

Republic vs Monarchy: The greek liberals in the early Twentieth Century*

By Dimitris Michalopoulos

Black Thursday¹ made an impact on Greece rather late, namely in the year 1930. To be sure, the resources of Greece have always been limited; nevertheless, this country was able to absorb, in 1922 and 1923, a huge refugee influx from Asia Minor; and simultaneously the government tried hard to get Greece industrialized. But it was impossible for the latter to avoid for ever the aftermath of the Great Depression. As a matter of fact, the Greek economy finally began to be affected; and in April 1932, Eleutherios Veniselos, Prime Minister since 1928, proposed the formation of a national coalition government in order to brave the crisis.

The proposal was declined; moreover, Veniselos was exceedingly distressed about the reaction of his former political friends. Alexandros Papanastassiou for instance, a previous authority of the Liberal party's² left wing and now the leader of a new political organization, on April 27th ³ taxed Veniselos with "fatalism" as far as the solution of Greece's economic problems was concerned. The Prime Minister was terribly upset; and the day after, he gave his former friend the following answer:

"Yesterday, Mr Papanastassiou accused me of fatalism. Nevertheless, I am sure that when I die it will be Mr Papanastassiou who will pronounce the most touching funeral oration. And even now I can foresee what he will say. Dear friends, Mr Papanastassiou will say, the dead man lying here was a real man, very courageous, with self-confidence and a lot of faith in the destiny of the nation to whose government he was assigned. Perhaps he often made mistakes; but he never lost heart. Therefore, he was not a fatalist, for he did not expect from the destiny the progress of his country; on the contrary, he placed in the latter's service all the fire of his soul, every capacity of his own, whether moral, intellectual or material."⁴

* As usual, thanks are due to Professor Michael Lumley for having read the manuscript and making many valuable suggestions.

¹ Namely October 24th, 1929, the very day Wall Street collapsed.

² That political party that was founded by E.Veniselos himself.

³ Dates are given accordingly to the calendar in use. (In Greece for instance, the Julian calendar was abandoned as late as 1923.)

⁴ S.I.Stephanou (ed.), *Political admonitions of Eleutherios Veniselos* (in Greek), vol. I (Athens, 1965), pp. 75-76.

It did not happen like this. Veniselos died not in Greece but in France, in March 1936; and Papanastassiou was given no chance to pronounce an oration. He dropped dead in November of that same year of a heart attack: he could not bear the restoration of the monarchy, for he had struggled against Kings and Queens all his life. Nevertheless, even today one can read the bittersweet remarks that Veniselos made in answer to the charge of his old friend. In fact, they are engraved on the former's tombstone, in Crete, the mountainous island in the Eastern Mediterranean - and his birthplace.

In point of fact, Veniselos might be called anything but certainly not a fatalist. A self-made man, always prepared to give battle if he believed he was right, he was quite willing to speak out the naked truth. He thought moreover that life is not a trivial matter and, accordingly, he never gave much care to the afterlife; thus money was of paramount importance to him. In short, he was a man who, with the passing years, became, openly or not, more and more alike to the human type emerging from the United States. He had travelled, besides, up and down in America during the year 1921.

Papanastassiou, too, used to live in a same sphere of latent American influence. He had never been in the States; nevertheless, his ideas, his very personality made an impact on the Greek community in the USA.

Both, Veniselos and Papanastassiou, had a very important part to play in the establishment and functioning of the First Republic in Greece.

I

As soon as the First World War broke out, Constantine, the King of the Hellenes, and Veniselos, the Greek Prime Minister, were in perfect agreement: the country should observe a benevolent neutrality towards the Entente, for Greece was not in a position to come into conflict with a major maritime Power, namely the United Kingdom. On the other hand, the flush of triumph which already pervaded the German Imperial Army -mainly since the 1870-1871 Franco-German conflict-made problematic the outcome of the new war. As a result (and given that the country's highest interest was the preservation of gains in the Balkan Wars), the populace immediately shared King Constantine's and El. Veniselos' view - and neutrality was unanimously regarded by the Greeks as really a smart choice.

In fact, already in October 1914, this neutralism was crowned with success. Greece was then able, by remaining neutral, to reoccupy Northern Epirus, i.e. the Argyrocastron (Gjirokastër) and Korytsa (Korçë) districts, from which she had been compelled to retire by the Great Powers some months earlier.

Thus the way was already paved for the union of Northern Epirus and the Kingdom of Greece. And of paramount importance was the very fact that all this was the result of a unanimous mandate of the belligerent Europe! The total number of Great Powers, the Entente ones as well as Germany and Austria-Hungary, had consented to the reoccupation of the northern part of Epirus by Greek troops.

Alas! A couple of months later, everything began to change. As a matter of fact, when British and French men-of-war attacked the Dardanelles, Veniselos thought that the time had come for Greece to enter the war on the side of the Entente. The corollary would be of course that the Greek Army would assist in the capture of the Gallipoli peninsula. King Constantine nevertheless dissented from the Prime Minister's opinion here – on the ground that the interests of the country demanded that she should remain neutral; and in the face of such a clash with his Sovereign, El. Veniselos resigned from office...

...But the King recalled him after elections took place in May 1915. It was not long before another disagreement arose. Were Serbia to be attacked by Bulgaria, should Greece help the former? Veniselos requested to go to the assistance of the Serbs – according to a *latissimo sensu* interpretation of the famous 1913 treaty of alliance between Athens and Belgrade. The King, however, was adamant once more, for the true *raison d'État* demanded nothing but neutrality.

And so Veniselos handed in his resignation for a second time. Furthermore, he refused together with his friends and followers to participate in the new elections; and finally he broke off relations with his Sovereign *ipso facto* crossing the Rubicon. In the year 1916, the National Divide of the Greeks was a reality.

II

Eleutherios Veniselos was born in Mourniés, a village near Canea, those days the capital of Crete, in 1864. Thus, he appeared on the scene, when the island was still under the Ottoman sovereignty; and it was his father *Kyriakos* who had a great influence upon his character.

Kyriakos Veniselos was just an ironmonger shopkeeper in Canea; he had nonetheless a strong personality. Though mainly self-taught he was well educated and of course he hoped his son would be given a solid education (in trade affairs for the most part).

As far as Kyriakos' forefathers are concerned, only suppositions are permitted. Up to now, rumour has it that he was of high birth; in other words member of an aristocratic family originating from Mystras, in the southern Morea³, near Sparta; but no evidence was ever produced. On the other hand, there is a reliable testimony that he was simply a "Hellenized" Armenian. He was obviously from Asia Minor; and after a long series of adventures in Anatolia and in Greece he disembarked in Canea in the days of the Crimean War (1853-1856)⁴. As a result of his wanderings in southern Greece he was nicknamed *Binizelos*⁵; and in Crete he was finally known as "Veniselos", i.e. under the scholarly form of his nickname.

Far more important was the fact that upon his arrival in Crete he was already a naturalized Greek; thus his son was a Greek citizen "by birth". In fact, according to a law voted in 1856 by both the Greek Senate and Chamber of Deputies and put into effect that same year⁶, everybody whose father was a Greek national had *ipso facto* the Greek citizenship. The very name Veniselos consequently became a radiant one in Modern Greek History.

During the first stages of his Cretan period, Kyriakos Veniselos was a peddler; and during his journeys through some villages of the Canea district, he met a nice girl, Styliani Ploumidaki: it was the love at first sight. Kyriakos married his beloved, and she became Eleutherios' mother. She was a simple illiterate woman; but all her life she was devoted to her husband and children. Apart his trials and tribulations, Kyriakos had so typical a Greek family life as to make an impact on Nikos Kazantzakis⁷.

Nobody ever knew why his dear son was christened Eleutherios. The source of the name is *eleutheria*, a Greek word meaning freedom. Was that christening a symbolic gesture? Was it a premonition of the part the little boy would have in Modern Greek history as an ardent irredentist? In any case, the choice of the name was a good one; and even today many people in Greece are given that very name, for they live in the fond hope of being such illustrious men as Eleutherios Veniselos was.

Be that as it may; the young Eleutherios went to school first in Canea and afterward in Syros and in Athens. His father being a Greek subject, the whole family had to flee from Crete whenever the Cretan Christians stirred up troubles

³ Another name for the Peloponnese in Medieval and Modern times.

⁴ Manoussos Koundouros, *Historical and diplomatic revelations. Historic events, 1890-1923*(in Greek). Edited by Harikleia G. Demakopoulou and Eleutherios G. Skiadas (Athens: ELIA, 1997), p. 329.

⁵ A common name even today in the Peloponnese.

⁶ The law No.391/1856, art. 14-28 (mainly art. 14).

⁷ See for instance the latter's book *Kapetan Michalis* (in Greek).

against the Ottoman authorities. Nevertheless, the young Eleutherios was a very intelligent boy; and as early as the age of sixteen, he had already successfully finished his secondary education. Furthermore, he was fluent in French and in German. Of course, he preferred all his life to speak and to write Greek; Greek was his mother tongue and, through systematic study, he had acquired a deep knowledge of both forms of this language, i.e. of the vernacular or *demotic* as well as of the classical one. But Kyriakos used to be a Cerberean, a very severe guardian of the studies of his son: a trader should know German and French. So Eleutherios had no choice but conform to the paternal dictate...

About 1880, Kyriakos' business was prosperous; so he became convinced his shop was somehow a gateway to heaven for his son; and as soon as the latter disembarked in Canea with the secondary school diploma in his pocket, he was in a hurry to proclaim him an ironmonger shopkeeper's assistant. In other words, Eleutherios seemed to be doomed to be a trader for the rest of his life. He therefore became gloomy and nearly turned into a real misanthropist. As a matter of fact, he ardently wished to continue his studies in the University of Athens. But Kyriakos was adamant: his son ought to be a good shopkeeper, a big businessman if possible in order to earn money "for the family". His wife, i.e. the mother of Eleutherios, was much younger than Kyriakos; and one of the latter's sons, contracted by typhus as a baby, was an idiot. Who would take care of them, if Kyriakos died? The answer was easy to foresee: Eleutherios, the smartest member of the Veniselos family!

That was the way things stood, when there appeared a *deus ex machina*. The godsend was a certain George Zygomalas, the Greek consul at Canea. He was clear sighted enough to discern, after a visit to the ironmonger shop, Eleutherios' sharp mind. He was therefore insistent that Kyriakos send the young man to Athens University. Kyriakos was a Greek subject in Ottoman territory; he was accordingly dependent upon the protection of the Greek consular authorities. So, after the Zygomalas' intervention in his "family affairs", he had no choice but to submit. Thus, in October 1881 Eleutherios Veniselos enrolled in the Law School of the University of Athens; nonetheless, two years later Kyriakos was dead. His presentiment about the proximity of his own end proved to be right.

Eleutherios obtained his *ptychion*⁸ as late as 1887. In accordance with a tradition deep-rooted among Athens Law students, he rarely attended classes; but to tell the truth, he could hardly have done otherwise. His father's death left him as unique boss in the Canea shop. Ostensibly he kept running that business

but in reality he started liquidation proceedings; he intended after his graduation in Athens to do further studies in Germany, a Mecca in those days for Greek jurists. But he suddenly met his future wife, fell in love with her... and accordingly changed his plans: he settled in Canea and became a lawyer.

III

He became renowned quickly. In order to plead a cause, he asked for substantial sums of money and in a short time he had the means to set up house. In 1890 he married his beloved, Maria Katelouzou, a girl whose family had come to Crete from the Ionian Islands⁹. In 1893 she bore a son, Kyriakos, and a year later Sophocles, their second boy; but in that childbirth Maria died of puerperal fever.

Veniselos never got over it; he kept mourning his lost wife for the rest of his life. As a result, he usually wore black clothes and he had that widely known little beard; and because motherlessness nearly had a disastrous effect on the children's minds, he took the maternal rôle, too, in their early life. Nevertheless, in mid-1890s everything in Crete was in a turmoil as a new uprising of the island's Christian populations was going on. The Greek government as well as George I, King of the Hellenes, encouraged the revolutionaries; and under these circumstances, in 1897, the Sublime Porte declared war against Greece. The Greek Army was defeated within a few weeks; but as soon as the armistice was concluded, somehow a miracle was accomplished. In fact, the humiliating defeat turned into a diplomatic triumph: self-government was given to Crete, the apple of discord. To be sure, Ottoman suzerainty was preserved; nevertheless four major Powers, namely Britain, France, Russia, and Italy, assumed the administration of Crete; and Prince George of Greece, a son of King George I, was appointed High Commissioner of the Powers in the island.

IV

Prince George, henceforth the High Commissioner, disembarked in Crete in December 1898; his arrival was the cause of a frenzy of delight among the island's Christian populations; and gave Kazantzakis the chance of writing some of his most exuberant pages. Alas! In that very case, one should not trust appearances: things were already coming to a political head.

⁸ The Greek traditional university diploma, obtained after four years of studies; i.e. something between the Bachelor's and the Master's degree of an American or British university.

⁹ Namely from Cerigo; in other words Maria Katelouzou was most probably of a remote Italian origin.

Truth to tell, it was Veniselos to give rise to a scandal: he managed to come up against the High Commissioner in an astonishingly brief lapse of time. To be sure, Prince George was an avowed Russophile. He had great ties with the Romanov family, given that he had saved the life of the Crown Prince, the future Czar Nicholas II, when the latter had been, during a journey in Japan, the victim of a murder attempt. The Romanov House on the other hand had an important part in his appointment as the Powers' High Commissioner in Crete. So, as far as the future of the island was concerned, his views were more than clear: the very aim of his policy would be the abolition of the Sultan's suzerainty and therefore the union (*enosis*) of Crete and Greece. The means of fulfilling this intention? His personal and family connections throughout the royal and imperial courts of Europe. In all this scheme, the local Parliament would play a decorative rôle.

Veniselos had strong objections. He was already an eminent politician in the island's microcosm; and as a honest man he was quick to recognize that prince George's wise administration had made the island as prosperous as never before. Moreover, he tacitly agreed that dynastic connections were the more safe path to enosis; but in no case would he accept the degradation of Parliament. In other words, his own response to the High Commissioner's proposition "Enosis without Parliament" was harsh, even ruthless: "No Parliament? No Enosis!" (At least for the moment.) As a matter of fact, his alternative to the choice of prince George was the achievement of the largest possible "home rule" in Crete, in order to render the Sultan's suzerainty "but a shadow". And afterwards one would expect just the favourable opportunity for the enosis... or whatever.

In 1905, Veniselos decided on settling by force his dispute with the High Commissioner. A Veniselist rebellion started in Therisso, a little mountainous village; soon after that the Big Four had to intervene. Prince George abdicated; and he was succeeded by Alexander Zaïmis, a Greek politician (and a notorious mediocrity). Things seemed to be "normalized" again; nevertheless, the scheme: "disagreement- rupture-armed conflict" was henceforth the typical one in Veniselos' political life.

In August 1909, a military coup was triggered in Greece, near Athens¹⁰. It was successful; therefore, the Army officers required radical changes in the whole government apparatus. The 1897 humiliation was not to happen again; but Greek politicians seemed hesitant; and then appeared a second *deus ex machina*.

This one came in the form of Epaminondas Zymvrakakis, nicknamed *Pamikos*. He was a legendary figure, rather a Renaissance condottiere than a Greek Army officer. He was born in Athens but he was the "kid" of a well known

¹⁰ The so-called Goudi coup.

family from the Canea district, i.e. the very one in which Veniselos was born; and as a member of such a Cretan family¹¹ he made very soon his professional choice: soldiering!

He volunteered for the Greek Army as a private; soon after he became an NCO and finally he was commissioned in the Cavalry. He used to gain promotion not by seniority but either on the battleground or in the political arena (but even thanks to love affairs, too). In fact, his martial features with a huge, handlebar moustache marked such turning points in Modern Greek history as the 1909 coup in Athens, and the 1916 one in Salonika. Simultaneously he used to fight duels practically with everybody he disliked; and (amazingly enough) he survived. His prestige among junior officers -and women alike- was enormous. So when he realized that the developments in Greek public life which the Army wanted had reached deadlock, he had a truly inspired idea: The Army should put the country's fate into the hands of Veniselos. He was so successful in ousting Prince George from the High Commissioner's office! Accordingly, he seemed to be the "Chosen" one to carry out the reforms Greece desperately needed in those very days.

The junior officers gave a wholehearted support to the idea of Zymvrakakis; and given that real power was then in their hands nobody dared to object. As a result Veniselos disembarked in Piraeus in early September 1910¹². To tell the truth, *Pamikos'* brilliantly thought out idea might have implied serious complications, for Veniselos was born in Ottoman territory; but all was well. As a matter of fact (and as mentioned above) he was, thanks to his father's initiative and the 1856 Greek law No.391, a Greek national; and for the sake of Greece he formed a government shortly after his arrival in Athens.

V

In the period when Veniselos made his appearance as a leading figure in the arena of Greek political life, the country was in a state of weakness and, therefore, isolation. Veniselos, upon the advice of Jacob David Bourchier, *The Times* correspondent in the Balkans and his mentor, paved the way for a Graeco-Bulgarian rapprochement, the First Balkan War and the subsequent defeat of Turkey. Moreover, the 1913 Graeco-Serbian alliance bore an even more impressive fruit: the defeat of Bulgaria and the settling of a new borderline. Jannina, and Florina, and Salonica were henceforth cities in the Kingdom of

¹¹ The Zymvrakakis family is now extincted.

¹² Obviously, it was not the first the time he was in Athens for political reasons.

Greece. The country was no longer powerless; but it was in that very period that the First World War broke out - and the Greek National Divide alike.

Attentive readers of this veracious story will not doubt foresee what happened next: when Veniselos' opinions definitely clashed with the views of the King, the bellicose Zymvrakakis, the inimitable *Pamikos*, already a myth of the zealous Veniselists, headed a fresh coup (in Salonika this time); Veniselos fled from Athens to Macedonia and assumed the presidency of a "provisional government"; and in 1917 it was King Constantine's turn to flee from the Greek capital not to Salonika (of course) but to Switzerland. That same year Greece officially took the side of the Entente Powers; but by a strange twist of fate the war she entered so late was to last for her only until 1922.

In late 1918 the First World War was over in Europe; and in 1919 a treaty between the winners and the defeated Germany was signed in Versailles, near Paris. Thomas Woodrow Wilson, the President of the United States, was universally acclaimed as *arbiter mundi*. And then something very strange happened: Veniselos managed to win the trust of the reticent Wilson.

In actual fact, Wilson was not at all disposed to meet Veniselos; but in the end, he assented to his request for a meeting, and Veniselos was summoned to the President's office. Wilson received him coolly, haughtily: he believed the Greek premier was ready to display to him the claims and rights of his country...

...But he was committing a fatal mistake; for Veniselos, a former Greek lawyer and the son of an alleged Armenian trader, had long before prepared his performance. He adopted therefore a quite pathetic attitude, and he began reciting his rôle: "...I am not here, Mr President, in the interest of Greece but for the sake of the League of Nations. I have some ideas in mind. Would you like to hear what I have to say?"¹³

The passion of Veniselos' comedy overwhelmed the President of the United States, seeing that -sentimentally speaking- the League of Nations¹⁴ was the latter's Achilles heel. It was in that way that Veniselos found a key to Wilson's heart but also the path towards the satisfaction of his country's claims; for Wilson henceforth turned into an enthusiastic advocate of Greek interests. And on April 29th, 1919, the President of the United States as well as Georges Clemenceau and David Lloyd George, i.e. the French Prime Minister and the British one, mandated the Greek Army to occupy Smyrna.

Embarking on this "Ionian Campaign" was perhaps Veniselos' gravest error; for even since 1915 Ioannis Metaxas, the acting chief of staff at those

¹³ Steph. I. Stephanou, *Eleutherios Veniselos, a creator of history* (in Greek), Athens, 1977, p. 117. (And some family recollections, too.)

days, had pointed out that *Greece could never hold territory in Asia Minor*¹⁵. Moreover, some days after the Greeks occupied Smyrna, in May 1919, Mustafa Kemal arrived in Anatolia from Constantinople in order to organize an armed nationalist movement. In other words, as far as the famous Veniselos' Ionian Vision was concerned, the inverse countdown had already begun.

VI

In 1917, after King Constantine had been ousted, Veniselos imposed upon Greece an apparently parliamentary régime, which in reality was a purely authoritarian one. As far as his foreign policy options were concerned, he was deeply convinced he was right; therefore, he did not see the populace did not at all want the war. In 1916 moreover, French and British men-of-war blockaded Piraeus and Athens; as a result, many people died of famine. In November of that same year, French marines attempted to occupy some key points in the Greek capital; the people rose up in arms and drove back the attackers. Worst of all, the very way the Entente Powers ousted the King Constantine in 1917 was more than humiliating; as a matter of fact, the whole matter was a traumatic experience for the large majority of the populace, mainly in the southern regions of the Kingdom. As a corollary, in early and mid- 1918, bitterness was prevalent among the Greeks; but Veniselos was still toying with the idea of an imminent Allied victory being enough to get all this forgotten.

Nonetheless, in August 1920, almost fifteen months after the occupation of Smyrna by Greek troops a peace treaty between the Allied Powers¹⁶ and Turkey was signed in Sèvres, near Paris. Greece acquired the Eastern Thrace¹⁷ (practically as far as the gates of Constantinople) and the Archipelago islands except the Dodecanese, which was given to Italy. Ottoman sovereignty was maintained merely in Asia Minor; nevertheless, an independent Kurdistan was to be created there (Armenia regarded as already existing). Even the Smyrna district was transferred to Greece; but such an important harbour was to remain (for some years) under the Sultan's suzerainty. As a matter of fact, it was scheduled to hold there a plebiscite in the mid-1920s; and the population could decide that way whether the Smyrna district would be annexed to Greece or not.

¹⁴ I.e. the precursor of today's UNO.

¹⁵ See Douglas Dakin, *The Unification of Greece* (London: Ernest Benn, 1972), p. 205.

¹⁶ Namely the British Empire, France, Italy and Japan as well as Greece, Belgium, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Armenia, Hedjaz, Czechoslovakia, and the Kingdom of the Serbs, the Croatians, and the Slovenes.

¹⁷ Greece had already been given Western Thrace, a part of the Bulgarian Kingdom till 1919.

In short, in the opinion of many people it was clear that the famous *Megaloidea* had been finally achieved; though Constantinople was still the capital of the Ottoman territories, a major Christian State was built in the Near East. The Greek flag henceforth flew on both the littorals of the Aegean Sea; and some courageous evzones managed to take photographs of themselves in front of Aya Sofia (still a mosque in those days). According to Veniselos' hopes and beliefs, it seemed therefore that Lethe¹⁸ was to prevail in the tragedy of the political life of Modern Greece.

Alas for all these hopes! Alas for the Greeks, the Armenians (and the Kurds)! Anybody with a talent for observation might spot some dark points in this matter of the Sublime Porte's demolition. First of all, the President of the United States was already back in America. Of course, in accordance with his own wishes, the League of Nations Covenant had been made an integral part of the treaty of Sèvres; but this meant practically nothing. Once Wilson returned to the States, he tried to persuade the Americans of the good intentions he had in founding the League of Nations. The outcome of his campaign is widely known: he was struck by apoplexy and segmental paralysis; and he died as early as 1924¹⁹. All that meant the American involvement in the Near East affairs was (temporarily) over.

At this time, the Turkish nationalist movement, under Mustafa Kemal's leadership, gained more and more in importance; simultaneously Kemal became more and more aggressive against the Sultan (in his mind merely an acolyte of the Allies). Henceforth he was a major headache for the victors of the First World War; and the British and French Commanders-in-Chief had stated that it was impossible to subdue him militarily. And then Veniselos committed another error: he declared the Greek Army able to have the upper hand in Anatolia; in other words, Greece had no need of the Allies' aid.

VII

He was terribly mistaken. As a matter of fact, the Asia Minor Moslems were exhausted after eight years of practically uninterrupted war²⁰. Nevertheless, once the Greeks disembarked in Smyrna they were by no means ready to rise up in arms. Why so? Because the footholds gained in Anatolia by the French, the British and the Italians, the territories occupied by them would be evacuated someday; their final withdrawal was beyond any doubt. But the Greeks had come to stay;

¹⁸ A word for oblivion in classical Greek.

¹⁹ He was born in 1856.

²⁰ The 1911-1912 Italo-Turkish war; the Balkan wars (1912-1913); and the First World War (1914-1918).

they never would give up the Asia Minor regions they managed to gain unless by force of arms. Almost any city and important village in Anatolia had an ancient or mediaeval Greek name, too. Thus the Greek campaign in Asia Minor rapidly turned into a struggle for existence between two nations.

Venizelos was no longer in a position to realize all that. On August 25th, 1920, i.e. a couple of weeks after the signature of the Sèvres treaty, the Chamber of Deputies, in Athens, awarded him the highest honor in Greece; and some days later, a huge open air festivity was held in the famous *stadion* of the Greek capital: priests and cantors were chanting psalms, troops were parading, crowds were cheering. Venizelos was at the height of his fame and he felt a demigod; and, in those glorious summer days, he reached the fateful decision to hold elections.

As a result, the Greek Army field officers got terribly upset; they were in a position to know better than the Prime Minister the mood of the soldiery; and they warned Venizelos that despite his diplomatic triumphs the Kemalists were nonetheless bitter foes; and they explained to him gently but firmly that the outcome of the conflict would be difficult to foresee. In brief, mainly by political means the Greeks were able to get themselves out of the mess, but this presupposed Venizelos' staying in power; but an anti-Venizelist temper was still prevalent in Southern Greece. An inescapable corollary therefore: the days were by no means ripe for elections.

Amazingly enough, Venizelos proved to be somewhat mulish in those very circumstances. Elections did take place on November 1st, 1920, i.e. only ten days after the rejection of the whole Wilsonian policy in the US presidential elections. The ones held in Greece were also a Venizelists' crushing defeat. Venizelos fled the country; and a couple of weeks later a referendum, too, was held. The results were easily foreseeable: King Constantine was panegyrically re-established on his throne.

VIII

Nobody knows why the new administration in Greece preferred to continue with the war. Neither the King nor the government seemed to have illusions about the campaign in Asia Minor which they justly regarded as a Venizelist action. Military operations were nonetheless going on; and enthusiastic young Army officers used to turn somersaults publicly in the streets of Athens...

...But simultaneously, in Anatolia, the Kemal resistance was becoming fiercer. İsmet pasha, Kemal's alter ego, twice stopped the Greek advance at

İnönü, a village the name of which would later be his own, too²¹. Furthermore, in the summer of 1921, the Greek troops failed to capture Ankara, the capital of the Kemalist Anatolia. And then the entire front became strangely quiet: no news at all reached either Smyrna or Athens.

The case of Mustafa Kemal was (somehow) alike the one of Veniselos; both were born outside the very core of their respective countries. Salonika has been Kemal's birthplace; and it was there he was nicknamed *Kemal* by his professor in Mathematics. As a matter of fact, that teacher was the first to grasp his exceptional abilities and to foresee his future course as a Nation Builder²².

He was born in 1881; his parents were poor; consequently, he chose soldiering as the career the most suitable to a good Ottoman patriot without means. As early as the early 1920s it was rumoured that his forefathers were not Turks but Slavs or even Jews converted to Islam; it matters little, for he was the one who, at such a turning point as the end of the Great War, was able to embody the very conscience of the Turkish people; and so, the most important date in all his career seems to be August 27, 1922, a Saturday.

It was on that very day, in the morning, that a Greek clergyman was crossing downtown Smyrna; he was going to his usual workroom, by the metropolitan's²³ office. He met suddenly a group of strange horsemen; they looked irregular, most probably a platoon of those Turks who, loyal to the Sultan and hostile to Kemal, had taken the Greek side in the war. Our clergyman was anxious; rumours were running that Turkish troops had broken through the Greek lines, that their advance was lightning. Where was the front? Where the Greek Army was still fighting?

These questions were put to the strange horsemen by the worried Greek pope²⁴. They looked at him chilly; and one of them answered him harshly, in Turkish. And finally the poor priest could understand what was going on: they were Turks, Kemalists!

In actual fact, the Greek Army had collapsed in mid-August, after a sudden attack of the Kemalist troops. Moreover, on August 20, major general Nicholas Trikoupis, the freshly appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Greek forces in Asia Minor, was taken prisoner. Some days later the Greek authorities were abolished in Smyrna; as a result the personnel fled to Greece. Finally, on the

²¹ In honour of his military skills and his contribution to the Turkish victory.

²² *Kemal* (or *Kiamil*) means "great", "perfect".

²³ A metropolitan in the Greek Church is the ecclesiastical head of a province. Chrysostom was those days the one of the Smyrna diocese; shortly after the city's capture by the Turks he was shot dead.

²⁴ Nothing to do, of course, with the Pope of Rome. A pope in the Orthodox Church is only a parish priest.

night of August 26/ 27 ²⁵ the Greek men-of-war weighed anchor. The Ionian metropolis was henceforth an open town.

Nevertheless, the Christian population was not panic-stricken. Several warships, British, American, French, were still offshore Smyrna. Moreover a lot of people were protégés, i.e. had a Western Power's citizenship. The Greeks, on the other hand, were still believing that, if Christians would get into trouble, the Armenians would be the main victims; and the Armenians shut themselves up in their houses and were anxiously waiting to see what the fate had in store for them.

On August 28th, Smyrna was fully occupied by Turkish regular troops. In the beginning everything seemed to be normal; but during the night of August 30th, a fire broke out which destroyed almost the entire city.

Sweet were those August and September nights on the seashores of the Archipelago; but instead Smyrna turned into a gateway to hell. And thus, from this modern version of the Miletus tragedy, a new status quo emerged in the whole Near East area.

IX

It was the Lausanne treaty that crystallized the new status quo; moreover, it became the cradle of a Graeco-Turkish rapprochement, *ab ovo* moribund but (amazingly enough) always hopeful.

The first, fruitless, stage phase of the Lausanne conference lasted from November 1922 to February 1923. The second one lasted ninety days: it began at mid-April 1923 and it was brought at an end three months later. In fact, the Peace Treaty of Lausanne was signed on July 24th, 1923²⁶. The winners of WW I on one hand and Mustafa Kemal's Modern Turkey, on the other, were the signatories; and this treaty is still valid today.

Eleutherios Veniselos was the head of the Greek delegation at the Lausanne conference; Demetrius Kaklamanos, the Greek Minister at London, assisted him²⁷ nominally; nevertheless, Andreas Michalakopoulos was his main, his real assistant. He was the leader of the Liberal party's right wing (and perfectly fluent in French).

Michalakopoulos was born in Patras in 1880; he wished to be an Army officer, but his father's premature death forced him to study Law. Michalakopoulos family, in fact, had a deep rooted reputation as jurists; and

²⁵ Dates are given according to the Julian calendar.

²⁶ Accordingly to the Gregorian Calendar, introduced in Greece in early 1923.

Andreas had practically no solution but to follow the family tradition. He studied therefore in Athens and afterwards in France and in Germany; and once returned to his birthplace he managed to become very soon a well established lawyer.

As early as 1910, he was a member of the Parliament; and a year later the Minister of National Economy. And given that Veniselos used to speak perfectly all languages except foreign ones, Michalakopoulos soon became his very confidant, his *éminence grise*²⁸. After the 1920 elections he fled from Greece to France; his presence therefore at Lausanne was due to the radical political changes that had already taken place in Greece.

In fact, the 1922 disaster brought about a putsch in Greece. King Constantine abdicated; his successor was George II, i.e. his elder son. The new administration was a Veniselist one; it was only natural therefore that Veniselos was appointed the head of the Greek delegation at Lausanne and that he was assisted by Michalakopoulos, his adviser. The latter, in fact, had a vast scholarship²⁹ and a rich experience of international machinations and conferences³⁰. Both Veniselos and Michalakopoulos were substantially helped by Andreas Michalopoulos, the former's private secretary³¹.

At the same time, another important development was taking place: the political rise of Alexandros Papanastassiou. As mentioned above, he was the leader of the Veniselists' left wing. He was born in 1876 in Tripolitsa, i.e. the very center of the Morea³². He studied Law in Athens; and as a graduate student Sociology, Economics and Philosophy, at the Universities of Berlin and Heidelberg. In 1910 he was already a member of the Parliament; and at once adopted radical ideas. From 1917 to 1920, i.e. during Veniselos' "parliamentary dictatorship", he was Minister of Communications; but after the 1920 crushing defeat of the Veniselist camp, he did not follow his leader (as for instance Michalakopoulos did). He stayed in Greece; and he embarked on adventures the impact of which would be supremely important.

In fact, though politically powerless, Papanastassiou did not at all sit idly by. As soon as King Constantine was back in Greece, he went immediately into

²⁷ He had signed, as a Greek plenipotentiary, also the Sèvres treaty.

²⁸ As a Minister without portfolio, he was Veniselos' unofficial adviser at the Paris 1919 Peace Conference, at Paris.

²⁹ He owned one of the largest private libraries (about 30,000 volumes).

³⁰ See Édouard Driault and Michel Lhéritier, *Histoire diplomatique de la Grèce de 1821 à nos jours*, vol. V (Paris: Les Presses Universitaires de France, 1926), p.310; N. Petsalis-Diomidis, *Greece at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919* (Salonika: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1978), p. 119 (note 6).

³¹ From 1917 to 1924 (he used to sign in French as *Mikalopoulos*); he assisted Veniselos mainly in Thucydides' History translation into Modern Greek. See Eve Zachariadou-Holmberg, *Veniselos' commentary on Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War* (in Greek), Athens: Liberal Club - Eleutherios Veniselos Museum, 1991, pp. iii, xiv (note 18).

the political attack against the monarchy; and things came to a climax in February 1922, when a so-called "Democratic Manifesto" was published and widespread throughout the country. Papanastassiou was the main writer; and by no means he minced his words. "Greece", he explained straight out, "was created by her children, who thought, who struggled and worked hard; the country therefore could not be regarded as a royal house's fief"; and the corollary was that King Constantine must abdicate, given that his return on the throne jeopardized the very treaty of Sèvres.

Experts in Modern Greek History will readily foresee the next part of this truthful story: Papanastassiou was sentenced to 3 years in jail in Aegina (somewhat a Saronic Bay Alcatraz in that time³³). Nevertheless, he was not at all hapless. Soon after his imprisonment, the above mentioned 1922 putsch took place and, as a result, power was seized by the Veniselists; King Constantine abdicated at last and (inescapable corollary) Papanastassiou was released. He boarded therefore the first steamer to Piraeus and within a few hours he was back in Athens³⁴. In the months and the years to come he would prove to be a catalyst in the Greek political life.

As a matter of fact, elections were regarded as imminent; and Papanastassiou believed he would be an influential member of the new (democratic) Parliament. In fact, he was henceforth the strongman in Greece. Why so? For the leadership of the 1922 coup d'État (that had ousted once more King Constantine etc.) trusted him and only him and practically nobody but him. In other words, as far the Greek politicians were concerned, he was (thanks mainly to his "Democratic Manifesto" adventure) the one who could act upon the rebelled Army.

X

The elections believed to be imminent in 1922 were finally held as late as December 1923; nevertheless Papanastassiou, the heroic advocate of democracy, whom encircled the halo of his jail days, had his old mandate triumphantly renewed in the new Parliament. Veniselos on the other hand did not put himself as a candidate. King Constantine, his enemy, had died in Palermo³⁵ of azotaemia at the age of only 55; and Veniselos, thanks to his 1920 bitter

³² As mentioned above, another word for the Peloponnese.

³³ Today a dreamed vacation place.

³⁴ Aegina is nearby Piraeus, the harbour of Athens.

³⁵ The capital of Sicily.

experience a unique connoisseur henceforth of the Greek politics, was not at all disposed to endure his own Palermo downtown Athens.

Alas! Fate had new triumphs for him in store... Although he did not stand as a candidate, although he had formally stated his public life was definitely over, he was *in absentia* elected in... twenty constituencies! He learned the news at Paris, where he enjoyed happy days in his famous 22, rue Beaujon (Paris VII^e) flat³⁶. Duty was calling! Thus, against his own will, finally he boarded a train south. A couple of weeks later, on January 11th, 1924, he was once more the Prime Minister of Greece.

But it was in those very days that the final act of the tragicomedy began; for the demigod of the Parliamentarianism in Modern Hellas had finally met his peer in matter of military coups; and the latter was nobody else but Alexandros Papanastassiou, his former disciple. Thanks to his spell in that Aegina jail, the latter had all the seditious Army roaring on his side. He was already saluted as a Heracles of the First Greek Republic (to be proclaimed); nonetheless he had in practice the tendency to be the ichneumon³⁷ of a would-be pan-Balkan democracy, a kind of Balkan Confederation.

King George II, who had succeeded his father after the latter's abdication, had been regarded from the very beginning of WW I as an avowed germanophile³⁸. Nevertheless the defeats suffered by the Germans in 1918 and by the Greeks in 1922 made him a sincere admirer of a parliamentary régime's merits; and it was *urbi et orbi* that he tirelessly exposed essential maxims of the constitutional orthodoxy...

In vain! Papanastassiou used to take very seriously his rôle as a democratic mongoose. The very fact that Elisabeth, the new Queen Consort of Greece, was born a Romanian princess³⁹ had no effect but to infuriate him. He wished to destroy every King (at least in the Balkans); and their siblings alike.

Venizelos, an unequalled diplomat (and by nature magnanimous), tried to protect both Royal Houses, Greek and Romanian: he was an established political prophet, an almighty premier, somewhat a Zeus in the arena of the European diplomacy. But now he had to brave a Heracles assisted by an Army capable of the worst. As a result, stormy scenes took place in the Greek Chamber; and Venizelos nearly met the fate of President Wilson, his mentor. He had a heart

³⁶ Purchased by his second wife, Helena Schilizzi, a very wealthy member of the London Greek colony.

³⁷ The herpestes ichneumon, i.e. the African (Pharaonic) and Asiatic quadruped and not the American ichneumon fly. It is on the former, commonly known as mongoose, that Rudyard Kipling modelled one of the most popular characters of his *Jungle Books*.

³⁸ See mainly Helena Venizelos, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

attack but, thanks God, no apoplexy and no paralysis struck him. He felt nonetheless his well running dry; therefore, he quitted hastily the premiership and sailed back to France.

So, on March 12th, 1924, the time was ripe for Papanastassiou, who formed his first government; and twelve days later Greece was proclaimed a republic. Nonetheless, in July 1924, the Papanastassiou government fell; and it was Andreas Michalakopoulos, the former Veniselos' *éminence grise*, who formed a new administration. This administration was a hybrid one; for Papanastassiou, knocked out in theory, still had the real power, given that the Army kept trusting (and backing) him. As a corollary, Michalakopoulos could do practically nothing, unless (tacitly) authorized by the Herculean guardian of the First Hellenic Republic. This development produced great confusion throughout Greece⁴⁰; and as a result one more military coup was successfully triggered. Now it was not Zymvrakakis who had the initiative, for he had accidentally died three years before; as a result, it was another legendary officer, Theodoros Pangalos, who headed the putsch.

XI

Pangalos was (politically speaking) a Papanastassiou's protégé. (Or vice versa, he was an Army officer whose Papanastassiou used to be a political protégé; it is up the reader to decide for.) It does not matter; be that as it may; for the crux of the whole issue is that Pangalos, once he seized the power, he began latently but nonetheless frenetically to prepare... a fresh war against Turkey! He accomplished therefore a kind of Entente with Belgrade, giving the Serbs rights of...sovereignty in the port of Salonica; and with Albania as well, by not compelling the Chams, i.e. the Albanian speaking Moslems of Southern Epirus, to leave Greece, as they were compelled to do according to a literal interpretation of the Lausanne treaty⁴¹.

Thanks to all of these achievements on the part of Pangalos, the Balkans nearly exploded once more. Thus another coup (against the seditious general this time) became more than necessary. At last, as early as 1926, he was militarily ousted from power; but Greece was in such a muddle that everybody felt only a Veniselos' Third Coming could put an end to the general chaos.

³⁹ It is noteworthy that, on the other hand, Charles, the Crown Prince of Romania, had married as early as 1921 a sister of George II, King of the Hellenes.

⁴⁰ See mainly the volume *Alexandros Papanastassiou: His social, political and economic ideas* (in Greek), Athens: Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, 1990.

⁴¹ See Dimitris Michalopoulos, "The Moslems of Chamuria and the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey", *Balkan Studies* (Salonica), vol. 27, No. 2 (1986), p. 309.

And Veniselos left his Parisian Olympus and came to Greece. In August 1928 he gained the elections and formed a government (practically his last one); and during the four next years Greece remained quiet... In fact, Veniselos never talked rubbish. He did commit errors, even some huge ones; nevertheless these errors were due to the criteria he used to base his policy on and rarely to a deliberate distortion of the reality⁴². Thus, in order to save Salonica from the mortal embrace of the Serbs, backed mainly by the French, but even the Czechs and the British, he realized a spectacular rapprochement with Benito Mussolini's Fascist Italy⁴³. This new alliance meant simply that in case of a new World War Greece, most probably, would not be at the side of the United Kingdom and France. Moreover, it is certain that in the early 1930s he planned a crucial shake-up in the Greek political system – apparently on the USA model but in actual fact along clearly authoritarian lines⁴⁴.

These decisions were fateful ones; and having lost the confidence of his traditional Western friends, he lost also the 1933 elections. As a result, he tried another putsch in 1935: it was the last one in his life; and it failed. Even today nobody knows clearly how and why the Liberals, then still controlling the Army and undoubtedly expert in the matter of military coups, proved themselves incapable of seizing power. At any rate, Veniselos sought refuge in Italy; but afterwards he went back to Paris, to his famous *rue Beaujon* flat; it was there that he would spend the rest of his life.

XII

Like his father, he, too, had a premonition about his impending death; and this feeling proved to be true: Eleutherios Veniselos died in the French capital on March 18th, 1936. It was aboard a man-of-war that his mortal remains were transferred for burial in Crete; and throughout Greece refugees from Turkey mourned for the statesman whom, regardless of his errors and miscalculations, they regarded as their **Father**.

⁴² Although in some cases, anxious to find justification for his policy and tactics, he did falsify facts *a posteriori*. And as rule he was prepared to do almost everything (**even** falsifications of facts) in order to help the Armenians.

⁴³ See Dimitris Michalopoulos, *Eleutherios Veniselos and the Yugoslav issue* (in Greek), Athens: Liberal Club–Eleutherios Veniselos Museum, 1991.

⁴⁴ See mainly Nicholas Antonopoulos, *Eleutherios Veniselos' ideas on the revision of the 1927 constitution* (in Greek), Athens, 1995.

On August 4th of that same year, Ioannis Metaxas, a former Army officer and the confidant *par excellence* of the late King Constantine, imposed an authoritarian –though anglophilic- régime upon Greece; in the meantime, King George II, whom Papanastassiou had ousted in 1924, was restored on his throne (alone this time, for he had already divorced, in Bucharest, from Elisabeth, his Queen Consort). All this was too much for Alexandros Papanastassiou: as mentioned, on November 17th, 1936, he died in his very house of a heart attack. Michalakopoulos' fate was somewhat different: as a "conservative Veniselist" and for the sake of parliamentarianism he made an effort to compromise with the King. Metaxas smelled the business and the state security acted rapidly. As a result, Veniselos' *éminence grise* was interned in Paros, a Cyclades island. It was there that his health (failing already) was mortally impaired; and he died on March 27th, 1938⁴⁵.

And so the Wilsonian maxims, wholeheartedly shared by Veniselos despite his *comédie parisienne*, were nowhere put into practice. Moreover, the smart translation Papanastassiou wished to make of those maxims in Balkan terms never took place. It is at this very beginning of the twenty-first century that the above maxims, "translations" and practices prove to have survived and are "fashionable" once more. Nonetheless, by no means they bring peace and prosperity to our world; on the contrary, it is the violence and corruption which again have the upper hand...

⁴⁵ In Athens, where he was hastily transferred.