

Loukianos Hassiotis

Aristotle University
Thessaloniki

DOI:10.2298/BALC1041209H

Original scholarly work

The Ideal of Balkan Unity from a European Perspective (1789–1945)

Abstract: The federal movement in the Balkans is especially interesting, not because it was an ideological trend based on distinctive local characteristics, but precisely because it emerged concurrently with similar political and ideological trends on the rest of the continent, thus reflecting the close connection and mutual dependence between the various regions of Europe. The article approaches the different attempts for Balkan cooperation between the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the Cold War in reference to the corresponding movements for the European reconciliation and unification, using comparatively the relevant bibliography.

Key words: Alliance, Balkans, Conferences, cooperation, Entente, Europe, federation, nationalism, radicalism, socialism, unity

Introduction

Balkan federalism is, without a doubt, one of the most unfairly dealt with questions in modern European history. Very few studies have addressed it, and those that have treated it as a peripheral issue, making no attempt at a comprehensive presentation or a theoretical analysis. Tellingly, the most complete and comprehensive monograph on the subject, Stavrianos's *Balkan Federation*, was written in the 1940s and has been the main point of reference for subsequent studies that have examined its specific aspects.¹

¹ L. Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation. A History of the Movement Toward Balkan Unity in Modern Times* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1964). Stavrianos was preceded in the 1930s by Robert Joseph Kerner and Harry Nicholas Howard, *The Balkan Conferences and the Balkan Entente, 1930–1935: A Study in the Recent History of the Balkan and Near Eastern Peoples* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1936), which mainly discusses the contemporary federal movement in the region. The later studies also covered only some aspects of the question. See, e.g., D. Djordjević, “Projects for the Federation of South-East Europe in the 1860s and 1870s”, *Balkanica* I (1970), 119–145; A. J. Panayotopoulos, “The ‘Great Idea’ and the Vision of Eastern Federation: A propos of the Views of I. Dragoumis and A. Souliotis-Nicolaidis”, *Balkan Studies* XXI/2 (1980), 331–365; A. Liakos, *Η ιταλική ενσποίηση και η Μεγάλη Ιδέα* [Italian unification and the Great Idea] (Athens 1985); V. Todorov, *Greek Federalism during the Nineteenth Century* (New York 1995); A. Tounda-Fergadi, *Μειονότητες στα Βαλκάνια. Βαλκανικές διασκέψεις, 1930–1934* [Minorities in the Balkans: Balkan conferences, 1930–34] (Thessaloniki 1994); L. Hassiotis, «*Η Ανατολική Ομοσπονδία*»: δύο ελληνικές φεντεραλιστικές κινήσεις

The lack of interest may be partially due to the fact that the relevant sources are both inadequate and scattered; but it has mainly to do with ideological factors: the fact that the subject has been ignored by Balkan national historiographies, which have tended to focus on developments in individual countries, and the final renunciation of the ideal of Balkan unification in the 1940s. In contrast, the study of European federalism developed more after the Second World War, presumably spurred by the momentum created by the birth of the European Economic Community and its subsequent development into today's European Union.² On the other hand, the very concept of Balkan unity is probably a contradiction in terms as regards the prevailing perception of the region, which sees its peoples as beyond the pale of European civilization, perpetually spoiling for a pitiless internecine fight.³

The federal movement in the Balkans is especially interesting, not because it was an ideological trend based on distinctive local characteristics, which is highly questionable; but precisely because it emerged concurrently with similar political and ideological trends in the rest of the continent, thus reflecting the close connection and mutual dependence between various regions of Europe.

του 19ου αιώνα [“The Eastern Federation”: two Greek federal movements of the nineteenth century] (Thessaloniki 2001).

² The literature on European federalism is inexhaustible. See, e.g., Geoffrey Barraclough, *European Unity in Thought and Action* (Oxford 1963); J. B. Duroselle, *L'Idée d'Europe dans l'histoire* (Paris 1965); W. Lipgens, *A History of European Integration, 1945–1947: The Formation of the European Unity Movement* (Oxford 1982); M. L. Smith and Peter M. R. Stirk, *Making the New Europe: European Unity and the Second World War* (London and New York 1990); Alexander Tchoubarian, *The European Idea in History in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: A View from Moscow* (Essex 1994); J. Maritain, *L'Europe et l'idée fédérale* (Paris 1993); R. Bideleux and R. Taylor, eds., *European Integration and Disintegration: East and West* (London and New York 1996); P. M. R. Stirk, *A History of European Integration since 1914* (London and New York 1996); David McKay, *Federalism and the European Union: A Political Economy Perspective* (Oxford and New York 1999); Giorgos Kokkinos, *Αναζητώντας την Ευρώπη. Οι αντινομίες της ευρωπαϊκής πολιτικής κουλτούρας και η ιδέα της ευρωπαϊκής ενοποίησης* [In search of Europe: The contradictions of European political culture and the idea of European unification] (Athens 2000); I. K. Hassiotis, *Αναζητώντας την ενότητα στην πολυμορφία. Οι απαρχές της Ευρωπαϊκής ενότητας από το τέλος του μεσαίωνα ως τη Γαλλική Επανάσταση* [Seeking unity in diversity: The beginnings of European unity from the end of the Middle Ages to the French Revolution] (Thessaloniki 2000); Anthony Pagden, ed., *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union* (New York and Cambridge 2002).

³ For the West's traditional approach to the Balkans, see M. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York 1997).

The French Revolution and Balkan radicalism

During most of the eighteenth century, the dreams of the south-east European Christians (or at least of their intellectual elites) about political emancipation from Ottoman rule were based on their liberation by an enlightened despot, such as the Habsburg Joseph II or Catherine the Great of Russia. This hope was not necessarily a local characteristic: it followed the conviction of European Enlightenment figures, such as Voltaire, who based their hopes for the modernisation of their nations and of Europe as a whole on enlightened absolute monarchy. As in the rest of Europe, so too in the Balkans it was the French Revolution that radicalised the thinking and the activity of the intelligentsia, because it showed that political emancipation could result from the action of the people themselves. The Declaration of Human Rights, the revolutionary constitutions of 1791 and 1793, and the ideological and political ferment in revolutionary France, were a source of inspiration for the rising bourgeoisies of south-eastern Europe, who sought to break away from the Ottoman and, secondarily, the Habsburg regime. Napoleon's occupation of the Ionian Islands and the Dalmatian coast in 1809 had immediate and long-lasting effects on the development of intellectual life and political thought in the Balkans, and also on the emergence of local national and social radical movements.⁴

Possibly the supreme exponent of Balkan radicalism, during its early phase at least — i.e. until the Congress of Vienna (1814) — was Rigas Velestinlis (or Pheraios). He was active in the last decade of the eighteenth century, with Vienna as his base and within a wider circle of Balkan revolutionaries, publishing in Greek a number of works that conveyed to his readers the revolutionary fervour and the expectations that the French Revolution had spawned all over Europe. Rigas's proclamation for a unified political organisation of the Balkans was the first such proposal to come from within the peninsula and was more comprehensively elucidated in the most political of his works, the *New political administration of the inhabitants of Roumeli, Asia Minor, the Mediterranean islands, and Wallachia-Moldavia*.⁵

Rigas called upon the peoples of the Ottoman Empire to rise up together to overthrow the sultan's regime and to found in its place a "Hellenic Republic", which would be "unified and indivisible": Greek would be

⁴ P. Kitromilides, "The Enlightenment East and West: A comparative perspective on the ideological origins of the Balkan political traditions", *Enlightenment, Nationalism, Orthodoxy*, I (Aldershot and Brookfield: Ashgate's Variorum, 1994), 60–63.

⁵ P. Kitromilides, "Republican aspirations in south-eastern Europe in the age of the French Revolution", *Enlightenment*, V, 275–282; P. Kitromilides, *Νεοελληνικός Διαφωτισμός. Οι πολιτικές και κοινωνικές ιδέες* [Modern Greek Enlightenment: The political and social ideas] (Athens 1996), 316.

its official language, and all its subjects would be recognised as equal citizens regardless of their religion or racial origin. The posterity has looked at the proposal with considerable scepticism, mainly as regards the new state's national orientation as reflected in its title and the choice of Greek as the official language. Was this in fact a reflection of budding Greek nationalism intent on establishing a Greek state over the entire territory of the European Ottoman Empire and much of Anatolia? Or was it a sincere proposal seeking to unify the Balkan peoples? At all events it would be pointless to judge Rigas on the basis of later patterns of thought, i.e. outside the tradition of the Enlightenment and the perception of the nation introduced by the French Revolution.⁶

Rigas's declaration was clearly influenced by the Jacobin model of state organisation and national identity. In the Charter of Human Rights Rigas faithfully followed the French declaration that preceded the French constitution of 1793; the choice of the more radical constitution of the French Revolution, which was to become the model for the die-hard French and European republicans, was no accident: it accurately reflected the preference of the Balkan radicalism of the time for a democratic system of governance, universal suffrage, and social cohesion over the more conservative demands subsequently adopted by European liberalism. The rationale of the federation was rejected or ignored either on the grounds of Jacobin centralisation, which looked at federal structures with suspicion as remnants of feudalism that helped perpetuate aristocratic power, or on the grounds that it corresponded with the ailing central Ottoman authority. The citizens of the "Hellenic Republic" could be Christians, Moslems, or Jews, of Greek, Slavonic, Turkish, or any other origin, but the sovereign people would be one and indivisible and the political institutions would have to underscore this unity. The diversity of the collective identity was thus recognised as one of the dimensions of the new state. True to the rationalism and Enlightenment of his age, Rigas regarded distinctions based on language, religion, or racial origin as artificial, asserting that it was possible for different ethnic groups to coexist as long as all citizens were recognised as equal regardless of their specific collective identities. This perception obviously could not stand up to the contradictions that emerged out of the developing national question, but at the time it was articulated the romantic concept of the nation had not yet been formulated, nor had Greek national identity been

⁶ For the influence of the French Revolution on Rigas's constitution, see Maria López Villalba, "Balkanizing the French Revolution: Rhigas's *New Political Constitution*", in D. Tziouvas, ed., *Greece and the Balkans* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 141–154. For the proposed "Hellenic republic", see M. Mazower, *The Balkans* (London 2000), 72–73.

fully clarified, nor were the national rivalries that subsequently characterised European political life yet taken for granted.

Rigas's initiative and the other Jacobin-type movements in the Habsburg Empire were vigorously and harshly persecuted by the Austrian police. The suppression of the radical movements by the police forces of the *ancien régime*, which after Napoleon's defeat and the establishment of the Holy Alliance seemed to be reaffirming its established position on the continent, meant that the only outlet for active opposition was the "conspiratorialism" of secret societies. The best-known conspiratorial organisation in south-eastern Europe at the time was *Filiki Etairia* (Friendly Society), established in Odessa in 1814. The new circumstances in Europe also changed the organisation's priorities compared to those of Rigas and his sympathisers. Whereas for Rigas the liberation of the subjugated peoples of the Ottoman Empire was inseparably linked with the prospect of political and social change, for *Filiki Etairia* a prerequisite of social reform was national independence. All the same, the notion of Balkan unity was embodied within the plans of *Filiki Etairia's* members and collaborators: in the "General Plan", which *Filiki Etairia* unsuccessfully promoted mainly to the Serbian leaders Karageorge Petrović and Miloš Obrenović with the aim of a Pan-Balkan uprising against the sultan; in the Russian Decembrist Pavel Pestel's "Greek Plan" for a Hellenic federation patterned after the American model; and, later — after unsuccessful attempts to foment a general uprising of the Balkan peoples — in Ioannis Kapodistrias's plan to create a confederation of Christian principalities in south-eastern Europe, headed by princes from various European royal houses and with its centre at Constantinople.⁷

During the first wave of insurrections in south-eastern Europe immediately after the Treaty of Vienna, the proposals for some kind of common political organisation of the Ottoman Empire's European territories bore no fruit, either because they were unrealistic or because they had limited support either from the local rebels or from the great powers. The Greek War of Independence failed to spread over the entire peninsula and was eventually confined to its southern tip, where the Hellenic kingdom was formed in 1830 with clear national characteristics. The Serbian uprisings (1804–15) that led to the creation of an autonomous Serbian principality met the same fate. The new states (like those that were to be formed in the next few decades of the nineteenth century, namely Montenegro, Romania,

⁷ Todorov, *Greek Federalism*, 1–22; P. Kitromilides, *Η γαλλική Επανάσταση και η Νοτιοανατολική Ευρώπη* [The French Revolution and south-eastern Europe] (Athens 2000), 160–169.

and Bulgaria) were shaped on the nation-state model. Their governments and rulers never seriously considered the arguments for unification or for forming a confederation except at times of crisis and usually out of sheer opportunism. Throughout the century the policy of the Balkan nation-states was based on the rationale of expansionism and of unifying all their co-religionists and ethnic kinfolk under their aegis.

"The East by and for the East": Federalisation as a solution to the national rehabilitation of the peoples of south-eastern Europe

The existence of the two old multi-ethnic — Habsburg and Ottoman — empires in south-eastern Europe and the Concert of Europe's support for their integrity in the nineteenth century influenced the character of the federal movements in the region. Thus local federalism developed as a variant of the subject nations' struggle for national rehabilitation: after the birth of the Hellenic kingdom irredentist organisations in Athens continued to base their plans on a general uprising of the Christians of the Ottoman Empire and to seek collaboration with Bulgarian, Serbian, and Albanian revolutionaries. Similar initiatives were under way in the Danubian principalities and in Belgrade, with Balkan-wide participation. The slogan "The East by and for the East", which was adopted by various political and intellectual groups in Greece in the 1860s as a paraphrase of the Risorgimento slogan "Italia farà da se", like its variants in other Balkan countries, reflected a belief in the political and cultural self-reliance of the Orthodox East, a critical attitude towards the great powers, recognition of the national rights of all the Balkan peoples, and an inclination towards some kind of confederation among them. It did not, however, reflect any kind of unified approach, nor did its use necessarily signify espousal of all these principles. It frequently veiled purely national aspirations with the aim of winning over allies among the neighbouring peoples, without at the same time precluding notions of intellectual supremacy, political hegemony, or leadership. For many of its Greek users, the slogan meant that the Greeks would acculturate the East, which would unite under their hegemony in order to free itself from Ottoman authoritarianism, follow in the footsteps of the west-European nations, and become a force to be reckoned with, capable of standing up to the pressures of the great powers.⁸ For Ilija Garašanin, the Serbian official and architect

⁸ See Liakos, *Η ιταλική ενοποίηση*, 126–128; E. Skopetea, Το «πρότυπο βασίλειο» και η Μεγάλη Ιδέα. Όψεις του εθνικού προβλήματος στην Ελλάδα (1830–1880) [The "First Kingdom" and the Great Idea: Aspects of the National Problem in Greece, 1830–80] (Athens 1988), 340–342; Hassiotis, «Η Ανατολική Ομοσπονδία», 18–19.

of the Serbian *Načertanje* irredentist plan, it meant the expansion of Serbia through a Balkan or south Slavonic alliance centring on Belgrade.⁹

The association of nationalism and federalism was clearly influenced by the struggle for Italian unification, and specifically by Giuseppe Mazzini, who was actively involved in the plans for the federal reform of south-eastern Europe by way of his European revolutionary activities. Mazzini's ideas were a mixture of Jacobin liberalism, religious sentiment, and universality; they were characterised by the contradictions of the early – liberal – period of nationalism: the linking of the principle of nationality and the solidarity of peoples did not address the destructive effects of aggressive nationalism. Although he himself disputed conservative theories about the “natural order”, his views included a strong dose of organic convictions, as is apparent, for instance, in his plan for the territorial reorganisation of Europe, which involved the creation of fourteen national groups divided according to history, tradition, geography, and language.¹⁰

According to the same theory, a prerequisite for the accomplishment of the south-European nations' mission was the collapse of the Habsburg and Ottoman empires. The local nations would subsequently form two confederations, the Danubian and the Helleno-Slavonic. Mazzini initially espoused the view that Greece had an acculturating role to play in the East, placing it at the head of a federation extending from Albania to Cilicia and Cyprus, and with Constantinople as its capital. Later on, discouraged by the limited capabilities of the Greek state and by its reluctance to cooperate with its neighbours, he upheld more balanced plans, though always inclining towards the creation of a local confederation, built according to democratic principles on the ruins of the multiethnic empires that would act as a barrier to Russian expansionism. Mazzini's political views and his geopolitical proposals continued to influence democrats and federalists in the Balkans in the decades that followed, for the question arose every time the Eastern Question flared up.¹¹

One of the best-known federalist organisations in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Democratic Eastern Federation, which was founded in 1865 and had members and associates in Athens, Belgrade, Bucharest, Sofia, and Constantinople, was considerably influenced by Mazzini's political theory: it was strongly antimonarchist, upheld solidarity among the peoples of the peninsula in their struggle for national liberation, and worked towards their organisation as a federation based on equality. Some mem-

⁹ Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation*, 51, 52.

¹⁰ A. C. d'Appollonia, “European Nationalism and European Union”, in Pagden, ed., *Idea of Europe*, 181–183; Duroselle, *L'Idée d'Europe*, 215–217.

¹¹ Hassiotis, «*Η Ανατολική Ομοσπονδία*», 14–16.

bers, like Andreas Rigopoulos, had sat on the European Democratic Central Committee founded by Mazzini in 1850. The head of the organisation in Athens, Panayotis Panas, was one of the most prominent figures in the Greek radical republican movement in the nineteenth century. Panas believed that the unity of the Balkan peoples could be achieved only by changing the local regimes and the nationalist policies they were following, and he was also very critical of the role of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which he held responsible for the Slavs' hostility towards the Greeks. During the Eastern Crisis of 1875–8 the Democratic Eastern Federation supported the joint rising of all the Balkan peoples against the Ottomans, though to no avail. In the end, this, like other federalist initiatives that appeared later on, was short-lived and had no decisive effect on inter-Balkan relations.¹²

The notion of the Danubian federation consistently featured in the geopolitical plans for central and eastern Europe for about a century — from the time of the rebellions of 1848 to just after Germany's defeat in the Second World War. It was based on the need to replace the Habsburg Empire with some other form of state construct that would satisfy the Habsburgs' disaffected subjects and at the same time maintain stability and the balance of power in the region.

The idea first appeared at the time of the Hungarian uprising of 1848–9, but the Magyar nationalists refused to discuss the possibility of a federal Hungary, thus attracting the hostility of the other local ethnic groups, who did not want to see the Habsburg administration replaced by the government of a centralised Hungarian nation-state. Later on, the leader of the rebellion, Louis Kossuth realised that the Hungarian national goals could not be attained without the support of the other nationalities in the region, and he therefore accepted the solution of the Danubian federation, which could include Hungary, Serbia, and Romania. The plan was kept alive in the years that followed by many of the most prominent political figures of the nations concerned, and was encouraged throughout this period by Mazzini, or by the prime minister of Piedmont, Camillo di Cavour, who were prepared to take part in any movement aimed at destabilising the Austrian Empire. Kossuth's proposal echoed the desires of the liberal leaders of the Danubian countries, who were anxious to introduce a constitutional monarchy. But it held very little appeal for the local peasantry, whose social problems were of little concern to the national leaders negotiating the formation of the Danubian federation. Furthermore, the local national movements did not prove receptive to the possibility of the federation until the prospect of separate national emancipation had receded. This latter

¹² Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation*, 150; Todorov, *Greek Federalism*, 83–139; Hassiotis, «Η Ανατολική Ομοσπονδία», 21 ff.

observation relates especially to the Magyar nationalists, who proved very reluctant to make any concessions to other nationalities and who eventually rejected the idea of the Danubian federation when the circumstances arising out of the Austro-Prussian war of 1866 enabled them to achieve their basic demands, reaching a compromise with the Habsburg Monarchy through the *Ausgleich* of 1867.¹³

The early Balkan socialists and their federal proposals

In south-eastern Europe the socialist movements emerged in the 1860s and 1870s, influenced by the republican revolutionary tradition, Saint-Simonism, anarchism, and the Russian *narodniks*, while Marxism began to gain ground at the end of the century. In each case they were movements that were active on the fringes of political life, with no major influence on society, apart from some purely local phenomena, which, however, came to nothing.

One of the first socialists to support the issue of the Balkan federation was the Serb Svetozar Marković, who attended the meetings of the League of Peace and Freedom that was founded in Switzerland in 1867. At the League's conference in 1869, when the Eastern Question was also discussed, Marković supported the creation of a Federal Republic of Free Nations of south-eastern Europe. Though Marković and his comrades were not anarchists, they were influenced by Bakunin's ideas about a free Europe that would be a confederation of free communities. He was more strongly influenced by the Russian *narodnik* Nikolai Chernyshevsky, who asserted that his country could attain socialism without first passing through capitalism, by means of the confederal organisation of the traditional Russian peasant community, the *obshchina*. Marković similarly believed that the new society should rest upon the democratic and patriarchal character of the village, the union of the communities, and organised cooperative production. His theory was modelled on the traditional south Slavonic community, the *zadruga*, which was to constitute the nucleus of the political reshaping of Serbia and the entire peninsula; the Balkan federation would consist of such communities bound together in a confederation.¹⁴ The Bulgarian socialist Khristo Botev's theories went in a similar direction. While in exile in Russia, he had met Russian nihilists and *narodniks*, and believed that Bulgaria

¹³ The best source for the Danubian federation is *Toward a New Central Europe: A Symposium on the Problems of the Danubian Nations*, ed. F. S. Wagner (Astor Park, Florida 1970). Cf. Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation*, 66–81.

¹⁴ W. D. McClellan, *Svetozar Marković and the Origins of Balkan Socialism* (Princeton 1964), 103, 122, 184–186.

could win independence from the Ottoman Empire only through a peasant rebellion that would also target the Bulgarian notables. He also supported the idea of the Balkan federation, which he thought ought to be the result of a social revolution of the Balkan peoples, not of negotiations between governments.¹⁵

Another source of federalist proposals for the Balkans was socialist exiles and émigrés in western and central Europe who were active in the interconnected left-wing and pacifist circles there, such as the Society of Friends of Peace, the International Peace Conference, the *Comité des Orientalistes*, and the League of Peace and Freedom. They included Pavlos Argyriades, a Greek from Macedonia who had settled in Paris shortly after the suppression of the Commune in 1871. Argyriades became a prominent figure in the French socialist movement. He supported the idea of Balkan unity both in the pages of his newspapers *La Question Sociale* and *Almanach de la Question Sociale (et de la Libre Pensée)* and through the League for the Balkan Federation, in the founding of which he had played a leading part in 1894. The League's ideological characteristics are fairly hazy, but there was a distinct tendency to link demands for political and economic emancipation with the demand for self-determination, as well as a strong criticism of the policy of the local governments and the European powers. Argyriades thought that the biggest obstacle to the confederation — apart from Ottoman domination, which anyway would soon collapse — was the conflict over the Macedonian Question, which had already divided the new nation-states and the peoples of the region. In his view, the problem could be resolved by creating an autonomous Albano-Macedonian state within the confederation. This was an alternative proposal to the demands for Macedonian autonomy supported by many, mainly Bulgarian, federalists — demands which, however, met with little response in Serbia and in Greece, due to the fear that the Slav majority in the province would one day lead to its being incorporated into Bulgaria.¹⁶

These initiatives, needless to say, remained peripheral, although they did create a tradition which was subsequently followed by the more organised socialist movements of south-eastern Europe that appeared in the last decade of the nineteenth and the first decade of the twentieth century, usually in the form of social democratic parties that shared the ideology of the Second International. The more important of these were the social democratic

¹⁵ Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation*, 115–119; A. Živković and D. Plavšić, eds., *The Balkan Socialist Tradition: Balkan Socialism and the Balkan Federation, 1871–1915*, vol. 8 no. 3 of *Revolutionary Review* (2003), 13–18.

¹⁶ P. Argyriades and P. Lagarde, *Solution de la question d'Orient. La Confédération balkanique et la Macédoine* (Paris 1896), 1–15. Cf. Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation*, 151.

parties of Bulgaria (1891), of Serbia (1903), and of Romania (1906), and the Socialist Workers' Federation (better known as the *Federación*) of the still Ottoman Thessaloniki, which was dominated by the city's Jewish element. These parties included the idea of the federal organisation of the Balkans in their manifestos and consistently opposed the nationalist policies of their states, as well as the intervention of the great powers in the region. However, their views on the national question in the Balkans diverged, probably reflecting the more general contradictions inherent in the International's position on the problem of nationalities. In particular, the Austrian Marxists' proposal for national autonomy within the framework of multiethnic states — which related to the ethnic problems of the Habsburg Empire and had a rather pro-German and anti-Russian stance — was ill-received by the Serbian and Bulgarian social democrats, who supported the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires and the reorganisation of the region into a federal republic, but approved of by the Romanian social democrats, who harboured similar fears as the like-minded Germans regarding the threat posed by Russian absolutism to the freedoms of the peoples of south-eastern Europe. All the same, these differences did not prevent the organisation of pan-Balkan socialist congresses (in 1910, 1911, and 1912), at which the participants pledged to promote the idea of solidarity among the nations of south-eastern Europe and to struggle “against the policy of conquest of European capitalism”. Furthermore, most of the socialists in the region opposed the military alliance of the Balkan nations against the Ottoman Empire (1912–13), arguing that it served the interests of the local bourgeoisies and dynasties and that an attempt to achieve national unity by dividing the peninsula would lead to more wars — as was borne out by the Second Balkan War, when the former allies fought among themselves over the division of Turkey's European territories.¹⁷

The socialists' inability to influence their governments' choices became even more obvious in 1914. Following the divisions within the Second International, when the European socialists split into those who supported their country's war effort and those who, headed by Lenin, opposed it and demanded that the war be turned into a class war, the socialist factions in the Balkans became divided into those who supported participation in the war and those who favoured neutrality. Both groups, however, remained loyal to the ideal of the Balkan federation. Thus in Greece, Platon Drakoulis, who supported Eleftherios Venizelos's policy in favour of Greece's joining the war on the side of the Entente, published in 1915 his proposal for a democratic Balkan federation — in which, in any case, the

¹⁷ Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation*, 186–195; Živković and Plavšić, eds., *Balkan Socialist Tradition*, 123–129, 151–156.

federal Greek state would include all the territories that Greece was laying claim to. Drakoulis's proposal was replied by the Bulgarian A. Shopov of the "broad" socialists (who supported their government's military aims) with the counterproposal of a federation based on the Bulgarian national arguments.¹⁸ On the other side, the "narrow" Bulgarian socialists who, led by Dimitŭr Blagoev, were opposed to the war, called for "uncompromising class war" against the Bulgarian bourgeoisie and the monarchy and for the establishment of a Balkan federal republic as the only means of averting the horror of war. More or less the same position was taken by the pro-neutrality Greek and Jewish socialists of the *Federaci3n*, which maintained a strictly anti-war stance.¹⁹

The local governments might not have made their choices on the basis of these declarations, but they did not ignore them either. Furthermore, after the October Revolution, the Balkan governments — like the rest of the European administrations — could not ignore the anti-war proclamations and the growing appeal of the left in the local communities. So, although in practice it remained an unattainable goal, the call for a Balkan federation, or at least for close cooperation among the nations on the peninsula, continued to be an active scenario for the reorganisation of the region and, possibly for the first time, resonated widely among those who had been disappointed with their governments' hitherto expansionist policies.

The federal idea between the Wars: Europe and the Balkans

Anyway, for most of the Balkan states, their process of national integration was almost complete and irredentism was no longer at the heart of their policy. So the preconditions existed for seeking ways to cooperate at a national level. At the same time, however, there was also the cleavage, which was seen in the rest of Europe and was fixed by the post-war peace treaties, between the "revisionist" states and those that preferred to maintain the *status quo*. Thus Bulgaria never concealed its desire to change the borders, while Greece, Yugoslavia, Romania, and Turkey based their post-war foreign policies on consolidating the borders. There was also the question of minorities, something of a new problem for the Balkan nation-states, which

¹⁸ P. Drakoulis, "Greece, the Balkans and the Federal Principle", *Asiatic Review* (Oxford, February 1915); A. Schopoff, *La Confédération balkanique et la Question macédonienne* (Sofia 1915).

¹⁹ Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation*, 199–201; Źivković and Plavšić, eds., *Balkan Socialist Tradition*, 226–232. For the Greek socialists' stance during the War, see G. V. Leonarditis, *To ελληνικό σοσιαλιστικό κίνημα κατά τον πρώτο παγκόσμιο πόλεμο* [The Greek socialist movement in the First World War] (Athens 1978).

inevitably determined relations between them.²⁰ And then, there were refugees — numerous in Greece and Bulgaria — who formed irredentist and nationalist pressure groups to influence their governments' foreign policy (especially in the former case).²¹

These issues proved crucial to the debate on the Balkan federation, but they were also an important consideration for the initiatives regarding European unification. Franco-German reconciliation was obviously a prerequisite for any European rapprochement, since relations between these two powers affected the security system of the entire continent. But it was not the only one: the east-European countries, like the Balkan countries, too, had to address not only the problems created in the relations between them by the minorities and the contesting of the borders, but also the revisionism of Hungary, Nazi Germany and the USSR; furthermore, all the European countries had to address the dilemma of transnational cooperation and the concomitant restriction of their national sovereignty — something which the new states of central and eastern Europe would not countenance.²²

The Balkan countries initially seemed reluctant to address these issues, either because they were not yet ready to renounce their traditional policies, or because they gave priority to their urgent political, social, and economic problems on the post-war domestic front, or because their interest had shifted to other forms of cooperation, such as the Little Entente formed by Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia.²³ In the same period the idea of a federal or a customs union burgeoned in the rest of Europe: from Coudenhove-Kalergi's 'Paneuropean' movement in 1923 to Aristide Briand's in 1929, there were many initiatives for economic and political unions at a European or regional level. At the same time the Depression reinforced the idea of a "common market", which was considered more realistic in west-European official circles. After a slight delay, this trend also

²⁰ L. Stavrianos, *The Balkans since 1453* (London 2000), 593–615; B. Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, vol. II: *Twentieth Century* (Cambridge and New York 1983), 134–136; S. K. Pavlovitch, *A History of the Balkans, 1804–1945* (Essex and New York 1999), 230–231.

²¹ For the part played by the refugees in shaping Bulgarian foreign policy between the wars, see J. D. Bell, *Peasants in Power: Alexander Stamboliski and the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union, 1899–1923* (Princeton 1977), 184–204; A. Kalionski and V. Kolev, "Οι πρόσφυγες στη Βουλγαρία την εποχή του Μεσοπολέμου: Προβλήματα ένταξης" [The refugees in Bulgaria between the Wars: Problems of integration], in *Πρόσφυγες στα Βαλκάνια. Μνήμη και ενσωμάτωση* [Refugees in the Balkans: Memory and integration], eds. B. K. Gounaris and I. D. Mihailidis (Athens 2004), 287–328.

²² Duroselle, *L'Idée d'Europe*, 270; J. Joll, *Europe since 1870: An International History* (London and New York 1976), 289–290; Stirk, *European Integration*, 25–29; Kokkinos, *Αναζητώντας*, 144–145.

²³ Stavrianos, *Balkans*, 593–615; Jelavich, *History*, 143–180.

reached south-eastern Europe; and it was no accident that Briand's proposal was supported by almost all Balkan capitals, at a time when most of the European governments seemed rather to disparage it.²⁴

The stage was set by the transnational agreements, which resolved at least some of the local disputes, most notably the friendship agreement between Greece and Turkey in 1930. Over the next five years a number of trade and cultural agreements were signed between the Balkan states, which considerably broadened relations between them. This climate of rapprochement gave birth to the idea of the Balkan Conferences, which started at the initiative of the Greek republican statesman and former prime minister Alexandros Papanastasiou. The initiative was accepted by all six Balkan states, and they put together national delegations made up of MPs, diplomats, academics, and representatives of pacifist and professional organisations. At the first conference, in Athens in October 1930, it was decided to create a permanent organisation for the Balkan Conferences with the aim of promoting Balkan cooperation in the political, economic, social, and cultural sectors, with Balkan unification as the stated ultimate aim. The instruments of the Conferences would be the general meeting, the council, the secretariat and the national delegations. They in fact constituted a semi-official entity, for the resolutions of the Conferences had no binding effect on government policy. The role of the national delegations was to disseminate the idea of the unity of, and cooperation among, the Balkan peoples, and to press for the implementation of the conference resolutions. The organisation modelled itself on the League of Nations and Briand's memorandum for the European federation.²⁵

The Balkan Conferences continued until 1934 and, despite the noted progress in a number of secondary, largely non-political issues, they showed that the countries involved were not yet in a position to find mutually acceptable solutions to the outstanding minority and border questions. At the meetings the national delegations reiterated the official views of their governments, essentially confirming the divide between the supporters and the revisionists of the *status quo* in the region. The confirmation became official in 1934, when the countries which supported the *status quo* formed the Balkan Entente, an official alliance with a far narrower range of aims than the Balkan Conferences and which included neither the revisionist Bulgaria nor the Italian-influenced Albania. In actuality it was a defensive alliance, focusing exclusively on countering the revisionist tendencies of Bulgaria. This

²⁴ Duroselle, *L'Idée d'Europe*, 272–81; Tchoubarian, *European Idea*, 122–32; Stirk, *European Integration*, 26–29.

²⁵ Kerner and Howard, *Balkan Conferences*, 21ff.; Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation*, 224–236; Stavrianos, *Balkans*, 736–738. Cf. Tounda-Fergadi, *Μειονότητες*, 41ff.

development was strongly criticised at the time by the visionaries of Balkan unity, as also by those who favoured the revision of the post-war borders in Europe, namely Germany and Italy; whereas the Entente was discreetly supported by Britain, France, and the USSR (which after 1933 aligned itself with the supporters of the *status quo*) as an initiative that might reinforce stability and peace in south-eastern Europe. The Entente was also criticised by later historians, because of the non-participation of Bulgaria and Albania and because of its anti-Bulgarian character. However, in view of the smaller countries' incapacity to contend with the great powers' aspirations in the region, the creation of a purely anti-revisionist alliance seems to have been the only way for the four participants to pursue an independent policy. At all events, it seems to have reflected the limits of intra-Balkan cooperation at the time. After all, the gradual domination of authoritarian regimes in most of the Balkan states, together with the general political and economic developments in Europe, which reinforced nationalist tendencies and a policy of autarky, hindered the efforts towards the political and economic unification of the peninsula.²⁶

For the rest of the 1930s the Balkan states managed to remain outside the crisis caused by Hitler's rise to power and the subsequent explosion of revisionism in Europe — save for Albania, which was forcibly annexed by Italy in 1939. They could not avoid their economic subjugation to Nazi Germany, of course, which considerably boosted Hitler's endeavour. But the responsibility for this was due more to Britain's and France's failure, first, to promote intra-European economic cooperation and, then, to successfully counter German economic and political influence in eastern Europe. This failure was also reflected in the western powers' reluctance to support, officially and right from the start, the Balkan Entente, the members of which sustained their pro-western orientation in their foreign policy until France fell in June 1940; at this time, Italy entered the War and Romania was forced to cede much of its territory to the USSR, Hungary, and Bulgaria, which pushed Bucharest once and for all into the Axis.²⁷ This was the end of the Balkan Entente, though not the end of the gestures of solidarity and

²⁶ Especially interesting for the history of the Balkan Conferences and the Balkan Entente are the contemporary studies by D. Alastos, *The Balkans and Europe: A Study of Peace and the Forces of War* (London 1937); T. I. Geshkoff, *Balkan Union: A Road to Peace in Southeastern Europe* (New York 1940); N. J. Padelford, *Peace in the Balkans: The Movement towards International Organization in the Balkans* (New York 1935). See also Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation*, 238–248. For a critique of Stavrianos's views on the nature of the Balkan Entente, see Sebastian H. Lukasik, "The Balkan Entente: A Reassessment of an Aspect of Balkan Diplomacy in the Interwar Period", *Journal of Modern Hellenism* 15 (Winter 1998), 67–90.

²⁷ Stavrianos, *Balkans*, 740–749; Stirk, *European Integration*, 42–44.

cooperation among the Balkan nations, as became apparent in the years that followed.

The federal idea in the 1940s

During the early phase of the War's expansion into south-eastern Europe only Greece was involved, after the Italian invasion in October 1940. Although the Balkan Entente had essentially collapsed, both Yugoslavia and Turkey were quick to offer Greece indirect help, the former secretly supplying munitions and the latter shifting troops to Thrace to avert any intervention by Bulgaria. The following year, however, Greece and Yugoslavia failed to coordinate their forces against the German invasion, and as a result both countries were speedily overrun by Wehrmacht troops. For the next four years south-eastern Europe shared the same fate as the rest of the continent under Axis domination.²⁸

The Nazi conquest of Europe initially created expectations of a new European order that would replace the confusion of the national rivalries and economically unite the continent. These expectations were fostered both by high-ranking Nazis and German diplomats, who adopted a number of ambitious scenarios for reshaping the 'New Europe' under German leadership, and by the Germans' collaborators in the occupied West, who were hoping that their small countries would be more highly valued in the New Order. The reality was different, however: German occupation soon made it clear that Berlin's policy was focused on looting and exploiting the European countries to serve Germany's war needs. The Nazis' European rhetoric was rekindled by the campaign against the USSR and the 'crusade against Bolshevism'; but it never evolved into an integrated European programme, nor was it sufficiently convincing other than for the fanatical anti-Communist collaborators who were recruited into the SS.²⁹

When the War began, Britain and France intended only to restore international law, but it soon became clear that this was not enough and that an alternative was required both to the Nazis' New Order and to the interwar situation. It was in this context that the pro-federal trend developed, which flourished especially during the War and was articulated both by unofficial bodies and resistance organisations in occupied Europe and by

²⁸ J. B. Hoptner, *Yugoslavia in Crisis, 1934-1941* (London and New York 1962), 192-225; Jelavich, *History*, 229-37.

²⁹ For this issue, see Smith and Stirk, eds., *Making the New Europe*. Cf. M. Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (London 2000), 422-432; Stirk, *European Integration*, 52-58, 64-67; M. Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (London and New York 1998), 144-155.

the official allied nations. All the same, Winston Churchill did not want to make any official commitment regarding the post-war structure of Europe while the end of the War was not yet in sight, and also to avoid giving the United States –on which he was relying for the War to continue– the impression that plans were being made that it might regard as antagonistic. To the contrary, he systematically encouraged federalist initiatives by the East European and Balkan governments in exile. In January 1942 the governments in exile of Poland and Czechoslovakia concluded an initial agreement for a federal union between them, while the governments in exile of Greece and Yugoslavia signed a similar pact in the same month. These were, of course, meaningless declarations, for they presupposed that the occupied countries would be liberated and their exiled political leaders would return to power. The Polish–Czechoslovakian agreement soon collapsed, owing to the two sides’ differing attitudes to the USSR. The latter anyway would not accept federal structures that might restrict its influence in Eastern Europe. The Greek–Yugoslav agreement fared no better: from the start the Greek side seemed less keen to adopt it and when it eventually did so it was only at the urging of British diplomacy. Furthermore the two governments had very little influence in their occupied countries, not only because of the occupation, but also owing to the growth of the pro-communist national liberation fronts, which made it uncertain that they would return to power. Among the resistance organisations patriotism remained stronger than federalism at a Europe-wide level. And if some liberals and social democrats in the resistance in the West worked actively to promote the idea of European unity, in the East and the Balkans, where the pro-communist movements predominated, the resistance movements were above all pursuing the national rehabilitation of their occupied or fragmented countries, which after all were suffering more from the German occupation and had been broken up because of it. Having adopted a patriotic rather than an internationalist discourse in order to gain wider popular support, and given the negative stance of the Soviet Union, the Balkan national liberation fronts of Yugoslavia, Greece, and Albania insisted more on their national character, though they maintained contact with one another throughout the War.³⁰

With the end of the War things changed once more. The advance of the Red Army into Eastern Europe and the northern Balkans confirmed Soviet influence in the region. In Yugoslavia Tito’s (Josip Broz’s) national liberation front prevailed totally over its opponents and felt strong enough both at home and abroad to pursue an ambitious initiative for Balkan unification. Tito’s initiative was based on Yugoslavia’s bilateral agreements with

³⁰ Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation*, 261–271; Tchoubarian, *European Idea*, 140–142; Stirk, *European Integration*, 58–70; Mazower, *Dark Continent*, 185–186, 202–206.

Albania and Bulgaria and seemed at first to have some prospect of being implemented: all three countries were now under 'fraternal' pro-communist regimes with ideologically similar manifestos and with the support of the USSR. In 1946 Yugoslavia and Albania concluded a treaty of friendship, cooperation, and mutual assistance and also established jointly run financial enterprises to exploit Albania's resources. The following year a similar agreement was signed by Belgrade and Sofia and both sides agreed to collaborate closely on the Macedonian Question in the hope that the Greek communists would prevail and all the Macedonian territories would be united in the framework of a future local federation. However, these initiatives of Tito's were not necessarily welcomed by the Albanian and the Bulgarian leadership, who were suspicious of the growing Yugoslav influence in their countries: Albania realised that Yugoslav 'support' was in fact replacing Italian 'protection'; while Bulgaria, which was forced to accept Yugoslav cultural propaganda in the Pirin area, saw that the establishment of the autonomous Republic of Macedonia within the framework of the Yugoslav federation was turning the Macedonian Question against it. As long as Tito continued to enjoy the respect of Stalin and the Cominform, Sofia and Tirana could only follow Belgrade's initiatives. But after the rift between Stalin and Tito in 1948, the two countries promptly severed their relations with Yugoslavia and rescinded the agreements they had signed with it. The last federalist movement in the Balkans was thus more or less nipped in the bud, owing to Moscow's refusal to accept Belgrade's independent actions and also because of Sofia's and Tirana's unwillingness to sacrifice their own independence for the sake of a federation centring on Belgrade.³¹

Conclusion

Throughout the period under examination the idea of Balkan unity was in most cases a secondary consideration in the local countries' diplomacy. The federalist proposals usually came from non-governmental representatives, more specifically from those who challenged not only their governments' foreign policy but also those governments' very legitimacy; for which reason the federalists in south-eastern Europe almost always belonged to opposition groups, initially among the radical democrats and then among the socialists. All the same, whenever the prevailing nationalist ideology was undergoing a crisis federalism seemed to appeal more strongly to popular opinion, while even the governments themselves appeared willing to follow the trend, at least insofar as they believed it served national interests. The

³¹ Jelavich, *History*, 315–321; R. J. Crampton, *The Balkans since the Second World War* (London 2002), 27–31.

idea of a united Europe followed a similar course in Europe as a whole. Until the interwar period mainly intellectuals and theoreticians on the left articulated it, but subsequently, under the dramatic impact of the First World War on the European communities, it seemed to attract the interest of official diplomacy — but again temporarily. It took another global crisis, again centring on Europe, the long separation of the continent into two opposing camps, and the collapse of European hegemony at a global level to change the situation: the weakening of the west European great powers was the decisive factor that prompted them to take the initiative to form an, initially regional, economic union, which is now developing into a wager for wider European unity. The continent's south-eastern extremity, of course, had neither the economic nor the political basis for such a venture. And this is why the only chance of accomplishing it is for the entire region to participate in European integration.

UDC 94(4:497) 1789/1945”
327.39

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