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THE DIPLOMATIC POSITION OF KOLETTIS
VIS A VIS FRANCE AND ENGLAND. A BRIEF ANALYSIS
OF THE FACTORS INVOLVED IN THE FOREIGN POLICY
OF THE FIRST GREEK CONSTITUTIONAL MINISTRY

Kolettis became prime minister of Greece on August 6th, 1844 with the encouragement, and with the unreserved assistance of France¹. Piscatory, France's ambassador in Athens, was instrumental in the establishment of an *entente* among the crown² and the leader of the «French» or «National» party. This cooperation of the monarchy with the popular political chieftain, became the cornerstone of the national policies of the Kolettis administration³.

The new ministry in Athens was considered by Guizot as the best guarantee for the political future of Greece. Its essentially conservative nature would have assured the tranquility of the kingdom from the forces unleashed by the revolution of 1843. Furthermore, Paris was confident that the new administration, in spite rumors to the contrary, would follow a realistic and a «proper» policy in its relations with the Ottoman Porte⁴. Kolettis had made it known, even before he had left Paris, that the territorial aggrandizement of the kingdom at the expense of its neighbor, was not in the political program of the «National» party⁵.

1. France, Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères. *Correspondance politique, Grèce*, vol. 41, fol. 21. Hereafter will be referred as *Correspondance politique, Grèce*.

2. *Ibid.*, vol. 40, fols. 226-238. See also Guizot, M. [onsieur]. [François], *France under Louis-Philippe from 1841 to 1847*, London, 1865, pp. 241-271. See also the comments of Queen Amalia concerning Kolettis in Petrakakos, *Koinobouleutike Historia tes Hellados*, 3 vols. (=1, 2, 7) Athens, 1935-1946, vol. 2, p. 435.

3. Jelavich, Barbara, *Russia and the Greek Revolution of 1843*, Munich, 1966, (*Südosteuropaische Arbeiten*, 65), pp. 66-67.

4. *Correspondance politique, Grèce*, vol. 41, fol. 30. See also vol. 43, fol. 125. Nearly forty years after Kolettis' death, in 1866, in a pamphlet written by an advocate of Greece's claims in Macedonia, Kolettis is taken to task for ignoring and abandoning Macedonia to Bulgarian designs. «In Italy in 1856... Ioannis Theodoridis...while studying medicine [was] initiated... in the Slavic propaganda about Macedonia. Fearful... he left for Athens and announced to Kolettis the terrible secret. But unfortunately Greek policy [then] and for a long time after, considered Macedonia from afar and Kolettis paid no attention whatsoever to the revelations of Theodoridis». Kalostypis, Ioannis, *Macedonia*, Athens, 1886, p. 62.

5. See letter of Kolettis to Guizot, where the former explicitly disavowed any intentions to perpetrate actions of hostility against the Porte. Guizot, *France under Louis-Philippe from 1841 to 1847*, pp. 298-299.

The Russian court also displayed a considerable degree of goodwill toward the new government¹. It is true, of course, that Nesselrode in his instructions to the Russian envoys in Paris and in Athens, had recommended the formation of a ministry of national unity in Athens, one composed by members of the «Russian» and of the «French» parties. However, the Russian minister did not oppose a purely «pro-French» cabinet headed by Kolettis. Nesselrode's main concern was the establishment of a stable administration which could enjoy the trust of the majority of the electorate, and prevent Greece from falling under British influence once again. Saint Petersburg, as it was the case with Paris, was of the opinion that the government of Athens, would not jeopardise the peace and tranquility of the East by fomenting uprisings in the Greek inhabited territories of the Porte².

Essentially then France and Russia affirmed that their support of the new administration rested on three fundamental principles: the preservation of the monarchical order; a moderate program of constitutional reforms; and, above all, a policy of peace *vis a vis* the Ottoman Empire³. The latter is of considerable importance as far as the direction of the Russian foreign policy toward the Porte is concerned. Even before the visit of Tsar Nicholas I to London in 1844 Saint Petersburg had embarked on a policy of peace with the Ottoman Empire. Russian expansion in the Balkans in spite assertions to the contrary, was not at the moment desired by Saint Petersburg.

In Greece, Kolettis was an active proponent of a *rapprochement* with the ancient enemy, the Porte⁴. The active role of the Greek com-

1. Dispatch of M. de Rayneval, French ambassador at Saint Petersburg, to Guizot of October 27, 1844, *Correspondance politique, Grèce*, vol. 42, fol. 314.

2. Malakasses, John Thomas, *France as a Protecting Power in Greece, 1832-1848. A Diplomatic History* (unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, University of Cincinnati, 1973), p. 155.

3. *Ibidem*.

4. Kyriakidis emphasizes the duality of Kolettis' goals: «establishment of governmental stability and the rise of the fallen royal prestige». However, Kyriakidis speaks of a third goal, that of national expansion to the detriment of Turkey. But this was more of a demagogic slogan than an established national policy. Kyriakidis, Epaminondas, *Historia tou Synchronou Hellenismou. Apo tes Hidryseos tou Basileiou tes Hellados mechri ton Hemeron mas 1832-1892*, 2 vols, Athens, 1892-1894, vol. I, pp. 523-524. Kordatos' assertions that Piscatory had given assurances to the king that France would support Greek expansion in Crete, Epirus, Thessaly are unsupported. At no time did Piscatory give promises of such French support in return for Kolettis becoming prime minister.

mercial element in the Empire, and especially the developing Greek merchant marine, had prompted the new administration in Athens to seek a commercial understanding with Constantinople¹. The benefits to the country and to the Greek commerce from such an agreement were evident. The growing Greek commercial class of the Empire, under a benevolent regime, would have assumed a position of economic preponderance in the economic life of Turkey. Of course, such a plan presupposed the existence of peaceful relations among Greece and the Ottoman Empire.

But the Greek administration saw its efforts seriously undermined by the opposition of Britain. The fall of the head of the «English» party Mavrokordatos in 1844 had precipitated a serious crisis in the Anglo-Greek relations². Britain not only suspected Kolettis of pro-French leanings, but was allegedly also concerned with his «nationalistic» policies of expansion. Any Greek aggrandizement, especially the peaceful penetration of the Ottoman markets by the Greek commercial class, was viewed by Britain, and rightly so, as detrimental to the English commercial interests there. The Porte, also mistrustful of Kolettis, because of the myths surrounding his name, fell an easy prey to the British dislike of the Greek administration, and resisted all efforts of Kolettis to establish an era of cooperation among the two states³.

Kordatos, Giannis, *Historia tes Neoteris Helladas*, 5 vols., Athens, 1957-1958, vol. 3, pp. 364-366.

Greek authors, in my opinion, have erroneously attributed to Kolettis irredentist policies. Misled by his internal propaganda, and the polemics stemming from the British embassy, they have called Kolettis the champion of Greek nationalism. See Philaretos, Georgios, *Xenokratia kai Basileia en Helladi 1821-1897*, Athens, 1897, pp. 93-95. Aspreas does not hesitate to call Kolettis the flag-bearer of the «great idea». Aspreas Georgios, *Politike Historia tes Neoteris Hellados 1821-1921*, 3 vols., Athens, 1922-1930, vol. I, p. 208. See also the monographs by Babouskos, Konstantinos, *He Megale Idea hos Idea kai Pragmatikotes*, Thessaloniki, 1970; Demaras, Konstantinos, *Tes Megales Tantes Ideas*, Athens, 1970. See also a minor, repetitive work by Kolsin-Pollis, Adamantia. *He Megale Idea. A Study on Greek Nationalism* (typewritten Ph. D. thesis, John Hopkins University, Faculty of Philosophy), 1958, pp. 434.

1. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

2. *Correspondance politique, Grèce*, vol. 42, fol. 211. See also fols. 216; 230-231; 234-235.

3. A series of unfriendly, if not outright hostile, actions by the Ottoman authorities, had welcomed the new administration of Kolettis. See letter of Kolettis to Piscatory of March 29, 1845. *Correspondance politique, Grèce* vol. 43, fol. 130. Also letter by the same to the French chargé d'affaires in Athens Sebatier, of May 30, 1845. *Ibid.*, fols., 228-229.

British diplomacy, once it had determined that the cabinet in Athens with the active support of the Greek monarchy was antagonistic to its interests in the East, invented every possible way to embarrass Kolettis and bring about his downfall. The Greek refusal to ratify the treaty of September 1843, the one pertaining to the Greek finances — the international financial control imposed by the three powers in Greece in the summer of 1843 — increased further British dislike of Kolettis¹. The «audacity» of Athens to defy the powers, and essentially Britain, was prompted not so much because of Kolettis' irresponsible defiance of that power, but rather because the Greek economy precluded the resumption of regular payments. Furthermore, the Greek inability was made known to all three signatory powers of the September convention. France and Russia, without abandoning their claims, had agreed on a temporary postponement of payments by the Greek kingdom. Britain on the contrary insisted on the strict execution of the treaties of September 1843 and May 7, 1832.

The last years of the Kolettis' administration were then dominated by an all-consuming and agonizing confrontation with Britain and her ally the Porte. Palmerston, the new British secretary of state, who had succeeded Aberdeen, gave his active encouragement and malicious advice to the ever-ready Turks, in all of their disputes with Kolettis. The case of the Cretan refugees², who were being manipulated by the Ottoman representative in Athens, the first of a long series of controversies among the neighboring states, provided Palmerston with an ideal opportunity to castigate in no uncertain terms the conduct of the Greek state³. It can be said that Palmerston's dispatch marked the

1. «The Government of H. M. [wrote Aberdeen] is obliged to adopt toward the Greek Government relatively to the future reimbursements of the loan interest, a language which could not be misunderstood or put aside. The Greek Government, in refusing to ratify the convention of September 14, 1843, could not escape the existing obligations which Greece has contracted toward the guarantee powers. These obligations are distinctly determined by the article 12 of the convention of May 7, 1832, which constituted the Greek Kingdom under the Bavarian dynasty. In default of the ratification [by the Greek government] of the convention of September 14, 1843, Great Britain, in her capacity as one of the guarantee powers, would insist...on the strict execution of the engagements which result from the aforesaid article 12th». *Ibid.*, vol. 44, fols. 126-127.

2. Letter of Kolettis to Musurus, August 13, 1846. *Ibid.*, vol. 45, fols. 187-188.

3. «With reference to your [Lyons'] despatch No 70, of the 10th ultimo enclosing a copy of a letter addressed by Monsieur Coletti to Monsieur Musu-

beginning of the British diplomatic offensive in Greece. British opposition become intensified in the early months of 1847, following the Musurus incident.

French diplomacy, which up to now was able to weather the Anglo-Turkish attack launched against Kolletis, suddenly found itself confronted with the determined and irrevocable decision of Palmerston not to tolerate any longer an unfriendly to the British interests regime in Greece. France could not any longer support dynamically Kolettis, except at the risk of a broader rupture with Britain. Mindful of her permanent European interests, to maintain an *entente* with Britain, Paris advised Kolettis to be more «moderate»¹. French diplomacy exerted, in an attempt, vain otherwise, to limit the conflict, all its influence at Constantinople to minimize the consequences of the Musurus incident and appease the Porte². This French diplomatic manœuvre by the Porte failed, since the Turks were constantly incited by the British diplomacy to maintain an arrogant and an uncompromising position³. It was thought in London, that the major crisis

rus, the Ottoman Minister at Athens, complaining that means are employed to induce the Cretan emigrants in Greece to return to their native island, I have to state to you that all persons residing in Greece, whether originally settled there, or having come thither from any part of the Turkish Dominions have a clear and undisputable right to leave Greece whenever they please, and that the intention of the Three Powers in making Greece independent was that it should be a free state, and not a great prison. The Greek Government may naturally dislike to see Greeks prefer to go to reside in the Turkish territory rather than to remain in the Kingdom of Greece, but it is the fault of the Greek Government that such preference is felt, and if the Greek Ministers persevere, in their present system of misgovernment, and if, by the mal-administration of affairs, robbery, violence, outrage and murder are encouraged by impunity, if neither the properties nor the lives of quiet and industrious men are secure, it will become surprising if any man who is able to leave the Greek state, should continue to reside in it. I have to desire that you will transmit, officially, a copy of this dispatch to Monsieur Coletti». *Ibid.*, fols. 279-280.

1. See dispatch of Piscatory to Guizot, January 30th, 1847. *Ibid.*, vol. 46, fols. 47-62. See also Poulos I. *To Epeisodion Mousourou. He Hellenotourkike Dienezis tou 1847*, Athens, 1959. Poulos' study makes use of some documents in the French diplomatic archives, but he surprisingly omits a great amount of documentary material which illuminates the role of France in the crisis. Poulos in his interpretation fails also to see the emerging independence of Kolettis from all foreign influence.

2. *Ibid.*, fols. 174-175.

3. See dispatch of Bourqueney, French ambassador at Constantinople, to Piscatory, February 8th, 1847. *Ibid.*, fols. 151-153.

in the Greco - Turkish relations which had resulted from the relatively minor diplomatic imbroglio with Musurus, with proper manipulation, would probably force Kolettis to resign¹, thus paving the way for Mavrokordatos and the «English» party to return to power. In addition the monarchy, with the toppling of its stoutest supporter, would have — if it desired to remain in the kingdom — more or less capitulated to the British demands, return to the British orbit, and accept a renewed British protectorate.

At this instance Kolettis, because of the force of circumstances, and the unreserved favor of the throne and the people that he enjoyed, felt confident to adopt an «uncompromising» position. It was the first time, since the establishment of the «independent» kingdom that the prime minister of the responsible government had dared follow a policy free of servility and dependance on one of the three «protecting powers». It should be added, of course, that a diplomatic retreat by Kolettis at this time, in the face of the combined British and Ottoman pressures, would have ended his political program and terrorized the crown into submission. These realistic political considerations on the part of the seasoned politician, whom the crisis had elevated to the position of a national leader, were not shared by the French government, and for obvious reasons, as has been indicated elsewhere. French diplomacy aghast at the impasse and the implications of the Musurus crisis, and above all the dynamic involvement of Britain against Kolettis, thought convenient to repudiate her protégé in Greece. Guizot, unwilling and unable to sacrifice larger French interests at stake elsewhere, «suggested» to Athens that Kolettis resign from office, at least temporarily². It was a friendly advice, by a personal admirer to the head of an independent government. Kolettis' acceptance or not of this suggestion would not have exposed Greece to any reprimand.

1. «You will [Palmerston wrote to Lyons] remind Mr. Kolettis that the political guarantee that Great Britain, France and Russia gave to Greece by the treaty of May 7, 1832, ceases to be applicable in the case that the Greek government will by its own fault and by its aggressive actions have brought against Greece legitimate hostilities on the part of a foreign power». *Ibid.*, vol. 47, fols. 108-109. Kolettis responded to this attack by Palmerston with the comment that «such an interpretation of the treaty was certainly uncontested». See reply of Kolettis to Palmerston, April, 1847, *Ibid.*, fols., 131-133.

2. Malakasses, *France as a Protecting Power in Greece, 1832-1848. A Diplomatic History*. See also similar «suggestions» made to Kolettis by the ambassadors of the central powers, who up to this time had steadfastly supported Kolettis and his policies. *Correspondance politique, Grèce*, vol. 47, fol. 154. See also Engel - Ja-

sals or the part of France. Of course, the support rendered to Kolettis would have been progressively lukewarm, and thus quite ineffective, exposing only the head of the «French» party to scorn by his political opponents and the Porte. The French attempt to solve peacefully the Musurus episode, and the subsequent dissolution felt both at Athens and at Constantinople with the ineffectiveness of the French diplomacy, opened a new chapter in the Franco - Greek relations, and indeed in the position of France in the Balkans. Prior to this, and especially during the last two years of the Kolettis administration, France had appeared to be in a position of dominance in the affaires of Greece. Its support had been considered vital and necessary for the local adherents of the «French» party, at least in the internal Greek political arena. French diplomacy had made skillful use of the prevailing conditions in Greece following the September revolution to bring Kolettis into power. In association with Austria and Bavaria, the principal supporters of the monarchy in Greece, Piscatory was able to establish a firm understanding among the suspicious king and the head of the «National» party. The cooperation of those two forces had rendered the opponents of Kolettis, both foreign and domestic, powerless. The «political dictatorship» of Kolettis was resting on assured ground. France, probably without realizing the broader implications of this *coup d'état* had created instead of a client regime, a nationalistic and highly independent political force in Greece, which was difficult to be contained without losing its credibility. The government of Kolettis had ushered a new period in Greece's foreign policy. The fact that his regime did not depend on the continuous favor on the part of one of the protecting powers for its own existence, and also the successful taming of the throne, were the elements that permitted Kolettis to defy both the «suggestions» of the French and the threats of Palmerston and his ally the Porte.

nosi, «Austria and the Beginnings of the Kingdom of Greece» *Journal of Central European Affairs*, 1 (April 1941 — January 1942), 29-44, 208-223. According to Engel - Janosi the Austrian ambassador in Athens, Prokesch, along with the new Prussian minister Werther, with whom he was in complete accord, had advised Kolettis to withdraw from his post. *Ibid.*, 217.