

THE LIBERATION OF THASSOS IN 1912

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The idea of compatriots' liberation under Turkish government was noble, elevated and very popular. Christian Balkan states, realizing their own role in the international politics, had to fight for a position prescribed by historical right, state and national interests. Italian-Turkish War meant the beginning of division of Turkey and for Greece it was a sign to carefully initiate negotiations about alliance with Bulgaria. The action of Italian Fleet drew great attention and rights to all islands in the Aegean Sea, with majority Greek population, were emphasized. There was a hope that certain autonomy will be insured for islands where 394,000 Greeks and only 29,000 Muslims and Jews lived, unless they are united with Greece¹.

Turkey didn't understand seriously the advice of the great powers to conduct reforms anticipated by Berlin treaty because of belief, unfortunately right, that the great powers were not in harmony. Moreover, Thessalonica magazine *Jeni-ber* on September 17th 1912 threatened the Christians by slaughter and claimed that Turkey will not wait a war declaration but do that itself. Far more realistic was the editor of *Tanvimata* magazine, Lufti Fakri, with prognosis that Turkey will have to conduct reforms and that it is better to do them without war².

The only goal of war was the liberation and uniting of blood brothers. Representatives of German, Austro-Hungarian and French government seriously warned Greece on 21st September 1912 not to make any hasty moves against Turkey because it will be responsible for the consequences. Maybe Greek government wanted to avoid or postpone the war but public was for the action. When the war wasn't prevented, the powers revised the attitude of territorial indifference and assumed the right to solve the question they thought to be of their interests.

Anonymous Serbian military expert in extensive study in the middle of 1912 analyzed the importance of the Balkan Peninsula borders³. He dedicated a special part

1. AC (Archives of Serbia), МП, Ю, 1912, II, 17.

2. АВИИ (Military Archives), Фонд Војске Краљевине Србије к-18, ф 1, 1/3.

3. АВИИ Фонд Војске Краљевине Србије к-2, ф 3, 41/1.

to the south front, i.e. the Aegean Sea that makes a very convenient area for military operations together with the coast and the islands. He defined the island Thassos as a strategic quote that controls and defends mouths of rivers The Strimon and Mestos, their river valleys and Kavala and Orfan Gulfs.

The south front has three defense areas if it is attacked from the sea by the fleet. The first defense area follows the line from Hiliodromija across Lemnos to Dardanelle, the second from Osa across “three-armed Halkidiki”, Lemnos to Dardanelle. The third defense area is formed by mountain Osa, peninsulas Cassandra, Longos and Athos, islands Thassos and Samothraki and peninsula Hersan. In case of the breach of the first and the second line the island Thassos becomes the key point, and in the third line it strengthens a wing for the first and second line⁴.

Operational ways from the sea are directed one to Thessalia and two for each Macedonia and Thrace. The directions toward Macedonia go to Thessalonica and Orfan gulf in the mouths of the Aksios and Strimon. The significance of these ways is enormous because these two mouths can be main strategic goals during the war. Thassos with Krušnica on the right side and Athos on the left, control the mouth of the Strimon. Shorter direction towards Thrace, directed to the mouth of the Marica, goes between Thassos and Samothraci. The author concluded that it takes big and strong fleet to use islands and crests for defending The Aegean coast.

The Balkan war in the sea is marked by complete domination of the Greek Fleet in the Aegean Sea that significantly affected other war operations. Greek fleet, raised to more perfect level just before the war, with minimal sources and insufficient arms, fulfilled the assignment completely. The fact that sailors and noncommissioned officers were recruited from the lines of trading sailors did not disparage the professional success that gets a real grade only when hypothetical question is asked- what course would the war take if the Aegean Sea was ruled by the Turkish and not the Greek Fleet. The most competent evaluation of the Aegean Fleet commander, rear admiral Kunduriotis, was given by Turkish military minister: “extraordinary officer, loyal order executor, brave and very competent sailor”⁵.

Squadron consisted of armored cruiser Averov under Kunduriotis’ direct command, armored warships Spesai, Hidra and Psara, 2 squadrons and 4 destroyers, then submarine Dolphin, ship Kanaris, torpedo boat Aris and medical ship Ionia. The fleet was enforced on 23rd October 1912 by turning trading ships Esperia, Macedonia, Pelops, Mykali into war ships. In December, ship Athinai was turned into war ship and drenot costing 45 million franks was ordered with the firm Volcano in Stetin⁶.

The war at sea started on 21st October 1912 when the first commandment was read

4. item

5. Рагине, Београд, 1926, св. IX, ст.13.

6. АВНН Фонд Војске Краљевине Србије к-16, ф 10, 32/5.

at Averov- occupation of Lemnos and creation of base at Mudros. The fleet appeared in front of Kastro and admiral Kunduriotis called the authorities to surrender; three days later, after a brief battle, the capital Kastro was captured.

From the liberated Lemnos, on 30th October, Kunduriotis ordered the occupation of Thassos. The operation was carried out by infantry special detachment under protection of armor warships and destroyers. During Thassos liberation, Turkish fleet demonstrated no counter effects. On 31st October, Kunduriotis telegraphed to naval minister about Thassos and Imros liberation. By Samotraki liberation, the Greek fleet blocked the entrance to Dardanelle. Its superiority was so great that, on 12th November, Kunduriotis had cut telephone cable towards Constantinople and sent dispatch: "I still constantly expect the emergence of Turkish fleet from Dardanelle"⁷.

Ismail, Egyptian khedive who was expelled from Constantinople, arrived in Cairo on 4th November 1912 through Bucharest and Trieste, and notified England that he wanted to normalize interrupted relations with Balkan states, especially Greece. Probably, khedive had feared about his properties in Turkey because he was out of favor with Young Turks.

The fact that English vice consul in Kavala received verification that Thassos was occupied on 1st November 1912, from Athens by telegramme also announcing invasion of Samotraki and Imros is very interesting. Harry H Lamb, English consul in Thessalonica received the news from Pera on 1st November by telegramme saying that Thassos had been occupied yesterday, i.e. 31st October, and that attack on Kavala was expected.

On 1st November 1912, Harry H Lamb notified the ambassador in Constantinople that on 28th October around 10 o'clock, two Greek torpedoes had arrived in port of Kavala. Their appearance had caused general panic in the city that practically had no defense. But, after few minutes, they continued towards Thassos, "island occupied by the Greeks yesterday". The arrival of Greek squadron was expected in front of Kavala and the city would surrender without resistance⁸. Kavala vice vizier was in the state of panic from the moment Greeks had taken over Thassos. He appealed to foreign diplomats asking not to leave the city because he was afraid of Greek fleet arrival from Thassos⁹. Bulgarian army entered in Kavala on 1st November.

There are no data in Serbian sources about the resistance of Turkish local authorities during Thassos occupation, except that on 8th November one transport ship took to Pireus 35 prisoners, authority representatives in Thassos¹⁰. That number allows me to conclude that a small number of Turks lived on the island.

7. Српске новине 248, 1912.

8. S/GB F.O. 195/2437.

9. S/GB F.O. 195/2438.

10. Српске новине 255, 1912.

Order was introduced immediately on liberated territory: clerks were appointed in limits of Turkish administrative division, pre-existed courts had received Greek presidents. By the most severe order, the authorities prohibited usurpation of properties of Muslims killed in war. All persons claimed to be owners of some property had to give evidence about that. There were no differences according to origin or religion, no requisition and military paid everything in cash¹¹.

The cultural world followed the war that changed not only the physiognomy of the Balkans but the whole Europe. Turkey, weakened by internal unrests, didn't show the force attributed by the best experts. Defeated in all fronts, Turks were forced to piece. Nikola Pašić, the president of Serbian government, considered the Greek decision not to sign the Protocol of Truce on 3rd December correct because the blockage of the Aegean Sea was useful for the allies¹².

The London conference on 20th December 1912 started by Turkish refusal to give away islands and Crete, territories taken over by arms and courage of victorious army. Such possibility was unacceptable, for in real situation Turkish fleet wasn't able to regain some of liberated islands. Negotiations continued in Greek persistence to get the islands and Turkish efforts to internationalize Greek territorial demands¹³.

In the middle of December, English, French and Russian ambassadors in Constantinople influenced Turkey to be indulgent and moderate at the negotiations. Serbian emissary in Sofia came to realization that Turkey will officially ask for application of law from 1880 that puts district, Kavala and island Thassos under protectorate of Egyptian khedive who has fiefs there...¹⁴

Greek minister of foreign affairs unofficial statement, given at one reception on 28th December 1912 that Greece will not withdraw army from the island, some diplomats in Athens personally approved. They considered it the best solution for Greece because they "didn't see what force would raise arms against Greece to take the occupied islands". There was some information that Greece would declare annexation and prevent negative decision by the powers¹⁵.

Through Boško Čolak-Antić, Serbian consul in Cairo, khedive asked Pašić on 31st December to intervene with Bulgarian government for permission to freely give aid, in food and clothes that had been sent to Kavala to Turkish fugitives and war sufferers. It can be concluded, out of the report of Serbian consul, that khedive yacht "Mahrusa" had already come to Kavala in humanitarian mission. Khedive also asked for approval for his representative (superintendent) to visit his properties near Kavala and see that

11. Срнаке поште 13, 1913.

12. AC, MHJ HO. 1912, XIII, J-1.

13. AC, MHJ HO. 1912, XIII, J-2.

14. AC, MHJ HO. 1912, XIII, J-1.

15. AC, MHJ HO. 1912, II, 144.

they are preserved¹⁶. It remains unclear why khedive didn't also ask for permission for his properties on Thassos to be visited.

Serbia successfully mediated and on 19th January khedive expressed his gratitude. The yacht "Mahrusa" brought Turkish refugees from Kavala. Serbian consul had a dilemma in relation to possible role of England in protecting khedive private property in turkey¹⁷.

In justified territorial demand on behalf of Greece declarative and diplomatic support of Russia, France and England wasn't enough. If they sincerely had wanted to help, they could have forced Turkey to ease up by fleet demonstration like it was done near Navarin in 1827. Russian press proposed for Russia asked for Greece all islands except Tenedos, Imros, Samothraki and Lemnos that neutralization¹⁸.

Official Vienna openly supported Turkey while Berlin was a little more reserved. Greece was especially irritated by behavior of Italy that also participated in conference work and that was directly interested for Dodekanese. Vincenzo Morello, a journalist from Italian Tribune was wondering why the Greeks were angry at Italy and said with insulting tone '...the Greeks would like the islands without sacrifice. The question who will replace Turkey in the archipelago is very important for us, the Greeks...for whose benefit the balance in the Aegean Sea is changed?' Nea Himera called for commercial circles to protest with Austro-Hungarian and Italian colleagues because of anti-Greek politics of their countries and "brutal, unjustified and merciless resistance to Greek aspirations"¹⁹.

Ally ultimatum related to renunciation of rights for the islands Crete and Wndrianopolis Turkey had arrogantly rejected on 17th January 1913 and the next day took out the fleet out of Dardanelle. Admiral Kunduriotis gave the command to the fleet: "The future of our Greece depends on today. Fight like the lions." There was a battle near Tenedos in which Turkish fleet was defeated. The Turks presented the defeat as a victory and a battle that involved only a part of Turkish fleet²⁰.

Provoked by Turkish reaction and with desire to prevent further hostility, the powers warned Turkey with a diplomatic note about the responsibility of preventing piece. Porta was asked to give up taking care of destiny of Aegean islands to the powers. Protection of Muslim interests, respect of mosques, buildings and religious properties were promised.

By taking over mediation on 7th march 1913, it was clear that the powers were determined to preserve the whole of Asian Turkey and that Greece will get Crete and

16. AC, МИД ПО, 1913, III/580.

17. AC, МИД ПО 1912, 1913, III/589.

18. Ръч. 17. января 1913.

19. Српске новине 43, 1913.

20. Српске новине 6, 1913.

only some islands in the Archipelago²¹. Pasic complained to Petrograd because "The Balkan alliance is stabbed back, conquered countries are taken away from Serbia and Monte Negro and war is prolonged for all Greek islands"²².

The official position of the powers has changed. Even though earlier England wanted all the islands to go to Greece, now it refused any discussion justifying itself by European question²³. Count Berhdtold accused Serbia for Skadar and Greece for islands because piece is not concluded²⁴. Kambon, French ambassador threatened to the Greeks: "If they don't sign, they could lose the islands"²⁵. The Bulgarians cleverly used fatigue and nervousness of Europe and showed readiness to ease up and blamed the Serbs and the Greeks for piece failure²⁶.

Andre Cheradame, journalist for the *L'Illustration*, on 16th May 1913 devoted the whole article to analysis of possible territorial solutions. Unless the Bulgarians give up Thessalonica to Greeks, they could get Kavala. The position of the city is beautiful; the port is suitable for commercial and war fleet. On the other hand, giving up Thessalonica could inspire the Bulgarians to try to get much more precious result they long for: getting Thassos and Samothraki that are convenient to great Bulgaria by their geographical position. Island Tasos is necessary because it provides strategic future of Kavala; Samothraki, although a little distant from the coast, has the same significance for the future Bulgarian port in Dedeagac (Alexsandropolis). The only problem is Greek population on Thassos, 12 344, and Samothraki 3600. A. Cheradame concludes that the Bulgarians can count on those islands only if they give concessions around Thessalonica. On the other hand, the Greeks have no interests to keep the islands that would be "objects of strong desire for taking over" for the Bulgarians²⁷.

According to article 5 of London treaty, it is anticipated that sovereigns of Germany, Austria, France, Britain, Italy, Russia, determine the position of all Turkish islands in the Aegean Sea, except Crete and peninsula Athos.

Continuing the work, the ambassador conference on 6th June implied one solution. The major part of the island can belong to Greece but not to be used as military or naval bases. It was discussed openly for the first time about the possibility for Thassos to belong to Bulgaria. The very indication of such preposition was very unpleasant especially for Greece and also for Serbia, because Bulgaria by exiting two seas would become the strongest country economically²⁸.

21. AC, МИ/І НО, 1913, V, /І-5, p-І/6.

22. AC, МИ/І НО, 1913, XII, /І-3, p-IV/6.

23. AC, МИ/І НО, 1913, V, /І-5, p-І/6.

24. AC, МИ/І НО, 1913, V, /І-5, p-І/6.

25. AC, МИ/І НО, 1913, V, /І-7, p-І/6.

26. AC, МИ/І НО, 1913, V/424.

27. Српске новине 146, 1913.

28. Српске новине 128, 1913.

On 11th august, the conference of the ambassadors achieved the Agreement about the Greek islands. It was decided that no island can become the property of some power and that solution about the islands occupied by Italy is postponed until Turkey fulfills Losana contract. Turkey is left with Imros, Tenedos and “one island so small that it’s rarely on the maps and that marquis Imperial cannot remember name”. It was decided for all other islands to belong to Greece except Thassos whose destiny is in relation to Kavala’s unsolved destiny²⁹.

Greek and Serbian fear in relation to Bulgarian pretensions and Vanzelos opinion reported to Stojan Novakovic on 12th December 1912 have turned right “When you consider the Bulgarian persistence...and the land in Trakia, then Macedonia up to Vodena... it is clear that they did not enter The Balkan alliance to give up something but to force others in the name of alliance to give up so they can achieve their national ideal of San Stefan Bulgaria”³⁰.

Way back on 23rd may 1913, Serbian high command warned Greece about Bulgarian military preparations: concentration of 100,000 soldiers in direction Dodeagac-Serez, ammunition transport, bringing of Turkish war prisoners in Serez for trench digging, intention to transfer even high command Main supply services³¹. As a precaution Greek authorities responded by arresting Bulgarians and searching their houses in Greek area.

Bulgaria intensified the pressure to Greece. In the middle of June 1912 the Bulgarians bombed Greek ships between Orfan bay and Tasos. Bulgarian telegraph agency informed on 16th June that island Tasos was in flames “since last night and that fire started on the cape St George by the Greeks who put the forest on fire”. Official Athens denied this news. As the island is Greek, they didn’t put it on fire and the news was announced to mislead the world³². During June 1913, the Bulgarians in Kavala were having major activities. Bulgarian, Russian and German ships transferred two troop divisions, about 70,000 men, over Cavalla.

Before Bulgarian retreat from Cavalla, the citizens had sent letter to Greek authorities on Tasos, calling them to take over in the district. Bulgarian army left the city on 8th July. His subordinates killed Captain Dojkov, military governor since the occupation of Kavala on 1st November 1912, because he hadn’t conducted severity over Greeks. Rear admiral Kunduriotis supervised the liberation of the city from the ship Nea Yenea and 11 Bulgarian soldiers, who found shelter in the Russian consulate, surrendered to Greek authorities and they were transferred as prisoners of war to Thassos by ship Kriti.

29. AC, МИ/Ј НО, 1913, XVI, /13, II-6/VII.

30. AC, МИ/Ј НО, 1912, XIII/227.

31. АВМН Фонд Војске Краљевине Србије к 14 ф 6 6/108.

32. Српске новине 134, 1913.

Austria judged Greek demand for Kavala as exaggerated considering that Thessalonica and hinterland were enough³³. Russia also defied openly to Greek demand for Kavala fearing the disturbed balance on the sea that was against its interests³⁴.

Pašić cleverly avoided pressure to calm the Greeks and responded "they are our allies and we don't want to pressure them to ease up". Pašić's personal opinion was that Greece could get Kavala if it doesn't ask for much on the other side.

Serbian diplomats in Vienna and Thessalonica criticized Greek military circles "for megalomania that reached the highest level where every sign of criticism is lost"³⁵. As the Serbs and Greeks had concluded defensive alliance and declared that they defended vital interests and not territory gaining, the message of these diplomats was not to have illusions about Greek military force and great hope about friends in Europe and that it is not correct to think that someone in Europe will always help demands of Kavala³⁶.

In formulation of demand, the Greeks officially asked border to Makria on the Aegean Coast east of Kavala on 19th July 1913. It was demanded for Bulgaria to give up pretensions in the Aegean Sea and that Greeks in Trakia are provided with church-school autonomy.

Greece acquired the right to Kavala not only by nationalism of its people and bloodshed but also by Bulgarian cruelty. France and Germany supported Greece. Moris Paleolog complained about Alexander Izvolski, a Russian ambassador in Paris who tried to persuade the world that everyone who supports Greece is against Russia³⁷.

It appeared to Serbian envoy in Vienna on 25th July 1913 that England is indifferent "although it has been said since last night that Misir khedive will ask for island Thassos near Cavalla"³⁸. In the report from 20th august 1913 he spoke again about the news that "Misirian khedive will ask for island Thassos"³⁹. In the Serbian records there is no official confirmation that khedive had asked that. Probably, Vienna also used khedive in attempt to revise Bucharest treaty.

In contrast to political circles, Greek military circles didn't look optimistically on renewal of negotiations with Turkey in September 1913. Their suspicion was amplified by concentration of Turkish army, negotiations between Turkey and Bulgaria about alliance and the fact that Turkey would not give up islands easily⁴⁰. If a new war started

33. AC, MHJ/I HO, 1913 V/768.

34. AC, MHJ/I HO, 1913 V/781 AC.

35. AC, MHJ/I HO, 1913 VI/326.

36. AC, MHJ/I HO, 1913 V/824.

37. AC, MHJ/I HO, 1913 VI/62.

38. AC, MHJ/I HO, 1913 VI/79.

39. AC, MHJ/I HO, 1913, VI. JI-1, II 6/I.

40. AC, MHJ/I HO, 1913, XI, JI-5, II-6/III.

and the Bulgarians took over Kavala, they would also invade Thassos. The Bulgarians had had great plans for Kavala in military and commercial way. Besides, Kavala is a good port with two railroads (from Sereza and Demir-Hisar) and island Thassos ahead for protection. Greek troops concentrated around Kavala with all necessary precautions.

Berliner Volks Zeitung criticized "crude mistakes of count Berthold" that tried to revise Bucharest treaty because of Cavalla "a port town on the Macedonian coast unimportant as commercial or naval guard because of Tasos ahead of it, so movement freedom is restricted in front of Cavalla". It is unknown why count Berthold fought for Cavalla to become Bulgarian and not Greek. He tried to patch unhealed wound of Bulgaria because Austro-Hungarian interests haven't been harmed, unless he wanted to show that nothing could happen in Balkans without agreement from Austria⁴¹.

Greek-Turkish relation improved followed the mediation of Romania. In November 1913, Janesku visited Constantinople and found hostile environment towards Greeks. Ambassadors in Constantinople try to find solution by organizing the islands into one autonomous area with one provincial governor, Turkish Christian⁴². German government wanted to postpone this question so the islands remain under Turkish sovereignty with bigger autonomy⁴³. Negotiations between Greece and Turkey stopped and resumed, but importantly Thassos definitively entered Greece.

41. Српске новине, 176/1913.

42. AC, МН/Д ПО, 1913, II, 1-5, II-1/IV.

43. AC, МН/Д ПО, 1913, I, 1-9, II-1/II.