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**THE 1912 BRITISH OFFER OF CYPRUS TO GREECE
AND THE REACTION OF THE GREEK AND MUSLIM CYPRIOTS.
A BRITISH PERSPECTIVE**

In the 1870s, the fortunes of the Ottoman Empire of which Cyprus had been part since 1571, assumed new dimensions. Its demise, the fear of Russian advance into the Balkans and the Mediterranean and the development of a new European Order based on the emergence of new nations and the search for new markets and territories by the established and emerging industrialised nations, meant that Cyprus became a prized possession. On 4 June 1878 the secret Cyprus Convention was signed between Great Britain and Turkey. In return for protection, the sultan transferred the island to the British Crown “to occupy and administer” for an undefined period, while retaining Turkish sovereignty over the island. If, however, Russia at any time restored to Turkey her Armenian conquests of 1877, then Cyprus was to be evacuated and returned to Turkey. Cyprus directly commanded the entrance to the Suez Canal, the coasts of Palestine and Syria, and the southern provinces of Asia Minor. With Gibraltar in the east of the Mediterranean, Malta in the centre and now Cyprus in the east, the process of converting it into a distant “British lake” was complete¹. Disraeli was convinced that Cyprus was “the key of Western Asia”² and the passage to India, but in a few years the importance of Cyprus for Britain diminished considerably³.

At the end of Turkish domination, Cyprus had been run down as never before in its history. With the change to Britain there seemed to be bright future for the island

¹ D.E. Lee, *Great Britain and the Cyprus Convention Policy of 1878*, Cambridge, Mass. 1934; C.W. Orr, *Cyprus under British Rule*, London 1918, p. 36.

² Benjamin Disraeli to Queen Victoria, 5 May 1878, in G.E. Buckle, *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield*, 6 vols., London 1920, 6, p. 291.

³ H. Temperley, *Disraeli and Cyprus*, “English Historical Review”, 46 (1931), pp. 274–279; H. Temperley, *Further Evidence on Disraeli and Cyprus*, “English Historical Review”, 46 (1931), pp. 457–460; A. Varnava, *Disraeli and Cyprus: Oriental and Imperial Fantasy and Realpolitik*, “Epe-tirida tou Kentrou Epistemonikon Erevnon” 34 (2008), pp. 411–449; A. Varnava, *British Imperialism in Cyprus. The Inconsequential Possession*, Manchester 2009, pp. 65–92.

as a British naval base. Under the benevolent administration of the British, Cypriots would become well-to-do British subjects, Queen Victoria's proclamation promising

...the adoption of such measures as may appear best calculated to promote and extend the commerce and agriculture of the country, and to afford to the people the blessings of freedom, justice, and security. It is Her Majesty's gracious pleasure that the Government of Cyprus shall be administered without favour to any race or creed; that equal justice shall be done to all, that all shall enjoy alike the equal and impartial protection of the law; and that no measures shall be neglected which may tend to advance the moral and material welfare of the people⁴.

But this bright picture did not become true because three years later, in 1881, as a result of the revolt of the Egyptian army, the British intervention led to a permanent military occupation of Egypt and the Suez Canal. Thus, the British no longer needed to develop Cyprus as a *Place d'Armes*, but decided to keep the island and use it as a source of revenue to redeem the Turkish loan of 1855, collecting the so called "tribute"⁵.

In the middle of 1912, the British military analysts discussed possible occupation of Aegean Islands by Italy and its effect on British naval policy. The admiralty policy in the Mediterranean was based upon the condition that British interests in the eastern part of the sea could only be threatened by such hostile fleets as Italian or Austro-Hungarian, but their hostile movement could be controlled by the British fleet based on Malta. Thus, "a cardinal factor" was that no strong navy should be in "effective permanent occupation" of any territory or harbor east of Malta⁶. It was decided that in order to secure British commerce and protect it from possible attack of Austro-Hungarian and Italian warships in the Mediterranean, a "definite naval arrangement" with France should be made "without delay". An Anglo-French

combination in war would be able to maintain full control of the Mediterranean, and afford all necessary protection to British and French interests, both territorial and commercial, without impairing British margins in the North Sea⁷.

⁴ Proclamation by His Excellency Lieutenant-General Sir Garnet Joseph Wolseley, Knight Grand Cross of the most distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George, Knight Commander of the most honourable Order of the Bath, Her Majesty's High Commissioner for the Island of Cyprus, 22 July 1878 in C.W. Orr, *Cyprus under British Rule*, pp. 40–41.

⁵ Already in July 1878, the Chancellor of the Exchequer indicated that he would use the revenues of Cyprus to redeem the 1855 Turkish loan guaranteed by Britain. Quoted in G. Hill, *A History of Cyprus*, 4 vols., Cambridge 1952, 4, p. 466. And, indeed, until 1927 the so-called Cyprus Tribute paid the annual interest to the British bondholders. Paying the 'tribute' was to become one of the most important grievances of the Cypriots. See G.S. Georghallides, *A Political and Administrative History of Cyprus, 1918–1926*, Nicosia 1979, pp. 17–38.

⁶ National Archives, Kew, Cabinet Papers, CAB/37/111, No. 77: Admiralty Memorandum: Italian occupation of Aegean Islands and its effect on naval policy, 20 June 1912, Secret.

⁷ CAB/37/111, memorandum by W.S. Churchill: Naval Situation in the Mediterranean, 15 June 1912, Secret, par. 8; National Archives, Kew, Admiralty: Record Office, ADM/116/3109, Co-operation with France in war: Admiralty War Staff Memorandum, 21 June 1912; CAB 37/111, No. 78, Memo-

In July 1912 it was agreed that the British navy would protect Anglo-French interests in the eastern and the French in the western Mediterranean⁸. Therefore, Britain needed an ally in the eastern Mediterranean and Winston Churchill's, who was then First Lord of the Admiralty, choice was Greece⁹.

Churchill's plan was to get from Greece a permission to use in time of peace and war naval facilities on one of the Greek islands in the Ionian Sea. With Gibraltar and Malta in British hands, Churchill was keen to obtain a deep-water harbor close to the Adriatic, from which in case of war with the Triple Alliance the British fleet could "bottle up" and neutralize the whole of the Austro-Hungarian and part of the Italian fleets. In November 1912, David Lloyd George, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, approached John Stavridi, his friend since the days when he was a practising solicitor, and presented to him Churchill's ideas.

John Stavridi (1867–1948) was a son of a Greek merchant, who became a naturalized British citizen. Educated in Geneva and Paris, Stavridi was admitted as a solicitor in 1898 and three years later joined the board of the British-owned Ionian Bank, operating in the eastern Mediterranean. In 1903 he was appointed consul-general for Greece in London and soon became the doyen of the Greek community in Britain. During the First World War, in November 1915, he was sent by the British government on a successful secret mission to Greece aimed at convincing the Greek government to give up their policy of strict neutrality. In 1919 he was knighted for his war services¹⁰. On 10 November 1912 Stavridi started a diary continued until 1915, where he recorded his diplomatic activity and detailed numerous conversations between politicians. The diary is practically the only source for the secret talks conducted in December 1912/January 1913 between the British government and the Greek Prime Minister, Eleftherios Venizelos, on the proposals of Cyprus/Argostoli exchange and Greek-Britain entente¹¹. There is no reason to doubt the diary's

randum by W.S. Churchill, 22 June 1912, Secret. For opponents of the treaty, see CAB 37/111, No. 86, Admiralty memorandum, 3 July 1912, Confidential, especially pp. 3–4.

⁸ ADM 116/3109, Co-operation with France in war: Anglo-French Naval Agreement, 23 July 1912, draft.

⁹ G. Miller, *The Millstone: British Naval Policy in the Mediterranean, 1900–1914, the Commitment to France and British Intervention in the War*, Hull 1999, pp. 317–319; E.C. Helmreich, *The Diplomacy of the Balkan Wars, 1912–1913*, Oxford 1938.

¹⁰ On Stavridi's life and career, see his obituary in "The Times" (27 July 1948); F. Bostock, "Stavridi, Sir John John (1867–1948)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford 2004; online www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/52619, accessed 25 Aug 2014.

¹¹ The diary is kept among Stavridi Papers, St Anthony's College, Oxford. Parts of the diary were edited by J.T.A. Koumoulides and published in the "Journal of Modern Hellenism", 4–5 (1987–1988), pp. 93–119, 85–121 [Cited as: Stavridi Diary]. The diary is the basis of the presentations of the ensuing negotiations by M.L. Smith, *Ionian Vision. Greece and Asia Minor, 1919–1922*, London 1998, pp. 12–18; H. Gardikas-Katsiadakis, *Venizelos kai Tsotsil: oi vaseis tis anglo-ellinikis synennoisis (1912–1913)* [Venizelos and Churchill: The Foundation of the British-Greek Understanding (1912–1913)], in *Eleftherios Venizelos: 12 Meletimata* [Eleftherios Venizelos: 112 Studies, ed. C. Svolopou-

veracity, especially that where it can be corroborated by the memorandum written in 1931 by Venizelos¹², it proves true to the facts.

During their meeting Lloyd George, remembering the Greek dream of *Megali Idea*¹³, told Stavridi:

If the [Balkan] allies are in agreement they can divide up European Turkey as they think best... You may consider Crete as yours... The only power that could prevent you from having it is England, and England will not fire a shot or move a single ship to prevent you...

And added: “Personally I don’t want him [the Turk] even to keep Constantinople”¹⁴.

Following this semi-private meeting, on 18 November Stavridi was invited to a meeting with Lloyd George and Churchill. They met in Lloyd George’s private room at the House of Commons. Churchill went straight to the heart of the question explaining the organization of the British fleet in the Mediterranean and how it co-operated with the French fleet:

As the powers were grouped... the enemies were Italy and Austria, and in any future war they could close up the Adriatic they could bottle up the whole of the Austrian and part of the Italian fleets... Provided England had a base close enough to the Adriatic...¹⁵.

Of all the available spots, Churchill indicated that the Admiralty would prefer Argostoli in the Greek island of Cephalonia. Churchill underlined that he did not suggest Argostoli’s session or lease, but only the right to use its harbor in a secret treaty. As compensation, Britain would cede Cyprus to Greece¹⁶.

los, Athens 1999, pp. 87–100; and the much criticized but detailed, A. Varnava, *British Imperialism in Cyprus, 1878–1915*, pp. 253–257.

¹² On 6 November 1931 Venizelos wrote a memorandum after a confidential conversation on the subject of the proposal with the British minister in Athens, Patrick Ramsay. Venizelos’s memorandum is discussed by S.V. Markezinis, *Politikē historia tēs Neōteras Hellados, 1828–1964*, 4 vols., Athens 1966, vol. 3: *Hē megalē exormsis, 1909–1922*, pp. 242–245. Ramsay for his part mentioned their conversation to the Foreign Office. National Archives, Kew, Foreign Office, FO 371/15235/8435/1931, Ramsay to Sargent, 7 November 1931, Private and Secret. Cf. Georghallides, *A Political and Administrative History of Cyprus*, pp. 92–93.

¹³ In 1844 Prime Minister of Greece, John Kolettis presented the essence of the so-called *Megali Idea*, the Great Idea, which in practice aimed at the recreation of the Byzantine Empire at its apogee: “The kingdom of Greece is not Greece; it is only a part, the smallest and the poorest, of Greece. A Greek is not only he who lives in the kingdom, but also he who lives [...] in whatever country is historically Greek, or whoever is of the Greek race. Constantinople is the great capital, the City, the joy and hope of the Hellenes”. Quoted in S.G. Xydis, *Modern Greek Nationalism in Nationalism in Eastern Europe*, eds. P.F. Sugar, I.J. Lederer, Seattle 1971, p. 237.

¹⁴ Stavridi Diary, 10 November 1912, I, 99.

¹⁵ Stavridi Diary, 18 November 1912, I, 100–101.

¹⁶ Stavridi Diary, 18 November 1912, I, 101. Cypriot historians hardly mention the proposal at all, e.g., S. Pantelli, *A New History of Cyprus*, London 1984, p. 73; C.P. Kyrris, *History of Cyprus*, Nicosia 1985, p. 314; or do not think it was really serious, e.g., K. Hadjidemetriou, *History of Cyprus*, Nicosia 2002, p. 367; or claim the proposal never had the Cabinet support, e.g., D. Alastos, *Cyprus in History*.

As for the choice of Cyprus to be ceded to Greece, Churchill recalled his visit to the island in 1907, during which he was impressed with the enthusiastic reception given to him, until he was informed that the shouts in Greek meant “Long live Greece” and “Long live union with Greece” and that “the enthusiasm was not for him but was raised by the hope that he would assist them in obtaining reunion to Greece”¹⁷.

Churchill’s visit to the island took place against a backdrop of growing Cypriot politicization. As he was the first member of the British Government to come to Cyprus since 1878, the leaders of the Hellenic agitation determined that every effort should be made to impress him with the predominance of what was known in Greek circles in the island as “The National Idea”, i.e. union with Greece¹⁸. In the memorial the Greek Cypriots presented to Churchill they expressed their hope that he would be the “harbinger” of the Union of Cyprus with “Mother Greece”, as this is “the strong and earnest desire which burns the breast of every Cypriot”¹⁹. They argued that Cyprus should belong to

...the beloved Mother Greece, in the bosom of which only will it enjoy the blessings of liberty on which every people has imprescriptive rights, and especially a people by reason of descent, language, religion and civilisation, forming as it does an integral part of the immortal Greek race, which has born and promoted civilization and developed humanity²⁰.

Churchill answered the memorial at length²¹. Dealing with the question of *enosis* he generously recognized the Greek Cypriots’ national sentiments, but underlined that the abrogation of the Treaty with Turkey is a most important political issue and that Greek Cypriots’ demand does not pay any attention to the views of “nearly one-third of the [Moslem] population”²² and thus could lead to a permanent antago-

A Survey of 5000 Years, London 1955, pp. 340–341. None of them mentions Stavridi Diary and following G.S. Georghallides, *A Political and Administrative History of Cyprus*, pp. 92–93, they seem to base their points on view on Markezinis, *Politikē historia tēs Neōteras Hellados*, 3, pp. 242–245.

¹⁷ For a detailed presentation of the visit, see M. Misztal, *Churchill’s Visit to Cyprus In 1907: Enosis and Constitutional Issues*, “Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia Anglica” 3 (2013), pp. 158–177. A detailed and well documented treatment of the visit is also G.S. Georghallides, *Churchill’s 1907 Visit to Cyprus: A Political Analysis*, “Επετηρίς Του Κέντρου Επιστημονικών Ερευνών” 3 (1969–1970), pp. 167–220, which, however, concentrates mainly on the “tribute” question.

¹⁸ National Archives, Kew, Colonial Office: Cyprus. Original Correspondence, CO 67/149; Cmd 3996: Cyprus. Correspondence relating to the Affairs of Cyprus (1908): I. Dispatch of C.A. King-Harman, 21 October 1907, par. 2; Appendix B: Letter of Greek Members of Legislative Council; Secretariat Archives, Nicosia, S.A. 3307/1907: Address of the Christian elected members of the Legislative Council, par. 1.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, par. 3 and 5.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, par. 8.

²¹ CO 67/149; Cmd 3996: I. Dispatch of C.A. King-Harman, 21 October 1907, Appendix C.: Mr. Churchill’s Reply to the Greek Elected Members. Secretariat Archives in Nicosia (S.A. 3307/1907, No. 30) have the draft prepared for publication in “The Cyprus Gazette”.

²² This is an exaggeration. In 1907 the Muslims made up about one-fifth of the Cyprus population.

nism between the two sections of the community²³. Therefore, His Majesty's Government may be "encouraged to hope that the people of Cyprus, while cherishing great national ideals, are content, for the present at least, to be governed in accordance with British ideas of justice and freedom"²⁴.

In his report on Churchill's visit, the High Commissioner, King-Harman, wrote that it was "of the greatest advantage to the island from every point of view" and that Churchill's "pronouncements on the political questions which agitate the people have been most satisfactory in their effect"²⁵. In his own memorandum to the Colonial Office, Churchill bluntly stated that it "may be urged" in defence of the existing system that Britain is only in "temporary occupation" of Cyprus and that "this argument may be used for what it is worth, which is not much", for it is obvious that Britain cannot ever give Cyprus back to Turkey, "Europe and the House of Commons would never tolerate such a retrocession". But then he adds that he would "deeply regret" if the question of giving Cyprus to Greece should be raised by the British Government. Because if that were done, the lives of the Cyprus Moslems who "have always behaved to us with the utmost loyalty and good conduct", would be "rendered utterly intolerable", and they would "all be oppressed or frozen out". Also, abandonment of Cyprus would be an "admission of failure either to revive the country or to reconcile the people, involved in the cession and would make a melancholy episode in British history and would be deservedly unpopular in England"²⁶.

Now, in 1912, 5 years later and seen from the perspective of the First Lord of Admiralty, the legal status of Cyprus, identical with the one in 1907, or the situation of the Cyprus Muslims, were no longer seen by Churchill as obstacles to ceding of the island to Greece. In 1912 formal sovereignty of Cyprus still belonged to the Ottoman Empire, but now the British determined that Greece could be an important ally providing them with the strategic naval rights. Interestingly enough, a report prepared by the Committee of Imperial Defence in April 1912 concluded that Cyprus "for practical purposes" is a British Crown Colony and as such will "certainly be liable to attack by any enemy of Great Britain"²⁷ and in case command of the Mediterranean were lost for two months, Cyprus could not be defended from an Austro-Hungarian attack:

²³ *Ibidem*, par. 5–7.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, par. 8.

²⁵ Cmd 3996: Dispatch of C.A. King-Harman, 21 October 1907, par. 21.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, par. 11; CO 883/7/3, Mediterranean 65, Condition of Cyprus. Memorandum by Mr. Churchill, 10 October 1907, pp. 5–6.

²⁷ FO 881/100014, Memorandum, 10 April 1912; CAB 38/20, No. 8, Committee of Imperial Defence Memorandum: International Status of Egypt, Cyprus, and Zanzibar when Great Britain is at War, 10 April 1912, p. 3.

no effective opposition could be offered to a landing by the existing garrison, and the capture of the island may be looked upon as inevitable unless a garrison proportionate to the scale of attack which may be expected is provided in time of peace²⁸.

On 12 November, Lloyd George informed Stavridi that Prime Minister Herbert Asquith and Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Minister, agreed with Churchill's proposal but the final decision would have to wait until the Balkan War was ended²⁹. On 10 December Lloyd George told Stavridi that negotiations could start³⁰. Two days later Stavridi briefed the Greek Prime Minister, Eleftherios Venizelos who, on his first visit to Britain, on 12 December came to London ostensibly to attend the peace conference after the first Balkan War³¹, but in reality to participate in the negotiations started by Stavridi³². Venizelos, prime minister from October 1910, had already co-operated with the British and French governments earlier, inviting the British specialists to help him in the reform of the Greek navy, and the French – of the army³³. These decisions indicated that Venizelos thought that Greece's interests were closer to France and Britain than to Germany.

On 16 December Lloyd George met Venizelos for the very first time entertaining him and Stavridi over breakfast. The Greek Prime Minister enthusiastically approved both the Cyprus for Argostoli naval rights exchange and especially the *entente* between Greece and Britain (and France)³⁴. The idea for an alliance had been earlier suggested by Stavridi:

A general understanding with Greece, with Great Greece as she would be in the future, would enable them [i.e. the British] to use all their ships for fighting the enemy, leaving us to police the seas and protect their commerce³⁵.

²⁸ CAB 38/20, No. 13, Committee of Imperial Defence: 1. The Attack on Cyprus by Austria, 2. The Defence of Cyprus, 9 May 1912, p. 4.

²⁹ Stavridi Diary, 22 November 1912, IV, p. 103.

³⁰ Stavridi Diary, 10 December 1912, IV, p. 105.

³¹ Stavridi Diary, 12 and 13 December 1912, IV, p. 106. On the general diplomatic background, see E.C. Helmreich, *The Diplomacy of the Balkan Wars 1912–1913*, Cambridge 1938; on the aims of Greece in the London negotiations, see H. Gardikas-Katsiadakis, *Greece and the Balkan Imbroglia: Greek Foreign Policy 1911–1913*, Athena 1995, p. 143.

³² Z. Fotakis, *Greek Naval Strategy and Policy 1910–1919*, London 2005, p. 59.

³³ D. Alastos, *Venizelos. Patriot, Statesman, Revolutionary*, London 1942, p. 80; M. Pearton, *Britain and the Greek Naval Defences, 1910–1918*, in *Greece and Great Britain During World War I*, Thessaloniki 1985, pp. 17–47; M.L. Smith, *Venizelos' Diplomacy, 1910–1923: From Balkan Alliance to Greek-Turkish Settlement*, in *Eleftherios Venizelos: The Trials of Statesmanship*, ed. P.M. Kitromilides, Edinburgh 2006, pp. 134–192, at 141–142; cf. memories of the chief of the British mission, M. Kerr, *Land, Sea and Air. Reminiscences of Mark Kerr*, London 1927, pp. 178–198.

³⁴ For earlier (Theotokis') plans for an alliance with Britain and France, see D. Dakin, *The Greek Proposals for an Alliance with France and Great Britain, June–July 1907*, "Balkan Studies" 3 (1962), pp. 43–60.

³⁵ Stavridi Diary, 22 November 1912, IV, p. 103.

Venizelos claimed also that the proposals would be approved by the Greek King George:

All the national aspirations of Greece tended towards a closer union with England and that from the king down to the meanest subject everyone in Greece would welcome such an understanding³⁶.

Indeed, King George fully endorsed Venizelos' decisions on foreign policy issues. But the obvious preference to cooperate with Britain and France rather than Germany was not general in Greece at that time. King George's son, Crown Prince Constantine, described as "arrogant, inflexible and not very bright", differed from his father both in character and political orientation³⁷. Like numerous Greek army officers, Constantine had been trained in Germany and had married Princess Sophie of Prussia, the sister of Kaiser Wilhelm³⁸. His accession as Constantine I in March 1913, after the assassination of his father, was to mean for Venizelos serious troubles especially as far as the foreign policy was concerned.

On 17 December 1912, at breakfast, Churchill, Lloyd George, and Prince Louis of Battenberg, the First Sea Lord, met Venizelos and Stavridi and agreed to make public the Cyprus for Argostoli deal. But it was agreed to keep separate the *entente* question because it affected France and Russia and Britain might have to consult these countries. Churchill on being asked how Turkey might react to the news of the cession of Cyprus to Greece, answered with a smile: "We will arrange that!"³⁹.

On 5 Jan 1913, Venizelos was informed by Lloyd George that Churchill had prepared a report on the *entente* to be submitted in the first instance to the French. Because proposed *entente* concerned the Mediterranean it was essential that all questions should be arranged in co-operation with France and that the Entente be between the three countries⁴⁰. Venizelos accepted this idea with enthusiasm, but was only shown a memorandum strongly advising him to develop a more mobile navy, buying in place of the Dreadnought ordered in Germany, a number of lighter boats⁴¹. Churchill also revealed that Asquith and Grey thought it would be difficult to justify giving up Cyprus unless it was made public. It seems that the deal over Argostoli and Cyprus was too advanced for Grey's cautious foreign policy with its attachment

³⁶ Stavridi Diary, 16 December 1912, IV, p. 107.

³⁷ T. Veremis and H. Gardikas-Katsiadakis, *Protagonist in Politics, 1912–1920* in *Eleftherios Venizelos: The Trials of Statesmanship*, pp. 115–116.

³⁸ On possible (but much exaggerated) influence of Queen Sophia on her husband see *Queen Sophia of Greece: The Woman at the Bottom of the Balkan Developments*, "Current Opinion", 59 (December 1915), p. 396.

³⁹ Stavridi Diary, 17 December 1912, IV, pp. 108–109.

⁴⁰ Stavridi Diary, 5 January 1913, IV, p. 110.

⁴¹ ADM 116/3098, Greece. Naval Strength – Present and Future, 24 December 1912. See Fotakis, *Greek Naval Strategy and Policy*, pp. 60–64.

to preserving regional balances. All agreed to delay until the Balkan-Ottoman peace negotiations had ended⁴².

Thus, although these promising talks proved inconclusive, they showed that Venizelos was ready to set Greece's course by reference to Britain and France. The idea that Greece could be of service to the liberal Western Powers, winning in return support for the national territorial and economic aspirations, was to direct Venizelos's policy during the Great War⁴³. On leaving London, he told Stavridi that:

He felt happy at the thought that our negotiations would result in an *entente* with England, and probably with France, and that Greece's future would be very different to her past, when she had to stand absolutely alone, supported by no one, with no a single friend to care what happened to her. Now... with the friendship of England and France [Greece] would become a power in the East which no one could ignore⁴⁴.

Unfortunately, these plans, both concerning Cyprus and the *entente* bore no fruit. When in January 1914 Venizelos visited London and approached the British government about the proposals of 1912/1913, he was told that "the acute political crisis on the [Irish] Home Rule Bill" made it impossible to make any final decisions on Cyprus proposal and it would have to be "dealt with at a later date"⁴⁵. Eventually, it was agreed to postpone until August⁴⁶, but the First World War broke out.

Most probably after the success of the London conference the probability of a general war diminished and Britain did not think it wise to alienate Turkey by giving Cyprus to Greece. Grey already in 1908 expressed his opinion that

I believe Cyprus is of no use to us and the Convention respecting it an anachronism and encumbrance. I would therefore give the island away in return for any better arrangements we could obtain. Indeed, bargain or no bargain we should be better without Cyprus⁴⁷.

By 1914, it was claimed, Grey had given up the idea of ceding Cyprus to Greece because he did not want to upset Italy⁴⁸. Even Churchill was rather disappointed that Venizelos did not follow his suggestions on naval policy of making the Greek navy more movable and useful for policing the eastern Mediterranean⁴⁹. Also, the cost of developing Argostoli would be substantial and Churchill already faced strong opposition in the Asquith cabinet over his financial demands to the point that he threatened to resign⁵⁰.

⁴² Stavridi Diary, 7 January 1913, IV, pp. 111–112.

⁴³ M. Llewellyn-Smith, *Venizelos' Diplomacy, 1910–1923: From Balkan Alliance to Greek-Turkish Settlement*, pp. 48–49.

⁴⁴ Stavridi Diary, 31 January 1913, VI, p. 88.

⁴⁵ Stavridi Diary, 20 and 21 January 1914, VI, p. 85.

⁴⁶ Stavridi Diary, 22 January 1914, VI, p. 86.

⁴⁷ FO 800/172, Grey to Bertie, 29 October 1908, Private.

⁴⁸ A. Varnava, *British Imperialism in Cyprus, 1875–1915*, pp. 258–259.

⁴⁹ M. Pearton, *Britain and Greek Naval Defence 1910–1916*, pp. 39–40.

⁵⁰ Churchill to Asquith, 18 December 1913, R.S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill*, II, 3, 1834–1835.

On the other hand, Venizelos could have thought that there was no point fighting for Cyprus now, because in result of the Balkan Wars the population and surface area of Greece were almost doubled, straining her economic and administrative resources⁵¹.

In Cyprus, the hopes for *enosis* were increasing along Greece's successes in the Balkan Wars. Already in early December 1912 there were rumours that Venizelos government was willing to talk about the future status of Cyprus during the London conference, but "hesitate to do so unless they are certain that Great Britain would not think such action unfriendly to her". Greek Cypriots tried to elicit from the High Commissioner information on the subject, but he refused to give then any reply⁵². Grey praised Goold-Adams for making no reply to enquiries on the subject and instructed him that the same course should be followed on any similar occasion which may arise in the future⁵³.

The rumours alone were enough to elicit a protest from the "uneasy" Muslim population of Cyprus "praying" that in the event of any changes in political status being considered it is "imperatively necessary" that Cyprus should be ceded to Great Britain or Egypt⁵⁴. The representative of the Cypriot Muslims wrote that they were informed "on good authority" that the Balkan War opened a "favourable field for the furtherance of the Hellenic sentiments" cherished by the "Greek element" in the island who were "taking political action and making earnest pursuits" in that respect; also it was "persistently reported" that numerous letters from Greek dignitaries who were "exerting efforts" outside the island stated that as a result of the war Cyprus would be ceded and annexed to Greece. These rumours were the cause of serious anxiety to the Cyprus Moslems, who had so far lived "in comfort, in the enjoyment of the blessings of tranquility" under the "protection and equitable administration" of the British Government. The Moslems expressed their concern that if Cyprus were to be ceded to Greece the Moslems would be "exposed to a most sorrowful plight, involving regrettable and execrable circumstances which would form an ev-

⁵¹ M.L. Smith, *Ionian Vision. Greece and Asia Minor, 1919–1922*, pp. 19–20. For the origins of Venizelos' famous metaphor of the "backbone", see I. Mallosis, *The Political History of Dimitrios P. Gounaris*, Athens 1926, pp. 255–256.

⁵² CO 67/167, Registry 38496: Goold-Adams to Harcourt, 4 December 1912, Draft telegram, leaf 384; CO 883/7/10, Mediterranean 72, Registry 38496: Sir Hamilton Goold-Adams to Lewis Harcourt, 4 December 1912, Confidential, Telegraphic, paraphrase, No. 128, p. 169.

⁵³ CO 67/168, Registry 39999: Mallet to Harcourt, 17 December 1912, leaf 156; CO 67/168, Registry 39999: Harcourt to Goold-Adams, 20 December, draft, leaf 157; CO 883/7/10, Mediterranean 72, Registry 39999: Lewis Harcourt to Goold-Adams, 20 December 1912, Secret, No. 132, p. 170.

⁵⁴ CO 67/167, Registry 41168: C.W. Orr to Harcourt, 17 December 1912, Telegram, leaf 403; CO 883/7/10, Mediterranean 72, Registry 39993: C.W. Orr to Lewis Harcourt, 17 December 1912, Telegraphic, No. 130, p. 169. "In view of the urgent and important nature of its content", the Moslems asked that the "purport" of the petition be sent by cablegram, "lest it should be too late, by the time the mail reaches London". CO 67/167, Registry 41168: The Muslim deputies to Goold-Adams, 13 December 1912; also in CO 883/7/10, Mediterranean 72, C.W. Orr to Lewis Harcourt, 19 December 1912, No. 134, Enclosure 3, p. 172.

erlasting dark stigma to civilisation in the annals of the world”, and abandonment to Greek administration of the Moslem community would mean their “annihilation or ruination” under the “effect of tragedies paralleling the tyrannies of the middle ages”. Therefore, the Muslims of Cyprus, always “so loyally obedient to the British rule”, asked that “should a condition of constrained necessity” arise for changing the present political situation of Cyprus, the Island might be ceded to Great Britain or annexed to the British-protected administration of Egypt⁵⁵.

George Vandeleur Fiddes, the assistant under-secretary at the Colonial Office, described the petition as “moderately worded” and added “I fear the Muslims have only too good reason to be apprehensive for their lives and property if ‘Hellenic’ element get the upper hand”. Fiddes must have been unaware of Churchill’s offer presented to Venizelos eleven days earlier, because on 28 December 1912 he also remarked that the fate of Cyprus will depend on questions of “high policy” and “has not yet come under discussion, so far as we are aware”⁵⁶.

A petition to London was also sent by the representatives of the Greek Cypriots asking for the enosis, in accordance with their “eternal aspirations”⁵⁷. The petition recalled how thirty-four years earlier Cyprus “hailed the British flag with joy and gratitude”, and relying on “their own historical rights” hoped that the British Nation “would not be long in completing its work of deliverance by effecting the national rehabilitation of the Island” and united it with the Hellenic Kingdom, to which they were bound by the “indissoluble ties of common origin and religion, of common traditions and a common language”. Now, owing to the issue of the Balkan war, “we confidently believe that the proper moment has come for a final settlement of the Cyprus question on the basis of the right of nationality by the union of Cyprus with her mother Greece”⁵⁸. On 7 January 1913, during a meeting with Cypriot nota-

⁵⁵ CO67/167, Registry 41168: Petition of the Moslem deputies to Harcourt, 13 December 1912, Original (in Turkish), leaf 406, Translation, leaf 407; CO 883/7/10, Mediterranean 72, Registry 41168: C.W. Orr to Lewis Harcourt, 19 December 1912, No. 134: Enclosure 2: The Muslim deputies petition to Goold-Adams, 13 December 1912, Translation, p. 171; CO 883/7/15, Mediterranean 77, Registry 41168: Lewis Harcourt to Goold-Adams, 3 January 1913, No. 2, p. 492.

⁵⁶ CO 67/167, Registry 41168: Departmental minute, 28 December 1912, leaf 404.

⁵⁷ CO 883/7/10, Mediterranean 72, Registry 40277: C.W. Orr to Lewis Harcourt, 29 December 1912, Telegraphic, No. 131, p. 170; CO 883/7/15, Mediterranean 77, Registry 40277: C.W. Orr to Lewis Harcourt, 29 December 1912, Telegraphic, No. 131, p. 170; CO 883/7/15, Mediterranean 77, Registry 493: C.W. Orr to Harcourt, 24 December 1912, No. 3, Enclosure 3: The Archbishop of Cyprus to Goold-Adams, 6/19 December 1912, p. 3. George Vandeleur Fiddes, the assistant under-secretary at the Colonial Office minuted: “I do not see any necessity or desirability of sending... [this petition] to the Foreign office”. They “know the views of the ‘Greek’ [sic!] community in Cyprus as well as we do”. CO 67/167, Registry 40277: Departmental minute, 21 December 1912, leaf 413.

⁵⁸ CO 67/167, Registry 493: C.W. Orr to Lewis Harcourt, 24 December 1912, Enclosure 1: Petition of the Greek Cypriots to Lewis Harcourt, 6/19 December 1912, Original (Greek), leaf 425–426 verso, Enclosure 2: Translation (English), leaf 427–429; CO 883/7/15, Mediterranean 77, No. 3: Enclosure 2: Translation, pp. 2–3.

bles, Archbishop Kyrillos actually publicly “proclaimed” the union of Cyprus with Greece⁵⁹.

On 18 January 1913, a popular Cyprus newspaper, “Eleftheria” [Freedom], in an article entitled “Cyprus to Greece – an accomplished fact”, reported that “a notable and well-informed person of Cairo” sent them news that “our own fatherland, Cyprus, will, by arrangement between the Governments of England and Greece, be conceded, together with all the other Aegean Islands to Greece”. According to the correspondent “the official English circles” in Cairo spoke “openly and with certainty” of the concession and that the Greek government had already named the future Governor of Cyprus, namely Constantinos Papamichalopoulos, a politician, who organized the “Panhellenic Union” in the United States of America. The “Eleftheria” was “whole-heartedly delighted and exults in being in the pleasant position” of first imparting these “exceedingly glad tidings” to the Cypriots⁶⁰. As the High Commissioner was informed, additional credence had been lent to the news by the information passed to the Greek Cypriots from another source that Mr Papamichalopoulos had been recalled from the United States⁶¹.

On hearing the news the Turkish Cypriots asked the High Commissioner how much truth was there in the report and – in the event the report were true – what steps would be taken by the British administration to protect the Moslem’s property to ensure that their religious interests were respected. Goold-Adams answered the Muslims that he had no official information as to the report to which he “attached little weight”, and he assured them that in case of transfer their rights would be guaranteed by the British Government⁶². Among the Colonial Office officials there was no certainty that the report was completely untrue. One of them minuted:

It would perhaps have been better had the assurance given by Sir H. Goold-Adams been less definite... Perhaps it would be desirable to authorize the High Commissioner to state that no such proposal has received consideration – *if that is the fact* [my italics]⁶³.

On 15 February 1913 there appeared in another Cyprus newspaper published in Limassol, “Aletheia”, a declaration of the Greek members of the Legislative Council, where *inter alia* they wrote that “indeed we know that some talk has been made *officially* between the Greek Prime Minister and the British Minister for Foreign

⁵⁹ S. Panteli, *A New History of Cyprus*, London 1984, pp. 73–74 (mentioning this fact A. Varnava, *British Imperialism*, p. 257 n. 119, gives wrong bibliographical details).

⁶⁰ “Eleftheria”, No. 348, 5/18 January 1913. CO 67/168, Registry 3780: Goold-Adams to Harcourt, 21 January 1913, Confidential, Enclosure: Extract from the “Eleftheria”, Translation, leaf 85.

⁶¹ CO 67/168, Registry 3780: Goold-Adams to Harcourt, 21 January 1913, Confidential, leaf 84; also CO 883/7/15, Mediterranean 77, No. 6, p. 5.

⁶² CO 67/168, Registry 3780: Goold-Adams to Harcourt, 21 January 1913, Confidential, leaf 83–84; also in CO 883/7/15, Mediterranean 77, No. 6, pp. 4–5.

⁶³ CO 67/168, Registry 3780: Departmental minute, 4 February 1913, leaf 82 recto and verso.

Affairs about Cyprus” and that in London “the question of the national settlement of the Island *is being gravely contemplated*”⁶⁴.

And again, the Colonial Office officials seemed completely unaware of the talks between Churchill and Venizelos, as George V. Fiddes minuted that it

is a pity that such mischievous and unfounded statements are circulated..., but I cannot see what we can do to stop them, short of directing the High Commissioner to state that all such remarks are devoid of foundation – which would hardly be a politic move.

Another minute stated that

This is all very bombastic and silly – especially *the lie* [my italics] that there has been any communication between the P[ri]me M[inister] of Greece and our For[eign] Secy[Secretary] about Cyprus⁶⁵.

The articles in “Eleftheria” and “Aletheia” caused “considerable unrest” among the Cyprus Moslems and were the immediate reason for a telegram to Colonial Office from the Council member for Nicosia, Dr Eyioub Moussa, as well as a letter of the Muslims spiritual leader, Ali Rif’at, the Cadi of Cyprus to the High Commissioner. Dr Eyioub wrote that “News for Union with Greece causing much panic. Mohammedans preparing for fight. We earnestly await your assurance by telegram”⁶⁶. The Cadi regarded the assurance given earlier to the Muslims by the High Commissioner⁶⁷ as “insufficient fully to calm the anxiety and commotion of the people” and therefore requested him to telegraph the Colonial Office asking “if there is any truth” in statements made in the Greek press that Cyprus was to be handed over to Greece⁶⁸. The Cadi asked also that “legal proceedings may be taken against those who are the authors and cause of such publications and rumours, hurting the Moslem feelings”⁶⁹.

The Cadi’s letter was answered verbally by the Acting High Commissioner, W.C. Orr, that it would be “highly inexpedient” to cable the Colonial office “in this sense” and at the same the Cadi was given assurance that the Government of Cyprus received “no intimation” that any change in the political status of the island was con-

⁶⁴ “Aletheia”, No. 1661, 15 February 1913, CO 67/169, Registry 9530: Goold-Adams to Harcourt, 13 March 1913, Enclosure: Extract from the “Aletheia”, Translation, leaf 265–266; also in CO 883/7/15, Mediterranean 77, No. 6, Enclosure 6, p. 5.

⁶⁵ CO 67/169, Registry 9530: Departmental minutes, 23 March 1913, 31 March 1913, leaf 262 recto and verso.

⁶⁶ CO 883/7/15 Mediterranean 77, Registry 10069: Eyioub Moussa to CO, 25 March 1913, Telegram, No. 7, p. 5.

⁶⁷ See CO 67/168, Registry 3780: Goold-Adams to Harcourt, 21 January 1913, Confidential, leaf 83–84; also in CO 883/7/15, Mediterranean 77, No. 6, pp. 4–5.

⁶⁸ CO 67/169, Registry 12119: C.W. Orr to Harcourt, 3 April 1913, Confidential, leaf 317.

⁶⁹ CO 67/169, Registry 12119: C.W. Orr to Harcourt, 3 April 1913, Confidential, Enclosure: The Cadi of Cyprus to Goold-Adams, 27 March 1913, Confidential, leaf 319–320.

templated and that in case of any “projected transfer” the Muslims would be given “ample notice”⁷⁰. The Colonial Office approved “the tenor of the reply” Orr gave to the Cadi⁷¹.

Harcourt asked Grey what to answer Dr Eyioub⁷², and was told that if an answer was “deemed desirable” it should be that “the union of Cyprus with Greece has not been considered” by His Majesty’s Government⁷³. A Colonial Office departmental minute stated that this answer “will probably go a long way to allay the present unrest [among Cyprus Muslims], which is not unjustified in view of the newspapers”⁷⁴.

Barely two days passed before the Colonial office received another dispatch from Cyprus that in the current issue of “Phone tes Kyprou” there appeared information that the High Commissioner of Cyprus, Sir Hamilton Goold-Adams, who was visiting Egypt, during a conversation with “a distinguished compatriot of ours” said that “officially he knew nothing, but personally he thought that the union of Cyprus with Greece would not be delayed”⁷⁵. Captain C.W. Orr, who was Acting High Commissioner, expecting questions from the Moslems of Cyprus connected with the publication, asked Colonial Office for the official refutation to be obtained from Goold-Adams. In reply to the request from the Colonial Office⁷⁶, Goold-Adams wrote that during the two days he spent in Egypt he never discussed with anyone the question of the future of Cyprus and he never even conversed with anyone who could “in the widest sense” be described as “a distinguished compatriot” of the Greek Cypriots. Thus, he confirmed, that there was “no truth whatever” in the publication in “Phone tes Kyprou”⁷⁷.

With the outbreak of the Great War and the growing necessity to convince Greece to join the Allies, in January 1915 a Foreign Office official suggested that “a bait for Greece might be found in Smyrna (and in certain eventualities, Cyprus)”⁷⁸. Ten days later Grey wrote to the British ambassador in Paris that it was “so essential to save Servia [sic!] by securing participation of Roumania and Greece” that the British were willing to “consider the cession of Cyprus to Greece, if this would really stimulate Greece to facilitate an arrangement with Bulgaria and promote a Balkan agree-

⁷⁰ CO 67/169, Registry 12119: C.W. Orr to Harcourt, 3 April 1913, Confidential, leaf 317.

⁷¹ CO 67/169, Registry 12119: Departmental minute, 18 April 1913, leaf 321.

⁷² CO 883/7/15, Mediterranean 77, Registry 10069: Read (CO) to FO, 28 March 1913, No. 8, p. 5.

⁷³ CO 883/7/15, Mediterranean 77, Registry 11684: Louis Mallet (FO) to CO, 7 April 1913, No. 9, p. 6; CO 883/7/15, Mediterranean 77, Registry 12119: Harcourt to C.W. Orr, 18 April 1913, No. 11, p. 7.

⁷⁴ CO 67/169, Registry 12119: Departmental minute, 14 April 1913, leaf 316.

⁷⁵ Extract from “Phone tes Kyprou”, 12 April 1913, CO 67/169, Registry 14020: C.W. Orr to Harcourt, 16 April 1913, Confidential, leaf 342; CO 883/7/15, Mediterranean 77, No. 12, pp. 7–8.

⁷⁶ CO 67/169, Registry 12119: Henry Lambert (Colonial Office) to Goold-Adams, 1 May 1913, draft, leaf 343; CO 883/7/15, Mediterranean 77, No. 13, p. 8.

⁷⁷ CO 883/7/15, Mediterranean 77, Goold-Adams to Henry Lambert (Colonial Office), 2 May 1913, No. 14, p. 8.

⁷⁸ FO 371/2241, Registry 2512: Lancelot Oliphant’s minute, 8 January 1915, leaf 277.

ment”⁷⁹. Eventually, on 16 November 1915, the British officially offered the island to the Zaimis government. As, however, Greece decided not to move but maintain a neutrality benevolent towards the Allies, the offer lapsed, never to be renewed⁸⁰. Thus the possibility of fulfilling the dreams of Greek Cypriots for *enosis* was ruined by “Mother Greece” herself.

STRESZCZENIE

BRYTYJSKA OFERTA PRZEKAZANIA CYPRU GRECJI Z 1912 ROKU ORAZ REAKCJE GRECKICH I TURECKICH CYPRIJCZYKÓW. BRYTYJSKI PUNKT WIDZENIA

Artykuł, oparty na materiałach archiwalnych z National Archives w Kew oraz na dzienniku brytyjskiego dyplomaty pochodzenia greckiego, Johna Stavridi, omawia brytyjską ofertę z 1912 r. dotyczącą przekazania Cypru Grecji w zamian za prawo używania greckiej Argostoli jako bazy morskiej. Churchill potrzebował Argostoli, aby ochraniać brytyjskie statki handlowe przed ewentualnym atakiem austro-węgierskiej i włoskiej floty wojennej na Morzu Śródziemnym. W grudniu oferta została przedstawiona greckiemu premierowi, Eleftheriosowi Venizelosowi, który ją zaakceptował. Te obiecujące rozmowy nie zakończyły się sukcesem, ale pokazały, że Venizelos jest gotowy współpracować ściśle z Wielką Brytanią i Francją.

Plotki o przekazaniu Cypru Grecji wzmocniły nadzieję greckich Cypryjczyków na wymarzone połączenie z Grecją, ale jednocześnie spowodowały liczne protesty tureckich Cypryjczyków.

Słowa kluczowe: Cypr, Grecja, Argostoli, Wielka Brytania, John Stavridi, Winston Churchill, Eleftherios Venizelos.

Key words: Cyprus, Greece, Argostoli, Great Britain, John Stavridi, Winston Churchill, Eleftherios Venizelos.

⁷⁹ FO 371/2241, Registry 6052: Grey to F. Bertie, 18 January 1915, Confidential, Telegraphic, No. 105, leaf 345.

⁸⁰ For a detailed discussion of the 1915 offer, see M. Misztal, *The Offer of Cyprus to Greece in 1915: A British Diplomatic Failure*, “Studia Historyczne”, 57, 4, 2014, pp. 473–491.