

# THE FOREIGN POLICY OF FRANCE AND THE MACEDONIAN PROBLEM AFTER THE WORLD WAR ONE

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## Abstract

The paper analyses the treatment of the Macedonian problem in the framework of the foreign policy of France in the years following the WWI. After winning the war, the basic tendency of the French foreign policy was preventing the new rise of Germany and preserving of the postwar status quo everywhere in Europe, including in the region of the Balkans. For that aim, France relied on a chain of East European countries, including the newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later: Kingdom Yugoslavia).

The ways in which the postwar peace agreements solved the Macedonian question failed to produce its easy ending. Therefore, the European states interested in the stability of the postwar order faced numerous challenges – the activity of the Macedonian organizations, the revisionist Bulgarian policy, the specific Italian Balkans policy, as well as the policy of USSR – a power whose foreign policy was steadily rising throughout the postwar years.

Apart from the features of the general politics of France toward the Macedonian problem, the paper analyses the position taken by France during the Paris peace conference, in the framework of the League of Nations, the methods in which the French diplomacy prevented the related crises, its quest for a peaceful solution, as well as its relations vis à vis the involved Balkan and European states.

**Key words:** Macedonian problem, France, Paris Peace Conference 1919, League of Nations, Kingdom of SCS, Bulgaria, IMRO.

## 1.Introduction

The present paper concerns a less discussed aspect of the influence of the postwar international order on the Macedonian problem – the French foreign policy. Apart from determining the relative

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importance of the Macedonian problem in the context of the general French postwar policy, the paper analyses the methods in which it was dealt, as well as the French relations with other factors which were relevant in this issue. The paper begins with a few notes on the context – the characteristics of the international relations in Europe after the WWI and the French foreign policy, as well as the Macedonian question (2). Further, it analyses the French politics in the framework of the Paris Peace Conference, the ways in which its diplomacy prevented the numerous crises caused by the Macedonian problem, the quest for its peaceful solution, its position in the framework of the League of Nations, as well as the relations of France with the involved Balkan and European states (3). The paper ends by a few concluding remarks (4).

## **2. Contextual notes**

### **a. The international relations after the WWI and the foreign policy of France**

In the period after the ending of the WWI, the international order comprised of two opposite camps; on the winning side, there were the Allies – USA, Great Britain, France, as well as their previous war allies. On the opposite side, there was a chain of states which were dissatisfied by the postwar international order and they were in search of its revision – apart from Germany, Austria, USSR and some smaller states, Italy became a member of this block, besides the fact that she won the war.<sup>3</sup>

Despite of the victory in the WWI, France felt little optimism for the future vis à vis its powerful neighbor, Germany.<sup>4</sup> Namely, ever since the German victory in the war of 1870 and its unification, France feared the consequences of the rise of its neighbor and its foreign policy.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, after the war, France tended to use the victory in order to preserve the postwar status quo, to reinforce its position and to create conditions which would prevent the new German rise.

As it is well known, she failed – many argue that the outbreak of the WWII was a consequence of the failure of the postwar peace order to establish a continuous peace.<sup>6</sup> Kissinger points out that

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<sup>3</sup> On the foreign policy of Italy: M. Kitchen, *Europe between the wars*, Routledge Taylor&Francis group (second edition), pp. 212-242; On the foreign policy of USSR: M. Kitchen, *Europe between the wars*, op. cit., pp. 141-175.

<sup>4</sup> An analysis of the French foreign policy throughout this period: J. Nere, *The Foreign Policy of France from 1914 to 1945. Foreign policies of the Great Powers*, Routledge & K. Paul, 1975; M. Kitchen, *Europe between the wars*, op. cit., pp. 305-334.

<sup>5</sup> B. Simms, *The Struggle for Supremacy from 1453 to the Present*, Basic Books, 2013, pp. 236-306.

<sup>6</sup> An analysis of the international order established after the WWI: *Histoire des Relations Internationales*, vol. III, Librairie Hachette, Paris, 1958, pp. 415– 596.

one of the conditions of the lasting peace is establishing an order in which no side would feel completely isolated, which would motivate her to improve its position with military means – clearly, the Paris peace conference of 1919 failed to ensure that kind of a development.<sup>7</sup>

The French diplomacy was aware that the postwar international agreements were a result of the reconciliation of numerous interests. Throughout Europe, the contemporaries feared that these agreements fail to ensure continuous survival of the fragile postwar order. After the withdrawal of the USA from the European international scene, the task of preserving the stability was entirely left upon France and Great Britain.<sup>8</sup> For that aim, France undertook a formation of a chain of Eastern European alliances, known as the Little Entente. Importantly, Serbia - which was now a part of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Kingdom SCS) was its war ally. These circumstances determined the French policy toward the Macedonian problem.

## **b. The Macedonian problem**

In the years following the WWI, the Macedonian problem, previously an important aspect of the Eastern question, was already very well known in the European political circles.<sup>9</sup> Namely, in the last decades of the XIX century, the European parts of Turkey (mainly Albania and Macedonia), became an object of huge interest of the neighboring, already established Balkan national states (in the case of Macedonia: Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece).<sup>10</sup> The developments are well known – in Macedonia, besides the church and educational activities, armed bands were formed and, at the end, real wars emerged. These (Balkan wars) ended by an international agreement which determined the division of Macedonia. The largest part of its territories was divided between Greece and Serbia, and the smaller part went to Bulgaria – a reason for its discontent for the years to come.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>H. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, Simon&Schuster, 1994, p. 81, pp. 218-287. See also: H. Kissinger, *World Order*, Penguin Books, 2014, pp. 82-86.

<sup>8</sup>J.P. Kaufman, *A Concise History of U.S. Foreign Policy*, Rowman and Littlefield (third edition), pp. 61-69.

<sup>9</sup> Eastern question was an international issue related to the decline of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans and in the eastern Mediterranean beginning with the second half of the XVIII century and the response of the Great Powers to it. Le Petit Mourre, *Dictionnaire d'histoire universelle* (Bordas, 2004), p. 967 and 1344 and further.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example: Pasko Kuzman et al. (eds.), *Makedonija. Mileniumski kulturno-istoriski fakti*, tome 4, Skopje, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example: Helmreich E.C., *The Diplomacy of the Balkan Wars 1912– 1913*, Harvard University Press, 1938; V. Stojchev, A. Stojchev, *Bukureshtiot miroven dogovor i podelbata na Makedonija vo 1913 godina*, INI, Skopje, 2013.

Contrary to many other parts of the European political map, when it comes to Macedonia, the Paris peace treaty did not bring changes, but simply confirmed the borders established in the aftermath of the Balkan wars.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, each of the involved states kept its prewar position toward the Macedonian problem – that it is inhabited by a population of the convenient nationality. In that sense, the official policy of the Kingdom of SCS followed the Serbian policy from the pre-1919 period – that Macedonia is south Serbia, populated by Serbs.<sup>13</sup>

Mirroring the situation elsewhere in Europe, after the war, the region was divided on states which were on the winning and on the losing side. The Kingdom of SCS was certainly on the winning side.<sup>14</sup> The position of Greece was specific – she was a winner on its northern borders, despite the defeat by Turkey on the east.<sup>15</sup> Finally, Bulgaria, which entered the war on the German side in order to gain Macedonia, found itself after the armistice on the losing side. The peace treaty with Bulgaria (Treaty of Neuilly) confirmed the borders from 1913.<sup>16</sup> Being the only Balkan state emerging from the war on the losing side, Bulgaria was isolated.<sup>17</sup>

The Bulgarian state policy also remained on the prewar positions that Macedonia is populated by the Bulgarians – including those living in the portions belonging to Serbia and Greece.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, she heavily objected to the diplomatic solutions of 1919. Nevertheless, aware of the international moment, Bulgaria formulated its revisionist policy through a project based on peaceful revision of the peace treaties, in accordance to the article 19 of the Covenant of the League of Nations.<sup>19</sup> Considering that the consent of the neighboring states for such a course of action was not probable, Bulgaria also developed its de facto revisionist politics toward Macedonia. Such a policy was influenced by the fact that throughout the previous years, a huge number of refugees from the other

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<sup>12</sup> B. Popovska-Netkova, “Nacheloto na narodnosta i makedonskoto prasanje po Prvata svetska vojna”, *Godishnik na Pravniot fakultet vo Skopje*, tom 36, 1994/1995, pp. 493-502; Lederer, J. Ivo, *Yugoslavia at the Paris Peace Conference*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1963, pp. 239– 240 and p. 248.

<sup>13</sup> The unofficial name was “Southern Serbia”. After 1929, the official name was “Vardar Banovina”.

<sup>14</sup> This name was changed in 1929, when the state was renamed “Kingdom of Yugoslavia”.

<sup>15</sup> R. Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, pp. 92– 9.

<sup>16</sup> Including a further, albeit small territorial loss of Bulgaria. For the text of the Treaty of Neuilly see: M. Stojkovich (ed.), *Balkanski ugovorni odnosi 1876-1996*, II tom (1919-1945), JP Sluzbeni List SRJ, Beograd, 1998, doc. 222, pp. 55-93.

<sup>17</sup> Another Balkan state belonging to the winning camp after the WWI was Romania.

<sup>18</sup> See for example: K. Paleshutki, *Makedonskoto osvoboditelno dvizhenie sled Prvata svetovna vojna/1918-1924/*, Sofia, 1993.

<sup>19</sup> “The Assembly may from time to time advise the reconsideration by Members of the League of treaties which have become inapplicable and the consideration of international conditions whose continuance might endanger the peace of the world.” Article 19, The Covenant of the League of Nations.

parts of Macedonia entered Bulgaria and in the postwar period they urged for a revision of borders.<sup>20</sup> The later one very much depended on the question which was the government in power. In the first postwar years, the Government of Stamboliski invested massive efforts to improve the relations to the Kingdom of SCS. However, after his fall and until 1934, when they were disbanded, all governments supported the activities of the Macedonian organization, including those which openly organized attacks across the Yugoslav border.<sup>21</sup>

These organisations were the key source of discontent by the postwar diplomatic solutions. Namely, the Macedonian revolutionary movement, formed and active during the last decade of the XIX century, after the failure of the Ilinden uprising and the wars prolonged in the period 1912-1918, was incredibly fragmented.<sup>22</sup> After the war, one of the Macedonian organisations (IMRO) created a basis in the Bulgarian regions bordering the Kingdom of SCS from where they undertook frequent cross border raids.<sup>23</sup> According to some accounts, in the interwar period, this was the most contested border in Europe and in the period 1919-1934, 467 attacks of the IMRO bands against the Kingdom of SCS were noted.<sup>24</sup> Although, from time to time, these bands also crossed the Greek border,<sup>25</sup> their main activities were directed against the Kingdom of SCS where they created continuous tensions. Apart from the unofficial support of Bulgaria, IMRO had other powerful allies – Italy and the Cominterne.<sup>26</sup> The final effect of this policy was a serious destabilization of Yugoslav Macedonia and serious tensions in the bilateral relations between Bulgaria and the Kingdom of SCS. In that way, the Macedonian problem survived and became the key source of danger for the postwar international order and the status quo in the Balkans.

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<sup>20</sup>R. Crampton, *A Short History of Modern Bulgaria*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987, p. 87 and p. 92.

<sup>21</sup>J. D. Bell, *Peasants in Power. Alexander Stamboliski and the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union 1899– 1923*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1977, pp. 184– 207 and pp. 208– 41; R. Crampton, *A Short History of Modern Bulgaria*, op. cit., pp. 93– 114.

<sup>22</sup>Z. Todorovski, *Vnatreshnata makedonska revolucionerna organizacija, 1924-1934*, Skopje, 1997; K. Paleshutki, *Makedonskoto osvoboditeno dvizhenie*, op. cit.; A. Grebenarov, *Legalni i taini organizacii na makedonskite bezhanci v Blgaria (1918-1947)*, Sofia, 2006.

<sup>23</sup>Z. Todorovski (ed.), *Todor Aleksandrov, Se za Makedonija. Dokumenti 1919-1924*, Skopje, 2005; Z. Todorovski, *Vnatreshnata makedonska revolucionerna organizacija*, op. cit.

<sup>24</sup>V. Jovanovich, *Jugoslovenska drzava i Juzhna Srbija 1918– 1929*, INIS, Beograd, 2002, p. 194.

<sup>25</sup>After the end of the WWI, a new, Greek-Turkish war began which Greece lost. On the exchange of population and the settlement of Greeks from Turkey, see: S. Ladas, *The Exchange of Minorities, Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1932; E. Kontogiorgi, *Population Exchange in Greek Macedonia. The Rural Settlement of Refugees 1922–1930*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006.

<sup>26</sup>Z. Todorovski, *Vrskite na VMRO so Italija vo periodot megu dvete svtski vojni*, Glasnik na INI, XXXX/2, Skopje, 1996, pp. 45-66; V. Popovski, L. Zila, *Makedonskoto prasanje vo dokumentite na Kominternata*, vol. 1, 2, Skopje, Gurga, 1999.

### **c.France and the Macedonian problem**

The French policy toward the Macedonian question is interesting. Actually, France was strongly involved in the Eastern question ever since its beginnings.<sup>27</sup> Several decades before the WWI, she was aware of the developments surrounding the Macedonian problem. Namely, although the region of the Balkans was an area of competing Austria-Hungarian and Russian influence, the events occurring there attracted the attention of all Great Powers, including France, which was permanently involved in the questions related to the Turkish Empire.<sup>28</sup> Notably, the French diplomacy remembered the failure of the European Great Powers to predict and prevent the events leading to the Balkan Wars. Namely, in that situation, completely unexpectedly, the previously competing Balkan states made an agreement and defeated Turkey. Therefore, the only course of action the Great Powers could take was the legitimization of their military victories in the form of the Bucharest treaty.<sup>29</sup> Another memory was even more fresh – in 1914, the WWI began, equally unexpectedly, in the Balkans. For these reasons, the permanent postwar crisis around Macedonia strongly attracted the attention of Quai d'Orsay (the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

### **3. The French policy of Balkan status quo after the WWI and the Macedonian problem**

#### **a.Introduction**

The first crucial influence of France with regard to this problem happened during the Paris peace conference of 1919. Namely, the Committee on new states and minorities, responsible to decide on the issue, discussed the proposition that the regions of Macedonia belonging to the Kingdom of SCS gain status of autonomy and minority rights. In this context, France strongly protected the interests of Belgrade.<sup>30</sup> This policy produced long term consequences, particularly because it ensured that the Macedonian question remained outside the competences of the newly formed League of Nations.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, although, under the influence of the USA, the international law and the principle of collective security (embodied in the League of Nations) gained a prominent

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<sup>27</sup> See, for example: M. S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question, 1774–1923: A Study in International Relations*, Macmillan, 1966; W. Miller, *The Ottoman Empire and Its Successors, 1801-1927*, Taylor and Francis, 1966.

<sup>28</sup> A. Hristov, J. Donev, *Makedonija vo megunarodnite dogovori, 1875-1919*, Matica Makedonska - Arhiv na Makedonija, Skopje, 1994.

<sup>29</sup> R. C. Hall, *The Balkans Wars 1912-1913. Prelude to the First World War*, Routledge, London and New York.

<sup>30</sup> H. Andonov Poljanski, *Velika Britanija i makedonskoto prashanje na Pariskata mirovna konferencija vo 1919 godina*, Arhiv na Makedonija, Skopje, 1973, pp. 33-58.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*. pp. 39-54. See also: I. Lederer, *Yugoslavia*, op. cit., pp. 239– 40 and p. 248.

role in the international order, the Macedonian problem was never treated through these mechanisms. The peace treaty provisions ensured that throughout the post war period, it never gained a legal character – neither from the point of view of internal constitutional law of the Balkan states, nor from the point of view of the international law. It remained with a status of a political and security issue disturbing the bilateral relations between Bulgaria and the Kingdom of SCS.

#### **b. France and the bilateral relations between Bulgaria and the Kingdom of SCS**

Faced by constant cross border attacks of the Macedonian organisations, throughout the interwar period, the Kingdom of SCS invested massive energy to solve this security challenge. In the interior plan, she developed in Macedonia its state apparatus and, particularly, it concentrated army and police. On international plan, she developed several approaches. We will analyse them here, in particular from the point of view of the policy led by France in each of them.

Certainly, the most radical were the ideas in the Kingdom of SCS on military intervention against Bulgaria. In the first postwar years, they were not only a reaction on the security challenges, but also an instrument of pressure on Bulgaria to implement the stern conditions of the Treaty of Neuilly related to the reorganization of the army and the reparations.<sup>32</sup> The possibility to include the mechanisms of the collective security was completely neglected. The role of France in this context was unexpected. Namely, Belgrade justified the ideas on the military intervention in a few Bulgarian border regions by the example of French occupation of the German area of Ruhr in 1923, aiming to force Germany to pay the reparations. It was precisely the French diplomacy which, after learning on these plans (together with the British), insisted that the plan is abandoned.<sup>33</sup> Namely, the Head of the Military Inter-Allied Commission of Control in Sofia, General de Fourtou informed Maréchal Foch that in case of such an occupation, the consequences would be very different compared to those in Ruhr – there would be war in Balkans again.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> W. N. Medlicott et al., eds, Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919– 1939, First Series, Vol. XXII, London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1980, Document No. 113: Sir A. Young to Earl Curzon, Belgrade, 21 April 1921 (No. 206 C 8553/7967/92), pp. 137– 8.

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem., Document No. 124: Earl Curzon to Lord Hardinge (No. 211 Telegraphic C 8592/6412/7), Foreign Office, 29 April 1921, p. 154 and Document No. 136: Sir A. Peel to Earl Curzon (No. 173 C 10162/6412/7), Sofia, 12 May 1921, pp. 167– 8.

<sup>34</sup> E. Aleksandrov (ed.), Istorija na Blgarite, vol. IV: Blgarskata diplomacia ot drevnosta do nasi dni, Trud, 2003, p. 362.

We can cite another example of the French conduct. In 1923, in Bulgaria occurred the coup d'état against the Government of Stamboliski which maintained good relations with the Kingdom of SCS. In the Parliament of the Kingdom of SCS, the opposition demanded a military intervention in Bulgaria or at least a military demonstration on the Bulgarian border, with the justification that the mobilization, ordered by the new Bulgarian government is contrary to the provisions of the Treaty of Neuilly.<sup>35</sup> The French diplomacy reacted immediately in Belgrade in order to prevent this development – after an intervention of Mussolini – a huge enemy of the Kingdom of SCS (see below).<sup>36</sup> Afraid of international isolation, Belgrade refrained from intervention.

We will mention another episode that occurred in 1924. Namely, on that occasion, the Prime Minister Pashic decided to direct an army in the Bulgarian regions where IMRO had its basis and which would remain there until the solution of the problem is found in the spirit of the previously signed Nish agreement (regulating the solution of the Macedonian crisis). Pashic sent a warning circular to the European capitals, after which Raymond Poincaré, the French President of the Council and Minister of Foreign Affairs warned the Bulgarian diplomatic representative in Paris that in such a case nobody would prevent the Yugoslav army.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, Britain intervened in a similar direction. Another similar episode occurred in 1927, after the assassination of General Kovachevich and the diversions on the railway Skopje-Belgrade. The Kingdom of SCS closed the borders toward Bulgaria and the later responded by declaring an emergency in the border districts. The tension calmed due to the French and British interventions.<sup>38</sup>

The dynamics of this type survived for many years. On one side, these frequent French interventions, sometimes coordinated with Britain, arose dissatisfaction with the Kingdom of SCS. On the other side, Belgrade addressed the Allied governments hoping to gain support against the Bulgarian behavior, which was contrary to the Treaty of Neuilly. Such was the example of the

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<sup>35</sup> SBNS (Minutes of the National Assembly), XIV regular meeting, 18 June 1923, pp. 626, 627, 634.

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem., p. 628.

<sup>37</sup> E. Aleksandrov, ed., *History of the Bulgarians*, op. cit., p. 373.

<sup>38</sup> K. Bourne and D. Cameron Watt (gen. eds), *British Documents on Foreign Affairs, Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print, University Publications of America*. See: Christopher Seton-Watson, ed., *From the First to the Second World War Part II, Series F, Vol. 7: Doc. 219 (C 157/42/7) Mr. Dodd to Sir A. Chamberlain, Sofia, 5 January 1928, pp. 289–91 and Doc. 222 (C 169/42/7) Sir a Chamberlain to Mr Dodd, Foreign Office, 16 January 1928, pp. 295– 6.*



collective notes on the part of the Kingdom of SCS, Romania and Greece against neighboring Bulgaria.<sup>39</sup>

In parallel to the frequent and high tensions, the bilateral relations between Bulgaria and the Kingdom of SCS also knew long term negotiations for a permanent solution of the Macedonian problem. Several initiatives of that kind existed and their result was the Treaty of Nish of 1923 and the Treaty of Pirot of 1930.<sup>40</sup> For example, when after the signing of the last, the Macedonian organisations responded by cross border raids, the Yugoslav Parliament refused to ratify the treaty. Only after the intervention of France and Britain with the Yugoslav minister on foreign affairs, the ratification followed.<sup>41</sup> The signing of the well-known Balkan Pact (in which Bulgaria did not take part) in 1934 was also preceded by negotiations, which encompassed meetings on royal level, during which the Macedonian crisis was discussed.<sup>42</sup> In this context, the French diplomacy was also strongly involved, pressuring the Bulgarian Prime minister Mushanov and King Boris to negotiate with the Kingdom of SCS.<sup>43</sup>

This continuous diplomatic activity of France demonstrates the resolution to prevent each crisis caused by the Macedonian problem. In order to ensure settlement, France frequently reacted in both capitals, demanding soothing of tensions and preventing their further escalation. In that context, although France supported the Kingdom of SCS, her preventive diplomacy included the efforts to reinforce its relations with Bulgaria. Namely, France could not permit the Yugoslav military intervention or further international isolation of Bulgaria which might only reinforce its already revisionist policy. Already during the crisis of 1921, the French diplomat Picot declared in Plovdiv that a moment came in which France should replace the old Bulgarian ally – Russia.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> For example: W. N. Medlicott et al., eds, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, op. cit., document No. 104: Sir A. Peel to Earl Curzon, (No. 129 C 7960/6412/7), Sofia, 14 April 1921, pp. 125– 6.

<sup>40</sup> An interesting document on the negotiations: Kenneth Bourne and D. Cameron Watt, gen. eds, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs, Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print*, University Publications of America; Christopher Seton-Watson, ed., *From the First to the Second World War*, Part II, Series F, Vol. 8, Document 37 (C 2162/197/7) Mr Kennard to Sir Austin Chamberlain, Belgrade, 20 March 1929, pp. 43– 5. See also: Doc. 120 (C 1699/82/7) Mr Waterlow to Mr A. Henderson, Sofia, 27 February 1930 and Inclosure (Doc. 121), pp. 169– 71.

<sup>41</sup> D. Livanios, “A Loveless Entanglement. Britain and Bulgar-Yugoslav Relations, 1924– 1943”, *Balkan Studies* 39, 1, 1998, Thessaloniki, p. 129.

<sup>42</sup> Vasil Guzelev at al (eds), *Car Boris III v britanskata diplomateska korespondencia 1919– 1941*, Sofia, Universitetsko izdatelstvo: “Sv. Kl. Ohridski” 2005. See Documents No. 128, 129, 130, 133, 135, 136, 137, 139.

<sup>43</sup>E. Aleksandrov, ed., *History of the Bulgarians*, op. cit., p. 402.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibidem.*, p. 362.

For that reason, her diplomacy developed in the sphere of rapid reactions, warnings and softening the tensions – instruments of diplomacy of preventing crises.

Apart from these standard efforts to control the parties which have lost the war in order to prevent the revisionism, a very important situation was occurring in Europe – the need to build international relations among actors with different ideological positions. As a matter of fact, there were, even before this period, similar moments of European history. Nevertheless, the challenges posed by the USSR and the Cominterne were considerable, even more so, considering that the ideology of communism gained supporters in different European states. Now, this ideology was propagated by a powerful state as the USSR.<sup>45</sup> In Bulgaria, the Cominterne had more and more supporters, in particular in the circles which were not satisfied by the postwar settlement, including the Macedonian organisations. For example, in 1922, the French embassy in Sofia discovered about the secret meetings among the representatives of the Bulgarian, Soviet and Turkish military circles, during which the Bulgarian side demanded support for territorial changes in the Balkans.<sup>46</sup> In 1924, the Cominterne almost succeeded to use the dissatisfaction of the Macedonians for its revolutionary ends. Clearly, for the French diplomacy it was essential to diminish the tensions between the Kingdom of SCS and Bulgaria, in order to neutralize these influences.

Although in the postwar period France could not count on the support of the USA, which after the signature of the peace treaties lost the interest for the events in Europe, in the case of the Great Britain, the situation was better. This state was equally interested in the preservation of the Balkan status quo, but with huge differences, compared to France. Namely, Britain was not facing the immediate danger from the events in Central Europe and Germany and, besides that, in the postwar years, she had no strong ally in the Balkans, unlike France which strongly supported the Kingdom of SCS.<sup>47</sup> For that reason, as several examples we provided above show, the two allies frequently worked together to soften the tensions.<sup>48</sup> Besides, in the issue of the greatest problem that Bulgaria faced – the strict conditions of the Treaty of Neuilly, both forces worked together to ensure softening of the conditions for its implementation. After the Treaty of Locarno in 1925, Bulgaria

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<sup>45</sup> G. Frost Kennan, *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1941*, Anvil Books, 1960.

<sup>46</sup> E. Aleksandrov, ed., *History of the Bulgarians*, op. cit., p. 365.

<sup>47</sup> D. Livanios, *A Loveless Entanglement*, op. cit., p. 132.

<sup>48</sup> See: D. Livanios, *A Loveless Entanglement*, op. cit.

followed the behavior of Germany, asking for withdrawal of the military control of the Allies. The Ambassador's Conference (in which the Allies participated) accepted this demand.<sup>49</sup>

The relations between France and Italy in this period form a particularly interesting theme. Occasionally, Italy joined the diplomatic demarches of France and Britain for the calming of the crisis,<sup>50</sup> but with regards to Macedonia, her policy was contrary to the French. Namely, after the drawing of the Adriatic borders,<sup>51</sup> Italy became a passionate enemy of the Kingdom of SCS, and, for that reason, she supported the Bulgarian position with regard to Macedonia. Immediately after the peace conference, much before she decided to lead an open revisionist policy, Italy had contacts with IMRO and strongly supported it. As a matter of fact, Mussolini even supported the coup d'état in Bulgaria from 1923.<sup>52</sup> In that way, when it comes to usual legal methods of the international order, Italy was the biggest enemy of the French politics toward the Macedonian problem. As we pointed out above, when it comes to the mobilization on ideological lines, the Cominterne posed a serious threat.

The strong support that France provided for the Kingdom of SCS was the most visible in the context of the collective security and the League of Nations. For example, in 1922, after one warning communique of Belgrade against the attacks of the Macedonian chetas on her territory, the Bulgarian government suggested the formation of an international enquiry commission.<sup>53</sup> The Council of the League refused that. The decision was of huge importance for Belgrade, as this type of a commission would criticize her bad administration in Macedonia and it could suggest minority protection.<sup>54</sup> We could also cite the example from 1928, when Italy announced that the Macedonian problem should be involved in the agenda of the League.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> E. Aleksandrov, ed., *History of the Bulgarians*, op. cit., p. 389.

<sup>50</sup> F. O. 371/12864, C4652, *Annual Report on Bulgaria*, dated 17 June 1928.

<sup>51</sup> A. Mitrovic, *Jugoslavija na konferenciji mira 1919-1920*, Zavod za izdavanje udzbenika Socijalisticke Republike Srbije, Beograd, pp. 147-157. See also: A. Kuzmanova, *Italia, Blgaria i Balkanite (1919-1927)*, BPS, Sofia, 2003, pp. 57-71.

<sup>52</sup> Z. Todorovski, *Vrskite na VMRO so Italija vo periodot megu dvete svetski vojni*, op. cit., pp. 45-66; C. V. Biljarski, *BZNS Aleksandar Stamboliiski i VMRO. Nepoznata vojna*, Sofia, 2009.

<sup>53</sup> V. Jovanovic, *Jugoslovenska drzhava*, op. cit., pp. 150– 1.

<sup>54</sup> D. Todorovic, *Jugoslavija i balkanske drzhave 1918-1923*, Institut za savremenu istoriju, Narodna knjiga, Beograd, 1979, p. 169. An interesting study on the Yugoslav governance in Macedonia: Nada Boskovska, *Das jugoslawische Makedonien 1918– 1941. Eine Randregion zwischen Repression und Integration*, Vienna, 2009.

<sup>55</sup> V. Jovanovic, *Jugoslovenska drzhava*, op. cit., p. 157.

The French refusal of the involvement of the League is the key service she has done to the Kingdom of SCS throughout this period. In that way, the Macedonian problem was left to be regulated through the mechanisms of the traditional diplomacy. As a matter of fact, the League was several times involved in the issues important for the Balkan stability, as was, for example, the case of the monitoring of the exchange of population,<sup>56</sup> the Bulgarian demands for a refugee loan in 1926 and the role of the Permanent International Court of Justice on the Yugoslav-Albanian border in 1925.<sup>57</sup> It is particularly important to note that the League was involved even in the problematics of border incidents on the Balkans. Such was the case of the Corfu crisis in 1923 (in which Italy prevented the outcome) and the Petrich incident of 1925 (in which Greece was obliged to pay a sum to Bulgaria).<sup>58</sup> These two examples demonstrate the great influence of the Great Powers interests in the decision making of this body. The fact that France and Italy had so different interests in the matters of the Macedonian problem demonstrates that the League would not be able to serve as an effective mechanism.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The presents analysis tends to provide an insight into the French policy toward the Macedonian problem in the period after the WWI. The analysis shows that throughout this period, the Macedonian problem was visible mainly in the relations between the Kingdom of SCS and Bulgaria, while Greece was concerned with another type of challenges and it is the relationship between these two states that formed the focus of the French foreign policy directed toward the stablisation of the region. A certain periodization is possible as well; the first phase concerned the solutions of the peace agreements (notably the Treaty of Neuilly). In the second phase, which began already since 1920, the problem was continuous and, while France employed numerous methods of traditional diplomacy, she took care to keep the question outside the mechanisms of the collective security and the League of Nations. The methods of traditional diplomacy which France employed include the urgent interventions to calm the crises and encouraging the negotiations. One may argue, therefore, that France relied on the same approach used for many decades to calm the numerous crises rising from the Eastern question. To ensure the success,

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<sup>56</sup> S. Ladas, *The Exchange of Minorities*, op. cit., pp. 49– 74.

<sup>57</sup> J. Swire, *Albania, The Rise of a Kingdom*, Williams and Norgate ltd, London, 1929, pp. 441– 2.

<sup>58</sup> James Barros, “The Greek-Bulgarian Incident of 1925” in: Joel Larus (ed.), *From Collective Security to Preventive Diplomacy*, John Wiley and sons inc, New York, London, Sidney, 1965, pp. 57– 91.

France put an effort to be constantly present in the Balkan politics through maintaining a strong diplomatic apparatus and contacts with the other centers of western foreign policy and, notably with Great Britain – a state which also had interest in the securing of the Balkan status quo. Such a system enabled France to ensure that its reactions were quick and to keep responding to the very first signs of the crises. She heavily relied on diplomatic interventions and the system of encouragement of negotiations and warnings on the consequences of the disturbances of the status quo. There is little doubt that, for many years, these mechanisms fully succeeded to contain the crises. However, in the years before the WWII, the emergence of new military blocks in Europe prevented France to continue with its policy and, as it is well-known, at the beginning of the war, Macedonia was again among the crises spots.

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