

### ***Book Review***

Dušan Spasojević, *Grčka: rat za nezavisnost, stvaranje države i preporod nacije* (Greece: The War of Independence, the Creation of the State and the Rebirth of the Nation), Čigoja štampa, Institut za evropske studije, Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, Fondacija Šaper, Beograd 2021.

The 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Greek Revolution and its global significance has triggered the interest and drawn inspiration of many experts around the globe on various fields such as science (Mark Mazower, Roderick Beaton), policy, diplomacy etc. Dusan Spasojević's study is a prime example.

The author, a carrier official diplomat, served as an Ambassador of the Republic of Serbia to Athens for eight years (2016-2024). His presence in Greece gave him the opportunity to indulge in Greek archival material and vast literature.

The author unravels the knot of facts and crucial moments of the Greek liberation movement while ascribing the initial victories of the Greek revolutionary forces to three main factors: firstly, he demonstrates Ali Pasha of Ioannina and his rebellion against the Supreme Porte as a catalyst for the early prevalence of the Greeks, then he continues by underlying the superiority of the Greek naval in the Aegean Sea against the Ottoman navy and, finally, he highlights the open military fronts in other parts of the Empire (Moldavia and Wallachia, Libanon, Mekka) which the Greeks fully exploited in order to prevail in Morea (Peloponnese) and Roumeli (Central Greece). In addition to the above, Spasojević features the portraits of the key figures of the Revolution such as Alexandros Ypsilantis, Theodoros Kolokotronis, Alexandros Mavrokordatos, Georgios Kountouriotis, Ioannis Kolletis, Ioannis Kapodistrias and distinguished Philellenes (Puskin, Byron) illustrating explicitly their actions and thus allowing the readers to fully comprehend their role in the making of history.

In the same chapter, Spasojević discusses without embellishments the devastating consequences that the civil armed conflicts had had for the Greek cause attributing them to personal disputes as well as to a full-scale struggle for political power between military leaders (*kapetanioi*) and the primates (*prokritoi*) and local interest over national. As the author notes the internal clash was directly related to the role that the Great Powers and the European diplomacy in general played in Greek affairs. Therefore, before even Greece gained its independence three groups had been formed seeking foreign assistance. Kolokotronis was leading the pro-Russian group, Mavrokordatos was head of the pro-English Greeks while Kolettis was in charge of

the pro-French. It should also be noted that Spasojević considers that during the revolutionary period the seed of discord that typifies the political life of modern Greece was planted. However, as a diplomat himself, Spasojević devotes a great deal of his narrative to the role that the Great Powers (in particular France, England and Russia) played during the revolution. On the one hand, he acknowledges the fact that the Greek independence was, to a great extent, the work of the Protective Powers taking into account that until 1827 the revolution was suppressed in military terms. He also stresses the point that even though Greek independence wouldn't suit their interests, the competition between them ended up in quarreling about who amongst them would support more firmly the cause of independence in order to reduce each other's influence in the newly established state. On the other hand, though, the author condemns the interventions of European diplomacy into Greek domestic policy, culminating in imposition of a foreign dynasty (Otto I, 1833).

It is with great pleasure to note that the author is not content with a simple record of historical events but attempts to penetrate into the depths of Greek self-consciousness and to present in a succinct and comprehensive way the characteristics of the Greek temperament, as they were forged through historical processes, civil conflicts, social conflicts and ideological confrontations. In an earlier chapter Spasojević outlines the two main pillars of the modern Greek national identity: primary religion (orthodoxy) and on a second level the language for which he points out that the modern Greeks are not fully aware of its historical depth and impeccable rationality. What matters the most, though, according to the author, is that in the course of history, the Greeks always managed to combine factors that seemed to be incompatible, that is to say: antiquity and Byzantine heritage, Enlightenment and Christian faith, continental and insular nature, tradition and modernism only to create a distinguished collective identity, a peculiar secular-religious synthesis and a composite living organization as Spasojević vividly describes it.

The author succeeds, as well, in highlighting the Balkan dimension of the Greek revolution, which is often downplayed or sidelined in the existing literature. As the monograph is mainly addressed to the Serbian readership, comparisons and contrasts with the case of the Serbian national liberation struggle are inevitable in Spasojević's study. Nevertheless, the fact that he has enriched his study with two chapters with special reference to the island of Crete, regardless of the personal reasons –his ancestors fought in the Cretan uprising against the Ottomans in 1866-1869– introduces the Mediterranean nature of the Greek liberation movement as well.

It should, also, be underlined that Spasojević knowingly follows the difficult path. That of detailed study and painstaking research, the fruit of which is a book written with passion and zealousness. Thankfully, Spasojević's study is not limited to a view of history "from above" but attempts to reconcile the world of high politics with the interests and historical pursuits of an ordinary citizen.

Additionally, Spasojević's study fills a large gap in the Serbian literature and will soon become a reference book in Serbia –and why not in the rest of the countries where the Serbian language is understood– for academics, students of the Department of Modern Greek Studies at the University of Belgrade and for every scholar who wishes to understand in depth the key components of the Greek individuality. From this point of view, it is also certain that the work in question will broaden the horizons of Hellenic studies in Serbia and contribute to strengthening the ties between the two countries. It is not by chance that Spasojević's book has been already translated into Greek providing an opportunity to Greek readership to know how their history is perceived abroad, especially in the Balkans.

Overall, the era of national revolutions which Spasojević deals with is the best starting point to realize that the concept of "traditional friendship" between Greece and Serbia should not be a mere debate about confronting common enemies or engaging in common struggles, but that its main characteristic is none other than the experience of common historical experiences and the consciousness of the historical continuity of the two nations over the centuries.

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