

*Zacharias N. Tsirpanlis*

**Camille Barrère and the Italo-Turkish Dispute over Kastellorizo  
in 1923**

*In memory  
of Antonia Pista*

Kastellorizo, an island of nine square kilometres at the south-eastern extremity of the Aegean or at the edge of the eastern Mediterranean, has been the outermost land and sea frontier of Greek territory since 1947. From 1912 to the end of the Second World War, the islanders lived through difficult times, suffering economic and mental duress, facing havoc from earthquakes and bombing, and enduring the great nations' scorn of their national and human rights.

Part of the Ottoman Empire from 1522 and inhabited exclusively by Greeks, the island naturally sought union with Mother Greece during the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913. The Italians, who had occupied the nearest islands, the so-called South Sporades or Dodecanese, in May 1912, refused for strategic reasons to extend their dominion some seventy-two nautical miles east of Rhodes as far as Kastellorizo. As we shall see, they probably had cause to regret this ere long.

When the islanders rebelled on 1/14 March 1913 and captured the small unresisting Turkish garrison, they did not receive ready support from the Venizelos administration, on account of the island's geographical position (just two miles off the coast of Asia Minor), its great distance from Greek-held areas, and the pressing priorities of Athens.

All this we know from the existing literature, most notably the early historical account by Dr Evangelos Vardamidis, as also more recent writings<sup>1</sup>.

1. Vardamidis, pp. 123-186; Renzo Sertoli Salis, *Le isole italiane dell'Egeo dall'occupazione alla sovranità*, Rome 1939, pp. 101-102; Kostas Tsalahouris, "Το Καστελλόριζο στις παραμονές της επανάστασης της 1ης Μαρτίου 1913", *Δωδεκανησιακά Χρονικά* 11 (1986) 187-214 (Tsalahouris does not know about Vardamidis and republishes documents which he believes to be unpublished); idem, *Ίμια. Το χρονικό της χάραξης των συ-*

The two-year period that followed (March 1913 - December 1915) was characterised by national fervour and a strong spirit of local self-government, with the indirect support of the Greek government<sup>2</sup>. It must be said, however, that, in terms of international law, the new régime on the island had no cover whatsoever. Neither Italy, on nearby Rhodes, nor Greece recognised the legitimacy of the islanders' actions. Furthermore, at the London Conference, the six Great Powers of the time (Britain, France, Germany, Austro-Hungary, Russia, and Italy) had decided that Greece should give the islands of Tenedos, Imbros, and Kastellorizo back to Turkey. This, among other things, was stated in their collective note of 31 January/13 February 1914, which was issued to Greece and Turkey. Athens accepted the decision in a reply dated 8 or 9/21 or 22 February<sup>3</sup>.

In other words, the islanders were entirely alone and unprotected, and they were understandably terrified of a vengeful restoration of Turkish misrule. Rumours of a bloody invasion by the Turks from the coast opposite kept the island in a state of mortal insecurity<sup>4</sup>.

Patrols by Greek warships in the local waters, the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, and the occupation of Kastellorizo on 28 December 1915 (New Style) by the French navy staved off any

*νόρων της Δωδεκανήσου (1932-1947)*, Athens 1997, pp. 75-102 (includes excerpts from Greek documents about already known events). Cf. also the interesting, informative, well-illustrated articles about Kastellorizo in the *Καθημερινή* Sunday magazine *Επτά Ημέρες*, 18 Feb. 1996.

2. Vardamidis, pp. 187-220.

3. For more details, see Athena Macris De Fabo, *The Aegean Island Question and Greece: A Diplomatic History, 1911-1914*, typewritten doctoral thesis defended at the George Washington University on 16 February 1981, and available from University Microfilms International (UMI), pp. 214-217; cf. Ronald John Lagoe, *Greece and the Great Powers: The Question of the Aegean Islands, 1912-1914*, typewritten doctoral thesis defended at Ohio University in June 1976 (UMI), pp. 309-315. For the texts themselves (the collective note and Turkey's and Greece's replies of 16 February and 21 February 1914 respectively), see *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914*, edited by G. P. Gooch and Harold Temperley, vol. X, part I, London 1936, Nos. 252, 253, 255, pp. 231-237; Charles Strupp, *La situation internationale de la Grèce (1821-1917): Recueil de documents choisis et édités, avec une introduction historique et dogmatique*, Zurich 1918, pp. 232-239 (including the other note which the Powers sent to the Greek government on 11/24 April 1914). Cf. Domna Dontas, *Greece and Turkey: The Regime of the Straits, Lemnos and Samothrace*, Athens 1987, pp. 26-27 (republication).

4. Vardamidis, pp. 156-157, 160-169.

adverse situation for the 9,000 or so islanders<sup>5</sup>. However, they also engendered further complications. The French action was rationalised by the need to monitor the hostile German submarines and the Turks' movements and mood<sup>6</sup>. The Athens government protested to Paris that Greek neutrality was being violated<sup>7</sup>. But no international act had adjudicated Kastellorizo to be part of the Greek state. To the contrary, on the basis of the verbal note of 1914, Turkey still retained its full sovereign rights<sup>8</sup>.

The French *occupatio bellica* was officially prolonged until 1 March 1921. The members of the French naval force seem to have lived quite harmoniously alongside the islanders, respecting the local institutions and their representatives, protecting the population from the predatory inclinations of the nearby Turks, and ensuring an adequate food supply during the difficult war years. The islanders, for their part, actively supported the French, offering their lives and all they possessed in the hope of victory over the common foe. After the War, in October 1920, the French republic officially acknowledged the islanders' self-sacrifice and heroism by awarding them collectively the *croix de guerre*<sup>9</sup>.

5. This was the estimated population in 1910: Livio Livi, *Prime linee per una storia demografica di Rodi e delle isole dipendenti dall'età classica ai nostri giorni*, Florence 1944, p. 164.

6. Sertoli Salis, *op.cit.*, pp. 222-224; Vardamidis, pp. 226-231.

7. Areti Tounda-Fergadi, "Violations de la neutralité grecque par les Puissances de l'Entente durant la première guerre mondiale", *Balkan Studies* 26 (1985) 115-120 (based on documents from the archive of the Greek Foreign Ministry); almost the same information in *eadem*, *Θέματα ελληνικής διπλωματικής ιστορίας (1912-1940)*, Athens 1996, pp. 88-92; cf. Tsalahouris, *Ίμια*, pp. 97-101 (who draws on the same documents).

8. Tounda-Fergadi, *op.cit.*, p. 119; Tsalahouris, *op.cit.*, p. 102.

9. Still important with regard to the French occupation is a book by Charles Héderer, Hellenist and medical officer in the French navy, *L'Île du Château-rouge (Castellorizo)*, Paris 1924 (extract from the *Revue maritime*), pp. 84 (partic. pp. 65-84, with interesting photographs; the preceding pages concern the ancient and mediaeval history of Kastellorizo). Héderer gives an eye-witness account as an active member of the force that occupied the island from 1915 to June 1918, when he was replaced by a colleague (p. 82 n. 2). Vardamidis (pp. 226-236) draws information and reproduces photographs from Héderer's book. For the island's jurisdictional status, see the monograph by Arnaldo Bertola (well-known jurist of the inter-war period, President of the Civil and Penal Court of Rhodes, and Professor in Turin University), *Cenni sull'ordinamento giuridico di Castelrosso durante l'occupazione francese (1915-1921)*, Rhodes 1924; cf. Vittorio Alhadeff, *L'ordinamento giuridico di Rodi e delle altre isole italiane dell'Egeo*, Milan 1927, pp. 191-197. For an example of recorded oral history, see Antonis Yannardassis, "Ιστορικά γεγονότα παρμένα από πρώτο 'χέρι'", in *H*

It is worth pointing out that those five years and two months of French occupation (28 Dec. 1915 - 1 Mar. 1921) strengthened the islanders' desire for independence and freedom and their (somewhat utopian, but necessary) optimistic belief in their eventual national rehabilitation, namely union with Greece. It was then too that a Gallophile faction came into being, which hoped that French rule would be maintained on the island.

It must be said that this period, when the French were on Kastellorizo, has not been studied either from the point of view of the internal organisation of the society and the economy or with regard to the international speculation that focused on this area after 1915. Some matters relating chiefly to diplomatic activity are clarified in a sheaf of French documents in the archives of the French Foreign Ministry: AMAE - Série Z, Europe 1918-1919, sous série, Grèce, No. 171 (Castellorizo 1918-1929). The sheaf comprises 174 numbered folios, and the bulk of the documents span the period from July 1919 to March 1921, though some are from 1923-1924. This, of course, was the crucial period of the Paris Conference (1919), when the fate of millions of people and various places, including Kastellorizo, was being discussed and decided<sup>10</sup>.

I shall not dwell on the documents of 1919-1921, for there are many of them and they pose a variety of problems. I may deal with them at a later date.

In accordance with the title of this article, I shall confine myself to one specific moment in time, 1923, for the following reasons.

i) Because the writings of a competent French diplomat, Camille Barrère (1851-1940), who served his country as ambassador to Rome for many years<sup>11</sup>, reveal, with delicate irony, the lameness of the argu-

*Φωνή του Καστελλόριζου*, No. 47 (Sept. 1981), pp. 2, 6; No. 48 (Oct. 1981), p. 2; No. 49 (Nov. 1981), p. 5.

10. N. Petsalis-Diomidis, *Greece at the Paris Peace Conference (1919)*, Thessaloniki 1976, pp. 136, 175 and n. 11.

11. For twenty-eight years, from 1897 to 1924; he dispatched numerous reports from Rome, and about the Dodecanese in particular from 1912 onwards: see e.g., *Documents diplomatiques français (1871-1914)*, 3rd series (1911-1914), vols. 1-8, Paris 1929-1935. Barrère was a pivotal figure during the Italo-French dispute and the two countries' clash of interests in the Mediterranean and the Near East; cf. the chapter on the Dodecanese and Italo-French relations in Francesco Cataluccio, *Antonio di San Giuliano e la politica estera italiana dal 1900 al 1914*, Florence 1935, pp. 130-137; Enrico Serra, *Camille Barrère e*

ments presented at the Lausanne Conference by the interested parties, Italy and Turkey, regarding their claims to Kastellorizo. Barrère's ironic tone reveals the true situation and the amoral attitude of the Great Powers; it does not, however, help to vindicate the weak.

ii) Because diplomatic history frequently goes no further than a dry interpretation of the final wording of the articles of the treaties—in this case, the Treaty of Sèvres (10 August 1920) and, particularly, the Treaty of Lausanne (24 July 1923). The backstage wheeling and dealing is usually ignored.

I shall use the French documents published here, together with others issued by the Italian diplomatic delegation at Lausanne in the spring of 1923, to try to clarify the two preceding paragraphs.

It must first be borne in mind that, like the Greek government earlier, the Italian government had made protests to the French government just after the War (in December 1918), demanding the cession of Kastellorizo, which was regarded as a major stopping-place on the sea-route between Rhodes and Attalia. The French Foreign Minister, Étienne Pichon, had assured the Italians that his country would respect their claims in the region<sup>12</sup>.

Under article 122 of the peace treaty concluded at Sèvres between the victorious Allies and Turkey, Italy received all legitimate rights to the Dodecanese, which it already held, and to Kastellorizo<sup>13</sup>. And so, a few months later, disregarding the islanders' protests and, once again, brutally violating the as yet only orally formulated principle of nationalities, the French handed the island over to the Italians in a formal ceremony on 1 March 1921<sup>14</sup>. The latter were satisfied and believed that

*l'intesa italo-francese*, Milan 1950 (excellent monograph).

12. Petsalis-Diomidis, *op.cit.*, p. 70 and n. 15.

13. For the text of article 122, *inter alia*, see Skevos Zervos, *La Question du Dodécanèse et ses documents diplomatiques*, Athens 1926, pp. 108, 111. It should be remembered that the Greek-Italian treaty ceding the Dodecanese, minus Rhodes, to Greece was signed at Sèvres on the same day (10 August 1920). This is also the date of the letter from the Italian ambassador to Paris, Lelio Bonin-Longare, to Venizelos, promising wide local autonomy for Kastellorizo (for the texts, see *ibid.*, pp. 100-101, 118-119). For the reasons why the Greek-Italian agreement of 1920 could not be implemented, see Zacharias Tsirpanlis, *Ιταλοκρατία στα Δωδεκάνησα. 1912-1943. Αλλοτριώση του ανθρώπου και του περιβάλλοντος*, Rhodes 1998, pp. 120-121.

14. AMAE, *cit.*, ff. 92<sup>r</sup>, 93<sup>r</sup> (text of the referendum—typewritten copy in French

the international community had safeguarded their dominions.

Two years later, however, with prestige and morale high following its great victory over the Greeks, Kemalist Turkey forcefully brought up, among other issues discussed at Lausanne, the question of its sovereignty over Kastellorizo. More specifically, on 8 March 1923, the Turkish Foreign Minister Ismet İnönü, who was heading his country's diplomatic delegation to Lausanne, read out a lengthy memorandum of counterproposals to the leading delegates of Great Britain, France, and Italy who had been appointed to Constantinople<sup>15</sup>. Apart from its other demands, the Turkish government was seeking the return of Kastellorizo, arguing that the island was just off the coast of Asia Minor and supporting its claim with the abovementioned decision taken by the Great Powers in London in 1914. On 10 March 1923, the Italian delegate, Felice Maissa, sent a hasty telegram to the Foreign Minister and Prime Minister, Benito Mussolini, mentioning only the matter that concerned Italy, i.e. Kastellorizo, and expressing the emphatic opinion that there could be no question of returning the island to the Turks. Just off the Turkish coast it might be, "*ma la popolazione è tutta ortodossa*"<sup>16</sup>. No mention of the fact that they were also Greeks!

One wonders at the Italian diplomat's ingenuous thought processes. He skates over the manifest and universally acknowledged ethnic identity of the islanders, highlights their religious identity (evidently in contradistinction to the Moslem Turks), and takes the latter as his sole basis for demanding recognition of Italian occupancy. At least he concedes that the islanders are Orthodox and not Roman Catholic.

translation— of the people of Kastellorizo for union with Greece: 19 Aug. 1920); ff. 158<sup>r</sup>, 159<sup>r</sup> (Kastellorizo, 1 Mar. 1921: copy, in French, of the official report of the cession of the island by the French to the Italians; signed by the French rear-admiral Mornet and his Italian counterpart Leoniero Galleani).

15. Sertoli Salis, *op.cit.*, pp. 297, 318. For İnönü's text, see *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, edited by W. N. Medlicott, Douglas Dakin, and M. E. Lambert, First Series, vol. 18, London 1972, pp. 990-1005; republished in: *Υπουργείο Εξωτερικών, 1919-1940. Ελληνικά διπλωματικά έγγραφα*, vol. 3 (20 Nov. 1922 - 24 July 1923), Athens 1994 (edited by Domna Visvizi-Dontas), pp. 737-744; cf. Domna Visvizi-Dontas, "Le Dodécanèse à la Conférence de Lausanne (1922-1923)", *Balkan Studies* 35 (1994) 77-78 (= Domna Donta, "Τα Δωδεκάνησα κατά τη συνδιάσκεψη της Λωζάνης του 1922-1923", in: *Ρόδος 2400. Διεθνές Συνέδριο 1993*, Rhodes 1994, pp. 342-343).

16. DDI, 7th series, vol. 1, No. 594, p. 420.

Three days later, on 13 March, Rome had no hesitation in proclaiming its rights over Kastellorizo. The French ambassador to Rome, Barrère, telegraphed to Paris the full semi-official government text, which had been distributed to the press (doc. No. 1). Italy's arguments were: i) that there were no Turks living on Kastellorizo, the population numbered 3,000, all were Greeks with a handful of Jews<sup>17</sup>, and the Turkish government therefore had no justifiable claim to the island, since the Ottoman national Pact<sup>18</sup> concerned claims to territory with an exclusively Turkish population; ii) that the French had ceded the island to the Italians as minor, direct compensation in view of the colonial acquisitions the War had given to France and Britain; iii) that the authority of the Allied decisions did not admit of any doubt or delay as a result of the Turkish demands: both the French and the British government would jointly support Italy's just and legitimate annexation of Kastellorizo.

Barrère's comments on the Italian arguments and the articles in the Roman press are quite caustic. In his letter of 16 March 1923 to the French Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Raymond Poincaré (doc. No. 2), he describes the indignation in Rome's journalistic circles and by extension the displeasure in Italian public opinion regarding Turkey's vulgar, ill-advised action.

The French diplomat dwells particularly on an article in the pro-government (Fascist) newspaper *La Tribuna*, the author of which maintains that a sense of diplomatic decency, if nothing else, should have deterred the Turks from "kicking those [the Italians] who had offered them a helping hand for years and years". Barrère justifiably scoffs at the righteous ire of the journalist, who has forgotten the Italo-Turkish war over Libya (1911-1912). One cannot but smile, says Barrère, at the Italians' misfortune over the Turks' claim to Kastellorizo, when one considers the accommodating attitude and the eager compliance shown towards the Turkish demands by Italy's second delegate at Lausanne, Giulio Cesare Montagna. It was he, indeed, who had previously declared

17. This was not so. According to the census of 1922, there were 2,742 inhabitants, all of them Greek Orthodox: see Ermanno Armao's well-documented study, *Annuario amministrativo e statistico per l'anno 1922*, Rome 1923, p. 115.

18. Passed by the great national assembly in Ankara on 28 January 1920: see S. T. Laskaris, *Διπλωματική ιστορία της σύγχρονου Ευρώπης (1914-1939)*, Thessaloniki 1954, p. 159.

that peace should be concluded with Turkey on any terms, because no one was disposed to go to war with the Turks. It had been believed that Montagna's pro-Turkish stance would ensure Ankara's good will towards Rome.

However, İnönü's proposals of 8 March completely reversed the Italians' feelings and bitterly disappointed them. Their expectations that their gracious conduct towards the Turks would be rewarded were dashed.

In the British embassy in Rome, Barrère adds, the Italians' disappointment and indignation over the Kastellorizo affair were a source of some amusement, ironic smiles being provoked by the logic of the journalists' (and diplomats') argument that Kastellorizo ought to be Italian because its inhabitants were Greek.

Besides, the British were wary, to the point of downright refusal, of strengthening the Italian presence in the eastern Mediterranean. In their reports in the first half of 1923, the Italian diplomats in London and Lausanne frequently allude to the anti-Italian stance of the British Foreign Minister George Nathaniel Curzon, with regard to both the Dodecanese and Kastellorizo. İnönü's firm and uncompromising demand for the little island, from March to May 1923, also rested on the smouldering antipathy between the British and the Italians, though Curzon was vehemently critical of the Turks' intransigence<sup>19</sup>.

Barrère too, as France's plenipotentiary at Lausanne, bluntly dismissed Turkey's immoderate demands, even though the two documents reproduced here show him as reprehending the Italian argument regarding Kastellorizo. Other sources, in fact, tell us that he had left Lausanne on 23 January 1923 and returned to his post in Rome, accompanied by rumours of a disagreement with Poincaré over the latter's extremely compliant attitude to the Turks' demands<sup>20</sup>.

19. Cf. DDI, 7th series, vol. 1, No. 617 pp. 440-441: London, 16 Mar. 1923, the Italian ambassador Pietro Tomasi della Torretta to the Foreign Minister and Prime Minister Mussolini (referring to "*insidie che si nascondono in questo ... atteggiamento britannico*"); No. 743 pp. 528-529: Lausanne, 25 Apr. 1923, Montagna to Mussolini; No. 748 p. 533 and No. 750 pp. 533-534: Lausanne, 26 Apr. 1923, *idem* to *idem*; vol. 2, No. 13 pp. 8-9: Lausanne, 2 May 1923, *idem* to *idem* ("*ripeto che nella questione [of Kastellorizo] temesi soprattutto la duplicità di Curzon*"); No. 14 p. 9: London, 2 May 1923, della Torretta to Mussolini ("*dalla conversazione non ho rilevato che Curzon potesse fare un doppio gioco incoraggiando di sottomano turchi alla resistenza*").

20. See the document in: *Υπουργείο Εξωτερικών, 1919-1940, op.cit.*, No. 324 p.

There seems to be reliable evidence that, shortly before he left Lausanne, the French diplomat stated:

I hope to return to Lausanne, but only when we have stood up to the Turks. I should never wish to end my career with a sense of shame for having signed an agreement by which the Great Powers had abdicated all their rights and responsibilities<sup>21</sup>.

At the time when he was writing these two documents (13-16 March), Barrère met Konstantinos Psaroudas, the Greek ambassador to Rome. In a report by the latter to Foreign Minister Apostolos Alexandris, we read that the two ambassadors met on 16 March 1923. During their discussion, Barrère expressed his discomfort over the concessions made to the Turks; stated his belief that no French institution, whether financial or educational, would henceforth be able to operate in Turkey; and opined that French influence in Turkey would disappear following the deracination of the Greeks and the Armenians. Psaroudas told him how badly Greek public opinion had received the news of the French plenipotentiary's departure from Lausanne<sup>22</sup>, for the Greeks had regarded Barrère's presence at the conference as a guarantee of a firmer policy towards the Turks<sup>23</sup>. This indicates his positive contribution—at a personal level, indeed, and contrary to the general trend of his own country's foreign policy—towards strengthening the Greek positions, together, of course, with French interests in the East.

As for Kastellorizo, the Italians' tenacity, backed eventually by London and Paris, overcame İnönü's intransigence. The negotiations between the Turks and the Italians began in mid-March 1923 and continued for two arduous months. Turkey was afraid that Italy might at some point be forced to hand the Dodecanese and Kastellorizo over to Greece. There was, after all, the earlier example of the Greek-Italian Treaty of Sèvres in 1920. The fact that the little island might be armed and fortified or become a smuggling centre were two strong arguments

411: Lausanne, 9/22 Jan. 1923, D. Kaklamanos to A. Alexandris.

21. *Ibid.*, No. 332 p. 418: Lausanne, 10/23 Jan. 1923, *idem* to *idem* (French text).

22. It might be worth looking for news reports or articles in the contemporary Greek press regarding Barrère's diplomatic activity at Lausanne.

23. *Ibid.*, No. 481 pp. 532-533: Rome, 17 Mar. 1923, K. Psaroudas to A. Alexandris.

propounded by the Turkish diplomats<sup>24</sup>.

Turkey's fears were perhaps exaggerated, but they did reflect an astonishing insight into possible future upheavals. In April and May 1923, the Italian plenipotentiary Montagna had grown extremely impatient with İnönü's refusal or clever temporising<sup>25</sup>. The frequent Italian appeals to the Allies for a united front to force the Turks to back down from their claim to Kastellorizo did not pay off until 27 May. It was only then, Montagna writes, that Sir Horace Rumbold and Maurice Pellé, plenipotentiaries respectively of Britain and France, "were constrained to come around to my point of view" ("*Rumbold e Pellé furono costretti associarsi mio punto di vista*")<sup>26</sup>. The next day, İnönü withdrew his reservations regarding Kastellorizo, and Montagna, feeling vindicated, was content<sup>27</sup>.

It is worth adding further evidence of the Italians' struggle to prevail upon Turkey. I found it in a study by an Italian historian who was writing between the wars, and the gist of his information is that the people of Kastellorizo came together at an official meeting in the island's cathedral, the Church of St Constantine, on 13 April 1923, where they expressed their desire to remain under Italian rule. They also sent a memorandum to this effect to the Italian government, signed by the notables<sup>28</sup>.

I have not been able to crosscheck this information against any

24. DDI, 7th series, vol. 1, No. 611 p. 437: Lausanne, 15 Mar. 1923, Mario Arlotta to Mussolini. The following year too, after the Treaty of Lausanne had been signed, Turkey was most concerned that Kastellorizo might be fortified: Turkish newspapers reported that Italy intended to transport heavy artillery to the island, lay a railway line, and fortify the harbour. The Italian government dismissed this as utterly fanciful: AMAE, *cit.*, f. 173<sup>f</sup>: Rome, 3 Sept. 1924, the advisor to the French embassy, François Charles-Roux, to the Foreign Minister.

25. Sertoli Salis, *op.cit.*, p. 298; DDI, 7th series, vol. 1, No. 736 p. 524: Lausanne, 23 Apr. 1923, Montagna to Mussolini; No. 743 pp. 528-529: Lausanne, 25 Apr. 1923, *idem* to *idem*; No. 748 p. 533: Lausanne, 26 Apr. 1923, *idem* to *idem*; vol. 2, No. 13 pp. 8-9, No. 14 p. 9, No. 39 pp. 27-28, No. 43 pp. 29-30: Lausanne, 2 May 1923, Montagna to Mussolini; London, 2 May 1923, della Torretta to Mussolini; Lausanne, 14 and 16 May 1923, Montagna to Mussolini respectively.

26. DDI, 7th series, vol. 2, No. 57 pp. 38-40: Lausanne, 27 May 1923, Montagna to Mussolini.

27. *Ibid.*, No. 59 p. 41 and No. 69 p. 48: Lausanne, 28 May and 5 June 1923, Montagna to Mussolini.

28. Sertoli Salis, *op.cit.*, pp. 298, 318 (where it is stated that the meeting was held at the home of the Italian governor of the island).

Greek source, though I do not doubt that the meeting took place. The Italian authorities would easily have persuaded the islanders to take such a step by dwelling on the Turkish threat. After all, in the wake of the Asia Minor Disaster, union with Greece seemed an impossible dream. However, a scholar is rather surprised by the Italians' exploitation of the "spontaneous" pro-Italian feelings of the very people whose referendum for union with Mother Greece in 1920 had been completely ignored both by the Italian government and by the governments of the other Great Powers.

Naturally, it was impossible in 1923 to foresee that Italy's diplomatic success in annexing Kastellorizo, as also the islanders' (coercive) choice, would create the most ideal and legitimate *conditiones* for the incorporation into Greece (in 1947/1948) of that little island, together with the rest of the Dodecanese. Had it been given to Turkey in 1923, it would patently have met the same tragic fate as Imbros and Tenedos.

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## THE DOCUMENTS

## 1.

*Telegram from Camille Barrère to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs*

Rome, 13 March 1923

AMAE, *cit.*, ff. 170<sup>r</sup>, 171<sup>r</sup> (typewritten)[170<sup>r</sup>]

Affaires étrangères

Télégramme à l'arrivée

Duplicata

En clair

[seal]

Direction politique

et commerciale

17 mars 1923

P.

No. 343

Z-358-2

Rome, le 13 mars 1923

reçu le 16 à 21 heures, par courrier

Presque tous les journaux reproduisent une note d'allure officieuse protestant contre la prétention émise par le Gouvernement d'Angora concernant le retour de l'île de Castelorizzo à la Turquie.

“Dans les milieux diplomatiques, dit la note, on observe que cette requête ne paraît, en aucune manière, justifiée.

“L'île de Castelorizzo ne peut pas être revendiquée par le Gouvernement turc sur la base du Pacte national ottoman, qui revendique tous les territoires habités par des sujets turcs: l'île, qui possède à peine 3 000 habitants, ne comprend pas d'éléments de nationalité turque, mais seulement des Grecs et une petite minorité israélite.

“D'autre part, l'Italie obtint la remise de Castelorizzo de la France qui l'avait occupée pendant la guerre —comme une des rares et immédiates compensations aux acquisitions coloniales faites, en raison de la guerre, par l'Angleterre et la France.

“Bien que dans les cercles diplomatiques on observe encore une réserve rigoureuse et logique au sujet de la requête turque comme en général au sujet [171<sup>r</sup>] de la note du Gouvernement d'Angora, parce que la réponse du

Gouvernement italien ne formera qu'un avec celle des alliés —avec qui sont à peine commencés les premiers échanges d'idées—, il est évident que le Gouvernement italien maintiendra fermement son droit incontestable en ce qui concerne la possession de l'île qui représente pour nous un certain contrôle dans la Méditerranée orientale.

“Il est, d'autre part, à présumer que la légitime thèse italienne ne pourra pas ne pas être loyalement appuyée par les Gouvernements de Paris et de Londres qui ne pourraient, comme ne peut l'Italie, sans voir leur prestige profondément atteint, remettre en discussion la question de la petite île sur laquelle flotte le drapeau italien”.

*Barrère*

2.

*Camille Barrère to the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs  
Raymond Poincaré*

Rome, 16 March 1923

AMAE, *cit.*, f. 172<sup>r-v</sup> (typewritten)  
[172<sup>r</sup>]

Rome, le 16 mars 1923

[seal]

Direction politique  
et commerciale  
26 mars 1923

Classement  
Sér. Z Cart. 358 Doss. 2

Ambassade  
de la République Française  
près S.M. le Roi d'Italie

Direction des  
Affaires politiques et commerciales

[seal]

Ministère des Affaires Étrangères  
Cabinet du Ministre  
22 mars 1923  
Chef du cabinet

Europe  
No. 110

## L'Italie et l'île de Castellorizzo

Son Excellence  
Monsieur Poincaré  
Président du Conseil  
Ministre des Affaires Étrangères

Monsieur le Président du Conseil,

L'annonce que le Gouvernement d'Angora réclamait la restitution de l'île de Castellorizzo a causé ici beaucoup de mauvaise humeur. On se croyait à l'abri d'une requête de ce genre, bien convaincu que l'on était d'avoir donné à la Turquie les marques du plus bienveillant intérêt et de s'être créé ainsi des droits à sa reconnaissance et à des égards particuliers.

Les journaux protestent avec indignation contre la prétention kémaliste. La Turquie, disent-ils, n'est nullement fondée à demander la cession de Castellorizzo. Il n'y a pour [172<sup>v</sup>] ainsi dire pas de Turcs dans l'île, dont la population est grecque. Le Pacte national dit explicitement que la Turquie doit revendiquer les territoires habités par des groupements ethniques turcs. Il est donc absurde que le Gouvernement d'Angora réclame ce territoire et il ne s'agit sans doute que d'un "ballon d'essai" de mauvais goût qui n'aura d'autre effet que d'irriter inutilement la population italienne. Si non la gratitude, écrit la *Tribuna*, tout au moins un sentiment de pudeur diplomatique aurait dû conseiller aux Turcs "de ne pas donner un coup de pied à ceux qui leur ont tendu la main pendant des années et des années pour les soutenir".

Dans sa sainte colère, l'auteur de l'article de la *Tribuna* oublie la guerre de Tripolitaine dont les Turcs n'ont pas perdu le souvenir. Quoi qu'il en soit, on ne peut se défendre de sourire de la mésaventure qui arrive aux Italiens, si l'on pense à l'attitude du second délégué à Lausanne, M. Montagna, qui était disposé à toutes les concessions, à toutes les capitulations et qui comptait ainsi assurer à son pays les bonnes grâces du Gouvernement d'Angora. À son retour à Rome, M. Montagna allait jusqu'à dire qu'il n'y avait qu'à faire la paix avec la Turquie à n'importe quelle condition parce que personne n'était disposé à lui faire la guerre.

À l'Ambassade britannique la déception et l'indignation italienne à propos de la revendication de Castellorizzo par les Turcs n'ont pas été sans divertir quelque peu. On y a particulièrement goûté la logique de l'argument invoqué par les journaux romains d'après lesquels Castellorizzo doit être italienne parce que sa population est grecque.

Veillez agréer, Monsieur le Président du Conseil, les assurances de ma très haute considération.

*Camille Barrère*

### **Abbreviations**

- AMAE = *Archives du Ministère des affaires étrangères* (Paris).
- Vardamidis = Evangelos N. Vardamidis, *Ιστορία της νήσου Μεγίστης (Καστελλορίζου)*, Alexandria 1948 (photocopy reprint, Athens 1996).
- DDI = *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani* [used here is the 7th series: 1922-1935, vol. I (31 Oct. 1922 - 26 Apr. 1923), Rome 1953, and vol. II (27 Apr. 1923 - 22 Feb. 1924), Rome 1955].