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EAST OF THE ODER

Mr. Simitis, Do the Right Thing

The current government need not fear the truth about past Greek dealings with Milosevic and his minions.

BY TAKIS MICHAS

During a conference last year organized in Athens by a European think-tank, the Greek EU Commissioner Anna Diamantopoulou spoke about the bright future awaiting Greece in Europe. After she finished her speech, I asked her whether this "bright future" would also include the leading Greek politicians who contributed morally, financially, politically and militarily to the genocide in Bosnia. In her reply, the EU official said that "history has proven that the Greek policies were correct." A couple of months earlier I had posed a similar question to the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs George Papandreou. His reply was that "one should look forward not backward."

If one agrees with Santayana's dictum that those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it, however, the responses from these two politicians—who belong to the camp of modernizers in Greek politics—are truly disheartening. Because there is enough evidence by now to indicate that a significant section of Greece's political establishment bears direct responsibility for the crimes committed in Bosnia during the last decade.

More specifically:

- Breaking the oil embargo. Throughout the war in former Yugoslavia, Greek companies supplied Serbia and the Bosnian Serb forces with the fuel necessary for the perpetuation of the war. This violation of the U.N.-imposed oil embargo was taking place with the full cooperation of the Greek authorities, as testified to by many U.N. and European Commission re-

ports, as well as through interviews which I conducted with some of the protagonists of the embargo-busting.

- Providing military help to the Bosnian Serbs. During at least the years 1994-1995, Greece was providing military assistance to the Bosnian Serb forces of General Ratko Mladic. This information appears in the third volume of the 7,000-page-long Dutch report of the Srebrenica massacre, the report which led to the recent resignation of the Dutch government. Entitled "Intelligence en de oorlog in Bosnie," this volume deals with the involvement of foreign secret agencies and foreign powers in the war in Bosnia. Its author, Professor Cees Wiebes of Amsterdam University, had five years of unrestricted access to the Netherlands intelligence community and to various foreign archives and the archives of the United Nations. Moreover, more than 90 foreign intelligence officials were interviewed for the project.

"There were lots of weapons transferred from Greece," Prof. Wiebes told me in the course of a telephone interview, "to the port of Bar in Montenegro from where they would find their way to the Bosnian Serb Army." The weapons consisted mostly of light arms and ammunition.

- Sharing NATO intelligence with indicted war criminal Gen. Mladic. There are strong indications that Greece was leaking NATO intelligence to Gen. Mladic, especially during the period of the alliance's air raids against the Bosnian Serbs during the months of August and September, 1995. "NATO officials were very reluctant to share intelligence

with the Greeks," said Prof. Wiebes, "because they were afraid that intelligence would leak to the Bosnian Serbs. At some point, NATO simply stopped sharing intelligence with the Greeks." My own research, based partly on interviews with associates of Gen. Mladic, confirms this.

- Helping the secret financing of Serb military operations. The Milosevic regime maintained more than 200 (!) accounts in Greek banks, according to a confidential memo—containing account numbers and other relevant details—sent last year to Greek authorities by the Special Prosecutor of the ICTY Carla Del Ponte. Those accounts were established during the years 1992-1995.

Throughout that period, Greek banking authorities repeatedly denied the existence of Milosevic's secret funds in Greece. Moreover, in a widely publicized case, a Greek high court judge recently refused to cooperate with the ICTY, saying that "he had no intention of becoming a detective for the Hague Tribunal." Greek foreign office officials have, in the past, denounced the U.N. tribunal as being partial and anti-Serb.

- Covering up Greek citizen's probable participation in war crimes. According to the Dutch report, Greek nationals took part in the takeover of Srebrenica by the Bosnian Serb Army and hoisted the Greek flag in the city after it had fallen to the Serbs. The report bases its findings on telephone intercepts of the Bosnian Serb Army provided by Bosnian intelligence. "One of the intercepted messages", Prof. Wiebes told me, "was from General Mladic, who asked for the Greek flag to be hoisted in the city"—presumably to honor the Greek lads. The presence of Greek nationals, their alleged association with Greek intelligence agencies and the hoisting of the Greek flag in

defeated Srebrenica were reported at the time by some Greek and foreign media. The Greek government vehemently denied these allegations.

- Greece provided a safe haven for members of Milosevic's secret services accused by international organizations for serious wrongdoings. In one such case in 1996, Greek authorities protected and helped escape a member of Belgrade's secret services who was wanted by the Belgian government and Interpol for murdering Kosovo Albanian activists in Europe.

The above-mentioned allegations represent just the tip of the iceberg of the whole sad story. The time has come for the government of Costas Simitis to make public all the information it has at its disposal, and to launch a parliamentary investigation into those allegations. If Mr. Simitis fails to do so, he will be perceived as continuing the policy of his predecessors, which included covering up serious wrongdoings. The results of such an investigation would pose no threat to either Mr. Simitis or to his close associates, who always maintained a healthy distance from the Balkan policies of their predecessors. Yes, the results may prove extremely embarrassing to some leading Pasok cadres and ministers who constitute the old guard of Andreas Papandreou diehards, as well as to some "elder statesmen" from the New Democracy opposition party. But this should not deter Mr. Simitis. Let them face the penalty they deserve for supporting in words and deeds some of the most heinous crimes committed in Europe since World War II. By taking such a line of action Mr. Simitis, as Karl Marx would say, "has nothing to lose but his chains."

Mr. Michas is a journalist living in Athens. His book "Unholy Alliance: Greece and Milosevic's Serbia" has just been released by Texas A & M University Press.

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