198).

¹⁰⁴ DBFP/1/XXVII/191-2,196-8. The Greeks argued that the minorities treaties were sufficient to protect the interests of all minorities in Greece and that minority questions concerned only individual states and the League. This was, of course, both legally quite correct and in line with the argument that they were simultaneously advancing at Geneva to secure the annulment of the Politis-Kalfoff protocol. See above pp.302-5.

¹⁰⁵ DBFP/1/XXVII/198.

¹⁰⁶ FO 371/10767 min. by McEwen d.5 Jun.1925.

The British viewed all this with detached resignation. They had long believed that the Greeks were likely to be forced to choose between the alliance and the railway, and so there was little surprise when this situation actually materialised.¹⁰⁷ At the same time, they were somewhat irritated by the insouciance of the Greeks: by not taking steps to improve the running of the line (for example, by heeding the British suggestion of a neutral manager) they had given the Yugoslavs a legitimate grievance, and by allowing Yugoslav capitalists to buy up the shares in the railway, they had given Belgrade a peg upon which to hang a claim to control it.¹⁰⁸ There was, however, no question of British intervention. This could do little good. Howard Smith warned that Yugoslavia, 'the coming great power in the Balkans', was determined to get control of the railway: British intervention 'would only earn for us Serb enmity in the future'.¹⁰⁹ Lampson similarly favoured abstention: 'If Greece does not get her alliance with Serbia it is mainly her own affair', even though he admitted that this might bring in its wake 'Balkan reactions of the usual type'.¹¹⁰

As the full extent of the impasse became clear British abstentionism was confirmed. The Yugoslavs had the whip-hand, McEwen declared on 22 May, and were determined eventually to get Salonica. Even if the Greeks improved the railway the Yugoslavs would 'not be long in finding a fresh grievance to take the place of the old', since 'the Serbian wolf is not now in a mood to listen to excuses, however convincing, from the Greek lamb'.¹¹¹ In this situation, Chamberlain decided, Britain should remain as aloof as possible, and should aim, if the situation became acute, to put the whole dispute in the hands of the League.¹¹² Thus when on 27 May Chamberlain was

¹⁰⁷ *DBFP/1/XXVII/177*. 'We have foreseen this all along. I warned [Kaklamanos] before he left that the Serbs were likely to open their mouths pretty wide' (FO 371/10767 min. by Lampson d.7 May 1925).

¹⁰⁸ *DBFP/1/XXVII/178,189*.

¹⁰⁹ FO 371/10767 min. by Howard Smith d.13 May 1925.

¹¹⁰ FO 371/10767 min. by Lampson d.14 May 1925.

¹¹¹ FO 371/10767 memorandum by McEwen d.22 May 1925.

¹¹² FO 371/10767 min. by Chamberlain d.26 May 1925. The Foreign Office was agreed that the question should be transferred to the League if a crisis arose, even though Nicolson for one thought this would not please the Yugoslavs. Tyrrell wrote that this should be done 'as we did in the case of Corfu', an analogy which would scarcely have cheered the Greeks (FO 371/10767 mins. by Nicolson d.25 May 1925, Lampson d.25 May 1925 and Tyrrell d.26 May 1925).

urged by the Greek chargé to 'express a hope to the Serbian government that the negotiations would not be broken off', he declined on the grounds that this would not contribute to a settlement.¹¹³ Similarly, Kennard was instructed to keep his distance from Kaklamanos, and to avoid giving any impression that Britain was ready to take a hand in the negotiations.¹¹⁴ At the last moment, when the talks were about to collapse, Chamberlain relented somewhat, and began to consider a joint Anglo-French approach to Belgrade ('we owe Greece something'),¹¹⁵ but this never materialised and the policy of non-intervention was maintained.

An assessment of whether any wider British interests were at stake in the dispute seemed to confirm the wisdom of this policy of inactivity. Britain was obviously concerned with the maintenance of peace in the Balkans, but in a memorandum of 22 May McEwen identified another possible consideration: the change in the Mediterranean balance of power that would follow a Yugoslav acquisition of Salonica.¹¹⁶ Nicolson seized on this to revive the fears of a Slav domination of the Aegean which he had expressed earlier in the year. If the Greeks lost Salonica, he argued, they would soon lose western Thrace too; and this would lead to a new refugee crisis, Greek bankruptcy and serious damage to British commercial and financial interests. More importantly, if Salonica fell into the hands 'of a strong military power comparatively immune to naval pressure, our influence in the Mediterranean will have suffered a serious rebuff'.¹¹⁷ This was evidently an extreme

¹¹³ *DBFP/1/XXVII/189-90*. In a briefing paper Nicolson had made the point that British influence would count for little in Belgrade, since the Yugoslavs wanted nothing from Britain but wanted Salonica very badly. An appeal to the League might also achieve little for the Greeks, since it would just antagonise the Yugoslavs and be blocked by France and Italy (FO 371/10767 min. by Nicolson d.27 May 1925).

¹¹⁴ FO 371/10767 min. by Nicolson d.30 May 1925, FO to Kennard tel.56 d.30 May 1925; *DBFP/1/XXVII/196*.

¹¹⁵ FO 371/10767 Kennard to FO tel.83 d.30 May 1925, mins. by McEwen d.2 Jun.1925 and Chamberlain d.2 Jun.1925.

¹¹⁶ FO 371/10767 memorandum by McEwen d.22 May 1925.

¹¹⁷ FO 371/10767 mins. by Nicolson d.27 May 1925.

view, but Nicolson's superiors gave it enough credence to ask the Admiralty for their views.¹¹⁸

By the time the Admiralty replied the negotiations had broken down, but in any case the navy evidently did not share Nicolson's alarm. The chief of the naval staff, Lord Beatty, argued that in a general sense a strong Greece was desirable as a counterweight to Italy and that therefore the preservation of the *status quo* was in British interests. However, he felt that it was fairly irrelevant who actually owned Salonica, as long as it was not in the hands of one of the great powers.¹¹⁹ Nicolson protested that this missed the point that to all intents and purposes Yugoslavia was a great power in the Balkan region, and certainly one impervious to British naval pressure,¹²⁰ but Lampson had the last word. If Salonica were to pass to Yugoslavia by peaceful agreement with Greece, then 'we could hardly object', however desirable it might be that the *status quo* should be maintained. If, on the other hand, 'Salonica were seized by force then there would be a threat to the peace of the world and we should all of us (including the League in its corporate capacity) be concerned'.¹²¹

Unlike the British, the French were prepared to consider intervention. As Grenard told Young in April, although the French like the Yugoslavs had an interest in the efficient running of the Salonica railway, they would nevertheless insist on adequate guarantees for Greek sovereignty.¹²² He repeated exactly this message to Nincic during the negotiations in May, but despite Greek hopes that French pressure would hasten an agreement, it proved of no avail and the Yugoslavs continued to pose their 'harsh conditions'.¹²³ This pained the French who sympathised with Greek arguments that the continued deadlock would both destabilise the region and undermine the

¹¹⁸ FO 371/10767 mins. by Chamberlain d.26 May 1925, and Tyrrell d.27 May 1925, Hankey to Tyrrell unno.1. d.29 May 1925, Nicolson to Hankey unno.1. d.2 Jun.1925, Hankey to Nicolson unno.1. 3 Jun.1925.

¹¹⁹ FO 371/10767 Hankey to Lampson unno.1. d.9 Jun.1925 and encls.

¹²⁰ FO 371/10767 min. by Nicolson d.12 Jun.1925.

¹²¹ FO 371/10767 min. by Lampson d.13 Jun.1925.

¹²² FO 371/10767 Young to FO no.128 d.16 Apr.1925.

¹²³ MAE Yougoslavie 51 Grenard to Paris tels.131-3 d.17 May 1925, Chambrun to Paris tels.62-3 d.23 May 1925.

republican regime in Greece. Moreover, as Kaklamanos argued, Yugoslav policy over Salonica was very short-sighted: as the last war had shown, it would do the Little *Entente* no good to have a hostile Greece in their rear. 'It will be no use at all to Serbia to hold the railway and the port of Salonica if the Greek fleet controls the sea and blockades the port'.¹²⁴

Kaklamanos' appeal for intervention was heeded by Paris. On 2 June Grenard was instructed to express French disquiet at the hitch in the negotiations and the fact that Yugoslavia's 'unacceptable conditions' were the chief obstacle to agreement,¹²⁵ whereupon he reminded Nincic of the importance of the alliance, and suggested 'that the Yugoslav pretensions as regards the Salonica line were unduly exorbitant and that it would be wise to modify them and show a generally more conciliatory attitude'. Nincic's reply was, however, evasive and merely repeated familiar arguments about Greek weakness; and in any case by this time the negotiations had already been adjourned. Grenard was, nevertheless, hopeful that French representations might be renewed later to greater effect, and Nincic did at least assure him that the suspension of the talks would not signify any rupture in relations.¹²⁶

The rôle played by the Italians in the negotiations was the subject of intense speculation. Throughout the talks the Greeks discerned the malign hand of Italy at work behind the scenes, striving to prevent any *rapprochement* between Greece and Yugoslavia.¹²⁷ Indeed, they managed to instil in the British 'a suspicion amounting almost to certainty' that Italy was backing Yugoslavia.¹²⁸ After the breakdown of the talks, the Greeks continued to plough this same furrow, arguing that Italy had 'played

¹²⁴ MAE Yougoslavie 51 Chambrun to QO tels.62-3 d.23 May 1925, Grenard to Paris tels.152-4 d.30 May 1925.

¹²⁵ MAE Yougoslavie 51 QO to Grenard tel.125 d.2 Jun.1925.

¹²⁶ *DBFP*/1/XXVII/196; MAE Yougoslavie 51 Grenard to Paris tels.156-9 d.3 Jun.1925, no.127 d.4 Jun.1925. The British speculated that the French were 'possibly rather alarmed at the singleness of purpose displayed by the Serbs over the question of Salonika' (FO 371/10767 min. by McEwen d.2 Jun.1925).

¹²⁷ MAE Yougoslavie 51 Chambrun to QO tel.58 d.7 May 1925, Grenard to QO tels.152-4 d.30 May 1925.

¹²⁸ FO 371/10767 memorandum by McEwen d.22 May 1925.

the rôle of "Mephistopheles". Nor was it just the British who found this idea plausible: Grenard too was

under the impression that the Italian government had used their influence with a view to bringing about a rupture of these negotiations, though he had no evidence in support of this supposition. It was, however, generally the policy of Italy to prevent, if possible, any understandings between the Balkan Governments, and he had no doubt that she had acted in accordance with that policy in the present case.¹²⁹

Grenard was doubtless confirmed in this analysis by dark hints from Nincic that Italy (and Bulgaria) had promised Belgrade liberty of action in the Salonica question.¹³⁰ Unfortunately but perhaps predictably, the published Italian documents throw little light on this matter and betray little beyond a lively general concern at the possibility of the creation of a bloc of Balkan states based around a nucleus of Greece and Yugoslavia.¹³¹

The Greeks may or may not have been sincere in painting a black picture of Italian policy, and this picture may or may not have been accurate. At the same time, it is clear that Italian policy and Greek attitudes towards Italy were not free from ambiguity: whilst the Greeks were at odds with Yugoslavia and blaming Rome, they also saw the utility of trying to cultivate better relations with the Italians. In retrospect, British observers argued that ever since the denunciation of the alliance Michalakopoulos had perceived the potential value of Italy as a counter-weight to hostile Yugoslavia, and these realist calculations had begun to overcome the Greeks' acquired antipathy towards Italy. Simultaneously, the Italians were attempting to ingratiate themselves with Athens: in the spring Italian diplomats became more active there and their work bore fruit with the visit of an Italian fleet to Navarino and Salonica in mid-May.¹³² True, talk of a genuine or lasting *rapprochement* was still premature, but Michalakopoulos made clear that he was prepared to turn Italian

¹²⁹ DBFP/1/XXVII/196-8; MAE Yougoslavie 51 Chambrun to QO tel.70 d.2 Jun.1925; FO 371/10767 Kennard to FO tel.87 d.2 Jun.1925.

¹³⁰ MAE Yougoslavie 51 Grenard to QO tels.131-3 d.17 May 1925, no.127 d.4 Jun.1925.

¹³¹ DDI/7/III/530-1,535.

¹³² FO 371/11357 Annual Report, Greece, 1925 pp.24-6.

intrigue to his advantage if Yugoslavia maintained an unfriendly attitude. Thus he told Young cryptically on 15 May that 'if it were necessary [for Greece] to become a satellite, he would choose a stronger power than Serbia'.¹³³ This very language was repeated to Chambrun after the suspension of the negotiations in June,¹³⁴ and the British chargé in Athens was struck by Michalakopoulos' admiration for the Italians, and the 'great efforts' being made by them 'to repair their position here'. The general feeling in Athens, he noted, seemed to be that if Greece could not have the Yugoslav alliance she would either do without it or find 'new friends'.¹³⁵ This foreshadowed the next phase of this dispute when the great powers were to become much more actively involved and the whole issue was to become entangled with the bigger questions in European international relations.

¹³³ FO 371/10767 Cheetham to FO no.154 d.15 May 1925.

¹³⁴ MAE Yougoslavie 51 Chambrun to QO no.68 d.9 Jun.1925.

¹³⁵ FO 371/10767 Keeling to FO no.177 d.5 Jun.1925.

Chapter Twelve

Greece, Yugoslavia and the Search for a Balkan Locarno

June 1925 - August 1926

In the wake of the adjournment of the Greco-Yugoslav negotiations, the three *Entente* powers all became more actively involved in the dispute. In the van were the Italians, if only by virtue of the increasing intimacy developing between Rome and Athens - albeit an intimacy that some Greeks viewed with misgivings. On 17 June Kaklamanos, while he blamed Nincic personally for Yugoslav intransigence, lamented to Nicolson that the hitch in the negotiations would give encouragement to the militarist party at Athens and charged Bodrero with having 'left no stone unturned to envenom the relations between Greece and Serbia'.¹ A week later, Michalakopoulos alluded to Italy's selfish motives: Rome wanted to prevent the formation of any Balkan combination and, specifically, 'to isolate Greece, in order that she might be induced to fall in with Italian ambitions in Asia Minor'.² Certainly, great efforts were being made by Italian diplomats to increase their influence at Athens, and the rise to power of Pangalos - at least in part facilitated by the recent foreign policy setback³ - in no way hindered them. Indeed, the visit to Athens on 7 July of Dino Grandi, a key Italian foreign policy-maker, seemed to indicate that Greco-Italian relations were about to enter a new and more cordial phase.⁴

The rise of Pangalos and the growing *détente* between Rome and Athens could not but have an impact on Yugoslav policy. At first, some feared that the Yugoslavs might react strongly, and take advantage of Greece's internal convulsions to march on Salonica. Kennard, for example, warned that the new found haste of the Radical party to come to terms with the Croats (in negotiations for a coalition) might reflect a desire to free their hands for such an external adventure.⁵ The Foreign Office was, however, not persuaded that the Yugoslavs would go so far as to defy the powers and launch an attack on Greece,⁶ and soon Kennard was reporting that the Yugoslavs were more

¹ DBFP/1/XXVII/205-6.

² DBFP/1/XXVII/208-9.

³ FO 371/10768 min. by McEwen d.29 Jun.1925.

⁴ DBFP/1/XXVII/209-10,212-3; FO 371/11357 Annual Report, Greece, 1925 p.25. See also pp.138-40 above.

⁵ DBFP/1/XXVII/210; FO 371/10768 Kennard to Nicolson p.l. d.26 Jun.1925, min. by Howard Smith d.29 Jun.1925.

⁶ FO 371/10768 mins. by Howard Smith, Nicolson and Lampson d.30 Jun.1925.

likely to use Greece's political instability simply as a further argument for their acquiring control of the Salonica railway.⁷

However, it soon became apparent that recent developments were breeding insecurity rather than confidence in Belgrade. By the middle of July the Yugoslavs were seriously alarmed at reports of Italian military preparations in the Trieste area and came to believe that some 'rash foreign adventure' in the Balkans was being contemplated. They did not necessarily expect to be the victims of such an adventure, but their relations with Italy had clearly recently taken a turn for the worse, and the coincidence of this with the Greco-Italian *rapprochement* was obviously causing concern.⁸ From mid-June onwards, therefore, Nincic's declarations to Kennard struck a newly conciliatory note, emphasising Belgrade's lack of territorial designs and determination, after a cooling-off period, to renew the alliance;⁹ and the most dramatic evidence of this Yugoslav change of heart came with Belgrade's response to a French initiative aiming to break the deadlock over the Ghevgheli-Salonica railway.

This initiative had originated with De Fleuriau in London who early in June had suggested the formation of a new independent company to administer the line and provide the efficient service the Yugoslavs demanded whilst not infringing Greek sovereignty. He envisaged the participation of foreign capital in this company which would permit the installation of some neutral, preferably French, individual at its head. The idea evidently appealed to Briand, who on 11 June instructed Grenard to take 'energetic and insistent' action to press the scheme upon the Yugoslavs and facilitate a resumption of negotiations.¹⁰ At first Grenard met with a cool response, Nincic arguing that the scheme would not provide sufficient guarantees for Yugoslav interests and that in any case he did not favour further negotiations before the actual

⁷ DBFP/1/XXVII/210.

⁸ DBFP/1/XXVII/214-6,219-20. The Yugoslav minister in Rome attributed the decline in Italo-Yugoslav relations to Mussolini now being 'more in the hands of extremists and ultra-nationalist wing of his followers' (DBFP/1/XXVII/219). The Foreign Office did not believe that Italian aspirations to play a leading rôle in the Balkans would lead them into adventure, and Lampson later minuted that 'it was a pity that Mr. Kennard started this hare' (FO 371/10695 min. by Lampson d.22 Jul.1925).

⁹ FO 371/10768 Kennard to FO tel.95 d.17 Jun.1925, no.233 d.30 Jun.1925.

¹⁰ MAE Yougoslavie 52 QO to Grenard tels.134-8 d.11 Jun.1925.

expiry of the treaty in November.¹¹ After the Pangalos *coup*, however, Nincic began to change his tune and on 16 July, when the scare about Italian military preparations was at its height, he told Grenard that he accepted the French suggestion and that, in order to 'cut short Italian intrigues', he proposed to resume negotiations with the Greeks as soon as possible.¹²

The French now hastened to press their proposal on Athens: on 20 July Chambrun spoke to Rentis who accepted in principle the idea of an international company to run the railway.¹³ The difficulty was, however, that the details of the scheme - how the company would be organised, and the proportion of share capital to be allotted to each country, for example - had been left vague by the French who hoped that Greece and Yugoslavia could settle such matters for themselves; and it soon became apparent that negotiations over these details were likely to divide the two states rather than draw them together.¹⁴ What the Quai d'Orsay in fact envisaged was a company which would be neutral in terms of its management and the nationality of its capital - this would of course permit French capitalists to take a leading role - but because this had not been made explicit, the idea arose in Athens and Belgrade that what Paris proposed was a Yugoslav-Greek company with some minority (perhaps one fifth) French participation. This was not acceptable to either state: the Yugoslavs would only accept a company that was purely Yugoslav, or at worst Franco-Yugoslav, whilst the Greeks refused to contemplate any Yugoslav participation at all, insisting that the company should be either Franco-Greek, Anglo-French or, failing that, under the control of a truly international governing body similar to the Danube commission.

¹¹ MAE Yougoslavie 52 Grenard to QO tels.174-9 d.19 Jun.1925, tel.181 d.20 Jun.1925, tels.184-5 d.22 Jun.1925.

¹² MAE Yougoslavie 52 Grenard to QO tel.193 d.29 Jun.1925, tels.215-6 d.16 Jul.1925; DBFP/1/XXVII/214-6; FO 371/10695 Kennard to FO no.262 d.21 Jul.1925.

¹³ MAE Yougoslavie 52 QO to De Fleuriau tels.999-1000 d.18 Jul.1925, QO to Chambrun tels.183-5 d.19 Jul.1925, Chambrun to QO tels.92-4 d.20 Jul.1925.

¹⁴ MAE Yougoslavie 52 QO to Chambrun tel.187 d.22 Jul.1925, note by Seydoux (assistant director of political and commercial affairs) d.23 Jul.1925, Grenard to QO tels.230-2 d.24 Jul.1925, Chambrun to QO tels.98-9 d.30 Jul.1925.

The net effect of all this was that by the end of August, despite agreement in principle to the French proposal, the two sides were no nearer any sort of settlement.¹⁵

Other factors played their part in frustrating a settlement. For one thing, the Yugoslavs again took up cudgels on behalf of the Macedo-Slavs in northern Greece, who were coming under increasing pressure from refugees from Anatolia: in mid-July Belgrade sent Athens a series of notes 'so stiff in tone' that the Greeks hesitated to reply to them officially.¹⁶ Essentially, the Yugoslavs were still holding out for the signature of a separate convention to regulate the application of the minorities treaties, while the Greeks were determined to resist this. Indeed, by the end of August, the minorities question had become, according to the French, at least as big an obstacle to *rapprochement* as that of the Salonica railway.¹⁷ This refusal to make concessions did not bode well for the renewal of the alliance, but it did seem to be the guiding spirit behind Greek policy. In mid-July, for example, Rentis had raised the idea of the conclusion of a series of compulsory arbitration parts in the Balkans, and by August this had matured into a plan for a fully-fledged Balkan pact. This was a cunning move, since the proposal was ostensibly unobjectionable, even laudable, but was in fact designed as 'the cheapest way for Greece to overcome the difficulties in which she was involved with Serbia'. It was, however, also rather transparent, and the

¹⁵ *DBFP/1/XXVII/215-6,221-5,231-3; DDI/7/IV/79-80*. This confusion over details seems to have been due to a breakdown of communications in the French policy-making process. On 6 August when De Fleuriau first directly informed the Foreign Office of his plan he stated that the share capital would be split in the ratio 40:40:20 between Greece, Yugoslavia and France (FO 371/10768 min. by Lampson d.6 Aug.1925). A fortnight earlier, in a conversation with Caclamano, Nicolson had anticipated this division, apparently by chance, and it became generally accepted that this was the essence of the French plan (*DBFP/1/XXVII/221,223-4*). This detail, however, was never made explicit in the French documents. On 22 August the Quai d'Orsay told Grenard that the Yugoslav demand for absolute control over the new railway company did 'not seem to correspond' to the original French suggestion foreshadowing a neutral company, but this was the first time Grenard had heard officially that the French intended there to be no Yugoslav or Greek participation (MAE Yougoslavie 52 QO to Grenard tel.220 d.22 Aug.1925, Grenard to QO tels.264-6 d.24 Aug.1925). Subsequently Nincic relented a little and conceded that a purely French company might be acceptable if Yugoslav claims in other areas were met (MAE Yougoslavie 52 Grenard to QO tels.267-70 d.26 Aug.1925, note by De la Baume d.27 Aug.1925).

¹⁶ *DBFP/1/XXVII/220,232; MAE Yougoslavie 52 QO to Grenard tels.172-3 d.24 Jul.1925; FO 371/10768 Kennard to FO no.233 d.30 Jun.1925*.

¹⁷ MAE Yougoslavie 52 note by Seydoux d.23 Jul.1925, Grenard to QO tels.235-7 d.27 Jul.1925, Chanbrun to QO tels.98-9 d.30 Jul.1925, tel.102 d.4 Aug.1925, Grenard to QO tels.252-60 d.19 Aug.1925, tel.271 d.27 Aug.1925, notes by De la Baume d.26 and 27 Aug.1925, QO to Athens tels.223-5 d.28 Aug.1925; FO 371/10768 Keeling to FO tel.134 d.6 Aug.1925.

Yugoslavs coolly made clear that while they were in sympathy with the idea of arbitration treaties, they would have to be signed 'side by side with and not anterior to the settlement of the Salonica Railway and Minorities questions in accordance with Yugoslavia's desires', which were 'reasonable and moderate'.¹⁸

In September, discussions continued at Geneva, where both Nincic and Rentis were attending the sessions of the League Council and Assembly, and where the atmosphere was expected to be more conducive to agreement than that of Athens or Belgrade.¹⁹ At first it seemed that these expectations were well founded. The idea of a Balkan security pact drifted into the background and talks between Rentis and Nincic, facilitated by Briand, appeared to make some progress. At one point the Yugoslavs accepted the idea of a purely French company running the railway, and in return the Greeks were ready to offer some concessions over the minorities issue. This agreement proved, however, to be ephemeral, since before the protagonists had even left Geneva the Yugoslavs retracted their concessions, returned to the demand for at least a mixed company and insisted that 'the question be reopened de novo through the ordinary diplomatic channels' at some later date. The deadlock therefore continued, and although both sides paid lip-service to the desirability of agreement, they had now adopted entrenched positions. In this situation, Nincic seemed resigned to postponing any further negotiations until the advent of a more reasonable government in Greece. Even so it was by no means obvious that the Yugoslavs held all the cards, and rumours that a formal Italo-Greek understanding - perhaps even also embracing Bulgaria - was in the offing were plausible enough to cause some concern in Belgrade.²⁰

¹⁸ *DBFP/1/XXVII/223,234-5,239-41*; MAE Yougoslavie 52 Chambrun to QO tels.92-4 d.20 Jul.1925, note by Avenol d.22 Jul.1925, QO to Chambrun tels.194-6 d.25 Jul.1925, Grenard to QO tels.252-60 d.19 Aug.1925, QO to Chambrun tels.223-5 d.28 Aug.1925.

¹⁹ *DBFP/1/XXVII/222*. The Council met from 2-28 September and the Assembly from 7-26 September.

²⁰ *DBFP/1/XXVII/241-4,247-50*; FO 371/10766 Keeling to FO no.296 d.17 Sept.1925, Kennard to FO no.382 d.7 Oct.1925, Kennard to Nicolson p.l. d.9 Oct.1925, Nicolson to Kennard p.l. d.15 Oct.1925; FO 371/10768 Ogilvie-Forbes (Belgrade) to FO no.371 d.29 Sept.1925, min. by Harvey d.7 Oct.1925, Kennard to FO no.389 d.16 Oct.1925; MAE Yougoslavie 52 Grenard to QO no.254 d.16 Sept.1925, Chambrun to QO no.114 d.22 Sept.1925, Clauzel (Geneva) to QO tel.95 d.28

This state of affairs left the French rather disgruntled. In truth their mediatory role had always been 'a somewhat onerous one'²¹ as they strove to remain on good terms with both sides whilst finding a mutually acceptable solution that would also secure their own political and military interests in the region.²² Certainly, they perceived that there could be no stable peace in the region without a genuine agreement between Greece and Yugoslavia: for this reason they always argued that the points at issue between the two must be settled in a spirit of 'reciprocal confidence and loyalty', and the alliance renewed, before there could be talk of arbitration treaties or a Balkan pact - the pact could not be the basis of a *rapprochement*, but must be built upon it. They warned the Greeks in particular that arbitration treaties would provide much less security than an alliance; indeed, to float the idea of an arbitration pact was both 'inopportune and harmful' to eventual *rapprochement*.²³ French policy was not, of course, wholly altruistic: a settlement of the Salonica question on the lines envisaged by De Fleuriau was designed to secure the lines of communication between Salonica and central Europe and to buttress French influence in a region where it was increasingly threatened by Italy. It was, therefore, galling to the French that by the end of September, not only had the idea of an eastern security pact atrophied, but there was no imminent prospect of either a Salonica settlement or a renewal of the alliance under French auspices.²⁴

Italian policy during this period was characterised by a lively interest in the course of the dispute and particularly in French efforts at mediation. One factor in this was certainly the desire to improve relations with Greece at a time when Italo-Yugoslav

Sept.1925, Grenard to QO tels.283-7 d.29 Sept.1925, Anginieur (chargé in Belgrade) to QO tel.291 d.9 Oct.1925, no.283 d.22 Oct.1925.

²¹ *DBFP/1/XXVII/232*.

²² FO 371/11357 Annual Report, Greece, 1925 p.9.

²³ MAE Yougoslavie 52 QO to Chambrun tels.194-6 d.25 Jul.1925, tels.203-4 d.30 Jul.1925, tels.223-5 d.28 Aug.1925 [quoted]. Grenard feared that if the Greeks did not make concessions for the alliance, the Yugoslavs would eventually just take what they wanted anyway (MAE Yougoslavie 52 Grenard to QO tels.230-2 d.24 Jul.1925, tels.252-60 d.19 Aug.1925).

²⁴ MAE Yougoslavie 52 Clauzel to QO tel.95 d.28 Sept.1925. Chambrun had always believed that the Greek pact scheme was merely a tactical manoeuvre (MAE Yougoslavie 52 Chambrun to QO tel.118 d.31 Aug.1925).

relations had become rather equivocal.²⁵ The Greeks played on this, and tried to win Italian support for the idea of internationalising the railway by pointing out that this might provide opportunities for Italian influence in the region.²⁶ That the preservation and extension of their influence was the main concern of the Italians was made clear in a memorandum of 17 September which explicitly stated that Italy's interest lay in preventing the formation of any Balkan bloc or Greco-Yugoslav *entente* (which would be susceptible to French or British influence whilst excluding that of Italy) and ensuring that Greece and Yugoslavia continued to gravitate separately and independently towards Italy. To this end, the memorandum suggested an initiative to trump the French and facilitate a settlement of the Salonica question: Greece and Yugoslavia would be told that accepting the French solution would be an unfriendly act, and that Italy would be willing to participate instead in a joint company to run the railway.²⁷ Rome had evidently investigated the ramifications - for example the financial implications - of going ahead with this scheme,²⁸ and Bodrero, for one, was keen to make some positive move to influence events, but in the end no action materialised.²⁹

In this respect British policy approximated more closely to that of Italy than that of France. After the Pangalos *coup*, the Foreign Office was unanimous in its determination that Britain should stay aloof from the Greco-Yugoslav dispute and, if a crisis arose, endeavour to place it before the League.³⁰ The French initiative on the railway question did nothing to alter this view. On 23 July Nicolson told Kaklamanos that a railway company controlled by the French 'would be a good thing and in the interests of Greece as well as in those of European stability': the French would side

²⁵ DDI/7/IV/45-6,58-9,64,79-80,87.

²⁶ DDI/7/IV/79-80.

²⁷ DDI/7/IV/91-3.

²⁸ DDI/7/IV/94.

²⁹ DDI/7/IV/101-2,105,109.

³⁰ FO 371/10768 mins. by Howard Smith, Nicolson and Lampson d.30 Jun.1925, min. by Howard Smith d.9 Jul.1925. Nicolson also believed that Britain should not object to improved relations between Greece and Italy: these were inevitable 'now that we have of necessity abandoned the phil-hellene policy initiated by Canning and pursued with profit for both countries for over a hundred years' (min. by Nicolson d.7 Jul.1925).

with the Yugoslavs in commercial matters but would certainly restrain them from any political (or military) aggression since France 'did not in the least wish to see Serbia turning her back on Central Europe and indulging in Balkan imperialism'. French involvement would provide 'a very dependable guarantee for Greece' who need not fear being trapped in the French orbit: 'our experience of the planetary systems evolved at the Quai d'Orsay was that they quickly developed a centrifugal tendency'. In other words, if the French were willing to take on the responsibility of brokering a settlement, then the Greeks would be foolish to refuse and the British, as Lampson noted, would 'have no reason to be jealous'.³¹ Even so, the British had no desire to become involved in the scheme themselves. Chamberlain was keen to remain 'as non-committal as possible' and on 27 July Lampson discouraged Kaklamanos' suggestion that an Anglo-French combine should run the line: 'British capital only invested in things which were commercially attractive and which were not really political enterprises'.³²

If the British looked benignly on the French railway scheme, they were much less keen on Rentis's idea for a Balkan arbitration pact. At first, Nicolson assumed that the scheme would receive Britain's blessing as long as it was in the style of Locarno and encompassed Bulgaria and Turkey as well as the former victor powers of the region.³³ British opinion soon came to regard the proposal as inopportune, however, not least because it became clear that the Yugoslavs were opposed. Belgrade perceived that the Greek *ballon d'essai* was designed to postpone concessions and to gain the benefits of an alliance on the cheap, and let it be known on 31 August that if Rentis sounded other powers with a view to pressurising Yugoslavia then this 'would not be regarded by public opinion as a friendly act'. Nicolson attributed this announcement to Yugoslav fears that the Greeks might bring the proposal before the Geneva Assembly:

³¹ DBFP/1/XXVII/221-2.

³² DBFP/1/XXVII/222-5; FO 371/10768 mins. by Nicolson, Lampson, Tyrrell and Chamberlain d.30 Jul.1925.

³³ FO 371/10768 Nicolson to Selby p.l. d.31 Aug.1925.

The Serbs know that it is force and not justice which will give them what they want at Salonika and in regard to the Minorities, and they also know that their attitude on both these questions would be impossible to defend if it ever came to open discussion by the Assembly. This situation, i.e. right versus might, was just the sort of situation for which the League was devised, and if Greece appealed to these principles she would acquire sympathy with the smaller powers. But the fact remains that Yugoslavia is her neighbour and is unscrupulous, whereas the sentimental sympathy of Scandinavia would be of small avail.³⁴

In other respects too the plan was untimely: Chamberlain did not want the Locarno negotiations complicated in any way. Thus he suggested to Rentis in Geneva 'that at this moment patience was needed, [and] that possibly if our western pact was successfully negotiated the example of the great Powers of the west might influence other countries'.³⁵ These arguments must have carried weight with Rentis and contributed to the dropping, for the moment, of the idea of a Balkan Locarno.

British policy in these particular instances was in perfect harmony with the line laid down in May and June when the troubled Balkan situation - of which the Greco-Yugoslav dispute was a key component - had given rise to general policy discussions in the Foreign Office. One of these was triggered by Kennard who, on the eve of his departure for Belgrade, requested an exposition of British Balkan policy with particular reference to possible developments, such as a Yugoslav seizure of Salonika and the creation of Balkan confederation. Lampson did not see how 'we can profitably answer or wisely attempt to answer Mr. Kennard's searching questions'.

The fact is, squarely put, that we have no fixed policy in the Balkans - or indeed anywhere else, save the restoration of a normal situation resulting in increased trade and thereby a greater opening for British products and British finance and industry generally. Is not the strength of this country its opportunism, in the best sense of the word? We prefer to know the concrete problem before we face it: we do not commit ourselves in advance. All we want is peace and quiet so that we may get on with our industrial work at home and develop our markets abroad.

³⁴ DBFP/1/XXVII/234-5; FO 371/10768 min. by Nicolson d.1 Sept.1925, Ogilvie-Forbes to FO no.345 d.2 Sept.1925.

³⁵ DBFP/1/XXVII/242-4; FO 371/10768 Selby to Nicolson p.1. d.8 Sept.1925.

Chamberlain added his own gloss to this: Britain had no immediate interests in the Balkans such 'as would dictate a particular solution of any of its many problems', rather 'our one & only interest is peace - internal & external - among the Balkan nations'. Britain therefore worked for moderation and reconciliation among those nations, not from any compulsion to be 'the policeman and pedagogue of the Balkans', but because the security Europe and Britain needed had to be built on foundations of stability. This was not the same as 'no policy or only a negative policy': 'rightly understood & practised this is a positive policy' even if 'the method of its application to any particular emergency can only be decided when that emergency arises'.³⁶

That Chamberlain's conception of British interests did not doom British policy to passivity was to be soon demonstrated. On 4 June Nicolson put up a proposal based on the premise that recent developments - including communist activity and the adjournment of the alliance negotiations - 'have demonstrated that the Balkans still constitute a focus of instability, and that the SCS Government are inclined to profit by the disunion or indifference of the Great Powers in order to advance their own highly dangerous ambitions'. The French shared British fears about this, but it was also 'very essential to secure if possible the adherence of M. Mussolini to a policy of joint action for Balkan peace' since 'Anglo-French representations at Belgrade would be politely disregarded: but concerted pressure on the part of Great Britain, France and Italy would have a very sedative effect'. Nicolson therefore suggested that when Chamberlain met Briand at Geneva they should issue an invitation to Mussolini for 'the informal reconstruction of the Concert of Europe for the purpose of maintaining some sort of order and discipline in the Balkans'.³⁷ It was natural that the idea of a flexible, informal *ad hoc* system of collaboration between the great powers should have appealed to Chamberlain: this was his wonted method of proceeding and in this case it also fitted in with his general policy of *rapprochement* with Italy and his desire

³⁶ FO 371/10695 min. by Bateman d.12 May 1925, memorandum by Howard Smith d.16 May 1925, mins. by Lampson d.17 May 1925 and 18 May 1925 [quoted], mins. by Tyrrell d.19 May 1925 and Chamberlain d.21 May 1925 [quoted].

³⁷ *DBFP/1/XXVII/201-2*. The proposal apparently originated with Tyrrell (FO 371/10695 mins. by Nicolson and Tyrrell d.4 Jun.1925). The League Council met at Geneva from 8-11 June 1925.

to entice Mussolini into acting responsibly in the international system.³⁸ He and Briand agreed on the text of a proposal and on 10 June handed Scialoja, the Italian representative on the Council, a telegram inviting Mussolini to consider not 'any clearly defined collective action' but rather the exercise of the solidarity of the great powers in Balkan affairs 'by more frequent exchange of views and whenever opportunity presents itself by a common diplomatic action'.³⁹

Although this was a positive step by Britain, its feasibility was questioned by Kennard, who doubted that it would ever be possible to concert the divergent policies of the great powers in the Balkans, where the French wanted to encourage closer links between the Balkan states under their own auspices whilst the Italians wanted to keep those same states divided. The British interest in peace, he argued, would be better served by the promotion of a Balkan confederation.⁴⁰ This idea in turn found no favour in London, where a policy of detachment and reserve was still preferred, but Lampson at least shared Kennard's scepticism: 'in practice, we [already] do concert when it is practicable to do so, but over such things as Salonica we are never likely to have loyal cooperation from Italy'.⁴¹ Any hopes of speedy action were further reduced by the fact that, for some reason, Scialoja never actually passed the telegram on to his master in Rome and a further copy was not transmitted, *via* Della Torretta, until August.⁴² Even now, Mussolini made no great haste to respond. When he met Chamberlain at Locarno in October, the possibility of instituting a regular exchange of ideas was touched upon, but his reply was 'rather non-committal'.⁴³ When Della Torretta finally transmitted Mussolini's official response on 24 October, it was vague in the extreme. Doubtless because he did not wish to limit Italy's freedom of

³⁸ For this last point, see Edwards *ESR* 10 1-13.

³⁹ *DBFP/1/XXVII/201-2*; FO 371/10695 Chamberlain to Tyrrell p.1. d.8 Jun.1925. The telegram also flattered Mussolini by referring to the 'special authority' enjoyed by Italy in Balkan affairs.

⁴⁰ FO 371/10695 Kennard to Nicolson p.1. d.19 Jun.1925, p.1. d.22 Jun.1925.

⁴¹ FO 371/10695 mins. by Lampson and Tyrrell d.1 Jul.1925, min. by Chamberlain d.2 Jul.1925, min. by Lampson d.3 Jul.1925 [quoted].

⁴² FO 371/10695 min. by Bateman d.11 Aug.1925, Chamberlain to Della Torretta unno.1. d.12 Aug.1925, Della Torretta to Chamberlain unno.1. d.13 Aug.1925; FO 800/258 Chamberlain to Graham p.1. d.20 Jul.1925, Graham to Chamberlain p.1. d.30 Jul.1925; *DDI/7/IV/58,70-1*.

⁴³ FO 371/10695 Chamberlain (Locarno) to FO no.43 d.17 Oct.1925 and encl.

manoeuvre and precisely because he was aware of the divergence of *Entente* interests in the Balkans, Mussolini merely recapitulated the terms of the Chamberlain-Briand telegram and said he would 'welcome with a lively interest' any concrete future proposals.⁴⁴ By the time of this reply, of course, the situation between Greece and Yugoslavia was one of stalemate. The only consolations were that both sides were 'emphasising their good will to each other' and that, so the Foreign Office believed, Nincic seemed 'to harbour no sinister intention of forcing a quarrel on Greece, at all events for the present'.⁴⁵

Other events in October, however, were to divert attention away from Greco-Yugoslav relations. In the Balkan arena, the Greek-Bulgarian incident erupted after a border skirmish on 19 October. After Greek troops crossed the Bulgarian border the situation was one of crisis until 28 October when, under pressure from the League and the powers, they withdrew; thereafter, until December, the Rumbold commission of inquiry was at work and there was intense speculation as to its findings.⁴⁶ Of wider importance was the initialing of the Locarno treaties on 16 October, which was widely held to have inaugurated a new era of pacification in international relations: this new spirit was, in fact, one reason why the international community was united in its response to the Greek-Bulgarian incident and so quickly reined the Greeks in.⁴⁷ More precisely the Locarno agreement triggered off a new wave of speculation (and some enthusiasm) in Europe about regional guarantee and arbitration pacts, and this was all the more intense because, with the western pact safely signed, Austen Chamberlain took up the matter. The obvious places to consider for an extension of the principles of Locarno were central Europe and the Balkans, and the Greco-Yugoslav dispute now became subsumed in the search for a Balkan pact.

⁴⁴ FO 371/10695 min. by Lampson d.24 Oct.1925, Della Torretta to Lampson unno.1. d.24 Oct.1925 and encls.; MAE Yougoslavie 52 note by Laroche d.22 Oct.1925; *DDI/7/IV/122*. The co-operation of the powers over the Greek-Bulgarian incident was perhaps an example of the sort of collaboration Chamberlain envisaged: see Orde, *International Security*, pp.203-4.

⁴⁵ FO 371/10766 mins, by Harvey d.13 and 21 Oct.1925.

⁴⁶ For more details, see pp.142-3 above.

⁴⁷ Barros, *League of Nations and the Great Powers*, pp.118-20.

Already, in his speeches preceding the Locarno pact, Chamberlain had expressed the hope that after its conclusion 'perhaps other nations might follow our example'. At Locarno he had mentioned this to Mussolini and to the Czech foreign minister, Benes: he suggested that the latter should take the initiative and begin consultation with Nincic and Mussolini about a central European pact, which Chamberlain felt was for the time being a more promising prospect than a Balkan one.⁴⁸ This Benes did in a conversation with Nincic at Bled on 21 October, but Nincic was rather wary of the idea and both ministers asked for a concrete initiative from the powers.⁴⁹

Consequently Chamberlain defined his attitude in a circular dispatch to British ministers in the central European capitals. Britain, he wrote, would welcome a Danubian pact, but salvation 'must come from within, and there can be no real peace but by consent. If the Great Powers were to impose peace, such peace would remain an outer garment which could be thrown off at any moment'. The governments of the smaller powers must therefore 'show the same largeness of view and desire of reconciliation as the Great Powers have done', but at the same time patience was needed for this spirit and for concrete proposals to mature. In the meantime, two essential preconditions were vital, namely 'a policy of conciliation and goodwill to minorities' and 'the co-operation and goodwill of the Italian government'.

Chamberlain's intention, in other words, was not to force the pace in this field or to impose any British conception of a pact, but rather to promote and foster the development of a 'Locarno-mentality' in the region, from which a pact would naturally follow.⁵⁰

From the beginning it was obvious that there were serious obstacles in the way of any such general *rapprochement*. Chamberlain was adamant that 'the counsel, assistance and goodwill of Italy as the Great Power most directly interested must prove a vital factor' in the success of the negotiations, but when Graham approached Mussolini his

⁴⁸ DBFP/1/XXVII/893-4; FO 371/10695 Chamberlain to FO no.43 d.17 Oct.1925.

⁴⁹ DDI/7/IV/120-1; FO 371/10701 Kennard to FO tels.134-6 d.22 Oct.1925, no.401 d.22 Oct.1925.

⁵⁰ DBFP/1a/I/64-5; FO 371/10701 mins. by Bateman d.23 Oct.1925 and Howard Smith, Lampson and Chamberlain d.24 Oct.1925.

response was no more than lukewarm.⁵¹ More importantly the Hungarians showed no enthusiasm for pacts with their neighbours until their multiple grievances - particularly over the question of Magyar minorities - had been satisfied.⁵² A Foreign Office memorandum of 11 November identified these two major problems: the Italians were 'disinclined to favour any move for understanding between the States of Central Europe as this might lead to something akin to a Danube Confederation, or, in other terms, a reconstitution of the Dual Monarchy under another name' whilst Hungary had 'no special inducement to lead her to seek reconciliation with her neighbours, and she can only regard them with thoughts of hatred and wait for the hour of her revenge'.⁵³ Nevertheless, there was some progress in December when, at a League Council meeting in Geneva, the Hungarian prime minister, Count Bethlen, was persuaded by Chamberlain and Lampson to consider an initiative to set up some arbitration agreement with Czechoslovakia as the first step towards a pact.⁵⁴ This progress was bound to be slow, however, since Bethlen had many internal problems to overcome before he could pursue this policy,⁵⁵ and it was in fact checked altogether shortly afterwards by the outbreak of a forged currency scandal which severely disrupted relations between Hungary and her neighbours.⁵⁶

From the outset, Nincic had made it clear that although he could contemplate a central European pact, it was premature to talk of any general reconciliation between

⁵¹ *DBFP/1a/I/65-6*.

⁵² FO 371/10701 Barclay (Budapest) to FO no.283 d.6 Nov.1925, min. by Lampson d.11 Nov.1925.

⁵³ *DBFP/1a/I/124-9*. The Romanians were generally enthusiastic about a pact, although anomalously they felt a Balkan pact would have more chance of success than a Danubian one (FO 371/10701 Dering to FO no.501 d.7 Nov.1925). The Czechs were not sure that the time was yet ripe (FO 371/10701 Dodd (Prague) to FO no.416 d.17 Dec.1925) and the Austrians were opposed, since a pact would mean abandoning any hope of *Anschluss* with Germany or recovering the south Tyrol (FO 371/10701 Akers-Douglas (Vienna) to FO no.303 d.26 Nov.1925; *DBFP/1a/I/174-7*).

⁵⁴ *DBFP/1a/I/223-30*; FO 371/10701 FO to Barclay no.370 d.3 Dec.1925, FO to Crewe no.4014 d.4 Dec.1925, min. by Lampson d.7 Dec.1925, Lampson (Geneva) to Howard Smith unno.1. d.12 Dec.1925, mins. by Lampson d.13 and 24 Dec.1925. Lampson's persuasion included telling the Hungarians that if they read the preamble to the German-Polish arbitration treaty signed at Locarno, they would see that arbitration treaties with their neighbours need not mean renouncing once and for all their lost provinces.

⁵⁵ *DBFP/1a/I/229*; FO 371/10701 Lampson to Kennard p.l. d.28 Dec.1925

⁵⁶ *BDFa/II/F/2/200-9,211-19,221-7*; FO 371/11243 memorandum by Howard Smith d.9 Oct.1926; Orde, *International Security*, pp.204-5.

Yugoslavia, Greece and Bulgaria. In particular, until the Greeks became less intransigent over the Salonica railway there could be no question of renewing the alliance, and without that there could be no Balkan pact.⁵⁷ When the Greek-Bulgarian incident erupted soon afterwards, Yugoslavia adopted a position of studied neutrality: there were (perhaps inevitably) rumours of some secret Yugoslav-Bulgarian understanding, but Nincic steadfastly declined to intervene. He was, however, hardly upset to see his two troublesome neighbours at odds, and hoped that Greece's action would have put her out of court with Geneva and thus have frustrated Greek plans to submit the Salonica railway question to the League for arbitration.⁵⁸ The Greeks, however, were adept at the diplomatic manoeuvring so often incumbent upon small powers and were determined, by taking advantage of wider developments, to recover swiftly any ground lost by their truculence towards Sofia. Thus on 2 November they addressed a telegram to Sir Eric Drummond, noting that one of the tasks of the Rumbold commission would be to suggest measures to prevent the recurrence of incidents like the recent one and remarking that, as the League secretariat was currently considering a proposal for a pact of security involving compulsory arbitration between the Balkan states, the Greek government was

glad to be in a position to adhere in principle to such an initiative, the salutary effects of which are quite plain. Compulsory arbitration, moreover, has been one of the characteristics of their recent programme in foreign politics. Greece ... will not fail to associate herself with every measure, aiming at the equitable solution of any dispute or conflict, which might arise in the Balkans and at the consolidation of general peace, for which peace in the Balkans is a vital and essential necessity.⁵⁹

This communication did not result from an outbreak of the 'Locarno-spirit' at Athens. Rather, by trying to place themselves at the head of any movement towards a Balkan pact, the Greeks were manoeuvring to rehabilitate themselves in the eyes of

⁵⁷ FO 371/10701 Kennard to FO tel.136 d.22 Oct.1925, no.401 d.22 Oct.1925.

⁵⁸ FO 371/10672 Kennard to FO tel.137 d.23 Oct.1925; FO 371/10673 Kennard to FO no.409 d.28 Oct.1925, no.410 d.29 Oct.1925, min. by Bateman d.3 Nov.1925, FO to Kennard no.529 d.2 Nov.1925, Erskine to FO no.240 d.12 Nov.1925; MAE Yougoslavie 52 Anginieur to QO no.288 d.25 Oct.1925; MAE Bulgarie 56 Chambrun to QO no.124 d.1 Nov.1925. The Greeks had hinted that they might refer the rail question to the League if the Yugoslavs refused to accept a purely French company (MAE Yougoslavie 52 Grenard to QO tels.285-7 d.29 Sept.1925).

⁵⁹ FO 371/10763 FO to Cheetham no.642 d.4 Nov.1925 and encl. (Punctuation as in original.)

international opinion, to overcome their general insecurity and isolation, to 'anticipate other suggestions less palatable to them which may come from the Rumbold Com[mission]' and to evade the demands which the Yugoslavs were insisting on as a *sine qua non* for the renewal of the alliance.⁶⁰ In other words, as with Rentis' pact proposal in the summer, the Greeks were speaking the language of Locarno and cultivating an air of righteousness in order to camouflage their less exalted and more traditional self-interest. In fact, as Drummond soon made clear, no Balkan security pact was under consideration by the League - it was hardly within the League's competence to propose such things. Nor had the Greeks made any such proposal themselves; rather, they were simply seeking to get their support for the idea put on record, to influence any concrete proposals that might materialise in the near future and to encourage progress towards a pact which they hoped would settle all their foreign policy problems cheaply and at one fell swoop.⁶¹

Greece's manoeuvres were not well received. The French perceived that Athens was trying to enmesh Belgrade in a pact in order to escape from the difficulties of direct negotiation, and held to the line that a pact must follow and not precede the settlement of their disputes and the stabilising of the Balkan political situation.⁶² In Athens, Cheetham, gulled by the Greeks into believing that any sort of pact must be a good thing, was dismayed to note that Chambrun was conducting propaganda against the idea and trying to force the Greeks to come to terms with Yugoslavia.⁶³ London, however, did not share his alarm, believing it to be natural and desirable that the French should continue to work for the renewal of the alliance which would be 'evidence of a change of spirit which is the *sine qua non* of a pact'.⁶⁴ Cheetham was told to 'go slow' and to encourage the Greeks to do the same: 'anything of the nature

⁶⁰ FO 371/10701 mins. by Bateman d.9 Nov.1925, Howard Smith d.10 Nov.1925 and Chamberlain d.10 Nov.1925 [quoted], FO to Crewe no.4014 d.4 Dec.1925.

⁶¹ FO 371/10701 Drummond to Cadogan unno.l. d.4 Nov.1925 and encls.

⁶² MAE Yougoslavie 52 QO to Grenard tels.294-7 d.9 Nov.1925, Chambrun to QO no.129 d.12 Nov.1925, note for the president of the council d.28 Nov.1925.

⁶³ FO 371/10768 Cheetham to FO no.354 d.12 Nov.1925; FO 371/10701 Cheetham to FO tel.184 d.6 Nov.1925, tel.186 d.6 Nov.1925, tel.187 d.7 Nov.1925.

⁶⁴ FO 371/10768 min. by Bateman d.25 Nov.1925; FO 371/10701 mins. by Bateman and Howard Smith d.9 Nov.1925, Lampson d.[?10] Nov.1925, Chamberlain d.10 Nov.1925.

of a Balkan pact can only be slow growth resulting from a general consciousness of its need'. Moreover, the Foreign Office was 'not without suspicion of the bona-fides of this sudden desire of Greek government to make the scheme their own: it comes curiously on the top of recent Demi-Hissar incident'.⁶⁵

The Greek scheme was in any case crippled by the opposition of Sofia and Belgrade: the Bulgarians would not consider a pact until their own grievances over the minorities and an Aegean outlet were dealt with,⁶⁶ and the Yugoslavs, although in principle in favour of a pact, were 'much offended' by the Greek initiative and likewise denounced it as premature.⁶⁷ The Greeks made some further token efforts to rally the great powers to their side,⁶⁸ but by December their initiative in favour of a Balkan pact had failed. As Chamberlain put it, the Greeks had been happy 'neither in the moment nor the manner in which they put forward their proposal' and they would have done 'better to settle some minor questions first'.⁶⁹

None of this, of course, facilitated a settlement of the Greco-Yugoslav dispute. Throughout the months when the proposed pact was being discussed, there were periodic rumours that negotiations might be restarted, but these were without substance: the Greeks had no intention of shifting their position on the railway question and the Yugoslavs therefore had no incentive to negotiate.⁷⁰ This caused some irritation in the Foreign Office, where Bateman wrote that the sooner the Greeks realised 'that the alliance must precede a pact & that alliances connote a certain amount of give & take on both sides the better'.⁷¹ Nevertheless, despite Lampson's

⁶⁵ FO 371/10701 FO to Cheetham tel.134 d.11 Nov.1925.

⁶⁶FO 371/10701 Erskine to Bateman p.l. d.5 Nov.1925; MAE Yougoslavie 52 Dard to QO tel.183 d.7 Nov.1925.

⁶⁷ FO 371/10768 Kennard to FO tel.161 d.22 Nov.1925, min. by Howard Smith d.23 Nov.1925 [quoted], Kennard to Howard Smith p.l. d.4 Dec.1925; FO 371/10701 Kennard to FO no.428 d.11 Nov.1925, Kennard to Lampson p.l. d.20 Nov.1925, Kennard to FO no.447 d.26 Nov.1925.

⁶⁸ FO 371/10701 min. by Howard Smith d.14 Nov.1925, Rumbold to Chamberlain p.l. d.1 Dec.1925.

⁶⁹ FO 371/10701 min. by Chamberlain d.2 Dec.1925.

⁷⁰ FO 371/10768 Eyres (Durazzo) to FO tel.54 d.9 Nov.1925, Kennard to FO tel.158 d.11 Nov.1925, Cheetham to FO no.354 d.12 Nov.1925, Kennard to FO tel.161 d.22 Nov.1925, mins. by Harvey d.23 Nov.1925, Bateman d.25 Nov.1925, Kennard to FO no.438 d.24 Nov.1925, Kennard to Howard Smith p.l. d.4 Dec.1925; MAE Yougoslavie 52 Grenard to QO no.314 d.26 Nov.1925.

⁷¹ FO 371/10768 min. by Bateman d.1 Dec.1925.

determination that Britain should avoid 'getting drawn into these Balkanics',⁷² British policy was not entirely passive. In late October Kaklamanos had suggested that if no agreement could be reached in direct negotiations, the railway question might be referred to the advisory and technical committee of the League on communications and transport, a neutral non-political body whose mediation the Yugoslavs would surely accept.⁷³ Lampson followed up this idea in December, telling both Rentis and Kaklamanos that since a direct settlement (the ideal solution) was so remote a prospect, it might be advisable to refer the matter to the League;⁷⁴ and he put the same suggestion to the Yugoslav minister in London, Djuric, who agreed that it was worth consideration.⁷⁵ As Lampson told Kennard a week later, there was no guarantee that the Yugoslavs would accept, but if they refused to turn to the League committee ('an international technical body who can have no special axe to grind') this would at least throw light on whether their aims were purely economic or rather 'political (which I more than suspect)'.⁷⁶

At the turn of the year there even appeared to be some glimmer of hope regarding the wider question of a Balkan pact. Amidst the blizzard of 'usual Autumn rumours' concerning new alignments in the Balkans - talk, for example, of Yugoslav-Bulgarian, Greco-Bulgarian and even Turco-Yugoslav *rapprochements*⁷⁷ - it became quite clear that the Yugoslavs were preoccupied with and 'genuinely panicky about Italian ag[g]ressive designs'.⁷⁸ In a conversation with Nincic at the end of December,

⁷² FO 371/10768 min. by Lampson d.3 Dec.1925.

⁷³ FO 371/10673 note by Howard Smith d.30 Oct.1925.

⁷⁴ FO 371/10768 min. by Lampson d.14 Dec.1925; FO 371/10766 min. by Lampson d.30 Dec.1925.

⁷⁵ FO 371/10695 min. by Lampson d.22 Dec.1925. Lampson made these suggestions in a purely personal capacity: official intervention was certainly not contemplated (FO 371/10768 FO to Kennard no.595 d.7 Dec.1925).

⁷⁶ FO 371/10766 Lampson to Kennard p.l. d.31 Dec.1925.

⁷⁷ FO 371/10673 FO to Kennard no.529 d.2 Nov.1925, Erskine to FO no.240 d.12 Nov.1925; FO 371/10794 FO to Kennard no.484 d.17 Oct.1925, Bateman to Stevenson p.l. d.17 Oct.1925 [quoted], Kennard to FO no.467 d.16 Dec.1925, Kennard to Howard Smith p.l. d.17 Dec.1925.

⁷⁸ FO 371/10794 Kennard to Howard Smith p.l. d.17 Dec.1925. The Foreign Office sought Graham's views privately about Italian intentions, but did not take Nincic's rantings seriously (FO 371/10794 min. by Lampson d.23 Dec.1925, Lampson to Graham p.l. d.30 Dec.1925; *DBFP/1a/I/292-4*). The consensus was that Mussolini definitely wanted an outlet for his surplus population, but would seek it in Anatolia and 'not Dalmatia', and that the Italians were making up to the Greeks in preparation for this eventuality: 'doubtless the old bribe of Constantinople has been held out to the Greeks. Let us

Kennard played on these fears in an effort to advance the cause of a Balkan pact in accordance with Chamberlain's instructions, arguing that the possibility of external aggression made unity between the Balkan states all the more imperative. Nincic promised to consider this argument, and Kennard evidently felt that he had made some progress.⁷⁹ On 24 December he told Lampson that, although he knew the Foreign Office did not want 'to play too prominent a part in Balkan politics', it might be possible to prompt the Yugoslavs into taking the lead in introducing the 'Locarno-spirit' into the Balkans. True, it was always difficult to rely on their word, but Nincic was scared of Italy and, whilst 'unintelligent and unreliable' was also 'vain and ambitious', and would relish the prestige that such an initiative would bring.⁸⁰ Lampson's response was cautious - excessive haste would be harmful and the right spirit had to present in all states - but generally approving: if the opportunity arose Kennard should always advocate arbitration treaties on the German-Polish model and indicate the obvious expediency of preparing the ground for these by settling outstanding questions in a conciliatory fashion. In other words, by the end of the year, although little concrete progress had been made towards any new pacts, some hopes had been raised in the Foreign Office that with a little judicious persuasion Yugoslavia might become an advocate of a Balkan Locarno.⁸¹

There were now signs of some divergence between the views of Britain and France. This should not be exaggerated: in general terms the French still believed that the way forward lay in settling the Greco-Yugoslav quarrel and then constructing, in accord with Britain and Italy, 'a strong pacific system which can prevent conflicts' in the Balkans.⁸² On the other hand, there were definite differences of emphasis between the British and French approaches. On the railway question, whereas the British were

hope they will not be such fools as to rise to it' (FO 371/10794 min. by Howard Smith d.30 Dec.1925).

⁷⁹ FO 371/10794 Kennard to FO no.467 d.16 Dec.1925, no.474 d.23 Dec.1925; FO 371/10695 min. by Lampson d.22 Dec.1925.

⁸⁰ FO 371/10701 Kennard to Lampson p.l. d.24 Dec.1925.

⁸¹ FO 371/10701 Lampson to Kennard p.l. d.28 Dec.1925. Lampson was also cautious because Chamberlain was on holiday and he did not want to 'risk queering the pitch' in his absence.

⁸² MAE Yougoslavie 53 note for the president of the council d.25 Dec.1925.

warming to the idea of a League solution, the French were increasingly sympathetic to the Yugoslavs. Thus, in late November, the Quai d'Orsay came to think that Yugoslav objections to a purely French private rail company - principally that it would have no political clout and would offer no real guarantee against Greek interference - seemed 'reasonable', and by the end of December the French were considering a renewed attempt to press a mixed Franco-Yugoslav-Greek railway company on Athens.⁸³ There were also wider issues to consider, as a *tour d'horizon* memorandum composed in the Quai d'Orsay on 25 December made clear: France might well have interests in all the Balkan states, but these varied greatly in importance, and it was incontestable that Yugoslavia 'must be the pivot of our Balkan policy'. All in all, this indicated that the French might be growing tired of their balancing rôle and inclining increasingly towards Belgrade.⁸⁴

The new year seemed to bring a decisive change in Yugoslav policy when, on 8 January, Gavrilovic told the Greek government that Yugoslavia was willing to settle outstanding differences in order to prepare the ground for a Balkan pact.⁸⁵ The reasons for this apparent change of heart were the subject of intense speculation: Kennard's subtle propaganda had obviously played its part and fear of Italy was still a motive, but it also seemed that as Yugoslavia's relations with both Bulgaria and Turkey had recently improved perceptibly Nincic for the first time believed a pact was a realistic possibility.⁸⁶ At the same time it was hard to tell what the Yugoslav proposal meant in practical terms, not least because, although Nincic did not disavow it, in fact Gavrilovic's declaration was unauthorised.⁸⁷ There was certainly doubt as to

⁸³ MAE Yougoslavie 52 Grenard to QO no.314 d.26 Nov.1925, min. by [?] nd. [quoted]; MAE Yougoslavie 53 QO to Chambrun no.460 d.19 Dec.1925.

⁸⁴ MAE Yougoslavie 53 note for the president of the council d.25 Dec.1925.

⁸⁵ FO 371/11239 Cheetham to FO tel.4 d.9 Jan.1926, min. by Howard Smith d.11 Jan.1926; MAE Yougoslavie 53 Blondel (chargé in Athens) to QO tel.6 d. 8 Jan.1926.

⁸⁶ FO 371/11239 Kennard to Lampson p.l. d.7 Jan.1926, Cheetham to FO tels.5-7 d.13 Jan.1926, min. by Bateman d.15 Jan.1926, 'Memorandum respecting the Balkan pact' by Howard Smith d.15 Jan.1926, Cheetham to FO tel.9 d.16 Jan.1926, memorandum by Howard Smith d.25 Jan.1926; MAE Yougoslavie 53 note for the president of the council d.25 Dec.1925, QO to Grenard tel.332 d.29 Dec.1925, Grenard to QO tels.350-6 d.30 Dec.1925. The Turkish foreign minister had visited Belgrade in late December and had cordial talks with Nincic, whilst Yugoslav-Bulgarian relations had been improving for several months.

⁸⁷ FO 371/11239 Kennard to FO tel.5 d.14 Jan.1926.

whether anything had changed on the railway question: the Greeks were still adamant that the Yugoslavs could not share in running the railway and Nincic, whilst giving out somewhat mixed signals, still seemed to favour a joint railway administration and to oppose any involvement by the League.⁸⁸ Nor were Greco-Yugoslav relations much better in other respects: the minorities question had flared up again, with both governments orchestrating demonstrations in their Macedonian territories which in turn led to violent exchanges in the Athens and Belgrade press.⁸⁹ In these circumstances it was rather hard to divine the exact nature of Yugoslav intentions.

The Foreign Office nevertheless saw in the Yugoslav move an opportunity to progress towards a settlement on the lines envisaged in December. Kennard had already expressed his support for the idea of referring the railway question to the League, and had suggested joint Anglo-French representations at Belgrade as the best way to overcome Yugoslav opposition.⁹⁰ The Foreign Office took up this theme after Gavrilovic's initiative: the railway question held the key to the realisation of a pact (that is, a series of arbitration treaties) but the views of the two sides were irreconcilable. Progress was, however, most likely to come if the Yugoslavs could be persuaded to abandon their present untenable position- that is, making demands that would infringe Greek sovereignty - and to allow the administration of the railway to be handed over to the League of Nations. Accordingly, Crewe and Graham were instructed to approach the French and Italian governments and to suggest that the best means of encouraging the Balkan pact which all three powers desired was for them to make joint representations at Athens and Belgrade for the submission of this question to the League without delay. There was no question of a pact being imposed from outside, but this seemed to London to be the best means of encouraging a resumption

⁸⁸ FO 371/11239 'Memorandum respecting the Balkan pact' by Howard Smith d.15 Jan.1926, min. by Howard Smith d.21 Jan.1926, Kennard to FO tel.5 d.14 Jan.1926; MAE Yougoslavie 53 Blondel to QO tel.6 d.8 Jan.1926.

⁸⁹ FO 371/11337 Kennard to FO no.488 d.31 Dec.1925 and mins., tel.8 d.16 Jan.1926 and mins., Cheetham to FO no.27 d.21 Jan.1926 and mins., 'Memorandum on Serbian "Minorities" in Greek Macedonia' by Bateman d.3 Mar.1926; FO 371/11343 Cheetham to FO no.427 d.31 Dec.1925 and mins., tel.8 d.16 Jan.1926, tel.18 d.30 Jan.1926.

⁹⁰ FO 371/11343 Kennard to Lampson p.1. d.8 Jan.1926, mins. by Harvey and Howard Smith d.13 Jan.1926, Tyrrell d.14 Jan.1926.

of talks and thus facilitating a pact.⁹¹ It was also in line with Britain's general policy of strengthening 'the influence and prestige of the League in the Balkans' and restraining 'Serbia in her more truculent moods'.⁹²

Nothing came of this move and this Gavrilovic initiative soon collapsed leaving Greco-Yugoslav relations in a worse state than ever. In part this was the fault of the French. The Greek foreign minister, Roufos, told the French chargé in Athens, Blondel, that, for the sake of an agreement, he personally favoured accepting Yugoslav demands for participation in the railway company and leaving the minorities question in the hands of the League.⁹³ Two important misunderstandings now intervened: first, Blondel told Paris that Pangalos would almost certainly accept Roufos' advice on these matters, and, second, Paris assumed that the Greeks had finally accepted the long-standing Yugoslav demand for the signature of a minorities convention on the lines of the Politis-Kalfoff protocol. The Quai d'Orsay passed this information on to Grenard, who in turn informed Nincic that an agreement was within sight.⁹⁴ Simultaneously, Briand told Chamberlain, who was visiting Paris, that the two sides were on the verge of a direct settlement, whereupon Chamberlain abandoned his plan for concerted great power representations.⁹⁵ Unfortunately, these raised hopes were soon dashed. In early February the Greeks transmitted proposals to Belgrade for settling the railway question by the conclusion of a technical treaty that would consign the administration of the line to the League of Nations and restated their view that the welfare of their minorities was adequately safeguarded by the

⁹¹ FO 371/11239 mins. by Howard Smith d.18 Jan.1926, Lampson d.19 Jan.1926, memorandum by Howard Smith d.22 Jan.1926, FO to Crewe no.238 d.22 Jan.1926, FO to Graham no.112 d.22 Jan.1926, FO to Kennard no.52 d.22 Jan.1926. It was always made clear that if either the Yugoslavs, French or Italians disliked the proposal then it would be dropped.

⁹² FO 371/11337 'Memorandum on Serbian "Minorities" in Greek Macedonia' by Bateman d.3 Mar.1926.

⁹³ MAE Yougoslavie 53 Blondel to QO tels.9-10 d.20 Jan.1926.

⁹⁴ MAE Yougoslavie 53 QO to Grenard tels.42-4 d.22 Jan.1926, Grenard to QO tels.39-41 d.26 Jan.1926; FO 371/11343 Kennard to FO tel.11 d.25 Jan.1926, mins. by Harvey and Howard Smith d.26 Jan.1926.

⁹⁵ FO 371/11239 Crewe to FO tel.42 d.28 Jan.1926, Graham to FO tel.17 d.29 Jan.1926; DBFP/1a/1/419.

minorities treaties guaranteed by the League.⁹⁶ These proposals, coming in the wake of Grenard's optimistic forecasts, made the worst possible impression on Nincic and dealt a severe blow to hopes for a pact.⁹⁷

There was continued talk of prospective arbitration treaties between Yugoslavia, Greece and Bulgaria, but Belgrade was always adamant that these could only follow the settlement of outstanding differences. Moreover, at least some Bulgarians were only keen on a treaty with Yugoslavia as the culmination of their improving relations because they hoped it would be the prelude to a joint attack on Greece - hardly evidence of a 'Locarno-mentality'.⁹⁸ On the railway question, there was no sign of any movement. In late February Roufos asked for London's opinion on the idea of transferring the railway question to the Yugoslav-Greek mixed technical commission established at Salonica to regulate the application of the 1923 convention, but London was unwilling to assume responsibility for any such idea, especially as the sittings of the commission had recently broken up amidst considerable acrimony. Thus the plan foundered, and the only real hope for progress was that Nincic and Roufos might be more conciliatory when they met at Geneva in March during the League Council.⁹⁹

The British placed the blame for this setback firmly on the Yugoslavs and the French. After Belgrade refused the Greek proposals, Kennard exchanged a series of private letters with various members of the Foreign Office in which he tried to put the

⁹⁶ FO 371/11343 Cheetham to FO tel.19 d.30 Jan.1926, tels.22-3 d.3 Feb.1926, no.52 d.3 Feb.1926, Erskine to Lampson p.l. d.4 Feb.1926, FO to Cheetham no.106 d.5 Feb.1926 and encls., min. by Howard Smith d.13 Feb.1926; FO 371/11239 min. by Tyrrell d.1 Feb.1926; MAE Yougoslavie 53 Blondel to Paris tels.14-18 d.3 Feb.1926, no.18 d.3 Feb.1926, Grenard to QO tel.44 d.5 Feb.1926.

⁹⁷ FO 371/11343 Kennard to FO tels.16-17 d.7 Feb.1926, no.54 d.8 Feb.1926, Kennard to Howard Smith p.l. d.11 Feb.1926.

⁹⁸ FO 371/11239 Erskine to FO no.11 d.20 Jan.1926 and mins., tel.8 d.5 Feb.1926 and mins., no.24 d. 4 Feb.1926 and mins., Kennard to Howard Smith p.l. d. 12 Feb.1926, Dering to FO no.60 d.8 Feb.1926, Erskine to FO no.43 d.4 Mar.1926, min. by Bateman d.10 Feb.1926; FO 421/310 Dering to FO no.70 d.13 Feb.1926.

⁹⁹ FO 371/11343 Cheetham to Lampson p.l. d.22 Feb.1926, Cheetham to FO tel.45 d.25 Feb.1926, min. by Bateman d.27 Feb.1926, Howard Smith to Kennard p.l. d.1 Mar.1926, mins. by Howard Smith and Lampson d.1 Mar.1926, Chamberlain d.2 Mar.1926, Kennard to Howard Smith p.l. d.5 Mar.1926, notes by Howard Smith d.4 and 8 Mar.1926, Howard Smith to Lampson p.l. d.8 Mar.1926, min. by Howard Smith d.9 Mar.1926, FO to Cheetham tel.31 d.9 Mar.1926; FO 371/11351 Crow to FO no.13 d.4 Mar.1926 and mins., Kennard to FO tel.32 d.5 Mar.1926, Cheetham to FO tel.50 d.6 Mar.1926, mins. by Bateman and Howard Smith d.8 Mar.1926, Crow to FO no.14 d.8 Mar.1926, Cheetham to FO no.106 d.11 Mar.1926.

Yugoslav case, pointing out that experience had taught the Yugoslavs not to trust in mere Greek assurances and to seek practical guarantees for their interests in Greece. London, however, was unimpressed: the Greeks had offered all possible guarantees for Yugoslavia's legitimate economic needs at Salonica, and Belgrade's refusal to accept them (or League involvement) was clearly suspicious; equally, the demand for a minorities convention was both legally unjustifiable and incompatible with the attitude Belgrade had adopted towards the Politis-Kalfoff protocol.¹⁰⁰ Despite this, however, Chamberlain had no desire to press the Yugoslavs: he decided to 'leave the thing severely alone',¹⁰¹ and 'not to become sponsor for either party'. If Britain did act again it would be as 'moderator between them & with France & Italy'.¹⁰² The likelihood of this, however, was reduced by British irritation with France.

Chamberlain certainly was vexed by what he saw as a lack of candour at the Quai d'Orsay (insisting at one point that 'France must treat us with confidence'¹⁰³) and Paris was blamed for encouraging Belgrade to reject the Greek proposals in order to gratify the French capitalists who would benefit from a share in the international administration of the line, and to facilitate the arming of central Europe.¹⁰⁴

The Quai d'Orsay's view was naturally quite different. The French had throughout been genuinely concerned, in their own interests, to influence Yugoslav policy in the direction of an arbitration pact: during January they exercised gentle pressure at Athens to elicit concessions - for they sympathised with the Yugoslavs over the railway and minorities - and urged Belgrade to accelerate moves to come to terms

¹⁰⁰ FO 371/11343 Kennard to Howard Smith p.l. d.11 Feb.1926, min. by Bateman d.18 Feb.1926, Howard Smith to Kennard p.l. d.15 Feb.1926, Kennard to Howard Smith p.l. d.19 Feb.1926, Lampson to Kennard p.l. d.22 Feb.1926, Kennard to Lampson p.l. d.26 Feb.1926, Lampson to Kennard p.l. d.1 Mar.1926.

¹⁰¹ FO 371/11343 Lampson to Kennard p.l. d.22 Feb.1926.

¹⁰² FO 371/11343 min. by Chamberlain d.2 Mar.1926.

¹⁰³ FO 371/11343 mins. by Chamberlain d.8 Feb.1926.

¹⁰⁴ FO 371/11343 note by Howard Smith d.6 Feb.1926, min. by Lampson d.6 Feb.1926, Kennard to FO tels.16-17 d.7 Feb.1926, no.54 d.8 Feb.1926, mins. by Bateman, Howard Smith and Lampson d.9 Feb.1926, Chamberlain d.10 Feb.1926, FO to Crewe draft tel., min. by Howard Smith d.10 Feb.1926, notes by Howard Smith d.13 Feb.1926, Lampson d.15 Feb.1926, Howard Smith to Kennard p.l. d.15 Feb.1926, mins. by Bateman d.17 Feb.1926, Howard Smith d.18 Feb.1926, Lampson to Kennard p.l. d.22 Feb.1926, note by Howard Smith d.4 Mar.1926; FO 371/11242 mins. by Howard Smith and Lampson d.12 Feb.1926; *DBFP*/1a/1/418-20.

with Athens whilst going slow on the *rapprochement* with Sofia - otherwise a Yugoslav-Bulgarian agreement would appear not as a pacific step but as a means of pressurising Greece.¹⁰⁵ After the shock of Greece's unacceptable proposals, Paris became irritated with London. The Quai d'Orsay felt that Chamberlain's scheme for joint representations was an attempt to coordinate pressure on Yugoslavia, which would be unfair, since the Yugoslavs had already made more concessions, and which obstructed a settlement by only encouraging Greek defiance. De Fleuriau raised this with Chamberlain, who told him that he had 'certainly given no encouragement to Greece to refuse any reasonable settlement or to expect British interference'.¹⁰⁶ During February one of the recurring themes in French correspondence on the question was that the Greeks were proving remarkably intransigent because they were relying on support from Britain. This worried the French, because they felt that the longer a Greco-Yugoslav settlement was delayed, the more Greece would be drawn into Italy's orbit. This in turn was a matter for concern given the remorseless progress of Italian diplomacy in the Balkans and the growing intimacy Paris perceived between London and Rome. Accordingly, by early March the French were more inclined to settle for the idea of neutral or League of Nations control over the railway if it would secure a speedy solution.¹⁰⁷

This difference of opinion between Britain and France was not yet a rift, but the two were clearly no longer quite seeing eye to eye. This was also evident on another issue that arose in February and which both influenced and was influenced by the Greco-Yugoslav question, namely talks concerning a tripartite Franco-Italo-Yugoslav pact. In December 1925 the Italians had approached Belgrade and suggested the conclusion of a new agreement to supplement the Pact of Rome. Nincic was reluctant to proceed

¹⁰⁵ MAE Yougoslavie 53 Grenard to QO tels.355-6 d.30 Dec.1925, no.360 d.31 Dec.1925, tels.16-17 d.12 Jan.1926, tels.22-3 d.16 Jan.1926, Dard to QO tels.12-15 d.19 Jan.1926, Grenard to QO tels.25-6 d.21 Jan.1926, QO to Grenard tels.42-4 d.22 Jan.1926, Grenard to QO tels.39-41 d.26 Jan.1926, Dard to QO tel.20 d.29 Jan.1926, QO to Blondel tels.27-8 d.2 Feb.1926.

¹⁰⁶ *DBFP/1a/I/419*; MAE Yougoslavie 53 Grenard to QO tels.53-5 d.7 Feb.1926, QO to De Fleuriau tels.125-7 d.8 Feb.1926, QO to Blondel tel.32 d.9 Feb.1926, De Fleuriau to QO tel.80 d.11 Feb.1926.

¹⁰⁷ MAE Yougoslavie 53 QO to Blondel tels.35-8 d.11 Feb.1926, tels.41-3 d.13 Feb.1926, note by Seydoux d.18 Feb.1926, Grenard to QO tels.63-9 d.21 Feb.1926, Besnard (Rome) to QO tels.164-8 d.27 Feb.1926, note by [?] d.1 Mar.1926.

with this without the French, and at his prompting Paris suggested to Rome that a tripartite pact should be concluded. It appeared - although details were rather slow to emerge - that what the French envisaged was a defensive alliance accompanied by arbitration treaties and a guarantee of existing frontiers (which would include the prohibition of an Austro-German *Anschluss*).¹⁰⁸ This was a natural move for a France worried at the growth of Italian influence in the Balkans and fearful for her position in Yugoslavia.¹⁰⁹ It was equally natural that the Italians should respond very negatively: Mussolini, posing as a good European, protested that as an alliance of victors it would be 'absolutely contrary to the spirit of Locarno', but in reality he was simply concerned to exclude French influence from the Balkans.¹¹⁰ The resultant Franco-Italian tiff placed Britain in a quandary: Chamberlain was determined to preserve good relations with both Paris and Rome and for that reason was determined to maintain an attitude of reserve. On the other hand, he could not see how the French proposal was 'in consonance with Locarno principles'.¹¹¹ As Howard Smith put it, the French wanted 'to create a system of defensive alliances directed to the preservation in their integrity of the peace treaties, while we believe that stable peace can only come by mutual agreements between ex-enemies'.¹¹²

Italian opposition, rather than British disapproval, soon killed the negotiations for a tripartite agreement. For some months thereafter there was talk of separate Franco-Yugoslav and Italo-Yugoslav agreements being concluded as a substitute, but Italian hostility prevented the former (or rather postponed it until 1927) whilst Yugoslav

¹⁰⁸ MAE Yougoslavie 53 Grenard to QO tels.355-6 d.30 Dec.1925; FO 371/11242 Kennard to FO tel.15 d.7 Feb.1926, no.53 d.8 Feb.1926, tel.18 d.9 Feb.1926, FO to Crewe no.713 d.3 Mar.1926, De Fleuriau to Tyrrell unno.1. d.5 Mar.1926; *DBFP/1a/I/418-20,476-7*; Carocci, *Politica Estera*, pp.49-56.

¹⁰⁹ MAE Yougoslavie 53 note by Corbin d.2 Feb.1926, note by Seydoux d.18 Feb.1926, Besnard to QO tels.164-6 d.27 Feb.1926; FO 371/11242 Graham to FO tel.53 d.2 Mar.1926.

¹¹⁰ *DBFP/1a/I/461,467-8,476-7*; *DDI/7/IV/159-60,164,168,172*; FO 371/11242 Kennard to Howard Smith p.1. d.25 Feb.1926, Kennard to FO tels.28-9 d.2 Mar.1926, Graham to FO no.193 d.3 Mar.1926, min. by Howard Smith d.9 Mar.1926.

¹¹¹ *DBFP/1a/I/418-20,455-6,461,467-8,476-7*. Chamberlain blamed the Quai d'Orsay rather than Briand for this attitude: 'it is a terrible pity that M.Briand cannot give more time to foreign affairs' (FO 371/11242 min. by Chamberlain d.13 Feb.1926, Lampson to Kennard p.1. d.1 Mar.1926).

¹¹² FO 371/11242 min. by Howard Smith d.24 Feb.1926.

caution (and fear) precluded the latter.¹¹³ During 1926 Franco-Italian relations deteriorated markedly, as the two states conducted a 'scrap for the hegemony of S[outh] E[astern] Europe' in which the Italians increasingly seemed to be gaining the upper hand. The British regretted this conflict, but had no wish to be drawn into it: 1926 was perhaps the highwater mark of the special relationship between Chamberlain and Mussolini and, precisely because he was aware of the possible danger from Italian policy, Chamberlain was determined 'to keep Italy, a growing power, in sympathy with our policy & in cooperation with us'. The net result was a prolonged Anglo-French difference of opinion over Italy.¹¹⁴ In the short term, these wider fears affected France's attitude to the Greco-Yugoslav dispute in contradictory ways: Paris was determined to cling on to Belgrade, but also aware that Yugoslav concessions to Greece could facilitate an agreement that would block the advance of Italian influence.

The tripartite pact episode also illustrated how difficult it was for the 'Locarno-spirit' to take root and flourish in the soil of south-eastern Europe: as one British observer put it, arbitration treaties and the like were no longer regarded as instruments of pacification 'but as pawns in the old contest of political intrigue and international jealousies'. There was a danger, in fact, that in attempting to emulate the western powers, governments in the east would 'only succeed in replacing the spirit of Locarno by that of "Frankenstein"'.¹¹⁵ This seemed to be confirmed by the course of Yugoslav-Bulgarian relations later in the spring when, under the guise of attempting to lay the ground for a pact, Nincic tried to force exorbitant concessions from

¹¹³ FO 371/11242-3 file 1618 *passim*; DDI/7/IV/178-80,186-7,199,203,219-20,234-9,255-6; Orde, *International Security*, pp.205-6; Shorrocks, *Ally to Enemy*, pp.47-8.

¹¹⁴ DBFP/1a/I/495-7,608-9,651-3,700-2; DBFP/1a/II/125-7,144-5,221-2,425 [quoted] and *passim*; Cassels, *Early Diplomacy*, 288-376,390-7; FO 371/11242 min. by Lampson d.3 Mar.1926 [quoted]. Lampson concluded that 'we don't want to be drawn in between them. But, to prevent trouble, we may have to play our usual rôle of honest broker'. For details of the meetings between Chamberlain and Mussolini in these months, the substance of their conversations and the wild rumours they engendered (for example, about the possibility of joint Anglo-Italian action against Turkey), see Edwards *HJ* 14 158-64. The *entente* eventually faltered because for the British it was designed to moderate Italian ambitions and not to deliver the gains Mussolini wanted (Cassels, *Early Diplomacy*, pp.312-4).

¹¹⁵ FO 371/11242 min. by Aveling d.3 Mar.1926.

Sofia.¹¹⁶ The Foreign Office was well aware this time that conciliation was far from the mind of the cynical Nincic: as Bateman put it, his ignorance was 'becoming increasingly dangerous as a factor in European relations'.¹¹⁷ Taken together, these two episodes of pact-making seemed to show that the spirit of pacification was lacking in both great and small powers alike, and that in consequence the chances of realising any sort of Balkan Locarno in the near future were extremely slim.

On the other hand, and perhaps paradoxically, as the pact receded from view so a Greco-Yugoslav settlement came into sight. At Geneva, where the League Council convened in March, Nincic suddenly became much more conciliatory, and agreed during conversations with Roufos to drop the claim for a minorities convention and to accept a Greek proposal that the railway should be run by a commission consisting of a Greek delegate and a Yugoslav delegate with a neutral commissioner as umpire and arbiter. This, it seemed, might meet Yugoslavia's economic grievances whilst protecting Greece's sovereign rights.¹¹⁸ The reasons for Nincic's change of heart are obscure. It is possible that Briand had exercised pressure on him to come to terms with Greece,¹¹⁹ and it is certain that the British told him frankly that Yugoslavia's claims were unjustifiable.¹²⁰ Equally, he may have been perturbed by the increasing amity between Greece and Italy: Roufos visited Rome before going on to Geneva and although he insisted that he had had no secret political conversations, the next few months were thick with rumours of a close Greco-Italian understanding, possibly aiming at an expedition against Turkey.¹²¹ Whatever the cause, March and April saw a definite improvement in the relations between Greece and Yugoslavia as the Greeks drew up a draft treaty. This was maintained despite the wriggings of Nincic who 'like

¹¹⁶ FO 371/11217 file 92 *passim*. See also above pp.261-2.

¹¹⁷ FO 371/11217 min. by Bateman d.6 Jul.1926.

¹¹⁸ FO 421/310 Chamberlain (Geneva) to FO no.19 d.17 Mar.1926 and encl.; FO 371/11343 note by Howard Smith d.16 Mar.1926.

¹¹⁹ FO 371/11243 SIS Report CX/9557/1 d.31 Mar.1926 and min. by Howard Smith d.3 Apr.1926, but cf. FO 371/11343 note by Howard Smith d.16 Mar.1926.

¹²⁰ FO 371/11343 Lampson to Howard Smith p.l. d.9 Mar.1926, p.l. d.11 Mar.1926.

¹²¹ FO 371/11343 Graham to FO tel.59 d.5 Mar.1926, note by Howard Smith d.8 Mar.1926, min. by Howard Smith d.16 Mar.1926, Lampson to Howard Smith p.l. d.16 Mar.1926; *DDI/7/IV/183-4*. For Greco-Italian relations, see FO 421/310 *passim* and pp.153-7 above.

Pharaoh, ... hardened his heart when he returned to Belgrade' and began to insist that he had not abandoned his claims regarding minorities.¹²²

In early May the Greeks communicated their draft treaty to Belgrade. The British felt that their proposals met every legitimate Yugoslav need, but Nincic was unhappy with them, chiefly because the Yugoslav commissioner was to be subordinate to his Greek colleague. Nevertheless by the end of June he grudgingly accepted them as a general basis for negotiations.¹²³ Simultaneously, talks were begun to settle the various problems of technical detail arising from the interpretation of the 1923 convention,¹²⁴ and Nincic made it clear that he wanted to conclude a political understanding as well. This, he said, would be the first step towards a Balkan Locarno, although this was very unconvincing - more probable motives were a desire to pressurise Bulgaria and fear of Italy.¹²⁵ The great powers on the whole kept in the background. The British rather despaired of the haphazard way in which the negotiations were conducted and were adamant that they would not be drawn into them.¹²⁶ The French took a rather more active interest and encouraged the negotiations, and it was partly due to this that the two sides agreed that the neutral arbiter should be a French citizen.¹²⁷ By the end of June, the improvement in Yugoslav-Greek relations was such that the two had become 'thick as thieves', a

¹²² FO 371/11343 Kennard to FO no.96 d.17 Mar.1926, mins. by Bateman and Sargent d.23 Mar.1926, Kennard to FO tel.45 d.31 Mar.1926, no.121 d.1 Apr.1926, mins. by Bateman and Howard Smith d.1 Apr.1926, Lampson d.d.7 Apr.1926, note by Howard Smith d.22 Apr.1926 [quoted], Kennard to FO no.160 d.23 Apr.1926 and mins.; MAE Yougoslavie 53 aide-mémoire by Karapanos d.25 Mar.1926, Grenard to QO no.92 d.30 Mar.1926, no.14 d.15 Apr.1926, tel.127 d.21 Apr.1926.

¹²³ FO 371/11344 Kennard to FO no.171 d.5 May 1926 and encls., min. by Harvey d.11 May 1926, Cheetham to FO no.184 d.6 May 1926, mins. by Bateman and Howard Smith d.18 May 1926, notes by Drummond d.24 and 27 May 1926 and Howard Smith d.31 May 1926, Ogilvie-Forbes to FO no.253 d.25 Jun.1926.

¹²⁴ FO 371/11344 Kennard to FO no.197 d.20 May 1926, min. by Bateman d.27 May 1926, Kennard to FO no.207 d.27 May 1926, no.218 d.8 Jun.1926, Ogilvie-Forbes to FO no.253 d.25 Jun.1926; FO 371/11351 Cheetham to FO no.249 d.24 Jun.1926.

¹²⁵ FO 371/11344 Kennard to FO no.229 d.10 Jun.1926, Kennard to Lampson p.l. d.11 Jun.1926, Ogilvie-Forbes to FO no.253 d.25 Jun.1926, min. by Bateman d.30 Jun.1926, min. by Chamberlain d.2 Jul.1926; MAE Yougoslavie 53 Grenard to QO tel.162 d.24 Jun.1926, tels.177-8 d.2 Jul.1926.

¹²⁶ FO 371/11344 Lampson to Kennard p.l. d.26 May 1926, mins. by Sargent d.18 Jun.1926, Chamberlain d.19 Jun.1926, FO to Ogilvie-Forbes no.367 d.24 Jun.1926.

¹²⁷ MAE Yougoslavie 53 Chambrun to QO tels.81-2 d.6 May 1926, QO to Chambrun tels.117-9 d.29 May 1926, Dubail (chargé in Belgrade) to QO tels.148-50 d.1 Jun.1926, Chambrun to QO tel.102 d.3 Jun.1926, tel.115 d.26 Jun.1926, QO to Chambrun tel.139 d.26 Jun.1926, Chambrun to QO tel.116 d.26 Jun.1926, tel.122 d.1 Jul.1926, no.86 d.7 Jul.1926, tel.132 d.20 Jul.1926.

development that was marked by a joint visit by Pangalos and Gavrilovic to the Salonica free zone.¹²⁸ By early August agreement had almost been reached on a series of conventions to settle the railway and free zone questions.

The Pangalos government had, unfortunately, failed to take Greek public opinion sufficiently into account. True, the signature of the August conventions was delayed whilst a political treaty was drawn up which, it was hoped, would make Greek concessions over Salonica more palatable to public opinion.¹²⁹ But the concessions had already begun to incite unease in Greece¹³⁰ and at the last minute it seems the Yugoslavs tabled a whole list of demands, which were accepted by Pangalos only because he was desperate for a foreign policy success to shore up his now crumbling regime.¹³¹ As it turned out, therefore, the signature of the agreements on 17 August proved not to be the end of this saga, but merely the beginning of a new chapter. The agreements unleashed a storm of disapproval within Greece that contributed greatly to the *coup* of 22 August which toppled Pangalos and brought to power a government extremely reluctant to ratify the treaties.¹³²

It was not difficult to see why the settlement was so unpopular in Greece. On the railway question the Greeks gained recognition of their sovereignty over the line, but had to pay 20,000,000 francs for the shares in the railway company, and soon lost confidence in the likely impartiality of the French arbiter. At Salonica, they made

¹²⁸ FO 371/11351 Crow to FO no.26 d.11 Jun.1926, tel.3 d.1 Jul.1926, min. by Bateman d.2 Jul.1926 [quoted], Crow to FO no.30 d.5 Jul.1926; FO 371/11343 Cheetham to FO no.233 d.8 Jun.1926, no.234 d.9 Jun.1926.

¹²⁹ FO 371/11344 MacKillop to FO tel.161 d.20 Jul.1926, Kennard to FO tel.112 d.29 Jul.1926, MacKillop to FO tel.166 d.2 Aug.1926, Kennard to FO tel.115 d.3 Aug.1926, MacKillop to FO no.297 d.24 Jul.1926.

¹³⁰ FO 371/11344 MacKillop to FO no.313 d.9 Aug.1926, tel.176 d.18 Aug.1926; MAE Yougoslavie 53 Chambrun to QO tels.140-1 d.12 Aug.1926.

¹³¹ FO 371/11344 memorandum by Bateman d.29 Oct.1926; FO 371/11345 Kennard to FO no.435 d.9 Nov.1926, min. by Howard Smith d.29 Nov.1926, Cheetham to FO no.420 d.26 Nov.1926; MAE Yougoslavie 53 Chambrun to QO tels.140-1 d.12 Aug.1926, Grenard to QO tel.205 d.14 Aug.1926, tel.208 d.16 Aug.1926. It has also been argued that Pangalos was eager for an agreement in order to clear the decks for a war against Turkey: Psomiades *Balkan Studies* 13 13-14.

¹³² FO 371/11344 MacKillop to FO tel.173 d.16 Aug.1926, tels.175-6 d.18 Aug.1926, note by Howard Smith d.17 Aug.1926, min. by Bateman nd., MacKillop to FO no.326 d.19 Aug.1926, tel.183 d.23 Aug.1926, Kennard to FO tel.127 d.23 Aug.1926, MacKillop to FO tel.185 d.24 Aug.1926, Kennard to FO no.354 d.26 Aug.1926, MacKillop to FO no.337 d.2 Sept.1926, Cheetham to FO no.367 d.7 Oct.1926.

many concessions that were likely to be very damaging to their economic interests: the free zone was enlarged, the Yugoslavs were given the right of cabotage and, contrary to all previous objections, they were to be allowed to use their zone as an entrepôt for goods destined for countries other than Yugoslavia. On the minorities question Pangalos had totally given away the Greek case, which had been incontestable, by extending the protection of the Greek minorities treaty to the 'Serb' minority in Macedonia (thus conceding that the Macedo-Slavs were effectively Serbs). To cap all this, the political treaty that was supposed to compensate for these concessions was extremely limited, being simply a defensive alliance without any military provisions or arbitration arrangements. The final straw was that whereas the technical conventions embodying Greece's concessions were valid for fifty years, this political treaty was to last a mere three.¹³³ The inequitable nature of the settlement was recognised by the British. Before they had known the details of the agreement they had applauded it as 'common sense & a fair compromise'¹³⁴ and 'Pangalos' wisest act'¹³⁵ and after the *coup* advised the Greeks to ratify it.¹³⁶ But once the terms of the conventions were published, the Foreign Office accepted that its enthusiasm had been 'ill founded' and instructed Cheetham to cease recommending ratification since it would not contribute to a permanent settlement.¹³⁷

The French, by contrast, were always keen to see the agreements implemented. On 20 August Chambrun reported that the presence of a French commissioner at Salonica could help to secure communications with France's eastern allies and would strengthen French influence at a strategically important point in the Near East.

Moreover, the settlement linked Greece to France's alliance system and consolidated

¹³³ FO 371/11351 Crow to FO no.37 d.24 Aug.1926, mins. by Bateman and Howard Smith d.1 Sept.1926; FO 371/11344 min. by Bateman d.19 Aug.1926, note by Lampson d.19 Aug.1926, MacKillop to FO no.337 d.2 Sept.1926, Cheetham to FO no.367 d.7 Oct.1926, memorandum by Bateman d.29 Oct.1926; FO 371/11345 min. by Bateman d.2 Nov.1926.

¹³⁴ FO 371/11344 min. by Bateman d.19 Aug.1926.

¹³⁵ FO 371/11344 min. by Chamberlain d.24 Aug.1926.

¹³⁶ FO 371/11344 Kennard to FO no.354 d.26 Aug.1926, FO to MacKillop no.596 d.6 Sept.1926, min. by Sargent d.1 Nov.1926.

¹³⁷ FO 371/11344 Cheetham to FO no.367 d.7 Oct.1926, min. by Bateman d.26 Oct.1926 [quoted], memorandum by Bateman d.29 Oct.1926, mins. by Sargent and Tyrrell d.1 Nov.1926, FO to Cheetham tel.149 d.3 Nov.1926.

French influence in Athens and Belgrade to the detriment of that of Italy.¹³⁸ After the Greek *coup*, the French exerted themselves to try and save the treaty and urged the new Greek government to ratify it.¹³⁹ When this failed, they pressed for a re-negotiation of the treaty within the existing framework; but this too was to no avail, and their insistent entreaties only alienated the Greeks.¹⁴⁰ The Italian attitude was the reverse of this. At first Rome was dismayed, and needed some convincing that there was no secret political or military convention accompanying the published agreements. Equally, the fall of Pangalos as a result of the treaty was a blow to Italian influence in Greece.¹⁴¹ In the end, however, as the treaty did not come into force the damage to Italian interests was less than it might have been, and soon afterwards Mussolini stepped up his drive for predominance in the Balkans: the Italo-Romanian treaty of September 1926 was a fine riposte to the Franco-Romanian agreement of June, and the treaty of Tirana with Albania in November was a stunning success. This accelerated Yugoslavia's alienation from Italy, as did the Italo-Hungarian treaty of April 1927, and this culminated in the Franco-Yugoslav treaty of November 1927.¹⁴² In this situation, therefore, France's efforts to preserve the Greco-Yugoslav settlement reflected not so much confidence as anxiety.

It was quite some time before a final settlement materialised. At the end of 1926 the treaty was still in limbo, and it was uncertain whether the Yugoslavs' fear of Italy would make them more conciliatory or more unyielding towards Greece.¹⁴³ During 1927 Greek diplomacy was very tentative, partly as a result of recent unhappy

¹³⁸ MAE Yougoslavie 53 Chambun to QO no.99 d.20 Aug.1926; FO 371/11344 min. by Howard Smith d.19 Aug.1926.

¹³⁹ MAE Yougoslavie 53 QO to Chambrun tels.182-3 d.24 Aug.1926, Chambrun to QO tels.150-1 d.25 Aug.1926, tel.153 d.27 Aug.1926; FO 371/11344 note by Tyrrell d.7 Oct.1926, mins. by Howard Smith nd., Sargent d.11 Oct.1926, and Tyrrell and Chamberlain d.12 Oct.1926.

¹⁴⁰ FO 371/12166 Loraine to FO tel.16 d.15 Jan.1927; FO 371/13654 Loraine to FO no.4 d.7 Jan.1929.

¹⁴¹ MAE Yougoslavie 53 Roger (Rome) to QO tels.486-7 d.26 Aug.1926, QO to Roger tel.702 d.27 Aug.1926, Grenard to [?Rome] tel.222 d.28 Aug.1926; *DDI/7/IV/307,312-3,316-7*; FO 371/11344 note by Howard Smith d.17 Aug.1926, Wingfield (Rome) to FO no.725 d.27 Aug.1926, mins. by Bateman and Howard Smith d.30 Aug.1926, Kennard to Sargent p.l. d.10 Sept.1926.

¹⁴² For these general developments, see Marks, *Illusion of Peace*, pp.86-9 and Carocci, *Politica Estera*, pp.57ff.

¹⁴³ FO 371/12178 Annual Report, Greece, 1926 pp.16-17.

experiences and partly as a result of domestic instability. Athens was reluctant to consider either an agreement with Italy (which would have offended both Yugoslavia and France) or renewed political negotiations with Yugoslavia. Belgrade was equally cautious, and the most significant event in the year was the Greek assembly's unanimous rejection of the Pangalos treaties in August.¹⁴⁴ Matters only really began to move in July 1928 when Venizelos returned to power, inaugurating a four year administration which brought Greece its only real political stability of the inter-war period. This administration was also marked by a very active policy of conciliation in foreign affairs, the most notable feature of which was the 1930 settlement with Turkey.¹⁴⁵ Venizelos' first move was to sign a treaty of friendship and arbitration with Italy in September 1928, but he was careful to couple this with conciliatory overtures to Belgrade. Thus, in October 1928 an agreement was signed reaffirming the terms of the 1923 convention which was to be clarified by protocols regulating its interpretation in a sense more favourable to Greece than those of 1926.¹⁴⁶ Finally, in March 1929, an agreement along these lines was reached accompanied by a pact of friendship and arbitration. This amounted, after years of tension, to a 'pretty complete liquidation of outstanding questions' between the two states, achieved where the railway question was concerned by reverting to an agreement concluded six years previously.¹⁴⁷

Nothing resembling a Balkan Locarno ever evolved. Chamberlain continued to envisage one, expressing the hope that 'there might be found in the Balkans a statesman with the courage and breadth of vision of Dr. Stresemann and the broad humanity and devotion to peace of M. Briand' to apply Locarno principles there, but the spirit of Locarno proved elusive, intangible and difficult to transplant.¹⁴⁸ Balkan politicians continued to pay lip service to the idea, and the network of friendship

¹⁴⁴ FO 371/12166-7 file 221 and FO 371/12167 file 228 *passim*.

¹⁴⁵ Clogg, *Concise History*, pp.108-11; Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic*, pp.36-41; Couloumbis, Petropoulos and Psomiades, *Foreign Interference*, pp.89-92.

¹⁴⁶ FO 371/12920-1 file 20, FO 371/12921-2 file 45 and FO 371/12923 file 79 *passim*.

¹⁴⁷ FO 371/13654 min. by Bateman d.11 Apr.1929 and FO 371/13654-5 file 496 *passim*.

¹⁴⁸ FO 371/12923 FO to Loraine no.54 d.27 Jan.1928, quoting a speech given by Chamberlain in November 1927.

treaties which proliferated in the region in the later 1920s could perhaps have served as the foundations for a comprehensive pact (as the Foreign Office had hoped in 1925-1926), but the will for a general *rapprochement* was lacking. The Balkan *Entente* which eventually materialised in the 1930s was certainly not in the style of Locarno, since it excluded Bulgaria and was, at bottom, simply anti-revisionist.¹⁴⁹ During the 1920s conditions in the Balkans were just not conducive to a pact: the peace settlement was maintained by a great preponderance of power on the part of the victors, who had nothing to gain from making concessions, whilst Bulgaria and Hungary simply had no incentive to come to a partial accommodation with the *status quo* along the lines of Stresemann's acceptance of Germany's western border.¹⁵⁰ More to the point, as the Greco-Yugoslav dispute showed, the former victor powers were by no means a cohesive bloc: they were divided amongst themselves as much as they were divided from Bulgaria, and indeed often used improved relations with Sofia to put pressure on each other. There was, in short, no consensus about a pact, the more so as the great powers of France and Italy were at odds in the region and over this question.

In these circumstances the search for a Balkan Locarno, even in the limited sense of a network of complementary arbitration pacts, was doomed to failure. Rivalries and conflicting interests in the region were simply too numerous and complex for a pact to be feasible. There was also the problem of instability, and not just in the political and economic sense: as the Greco-Yugoslav dispute illustrated, few considered the post-war territorial settlement to be set in stone, and this naturally bred an insecurity which militated against the pursuit of conciliatory policies. The fact that Greece and Yugoslavia both used pact proposals for ulterior motives, as new means to pursue old ends, demonstrated a persistence of *realpolitik* thinking in the Balkans which shocked the Foreign Office.

¹⁴⁹ For an account of the origins of the Balkan *Entente* and other moves in the inter-war years for Balkan cooperation and confederation, see P.Papastratis, 'From the "Great Idea" to Balkan Union' in Sarafis and Eve (eds.), *Background to Contemporary Greece II* 153-179.

¹⁵⁰ Orde, *International Security*, p.203.

Yet this had in fact also been the spirit in which Stresemann approached Locarno - by investing Locarno with such a mythic, transcendental significance the British rather obscured the fact that it was essentially a treaty like any other, concluded only because of the coincidence at a particular time of several otherwise incompatible or divergent national interests. They over-estimated the rôle of will power and atmosphere and rather under-estimated that of hard political calculation.¹⁵¹ In pursuing the quest for a Balkan Locarno, the British betrayed this fundamental misperception of what Locarno was: the realisation of a Balkan pact was not simply a matter of importing a new spirit of idealism into the region, or of discovering hitherto untapped reserves of courage, vision and humanity - there had also to be a coincidence of political interest. Balkan statesmen never really developed a 'Locarno-mentality', and continued to pursue their own narrowly defined national interests in the Hobbesian confusion of the Balkan political arena. But in that sense, they perhaps showed that they perceived the true nature of Locarno rather better than did Austen Chamberlain.

¹⁵¹ This charge is also made by Chamberlain's biographer: Dutton, *Chamberlain*, p.259.

Conclusion

The internal situation in Greece in the inter-war years moved through a period of great instability in the aftermath of the Asia Minor disaster, stabilised with the Venizelos administration of 1928 -1932, then fragmented once more as the national schism resurfaced and led to the Metaxas dictatorship of 1936 - 1941. In this respect Greek internal developments followed a pattern similar to that of European international relations which also moved through a period of uncertainty to one of apparent stability after the Dawes-Locarno settlement, but a stability which ultimately proved to be based on unsure foundations. The two processes were not, however, synchronised. Whereas 1923 -1926 marked the transition to stability in international relations, it was the period of maximum fragmentation, uncertainty and upheaval in Greek internal affairs.

From September 1922 to October 1923 the political struggle in Greece was still to some extent between the old factions of Venizelists and royalists. The latter, however, were severely weakened by the execution of the six and then by the failure of the October 1923 counter-revolution which both discredited the royalist cause with public opinion and destroyed its military base. For many years the schism in its old configuration was now transcended, and the decisive political struggles henceforth took place within the Venizelist bloc which fragmented into a welter of competing factions. For six months the struggle centred on the nature of the regime, until in March 1924 the extreme republicans triumphed and a republic was established by decree. This represented a defeat for Venizelos, who had sought to manage the transition to a republic and to endow it with a cloak of legitimacy, in order to guard against royalist revanche and to perpetuate the dominance of the Liberal party. The brevity of his premiership illustrated the limited influence of his commanding presence, given the balance of forces in Greece; but his prophecies of doom about a 'stillborn republic' were in the long term vindicated. In the short term, on the other hand, the creation of a republic seemed to settle the constitutional question and encouraged the expression of other differences between the factions: the governments

in power from March 1924 to June 1925 were all plagued by social unrest, economic troubles and parliamentary strife. The bickering of the politicians only encouraged the leading military figures to consider extra-parliamentary authoritarian measures as a means of bringing order to Greece, and this culminated in the Pangalos dictatorship established in June 1925. The rather *opéra bouffe* character of this regime, however, highlighted the very limited nature of the alternative vision offered by the military in Greece. For all his grandiose visions of transcending the schism and destroying the old blocs, Pangalos never established autonomy from the political parties or superseded them, and ultimately the parties, with the help of another military leader, brought him down. The terrible mismanagement of economic and foreign affairs perpetrated by Pangalos brought factious Greek opinion to its senses for a time and in December 1926 an ecumenical government was formed which helped stabilise Greece (for example by finally promulgating a constitution) and this paved the way for the later return of Venizelos to power.

Instability in Greece obviously had many causes. The collapse of Greek irredentism in 1922 robbed the Greek people of their previous sense of national purpose, and brought to the surface and sharpened the divisions which had originally precipitated the schism. True, the schism itself was not apparent for much of the 1920s since Venizelism was triumphant, but the divisions within the Venizelist bloc that were now brought to the forefront were themselves, in turn, quite sufficient to perpetuate instability. The parlous economic situation exacerbated the problem, as did the economic and social difficulties inherent in the process of refugee settlement - witness, for example, the small scale but persistent communist activity in Greece in the 1920s. The contribution of the military to all this was complex but unhelpful - the military never supplanted the politicians but their interventions in politics perhaps hindered the evolution of a genuine political settlement based on the actual balance of political forces in the country, since, for as long as the army was dominated by Venizelists, the military had a professional, political and personal stake in preserving

the republican *status quo* by whatever means necessary. Although there was a broad consensus within Greece on the primacy of the task of domestic reconstruction, the feuding and instability both diverted energy from that task and directly hindered it, by deterring external investment and international assistance. The powers - whose structural economic influence in Greece was still a salient feature - insisted that the advent of stability must precede investment and help, whereas the Greeks claimed that only finance could bring stability and were inclined, by force of habit, to seek salvation by ingratiating themselves with the powers rather than by putting their own house in order. This was a faulty strategy, especially as the powers, now that their vital interests were no longer engaged in Greece, were unwilling to become embroiled in her affairs.

Greek foreign policy in these years was essentially reactive, quite naturally given the changed priorities of the post-1922 situation. The Dodecanese - one of the last remaining fragments of unredeemed territory - proved unattainable, reinforcing the lesson that Greek expansion was impossible in the face of opposition from a great power, in this case Italy. The question was in any case really an Anglo-Italian one in which the Greeks were only peripherally involved, and Britain's lingering sense of obligation towards the Greeks gradually evaporated in the face of more general considerations, including an awareness that Greece was now of little importance. The Corfu crisis emphasised again the dangers the Greeks faced as a weak nation with powerful neighbours; but although the crisis was an extremely uncomfortable experience for them, the intervention of the powers and the League at least ensured that their territorial integrity was maintained. Indeed, despite Greek weakness this integrity seemed effectively to be guaranteed, as was proved, admittedly in a very roundabout fashion, by League intervention to restore the *status quo* during the Greek-Bulgarian incident of October 1925. In fact, the League proved to be a boon for the Greeks generally, as a conduit for external assistance that enabled Greece to escape the danger of domination by any one power, as a neutral safeguard against

foreign interference (as shown in the minorities question) and as a weapon in the armoury of diplomacy (as shown over the Salonica railway question and the Balkan pact). Towards Bulgaria Greek policy was single-minded: together with other states in the region Greece simply opposed all Bulgarian efforts at revisionism, and in this relationship alone did she have the whip-hand. Even Greece's conciliatory moves, such as the offers made over the Aegean outlet, were probably designed to reduce the revisionist threat by removing ostensible grievances. An overall verdict on the conduct of Greek policy is therefore bound to be mixed. On some occasions the Greeks doggedly defended their position, skilfully manoeuvred and succeeded in protecting their interests. On others, they sometimes exacerbated by stubbornness and procrastination problems that would otherwise have been susceptible of solution. This was perhaps explicable, however, given the unstable conditions, especially the precariousness of the new territorial arrangements in the region, which militated against the pursuit of generous and conciliatory policies.

In Greek internal matters, the British wanted to see stability established, yet they were unwilling, given the limited nature of their interests in the country, to make any great positive effort to achieve this. Indeed, they wished to avoid, if possible, any intervention in Greek affairs since, given Greek weakness, it was likely to lead only to unprofitable entanglements: although they desired stability in Greece, the existing instability was a powerful argument against intervention. They did consider occasional acts of interference in contravention of this general rule - such as the withdrawal of Lindley in 1922 and the restoration of diplomatic relations in 1924 - but these involved little effort or commitment. On the question of the nature of the regime, the British at first deprecated the prospect of a republic, not on principle but because they believed it would bring chaos. They were not, however, prepared to intervene to avert it and they accepted it pragmatically once it arrived: what they wanted was stable government, regardless of its political complexion; and after the 1924 plebiscite it seemed that this might be achieved by the republic which appeared

to reflect the actual will of the people. For the same reason, after an interlude of fragile parliamentary rule, they accepted and gradually warmed to the Pangalos dictatorship. This illustrated an enduring feature of British Greek policy between the wars: in 1938 a senior Foreign Office official writing of Britain's attitude towards the Metaxas dictatorship declared that

though we do not hold a brief for it in so far as it is a dictatorship rather than a parliamentary administration, we have had such disappointing experiences of the latter in Greece from the point of view of British interests that we are not inclined to attach much value to that particular type of parliamentarism which is traditional in Greece ...¹

British policy towards Greece could therefore be seen as prudent, pragmatic and calculated, and unencumbered by unnecessary considerations of principle or sentiment. Principle was certainly only invoked when it coincided with interest, and the sentiment which undoubtedly existed barely affected policy. In part this was because the misdeeds of the Greeks were a countervailing factor: as Chamberlain once exclaimed, 'why I like the Greek & why I feel sympathy with him, goodness only knows!'² Political considerations were always paramount. Thus, in 1924 Nicolson suggested marking the centenary of the death of Byron by the return of the Elgin marbles to Greece; but the idea was rejected because of the likely outcry from public opinion.³

On the other hand, the verdict on British policy is less favourable if economic questions are brought into the equation. There was an almost total lack of coordination of political and economic interests, and this was much to the detriment of the latter. The Foreign Office in general did not worry if British influence in Greece was temporarily eclipsed, believing that the country's geographical position and susceptibility to naval pressure meant that it could easily be brought to heel if

¹ FO 371/[?] Sargent to Bessborough p.l. d. 29 Aug.1938, quoted in Papastratis, *Background to Contemporary Greece* II 175.

² FO 371/11344 min. by Chamberlain d.24 Aug.1926.

³ FO 371/9892 min. by Nicolson d 2 Apr.1924 and FO 371/9892-3 file 3584 *passim*.

necessary.⁴ The confident detachment which this attitude bred, however, did not help the British in the hunt for contracts in Greece, and consequently these contracts went increasingly to the French, Italians and Americans. At the same time, diverse British economic interests were in conflict; for example, the desire to see a balanced budget in Greece contradicted the wish to sell arms or secure other lucrative contracts there. Equally, although the British still had great economic influence in Greece because of their dominant position in the international economic system, they were reluctant to exercise it (for example over the second refugee loan) to gain satisfaction over contracts, outstanding claims or the war debt. Thus Britain's overarching interest in the restoration of stability conflicted with narrower and more parochial concerns in Greece. This type of conflict may well have been inevitable, but the disjunction between political and economic interests often left the British frustrated and hampered the overall effectiveness of British policy.

French policy towards Greek internal affairs was, in essentials, similar to that of Britain. On the question of the nature of the regime the French, like the British, refrained from intervention in order to avoid entanglements in a region where vital interests were not at stake. Despite the antics of renegade French representatives or the Paris press, the Quai d'Orsay certainly did not work for or encourage a republic in Greece. On the contrary, in order to promote stability it restrained the republican extremists and deprecated anything but peaceful, democratic constitutional change - in 1923, after all, the French were even prepared to bolster the position of George II by recognition. The Machiavellian and selfish motives which the British and French imputed to each other at times of crisis in Greece were a reflection not of reality but

⁴ This confidence about British influence was the general rule in London even if British diplomats in Athens did not always share it. On occasion the British would act positively to maintain their influence, but there were usually special reasons for this: thus, London agreed in 1924 to send a naval mission to Greece, but only to forestall the despatch of a French mission which might induce the Greeks to buy naval armaments far in excess of their requirements.

of the suspicion pervading the *Entente* between 1922 and 1924.⁵ True, the French, unlike the British, had a political preference for the republicans, but this only manifested itself in a vigorous French welcome once the republic had actually been established and approved by plebiscite. By the same token, it must be admitted, the French were always keen to keep certain royalists, especially Metaxas, out of power, and some of their actions designed to promote stability in Greece (such as recognising George II) were also intended to perpetuate the exclusion of these elements from government.

The French welcomed the republic in Greece largely because they believed it would increase their influence, given the francophile proclivities of most Greek republicans. After the republic was established the French definitely stepped up their vigorous promotion of their political and economic influence, in the case of the latter by dogged pursuit of government contracts and encouragement of Greek arms purchases. The intensity and success of these efforts was in marked contrast to the ineffectiveness of British policy, and this bred some resentment: the British did not fear the growth of French influence in a general political sense, but the continual loss of contracts certainly rankled. The British also deprecated French arms sales, which seemed to be part of a wider militarist policy in central and eastern Europe that was not conducive to the stability both powers sought. The French, for their part, although they were rather more ready to use political influence in Greece to further their own economic ends, did not see the extension of their influence as inimical to stability, and if they were rather more concerned about preserving their influence in Greece than the British, this simply reflected a higher level of anxiety about their international position and a greater direct interest in the region. Certainly, for the French, Greek internal developments were not matters of purely academic concern devoid of wider ramifications. In 1925-1926, for example, influence in Greece

⁵ There may have been some truth in the British belief that the French were scheming for a republic in 1922 before the revolution, but this was certainly not the case after it.

became for the French one means of conducting a much wider struggle for influence with the Italians in eastern Europe, and this was the root cause of France's determination to prevent Pangalos falling in thrall to Rome. Although Greece was not one of the small states most important to France, the maintenance of influence there had broad implications for the maintenance of France's sphere of influence and, indirectly, her great power status.

Italian policy towards Greek internal affairs though always characterised by a certain measure of inconsistency passed through three distinct phases. In the aftermath of the 1922 revolution it was resolutely hostile: in order to prevent the revival of Greece under a Venizelist regime the Italians continually intrigued and interfered to support the royalists, which culminated in the support given to the Metaxas *coup* attempt in October 1923. This was coupled with an aggressive policy over the Dodecanese question and Corfu, where Greece was seen as a potential source of propaganda victories by Mussolini. Although there was a novel tone to this policy - with bombastic rhetoric and actual violence over Corfu - the substance was very similar to the anti-Greek policy of Mussolini's liberal predecessors. After the failure of the Metaxas *coup*, Italian influence in Greece sank to a new low, and Italian policy entered a transitional phase, where continuing hostility mingled with hints of a possible *rapprochement*. It was only in 1925, after the trauma of the Matteotti murder had subsided and the fascist regime was consolidated, that this *rapprochement* - the third phase of Italian policy - materialised.⁶ Although the details of Mussolini's policy still remain to be filled out by archival research, it is clear that his *rapprochement* had two main aims: first, to prepare the ground for possible future large scale revisionism, perhaps through an expedition against Turkey, and second, to usurp France's position as the dominant power in south-eastern Europe. Thus for Italy, as for France, the

⁶ Another essential precondition for the *rapprochement* was a willingness on the part of the Greeks to consider it. This was only forthcoming because of Yugoslav hostility - further evidence, perhaps, of the limitations of the *rapprochement*.

question of influence in Greece as manifested by the award of contracts and the like had a much wider significance than for Britain. The Greco-Italian *rapprochement* was always limited, however, by the problem of the Dodecanese, by the Greeks' reluctance to tie themselves too closely to any single power and by its dependence on the presence of Pangalos. Thus although the Italians succeeded to an extent in establishing their own sphere of influence in the region, these inhibiting factors and unfavourable international circumstances precluded the mounting of any expedition to Asia Minor and the fruits of the *rapprochement* were therefore limited. On the other hand, the policy of *rapprochement* with Greece was at least imaginative, and it held out the prospect of possible greater rewards than the traditional Italian policy of blunt hostility towards Athens.

A more general verdict on the policy of each of the powers is possible if Greek foreign policy and the problems of the whole southern Balkan region are brought into consideration. Where the British were concerned, the level of consistent internal agreement about the fundamental lines of policy in the area is the most striking feature. Although the particular issues at stake changed over time and emphasis fluctuated, there was no disagreement about the central imperatives of promoting stability and prosperity, avoiding entanglements and preserving, if possible, unanimity amongst the Allies. This makes it rather difficult to analyse the contribution of individual policy-makers, especially as the usual problem - that the length of minutes is in inverse proportion to their influence - is intensified in the case of questions which are not of central importance: on certain issues weeks could pass without any despatches being seen by the foreign secretary. The limited information which does emerge tends to confirm existing pictures: Crowe and Tyrrell were cautious and sensible permanent under-secretaries, conscious of the limitations of British power but not defensive or defeatist; Curzon was consistently irascible and almost continuously irritated with the French; Macdonald was always pressed for time but not lacking a certain vision; and Chamberlain possessed a dry wit, a

willingness to listen to expert advice and considerable insight. Nicolson was perhaps the most informed and articulate commentator on Balkan affairs, but he was sometimes unduly alarmist about possible changes in the region and often imagined British interests to be rather more engaged there than was in fact the case. The most authentic and representative voice in the Foreign Office was probably that of Lampson who as head of the Central Department was also quite influential. Lampson was realistic and calculating, and the most consistent advocate of the policy of 'wait-and-see' or, as he termed it, 'opportunism'; that is, a policy of avoiding intervention until 'our own interests are at stake in some shape or form, e.g. a disturbance of the peace of Europe'. This rejection of unnecessary entanglements was also rooted in a sound appreciation of British limitations: 'Heaven knows we have quite enough on our hands already'.⁷

For the British, relations with France were obviously a central concern throughout the period: even at the height of Anglo-French acrimony in 1923, Curzon would never abandon the *entente* with the state that after Britain was the staunchest supporter of the international *status quo*. The British also evinced a persistent desire to work with the Italians, increasingly so as Mussolini's authority at home grew and his capacity to cause disruption abroad developed. These two tendencies converged under Chamberlain who sought by various means to regularise inter-allied co-operation and to recreate an informal concert (whether over the Balkans as in the scheme of June 1925 or in the 'Locarno-cabal') to manage the international system. A further feature of British policy was a willingness, whilst upholding the main lines of the peace treaties, to consider changes in detail to preserve the stability of the system so long as no British interest was affected: British equanimity about the possible eventual transfer of Salonica to Yugoslavia or the creation of a Yugoslav-Bulgar confederation are cases in point here.

⁷ FO 371/10700 min. by Lampson d.23 Jun.1925.

Yet another recurring theme is the British belief in the utility of the League of Nations. True, the Corfu crisis demonstrated an unwillingness to face the contradictions and difficulties underlying the notion of collective security, and the British generally 'used more or less internationalist language without commitment, and in the end got the worst of both worlds'.⁸ But the British certainly saw possibilities for the League in the Balkans. It could be used as an instrument of policy, as a means of achieving British goals without drawing undue attention to the fact, as in the case of the Politis-Kalfoff protocol. Equally, it could serve as a buffer between London and problems in the Balkans and as a means of sharing the burden of resolving them. The British even hoped, as the Salonica railway episode showed, that the League might be able to solve certain kinds of dispute without the need for any direct interference from the powers, who could thus remain at arms length. There were hints that the British wanted the League to develop further in this direction: they were keen that it should not overstretch itself prematurely and sought continually to shore up its influence and moral force so that it could contribute to promoting stability in the region.

British policy-makers were certainly capable of brutally realistic assessments of British interests, as was illustrated by the emotive question of international minority protection. The British had promoted minority protection at Versailles, not out of sympathy for the minorities or a desire to perpetuate their existence, but out of a calculation that protection would encourage them to settle down within the new boundaries of 1919 and to integrate, thus producing the stability British interests required. In other words, for the British, minority protection was a means to an end rather than an end in itself, and whenever minority protection looked likely to cause international friction or to cast doubt on the territorial settlement they did not support it. This was demonstrated over the Politis-Kalfoff protocol: this attempt to make

⁸ Orde, *International Security*, p.209.

minority protection effective seemed likely to aid revisionism and ferment international friction, so the British worked to annul the protocol, and favoured an exchange of minorities between Greece and Bulgaria as a better means of bringing stability to the area. For a similar reason the British had no intention of interfering in Yugoslav Macedonia to prevent the persecution of the Macedo-Slavs there: although London deprecated the harsh methods the Yugoslavs were using to assimilate them, in the long run their integration was desirable to promote stability. The British never intended minority protection to lead to self-determination for minorities; it was only meant to protect their liberty to assimilate. The British even became half-hearted about protecting minorities from persecution, since often that too was most conducive to stability. In 1922 Cadogan opined that, regardless of the contravention of the minorities treaties,

yet more harm would in the end be done by unnecessary interference than, even at the risk of a little local suffering, to allow these minorities to settle down under their present masters. ... [S]o long as these people imagine that their grievances can be aired before the League of Nations they will refuse to settle down and the present effervescence will continue indefinitely.⁹

This view was echoed by Chamberlain in 1925 when he doubted whether the minorities treaties were 'really anything but an evil for all concerned, serving only to keep alive differences which might otherwise be healed in time'.¹⁰

Whether British policy-makers conducted policy effectively and successfully protected British interests in this period remains a matter of debate. On the Dodecanese question, the eventual British retreat can be seen as either a clear defeat or as proof of a laudable flexibility and pragmatism. In the Corfu crisis, British policy clearly suffered a rebuff, but it could also be argued that the British did their best, in adverse circumstances, to preserve peace, protect Greece, limit Italian gains and support the League. On the minorities question, the lack of sympathy evinced by the

⁹ *DBFP/1/XXIV/326*.

¹⁰ FO 371/10701 min. by Chamberlain. d.11 Nov.1925.

British for oppressed minority groups could be criticised, but they were always guided by the lodestar of stability which was their paramount interest. As for their attitude towards the League more generally, the British could perhaps be taken to task for a certain naivety - an insufficient appreciation of the extent to which it was no more than the sum of its parts; at other times, however, they demonstrated an acute awareness of its limitations and a consciousness of the need to build up its powers and functions gradually. On the Salonica railway question, the British could be censured for failure to resolve a highly contentious and inflammatory problem. On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that they demonstrated great flexibility and deployed a variety of tactics to try and settle the dispute, whether by promoting a League solution, attempting to concert great power action, or exercising a pacifying influence through informal channels. On this question and more generally, the British did what they could, within the limits set by their capabilities and interests, to stabilise the Balkans and they enjoyed a reasonable amount of success.

British policy towards France and Italy can also be interpreted in conflicting ways, but overall the verdict must be that Britain managed relations within the *Entente* rather well. The *Entente* remained the cornerstone of British policy, the central device by which Britain sought to marshal the great powers in support of the *status quo*. In the early part of this period, relations with France were tense, but the British managed at the time of the Dawes-Locarno settlement to make French policy conform more closely to British interests without any excessive British compromises. As for Italy, although the Corfu crisis was an ominous portent, the British learnt a useful lesson from it, and henceforth, perceiving the possible future strength of a revitalised Italy, worked by careful handling to keep Italian policy within bounds and to minimise the potential danger to the stability of the system that it posed. Although Chamberlain has been criticised for his appeasement of Rome, in reality he contained Mussolini without conceding anything of substance. It was no mean feat for Britain to manage this relationship with her partners: at first - particularly in the Corfu crisis - the main

danger was that co-operation between France and Italy would frustrate British policy; later the difficulty was rivalry and antagonism between the two with Britain placed uncomfortably in the middle. Nevertheless, the British succeeded generally in maintaining good relations with both powers and preserving, however loosely, the triple *Entente*, without subordinating their own interests to those of their partners. In this respect, as more generally, the verdict on British policy must be, on the whole, quite favourable.

The aspects of French policy examined here do not perhaps throw much light on the mechanics of policy-making in France, or on the fundamental problem of Franco-German relations. On the other hand, they illuminate the problems and complexity of France's alliance policy in eastern Europe and the vexed nature of Franco-Italian relations - indeed, the 'Italian problem' seems to lie at the heart of France's policy in the region. The general pattern of the 1920s was of France gradually despairing of the attempt to work consistently with Italy and turning instead to the little states of south-eastern Europe. During and after the Corfu crisis, France's attempt to ride the two horses simultaneously came to grief as a result of its own contradictions, and gradually Mussolini's reluctance to compromise with France led to a definite estrangement - to the chagrin of the French, who perceived that even the least of the great powers was worth several small states. From this point on, the French became determined to advance their influence in south-eastern Europe - or rather to protect it from the depredations of Italy - and in these circumstances Greece grew in importance for France. It was, however, a complex business to make progress in this direction when there was such rivalry between the states of the region, and the French system emerges as rather less substantial than was once thought: its origins were slightly desperately defensive, and it was weakened by a certain lack of focus and the refusal of the British to assist French policy in this area. On the other hand, the Salonica railway question - which illustrated how the French, unlike the British, felt a need to intervene actively in the region to protect their interests - demonstrated that

the French possessed an impressive tactical flexibility and a willingness to concert political and economic policy in order to protect their interests. The overall verdict must be, however, that France's position was weakened in the region in these years largely because of Italy's policy and France's inability to effectively concert potential allies. In the later part of the period, opposition to Italy was the dominant *leitmotif* of French policy because the search for a genuine understanding - always a chimera given their conflicting interests and Mussolini's ambitions - had clearly failed.

Italian policy in this period provides some useful evidence for the debates on continuity and coherence. In the immediate aftermath of Mussolini's rise to power, Italian policy towards Greece was unchanged, being resolutely hostile though perhaps slightly more assertive. On the Dodecanese question the very same claims and assertions continued to be made, resulting in a certain measure of success by 1924. From 1925 onwards there was a change in policy, with the pursuit of *rapprochement* with Greece: it could be argued, however, that the essential objective of this policy, namely the expansion of Italian influence and power in the Mediterranean region, was unchanged. As for consistency, it would be fair to say that this lay only in the search for advantage, with various means being used to this end. On the other hand, revisionism and imperialism - whether in the shape of projected expeditions against Turkey or in colonial gains in Africa derived from the Anglo-Italian *entente* - were fairly consistent themes. In broad terms there was certainly continuity with liberal Italy in the sense that Mussolini also sought to make Italy a real great power. In this he was moderately successful in this period in that Italy expanded her colonial possessions and carved out a sphere of influence of sorts in south-eastern Europe. This was achieved at the expense of France, and with the help of a certain benevolent neutrality from Britain: one further feature of the period was indeed the absence of any apparent conflict of interest between Britain and Italy - each respected the other's interests and while Mussolini's ambitions remained within bounds there was no real clash.

The fundamental question about the international system of the 1920s therefore remains. Was it doomed to collapse, or did it have the potential to evolve into some sort of stable order? By the mid-1920s the Dawes-Locarno settlement had brought a measure of stability to western Europe and there had also been a improvement in the south-east of the continent: there was no Balkan Locarno, but through the efforts of Britain and the League economic stabilisation and reconstruction had at least begun. Greece was a case in point: the disruptive impact of the 1922 disaster had been minimised by international assistance with refugee settlement which certainly promised increased stability in the long term. The prudent policies of Britain and France, coupled with the influence of the League, also helped to contain potential disruption to the political *status quo* in the region, and even Italian mischief-making had been kept in check. Contemporaries certainly felt that the situation had improved, and there was certainly at least a possibility that it would continue to do so.

In retrospect, however, there were other, less promising portents. Firstly, the Corfu crisis had laid bare the inherent contradictions of collective security, and although the Foreign Office had perceived these dimly they were not squarely faced, which made the shock when collective security was again found wanting in the 1930s more serious than it might otherwise have been. Secondly, British policy on the minorities question was flawed: London hoped that minority problems would gradually disappear as minorities were assimilated or integrated, one way or another, into the states they inhabited; but this never happened. In the case of Greece and Bulgaria this was masked by the exchange convention which relieved tension by eliminating the minorities, but in all other regions the minorities remained *in situ*, embittered and resentful; and minority problems rumbled on into the 1930s when they seriously affected the stability of the international system. British policy thus betrayed a grave under-estimation of the persistence of nationalist feeling, the corrosive, destabilising effect it could have and the temptation and potential it offered for exploitation by revisionist powers. Thirdly, although British policy-makers were generally amply

endowed with cynicism and realism, the Foreign Office attitude towards a Balkan security pact showed a worrying misperception of the nature of the Locarno treaty itself that did not bode well for the future. It is not necessary to subscribe to the thesis that the later 1920s were mere years of illusion to recognise that these three problems constituted serious fault-lines in the international system.

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