The Quest for Enosis: The visit of the Greek Cypriot Deputation to London in October November 1929. A view from the Greek archives

Klapsis, Antonis

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The signature of the Lausanne Peace Treaty on 24th July 1923 marked the beginning of a new period in the history of the Cyprus Question, at least from a legal point of view, as Turkey officially recognized the annexation of the island proclaimed by Great Britain on 5 November 1914 (Article 20). Thus, London acquired full legal sovereignty over Cyprus, which as a result became an undisputed British possession. For the majority of the Greek Cypriot population of the island, however, this development did not seem to coincide with their national aspirations. Ever since 1878, when the Sublime Port ceded Cyprus to the British Empire as an exchange to London’s engagement to maintain the integrity of the Ottoman dominions against Russia, the Greek Cypriots did not hide their desire for Union (Enosis) of their homeland with Greece. Even though the Greek Cypriots did not engage in a mass struggle against the colonial authorities during the first decades of the British rule when Cyprus was still officially part of the Ottoman Empire, the dream of Enosis remained alive. A much more active policy would be adopted only after the annexation of the island by Great Britain, as it was then made obvious that the British occupation received a permanent character. The fact, after all, that in 1915, that is during World War I, London decided to offer Cyprus to Greece in order to persuade the latter to help Serbia against Bulgaria, was thought from the Greek Cypriot point of view as a tangible proof of the recognition of their desires from the colonial power, even though the offer was rejected from the Greek government and was never again officially repeated.

In this context, the leaders of the Greek Cypriot community seemed to believe that after the end of World War I circumstances were more favorable for the satisfaction of their demands. Thus, in 1921 the Greek Orthodox Church together with parts of the Greek Cypriot elites decided to found the Political Organization of Cyprus, which primal goal was to promote the demand for Enosis. Their mission, however, would soon prove a rather difficult one. The conclusion of the Lausanne Peace Treaty offered them the first obvious disappointment, which was soon followed by yet another one, as the British – almost immediately after Lausanne – refused to take into serious consideration the Greek Cypriot proposals for administrative changes that would enable the implementation of a wider measure of self-government on the island. What is more, when in 1925 the British government decided to reform the 1882 constitutional arrangement, it was made obvious that London was not prepared to grant the Greek Cypriot majority with more privileges than in the past. Cyprus became a Crown Colony and the High Commissioner was granted the title of Governor, but even though the elected Greek Cypriot members of the Legislative Council were increased from nine to twelve, the Turkish Cypriots retained their three seats and the official members were also increased to nine in order to deny the Greek Cypriots a parliamentary majority.

The 1925 constitutional reforms, however limited from a practical point of view they were, were soon followed by a change in people. In November 1926 the new Governor, Sir Ronald Storrs, arrived in Cyprus. Storrs had the fame of being a Philhellene and admirer of the ancient Greek culture and spirit, thus bringing with him new hopes for changes in the internal level. Indeed, it soon became obvious that Storrs was determined to justify the hopes which were created immediately after his appointment. In this context, his most spectacular achievement was undoubtedly his decisive contribution to the abolition of the Tribute, an annual sum of initially £92,800, which was later reduced to £42,800, to pay for the Ottoman debts raised in Great Britain. The Tribute constituted a matter of great importance for the local population. Thus, the Governor managed to further improve his image among the Cypriots, both Greek and Turkish; and the letter appealed to him by the members of the Legislative Council on 5 September 1927, left no doubts about that: “We are most grateful to Your Excellency for the great care and consideration which prompted your appeal to relieve Cyprus from the heavy burden of the Turkish Debt charge. The happy answer of the Imperial Government has fulfilled all Cypriot aspirations concerning this burden, and in the apt words of your Excellency, spring has indeed been restored to the year.”

But the good days were not about to last for long. The year 1928 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the British occupation of Cyprus, and Storrs wanted to celebrate the Jubilee. However, the Greek Cypriots, who wanted to manifest their devotion to the ideal of Enosis, refused to participate in the celebrations, whereas the Greek Cypriot Press accused the Governor that he only wanted to promote his personal prestige17. Thus, the Jubilee constituted – in an ironic sense – probably the first important point of friction

1 The Ottoman Empire had already recognized the British annexation of Cyprus by the Sevres Peace Treaty: Given the fact, however, that the latter was never ratified, it remained a dead letter. For more details about the discussions about the Cyprus Question during the Lausanne Peace Conference see C. Svolopoulos, “The Lausanne Peace Treaty and the Cyprus Problem” in: Greece and Great Britain during World War I (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1985), pp. 241–243.
5 Diplomatic and Historical Archives of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs [= A.G.M.F.A.], 1923, 7.5, Kaklamanos to Ministry of
between Storrs and the political Greek Cypriot elite. The Greek Government, taking every precaution in order not to appear as intervening in the affair, advised the Greek Cypriots to abstain from any riots and to avoid writing offensive articles against the British in their newspapers. Indeed, Greek Cypriots, whether following the advice from Athens or not, avoided to further trigger the tension, but at the same time they appeared determined to appeal once again to the British government, asking for Enosis with Greece. The result was, nevertheless, the same as in the past: London clearly stated that the question was conclusively closed, thus disappointing once again the Greek Cypriots. The latter, however, were not willing to give up their struggle so easily. In fact, when Storrs returned to Cyprus on 18 October 1928 after a trip to Great Britain, the Greek Cypriot mayor of Famagusta did not hesitate to close his welcome speech by referring to the desires of his compatriots for Union with Greece.

Greek Cypriot nationalism was on the rise and almost nothing could be done to silence it. The situation further worsened after the publication of the new Penal Code of Cyprus. The Cypriots reacted against it on the one hand because of its inhuman articles (some of which for example permitted tortures like the use of whip), and on the other as a result of the unilateral way it was implemented since it had not been adopted by the Legislative Council. It was evident that the Greek Cypriots were determined to stick firmly to their demand for Enosis, a fact that was further underlined in January 1929 when Archbishop Kyrillos sent a Memorial to the Presidents and the Members of the House of Commons and the House of Lords, as well as the religious leaders of Britain and the British Press, asking again for Union with Greece.

In this context, the victory of the Labour Party in the British elections of 30 May 1929 seemed to open a “window of opportunity” for the Greek Cypriots in their quest for Enosis. After all, the Labours were thought to be less reluctant towards this demand and their leader, the new British Prime Minister Ramsay McDonald, had publicly stated during the International Socialist Congress held in Berne in 1919 that he would consent to the self-determination of the Cypriot people if his party was ever to rise to power. Thus, almost immediately after the British elections and the formation of the new government, the Greek Cypriots decided to compile a new Memorial, which they would submit to the Secretary for the Colonies, asking for Union with Greece. For this reason, the Bishop of Kition Nikodemos (Mylonas) and the lawyer Stavros Stavrinakis, both elected members of the Legislative Council, were entrusted to travel to London, where they would act as “ambassadors” of the unredeemed Greek Cypriot people. The Deputies were to be assisted in their task by Zenon Rossides, who would act as the secretary of the Deputation.

The compilation of such a Memorial was not of course something new, as various similar attempts had been made in the past. However, for the first time after the conclusion of the Lausanne Peace Treaty, the Greek Cypriots were asking from the Greek Government to help them, by recommending the two “ambassadors” to prominent British personalities, in order to achieve the desired goal. The Greek consul to Larnaca Dionisios Inglessis was nevertheless extremely reluctant towards such mediation from the part of Athens, as he feared that it would be extremely difficult to keep it a secret – primarily because of the tendency of the Greek Cypriot politicians not to keep secrets. Inglessis’ views naturally affected the Greek government and so a few days before Nikodemos and Stavrinakis arrived in London, Athens instructed the Greek ambassador Dimitrios Kaklamanos to help the Greek Cypriot Deputation, transmitting at the same time Inglessis’ fears and doubts. From his part, Kaklamanos seemed willing to offer his help to the Deputation, but on condition that he would first be convinced for the discretion of its members. He also added that the Deputation should be considered as an expression of the political parties in Great Britain, and not just the Labours, because even if the latter were ready to accept some of the Greek Cypriot proposals, it would be almost impossible to do so without the consent of the rest. Finally, Kaklamanos underlined that the Greek Cypriot Memorial should be moderate, avoiding remarks that would have a bad impression on the British side.

The Greek government was in full agreement with Kaklamanos’ suggestions, and when the Greek Cypriot Deputation reached London, the Greek ambassador, they were also convinced about the necessity to follow his line. Kaklamanos explained to Nikodemos and Stavrinakis that according to his opinion the main Greek Cypriot demand should remain that of Enosis and not that of self-government. Indeed, the Greek Cypriot letter addressed to the Secretary of State for the Colonies Lord Passfield, was based more or less on Kaklamanos’ ideas. The Deputation underlined the fact that the Greek inhabitants of Cyprus had welcomed the occupation of their island by Great Britain in 1878 “because they looked upon it as a transitory stage which would eventually lead to their only legitimate and decisive political settlement, namely union with their mother-country Greece”. Despite their continuous appeals, however, the British government had repeatedly refused to fulfill the national desires of the Greek Cypriots. Thus, the latter were once again asking what they thought it was their natural right: their national independence in the form of their political Union with Greece, urging at the same time London to follow its own generous precedent associated with the Ionian Islands.

16 Νέος Κυπριακός Φύλαξ [New Cyprus Guardian], 15 August 1928.
17 Αζήτεια [Truth], 19 October 1928.
20 Γιάννης Π. Πικρός, Ο Βενιζέλος και το Κυπριακό (Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Νέος Κυπριακός Φύλαξ, 1977), 84-85.
23 Richter, op.cit., p. 376.
29 Ibidem.
30 A.G.M.F.A., 1929, A/22/III, Greek Cypriot Deputation to Lord Pass-
Kaklamanos’ insistence on the demand for Enosis was directly associated with his perceptions about the situation in Cyprus. The Greek diplomat was afraid that if the Greek Cypriots were granted with a status of wider self-government, they would soon find themselves politically divided, a development which would tend to weaken their devotion to the idea of Enosis31. Athens, however, did not seem willing to share these fears. The Greek Foreign Minister Andreas Michalakopoulos, for example, even though he approved Kaklamanos’ suggestions about the demand for Enosis, believed that the self-government itself did not constitute a threat against the policy of Enosis. Michalakopoulos explained that it was highly unlikely for London to consent to the demand for Enosis, because in this case the Labour government would appear as undermining the unity of the British Empire. Thus, if the demand for Enosis was rejected as expected, the Greek Cypriot Deputation should seek to secure some reforms in the administration of the island, which according to Michalakopoulos would constitute the first step towards Enosis32.

The meeting of the Greek Cypriot Deputation with the British Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies would soon confirm Michalakopoulos’ predictions about the fate of the demand for Enosis. The Under-Secretary unambiguously excluded every such possibility. In fact, London did not seem willing to consent even to some serious administrative reforms as Michalakopoulos hoped33. The Greek Cypriots were naturally disappointed and their disappointment would become even greater after a second meeting with Lord Passfield two weeks later. Following the example of his Under-Secretary, Passfield stated to the members of the Deputation that the possibility of Enosis was simply out of the question34. The message was clear: it was more than obvious that the British government was far from prepared even to discuss the issue of Enosis, leaving at the same time no practical hopes about the possibility of granting the people of Cyprus a status of a wider political self-government.

Despite these extremely unfavorable conditions, however, the Greek Cypriot Deputation did not hesitate to submit their Memorial to the British government, asking for Enosis of Cyprus with Greece or alternatively for changes in the administrative system of the island in order to grant the local population with a form of a responsible government. “The Greek elected Members of the Legislative Council”, they pointed out in the letter that accompanied the Memorial, “representing more than four-fifths of the population of the island, have entrusted us with the task of making known to the British Government and to the people of Great Britain the strong national aspirations of that population for Union with Greece. We are convinced that if a plebiscite were taken on that issue in the island to-day the result would clearly demonstrate the strength of this national sentiment of the historical section of the Cyprus population for their Political Union with their Mother Country. This desire is not prompted by any unfriendly feelings towards Great Britain, to whom the whole Hellenic world bears a lasting gratitude, coupled with that admiration and respect which is due to the most liberal among the civilized nations to-day. It is purely the outcome of the natural aspiration of a civilized people to be united to, and form political part of that free nation with which, through strong ties of race, of blood, of language, of religion and of tradition, they in fact share common national conscience”35.

The Greek Cypriot appeals, however, no matter how justified on the basis of self-determination might appear to be, were not enough to change the British attitude. In fact, Lord Passfield’s official reply to the Greek Cypriot Memorial, which was published in The Cyprus Gazette on 13 December 1929, shattered even the slightest hope that any positive step was about to be taken from London in that direction: “The first request contained in the Memorial”, Lord Passfield underlined in his reply, “is a renewal of the demand that Cyprus should be ceded to Greece. My answer on this point can only be the same as that which successive Secretaries of State have in the past returned to similar demands, namely, that His Majesty’s Government are unable to accede to it. This subject, in their view, is definitely closed and cannot profitably be further discussed”. At the same time, he also rejected the Greek Cypriot demand for a responsible government, arguing that “the time has not yet come when it would be to the general advantage of the people of Cyprus to make a trial of a constitutional experiment in this direction”. On the contrary, he was asking from the Greek Cypriot elected members of the Legislative Council to cooperate with the British authorities of the island, a development which according to his opinion would enable the improvement of the situation in general36.

Naturally, Lord Passfield’s reply bitterly disappointed the Greek Cypriots. “The reply in general denotes a disposition which is in direct conflict with those very notions of liberty and fairness which should be rudimental in the policy of a Labour or any progressive Government”, argued Rossides in his counter-reply. In this context, Rossides added that despite the British attitude, the Greek Cypriots would not stop fighting until they reached their final goal; on the contrary, such an attitude would only result to the stimulation of “[...their inherent desire for freedom, which is inseparably bound with the very honour of every self-respecting people]”. Coming to the point of self-government, Rossides rejected Lord Passfield’s allegation that the Cypriots have not sufficiently advanced to merit a more liberal administration, given the fact that much less advanced peoples in other British colonies had secured various forms of self-government. From this point of view, Rossides underlined the pretext-like element in the British refusal for constitutional reforms in Cyprus, whereas at the same time he added that the allegation itself reflected unfavourably upon the actual effects of 50 years of British administration in the island. “The cause of any such political immaturity, as alleged”, he concluded, “should be sought rather in the method of government which has been so far applied to that country. It cannot be denied that an autocratic system of administration which gives no real voice, no opportunities, and no responsibility to the people is not likely to educate them in the use of their own initiative and to promote their latent qualities, nor can it be conductive to high political standards. Only in liberty and in responsibility can the people effectively advance, become constructive and politically mature. Deny them responsibility and you have the safest way of impeding their progress and of rendering them always destructive and inefficient, thus creating a vicious circle, which cannot be too strongly condemned. All nations which have at different times and

36 For more details see The Cyprus Gazette, 13 December 1929. See also The Near East and India, 6 February 1930.
places attained a high standard of civilization have gradually developed to that stage only in liberty, without which there can be no real progress; so that a denial of freedom amounts, in effect, to a denial of the means of advancement”37.

Indeed, the sense of disappointment was even greater as far as the rejection of self-government was concerned given the fact that many Greek Cypriots hoped that at least this demand stood some serious chances of becoming accepted by London. Inglessis, however, believed that the British had intentionally cultivated such hopes in order to divide the Greek Cypriot public opinion and create two opposing parties: one in favor of Enosis and another in favor of local autonomy. According to Inglessis, this tactic had borne some fruit and it was only because of the intelligence and skillfulness of Nikodemos as well as the instructions given to him by the Greek government that the situation did not get out of control at the expense of Greek Cypriot interests. The Greek consul in Larnaca added that Lord Passfield’s denial to accept the proposed scheme of administrative reforms that would lead to a form of wider self-government of Cyprus was most probably connected to that stage only in liberty, without which there can be no real progress; so that a denial of freedom amounts, in effect, to a denial of the means of advancement”37.

The disappointment of the Greek Cypriots would soon become greater because of the British efforts to gain control over primary education, especially over the administration of Greek Cypriot schools38. Until the end of 1929 the teachers of Greek Cypriot primary schools were elected by the local communities, a privilege that has never been disputed in the past39. According, however, to the new law which was published on 18 December 1929, the British government of the island was responsible for the appointment of the members of the Board of Education and teachers, who in turn were not considered as civil servants and as a result they could be fired by the Governor40. What is more, the fact that three out of the twelve Greek Cypriot elected members of the Legislative Council had voted in favor of the new law41, created a new point of friction between the Greek Cypriot political elites, which were once more divided.

It was more than obvious that the British sought to manipulate the teachers, who in many cases were acting as the semi-formal agents in favour of Enosis42. Reacting to this development, Rossides wrote a detailed letter to Lord Passfield about the question of education in Cyprus. Rossides reminded that the education in Cyprus had been so far controlled by the local elected communal bodies, which were responsible for the administration of the schools, and that this privilege and acquired right of the Greek Cypriots to have in their hands the education of their own children had been enjoyed by them all through the British occupation and even much earlier under the Ottoman rule. In this context, the Greek Cypriots saw with great surprise and regret the new law, by which the communities were deprived of their ancient privileges respected even by the Sultan. For Rossides the whole issue was not irrelevant to the tendency of the British to deny the Greek Cypriots the right of self-government. But the British answer to the Greek Cypriot appeal was once again negative, since London refused any further discussion on the matter43.

The British attitude concerning the educational question intensified further the sense of dissatisfaction among the Greek Cypriots because of the negative reply to the demand for Enosis. In this context, the disappointment of the Greek Cypriots was more than evident. Kaklamanos from London was still asking for moderation, explaining that the only plausible course of action was that of the “gradual enlightenment of [British] public opinion”44, but it was obvious that many Greek Cypriots were gradually losing their patience. The rejection of the Greek Cypriot Memorial contributed to the radicalisation of the pro-Enosis movement, weakening the position of moderate Greek Cypriot leaders who were in favour of a more progressive solution of the Cyprus Question45. The foundation of the National Organization of Cyprus in January 1930 as well as the victory of the most firm pro-Enosis Greek Cypriot political figures in the October 1930 proved that the consequences of the failure of the Deputation’s mission were far more important than the British initially believed. From this point of view, the visit of the Greek Cypriot Deputation to London in the autumn of 1929 consists a turning point in the history of the Cyprus Question, since it opened a circle which would close two years later with the 1931 Revolt.

37 The Near East and India, 6 February 1930.
39 For more details on this matter see Richter, op. cit., pp. 385–389.
41 In his memoirs, Stors clearly implies this, underlining at the same time the great importance of the teachers exercised on the Greek Cypriot population of the countryside: “But the method of appointing, transferring and dismissing teachers, male and female, by the Greek Members of Council was open to grave objections. The politicians too often exercised their power for political or petty personal aims. The teacher was usually the only educated man in the village, as a political agent he was therefore almost indispensable to the politicians, who were exclusively town-dwellers. Being dependent upon the politicians for advancement in his profession he had to serve the political purposes of his masters”; see Stors, op. cit., pp. 500–501.
46 Faustmann, op. cit., p. 46.