

GREEK REPLY TO ITALIAN DEMANDS

Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Italian Legation in Athens

Athens, 30 August 1923

The Royal Minister for Foreign Affairs has the honor to acknowledge the receipt of the verbal note of the Royal Italian Legation dated 29 August 1923.

The Greek government desires to assure the Italian government once more of its deep regret at the abominable assassination of the members of the Italian Mission on Greek territory. This regret is shared by the entire Greek nation, which from the very first condemned the crime with the profoundest indignation.

As has been already stated, the assassination of the members of the Italian Mission took place near the 54th kilometre stone on the carriage road from Janina to Argyrokastro, at a point less than one hour's journey from the Albanian frontier, and at a curve in the road on the edge of a dense forest.

Immediately on receipt of the news of the crime, the authorities ordered various military detachments to take up the pursuit of the assassins and the Governor-General of Epirus, together with the public prosecutor and the examining magistrate, proceeded to the place. In addition, the chief of police and certain senior military judicious officers have left Athens on board a warship for the purpose of supervising efforts of the prosecution and of instituting the most active possible search for the murderers. The enquiry began yesterday, and is being prosecuted without interruption, but it has been unable as yet to determine the nationality of the perpetrators or to ascertain the motives of the crime.

The Hellenic government can only protest against the allegation that it is guilty of an offence against Italy.

It could not in fact be seriously alleged that such an offence could have been committed by the Hellenic government, either intentionally or through negligence, in view of the fact that the Hellenic government had no reason for feeling any animosity against the Italian Mission, which was performing a peaceful and honorable task on the frontier of the country. If the Royal government had any complaints to make in connection with the demarcation of the frontier, such complaints could not concern General Tellini, who was merely carrying out the demarcation of the line already fixed at Florence.

It is true that certain disputes, due to an erroneous interpretation, had arisen within the Mission of which he was the president, but they only concerned secondary points in connection with which the Royal government had communicated with the Conference of Ambassadors, at the same time complying, in a conciliatory spirit, with the General's decisions. In the opinion of the Hellenic government, the General did not on any occasion fail in his duty as an honorable soldier and an honest arbitrator.

On the other hand, the Hellenic government could not possibly be accused of negligence in connection with the safety of the Mission, seeing that it had placed a special detachment of soldiers at the disposal of the Mission for this purpose. Emphasis must also be laid on the fact that the local authorities had organized several patrols on account of the presence near the frontier of bands of Albanian brigands, to which the Royal Minister had previously drawn the attention of the Albanian government by two verbal notes. Moreover, no doubts as to the personal safety of General Tellini or of any other member of the Italian Mission were ever expressed, and no representations were made to the Hellenic government in this connection.

The Greek government therefore considers the statement of the Italian government contained in its verbal note, to the effect that the Hellenic government is guilty of a serious offence against Italy, to be entirely unfounded, and it is unable to accept the demands formulated under Nos. 4, 5, and 6 in the verbal note which outrage the honor and violate the sovereignty of the state.

Nevertheless, the Hellenic government, taking into consideration that the abominable crime was committed on Greek territory against subjects of a great friendly state entrusted with an international mission, declares its willingness to accept:

1. That the government shall express its regret to the Italian government in the most complete and official form. For this purpose the general officer commanding at Athens shall call upon His Excellency the Italian Minister.
2. The Hellenic government shall have a service held in the Catholic church at Athens in honor of the victims, which all the members of the government shall attend.

3. On the same day honors shall be paid to the Italian flag in the following way—a detachment of the garrison of Athens shall proceed to the Italian Legation and shall salute the flag, paying all customary honors.
4. Solemn military honors shall be paid to the victims at Prevesa when the bodies are transferred to the Italian vessel.

In addition, the Hellenic government declares its complete willingness to grant, as a measure of justice, an equitable indemnity to the families of the victims, and it would be pleased to accept any assistance in the work of enquiry which Colonel Perrone might be able to lend by supplying any information likely to facilitate the discovery of the assassins.

The Hellenic government ventures to hope that the Italian government will recognize the justice of the point of view set out above as well as its sincere desire to give satisfaction to the Italian government in the most equitable way possible. If, however, contrary to this anticipation, the Italian government were unwilling to recognize the satisfaction given as adequate, the Hellenic government has the honor to inform the Royal Italian Legation that, in accordance with the provisions of the Covenant of the League of Nations, it will appeal to the League and undertake to accept its decisions.

“The Corfu Crisis,” *World Peace Foundation VI* (1923):202–204.