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# GREECE AND THE ROAD TO WORLD WAR I: TO WHAT END?

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On the centennial anniversary of World War I, this article looks at how the divisions among European powers and alliances contributed to the political division of Greece, a smaller state forced to choose between the Central Powers (Austria, Hungary and Germany) or the Entente Powers (England, France, and Russia). The great powers attempted to garner the support of smaller nations by promising a portion of the land spoils obtained in conquest. It also reveals a leadership dynamic between monarchy and democracy, represented by King Constantine and Prime Minister Venizelos, as Greece was in a transition toward the modern bureaucratic state.

Greece ended up on the winning side of the war, but what end did it serve? The National Schism did not heal, the administration of new territories was not peaceful, and international treaties brought unforeseen consequences. And, it was peace-desiring citizens who had to bear the cost of it all.

One year intervened between the two Balkan Wars and World War I. And even though this period was of such brevity, many Greeks remembered it as a children's myth. To many of them, this was a magical period, a period of happiness, and a period of unity and calmness in the turbulent sea of the previous and future years. Greece of 1914 seemed united behind the victorious King Constantine and its great Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos who led her to glory. But history is not an idyllic exercise,<sup>1</sup> and proved to be not idyllic because of what soon followed. Fundamental social, economic, and political challenges as well as the foreign policy pursued by Venizelos ultimately led to more war and then catastrophe in 1922.

From 1910 to 1915 there seemed to be political stability based on the dominance in parliament of Venizelos'

Liberal Party. But “this new political stability created problems which even today remain unresolved.”<sup>2</sup> In his campaign speeches, Venizelos often declared that Greece was being ruined by *favlokratia* and by “rule of the incompetent.”<sup>3</sup> Yet the expansion of the state during these five years, and the legal protections granted to public servants under the revised constitution of 1911, meant the creation of a valuable patronage system and a public service loyal to the Venizelist party. Even though the dominance of the Liberal Party encouraged the growth of an opposition party, the National Opinion Party which was renamed in 1920 the Populist Party, under the leadership of Dimitrios Gounaris, did not have much chance of a

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parliamentary majority and its future use of patronage was preempted. “Patronage remained, it must be emphasized, an important means to political power; and an important end in itself because of the prestige its distribution conferred.... Thus by 1915 the Greek political world was already seriously divided between those who had held office and patronage in their hands since 1910 and those who had been excluded from the privileges which in Greece affect material interests and personal prestige so intimately.”<sup>4</sup>

The prevailing circumstances caused, according to Gibbons, “an incompatibility between the values and institutions of traditional Greece, in particular categorical obligations to families and communities, the absence of wider corporate loyalties either in the countryside or the town, and the growth of patronage which protected or promoted these interests in relations with the state, and on the other hand the effort to govern the country through the western institutions of corporate parliamentary parties, and a centralized bureaucracy, elaborate and overstaffed, in theory impartial, in practice too closely allied to the party which had appointed its members. It was this incompatibility which...Venizelos’ policies accentuated.”<sup>5</sup> One of the consequences of the Goudi “revolt” in 1909 was the rise of the modern

Greek urban state. The oligarchy was forcefully pushed aside. But the leaders of the urban class, specifically Venizelos, brought back members of the oligarchy to serve the national interest. They were in a hurry to utilize representatives of the oligarchy by assigning them to significant posts because of their experience. Hence, whole departments and high posts were offered to “natural enemies of the new situation” in Greece.<sup>6</sup>

Venizelos had told King George, the father of King Constantine, it would take five years for the regeneration of Greece. But his work was interrupted by war. The existing domestic divisions were exacerbated by the different perceptions of the national interest held by King Constantine and Prime Minister Venizelos, and by their divergent foreign policies. On the international level, there were emerging opposing blocks. Would it have been possible for Greece, interested in stability while attempting reorganization and reorientation, to remain neutral?

What would have been her place in case of an international conflict?

In a speech before the Greek parliament, 17 November 1914, Venizelos stated that Greece would remain neutral, but at the same time he did not hesitate to remind those present of Greece’s

responsibilities toward Serbia as an ally: responsibilities his government was obliged to fulfill. Venizelos also said that Greece did not desire the spillover of the war into the Balkans, a region that only a short time ago had suffered from two wars.<sup>7</sup> But Venizelos and his Liberal Party regarded Bulgaria as the natural ally of the Central Powers, and believed that Bulgaria at some point would attack Serbia and then Serbia, threatened by Austria, would not be able to hold onto Serbian Macedonia. If Bulgaria turned against Greece, Greece would be in a helpless position. In addition, if Turkey were to join the war effort and Turkey were victorious, Turkey “would destroy Hellenism in Asia Minor.” Even if Turkey were defeated, “Hellenism in Asia Minor would fall under alien domination.” In both instances, “Greece would be the loser, unless she participated in the war and contributed to the victory of the Western allies. For Venizelos and his party, the European war offered an opportunity which Greece could not afford to miss.”<sup>8</sup>

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King Constantine and his allies, many of whom had been educated and had received their military training in Germany, did not believe that Germany could be defeated. Although Venizelos was much aware of the King's political inclinations, he was especially concerned about the influence exerted upon the King by George Streit, the Greek Foreign Minister, and by the General Staff. Among the latter, Lt. Colonel Ioannis Metaxas became one of the King's most influential advisers. King Constantine was a military man. "After completing his education at the University of Heidelberg and the Military Academy of Berlin, he spent a brief period as a student officer with the German General Staff and served with the 2nd Prussian Infantry Regiment. It was during this period that he met the Kaiser's sister Sophia whom he married in 1889. To the impact of these years we must attribute his respect and admiration of the German military

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machine. Indeed, Kaiserism had made a deep impression on Constantine. His basic autocratic inclinations coupled with an inculcated German militaristic spirit characterized Constantine the King and the General; during his reign military factors received primary consideration, and the German order of things was his model. He generally distrusted politicians and had little faith

in constitutional and parliamentary processes. Naturally, his entourage was made up of old guard reactionaries, and when he ascended the Greek throne following his father's assassination in May 1913, he gathered about him a group of anti-Venizelists. His chief military advisers, his own staff, were graduates of the Berlin Military Academy and fervent Germanophiles. Upon his accession to the throne he intended to play a decisive role in the formulation and execution of foreign policy."<sup>9</sup>

Colonel Metaxas was convinced that the Entente Powers would be defeated by the Central Powers, and that the involvement of Balkan states in the European war would not affect its outcome. To him, the Balkan front was of secondary importance.<sup>10</sup> The King's allies also opposed "the idea of an Anatolian venture as being beyond Greece's military and administrative potential. Furthermore, they considered Germany the natural guarantor

of Hellenism against Slavism. No Entente guarantees could outweigh the danger of a Bulgarian attack, which they tended to magnify. Only the fear of Entente naval supremacy prevented them from openly pressing for Greece to join the Central Powers. They consequently favored a policy of neutrality and, ... they gathered considerable support.”<sup>11</sup>

The interpretation<sup>12</sup> of the 1 June 1913 treaty between Greece and Serbia became a significant issue; the question raised was about the obligation to support Serbia in case of an attack by one or more countries, or only by Bulgaria. Venizelos believed that the likelihood of a Bulgarian attack was too great to offer Greece’s support in case of an Austrian attack. Greece and Serbia would be weakened and Bulgaria would greatly benefit. “The Serbian government was informed of his [Venizelos] reasoning and expressed their satisfaction with the promise of Greek support in case of Bulgarian attack. When, in August 1914, the Entente demanded from Greece the cession of Kavalla and Edessa to Bulgaria for the first time, Venizelos himself refused and Greece made an agreement with Serbia that any concession to Bulgaria should first receive their mutual consent. On 18 August, however, Venizelos offered the unconditional support of Greece to the Entente, fearing that the Allies might return the Aegean islands to Turkey in exchange for her neutrality. The offer, however, was rejected, mainly because Russia considered that Greek cooperation might endanger her own claims in the area of Constantinople and the Straits.”<sup>13</sup>

More specifically, the British Ambassador in Athens in a message delivered to Sir Edward Grey on 19 August 1914 said that Prime Minister Venizelos had come to him the night before, “and, with full approval of the King and Cabinet, formally placed at disposal of Entente Powers, all the naval and military resources of Greece from the moment when they might be required. His Excellency said he had made a similar declaration to my French colleague and my Russian colleague, as those countries were our allies, but that offer was made in a special sense to His Majesty’s Government, with whose interests those of Greece were indissolubly bound up. He knew resources of Greece were small, but 250,000 troops she could dispose of, her navy and ports might be of some use, and he suggested that, in case of necessity, 50,000 Greek troops could be sent to Egypt to keep order. The offer would remain open, and until it were accepted it must, of course, remain a profound secret.”<sup>14</sup> David Lloyd George, reflecting upon

the Allied decision to reject Venizelos' offer, said it was "a stupendous error of judgment. It turned out to be a calamitous error, not only for both Britain and Greece, but also for the world, for it prolonged this devastating War for two years."<sup>15</sup> Winston Churchill expressed similar sentiments. He said that "the Greek army and navy were solid factors; and a combination of the Greek armies and fleet with the British Mediterranean squadron offered a means of settling the difficulties of the Dardanelles in a most prompt and effective manner."<sup>16</sup>

For two months, the governments of both France and England had hoped that Turkey would join their alliance or at least remain neutral. The Russian government was pleased with the prospect of neutralized Straits

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and internationalized Constantinople. As stated, the British rejected Venizelos' overtures because they were naively seeking the cooperation of Turkey and Bulgaria. On 4 November 1914, the Turkish government decided to attack Russia and from that moment the partition of the Ottoman Empire became a focal point during diplomatic negotiations among the Allies. The Allies, in case of an Entente victory, could now satisfy their own interests and could

afford to be generous by carving up the Ottoman Empire and making territorial offers to potential allies like Italy and Greece. "Italy had no other title but her greed for aggrandizement, often misrepresented as the consummation of the *Risorgimento*. It was, however, very different with Greece who could back her claims in Asia Minor with over two million Greek Christians who lived there, many of whom belonged to the financially, administratively, intellectually and socially leading class, and who, consequently, suffered from Turkish misgovernment and excesses of nationalist and religious fanaticism. The stage was set for the realization of the [M] egali [I]dea."<sup>17</sup>

Soon after Turkey entered the European War, the Allies made a generous offer to Bulgaria. As Venizelos stated, the offer to Bulgaria included:

“[R]etrocession of the Dobrudja; cession of the whole of Thrace with the exception of Constantinople and the Straits; cession of the left bank of the Vandar and, on the right bank, of the zone which was considered, according to the Serbo-Bulgarian Treaty of 1912, as incontestably Bulgarian, including Monastir; cession of Eastern Macedonia, notwithstanding the protestations of the Greek government.

Bulgaria was thus offered the opportunity of repairing the disaster which her treason in 1913 had cost her, and of becoming as powerful a Balkan state as the Bulgaria of the Treaty of San Stefano. For the second time, however, Bulgaria showed her intention of not being content to assume merely a preponderant position in the Balkans, but of seeking to establish there an absolute hegemony....

I [Venizelos] view of what precedes, one can see how impossible it is to satisfy Bulgaria, without completely sacrificing the other Balkan peoples, and without concessions which would assure her the immediate hegemony of the Balkans or would at least bring about its realization in the near future. Consequently, we know that any settlement of Balkan affairs, short of Bulgarian hegemony, would not be accepted by her only with profound dissatisfaction.<sup>18</sup>

Many in Greece were disturbed by the willingness of the Entente Powers to so generously attempt to accommodate the Bulgarian government. Although the sentiments of many in Greece were pro-Entente, the attitude of Bulgaria was, to say the least, doubtful. Yet the Allies, hoping to entice Bulgaria to their side, offered Greek and Serbian territories to Bulgaria. “Such a ceding of national domain is repugnant to any people, but it was even tragical, in this case, for it was a question of surrendering territories which were inhabited by more than a million Greeks and Serbs, who had just gained their freedom as a result of the victorious wars of 1912-13.... Greek public opinion was aroused even more by the belief that Greece once again “was being cruelly wronged.”<sup>19</sup> The government of King Constantine also attempted to prejudice Greek public opinion against the Allies. “They worked it for all it was worth to rouse Greek patriotic sentiment against cooperation with the Powers that were negotiating a surrender of Greek territory behind the backs of the King and his Ministers.”<sup>20</sup>

Not much time lapsed after the Treaty of Bucharest was signed in 1913



when it became obvious that the Bulgarian government would not miss the opportunity, when it arose, to try and redress what it considered Bulgaria's rightful grievances. As Petsalis-Diomidis says:

... [I]t was only natural that, when war came, she [Bulgaria] would probably side with the higher bidder and the most powerful guarantor of her claims. The realization of the Middle Eastern schemes of Germany strictly depended on Bulgarian cooperation as the route from Berlin to the Persian Gulf passed through Belgrade, Sofia and Constantinople. As Turkey and Serbia had already chosen sides, Germany could offer Bulgaria the recovery of her gains before the second Balkan [W]ar and even the prospect for reaching the Adriatic at the expense of Serbia, Albania and Greece-offers which were likely to exceed those of the Entente, who at the most could merely promise concessions extracted from their ally Serbia or their friend (and prospective ally) Greece. Other considerations drew Bulgaria towards the Central [P]owers: Turkey was a threat to her southern and eastern frontiers; Serbia, if victorious, would gain further territory in Macedonia; Greece would never risk exposing herself to the Entente fleets, and, if she did not remain neutral, she would join the Western Allies.<sup>21</sup>

It would be useful at this point to briefly consider the relationship between Great Britain and Greece, and in particular David Lloyd George and Venizelos. At first, David Lloyd George had little respect for "the avaricious Greeks," and his interest in the Balkans was primarily related to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. He believed that Bulgaria was the most valuable of the Balkan League. And he insisted that, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria should make substantial territorial gains. Regarding Greece, he thought that it and not Italy should receive Turkish territory. Soon thereafter, Lloyd George changed his mind and began to advocate Greek claims, and the creation of a strong Greek state. "This change came as a direct result of his association with Venizelos..."<sup>22</sup>

David Lloyd George and Venizelos met on numerous occasions in December 1912 and January 1914 to discuss Lloyd George's unofficial proposal for Greece, in case of a crisis, to temporarily hand over to Great Britain the harbor of Argostoli for use by the British navy and in return Greece might receive Cyprus. Before much could be accomplished World War I broke out. These early meetings between Lloyd George and Venizelos



were orchestrated by people who were anxious for the two politicians to develop close relations. “[T]he principal characters encouraging Lloyd George to embrace the cause of Greece were Lady Crossfield, the Greek wife of Sir Arthur Crossfield, Liberal MP for Warrington, and Basil Zaharoff,”<sup>23</sup> born, in Asia Minor on 6 October 1849, Zacharias Vasileios Zaharoff.

Zaharoff was an arms dealer and “[a]s an intimate of Venizelos, whose government he had aided with guns and money in the Turkish and Bulgarian troubles of 1911 and 1912, he rightly expected the sympathies of the Greek Prime Minister to favor his own and the Allied cause.”<sup>24</sup> Zaharoff did his best to help Venizelos so that he might involve Greece on the side of Entente. “Zaharoff’s consuming and passionate interest in Greece led him to a view of that country’s future which corresponded with the foreign policy of Venizelos. At the same time, Zaharoff developed close ties with Lloyd George, and it is not improbable that he served as the catalyst for the future political understanding between Venizelos and Lloyd George.”<sup>25</sup>

When David Lloyd George first met Venizelos, he was Chancellor of the Exchequer and foreign policy was not among his responsibilities. Nonetheless, Lloyd George believed that British national security depended on naval supremacy. It was for this reason that he proposed “trading Cyprus for naval facilities in Argostoli.” Even though the early meetings between the two men did not bear any fruit, Lloyd George had a chance to familiarize himself with Venizelos and the political situation in the Near East.<sup>26</sup>

In the interim, Venizelos had become even more concerned about Greece’s entrance into the war, especially after the Turkish government had decided to join the Central Powers. “He feared that Greece’s neutrality was turning into dangerous isolation. In October 1914, France and Britain had agreed that Russia would gain control of Constantinople and the Straits. Venizelos was also aware that Italy had ambitions in Asia Minor and that Serbia—or even Bulgaria, if it chose to join the [A]llies—could ultimately be compensated with territory in the Balkans at the expense of Greece. Accordingly, Venizelos urged the [K]ing to accept [Sir Edward] Grey’s [British Foreign Secretary] proposal but Constantine delayed by referring the matter to the Greek general staff.”<sup>27</sup> More specifically, in a memorandum sent to King Constantine on 11 January 1915, Venizelos stated that Greece was called upon to participate in the war not only because

of moral obligations but also because such participation would lead to a more powerful Greece: a powerful Greece that we could not have imagined even a few years prior.<sup>28</sup>

The offer by Venizelos to assist the Entente Powers was not renewed for approximately three years, and then only because the King's attitude had become so hostile he had to be driven out of power by the Allies. As David Lloyd George notes:

When Venizelos made his offer on the 19th August, 1914, to place at the disposal of the Entente Powers all the naval and military resources of Greece, he had succeeded in persuading the King that the Entente—now that Britain was in that Alliance—was bound to win in the end. Meanwhile the great Navy of Britain had the Greek ports and islands at its mercy. That prospect overrode Constantine's predilection for Germany. But when the German Army drove the French and British armies headlong towards Paris and smashed a great Russian force at Tannenberg; when also Turkey joined the Central Powers, the King came to the conclusion that his Prime Minister had been at least premature in his anticipation of an Entente victory. As the campaign developed and the immense Russian Army was being rolled back from the German frontier, the Turks were holding up the British Armies in Mesopotamia, the Suez Canal and Gallipoli, and the Allied attempts to break through the German lines in France were repulsed with unparalleled carnage King Constantine's sympathy with Germany became less concealed and more operative. He completely thwarted the pro-Ally plans of Venizelos.

The history of Greece for the next two years was one of a desperate struggle between Venizelos, who was still anxious to come to the aid of the Allies, and the King, whose pro-German proclivities became more and more pronounced as German victories in France and in Russia multiplied, and the British attacks in Mesopotamia and the Dardanelles were defeated by the Turkish armies.<sup>29</sup>

Ioannis Metaxas was not much impressed by the British offer for Greece's participation in a joint Greek-Romanian offensive in the Balkans.<sup>30</sup> He insisted that Greece could only participate if Serbia and Romania participated as well. Metaxas was also skeptical about Greece's ability to maintain territories in Asia Minor "in the face of Turkish opposition unless

the [A]llies decided to partition the Ottoman [E]mpire.”<sup>31</sup> Venizelos and Metaxas “were now divided by differences which were not to be settled in their lifetime. Neither was to deviate from the line adopted at this time. The clash served only to strengthen their convictions. The arguments for and against the Anatolian venture were never again to be put in so pure and rational a form, but were henceforward muddled and distorted in the waters of personal antipathy, factional bitterness and schism.”<sup>32</sup>

Despite the objections, Venizelos sent, on 17 January 1915, another memorandum to the King stating that the concession of Kavalla was indeed a most painful sacrifice, and he felt the deepest psychological pain in recommending it. But he did not hesitate to propose it, when he took into account the national gains which were to be secured by this sacrifice.

He further stated that the concessions to Greece in Asia Minor, which Sir Edward Grey had recommended, may be, if of course Greece were to submit to sacrifices to Bulgaria, so extensive that another equally large and not less rich Greece will be added to the doubled Greece which emerged from the victorious Balkan [W]ars. Under these circumstances, Venizelos claimed, Greece must enter the war without any hesitation. Hellenism would not again be presented with such an opportunity.

If we do not participate in the war, Venizelos added, Hellenism in Asia Minor would be lost forever.<sup>33</sup> To Venizelos, Grey’s concessions in Asia Minor were “as much a day of rejoicing as the day of the signature of the Treaty of Bucharest.”<sup>34</sup>

Prime Minister Venizelos had hoped that the area in Asia Minor he could demand from the Allied Powers would include “the whole western littoral from Cape Phineka to the gulf of Adramytteion (Edremit), with a substantial hinterland of 125,000 square kilometers. This compared with an area to be conceded (the kazas of Drama, Kavalla and Sari-Saban) amounting to only 2,000 square kilometers. The Drama-Kavalla region was rich, but could not be compared in wealth with the whole region sought in Asia Minor. As to population, Greece would gain more than 800,000 new Greek

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souls in Asia Minor, while the 30,000 or so in the Kavalla area would not be lost to Greece, because of the exchange of populations which Venizelos envisaged. He planned that the Greek populations leaving East Macedonia under the exchange should migrate to Asia Minor, thus strengthening the Greek element in the population of the Smyrna zone....” To Venizelos, such an opportunity would not appear again.<sup>35</sup>

Venizelos’ admission that there might be some difficulties administering the territories in Asia Minor did not curtail his optimism about the rising power of Greece and the declining power of Turkey. He said:

It is true that for a number of years, until we organize all our military forces on the basis of the new resources yielded by the mobilization of the greater Greece, we shall be forced in case of war in the Balkan peninsula to employ part of our forces in Asia Minor in order to avert a possible local uprising there – an uprising which is extremely unlikely, since with the complete dissolution of the Ottoman state, our Muslim subjects will be excellent and law-abiding citizens. The force to be disposed for this purpose will anyway be provided within a very short space of time by the Greek population of Asia Minor.”<sup>36</sup>

According to Smith, “[t]he Ionian vision blinded Venizelos both to the military dangers of the action he proposed and to the ruinous effects of the Kavalla proposal on national unity. For Kavalla was to become one of the chief symbols of the developing schism between the Liberals and their opponents.... The bitter and undignified debate helped to exacerbate relations between the two sides and to make their future cooperation impossible. But the origin of the schism lay elsewhere, in the anti-Venizelists’ belief that Venizelos was determined to bring Greece into the war eventually regardless of the terms (a belief that seemed to be reinforced by his attitude to Kavalla), and the Venizelists’ belief that their opponents were determined to maintain Greek neutrality under all circumstances. Neither belief was entirely correct in the first half of 1915, though both were plausible when one considers the terms that each side regarded as adequate for abandoning neutrality.”<sup>37</sup>

The fervor of each side was enhanced further by the determination of the anti-Venizelists and the King to defend their positions against those of the elected government. In addition, while the anti-Venizelists desired to

recapture what they had lost politically since 1910, the Venizelists wanted to settle scores once and for all. “But in its origin the dispute was what it seemed—a radical difference over the issue of war or neutrality, reflecting a broad difference in psychology between those who shared Venizelos’ vision of an expanding, dynamic Greece actively associated with England, and those whose attitude to the outside world was narrow, suspicious and defensive.”<sup>38</sup>

Prime Minister Venizelos advised King Constantine to accept Grey’s proposal, but the King put an end to such plans by dismissing Venizelos as Prime Minister and by putting in his place Gounaris, an opponent of Venizelos. As the menace to Serbia persisted, Grey did not wait for the new Greek government to respond to his proposal. On 7 April 1915, and after consulting with the French and the Russians, he presented the Greek government with a definite proposal. He stated: “The three Allied Powers have taken note with satisfaction of the declaration made to them by the new Greek government to the effect that they will continue the foreign policy of their predecessors. The Allied Powers for their part remain, as hitherto, prepared to assure to Greece in return for her cooperation in the war against Turkey, the territorial acquisitions already promised in the Aidin Vilayet.”<sup>39</sup>

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As the British government was negotiating with the Greek government, discussions were held between the Entente Powers and Bulgaria, with the intent of convincing the Bulgarian government to either join the alliance or at least to remain neutral. In return, the British, as stated previously, offered Bulgaria Kavalla and Drama. King Constantine and the government of Prime Minister Gounaris exploited the circumstances to influence Greek public opinion against the Allies. They argued that the Entente Powers were negotiating behind the backs of King Constantine and Gounaris to give away Greek territory.<sup>40</sup>

This was a period of “clumsy correspondence going on simultaneously between the Allies and Greece and the Allies and Bulgaria and the Allies

and Serbia, with a view to securing some understanding which would save Serbia from a combined attack of German, Austrian and Bulgarian forces. The Bulgarians refused to consider any proposal which was not clear and definite. The Allies promised nothing which was not subject to the consent of Greece, and the Greek King, who did not want an understanding between Bulgaria and Britain, refused to give that consent.”<sup>41</sup>

This, of course, was not the end of efforts to engage Greece. On 19 February 1915, an Allied navy attacked Turkish forces in the Dardanelles and Venizelos was given another opportunity to argue for Greece’s participation in the war.

The presence of [A]llied warships in the Dardanelles made a strong impression on all the Balkan leaders and drove the point home that the demise of the Ottoman [E]mpire was imminent. Greece had a golden opportunity of acquiring the ancient land of Ionia and Venizelos was determined not to lose such a possibility. Moreover, he had received a message from Lloyd George via the Greek ambassador in London which suggested that Britain and France would not permit the disposition of the Near East to be settled by Russia alone. This, as well as other hints from Britain and France, suggested that Greece could still acquire some parts of Asia Minor if it entered the war. Unlike the previous situation, which would have forced Greece to commit the bulk of its forces in a major campaign against the Central Powers, the Dardanelles operation was limited action and only required a small force with the prospect of immediate gain. Consequently, Venizelos proposed to Constantine that Greece join the [A]llies by contributing an army of 40,000 to the Dardanelles campaign. Once again, Metaxas objected and offered his resignation as a protest to the Venizelos plan. To strengthen his position, especially after the resignation of Metaxas, Venizelos advised the [K]ing to bring the matter before the Royal Council, which included former prime ministers and the leaders of the other parties. With the exception of Theotokis, all the members of the Royal Council accepted Venizelos’ recommendations and repeated their approval when Constantine convened the council a second time. Nevertheless, the [K]ing was reluctant to enter into a war with Germany and, to the surprise of Venizelos, he rejected any Greek participation in the conflict. Venizelos accordingly tendered his resignation.<sup>42</sup>

King Ferdinand of Bulgaria and King Constantine of Greece “were playing a very foxy game.” King Ferdinand had decided to join the Central Powers believing that by doing so he would secure much more territory at the expense of Serbia, Greece, and Romania, than what the Allies were offering him in their communications with him. King Constantine on his part had become by now clearly pro-German “in his attitude and conversation.”<sup>43</sup>

What transpired at this juncture between the King and the Prime Minister were the first manifestations of a crisis that began with the ascension of Constantine to the throne. King Constantine had decided to dismiss Venizelos in order to undo the work of those responsible for the Goudi “revolt.” Argyropoulos, a Venizelist and former prefect of Thessaloniki, asserted that, based on his observations of domestic developments between 1912 and 1913, there was complete disagreement between the King and the Prime Minister over foreign and domestic policies, especially over the fundamental principles upon which the governmental system was based. A governmental system which would have been in danger if those defeated in 1909 had had their way.<sup>44</sup>

During the course of the few months, the unfolding events seemed to justify the King’s position to keep Greece neutral. The Dardanelles campaign proved to be a calamity for the Allies and strengthened the hand of those who were pro-German.

From February to March 1915, David Lloyd George believed that Venizelos was pivotal regarding the situation in the Balkans. He thought that, with Venizelos’ support, it would be possible to begin a Greek, Romanian, and Allied offensive in the Balkans and at the same time save the Serbian army. After Venizelos’ resignation, Lloyd George proposed to the Allies to send an army to Thessaloniki to intimidate the government in Athens and secure Venizelos’ return to power. Ultimately, Lloyd George did not pursue his proposal thinking that it would as much hurt Venizelos. “He did not, however, abandon his plan for a Balkan offensive or the notion that Venizelos was a key element to achieving this.”<sup>45</sup>

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These developments led Lloyd George to use Zaharoff as an intermediary to support Venizelos. At the end of 1915, Zaharoff decided to live in Athens to begin a propaganda campaign in support of Venizelos and against the efforts of Baron von Schenck, who was conducting his own propaganda campaign in support of King Constantine and his policy of neutrality.<sup>46</sup> In many press reports, Schneck was referred to as “a great and mysterious power for evil who was leading the Greek nation astray and seducing it from the right path—from Venizelos and from the Entente.”<sup>47</sup> Zaharoff “had much to undo before any campaign could hope to operate against the von Schenck machine. A vicious war of plot and counter-plot began.... Clever though he was, von Schenck owed less of his success in Greece to his own ability than to the wild exaggerations and incredible stupidities of the Allied propaganda bureau, whose head was a French

**Roqueleuil openly urged the Greeks to declare war against Germany, which the people were by no means inclined to do.**

naval officer, Captain de Roquefeuil. For some time after Zaharoff took over command—with his usual obliquity—he allowed de Roqueleuil to continue as nominal head of the Allied secret forces. A great change shortly became apparent.”<sup>48</sup> Roqueleuil’s abilities were limited, and he approached “the task in too brusque and military fashion. He openly urged the Greeks to declare war against Germany, which the people were by no means inclined to do.”<sup>49</sup>

Zaharoff not only provided millions of francs for the Allied propaganda in Greece, but he also helped to organize the movement against King Constantine. The more difficult Schenck’s job became to forward Germany’s interests in the Greek press, the more loudly he announced his successes in German newspapers. In 1916, Schenck and his staff were expelled from Greece. When the Greek government finally decided to join the Entente Powers, Zaharoff gave himself considerable credit for Greece’s participation in the war. Although his work extended in many areas, his other efforts to promote the Allied cause were as significant.<sup>50</sup>

King Constantine had no intention to change his mind and commit Greek forces on the side of the Entente Powers. Domestic conditions in Greece had become difficult. As stated, Venizelos tried to convince King

Constantine to support the Entente, believing that Greece would benefit and would be able to fulfill its national aspirations. But the early German and Austrian victories and the failure of the Dardanelles campaign made the members of the royal family, who believed in German victory, tolerable. The members of the Venizelos government were also divided regarding the role of Greece. The disagreements among Venizelos' Ministers were a sign of things to come. The period of cooperation between the King and Venizelos had come to an end.<sup>51</sup>

On 23 August 1915, Venizelos was reelected as Prime Minister and once again he was opposed by the King over foreign policy. Venizelos had the support of the majority of the Greek citizens, and that made it difficult for King Constantine to openly support Germany. Despite the electoral outcome, there is no doubt that the King was secretly in touch with the German and Bulgarian governments, assuring them that he would not allow any military actions to be taken against the Central Powers.<sup>52</sup> Although Venizelos had the support of the Greek people he had "to face a strong opposition, composed of jealous party leaders, great provincial families, party bosses, majors and lawyers, the whole network of party jobbery whose power had been endangered by the reforms of 1910-11;

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and this opposition of personal hostility to Venizelos was cleverly utilized by the German propaganda, which had only to identify the policy of loyalty to Serbia and to the Protecting Powers with the figure of Venizelos in order to make this mixed opposition into a compact body of opinion working in effect if not intention for Germany."<sup>53</sup>

These kinds of machinations made it difficult for Venizelos to successfully implement many of his plans. "He was essentially a liberal and a democrat, and all the reactionary elements hated and feared his ideals, his legislation and his personality. He succeeded in obtaining from the King a promise that if Serbia were attacked by Bulgaria, even if Germany were

involved, the Greek [a]rmy would march to the aid of their Allies. That promise was worthless, for the King never intended to redeem it. It was only given to bridge over a temporary political menace to his throne. When that had passed away, Venizelos was once more flung out of office.”<sup>54</sup> King Constantine managed to repudiate the treaty with Serbia, dismissed his pro-Allied Prime Minister, and adopted a “menacing attitude towards the Allies.”<sup>55</sup>

Indicative of the difficult relationship between Venizelos and King Constantine were the comments Venizelos made at a dinner gathering in April 1915 to members of the Delta family. At this gathering, Venizelos spoke of his political program and how participation in the Dardanelles campaign would have required little sacrifice. As reward, he said, Lloyd George had promised the Asia Minor hinterland. The fulfillment of the Great Idea seemed within reach. He was determined to realize his dream. And if the King stood in his way, Venizelos was willing to push him aside, as he had done to Prince George in Crete.

The disagreement between the two leaders reached a critical point when the government of Bulgaria called for mobilization of its armed forces, aimed at Serbia, on 22 September. Venizelos insisted upon assisting Serbia with which Greece had a defensive alliance. King Constantine agreed with Venizelos and called for mobilization of the armed forces, but also stated that Greece was only committed to assist Serbia if it were attacked by Bulgaria. To King Constantine, the treaty with Serbia was not binding if it involved conflict with any of the Great Powers. Venizelos managed to get Constantine’s consent for an Allied force to land in Thessaloniki for the purpose of helping Serbia. At the same time, he convinced the Greek parliament, behind the King’s back, to permit a Greek force to fight along the Serbians. Constantine once again asked Prime Minister Venizelos to resign, but it was too late to prevent the landing of French and English troops in Thessaloniki.<sup>56</sup> By the end of January 1916, there were 125,000 French and 100,000 English troops. The presence of these troops, and the objections of the opposition parties and of King Constantine were a prelude to the Εθνικός Διχασμός (National Schism).<sup>57</sup> As Carey and Carey succinctly state, “[t]he stage was set and the lights dimmed for the drama of the long struggle between the two men which was to plunge the monarchy and the ‘constitutional question’ of the [K]ing’s powers into the political

arena until they became the chief cause of dispute between political parties for many years and finally affected the whole of Greece's political life."<sup>58</sup>

In a speech delivered in August 1917 before the members of the Greek parliament, Venizelos expressed his frustration with the King during the Schism by stating that:

King Constantine, after he had for a moment been carried away by my arguments, and had even authorized me to proceed to carry out my policy, soon recovered himself. Surrounded as he was by the persons whom I need not specify, he went to the length of defying not only my own opinion, representing as I did the majority of the country, but the opinion of the whole country without exception; for, as I have already explained, every political factor which was, at that time at any rate, recognized in the country, joined in recommending him to follow my advice.

In the same speech, Venizelos claimed that in a letter to the King he said the following:

Your Majesty, having failed to persuade you, I am very sorry, but it is my duty, as representing at the present moment the sovereignty of the people, to tell you that this time you have no right to differ from me. By the elections of [1915] the people have approved my policy and given me their confidence; and the electorate knew that the foundation of my policy was that we should not allow Bulgaria to crush Serbia and expand overmuch so as to crush us tomorrow. At this point therefore you cannot depart from this policy: unless of course you are determined to set aside the Constitution, and assuming full responsibility by a Royal Decree.

It was at that moment, according to Venizelos' speech, when King Constantine responded as follows:

You know, I recognize that I am bound to obey the popular verdict when it is a question of the internal affairs of the country; but when it is a question of foreign affairs, great international questions, I think that so long as I believe a thing is right or not right, I must insist upon its being done or not done, because I am responsible before God.<sup>59</sup>

Venizelos' second dismissal by King Constantine was followed by a speech the Prime Minister made before parliament on 22 September 1915.

This speech signified the total breakdown of relations between the King and the Prime Minister. In his speech, Venizelos said to allow a victory by the Central Powers, with Bulgaria and Turkey as members, would seriously threaten our national interests. Turkey would be strengthened even further, and a stronger Turkey would be a catastrophe for Hellenism in Asia Minor. A defeat of Serbia would alter the balance of power in the Balkans with a much more powerful Bulgaria.<sup>60</sup> After the speech, King Constantine invited Venizelos to the palace and told him that he was in disagreement with the Prime Minister's statements. He repeated his conviction that Germany would emerge as the victor in the war, and that fulfilling Greece's obligations toward Serbia would be in vain and disastrous.

**Kafandaris said that the dismissal of Venizelos was based on the theory that the King had the power to dismiss the Prime Minister. But this expressed views of the divine right of kings: views that were believed to have disappeared in the deep darkness of past human history.**

George Kafandaris, Venizelos' ally in parliament, in a speech made in August 1917 before members of the Greek chamber said that the dismissal of Venizelos was based on the theory that the form of the Greek government had given the King the power to dismiss the Prime Minister. But more important, Kafandaris said, was the fact that for the first time in a long time supporters of the King were expressing views supportive of the theory of divine right: views that one might have thought had no place in the mind of free citizens. "Such theories lead us to think that ideas once believed to have disappeared in the deep darkness of past human history are resurfacing again to influence contemporary life.... Our system of government was modeled after that of Great Britain and is known as constitutional monarchy. In a constitutional monarchy the King is a passive instrument of the state in managing public affairs. All political authority is vested in the people and the members of parliament and government elected by the people."<sup>61</sup>

The two national elections in 1915 are regarded as the beginning of the National Schism. These two elections are significant for a number of reasons including the fact that they were the first elections since the territorial adjustments that resulted from the Treaty of Bucharest and the first

when the Venizelists opposed the united anti-Venizelists. The 1915 elections also illuminated the electoral geography of the period; the opposition between the anti-Venizelists of the “Old Greece” and the Venizelists of the “New Lands.” While Venizelism would become even less attractive in the “Old Greece” between 1916-1920, Venizelism would be strengthened further during the next few years in the “New Lands,” especially after the population exchange in 1923.<sup>62</sup> The chasm between the indigenous people of Greece and the “refugees,” between the Greeks of “Old” Greece and “New” Greece had become unbridgeable.<sup>63</sup>

The Greek government that followed Venizelos’ second resignation, first led by Alexander Zaimis and then by Stefanos Skouloudis, was of the opinion that neutrality best served the national interest. This was also the policy followed by the Dimitrios Gounaris’ government. Did such policies benefit the Greek nation? No, said General Daglis. To him the policies of the anti-Venizelists hurt the Greek economy, diminished national sovereignty, violated the treaty with Serbia, and worst of all raised the level of mistrust and animosity of the Protecting Powers toward Greece. All this was at a time when the Greeks could not depend on German support. Germany was an ally of Austria, Bulgaria, and Turkey, the deadliest enemies of Hellenism.<sup>64</sup> All three leaders were elderly, they represented the old guard, and they were not fully in touch with the times and the changing circumstances. They were anachronistic during a period of dramatic domestic and international changes.

Allied Balkan diplomacy had been a failure to this point. The Allies had rejected the offer of Greek assistance at the beginning of hostilities. The Allies had done nothing regarding promises to give Smyrna to Greece. The Allies lost Bulgarian support for many reasons including their hesitations—the Allies were facing their greatest crisis in the Balkans with “a semi-hostile Greece and an actively hostile Bulgaria.”<sup>65</sup> When King Constantine decided not to help Serbia, Grey attempted to change his mind by promising that “if Greece prepared to give support as an ally to Serbia, now that she has been attacked by Bulgaria, His Majesty’s Government will be prepared to

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**The Greeks could not depend on German support. Germany was an ally of Austria, Bulgaria, and Turkey, the deadliest enemies of Hellenism.**

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give Cyprus to Greece. Should Greece join the Allies for all purposes, she would naturally have a share with them in advantages secured at end of war, but the offer of Cyprus is made by H.M. Government independently on condition that Greece gives immediate and full support with her army to Serbia.”<sup>66</sup>

Sir Edward Grey regarded his offer to the King so important that on the same day he sent a telegram to the British ambassador in Athens to communicate the offer of Cyprus once more. Prime Minister Zaimis did not inform the King about the telegram for two days. When Zaimis responded four days after he had received the communication he said that Greece would not take action to help Serbia and that Athens would maintain neutrality toward the Allies. As for King Constantine, he was so convinced of German

victory, no offer could change his mind.<sup>67</sup>

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**The German Minister requested the surrender of Fort Rupel. The Greek government surrendered the territory with its garrison without any shots being fired.**

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The German Minister requested the surrender of Fort Rupel, an important position in the passes entering Eastern Macedonia. The Greek government not only surrendered the territory, it surrendered it with its garrison without any shots being fired. “A few weeks later the Bulgarians advanced and occupied almost the whole of Eastern Macedonia up to the

sea. This occupation included the port of Kavalla, the proposed cession of which to Bulgaria was the reason assigned by Constantine’s Ministers for their refusal to honor their promise to support Serbia. The Greek garrison of 8,000 men was instructed by Constantine’s Ministers to surrender to the invaders, and they were subsequently interned in Germany until the end of the war. The feeling aroused by this act of perfidy was intense.”<sup>68</sup>

In a letter Venizelos wrote to Leonidas Paraskevopoulos, the Commander of the Third Army Corps, on 6 January 1916, expressed his despair. He said: “To think that within just two years, poor Greece should have fallen from the prominence to which she was raised by the two Balkan Wars and the treaties of Bucharest and Athens which terminated them, to today’s exhaustion. The future of the nation is dark again.”<sup>69</sup>

Rupel was seen as a symbol of the national crisis. The name of the fort summarized the negative consequences of neutrality. Constantine and his



supporters believed that neutrality guaranteed the safety of the country and its territorial integrity. But the fort's fall repudiated the system of neutrality, its justifications, and aims. After Rupel, the defenses of the country also dissolved. The northern territories were at the mercy of the invaders. If neutrality was implemented because of incorrect estimation of the circumstances, the fall of Rupel called for its abandonment.<sup>70</sup>

These events signified the final breakdown of relations between Venizelos and King Constantine. They both believed were correct in their interpretation of the constitution as related to the powers of the King dismissing the Prime Minister. "But the constitutional difference between Venizelos and Constantine should not obscure the fundamental issues which had precipitated it: in the first place the protracted dominance of the Venizelists over office and privilege, and secondly the differences of policy affecting the sacred matter of the Great Idea which convinced both political factions that each was the authentic author of the ethnic truth."<sup>71</sup>

This sequence of events convinced the King to once more test public opinion by calling for new elections on 19 December 1915. The decision by Venizelos and his Liberal Party to abstain believing that a second dissolution of parliament in six months "was unconstitutional (and partly in fear of an electoral defeat), intensified the schism by placing the opposition in an extra-parliamentary and therefore potentially revolutionary position which encouraged the anti-Venizelist governments of a one-sided chamber" to purge Venizelos' supporters from the civil service and the armed forces.<sup>72</sup> The leader of the Liberal Party referred to the elections of December 1919 as "comical politics." To him, half of the electorate would have been prevented from participating because of the military mobilization.<sup>73</sup> An additional reason given by Venizelos in justifying abstention from the December elections was that through the elections the monarchy attempted to dismantle the political system; to him, the monarchy was interested in imposing a certain political system where the monarch was the dominant personality. But such an outcome meant the destruction of the parliamentary system where the people are dominant and who are the

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**Rupel was seen as a symbol of the national crisis. The name of the fort summarized the negative consequences of neutrality.**

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source of all authority.<sup>74</sup> By December 1915 the state machinery had been cleansed of Venizelist elements. In addition, because the voter turnout in the elections of 19 December was about a quarter of that in the previous June, parliamentary government was wounded and the governments that followed these elections lacked the necessary legitimacy.<sup>75</sup> The electoral outcome demonstrated that the monarchy had succeeded in demolishing Greece's political system.<sup>76</sup>

On 21 June 1916, the Allies demanded the dissolution of parliament, a new government, and the demobilization of the military. King Constantine replaced the Prime Minister but was not willing to accommodate the Allies in relation to their other demands. On 27 August 1916, a meeting of members of the Liberal Party was held in Athens to consider the political situation. Later on the same day many of Venizelos' supporters went outside his house to express their support. From the balcony of his house Venizelos made the following address:

Fellow Citizens, Four days ago, when a deputation of yours asked me what we must do in order to forestall the definite and complete disaster towards which we are drifting, I advised you to meet together and to give expression to your overwhelming grief in view of the humiliations which the prevailing policy has heaped and continues to heap on the land and the nation.

I want to thank you for answering my suggestion so promptly and in such numbers, gathering together this great assembly of the people, and giving me the opportunity once more, after two and a half years, to communicate with you directly....

I recommend you, then, to summon a deputation of a few members, the choice of whom can be left to the Committee of this meeting, a deputation which will go before His Majesty and will address him in words like these:

King of the Hellenes!

You have been a victim of men who, in order to undo the work of the Revolution (of which tomorrow is the seventh anniversary) and to restore the old regime of corruption, have not hesitated to traffic the people's reverence for the Crown and their devotion to your person;...

You have been the victim of your military advisers, who with the

narrowness of the military understanding, and with the desire to establish an absolutism which should make them substantially masters of the situation, have persuaded you that Germany would emerge victorious from the European War.

You have been the victim finally of your own quite human and not unnatural weakness. Accustomed to admire everything German, bewildered by the unrivalled German organization of military and other affairs of every sort, you not only expected a German victory, but you came to desire it, hoping that it would enable you to concentrate in your own hands all the authority of the government, and substantially to set aside our free Constitution.

Today's assembly of the whole people was called together in order to express the nation's sorrow, and to demonstrate in a lawful and orderly manner the distress and indignation of the people on account of the calamities to which the country has been and is still being guided by the policy of the prevailing governments.

The assembly of the whole people aims also at your own enlightenment, O King; wishing to convince you that in spite of the efforts to undermine its settled beliefs, the people is not satisfied with this state of affairs, as those around you vainly contend, wishing to make an appeal to your patriotism, so that you may decide to rid yourself of the pernicious influences which, as we have said, traffic and cheapen the people's love of your Majesty, and are gradually misleading you, and with you are driving the Dynasty and the country and the Hellenic people into the consequences of a national catastrophe....<sup>77</sup>

After Venizelos finished speaking to his supporters, the people dispersed and the same day they elected representatives to meet with King Constantine. The King refused to receive the people's representatives.

National unity had been destroyed. On 1 September 1916, two ardent supporters of Venizelos, Pericles Argyropoulos and Colonel Zymbrakakes, revolted against the government and established in Thessaloniki the Εθνική Άμυνα or National Defense for the purpose of supporting the Allies and driving the Bulgarians and Germans out of Greece. Neokosmos Grigoriadis, an early participant in the revolt and a supporter of Venizelos, said that the uprising was clearly a national movement. It sprang out of fear that Greece

would lose Greek territory. It was a Greek movement and a spontaneous one. It began without guidance from anyone. The participants did not seek advice from anyone, not even from Venizelos. Indeed, when at a later point the participants in the movement sought Venizelos' advocacy, he did not approve their actions. But the national circumstances were such that Venizelos changed his mind and decided to assume leadership on 30 September.<sup>78</sup>

Venizelos, disappointed by the King's determination to maintain neutrality, began communication with Admiral Kountouriotis and General Daglis on the position they ought to maintain. Shortly thereafter, Kountouriotis and Venizelos first and Daglis a few days later left for Chania where they proclaimed a revolutionary movement to compel the King and his government to abandon neutrality and to call for intervention on the side of the Allies. The "Triumvirate" quickly took control of Crete. Samos, Mytilini, and Chios declared their support of the revolutionaries, and soon other islands followed suit.<sup>79</sup>

**Venizelos said that it was not necessary to explain the reasons for the revolutionary movement because they were closely witnessing the consequences of the criminal policy of the Athens government.**

It is important to note that the Cretan gendarmerie played a significant role during the movement at Thessaloniki. N. Grigoriadis commented that the gendarmerie at Thessaloniki was almost exclusively composed of Cretans and that once again Crete had become the "Acropolis of

Hellenism."<sup>80</sup> The second day after his arrival in Thessaloniki, informed of the contributions of the Cretans, Venizelos visited some of them to express his and the country's gratitude. On the same occasion, Repoulis proclaimed that the Cretans were the "Antigone of Greece."<sup>81</sup>

Critics of Venizelos, including politicians, historians, and others, argued that what he had done was to be expected based on his personality, a person driven by passions. In an address before Parliament on 13 August 1917, Venizelos stated otherwise. He said that the decision to once again become a revolutionary was difficult, and having been a revolutionary in the past he was fully aware of how dangerous revolutions could be. He came to the conclusion to lead the revolution only after he had spoken with Admiral

Kountouriotis who told him that Greece was being betrayed, and the current policy was dishonoring Greece and the Greek people.<sup>82</sup>

On 9 October 1916, the “Triumvirate” arrived in Thessaloniki and established a “rival provisional government.” In a speech to the people of Thessaloniki, Venizelos said that it was not necessary to explain the reasons for the revolutionary movement because they were closely witnessing the consequences of the criminal policy of the Athens government. He went on to say that siding with Serbia and the Great Powers, who were fighting for liberty, peace, and the independence of small nations, was an effort to rescue the honor of the nation and to safeguard the national interests. In addition, he stated that when the national struggle is over the people of Greece would be called upon to decide who was right: we or those in Athens? And I am sure, he said, the people of Greece would condemn those who knowingly sacrificed the national interests for personal interests.<sup>83</sup>

Venizelos’ early efforts to organize a government and an army in a divided country were plagued by many difficulties. Venizelos’ base of support was in the “New Lands,” and especially the islands. This was understandable because “Old Greece” had almost continuously been in a state of war since 1912. The people living in “Old Greece” were tired of war, and many of them gladly placed themselves along the side which was promising peace.<sup>84</sup> “His immediate problem was the organization of a sizeable army in order to fulfill the declared aim of the revolution, i.e., to fight against the Central Powers together with the Allies. The latter task proved to be more difficult than the establishment of the Provisional Government in the Aegean Islands, and Macedonia. His difficulties were further complicated by the fact that he did not enjoy the full and unqualified support of the Allies as one might have expected.”<sup>85</sup> Yet when the government at Thessaloniki could not afford to raise an army and pay for its upkeep, it was the British and French governments who provided the necessary funds for Venizelos to raise an army to assist

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**When the rival government at Thessaloniki could not afford to pay for an army, it was the British and French governments who provided the necessary funds for Venizelos to raise an army to assist the Allies on the Macedonian front.**

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the Allies on the Macedonian front. This Allied decision was made on 20 October 1916, at the conference at Boulogne.<sup>86</sup>

After establishing the Provisional Government and after having moved the seat of his government to Thessaloniki, Venizelos assumed control of the National Defense forces. In an attempt to economize, he tried to limit the administrative apparatus. "A number of committees were also set up in Athens to facilitate the Provisional Government's work in Old Greece. One of the most important was the committee entrusted with the enlistment of volunteers for the forces of the Provisional Government. This committee included K. Zavitsianos, General Korakas, General Sisinis, and Dimitris Theodorakopoulos. Under the latter committee several sub-committees operated in various districts. A political committee under the chairmanship of Venizelos' close associate Constantine Raktivan handled the political affairs of the Provisional Government in Old Greece. A third committee was responsible for the distribution of allowances to the families of those who enlisted in the National Defense forces."<sup>87</sup> The revolutionary government formed by the "Triumvirate" included Sofoulis, Repoulis, Miliotis, Gkinis, Negropodis, Averof, Kassavetis, Simon, and Politis. The "Triumvirate" also enlisted the services of Romanos and Kaklamanos.

Venizelos was confronted with yet another problem: the necessity to reassure "Old Greece," and even some of his followers, about the political aims of the revolution. "Of course, he had made it amply clear upon his arrival in Crete that the sole aim of the Provisional Government was to organize a force for the purpose of liberating Macedonia, and he was careful to avoid statements against the King or the dynasty. Instead he appealed to the King to join forces for the salvation of the country. His initial moderation, however, convinced no one, not even some of his own followers; and many feared that the Provisional Government would sooner or later turn against the King and the dynasty, establish a republic, or even disturb the established socio-economic structure."<sup>88</sup> These were the fears of many in "Old Greece" and not necessarily in the "New Lands."

At first, the Allies were reluctant to recognize Venizelos' government fearing civil war. But the conduct of the Allies toward King Constantine gradually became harsher. Fearful that the government of Athens might use its military in northern Greece against them, the French demanded from King Constantine to surrender war material. "On 1 December when

French and British forces landed near Athens to receive guns and war materials which the [A]llies had demanded as a guarantee of the royal government's neutral intentions, and in compensation for artillery and supplies surrendered to the enemy at Fort Rupel and in Macedonia, the [A]llied force was attacked and after suffering heavy casualties was forced to retire in some disorder to its ships. The exaltation of this much exaggerated victory and the orgy of murder and maltreatment of Venizelists which followed [during the next two days] proved the strength of the festering resentment of royalists at the many humiliations they had suffered at [A]llied hands."<sup>89</sup> During the events of 1 December there were about 60 dead and 170 wounded on the Allied side while there were about 40 dead and 100-150 wounded on the Greek side. The incidents of 1-3 December 1916 are known as the "Νοεμβριανά" (November events) as opposed to "Δεκεμβριανά" (December events) because the Julian calendar was then in effect.<sup>90</sup> Constantine's regime was responsible for "unleashing a wave of persecutions and mob terror against Venizelist 'traitors,' culminating in the November 1916 events in Athens.... Civil war between the 'State of Athens' and the 'State of Thessaloniki' continued until the summer of 1917."<sup>91</sup> Once the Allied troops withdrew from Athens, the Venizelists residing in Athens were left at the mercy of the Reservists who were a royalist paramilitary group. This group was led by two generals: General K. Kallaris and General A. Papoulas.<sup>92</sup>

A few days later the Church and a large number of Athenians, many of them members of the high society, anathematized Venizelos as a traitor. Similar incidents took place throughout the country. The anathematization of Venizelos by the Church in Patras was especially lengthy, in part stating the following:

Cursed,  
 Anathema to your family who soiled Greece with you.  
 Anathema to your father who helped give you birth.  
 Anathema to your mother who held such a snake in her womb.  
 ...and to forever remain in the darkness of our religion, which you did not respect...  
 to not find someone to close your eyes, even dead, to have your eyes open,  
 so that you continue watching the country you betrayed.



Anathema to your soul.  
Anathema to the chaos it [soul] will fall.  
Anathema to its memory.  
Anathema to you.<sup>93</sup>

The Greek ambassador to Rome, Koromilas, sent a passionate letter to the King asking him, to no avail, to espouse the cause of the Entente Powers:

Reading the ingenuous dispatches of the Government which affirm its intention of preserving the best relations with the Entente Powers, I observe that it does not realize either the appalling gravity of the situation or the ultimate catastrophes towards which official Greece is heading. The obscure and ambiguous policy which Your Governments have pursued for over a year has led us to hostilities with our natural friends, the Powers of the Entente, whom we have so frequently assures of our good friendship, whilst—the most amazing thing—this same policy has driven us to non-resistance against the Bulgarians, our hereditary enemies, when they came and captured our forts, our Macedonian towns, half our war supplies and our soldiers. Now that blood has been shed, France and England, to whom we owe the restoration of our liberties and who have so often aided us, have become the implacable enemies of Your Majesty and of that Greece which remains your Kingdom.

One part of Greece has repudiated the other: it has separated itself by violence; it has seceded from the Athens Government in order to go to Salonica to defend our land which we have abandoned to our enemies. I am well aware how people tell You, Sire, that nevertheless the bulk of the people are with You; but You were King not of the majority, Sire; You had absolute sovereignty over all the Greeks, whether over those who dwell in the Kingdom, or those who dwell outside; and they who speak to You thus, intending to console You, belittle Your Majesty and even shake Your throne which they claim to uphold, for majorities crumble away with the advent of adversity. And the throne cannot be a political party.

Never, Sire, has the Nation been in more terrible circumstances. It is unthinkable that pity should not have conquered all hearts and impressed on them the ruin of their native land and that the unity of all its citizens alone can save it....

Whatever the issue of this vast conflict—and it will probably be

doubtful as You Yourself feel—Greece should remain true and sincere friend of the Entente Powers. M[r]. Venizelos and his Salonika colleagues have perceived this truth. Do not refuse, Sire, to realize it too. Since you are the King, not of the majority of the people, but of all the Hellenes, forget the past, forget the resentments which You may feel, call upon the cooperation of M[r]. Venizelos and his friends; I am firmly of the hope that they will willingly give it to You. Set up a strong Government, capable of assuming responsibilities, capable ultimately of relieving You thereof. Make the gesture, Sire; You who have made glorious the national arms, save the soul of Greece from the passions which rend it; save the nation and our race; Greece, united by You, will succeed in weathering the storm and avoiding the disasters which are in the air, no matter what unexpected blows the War may hold in store for us. If you do not undertake it at once, the future of our Country, of Hellenism, will be lamentable, will be horrible.

I beg Your Majesty to forgive the freedom of my language. The affection I feel for You forces me to speak to You thus, as my heart bleeds to see what You have been in the past and what the future holds. It is my duty to speak to You plainly, without reserve; it is my duty to tell Your Majesty that the policy which has led us inevitably alas! To our present plight is fatal and I profoundly disapprove of it. Only this advice which I venture to give, only your Royal gesture, which will mean national unity, can still save what remains.<sup>94</sup>

King Constantine tightly held onto his opinions about politicians and military affairs. At a meeting with Zavitzianos on 19 August 1916, King Constantine said how much he respected and loved politicians but he also added that none of them understood military matters. He went on to say that for that reason he had to be responsible for all military matters and that he had no intention to give up these powers to anyone, not even Venizelos. King Constantine also stated to Zavitzianos that he was not going to allow the destruction of Greece, and he was not going to allow Greece to be among the defeated nations. If the Entente Powers were the victors, the King said, he would resign in favor of his son.<sup>95</sup>

The government in Thessaloniki became increasingly anti-royalist, and the Allies, after the events of 1 December 1916, recognized Venizelos'

government by sending representatives to Thessaloniki. On 7 December 1916, the Allies instituted a blockade of “Old Greece” causing much suffering, and demanded the King’s departure. King Constantine did not resist, and agreed “to the succession of his second son Alexander without, however, giving a formal admission of his abdication. For many Greeks the impression of their King driven from his throne was painful and deeply wounding.... Venizelos, soon reinstated in power at Athens as Prime Minister, asked for the recall of the chamber elected in June 1915 [thus the ‘Lazarus Chamber’] which in his view had been unconstitutionally dissolved. Without delay the civil service, army and navy, were reorganized to become as exclusively Venizelist as previously they had been Constantinian. As the schism became more clear and more uncompromising each turn of fortune temporarily destroyed the professional positions of an increasing number of families, and the existence of duplicate officer corps and civil services itself made difficult the prospect of reconciliation.”<sup>96</sup> King Constantine accompanied by his family and some of his closest allies, including Gounaris and Metaxas, left Greece on 14 June 1917 for Switzerland.

The dethronement of King Constantine occurred at a time when he was notably popular among the Greeks. As Zavitzianos says: “Never was dethroned a more popular King.” His popularity was not dated back to his early years, not when he enlisted in the military, and not when he became the Commander-in-Chief. As the Commander-in-Chief he was much blamed for the 1897 catastrophe. The King’s popularity began when Venizelos decided to reinstate him in the military, despite opposition among the ranks of the Liberal Party, after he had been removed because of the 1909 “revolution.” Constantine became King during war, and he led the Greek army to victory during the Balkan Wars.<sup>97</sup>

King Constantine’s departure ended two difficult years for everyone involved including the Greek nation. When King Alexander proclaimed that he had hoped to follow his father’s brilliant reign he must have had in mind his accomplishments during the Balkan Wars rather than “the last two unhappy years.”<sup>98</sup> Prime Minister Venizelos informed the new King that when the circumstances allowed it he wanted to revise the constitution in order to strengthen its democratic principles. King Alexander, who did not feel comfortable in his new role, withdrew from center stage. Greece had been unified by force and it would be governed under Marshall Law

for the next three years. The manner in which Alexander fulfilled his royal responsibilities justified Venizelos' decision not to seek the abolition of the monarchy.<sup>99</sup>

Venizelos was free to support the Allied cause and Greece entered the war on 29 June 1917. At least according to his supporters, Venizelos believed that Hellenism, by participating in the war on the side of democratic states, was on a safe path toward the realization of national unity. According to them, Venizelos also believed that it was necessary for Greece to fight in support of the ideas promoted by France and England.<sup>100</sup> Venizelos recalled the Greek diplomats from Berlin, Vienna, Sofia, and Constantinople. "Ten divisions of the Greek army fought with great valour in the autumn campaign in 1918 along the Macedonian front. They routed German and Bulgarian positions and pushed the front line northward at a great human cost. The hard fighting was soon rewarded as Germany and its allies capitulated. Then came the reward as Greek troops triumphantly marched into Constantinople/Istanbul. At the cost of splitting the nation, Venizelos had brought the nation into the war on the victorious side. In order to justify the cost he now had to win the peace: the wounds of war would only be healed with the fulfillment of the Megali Idea. But even then the deep cleavages wrought by the *Ethnikos Dikhasmos* could not be undone. The legacy of sectarian violence would endure."<sup>101</sup>

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With the end of World War I, many had hoped that Greece would finally experience peace after years of war, but it did not. Instead, Greece experienced more war, defeat, and terrible social and political instability throughout the interwar period. The Balkan Wars and World War I had exhausted Greek society. The important question after World War I was if Venizelos and the Liberals would receive enough support from the Allies at the Paris Conference in 1919 in return for the country's sacrifices. At first, it seemed that might be the case. The Treaty of Serves (signed on 10 August 1920) gave Greece eastern Thrace, and all the Aegean islands,

including Imbros and Tenedos, but excluded the Dodecanese. In addition, Greece was given the administration of the Smyrna district for five years, after which the League of Nations would decide whether it became a full part of Greece. Greece came close to achieving the fulfillment of the Great Idea: the liberation of all territories once considered Greek and their unification under a single state.

But the victory at the Paris Conference proved ephemeral. The Treaty of Sèvres was never ratified by the dissolved Ottoman Empire, and the arrival of Greek troops in Asia Minor revived Turkish nationalism under Mustafa Kemal. Successive errors committed by Greek governments and Allied abandonment of Greece at a time of need led to a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Turks in 1922, a defeat that was followed the Treaty of Lausanne (signed on 24 July 1923). The catastrophe in Asia Minor signified the end of the Great Idea as a dominant Greek foreign policy goal and three thousand years of Hellenic presence in Asia Minor was brought to an abrupt end. Because of the Treaty of Lausanne Greece lost most of the territories it had gained in 1920. Furthermore, there was a forced exchange of populations; Turkey accepted 354,647 Muslims from Greece, while Greece received 1,300,000 refugees from Asia Minor. The decade that followed the military debacle of 1922 was characterized by more social unrest, political instability, and serious financial problems.

## NOTES

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4. Campbell and Sherrard, *op.cit.*, 116.
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6. Ventiris, vol. I, *op.cit.*, 195-196.
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8. Nikos Petsalis-Diomidis, *Greece at the Paris Conference (1919)* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1978), 33-34.
9. George B. Leon, *Greece and the Great Powers, 1914-1917* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1975), 61, 67-68.
10. Constantine G. Zavitzianos, *Ai Anamneseis tou ek tes Istorikes Diafonias Vasileos Konstantinou kai Eleftheriou Venizelou: Opos ten Ezese (1914-1922)*, vol. II [*His Recollections from the Historic Dispute between King Constantine and Eleftherios Venizelos: The Way he Lived it (1914-1922)*] (Athens: Publication Brothers G. Rodi, 1946), 40.
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18. Eleftherios Venizelos, *Greece before the Peace Congress of 1919: A memorandum dealing with the rights of Greece* (New York: Published for the American Hellenic Society by Oxford University Press, 1919), 15-17.
19. Auguste Gauvain, *The Greek Question*, trans. Carroll N. Brown (New York: Published for the American-Hellenic Society by Oxford University Press, 1918), v-vi.
20. Lloyd George, *op.cit.*, 1212-1213.
21. Petsalis-Diomidis, *Greece at the Paris Conference, op.cit.*, 33.
22. Andre Gerolymatos, "Lloyd George and Eleftherios Venizelos 1212-1917," *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 15, no. 3-4 (1988): 37-38.
23. *Ibid.*, 38-39.
24. Guiles Davenport, *Zaharoff: High Priest of War* (Boston: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Company, 1934), 174.
25. Gerolymatos, *op.cit.*, 39.
26. *Ibid.*, 41-42.

27. *Ibid.*, 43.

28. Cited in Ventiris, vol. I, *op.cit.* 371.

29. Lloyd George, *op.cit.*, 1209-1210.

30. According to Gerolymatos (*op.cit.*, 43), Lloyd George, on 21 January 1915, unofficially informed Venizelos that Britain was ready to commit 40,000 troops to assist Greece if Greece were to join Romania in a Balkan offensive. Venizelos responded by stating that Greece would participate and support Serbia as long as Romania also participated.

31. *Ibid.*, 43.

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34. *The Vindication Of Greek National Policy 1912-1917: A Report of Speeches Delivered in the Greek Chamber, August 23 to 26, 1917, by Mr. E. Venizelos and others* (London: George Allen and Unwin, LTD, 1918), 80.

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37. *Ibid.*, 54.

38. *Ibid.*, 54-55.

39. Cited in Lloyd George, *op.cit.*, 1211-1212.

40. *Ibid.*, 1212-1213.

41. *Ibid.*, 1213.

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46. *Ibid.*, 46.

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