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**GREEK AND SERBIAN PEOPLE  
THROUGH THE FUNCTIONING OF GREEK-SERBIAN  
FRIENDSHIP SOCIETIES FROM THE 1990s**

In this paper I will try to give the answer to the question of the role which Greek-Serbian Friendship societies have played in the relationship between Greek and Serbian people since the 1990s to this day.

This work was completed after my own empirical investigation and the use of literature. As written sources I used the Serbian-Greek Friendship archives. I collected the oral sources by using the interview method and free conversation with the presidents and active members of the Society. I did several empirical investigations on the territory of Greece in the period from 2003-2006. Due to the long and patient stay on the field I've achieved a good *insight* into the situation.

As it is known, Greece is the only country of the EU whose people showed an open sympathy for Serbia and Montenegro during the crisis and war on the territory of the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s.

In the history of making connections between the two peoples and in their mutual friendship, people from the academic and ecclesiastic and spiritual world played an important role. People from the Hellenistic and Byzantine circles were among them. As in earlier centuries, the bond between Serbian and Greek spiritual fathers was important for making better relationships and understanding between the two countries. This was achieved thanks to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the monastery of Chilandar on Mount Athos and through the education of the Serbian spiritual fathers which they received at the Seminary on

the island of Chalki and at the Faculty of Theology in Athens<sup>1</sup>.

Beside this, it is also well known that Greece and Serbia have traditional friendly relations on the political level as well. They were allies in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Balkan wars and in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. Greece and Serbia are the only Balkan countries that fought against the Axis.

The Serbian-Greek Friendship Society was founded on 4 March 1991 in Belgrade. The academician Dr Dušan Kanazir who was then the president of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts was also the first president of the Serbian-Greek Friendship Society<sup>2</sup>. The formal assembly of the Society was held on 10 June 1991 at the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts and it had a founding character<sup>3</sup>. Most members of the Society are the prominent people in the fields of science and art. Today the Society has about 2500 members. Apart from The Serbian-Greek Friendship Society, some other societies were founded in Serbia and their aim was to make the Serbian-Greek friendship stronger.

The first Greek society in Belgrade, "Riga Fereos", was founded in 1922. World War II obstructed the work of the Society. Only in 1996 did the Society continue to work under the same name and with the same cause of helping Greek people in Serbian surroundings. Those were difficult years. All citizens needed help, including Greek people who were the hidden minority. Greece showed an extraordinary solidarity. Greeks in Belgrade, proud of their homeland, delivered help to those who needed it most. The broadcasting media regularly and fully reported their activities<sup>4</sup>. The Society now has 1300 members. Many of them are not active members. It is assumed that there are now about 3200 descendants out of the Society. The members of "Riga Fereos" mostly have Serbian surnames (70%), which were derived by adding of

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1. S. Terzić, «Serbs and Greeks, on the occasion of 125 years from the opening of the General Consulate of the Kingdom of Greece in Belgrade», *The Herald of the Serbian-Greek Friendship Society* 4 (1994) 15.

2. D. Kanazir, «Letters to Friends», *The Herald of the Serbian-Greek Friendship Society* 1 (1991) 14.

3. M. Stojanović, *The Herald of the Serbian-Greek Friendship Society*, vol. 2 (1991) 1.

4. O. Milanović, «Misija unuke Grka Zorbe» 1999, <http://www.politika.co.yu/ilustro/2108/11.htm>.

the suffix *-ić* to the Greek stem, by translation, or they are completely different<sup>5</sup>.

In 1991 Dr Dušan Kanazir invited in an open letter the Greek side to form the Greek-Serbian Friendship Society<sup>6</sup>. In Greece the first Greek-Serbian Friendship Society was founded in Athens on 22 September, 1992. The president of the Society is Mr Aris Mousionis.

By the statute of the Serbian-Greek Friendship Society in Belgrade it was arranged that the activities were to be done in work groups and sections, and that branches should be founded in other towns. Indeed, many local branches of the Society were founded in many towns all over Serbia. The Society has been working without any material help or sponsorships for 15 years mostly due to the enthusiasm of its members. The society has been trying to influence the development of connections in the fields of science, culture, technology, trade, sport, tourism etc. Since its founding till today the Society has organized courses of contemporary Greek language twice a year. The *slava* (the feast of the Patron Saint), St Emperor Constantine and Empress Helen, they have celebrated on 3 June every year since 2002. The Society celebrates important dates from the recent Greek history, like 25 March and 28 October. Today the president of the Society is Dr Miodrag Stojanović, the founder of the Department of New Hellenic studies at the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade.

At the beginning of the 1990s there was no Modern Greek history, the history of literature, a dictionary, a grammar of the Greek language in Serbian, neither in Greece nor in Serbia. On the other side, there were excellent studies of the Classical period and of the Byzantine period as well as of the Ancient Greek language. The Department of New Hellenic studies at the Faculty of Philology at the University of Belgrade was founded in 1995 with the great attribute of some of the members of the Serbian-Greek Friendship Society. The fact that the Greek side did not respond till this day is bewildering, ie there still isn't a Slavic Department, not to mention a Serbian language Department.

The Art Department of the Society organizes exhibitions of the art works of its members under the unique name of "Ellada in our

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5. J. Đorđević-Jovanović, «Greeks in Belgrade», *Hidden Minorities in the Balkans*, Institute for Balkan Studies, Special Editions 82 (2004) 162.

6. D. Kanazir, op.cit., s. 14.

Heart". Promotions of books, monographs and anthologies are also a part of the program of the Society. The Society presented itself in public by a series of lectures given at the National University of Kolarac about the relationship between Greece and Serbia in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in the fields of politics, spiritual life and culture. In May 2006 they organized a series of lectures with the topic "Corfu in Serbian history, literature and art". "The Herald of the Serbian-Greek Friendship Society" was published in two languages. Six issues were published. Parts of the Statute of the Society were published in the first issue, in which they speak of the intentions of the founders of the Society. Among others, texts of Mr E. H. Karaianis were published, who was then the ambassador of Greece in SR Yugoslavia, as well as texts of the Bishop of Bačka, Mr Irinej Bulović, in which it stated that the Orthodox faith is the strongest bond between the Greek and the Serbian people which has also created a mutual cultural tradition<sup>7</sup>.

Therefore, these societies, both in Greece and in Serbia, are non-governmental and non-profitable organizations and their aim is to strengthen the bonds between the peoples of Serbia and Greece. The Society in Serbia pays more attention to scientific and cultural-artistic cooperation. The Society in Greece is oriented to humanitarian help for Serbia. During the war and falling apart of former Yugoslavia, in the 1990s, large quantities of humanitarian help were sent to Serbian people in all areas they inhabited.

Greeks organized help for the children from the war regions in the territory of former Yugoslavia. For example, the Greek-Serbian Friendship Society in Patra was founded in 1994 and it received around 3500 children in the summer camp Psatopirgo (Ahaia, Peloponesus). Many children who came were not baptized and they returned home as baptized. They were naturally asked first whether they wanted to be baptized, it was not forced upon them. But, they were regularly given a different name at baptism, and common Greek names were given them by the Greek godfather (or godmother). Therefore, this was a missionary function of the Society through which hel-

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7. I. Bulović, «The word of the bishop of Bačka, his eminency Dr Irinej Bulović», *The Herald of the Serbian-Greek Friendship Society* 1 (1991) 6-8. E. Karaianis, «The word of his eminency Mr E. Karaianis, «The ambassador of Greece», *The Herald of the Serbian-Greek Friendship Society* 1 (1991) 9.

lenisation was performed, if one considers the fact that a personal name is a very important ethnical mark.

Unfortunately, considering the limited space, in this work I am not able to give a detailed description of the activities of every branch of the Society in Serbia and in Greece. I will just mention some of them. The branch of the Greek-Serbian Friendship Society of the island of Cephalonia was founded in 1996. There were many very important cultural and sport exchanges with the participation of the youth musical-dancing groups and sports clubs from Cephalonia and Serbia. The Symphony Orchestra of the national television of Serbia and of the Opera of the National Theatre were guests in Cephalonia. The founding of the branches also continued in peace, and therefore it was not connected to war only. One of the examples is Ioannina in which a branch was founded in 2003.

Connections of Serbian and Greek students had an important place in better meeting and understanding between the two countries. Many Greek members of these societies went to the universities in Serbia. The Greek Orthodox Church had an important role and it independently helped these societies. In some of the societies the founders were also Orthodox Christians, but there are societies which were founded by atheists.

We have read many times generally in the media, that Greeks showed solidarity to Serbia, because of their religion. Naturally, there are traditional Orthodox Christians who befriend others only because they have the same faith. Nevertheless, there are Orthodox people who in the spirit of the authentic Christianity and out of love do not reject anyone. Besides, there are many atheists or communists or anarchists in Greece who all supported the Serbs. Greeks showed solidarity to Serbia, because they didn't like an attack against a sovereign country and the bombing of innocent civilians. The attitude of my Greek examinees is that Greeks do not support Serbs because they are Orthodox Christians, but because, in their opinion, the right is on their side. Kurds who are not Christians have also the support of Greek people, because in their opinion the right is also on their side. During the Israel invasion of Lebanon Greeks supported Palestinians (mostly Moslems) because, in their opinion, the right was on their side. They also supported the Iraqians and others, too.

Greeks had several waves of refugees in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and many Greeks have refugee origins. Some of my Greek examinees of Asia Mi-

nor descent believe that it is possible that this is the reason why they can feel the suffering of others so acutely and why they want to help people with similar problems.

However, one should always have in mind that in political relations between the two countries interest has the main role, not love. This is the reason I am pointing out the fact that in this work I do not speak of the relationship between the two governments. This is about a phenomenon of a nongovernmental organization which helped people a lot in war regions and prompted cultural and artistic cooperation in very hard times of isolation. There is an opinion that Greeks helped Serbs because they saw in Serbia a potential new market and opportunity to earn on the restoration of a broken country<sup>8</sup>.

It cannot be denied that the Greek-Serbian Friendship Societies in the last 15 years have greatly helped in coming and spreading of the Greek culture and spiritual values in Serbian people. This was primarily achieved by the spreading of the Greek language, by the founding of the Department of New Hellenic studies, as well as by translating of works of Greek writers into the Serbian language. Of great importance is the introducing of the Greek style of the Orthodox faith, baptizing in Greece and giving Greek names. However, one should have in mind that Greeks did not help Serbs only because they are Orthodox, and many Greek atheists are witnesses to this, and they are also members of the Society. To better knowing contributed traveling tours and visiting of cultural-historical monuments, which were organized by both sides. Especially important is the giving of guest performances of cultural-artistic groups and musicians, since the language of music is comprehensible to everyone.

As a conclusion I would like to say that the “marriage” between Greek and Serbian people, whether it was concluded out of love or out of interest, has been very fruitful. As such, these “marriages” bore much fruit which resulted in scientific, cultural, artistic, sports, humanitarian cooperation and help.

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8. X. Gounari, «The Great Expansion of the Greeks into Serbia», *www.acci.gr/ trade*.

## ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

**ΣΧΕΣΕΙΣ ΕΛΛΗΝΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΣΕΡΒΩΝ, ΜΕΣΑ ΑΠΟ ΤΗ  
ΛΕΙΤΟΥΡΓΙΑ ΣΥΝΔΕΣΜΩΝ ΕΛΛΗΝΟ-ΣΕΡΒΙΚΗΣ ΦΙΛΙΑΣ,  
ΟΙ ΟΠΟΙΟΙ ΔΗΜΙΟΥΡΓΗΘΗΚΑΝ ΜΕΤΑ ΤΟ 1990**

Σε αυτό το άρθρο κάνουμε εκτενή αναφορά στο ρόλο τον οποίον διαδραμάτισαν οι σύλλογοι ελληνο-σερβικής φιλίας στη σχέση μεταξύ ελληνικού και σερβικού λαού, από τη δεκαετία του '90 μέχρι και σήμερα.

Η Ελλάδα ήταν η μόνη χώρα της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης, η οποία εξέφρασε ανοικτά τη θερμή της συμπαράσταση στους Σέρβους, κατά τη διάρκεια της κρίσης και του πολέμου στα εδάφη της πρώην Γιουγκοσλαβίας.

Αυτοί οι σύλλογοι ελληνο-σερβικής φιλίας, τόσο στην Ελλάδα όσο και στη Σερβία, είναι μη κυβερνητικές και μη κερδοσκοπικές οργανώσεις, οι οποίες βασικό σκοπό έχουν να ενδυναμώσουν κυρίως τους δεσμούς ανάμεσα στους δυο λαούς.

Η σέρβικη κοινωνία ενδιαφέρεται περισσότερο για συνεργασίες σε επιστημονικό και πολιτιστικό-καλλιτεχνικό επίπεδο. Οι σύλλογοι στην Ελλάδα είναι πιο πολύ προσανατολισμένοι στην υλική υποστήριξη των Σέρβων.

Κατά τη διάρκεια του πολέμου και μετά τη διάλυση του κράτους της Γιουγκοσλαβίας, στη δεκαετία του '90, μεγάλες ποσότητες ανθρωπιστικής βοήθειας εστάλησαν στους Σέρβους, σε όλες τις περιόδους, όπου αυτοί ζούσαν.

**ΣΥΝΔΕΣΜΟΣ ΦΙΛΟΛΟΓΩΝ  
ΝΟΜΟΥ ΣΕΡΡΩΝ**

**ΕΤΟΣ ΙΔΡΥΣΗΣ 1982**

ΕΔΡΑ: ΜΕΡΑΡΧΙΑΣ 13 (Γραφεία Ε.Λ.Μ.Ε.Σ.), 621 25 - ΣΕΡΡΕΣ

**ΔΙΟΙΚΗΤΙΚΟ ΣΥΜΒΟΥΛΙΟ  
(2005-2007)**

Πρόεδρος : Πέτρος Σαμσάρης  
Αντιπρόεδρος : Ελένη Κατσαρίδου  
Γεν. Γραμματέας : Μαρία Σιομπότη  
Οργαν. Γραμματέας : Σταυρούλα Σάββα  
Ταμίας : Σουλτάνα Ζουρνατζή  
Ειδ. Γραμματέας : Νικόλαος Κατσαμάνης  
Έφορος Βιβλιοθήκης : Χρύσα Μπογδάνη



ΠΕΡΙΟΔΙΚΗ ΕΚΔΟΣΗ ΤΟΥ ΣΥΝΔΕΣΜΟΥ ΦΙΛΟΛΟΓΩΝ Ν. ΣΕΡΡΩΝ

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# ΣΙΡΙΣ

ΤΟΜΟΣ ΕΒΔΟΜΟΣ  
2003 - 2007

*Επιμέλεια*  
Πέτρου Κ. Σαρσάρη



ΣΕΡΡΕΣ 2007

# ΣΙΡΙΣ

ΠΕΡΙΟΔΙΚΗ ΕΚΔΟΣΗ ΤΟΥ ΣΥΝΔΕΣΜΟΥ ΦΙΛΟΛΟΓΩΝ  
ΝΟΜΟΥ ΣΕΡΡΩΝ

## ΕΠΙΤΡΟΠΗ ΣΥΝΤΑΞΗΣ

Στάθης Πελαγίδης, δρ. Φιλ. - *Ομότ. Καθηγ. Παν/μίου*  
Πέτρος Σαμσάρης, δρ. Φιλ.  
Πέτρος Βλαχάκος, δρ. Φιλ.

## ΣΥΝΔΡΟΜΕΣ - ΣΥΝΕΡΓΑΣΙΕΣ - ΑΛΛΗΛΟΓΡΑΦΙΑ

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