

*John A. Mazis*

**The Greek Association of Odessa:  
Nationalist Politics on two Fronts**

The Greek Benevolent Association of Odessa (Grecheskoe blagotvoritelno obshestvo in Russian, Ἑλληνικὴ Ἀγαθόεργος Κοινότης ἐν Ὁδησσῷ in Greek) was arguably the crown achievement of Odessa's Greek community. Indeed, given the fact that Odessa's Greek community was the most vibrant and active in the whole of the Russian Empire, the Greek Benevolent Association of Odessa (henceforth GBAO) was the jewel of the Greek community in Russia as a whole. However, while the life and times of the Greeks in Russia in general, and that of the Greek community of Odessa in particular, have been the subject of books and articles by Greek, Russian, and American scholars, the work and importance of the GBAO itself is almost totally unknown. This is really unfortunate as the GBAO became in a short period of time after its creation in 1871 the undisputed leader of Odessa's Greek community. As its name suggests the GBAO was primarily a philanthropic organization dedicated to help the needy Greeks of that city. As its detail records reveal the GBAO was successful in fulfilling its goals as a benevolent organization<sup>1</sup>. A closer look into the activities of the GBAO reveals another dimension of that institution. It is the contention of this writer that the GBAO was from its inception designed to be a political entity. Given the fact that Imperial Russia was not an open and democratic society, such a political move by an ethnic minority might have been far fetched. However, the Greeks of Odessa did exactly that and they were successful in their endeavor. The purpose of this essay is to bring the political dimension of that remarkable organization to the attention of a wider audience.

While the story of the GBAO unfolded in the 19th and 20th centuries,

1. For more details see: John Mazis, "The Greek Benevolent Association of Odessa 1871-1917: Private Charity and Diaspora Leadership in Late Imperial Russia", Unpublished Ph.D. Diss. University of Minnesota 1998.

Greek presence in the area predates that event. Greeks have been present on the Black Sea coast for thousands of years. They have been living in southern Russia before the Slavs (early Rus') were residents of what became the domain of the Russian Empire. In some respects, the Greeks can be considered as native peoples of the area. It is well documented that ancient Greek city-states colonized the Black Sea littoral before classical times<sup>2</sup>. After the demise of classical Greece, the Greek Black Sea colonies continued to exist under the Romans, Byzantines, and Ottoman Turks who controlled in turn the Black Sea basin<sup>3</sup>. In the process, the Greek colonies lost their independence and even their Greek character. A new era of Greco-Rus' relations came to being in the tenth century AD when Grand Prince Vladimir of Kiev (the strongest of the Rus' principalities) was converted to Christianity<sup>4</sup>. With Kiev's (and in time the rest of Russia's) conversion to Orthodoxy, there was a wholesale introduction of Greek culture and letters to Russia. Vladimir had to import Orthodox priests to teach the new religion<sup>5</sup>, architects and painters to construct churches<sup>6</sup>, scholars and teachers to instruct the new converts<sup>7</sup>. Since Orthodoxy was dominated by Greek culture Kiev's conversion meant that the Russians came into closer contact with the Greek world<sup>8</sup>. Often when the Russian Church faced dogmatic challenges,

2. See John Boardman, *The Greeks Overseas*, Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964, pp. 245-275. Also, William H. McNeill, *History of Western Civilization*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969, pp. 41-45. According to McNeill most of the ancient Greek colonization occurred between 750-550 B.C.

3. For a panoramic and diachronic description of the Greek presence in the region, see Marina Koromila, ed. *The Greeks in the Black Sea*, Athens: Panorama, 1991.

4. Vladimir was a pragmatist looking to gain advantage by his conversion rather than a man who was looking for spiritual guidance. Reportedly he rejected Islam due to that religion's prohibition of wine consumption (a sacrifice that Vladimir was not prepared to make), Judaism was rejected because the prince reasoned that a god who has allowed his chosen people to be uprooted was not much of a protector. Janet Martin, *Medieval Russia 980-1584*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 6-7.

5. John Meyendorff, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 21.

6. Janet Martin, *op.cit.*, pp. 10, 46, 66.

7. Dimitri Obolensky ed. *The Byzantine Inheritance of Eastern Europe*, London: Variorum Reprints, 1982, p. 11.

8. See B. L. Fonkich, ed. *Graeco-Russian Contacts from the middle of the XVI century up to the beginning of the XVIII century*, Moscow: USSR Academy of Sciences, 1991, pp. 51-52.

both internal and external, it turned to Constantinople for advice and it was not uncommon for a Greek cleric and/or scholar to be dispatched as a troubleshooter<sup>9</sup>. Also, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church was not only approved by the Patriarch but at times was a Greek cleric imported for the job<sup>10</sup>.

Modern Greek emigration to Russia in a significant way started at the time of Peter the Great. Up to that time emigration had taken the form of colonization, as in ancient times, or, as in the case of the middle ages, it was a small scale affair in which a Greek scholar or notable came to Russia. In both cases the immigrants did not have much contact with the wider Russian public. The early colonists created their own cities which remained for centuries outside the mainstream of Russian life. By the time they were forced to integrate, they had lost most of their unique (Greek) characteristics. In the case of individuals emigrating, their contact with the average Russian was minimal. Being educated scholars and clerics, those Greeks were part of the élite. Their lives in Russia were confined to the Kremlin or the bishop's palace. In contrast, the new immigrants were more numerous and destined from the start to intermingle with Russian society. Around 1700, Peter the Great realized that in order to modernize his state and his army he needed educated people skilled in arts and crafts in which his own people were ignorant. For instance, Peter needed skilled shipbuilders to create a Russian Navy, and men educated in the science of modern warfare. Since few, if any, Russians possessed such skills (and the foreigners already living in Russia were not enough) Peter instructed some of the noblemen in his

9. One instance which illustrates the complexity of Greek-Russian church relations is the story of the cleric Maksim the Greek. In the early sixteenth century the Grand Prince of Muscovy requested from the Patriarch of Constantinople to send an educated theologian who could help the Russian church in matters of dogma. Maksim the Greek was sent to Moscow and devoted his energy and vast knowledge not only to matters of dogma, but also in translating works from Greek into Russian. In time Maksim fell into disfavour and spent the remaining of his life a virtual prisoner. See Jack V. Haney, *From Italy to Muscovy. The Life and Works of Maxim the Greek*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1973. Also, Hugh Olmsted, "A Learned Greek Monk in Muscovite Exile: Maksim Grek and the Old Testament Prophets" *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* 3 (1987) 1-74.

10. For centuries the leader of the Orthodox Church in Russia was often a Greek. Between the time of Vladimir's conversion (late tenth century) and the "Mongol Yoke" (early to middle thirteenth century) there were twenty-three leaders of the Russian Church of which seventeen were Greeks. Meyendorff, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia* p. 19.

immediate circle, who happen to be in the West at the time, to entice foreigners with promises of high wages, bonuses, and positions in the Russian state apparatus. Among the large number of foreign craftsmen who took up the Russian offer were a number of Greeks<sup>11</sup>. This first group of Greek immigrants did not achieve fame and fortune in their new home. Although they contributed in creating Russia's first navy, none achieved high rank in the state bureaucracy. Most of them remained anonymous to the historian, a small footnote to Russian history<sup>12</sup>.

A second category of early Greek settlers in Russia consisted of those who were included in the expanding empire by virtue of the fact that their places of residence were conquered by Russia. In this category belong thousands of Greeks (descendants of the ancient colonists) living among the Crimean Tartars. These Greeks belong to the new emigration wave, since their move was massive and by virtue of their professions (mainly farmers and traders) came into contact with Russian society. At the same time the fact that they were already living in the area, and that they had lost most of their national characteristics, puts them in a separate class from the core Greek emigration<sup>13</sup>. A number of those Greeks were lured away from Crimea to the area of Mariupol where they prospered as farmers. Over the years they became Russian-speakers but retained a sense (however vague) of their national origins<sup>14</sup>. The bulk of the new Greek immigrants were either refugees of war, or others who

11. B. H. Sumner, *Peter the Great and the Emergence of Russia*, New York: Macmillan Pubs. 1962, pp. 37-38. Also, Eric Morris, *The Russian Navy: Myth and Reality*, London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1977, pp. 3-15. According to a recent study there were at least 66 Greeks who joined the Russian Navy around 1700. Of them 62 were sailors, one boatswain (a non-commissioned officer with expertise in running a ship's deck crew), one navigator and two ship's captains. See Edward J. Phillips, *The Founding of Russia's Navy. Peter the Great and the Azov Fleet, 1688-1714*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995, p. 138.

12. One eponymous Greek footnote in Russian history of that period occurred when Eudoxia Dioper, daughter of a Greek sea captain became the first wife of Abram Petrovich Hannibal, Alexander Pushkin's African ancestor. Joseph Wieczynski, *The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History* 59 vols. (USA: Academic International Press, 1983, 12:82).

13. The Greeks of the Crimea were considered by Russian authorities to be vital to the areas' agriculture. See Peter Simon Pallas, *Travels Through the Southern Provinces of the Russian Empire in the Years 1793 and 1794*, London: Stockdale, 1812<sup>2</sup>, p. 346.

14. Grigorii Arsh, "Οι Έλληνες της Ρωσίας" ("The Greeks of Russia"), *Μουσείο Φιλικής Εταιρείας*, Athens: Foundation for Hellenic Culture, 1994, p. 18.

came from Greece proper during the second half of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. They came to Russia to seek shelter, or because they were enticed by Russian authorities due to the benefits which their knowledge of agriculture, trade etc. could give their new homeland.

During the First Russo-Turkish War (1768-1774) Alexis Orlov was sent to Greece by Empress Catherine the Great (1762-1796) with instructions to lead a revolution which would distract the Ottoman Empire and force her to keep troops in Greece, away from the northern theater of operations<sup>15</sup>. In 1770 Orlov visited Greece and succeeded in enticing the Greeks to a massive revolt. However, without concrete support from Russia, the revolt died down and the Turks were able to defeat the few rebels who continued to resist. Once the revolt was completely extinguished Turkey allowed large numbers of Albanian paramilitary formations to invade southern Greece (Morea) which had been the hotbed of the revolt, and pillage it. Adding insult to injury, once Catherine had accomplished her war aims (by conquering the Crimea), she ended the war and signed a treaty with Turkey. The outcome of the so called *Orlov Affair* was the catalyst in Greek emigration. As a result of the defeat, thousands of Greeks, mainly from Morea and the islands, became refugees. Over 30,000 Greek refugees arrived at the nearby domain of the Venetian Republic but due to political pressures they had to leave and either returned to Greece, and an uncertain future, or looked for help elsewhere<sup>16</sup>. Catherine, while not admitting any responsibility for the calamity of the Greeks, she did feel obligated to accommodate those co-religionists, many of whom had fought in Russian-organized military units. Before long, Russia's southern province became the new home and the destination of choice for most Greek immigrants, a situation which lasted for a hundred years until the United States became the new "promised land". While Greek emigration to

15. See, *Ίστορία τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ Ἔθνους (History of the Greek Nation)* 16 vols. (Athens: Ekdotiki Athenon, 1978) IA, pp. 86-89. And, George Roussos, *Νεότερη Ίστορία τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ Ἔθνους, 1826-1974. (Modern History of the Greek Nation, 1826-1974)* 7 vols., Athens: Hellenic Educational House, 1975, 1:128-145. Also, Isabel de Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981, p. 349.

16. Franco Venturi, *The End of the Old Regime in Europe, 1768-1776* (R. Burr Litchfield trans.), Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989, pp. 46-55.

Russia did not end after the 1790s, the 1770-1790s era represents the high water mark of Greek emigration. The Greeks who came to Russia in the nineteenth century can be divided into two categories. Those who came individually lured by the promise of easy riches, and those who came by the thousands as refugees from the Russo-Turkish wars of 1828-1829, 1853-1856 and 1877-1878<sup>17</sup>. A somewhat smaller number of refugees reached Russia as a result of the Greek-Turkish war of 1897. [while about 135,000 more Pontic Greeks crossed the frontier from Turkey to Russia during the First World War]<sup>18</sup>. The impact of those relative newcomers to the more established colonists of earlier eras should not be underestimated. As it has been pointed out by some scholars, the newcomers were able to prosper in their adopted land and, as the earlier immigrants moved out of business enterprises to owning land, bonds etc., they came to dominate trade and shipping between the Black Sea and Europe<sup>19</sup>.

The Greeks of Russia were able to establish their own ethnic/philanthropic organizations from the beginning of their appearance in the Russian scene (1790s) even though the political climate in that country was anything but conducive to such activities. Imperial Russia, being governed by an absolutist and at times repressive regime, was not a fertile ground for the creation and operation of civic groups. The idea of non-government sponsored and controlled corporate entities was rejected by the regime which believed that sooner or later such “clubs” would come under the influence of anti-government forces<sup>20</sup>. Such organizations as were allowed to exist were ostensibly non-political in nature. The existence of legal groups with political goals as their main characteristic was not allowed. The regime was suspicious of volunteer

17. K. Papoulides, “Οι Έλληνες της Ρωσίας τον 19ο και στις αρχές του 20ού αιώνα” (The Greeks of Russia in the Nineteenth and the Beginning of the Twentieth Century) *Balkan Miscellany* 4 (1992) 110.

18. Idem, pp. 110-111.

19. Tzelina Harlafti, “Ελληνικά εμποροναυτιλιακά δίκτυα στη νότιο Ρωσία, 1830-1914” (Greek Merchant Marine Networks in South Russia, 1830-1914), Conference “The Greeks in Ukraine (18th-20th Century) Social Life, Trade, Culture” Foundation for Hellenic Culture, Institute for Balkan Studies, Odessa State University, Odessa, 27 Sept. 1996.

20. Adele Lindenmeyr, “The Rise of Voluntary Associations During the Great Reforms: The Case of Charity”, *Russia’s Great Reforms 1851-1881*, Ben Eklof, ed., Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 267.

organizations because the idea of any type of citizens' initiative was considered dangerous. Thus the only legal civic groups allowed in Imperial Russia, that is prior to the Great Reforms of the 1860s, were charity organizations provided that they stayed non-political and continued to be the recipients of official favour<sup>21</sup>. It was only after Nicholas' death in 1855, and the relative openness of the society that accompanied the reform efforts of the early sixties, that non-governmental civic organizations flourished. Whereas in 1855 there were only about 40 private benevolent associations in Russia the number ballooned to 348 by 1880<sup>22</sup>. To be sure, the government kept tight control of such entities but the general relaxation by the state allowed even minority groups to establish their own associations<sup>23</sup>. Even though the pre-1860s Russian state was not favouring non-governmental organizations one should note that the GBAO was neither the only nor the first Greek civic group formed by the Greek immigrants in that city<sup>24</sup>. Indeed, Greek corporate groups existed in Odessa (in one form or another) almost from the founding of the city. In the late 1790s the Greek battalion of Odessa, a military unit, assumed functions which went outside the traditional military sphere. The second Greek organization to be associated with Odessa was the most famous of them all. In 1814 three Greek immigrants created a secret society whose goal was the violent overthrow of Ottoman rule in Greece. This was the famous Φιλική Έταιρεία (Friendly

21. Th. Panagiotides, *Ο ἐν Ρωσία Ἑλληνισμός (The Greeks of Russia)* Athens: Trembela, 1919, p. 25. For that reason the various Greek organizations used philanthropy as their main purpose for existence even though not all of them were true philanthropic associations.

22. Adele Lindenmeyr, *Poverty is Not a Crime*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, pp. 116-122.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 204.

24. An even earlier organization of Greeks in Russia was the Greek community of Nezhin. The Greek commercial community of that city was numerous and influential enough to receive special attention from Moscow. In 1657 the Greeks were given some privileges by the local authorities but in 1696 those privileges were codified by the central administration and the Greeks were allowed to create their *Greek Commercial Brotherhood of Nezhin*. Peter the Great confirmed those privileges in 1710. See K. Papoulides, "Ουσιμμένες σκέψεις με αφορμή την τύχη του αρχείου της Ελληνικής κοινότητας της Νίζνας" ("Some Thoughts Regarding the Fate of the Archives of the Greek Community of Nezhin"), Conference "The Greeks in Ukraine (18th-20th Century) Social Life, Trade, Culture" Foundation for Hellenic Culture, Institute for Balkan Studies, Odessa State University, Odessa, 26 Sept. 1996.

Society) which indeed ultimately succeeded in its goals<sup>25</sup>. The Friendly Society dissolved voluntarily in 1821 once its goal of starting a revolt against the Turks materialized. By then the Russian authorities had discovered the Society and from that time on all attempts by the Greeks of Odessa to organize were viewed with suspicion. Indeed, shortly after the breakout of the Greek revolt (February 1821), the Greeks of Odessa created an organization whose goal was strictly philanthropic, namely the assistance of the thousands of Greeks who were suffering as a result of the revolt. This organization was named the Greek Philanthropic Society of Odessa (Γραικική Φιλανθρωπική Έταιρεία), and it was short-lived<sup>26</sup>. Created in August of 1821, it was dissolved in December of the same year due to the pressure of the Russian authorities which could not believe that any Greek organization was without political aims<sup>27</sup>. Between the founding and dissolution of the Friendly Society (1814-1821) yet another Greek civic organization had come into existence: the Board of Trustees of the Greek Commercial School (also known as Greek Boys' School). This school was founded in 1817 as a training facility for young men of modest or no means who could become clerks in the various trading houses of Odessa. The Boys' School operated until 1917 but in the 1870s the GBAO took over its management and used its considerable cash reserves to finance its own educational projects. The above mentioned organizations (the Greek Battalion of Odessa, the Friendly Society, the Greek Philanthropic Society, and the Board of Trustees of the Greek Commercial School), were not the only ones that existed besides the GBAO. From the time that the Philanthropic Society dissolved itself (1821) until the GBAO was instituted (1871) there were a number of loosely organized bodies which provided philanthropic services. These organizations are largely unknown although references of their existence appear in credible sources<sup>28</sup>. Even after its establishment

25. There are many works written about the Friendly Society a number of them by Academician Grigorii Arsh. His work *Eteristkoe dvizhenie v Rosii. (The Friendly Society Movement in Russia)*, Nauka: Moscow, 1972, is considered classic on the subject.

26. E. Pavlides ed., *Ο Έλληνισμός της Ρωσσίας (The Greeks in Russia)*, Athens: Union of Greeks from Russia, 1953, pp. 162-163.

27. See K. Papoulides, "Οι Έλληνες της Ρωσσίας" p. 115. Also, Marina Koromila, *The Greeks and the Black Sea* p. 257.

28. Sofronis Paradissopoulos, "Activities of the Greek Charity Society in Odessa, 1871-1896" (Unpublished paper), p. 2.



the GBAO was not the only organization of its kind. There are references of several Greek philanthropic bodies working in Odessa although there is no sufficient information about them<sup>29</sup>.

Since there were several Greek civic organizations in operation in the 1870s, one has to wonder what was the impetus for the creation of yet another civic body. The reason for the creation of that new organization was rooted in the rising needs within the Greek community but also due to social and political pressures both from outside forces and from within the Greek community itself. The last half of the nineteenth century saw a change in the composition of the Greek community in Odessa, and its counterparts in South Russia as well. A new wave of refugees from Asia Minor and other Turkish held areas came to the city. Whereas the old generation of Greek immigrants (who had roots in Greece proper but was well-established in Russia after living there for three generations) was content and willing to blend with Russian society, the newcomers were intensely nationalistic and demanded the preservation of their national identity<sup>30</sup>. As more of those newcomers became successful and achieved leadership positions within the Greek community, they started pressuring for institutional changes<sup>31</sup>. Besides internal pressures, the Greeks of Odessa were also under pressure from the outside. Russia had been good to the Greeks, giving them a safe home and opportunities to make money and a career. In turn the Greeks had

29. E. Kapsambelis, *Ἐκθεσις περί Γεωργίας, Ἐμπορίας, Βιομηχανίας καί Ναυπηγίας ἐν Ρωσσίᾳ ἐν γένῃ καί ἰδίᾳ ἐν Ὀδησσῷ* (Report on the Agriculture, Trade, Industry and Merchant Marine in Russia and Particularly in Odessa), Athens: National Press, Reports of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1912, p. 12. Kapsambelis in his detailed works about the Greeks of Russia mentions two Greek philanthropic organizations in Odessa but he only names GBAO. The same is true for other such works. See *Ἡμερολόγιον τῶν Ἐθνικῶν Φιλανθρωπικῶν Καταστημάτων* (Almanac of National Philanthropic Institutions), Constantinople: n.p., 1905, p. 207.

30. The earlier Greek immigrants were comfortable in Russia and believed that russification was a desirable goal. By contrast, the newer immigrants from the Ottoman Empire were more nationalistic and insisted on keeping their Greek identity. See, K. Papoulides, “Ἡ Ἑλληνοεμπορική Σχολή τῆς Ὀδησοῦ 1817-1917” (“The Greek Commercial School of Odessa 1817-1917”), *Pontic Greek Archive* 37 (1982) 149-150.

31. Vasilis Kardasis, “Νότια Ρωσία τον 19ο αιώνα: Οἱ Ἕλληνες ὁμογενεῖς” (“South Russia in the Nineteenth Century: The Greek Diaspora”), Conference “The Greeks in Ukraine (18th-20th Century) Social Life, Trade, Culture” Foundation for Hellenic Culture, Institute for Balkan Studies, Odessa State University, Odessa, 27 Sept. 1996.

been faithful subjects of the tsar. While the Greeks as a minority in the Russian Empire were not cause for concern, that was not true for all of the empire's non-Russian subjects. In an attempt to unify the country and make it more manageable, the state came up with the idea of *Russification*, a policy which aimed at homogenizing Russian society by absorbing the various minorities in the Russian majority culture. The implementation of this policy became another reason for the creation of the GBAO<sup>32</sup>.

The Greek minority in Russia was an ideal target for russification because by virtue of already being Orthodox it was already halfway closer to the government's goal of transforming the ethnic minorities into Russians<sup>33</sup>. Within Russia's Greek community there was a schism concerning russification. The "old guard" of the Greek community was willing to go along with the Russian government's program. According to a report by the Greek consul in Taganrog (a city in South Russia with a sizable Greek population) the well to do Greeks exhibited no civic spirit and were russified<sup>34</sup>. The russification of the Greeks of Russia was not an explicitly stated government goal, but the pressure was there and although subtle it was felt keenly by the Greek community. The Russification policy vis-à-vis the Greeks took the form of refusing permission to establish new Greek schools and even closing some existing ones<sup>35</sup>. In some areas of the Russian Empire russification of the Greeks was rather successful. Thus in Transcaucasia towards the end of the nineteenth century, Russian was the language of instruction in 150 Greek schools while 100 Greek churches celebrated the liturgy in Russian<sup>36</sup>. It has been

32. "Russification in Tsarist Russia" in *The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History* 1983 ed. 32: 205-211.

33. Th. Panagiotides, *The Greeks of Russia*, p. 11. The author reiterates the fact that the Greeks of Russia became a prime target of russification due to their religious and cultural proximity to the ideas of that policy.

34. S. Kiouze-Pezas, *Ἐκθέσις περί Γεωργίας, Ἐμπορίας, Βιομηχανίας καί Ναυπηγίας ἀνά τήν Προξενικήν Περιφέρειαν Ταϊγανίου 1910-1911. (Report on the Agriculture, Trade, Industry and merchant Marine in the District of Taganrog 1910-1911)*, Athens: National Press, Reports of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1912, p. 8.

35. S. Loukatos, *Ο Ἑλληνισμός της Διασποράς 1830-1914 (The Greeks of the Diaspora 1830-1914)*, Athens: Center for Southeastern European Studies, 1994, p. 70.

36. N. Petsalis-Diomidis, "Hellenism in Southern Russia and the Ukrainian Campaign: Their Effect on the Pontus Question (1919)", *Balkan Studies* 13 (1972) 221-264, esp. 223-224.

claimed that as a result of Russia's policy of russification as many as half of Russia's Greeks were to an appreciable degree assimilated by the beginning of the twentieth century. The greatest danger to the Greek minority of Russia was russification not due to external pressure but through intermarriage. A large number of Greeks married Russians and as a result their children became russified<sup>37</sup>. The leaders of the Greek community realized that they needed to pay more attention to Greek-oriented education as a counterbalance to the steady absorption of the younger generation of Greeks into the Russian society. Above all else, the leaders of the Greek community of Odessa reached the conclusion that they needed a new organization, more active and efficient in its approach to the needs of the community.

The Greeks of Odessa were lucky in the sense that at the time they decided to create such an important and large civic group a number of factors favourable to their cause were in existence. The most important of those factors was the attitude of the Russian state. Since the 1860s the Russian government was in the process of overhauling the structure of Russia's society with the ultimate goal of modernizing the state. The end of serfdom allowed the vast majority of Russia's people to be free while a number of educational, army, and judicial reforms began to transform Russian society. As part of that overall change, the state became more tolerant of civic organization and if not actively supportive, at least was willing to allow their existence. By 1901 there were about 3,700 such organizations in existence<sup>38</sup>. The creation of civic groups such as the GBAO can be also attributed to the frustration of the forward looking Russian middle class. That middle class, which included among its members not only the rich but also the educated professionals, was committed to change and the importance of public initiative (*samo-deiatel'nost'*)<sup>39</sup>. Since it was excluded from implementing social reforms

37. E. Kapsambelis, *Ἀναμνήσεις Διπλωμάτου (Memoirs of a Diplomat)*, Athens 1939, p. 27.

38. A. Lindenmeyr, "The Rise of Volunteer Associations", p. 265. As the same author notes in page 269, the new freedoms did not mean that a civic organization would be automatically allowed to exist. Russian Poland was explicitly excluded from the general relaxation of government vigilance regarding civic groups. Even in the rest of the empire, if the authorities were suspicious of a proposed organization they would refer the matter either to the Committee of Ministers or reject the proposal outright.

39. A. Lindenmeyr, *Poverty*, p. 123.

through political participation, it channeled its efforts to social improvements through civic action<sup>40</sup>. Indeed, the new activism of the middle class has been called “silent bourgeois revolution” because “In the Russian context, all independent public initiative was political, even when it was not overtly opposition, because it challenged, indirectly if not directly, the autocracy’s control over society”<sup>41</sup>. At the same time, the Greek government was taking a more active role in the affairs of overseas Greeks in general<sup>42</sup>. Odessa and its Greeks were well known to the Greek government through the generous contributions that various wealthy Greeks of the city had given to Greek philanthropic causes. Another link between the Greeks of Odessa and the Greek state was the Greek consul in Odessa John Voutsinas (1834-1902). This individual was not only the long serving Greek representative in Odessa but also a merchant and leader of Odessa’s Greek community. After many private meetings among the élite of Odessa’s Greek community, the Greek Benevolent Association of Odessa (Ἑλληνική Ἀγαθόεργος Κοινότης ἐν Ὀδησσῶ) came into existence on August 25th 1871<sup>43</sup>.

As its record indicates, the GBAO assumed, almost from the moment of its creation, the leading position in Odessa’s Greek community even though this was never spelled out in the organization’s charter. It appears that the leadership of Odessa’s Greeks was a GBAO goal from the start, a goal which had to remain unstated given the political realities of Russia at the time which made any declared attempts for leadership of an ethnic minority problematic, to say the least. Thus the GBAO combined its general leadership position with that of a charitable institution, the former covering the latter, and achieved its own private aims by going around the rules and regulations of the host state. The charter of the GBAO provides some insight as to that organization’s ultimate goal of leadership of the city’s Greek community. Article One of the GBAO charter states that the association’s goals were: a) to take care by any

40. A. Lindenmeyr, “The Rise of Volunteer Associations”, pp. 270-271.

41. A. Lindenmeyr, *Poverty*, p. 196.

42. For an interesting case see Xanthippe Kotzageorgi, *Οι Έλληνες της Βουλγαρίας*, (“The Greeks of Bulgaria”), Thessaloniki: IMXA, 1999.

43. The leaders of the Greek community petitioned the city authorities in 1867 for permission to form an association. Due to various legal and bureaucratic problems the petition took four years to be approved. S. Paradissopoulos, “Activities”, p. 3.

means of the needs of Odessa's needy Greeks both those living in the city as well as of those who are passing through it; b) to take care of the upkeep of the Greek church; c) to maintain and improve Odessa's existing Greek educational and philanthropic institutions; and d) to create, subject to government approval, such new institutions as it deemed necessary<sup>44</sup>. In other words, the new organization was from its inception dedicated to play the leading role in Odessa's Greek community. One of the organization's goals was the creation of such institutions as the organization thought necessary<sup>45</sup>. To that end the GBAO created the Rodokanakio School for Girls. The Greek community of Odessa already had the means to provide a first class Greek education to its male members. Thus it was only logical that similar educational needs of females should have high priority. As it has been noted, due to the common religion which the Greeks and the Russians shared, mixed marriages were common and a source of worry to the Greeks who were afraid that their children and grandchildren would be russified. If the young Greek women were educated in a first class Greek institution it was almost assured that their children, even if their father was Russian, would be raised as Greeks culturally and linguistically. Educating the young Greek women of Odessa was not only a matter of fairness or concern for the needs of the next generation. It was, above all, a matter of national importance and a subject of such weight that no civic group which wanted to represent the Greek community could ignore.

A little over a month after its creation the GBAO board of trustees allocated 2,000 rubles (out of a total of 12,000 at its disposal) to be used for the benefit of the Girls' School<sup>46</sup>. It was decided that while the school could not be "wholly Greek in character" it would teach Greek language, history and geography, most of the teachers were to be Greek or Greek speakers and the principal to be (if a non-Greek) would have to speak some Greek<sup>47</sup>. After graduating from the second (and highest) grade of

44. Gosudarstvenyi arkhiv Odesskoi oblasti (State Archives of Odessa Province, GAOO), f. 765, op. 1, d. 1, l. 12.

45. GAAO, f. 765, op. 1, d. 1, l. 12.

46. GAAO, f. 765, op. 1, d. 2, l. 10b. January 17, 1872. For some time, the school was simply referred to as "Girls' School" (Παρθενωγωγείον), later the title Rodokanakion was added to honour the GBAO president and the school's major benefactor Th. Rodokanaki.

47. See Nicholas Hans, *History of Russian Educational Policy (1701-1917)*, New York:

the Rodokanakio School, the young ladies were eligible to attend the third grade of any Greek gymnasium. The Greek Parliament (Vouli) passed law 717/1937 according to which the Rodokanakio School for Girls was recognized as equivalent to Greek secondary schools<sup>48</sup>. Soon after the start of the operation of the Girls' School, it became clear that due to increasing enrollment the GBAO needed to find a permanent home for the school. On November 15 1874 it was announced that the building of the new school house was almost completed and since Th. Rodokanaki was a major benefactor (he donated the total amount of construction which came to about 40,000 rubles), and the President of the GBAO during the building of the school house, the board of trustees resolved to petition the authorities to name the school "Ροδοκανάκειον Ἑλληνικόν Παρθενγωγεῖον καί Νηπιαγωγεῖον" (Rodokanakio Greek School for Girls and Kindergarten)<sup>49</sup>.

During its forty-five years of existence the GBAO fulfilled, and even surpassed, the mandate given to it by its charter and in the process it became much more than an ethnic benevolent organization. Due to its longevity, stability, wealth and institutions and individuals it supported, the GBAO became a leader of Odessa's Greek community<sup>50</sup>. In that respect, the organization was political, not in the narrow definition of partisan politics (although in time it did play that role as well) but rather in the broader sense of representing a community in an informal yet real way. Clearly the GBAO did not seek to influence general Russian policy domestic or foreign. The Russian political system itself was against any type of outside input. The GBAO, like all other civic organizations in late Imperial Russia, had to follow certain rules and regulations as a prerequisite for its existence. At the same time the GBAO sought, and gained, preferential treatment from the Russian government in some important matters. In this narrow sphere, the GBAO became politicized

Russell and Russell, 1964, pp. 127-128.

48. S. Paradissopoulos, "Activities", pp. 7-8.

49. GAAO, f. 765, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 19ob-20.

50. GAAO, f. 765, op. 1, d. 26, l. 185. The GBAO was a wealthy organization with a substantial income from endowments. A comparison with other Russian organizations of the same type reflects the GBAO's relative wealth. The GBAO with capital assets of almost 530,000 rubles (in 1917) belonged to the few, less than 7% of better to do Russian charitable associations.

and “lobbied” the government towards its own ends. Even though the GBAO depended on the state for its existence, it attempted to follow as independent a line as was possible under the circumstances. Thus when the governor of the city of Odessa demanded that the GBAO notified the authorities in advance of its General Assembly and various board meetings, the GBAO, in essence refused to fully comply with the order. Noting that according to regulations the GBAO was obliged to report General Assembly meetings but not those of its Board of Trustees, the GBAO leadership wrote back to the governor promising to comply with the request about the former but omitted any reference to the latter<sup>51</sup>. Evidently, the authorities were satisfied and for years after that the GBAO notified the city governor only about its yearly General Assembly meetings, omitting information about the monthly meetings of its Board of Trustees<sup>52</sup>. As the GBAO branched out to other activities, various branches of the Russian government were interested in gathering more information about this benevolent association’s activities. Thus the educational authorities asked for more information on the teachers who taught at the Rodokanakio Girls’ School<sup>53</sup>. The GBAO Board of Trustees also received inquiries from Odessa’s police about the people who received poor relief as well as the total amount given to them. The GBAO complied with such requests but it declared its total support for the poor at 2,500 rubles a year, an amount smaller than what was usually given out by the organization.

It was only natural that the Greek government would utilize the GBAO whenever it could. Sometimes it did so in matters outside the traditional sphere of action of a charitable institution. Thus in 1909 the Greek government, via its Odessa consulate, asked for help from the GBAO in locating any original papers from the old patriotic organization “Friendly Society”<sup>54</sup>. The records of the GBAO do not indicate what steps the organization took but they must have been effective because the Greek government sent its thanks for helping locating such documents<sup>55</sup>. In another case (July 1911) the Greek Consulate asked the

51. GAOO, f. 765, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 10b-2.

52. Most of those routine reports can be found in GAOO, f. 2, op. 1, d. 857.

53. GAOO, f. 765, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 32-32ob.

54. GAOO, f. 765, op. 1, d. 10, ll. 60-61.

55. GAOO, f. 765, op. 1, d. 10, l. 137.

GBAO for information on total number of Greeks residing in South Russia<sup>56</sup>. The GBAO was from the start receptive to requests for support of Greek “national causes”. Thus, on November 20, 1872 the Board of Trustees of the GBAO received an interesting request for support. The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Anthimus (being the spiritual leader of all Orthodox Christians) wanted financial support in order to create what he called a “National Treasury”<sup>57</sup>. Ten years later the Patriarch sent a circular to all Orthodox Christians (and to GBAO as representative of the city’s Greeks) asking for contributions in order to establish and maintain a theological seminary<sup>58</sup>. At times the GBAO was instrumental in helping fellow Greeks who found themselves in need due to circumstances that can be labeled as “national emergencies”. On December 12, 1881 the imperial authorities of the Black Sea port city of Batum located near the Russo-Turkish borders in present day Republic of Georgia, asked for help from the GBAO. According to the request, an unspecified number of Greeks came to Batum from the Ottoman Empire, presumably as refugees. Those people received some help from local authorities and private sources but needed supplementary support. The authorities asked the GBAO to help and the latter responded positively<sup>59</sup>. This event was important symbolically as it demonstrated that the Russian authorities did view the organization as the natural leader of that community. This was not the last time that the GBAO helped Greek refugees in Russia. During the First World War, when Rumania was overrun by the German army (1916-1917), a number of Greek refugees crossed the frontier to Russia to avoid being interned as nationals of a hostile power<sup>60</sup>. The GBAO was instrumental in helping those refugees<sup>61</sup>. In many instances the requests for support were clearly intended for

56. GAOO, f. 765, op. 1, d. 19, ll. 2-3.

57. GAOO, f. 765, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 9ob-10.

58. GAOO, f. 765, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 37-37ob.

59. GAOO, f. 765, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 36ob-37.

60. Rumania declared war on Germany and Austria-Hungary on August, 1916 and capitulated in December of the same year. Many Greeks living in Rumania found themselves in a difficult position. Even though Greece did not enter the war officially until the summer of 1917, by August of 1916 the country was already split into two with Venizelos established in the North. Thus although Germany and Greece were not at war, the two countries were not friendly either.

61. GAOO, f. 765, op. 1, d. 10, ll. 271-282.



Greek national causes. This was the case in 1911, when the government of independent Crete solicited help from the GBAO and other Greeks of the diaspora<sup>62</sup>. Another call for help came from Greek Orthodox Metropolitan Chrysanthos, the spiritual and political leader of the Greeks living on Turkey's Black Sea littoral<sup>63</sup>. The level of support of national causes by the GBAO becomes clear from the hand written letter sent to the organization by Greece's Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos. The letter is dated 31 January 1913 which means that it was sent during the height of the First Balkan War when Greece and her allies (Montenegro, Serbia, Bulgaria) were victorious against the Turks. Venizelos took time out of his busy schedule (besides being premier he was also minister of defense) to thank the GBAO for its generous contribution of 90,000 gold French francs donated to cover "national needs"<sup>64</sup>.

Besides the direct way with which the GBAO helped Greek national causes, there were also indirect ways by which it continued to provide assistance. Over the years, whenever Greece found itself involved in wars aiming at irredentist goals the GBAO was active in offering "humanitarian" aid, which did help the combatants. Quite often the GBAO, and Odessa's Greek community as a whole, financed transportation of volunteers from Russia to Greece in order to fight on the side of the regular Greek army. Also, the GBAO made sure that the families of those volunteers did not suffer financially while their breadwinner was away. This was the case in 1878 when, during the Russo-Turkish War, a number of Greeks from Russia joined the Russian Army as well as Greek paramilitary units<sup>65</sup>. Similarly, after the disastrous (for Greece) Greek-Turkish War of 1897, the GBAO opened its coffers and helped a number of Greeks of

62. GAOO, f. 765, op. 1, d. 19, ll. 89-96. Crete was semi-independent from 1897 until its union with Greece in 1912.

63. GAOO, f. 765, op. 1, d. 26, l. 144.

64. GAOO, f. 765, op. 1, d. 22, l. 62.

65. The activities of Odessa's Greeks during that war have only recently been examined by professor Piatigorskij utilizing the post-communist opening of state archives. Grigorij Piatigorskij, "Οι εξεγέρσεις στις ελληνικές επαρχίες της Οθωμανικής αυτοκρατορίας το 1878 και οι Έλληνες της Οδησσού" ("The Revolts in the Greek Provinces of the Ottoman Empire in 1878 and the Greeks of Odessa"), Conference "The Greeks in Ukraine (18th -20th Century) Social Life, Trade, Culture". Foundation for Hellenic Culture, Institute for Balkan Studies, Odessa State University, Odessa, 28 Sept. 1996.

Odessa who volunteered and fought in that war<sup>66</sup>. The GBAO and Odessa's Greeks as a whole were also involved in helping volunteers join the Greek army during the First World War<sup>67</sup>.

During the First World War the GBAO became involved in Greek political affairs in an unprecedented way. Political events in both Russia and Greece created a climate in which the Greeks of Odessa could voice their political beliefs openly, even though Russia was still governed by an autocratic regime. In order to understand better how such political gestures were allowed to manifest themselves, one has to look into events prior to the beginning of the war. During the nineteenth century, Greece had gone through a number of political transformations which culminated, by the early twentieth century, in the creation of a system of constitutional monarchy in which the king retained a number of powers but an elected parliament conducted most of the state's affairs. The political parties of the day were controlled by a few wealthy and well known individuals centered in Athens with a long family tradition of office holding. In 1909 a military coup toppled the old order and power shifted to the new emerging middle class with Eleftherios Venizelos and his Liberal Party as their champions. Venizelos undertook an extensive program of political and administrative modernization with the aim of rejuvenating the country and challenge the Ottoman Empire. As a result, Greece and its Balkan allies fought successfully against Turkey in 1912-1913 and the country tripled in territory almost overnight. Political as well as personal differences between Venizelos and King Constantine I came to a head at the beginning of the First World War. Venizelos, a known admirer of France and Britain, pointed to the fact that Greece through treaties (with Serbia) and national interests should enter the war on the side of the Western Allies. Constantine (who had studied at the German Military Academy and was married to the Kaiser's sister) favoured neutrality. Constantine believed that the constitution gave authority for defense and foreign affairs to the king while Venizelos pointed to his electoral success as proof of his popular mandate. Eventually the country was split into two (first ideologically and then literally) creating a "National Schism" (Ἐθνικός Διχασμός)

66. GAOO, f. 765, op. 1, d. 8, ll. 43-44.

67. *Ἀναγέννησις* June 4, 1917 p. 3.

which never really healed. That schism transcended national boundaries and appeared wherever Greek communities of the diaspora existed. Odessa was no exception, but the local political climate made the situation even more interesting. The Russian Emperor Nicholas II had many ideological and personal ties with the Greek Royal family. As an autocrat, Nicholas understood the “right” of kings to govern independently from parliaments. On a personal level, Constantine was related to the Romanovs’s through his mother Queen Olga who was a Russian Grand Duchess. At the same time Russia was at war with Germany and Constantine’s pro-German sentiments put him at odds with his Russian relatives. This ambivalent official position allowed interest groups, such as Odessa’s Greek community, to voice their preference for one or the other of Greece’s two opposing factions.

The Greek community of Odessa had a history of supporting Venizelos’ program of political and economic change. The Greek Liberal Party advocated for a constitutional form of government, economic freedom, and wider political participation. Those were goals which the middle classes all over Europe (including the leadership of the GBAO) understood and supported. Odessa’s mainstream Greek newspaper *Κόσμος* (The World) added its editorial support for the 1909 coup less than a week after that event took place. On 21 August 1909 *Κόσμος* criticized Greece’s old style politicians (against whom the coup was aimed) as being responsible for Greece’s bad governments and also for not allowing new men with progressive ideas to achieve their goals<sup>68</sup>. After the successful conclusion of the First Balkan War, the newspaper was hailing Venizelos as Greece’s leader and noted that the Greek Premier’s efforts not only rejuvenated Greece itself but that the new spirit spilled over to the Greeks of the diaspora and the Greek community of Odessa<sup>69</sup>. During the time of the “National Schism”, Odessa’s Greek community was not as divided as other communities of the Greek diaspora. To be sure, differences did exist and some individuals did attempt to “take over” community institutions. The Venizelist newspaper *Αναγέννησις* (Renaissance) reported that on 11 June 1917 some un-

68. *Κόσμος* August 21, 1909 # 359 p. 1.

69. *Κόσμος* May 5, 1913 # 483 p. 1. It should be noted that this newspaper was not partisan Venizelist having often editorialized that Greece needed the royal family. See # 362 p. 1.

named individuals registered a number of new parishioners in the local Greek Orthodox Church with the aim of influencing upcoming elections<sup>70</sup>. A few months later, the same newspaper claimed that the priests of the Greek Orthodox Church of the Holy Trinity were royalists in their political beliefs (even going so far as to want the re-establishment of tsardom), and they manipulated the just concluded elections for Church Board<sup>71</sup>. According to the GBAO records, a number of the organization's members charged that the elections were "rigged" not only because a number of people were registered overnight, but also because some of them were not even Greeks<sup>72</sup>. With the exception of the above mentioned incident, it seems that the majority of Odessa's Greeks supported Venizelos' Liberal Party<sup>73</sup>. The GBAO, the leader of Odessa's Greek community was at the forefront of support for Venizelos' program. On March 4, 1915, when Venizelos was still Premier but Greece remained neutral due to royal insistence, the Board of Trustees of the GBAO passed a resolution asking Greece to abandon its neutrality and enter the war on the side of the Western Powers (Russia being an ally of the British and the French)<sup>74</sup>. This clear political stance of the GBAO (even for a cause favourable to Russia) was a dynamic move which points to the overwhelming support for Venizelos among Odessa's Greeks. Later that year, when the disagreement between king and Venizelos led to the premier's resignation, the GBAO came out openly for Venizelos by sending him a telegraph of support<sup>75</sup>. In the next few years, up to the communist victory in the Russian Civil War, the GBAO (while maintaining its character as a benevolent organization) came to assume the characteristics of a political organization<sup>76</sup>. Using its excellent rela-

70. *Ἀναγέννησις* June 16, 1917 # 8 p. 4.

71. *Ἀναγέννησις* September 27, 1917 # 22 p. 4.

72. GAOO, f. 765, op. 1, d. 26, l. 100.

73. The royalists were clearly the minority and kept a relatively low profile. There was a royalist newspaper called *Ἡλιος* (The Sun) but its circulation and importance appears to have been limited. See *Ἀναγέννησις* June 4, 1917 # 6 p. 11.

74. GAOO, f. 765, op. 1, d. 24.

75. GAOO, f. 765, op. 1, d. 24, l. 21, dated September 18, 1915. The telegraph was sent after unanimous vote by the GBAO Board of Trustees. This gesture put the GBAO, and the Greek community of Odessa which the organization clearly represented, on the liberal side and openly against the wishes of the King of Greece.

76. *Ἀναγέννησις* June 25, 1917 #9 p. 3 and July 23, 1917 # 13 p. 1.

tions with Greece's Consul General Kapsambelis, the GBAO was able to achieve its ends with the help of the local Russian authorities. Thus when the Greek language newspaper *Ἑλληνικός Ἀστὴρ* (Greek Star) displeased the GBAO, the organization requested from Kapsambelis to close the newspaper. Within a few days the military commander of Odessa, using his special powers under the marshal law which existed at the time, ordered the closing of that newspaper<sup>77</sup>. But the action which clearly demonstrates the politicization of the GBAO took place in late 1915. Greece was still neutral in the war and many communities of the Greek diaspora clamoured for their country's entrance in the war at the side of the Western Powers. Some of those Greek communities decided to act independently of the Greek government and convene in a representative body composed of Greeks from different communities. That body, which would be clearly pro-western, would coordinate the actions of the Greeks of the diaspora, show the West that there were Greeks who supported their side, and bring pressure on the King of Greece to change his policy. The Greek community of Odessa was invited to send representatives to Paris, the site of the proposed gathering<sup>78</sup>. It is interesting to note that the Greeks of Paris (who were the ones contacting their Odessa counterparts) sent the telegram to the GBAO, again underlying the fact that the organization was the leader of Odessa's Greeks. On December 21st the Board of Trustees of the GBAO agreed to designate as their representatives to Paris Messrs. Ralli and Triandafilides who had the advantage of being two GBAO members who were already in that city<sup>79</sup>. The indication from the GBAO record is that the association acted independently without asking the permission of the Russian authorities or the advise of the Greek Consul<sup>80</sup>. It appears then that during the First

77. Ιστορικό Αρχείο Υπουργείου Εξωτερικών (Historical Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ΑΥΕ) Athens B/49 pp. 4-5 March 3, 1916. The request to Kapsambelis by the GBAO claims that the editor of the newspaper slandered people of the Greek community and had become the organ of a few meddling individuals. In the military governor's order the editor of the newspaper is labeled "irresponsible".

78. GAOO, f. 765, op. 1, d. 24, l. 22. The Board of Trustees of the GBAO discussed the telegram for the first time on December 8, 1915.

79. GAOO, f. 765, op. 1, d. 24, l. 23.

80. Kapsambelis, although personally sympathetic to Venizelos, was still the representative of the Greek government and thus could not be contacted officially (it would not be surprising if the leaders of the GBAO contacted Kapsambelis privately and asked his opinion).

World War the GBAO behaved in a way that a political organization would. It advocated a particular course of political action and pursued its aims independently from both Greek and Russian governments. One could say that during that period, the GBAO revealed itself to be a national organization with goals going beyond the narrow ones which its charter described.

The year 1917 was one of critical importance for Russia and for the world as a whole. The First World War was in full swing and besides the carnage it had created in the various fronts among the combatants, its effects were felt among civilians as well. Blockades and new types of "total war" had brought commerce to a standstill while inflation and food shortages hit the civilian populations more than at any other time before in the history of warfare. Since Turkey had entered the war on the German side, the Dardanelles were closed to navigation and trade to and from Odessa came to a standstill. As a result, the economy of the city suffered and even people not directly engaged in trade felt the pinch. Shortages of food and other goods caused by the war added to the discomfort of the people while worries over loved ones in combat and military reversals taxed the tranquillity even of the most patient individuals. The Greeks of Odessa were doubly hit during this turmoil. Most of them anxiously followed the events of the war not only in Russia but in Greece as well. There was also some political friction between those GBAO members (the majority) who supported the pro-western Greek Premier Venizelos and those who remained loyal to pro-German King Constantine I. To those differences were soon to be added political antipathies between those who supported Russia's new liberal regime versus those who supported the tsar<sup>81</sup>. Political developments in Russia during the early part of 1917 were also favourable for that country's Greeks. The February Revolution did away with the tsar and a western-style democratic government was established which was willing to allow Russia's ethnic minorities a larger degree of freedom and participation in the government. Unlike some other minorities of the empire (such as the Poles and the Finns), the Greeks were not expecting

81. Not surprising those Greeks who supported Venizelos were also well disposed towards Russia's Provisional Government while those who were royalists supported both the Greek and the Russian thrones.

self-determination but were hopeful of more freedom to administer their educational and other community affairs. Due to war and revolutionary developments, the Greeks of Russia were optimistic about the future and made a rather belated attempt to organize in all-encompassing union of Russian Greeks with political, educational, religious and financial goals<sup>82</sup>.

In 1917, between the February and October Revolutions, the various Greek civic groups in Russia created an umbrella organization in order to respond to the monumental events sweeping the country. All of the Greek philanthropic organizations were represented and the GBAO was the driving force<sup>83</sup>. The Greek organizations of Russia met on June 29 1917 in Taganrog and they agreed on the following seven objectives:

- 1) the union of all the Greek associations in Russia;
- 2) safeguard the independence of the Greek Orthodox Church from its Russian counterpart;
- 3) achieve the recognition by the Russian authorities of the Greek schools as ethnic schools and allow them to teach Greek language, history etc.;
- 4) establish a Greek bank and other institutions which would help the community;
- 5) publish a Russian-language Greek newspaper;
- 6) focus on the problems of rural Russia; and
- 7) define and coordinate the political position of Russia's Greek community so that it could achieve its other goals<sup>84</sup>.

At the time of the above meeting the Greeks of Russia were walking a tight rope. On the one hand they wanted to organize themselves on a pan-Russian level and thus take advantage of the liberal policies of the new government which was willing, unlike its tsarist predecessor, to accommodate the various minorities (the attempts by the tsarist government to russify the Greek element were eased by the new govern-

82. *Ἀναγέννησις* June 25, 1917 p. 3.

83. It is reported that the vice-president of the GBAO E. Pavlides called for a panhellenic meeting of the Greeks of Russia with the goal of creating an umbrella organization. *Ἀναγέννησις* 14 May 1917: 1-2.

84. *Ἀναγέννησις* 2 July 1917: 1.

ment)<sup>85</sup>. On the other hand, the Greeks did not want to get involved in Russia's political affairs and run the risk of being identified with a party that might lose the political battle. These aspirations remained unfulfilled. As it turned out both GBAO as well as the vast majority of Russia's Greeks were forced out of the country due to the monumental events of October 1917. Hellenism in Russia was almost wiped out and the GBAO became a footnote in history as a result of Russia's change of regime following the October Bolshevik Revolution, the civil war and foreign intervention. Ironically enough, that tragic outcome came when the GBAO was at the pinnacle of its power.

Given the events of 1917-1920s, the end of the GBAO was inevitable. The communists were ideologically opposed to non-governmental charity organizations, wanted to control the property of such institutions, and distrusted all types of non-communist led civic groups. The Bolsheviks tolerated private charitable institutions and allowed them to operate during the 1921-1922 famine but banned them soon after<sup>86</sup>. Thus when the Soviets were firmly established in Odessa the end of the GBAO became imminent. The fact that the Greek community of South Russia was identified with the anti-Communist camp was another reason to abolish that minority's independent institutions. While it is true that a number of Russia's Greeks were sympathetic to the communist cause, the most prominent and vocal members of the community were identified with the Whites. Consequently, the whole Greek community of Russia was labeled hostile to the new regime. The Greeks of Russia became the victims not only of the political events of their host country, but also of political decisions taken as far away as Paris. The victors of WWI decided that it was beneficial to their interests to defeat communism in Russia. To that end it was decided to send French troops to South Russia to intervene in that country's civil war and help the Whites defeat the Reds. The Greek Premier E. Venizelos agreed to provide Greek troops in support of their French allies<sup>87</sup>. In exchange for

85. Michael Dendias, *Αἱ Ἑλληνικαὶ Παροικίαι ἀνά τόν κόσμον (Greek Communities Throughout the World)*, Athens: Sideri, 1919, p. 24.

86. A. Lindenmeyr, *Poverty*, p. 3.

87. See Theofanis G. Stavrou, "Greek Participation and the French Army Intervention in the Ukraine", in Peter Pastor ed. *Revolutions and Interventions in Hungary and its Neighbor States, 1918-1919*, Boulder: East European Monographs, 1988, pp. 321-334.



Greek participation in the Russian campaign, France promised to support Greek expectations in Thrace and Asia Minor<sup>88</sup>. The story of the allied intervention in South Russia is not particularly glorious. The western powers overestimated the popular support for the White cause and underestimated the power of the Bolsheviks. This, coupled with bad planning and low morale, spelled the doom of the expedition. However, the short period of time which the western allies spent in Ukraine, January to summer 1919, was enough to turn the local population and the communist regime against the Greeks of Russia. Greece sent over 23,000 troops to South Russia, thus the Greeks were the most numerous invading troops in the area. Russian public opinion was against the foreign intervention and it manifested itself with, among other ways, enmity for the Greeks<sup>89</sup>. The Greeks of Russia, and particularly those of Odessa, welcomed the Greek troops enthusiastically. Such demonstrations of support for the invaders embittered the Russian population and turned it against the local Greeks<sup>90</sup>. As part of the military operations, the Greek army had to arrest and disarm Bolshevik sympathizers among the civilian population, a state of affairs which alienated the Russia public. In some instances, such as the one which occurred in the city of Kherson in March of 1919, a large number of Russian civilians were killed when the people of that city attacked the citadel which was defended by Greek army units<sup>91</sup>. The Ukrainian Soviet complained to the Greek government and threatened the Greeks of Ukraine with reprisals<sup>92</sup>. In some other parts of Russia, the local Greeks became even more identified with those who opposed the Bolsheviks. The Greek Central National Committee of Transcaucasia set up an army brigade composed by local Greeks and commanded by Greek officers of the Russian Army under Major-General Ananias<sup>93</sup>. Once the communist regime became well established, the leaders of the Greek community,

88. N. Petsalis-Diomidis, "Hellenism in Southern Russia...", pp. 233-235.

89. Kim Munholland, "The French Army and Intervention in the Ukraine", in Peter Pastor, ed. *Revolutions and Interventions in Hungary and its Neighbor States, 1918-1919* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1988), p. 349.

90. Petsalis-Diomidis, "Hellenism in Southern Russia...", p. 237.

91. *Ibid.*, pp. 252, 257.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 240.

93. *Ibid.*, pp. 225-226.

being themselves wealthy capitalists, escaped to the West leaving the field open to those communist or communist sympathizer Greeks who were now in position to assert their leadership on the community<sup>94</sup>. Soon after, on an unspecified date, the GBAO (as quietly as it was created about fifty years before) ceased to exist. The few Greeks that are left in the city today are either elderly Greek speakers or young Russian speakers. Both categories are assimilated to the Russian way of life<sup>95</sup>. Most common are the people who know that a great-grandparent was Greek but that is about all they know of their ethnic past. Some old mansions of Greek merchants survive, dilapidated sad reminders of past glories and of days when the city was rich and important. The tourist to the city would be surprised to find that in Odessa's center there is a "Greek Square" and a "Greek Street", reminders of a time when Greek merchant houses controlled the city's economy and young men from all over the Greek world came to Russia, as later they would go to America, to make their fortune.

94. The first mass exodus of Greeks from Odessa occurred on April 4, 1919. When the Greek army was evacuating the city 10,000-12,000 Greeks from Russia chose to leave with the troops. See Petsalis-Diomidis, "Hellenism in Southern Russia...", p. 241. By 1921 the Greek population of Odessa was reduced to 1,439 from the 5,000-10,000 estimated in 1897. See I. K. Hassiotis, ed. *Οι Έλληνες της Ρωσίας και της Σοβιετικής Ένωσης, Μετοικεσίες και Εκποπισμοί, Οργάνωση και Ιδεολογία (The Greeks of Russia and the Soviet Union. Emigrations and Forcible Relocations, Organization and Ideology)*, Thessaloniki, University Studio Press, 1997, Table 23, p. 564.

95. While Odessa is located in Ukraine, it is a city of mixed ethnic groups with a clear Russian character.