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“Fear Not, For You Have Brothers in Greece’’: A Research Note

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Introduction

During the aggression on the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, many volunteers from Orthodox countries fought in the army of the Republika Srpska (VRS). Among them were Ukrainians, Romanians, Greeks, and Russians, to name the most obvious. However, the most interesting are the Greeks:¹ first, Greek fighters took part in the genocide in Srebrenica; second, the Greek government and a large part of the public supported and approved their actions. Orthodox Christian foreign fighters in the VRS are often called “mercenaries,” which is inaccurate, since they fought for ideology and not for money. While this topic is important, it is controversial and has been little investigated so far. This research note aims to explore the role of Greece and Greeks in the aggression and genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

‘We moved in and ‘cleaned up’ the place!’

The first Greek volunteers arrived in Bosnia in 1993.² In March 1995, at the request of General Ratko Mladić, the Greek Volunteer Guard (GVG) was formed, with its base in Vlasenica.³ It was fully integrated into the Drina Corps of the army of the VRS and was closely connected to Greek intelligence agencies; its activities were closely monitored by the Greek embassy in Belgrade.⁴ The unit had its own insignia, a double-headed eagle on a black background. We now know that it took part in the VRS offensive on the UN enclave of Srebrenica. Greek volunteers were also spotted in the Konjic area.⁵ A large number of the GVG’s members were also members of Hrisi Avgi, a neo-Nazi organization in Greece, but overall the members represented mainstream Greek opinion.⁶ To support the connection between the GVG and Hrisi Avgi, there exists a picture of a few GVG members in Srebrenica saluting in the Nazi style. After the fall of Srebrenica, Serb and Greek soldiers raised four flags on the Orthodox Church in Srebrenica: the Serbian, the Greek, the Byzantine, and the flag of Vergina (the disputed “Greek Macedonian” flag).⁷ It is also reported that video footage was shot of this event for propaganda purposes.⁸ The Greeks celebrated all night with their Serb fellow soldiers and sang the Greek and Serbian national anthems.⁹ The same day Srebrenica fell, the Greek national television station, MEGA, conducted a telephone interview with a Greek volunteer from Srebrenica, who said with excitement, “After the artillery stopped its bombardment we moved in and ‘cleaned up’ the place!”¹⁰

The primary reason for the Greek presence in Bosnia was ideology. When asked his motives for fighting, one Greek volunteer answered, “I am an Orthodox and I must help my Serb brethren against the Muslims.”¹¹ Another had greater visions: “We are fighting for a Greater Greece in a Europe free from Muslims and Zionists.”¹² Yet another said,

“The Vatican, the Zionists, the Germans and the Americans conspire against the Orthodox nations. Their next target after Serbia will be Greece.”¹³ Four members of the GVG were awarded the White Eagle medal by Radovan Karadžić himself. The Greek volunteers maintained two offices in Greece, one in Athens and the other in Solun, which were used for recruitment.¹⁴

‘‘God and the Greeks’’

The Greek government, the Greek Orthodox Church, and the majority of the Greek public openly supported the Milosević and Karadžić governments during the aggression on the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The roots of Serb–Greek relations run deep. As the famous Greek lawyer Alexandros Lykourezos has put it, Greece’s relationship with Serbia “stems from Greece’s hostile relationship with Turkey, which is also often hard for outsiders to fathom.”¹⁵ During the Yugoslav wars, the socialist Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) and the right-wing New Democracy sided with the Serbs. The socialists sided with the Serbs because of their anti-Americanism, which also explains why Muammar Qaddafi and Saddam Hussein supported Milošević, while New Democracy sided with the Serbs as fellow members of the Orthodox faith. Despite their differences, these two political rivals readily agreed on Serb policies in the Yugoslav wars. One such point of agreement was Radovan Karadžić. Karadžić visited Greece on two occasions, first in the summer of 1993 and second in January 1994.¹⁶ Both times he received the highest state honors. In 1993 he met with high-ranking Greek officials, including Prime Minister Constantine Mitsotakis, PASOK leader Andreas Papandreou, and Archbishop Serapheim of the Greek Orthodox Church. The Greek–Serb Friendship was also helpful in bringing Karadžić to Greece.¹⁷ This organization was formed in 1992 and is still active today, promoting Serb interests in Greece. Its president, Aris Mousionis, was seen together with Karadžić during the latter’s visit to Greece; he personally shared with Serb general Ratko Mladić NATO military secrets concerning the air strikes initiated against Bosnian Serb forces in August 1995.¹⁸ The importance of this organization is shown by the fact that during the war Karadžić awarded the Greek–Serb Friendship the Njegoš medal (Orden Njegoša).¹⁹ The Greek Orthodox Church organized an open-air mass meeting honoring Karadžić at Piraeus Stadium, where among those present were, besides Greek Church officials, Greek politicians Kostas Karamanlis²⁰ and Akis Tsochatyopoulos, then minister of defense. It was here that Karadžić made the now-famous remark, “We have with us God and the Greeks.”²¹ He next visited Greece in January 1994, when he arrived in Athens to attend a medical conference titled “The Effects of the Embargo and the War on the Health of the Serb People.”²² Even today, Karadžić is still considered a hero and a defender of the Orthodox faith by a large number of Greeks. Recently there have been many reports that Karadžić is hiding in Greece; both Bosnian and foreign intelligence officers claim that he occasionally hides in the Hilandar monastery on Mt. Athos.²³ It is important to note that the Greek Orthodox Church has appointed Karadžić “to the 900-year-old ‘Knights’ Order of the first rank of Saint Dionysius of Xanthe,” declaring him “one of the most prominent sons of our Lord Jesus Christ working for peace.”²⁴

The Greek Church, besides supporting Karadžić personally, supported the military actions of the VRS. In December 1993, Greek Orthodox priests visited the ethnically cleansed Bosnian town of Zvornik and conducted a liturgy in the church of Saint Nikolas, the protector of Zvornik.²⁵ In February 1995, a delegation led by Archimandrite Ignatios of the Diocese of Piraeus visited the Serb-occupied part of Sarajevo and gave blessings to the Serb soldiers who were constantly shelling the city. Numerous reports

show that the Milošević regime had bank accounts in Greek and Cypriot banks. According to the testimony of Radomir Marković, head of the Serbian State Security Service from November 1998 to 2000, the regime used these bank accounts to purchase military equipment from abroad for the needs of the Republika Srpska and the Republika Srpska Krajina.²⁶ Via these banks, more than €770 million was spent by Serbia to buy arms from Russia and Israel.²⁷ Greece, probably in return, was allowed to draw large quantities of electricity each day from Bosnia, and the Greek state energy company paid \$20,000 a month to Belgrade for the use of these power lines.²⁸ The issue of secret bank accounts from the Milošević era is still active, and there is no doubt that it played a role in shaping Greek foreign policy; but, compared to Greek sympathy for Serbs, the economic motive was a minor one. Perhaps one of the most important things Greece did for Serbia was to supply it with much-needed fuel, without which the Bosnian Serb Army could not have mounted their military operations. Greece smuggled fuel to Serbia by recruiting Serb criminals such as Vladimir Bokan, who smuggled fuel on behalf of Greece while in return the Greek government provided him with Greek citizenship and turned a blind eye to his private profit-making activities.²⁹ In 2000, Bokan agreed to tell his story to Greek journalist Takis Michas. He later agreed to another meeting during which he would provide Michas with the names of Greek politicians and businessmen with whom he had worked and who had also helped break the embargo. A few days after their first meeting, however, Bokan was assassinated by unidentified persons. Other experts, such as Dutch professor Cees Wiebes, who worked on the report of the Netherlands War Documentation Institute (NWDI), claim that in 1994 and 1995 Greece supplied the Bosnian Serbs with weapons and ammunition, which were shipped from Piraeus to Bar, Montenegro.³⁰ Another way in which the Greek state supported the Bosnian Serbs was by giving NATO military secrets to the VRS. Greece, as a member of NATO, had access to information about planned NATO targets during the 1995 air strikes; this information was leaked to the VRS through Aris Mousionis, president of the Greek–Serb Friendship Association. Once NATO discovered the leak, Greece was no longer allowed access to this information.³¹

The Post-Srebrenica Period

In June 2005, after images of executions of boys and men from Srebrenica by Serb special forces (Škorpion) were shown around the world, a Greek member of parliament, Andreas Andrianopoulos, requested that an investigation be opened into whether Greeks took part in the genocide. No results have been published so far, and it is not even known at what stage the investigation is today.³² The report published by the NWDI in 2002, which led the entire Dutch government to resign, confirmed that Greek volunteers took part in military operations in Srebrenica and that Greece violated the embargo by supplying the Serbs with fuel and other materials.³³ The Greek government has continued either to deny any Greek involvement in Srebrenica or to state that it is not interested in the matter. In June 2005, a Greek official, Jorgos Kumucakos, said that the Ministry of Justice would cooperate with the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague “if it was requested by them.”³⁴ At the same time, the minister of justice, Anastasios Papaligouras, said that it “is possible that Greek citizens took part in the massacre of civilians in Srebrenica.”³⁵ There are also unconfirmed reports that Carla Del Ponte gave a list of Greek citizens who were volunteers in Bosnia to a Greek diplomat, Jorgos Papandreu, in April 2003. Unfortunately, Greek officials have not shown the willpower to arrest those suspected of crimes, even when there is strong evidence. One such case occurred in 2003, when police, in an operation to bust an illegal

steroids network, searched the house of a thirty-six-year-old in Athens. While searching for steroids they came up with “something much more horrific[:] 80 photos of slaughtered Muslim civilians in Bosnia.”³⁶ This man was at first a member of Arkan’s Tigers, then later joined the GVG, but he also served as a trainer for Fikret Abdić’s forces in Krajina. Despite these photographs, he was charged only with selling illegal drugs.

Even though Greece is financing major reconstruction projects in Bosnia and helping Bosnia on its path to membership in the European Union, evidence has shown that some indicted war criminals may be hiding in Greece. In November 2006, *Dnevni avaz*, a leading daily in Bosnia-Herzegovina, published a picture of Stojan Župljanin in the Hilandar monastery in northern Greece.³⁷ He is shown dressed casually, standing under a cross and inscription relating to Serbia’s fourteenth-century emperor Dušan. This is the most sacred shrine of the Serbian people and is a place where Serbian monks reside—the same place where, in March 1991, Milošević declared that “the spirit that united us during the period of the Turkish rule” once again united the Greeks and Serbs.³⁸ In June 2007, a former member of the GVG, Kirakos Katharios, published a book titled *The Journey of a Volunteer*, in which he writes about the heroic actions of Greek volunteers in Bosnia and states, among other things, that Srebrenica is a “lie” and that the Greeks did not participate in any crimes: “If they had, the Moslem government of Bosnia would have raised the issue.”³⁹

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the war in Bosnia was pursued with Greek support for Serbian forces. Some believe that this reflects a Greek fear of being surrounded by three “Islamic states.” Greece has shown this attitude on numerous occasions, especially when it banned Turkish flights over Greece which would have helped enforce UN no-fly zones in Bosnia.⁴⁰ Most Greeks feel that Turks, Zionists, Germans, and Americans endanger their religion. The reason that most Greeks are so anti-American has to do with the United States’ support of the Greek junta in the 1970s and its support of Turkey. Major Greek institutions manipulated the Greek public into supporting the Serb aggression against Bosnian Muslims. It is enough to say that the Greek state media had correspondents in Pale, Serb-occupied Sarajevo, and other places, but rarely in territories controlled by the Bosnian government.⁴¹ In addition, Slobodan Milošević went on his last holiday to the Greek island of Hydra in 1998, long after he was indicted by the ICTY; he was protected by Serb and Greek bodyguards provided by the Greek government. Alexander Likourezos, a major Greek lawyer, acted as General Mladić’s adviser and has said that he would defend Mladić if he were arrested and brought to The Hague.⁴² Although Greece has shown progress, from fully supporting Serb crimes, to denying any knowledge of them, to finally admitting that “it is possible that Greek citizens took part in the massacre of civilians in Srebrenica,” much more remains to be done by the Greek government and the Greek Orthodox Church.⁴³ Financing the reconstruction of the Serb-destroyed parliament building in Sarajevo will not heal the broken hearts of the mothers of Srebrenica.

Notes

1. Netherlands War Documentation Institute (NWDI), “Srebrenica—A ‘Safe’ Area: Reconstruction, Background, Consequences and Analyses of the Fall of a Safe Area,” in *Intelligence and the War in Bosnia 1992/1995: The Role of the Intelligence and Security Services*, <http://193.173.80.81/srebrenica/> (accessed 21 January 2008).
2. Takis Michas, “Greece’s Balkan Closets,” *Wall Street Journal*, 4 July 2005

3. Takis Michas, *Unholy Alliance: Greece and Milošević's Serbia* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 18.
4. Ibid.; also see “Grčki dobrovoljci borili su se uz Srbe u Srebrenici,” Croatian Informative News Agency (HINA), 13/14 July 1995, http://jagor.srce.hr/mvp_news/hna/Srpanj95/0714951.hna.html#index43 (accessed 8 June 2007).
5. According to Amor Mašović. See “Grčka zastava bila u Srebrenici,” 29 June 2005, <http://www.durmitorcg.com/opsirnije.php?id=6819> (accessed 5 January 2008).
6. A photo of Greek neo-Nazis in Srebrenica appeared in the daily newspaper *Eleftherotypia* on 16 July 2005, http://www.enet.gr/online/online_fpage_text?id=13996864,21821632,8195520%22; Takis Michas, e-mail to the author, 18 June 2007.
7. Michas, *Unholy Alliance*, 17.
8. NWDI, “Srebrenica.”
9. “Grčki dobrovoljci.”
10. Michas, *Unholy Alliance*, 17.
11. Ibid., 18.
12. Ibid. It is important to note that Nikolaos G. Michaloliakos, the founder and former leader of Hrisi Avgi, wrote a book whose title translates as “For a Greater Greece in a Free Europe.” A list of Michaloliakos's publications is available at <http://www.logxi.com/vivlia2.php>.
13. Michas, *Unholy Alliance*, 18.
14. See *Grčki dobrovoljci*.
15. Raymond Bonner, “Greek Lawyer Pleased to Defend Bosnian Serb,” *New York Times*, 4 August 1996, <http://www.nytimes.com/specials/bosnia/context/0804yugo-greece.html> (accessed 6 January 2008). Alexandros Lykourezos is a Greek lawyer and General Ratko Mladić's former advisor. He also added that the “animosity is rooted in centuries past, to the days of the Ottoman Empire, when both the Serbs and the Greeks chafed under rule from Istanbul.”
16. Michas, *Unholy Alliance*, 22, 28.
17. Ibid., 24.
18. Ibid., 38. Mousionis advised Papandreou on the Bosnian war and was his personal intermediary with Karadžić and with Slobodan Milošević.
19. Senad Pećanin & Šeki Radončić, “Na listu odlikovanih zlocinaca i Milorad Dodik,” *Dani*, 28 April 2006.
20. Kostas Karamanlis (New Democracy), now prime minister of Greece, visited Bosnia this year to open the Serb-destroyed parliament building, which is now called the Greek–Bosnian Friendship Building. An unidentified person or persons threw eggs at him.
21. Michas, *Unholy Alliance*, 26; for video footage of this event and more see Ingeborg Beugel, dir., *Op z'n Grieks [The Greek Way]* (IKON, 2002).
22. Michas, *Unholy Alliance*, 28.
23. Šeki Radončić, “Karadžić na Hilandar, Kadijević u Moskvi,” *Monitor*, 2 April 2007, http://www.monitor.cg.yu/ARHIVA/a_858_01.html (accessed 21 January 2008); also see Selvedin Avdic, “Niko više ne želi da uhapsi Radovana,” *Start*, 18 September 2007. According to one source, Philippe Rondot, the famous French intelligence officer who participated in capturing Ilich Ramírez Sánchez, shares this opinion and claims that the 2004 fire at Hilandar monastery was connected with Karadžić.
24. Michael Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 85. Perhaps in divine retribution, several of the bishops who signed this decree have been humiliated in spectacular fashion; see Helena Smith, “Sex and Fraud Woe for Greek Church,” *Guardian Unlimited*, 19 February 2005, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/religion/Story/0,2763,1418094,00.html> (accessed 6 January 2008). For more on this topic see Abdal Hakim Murad, “The Churches and the Bosnian War,” http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/ahm/the_churches_and_the_bosnian_war.htm (accessed 6 January 2008).

25. Michas, *Unholy Alliance*, 21; Serb forces carried out ethnic cleansing in Zvornik in early 1992.
26. Human Rights Watch, *Weighing the Evidence: Lessons from the Slobodan Milosevic Trial*, <http://hrw.org/reports/2006/milosevic1206/index.htm> (accessed 6 January 2008).
27. See NWDI, "Srebrenica."
28. Ibid.
29. Michas, *Unholy Alliance*, 69.
30. "Grčki List 'Eleftherotipija': Kako je Grčka vojno pomagala bosanske Srbe," *Novine Toronto*, 3 May 2002, http://www.novine.ca/ARHIVA/2002/03_05_02/svet.html (accessed 6 January 2008).
31. Michas, *Unholy Alliance*, 38.
32. Takis Michas has said that he does not accept any results from this investigation. Interview with the author, 1 May 2007. See "Da li će se zaboraviti ovaj priča?" *Preporod*, April 2007.
33. See NWDI, "Srebrenica."
34. "Grčki dobrovoljci i zločini u BiH," *B-92*, 29 June 2005, http://www.b92.net/info/komentari.php?nav_id=171637 (accessed 21 January 2008).
35. Ibid.
36. This information appeared in the Greek daily newspaper *Eleftherotypia* on 20 November 2003; English translation by Takis Michas.
37. Stojan Župljanin has been indicted for war crimes by the ICTY and is still on the run.
38. Michas, *Unholy Alliance*, 32.
39. Takis Michas, e-mail message to the author, 23 June 2007; English translation of statement by Kirakos Katharios is by Michas. For a full version of Katharios's interview with the right-wing newspaper *Eleutheros Kosmos* and more on the book, see book review, Κυριακος Καθαριος: Πολεμησα Στην βοσνια Πατι Πιστευα Οτι Ετσι βαηθω Την Ελλαδα, *Eleutheros Kosmos*, 13 June 2007, http://elkosmos.gr/site/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=452&Itemid=59 (accessed 6 January 2008).
40. Salahi Ramadan Sonyel, *The Muslims of Bosnia: Genocide of a People* (London: Islamic Foundation, 1994), 54.
41. Michas claims that there were no Greek reporters in Bosnian-controlled territories at all, while others claim that there were a handful.
42. For more on this topic, see the Dutch documentary *Op z'n Grieks*. Ingeborg Beugel, the director of this superb documentary, says that ever since its release she is on the Greek "black list"; she has not been able to get an interview with any Greek official since.
43. Recently the director of the Athens Stock exchange, Vasilios Margaritis, while in the Bosnian town of Teslić, called Republika Srpska a "friendly country." Nobody reacted to this provocation. See Eldar Dizdarević, "Orlovi sa Atinske berze," *Dani*, 11 June 2007.