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Greek-Cypriot Enosis of October 1915: “A Lost Opportunity?”

Britain offered Cyprus to Greece in October 1915 on the condition that she went to Serbia's assistance in order to fulfil her Treaty obligations under the Serbo-Greek pact of May 1913. It gave Greece a golden “opportunity” in achieving *enosis* with Cyprus. Alternatively was it a “lost opportunity” when Zaimis administration rejected the British proposal.

It will be argued that the cession of Cyprus to Greece by Great Britain does not seem to be as genuine an offer, as it appears at first glance. Confronted with political and military problems on the Western, Dardanelles, Balkans, and Middle East fronts; Britain made the offer of Cyprus out of desperation and under the exigencies of war.

The British proposal becomes more meaningful against the background of unfolding events in the months of September-October 1915 in the Balkan Peninsula.

The Salonika front: assistance for Serbia

When Bulgaria began mobilising its armed forces on September 25, 1915 she had finally decided to cast her lot with the Central powers: Austro-Hungarian, German and Ottoman Empires. Serbia was now facing an imminent attack on two fronts from German and Austrian forces to the north and Bulgarian troops along her eastern frontier². In response, the Greeks commenced their mobilisation with King Constantine telling Venizelos that Greece would not be deviating from its

1. This paper was presented at Latrobe University Conference “Cyprus - Ancient & Modern”, organised by the Departments of Greek Studies and Archaeology in conjunction with Cultural Services, Cyprus Ministry of Education, held in Melbourne July 31 - August 1, 1993.

2. Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis*, vol. 3, Odhams, London, 1938, pp. 862-63.

neutrality and the former assuring the Bulgarians that Greece would not be assisting Serbia in a Serbo-Bulgarian conflict. The Bulgarians assured Constantine that they had no territorial designs on Greece³.

The Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos requested that Britain and France dispatch Allied contingents to Salonika to enable Greece to enter the war to fulfil its treaty obligations towards Serbia⁴. Mitrakos points out in his book *France in Greece during World War I* that the possibility of sending allied troops to Salonika had been raised in conversation on September 19, 1915 by M. Jean Guillemin, the new French Minister in Athens with Venizelos⁵.

Venizelos told the French Minister that he personally favoured such an expedition proceeding and that the Allied plan remain secret until the last minute because King Constantine would certainly not budge from his declared policy of neutrality. At an official level, Venizelos could not be seen endorsing the allied landing because he would required to lodge an official protest as Premier of a neutral country⁶.

When British officers and men landed at Salonika on October 1, this certainly surprised Constantine who feared that Greece's neutrality might be compromised. Venizelos protested somewhat hypocritically to the allied landing, with the *Entente*: Britain, France and Russia replying that as protecting powers they had the right to land troops destined for Serbia without asking the permission of the Greek government⁷.

Venizelos intended to use the Salonika expedition in getting Constantine to declare war against the Central Powers. The Greek Premier was intending to present the king with a *fait accompli* in reversing his original policy of neutrality. On October 4, 1915 Venizelos requested the Greek Parliament to approve the dispatch of Greek forces to assist Serbia not only against Bulgaria, but also against the Central powers, if required.

3. Douglas Dakin, *The Unification of Greece 1770-1923*, St Martin's Press, New York, 1972, p. 208.

4. Churchill, *op.cit.*, p. 864.

5. Alexander S. Mitrakos, *France in Greece during World War I*, East European monographs, Boulder, 1982, pp. 7 & 191 fn. 59.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

7. Dakin, *op.cit.*, p. 209.

He gained 147 votes out of a total of 257 for endorsing his policy measure. Next day, Constantine dismissed Venizelos for the second time (the other occasion being in March 1915), after failing to sway the monarch to his pro-*Entente* policy⁸.

In an interview on October 6, King Constantine told Sir Francis Elliot, the British Minister at Athens, that Greece would not deviate from its neutrality stance and that Venizelos's dismissal was justified, as he had gone too far in the Chamber in committing the country to take part in the European war⁹. Further to this Constantine was disturbed at the prospect of the 2 Allied divisions being transferred from Gallipoli to Salonika. He thought the Gallipoli expedition was being abandoned and would release the whole Turkish army to reinforce the Bulgarians¹⁰. Meeting the representatives of the 4 Powers (Great Britain, France, Russia and Italy), M. Zaimis, the new Greek Prime Minister, declared on October 7 that the new administration would continue its policy of benevolent neutrality towards the *Entente* and that Greek mobilisation would be continuing unabated for the present time¹¹.

When Austrian and German divisions entered Belgrade from the north on October 9 and Bulgaria invaded Serbia on October 11 from the east, the future existence of Serbia as a nation now seemed in doubt¹². With Serbian anxiety over Bulgarian intentions on its eastern frontier, an approach was made to the Greek Government on October 10 for developing a joint plan of action.

Sir Francis Elliot informed the British government that his Serbian counterpart had that day told Zaimis that the menacing Bulgarian attitu-

8. G. B. Leon, *Greece and the Great Powers 1914-1917*, Institute for Balkan Studies, Thessaloniki, 1974, pp. 238-45; Dakin, *op.cit.*, p. 209.

9. Cab 42 Papers of the War Council, Dardanelles and War Committee, Public Record Office, London. Cab 42/4/1 Committee of Imperial defence, *Precis of Documents and proceedings connected with the Political and Military developments in the Balkan Peninsula*, para. 145.

10. Churchill, *op.cit.*, p. 865.

11. Cab 42/4/1 para. 152.

12. Churchill, *op.cit.*, p. 869. Uskub (Skopje) fell on October 22 and Nish on November 2, 1915 to Bulgarian troops. By early December Monastir was occupied by Bulgarian troops; the Serbian army was either destroyed or driven completely from Serbian soil.

de in that Serbia considered a *casus foederis* had risen and called upon the Greek Government to allow the two General Staffs to conduct defensive measures¹³. Zaimis replying that the treaty was framed purely in connection with Balkan troubles and did not presently extend to include a great power like Germany. The Serbian Minister contested such an interpretation and Greek premier indicated that the German Emperor Kaiser Wilhelm 11 had told Constantine that war with Bulgaria meant war with Germany¹⁴. As the Zaimis Cabinet had shown its determination to maintain neutrality and a benevolent attitude towards the *Entente*. The Allies had its own problems to resolve and to establish a coherent policy in the Balkan Peninsula

*Anglo-French Co-operation in the Balkans:
A muddle of British diplomacy*

The British Cabinet sought to find solutions for its political and military problems on the Western, Dardanelles, Balkans and Middle Eastern fronts. She also needed the cooperation of her French ally. On October 4, 1915 A. J. Balfour, First Lord of Admiralty and Lord Kitchener, the War Minister, told their colleagues at a meeting of the Dardanelles committee that they were going to have discussions with the French regarding proposed allied operations in the Near East.

They were seeking clarification of whether the French General Staff knew about the promise of the French government to send 150,000 men to Salonika¹⁵.

Sir Edward Grey, British Foreign Secretary, was opposed to sending additional forces to the Balkans until the French and the Greeks had revealed their intentions. Asquith, the British Prime Minister, thought it important for the French to reveal their plans. Lord Lansdowne believed that pressure could not be applied in the Balkans, until the French front had been settled.

Even Lloyd George, the Minister for Munitions, thought it rather premature to have a conference as it was impossible to predict the out-

13. Cab 42/4/1 para. 164.

14. *Ibid.*; Cab 37/135/20 A note by Sir Arthur Nicolson to Sir Edward Grey October 11, 1915.

15. Cab 42/4/2 Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee October 4, 1915.

come of the war¹⁶. As it can be seen from this meeting that differences of opinion existed rendering it difficult in establishing a clearly defined policy in prosecuting the war.

At the Calais Conference of October 5 and 8, Kitchener and Balfour represented Great Britain and General Joffre, Commander-in-Chief of the French Army and Augugneur, the Navy Minister represented France. In the ensuing discussion Kitchener proposed sending 400,000 men to Salonika for the purpose of eliminating Austria. Otherwise the expedition should not proceed. There is no doubt that Kitchener was not in favour of this expedition. Joffre rejected Kitchener's suggestion that a smaller force of 150,000 men: comprising of 64,000 French and 86,000 British troops could easily be sent to Salonika without imperilling Allied operations on the western front. The French General saw the Salonika expedition as a means of providing cover for the Serbian retreat and preventing Salonika from falling into German hands¹⁷.

While the French sought British support for the Salonika expedition, they were also critics in France who denounced the mission. One of the fiercest attacks came from Georges Clemenceau, the Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, who believed the western front to be the primary theatre of operations and "side-shows" at Gallipoli or Salonika were wasteful and dangerous¹⁸.

Another critic was Theophile Delcasse, a French Cabinet Minister, who believed that the Salonika mission should be cancelled, on the grounds that the *Entente* could not send enough forces in time to assist from being cut in two by the Central Powers¹⁹. Both feared a Dardanelles type fiasco which would lead to the tying down of valuable manpower.

On October 6, the Dardanelles Committee sought the expert opinions of the War Office and Admiralty in determining the best options in continuing the war effort. Kitchener and Balfour reported to the

16. *Ibid.*

17. Mitrakos, *op.cit.*, p. 17; Cab 42/4/3 Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee October 6, 1915; Keith Nielson, *Strategy and Supply: The Anglo-Russian Alliance 1914-1917*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1984, p. 115.

18. Mitrakos, *op.cit.*, p. 15.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

Cabinet the substance of their discussions of the previous day with the French. Kitchener considered the Salonika scheme a “wild goose affair” and going to Serbia’s assistance as a very dangerous enterprise. Balfour was very critical of the French in ordering its troops to proceed up to Nish; whereas the British had gone to assist Greece in fulfilling its treaty obligations towards Serbia. Lloyd George, on the other hand, thought the French were chivalrous in going to Serbia’s assistance through Greek territory. Both Kitchener and Balfour saw the need of retaining the Gallipoli campaign and had made this point clear to the French²⁰.

After much deliberation, the military and naval experts made their findings available to the committee on October 9 by advocating that Britain’s energies should be devoted to the Western front in defeating Germany²¹. They were utterly opposed to the Salonika landing and had favoured the continuation of operations at Gallipoli. As the committee deliberated over the recommendations of its military experts, no agreement had been reached over Salonika and Dardanelles²². Meeting again on October 11, the committee discussed its likely options in the Balkans and had decided on 3 possible courses of action. They were:

1. Immediate instructions to be given for the dispatch, as soon as the present operations are over of an adequate substantial force from France to Egypt, without prejudice to its ultimate destination.
2. A specially selected general to proceed without delay to the Near East... and to consider and report as to which particular sphere and with what particular objective, we should direct our attention.
3. The General Staff, War Office, to state in what way their views given in their appreciation of the 9th October could be modified, if both Greece and Roumania were to act with the Allies²³.

20. Cab 42/4/3 Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee, October 6, 1915.

21. Churchill, *op.cit.*, p. 866.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 867.

23. As quoted in David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, Vol. 1, Odhams Press, London, 1938, p. 297.

Commenting on the third proposition, Bonar Law, the Colonial Secretary, Sir Edward Carson, the Attorney-General, and Lloyd George were clearly in favour of going to Serbia's assistance meaning that the Salonika expedition should proceed²⁴. Drafting a note on October 12, Bonar Law favoured assisting Serbia and that Allied forces at Gallipoli should be withdrawn without delay. As the Allied position at Gallipoli had become tenuous, the Turks would soon be strengthened with the arrival of ammunition and that the Central Powers would be dominant in the Balkans²⁵.

In another memorandum Lloyd George believed that Serbia should be saved and offered two reasons for this. In the first case, by abandoning Serbia to her own fate would be fatal for British prestige; and secondly that Serbia provided the only barrier "between us and the reconstruction of a Great hostile Moslem power, which would be a menace to Egypt, Tunis, Algiers, and Morocco and also our hold in India". He further raised the question of Roumania and Greece being persuaded to join the war effort²⁶.

It is interesting to note that two salient points emerge from the notes above. Both authors make no suggestions of offering any territorial compensations to induce Greece in joining the *Entente*. Further to this both were correct in pointing out that Constantinist Greece would be at the mercy of the *Entente* naval fleets should she attempt to assist the Central powers²⁷. Even Colonel Paul Braquet, the French Military attache in Athens and Colonel Joseph Bordeaux, member of the French military mission to Greece before the war, warned Paris that Greece was afraid to fight Germany and advocated a policy of coercion against Greece²⁸. A way had to be found to gain Greek support for the continuation of the Salonika mission and to get her to enter the war.

24. Cab 42/4/6 Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee, October 11, 1915; Lloyd George, *op.cit.*, p. 296.

25. Cab 37/135/23 Note by Mr Bonar Law, October 12, 1915.

26. Cab 37/136/9 Memorandum by Lloyd George, October 12, 1915.

27. Cab 37/135/23; Cab 37/136/9.

28. Mitrakos, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

British offer of Cyprus to Greece

British efforts would now focus in attempting to bring Greece and Rumania to the side with the *Entente*. It is also the indecision of British diplomacy in the Balkans and the French commitment in going to Serbia's assistance that the British offer of ceding Cyprus to Greece becomes more understandable.

On October 12, 1915 Grey instructed the British Ministers Barclay at Bucharest and Elliot in Athens to urge these two Balkan states to declare war²⁹. In all this Grey had offered nothing to Greece, whereas Rumania was promised logistical support. The next day Grey telegraphed Elliot promising that "if Greece joins us now, her territory will be guaranteed and she will receive proper territorial acquisitions at the end of the war"³⁰.

Responding to Grey's two telegrams, Elliot made it known to London, that it was essential that the Greeks be offered territorial compensations now and after the war. He advocated the coast of Thrace up to Dedeagatch (Alexandroupolis) "as well as such further acquisitions as result of war may render possible"³¹.

Even M. Viviani, the French Premier, thought the ceding of Eastern Thrace was such an attractive proposition that Greece could not refuse such an offer. Viviani agreed with Guillemin that if the Greeks refused, then coercion should be applied³².

Unexpectedly a most tempting offer was made to induce Greece to join the *Entente*. Lord Robert Cecil, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, suggested that Britain make further territorial offers to Greece by offering Cyprus. He outlined his plan:

We ought also to offer to, secure for Greece Southern Thrace with Smyrna and the hinterland, and as a pledge of our since-

29. C. M. Woodhouse, "The offer of Cyprus: October 1915", in *Greece and Great Britain during World War I*, First symposium organised in Thessaloniki December 17-18, 1983, by the Institute for Balkan Studies in Thessaloniki and King's College in London, Thessaloniki, 1985, p. 79.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

32. Mitrakos, *op.cit.*, pp. 19-20.

rity in these matters, to transfer to her until the end of the war, at any rate, possession of Cyprus. It seems to me that if we could present to the Greek people the immediate possibility of occupying Cyprus, it would be more attractive than any amount of promises of advantage at the end of the war³³.

One wonders how did Robert Cecil came up with the Cyprus offer in the first place, even though Ronald Burrows, Principal of Kings College, also an ardent Venizelist had proposed on October 13 to Cecil his known scheme for ceding Cyprus to Greece³⁴. On the Cecil minute, Grey wrote the words "we cant" and then crossed it out. It is difficult to speculate what went through Grey's mind at this time over the Cyprus offer. He proceeded to comment on the proposed purchase of Roumanian wheat³⁵. Woodhouse tells us that "There is no, record of anything that passed orally between Grey and Cecil, or between Ministers and officials on the proposal"³⁶.

The author agrees with Woodhouse's assertion but it still does not explain how Grey changed his mind some 24 hours later over Cyprus. Maybe further investigation of the personal papers of Robert Cecil, Edward Grey and other participants could be conducted to shed some light on this issue.

Another telegram was sent to Elliot on October 16, instructing him that Britain was prepared to cede Cyprus to Greece on the condition that she went to Serbia's assistance³⁷. The text of the telegram made the following offer:

Everything that passed with M. Venizelos when he was Prime Minister was on the assumption that Greece should support

33. Memorandum prepared by J. W. Headlam-Morley and J. W. Childs of the British Foreign Office, December 1924, "Britain and Cyprus since 1914", British Documents on Foreign Affairs, general editors Kenneth Bourne and D. Cameron Watt, Series F, Europe 1919-1939, vol. 6 Italy and South-Eastern Europe, January 1924 - June 1926, (ed.) C. Seton-Watson, University Publications of America, 1992, p. 99. Hereafter cited as B.D.F.A.; also quoted in Woodhouse, *op.cit.*, pp. 80-1.

34. The Burrows scheme will be discussed later.

35. Woodhouse, *op.cit.*, pp. 81 & 91.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

Serbia according to the Treaty.

It is a great disappointment to find that Greece is not going to do so, and we cannot think the explanation, of which the Greek Minister here has given us a copy, is satisfactory or absolves Greece from her obligations.

His Majesty's Government are asking the support of Greece for Serbia believing that it is especially in the interests of Greece to prevent Serbia from being crushed.

If Greece is prepared to give support as an Ally to Serbia, now that she has been attacked by Bulgaria, His Majesty's Government will be prepared to give Cyprus to Greece. Should Greece join the Allies for all purposes she would naturally have a share with them in advantages secured at end of war, but the offer of Cyprus is made by [Britain] independently on condition that Greece gives immediate and full support with her army to Serbia. Time is of importance, and you should ask M. Zaimis to give an early reply.

The final paragraph of this telegram was sent separately in which Grey told Elliot that:

You should make communication about Cyprus at once; it is quite independent of the other proposal, which is now being considered by Roumanian Government, and as to which it will be well to say nothing to Greece till the answer from Roumania has been received, when I will give further instructions³⁸.

What emerges from Grey's telegram are two points. Firstly, the cession of Cyprus was used as bait to lure Greece to go to Serbia's assistance and maybe appealing to those elements both in Greece and Cyprus who favoured *enosis*; and secondly, Britain gave Zaimis only a short time (no specific time limit was given) for a proper response to be given to this offer.

It was psychological pressure being applied on the Greeks to reveal their intentions. Then the offer does not seem to be as genuine as it first

38. Quoted in Woodhouse, p. 82.

appears. The cession of Cyprus was made out of desperation and also under the exigencies of war facing Britain in the various theatres of war, as adumbrated earlier.

Britain probably knew that the Zaimis Cabinet would not accept the offer of Cyprus as a condition for Greek participation in the war and that Constantine had no desire in fighting the Central Powers.

It is interesting that only a handful of Cabinet members in Asquith, Kitchener, Bonar Law, Grey, Chamberlain, and King George V who knew of the Cyprus offer³⁹. One wonders why others in the cabinet had been bypassed or left out of the decision-making process. It is also strange why the British monarch would want to give up the island of Cyprus which formed an integral part of the British empire. Moreover, the unfolding events would render the offer of Cyprus obsolete.

When the offer of Cyprus was revealed to Zaimis, the Greek Premier told Elliot that he could not give a reply, until the matter had been discussed by the cabinet. Elliot said that the offer of Cyprus was a unique opportunity for Greece, in that Cyprus would be assured to her irrespective of the outcome of the war. Further to this, Elliot suggested that Britain make a definite promise of Thrace, as convincing proof that her attitude towards Bulgaria had finally changed. Venizelos, the Ex-Premier, was very pleased with this new offer and believed it would have an excellent effect on public opinion in Greece⁴⁰.

On October 19, Elliot reported that the offer of Cyprus was to be discussed by the Council of Ministers (including King Constantine) that day⁴¹. Next day Zaimis told the British and Russian ministers that "in view of military opinion that it would only be courting disaster to go to help Serbia, it had been decided not to take action but to maintain a neutrality benevolent towards the Allies. No offers whatever would move the Government from that attitude"⁴².

Elliot pressed Zaimis "what force would persuade them?" and Greek Premier replying that the Greek General Staff were convinced that Allied troops would arrive too late to render assistance to Serbia. It was

39. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

40. Cab 42/4/21 Precise of documents in the Balkan Peninsula, para. 202.

41. *Ibid.*, para. 209.

42. Woodhouse, *op.cit.*, pp. 84-5.

much better to deploy the Allied forces either in France or Asia Minor⁴³. Regarding the offers that had been made to Greece, Sazanov, the Russian Foreign Minister 1910-16, believed that these enormous offers would lower allied prestige and would create the impression that the allies were in such dire straits, that they were willing to pay any price for Greek co-operation. In other words, the *Entente* could not be dictated to by such a small power as Greece⁴⁴.

The French and Italians had not objected to the Cyprus offer, whereas the Russians objected to the Greeks gaining dominance in the Eastern Mediterranean⁴⁵.

The official Greek reply to the British offer on Cyprus was made on October 22, 1915 by her Minister in London. The Greek text ran:

The Royal Government finally desires to express to the English Government its gratitude for the noble thought which it has conceived in proposing to them the cession of the island of Cyprus. Nothing could be more agreeable to them than this offer which, by opening up attractive prospects to the national aspirations, is of a nature to fill the hearts of the greeks with joy. But tempting as it might be, it would not modify the gravity of events by which Greece finds herself confronted or make more effectual the armed resistance that she could give to Serbia⁴⁶.

Therefore the Greeks were under no obligation to assist Serbia and not even the offer of Cyprus would make them abandon their benevolent neutrality. With Sir Edward Grey being unavailable, Gennadius, the Greek Minister in London, was received by Lord Crewe who came to explain his governments instructions on the conditions attached to Greece's benevolent neutrality. In response Crewe telegraphed Elliot on October 24 explaining the substance of the former's discussion with Gennadius. Crewe went on:

43. Woodhouse, *op.cit.*, p. 85; Cab 42/4/21 para. 214.

44. Cab 42/4/21 para. 219.

45. Woodhouse, *op.cit.*, p. 83.

46. The text of this is in B.D.F.A., vol. 6, p. 102.

As regards Cyprus, I suppose the Greek government would understand that the offer had lapsed. The Minister said he supposed they must regard it is not merely suspended. I answered that whether it is never made again or made at some future time must depend on circumstances which could not now be foreseen. All I could say now was that it is non-existent⁴⁷.

On October 25, Elliot saw Zaimis to confirm that the offer for Cyprus had lapsed⁴⁸. Elliot had still not yet lost hope in Greece. Moreover, with the lapse on the Cyprus offer, this did not prevent the Greek Government from offering its assistance in the future and submitting its demands. Zaimis replied that Greece was facing dangers on all sides. Elliot saw only danger for Greece that was the massacre of Greek populations in Turkey should the Turks and Germans be victorious⁴⁹.

Woodhouse tells us that the Liberal Press in Athens had been critical of Zaimis for having declined the offer of Cyprus. In an unpublished letter (to Dimitrios Gatopoulos) Zaimis wrote that "unfortunately I was under pressure from on high"⁵⁰.

This is a further intimation of King Constantine remaining neutral in the Great war and making it impossible for Greco-Cypriot *enosis* from taking place. It is also unfair to place all blame on Zaimis, as Constantine too must share some of the responsibility, as he was prepared to sacrifice any politician who declined to follow or obey his stated policy of benevolent neutrality.

Another approach for ceding Cyprus was the Burrows scheme. Ronald Burrows recorded his idea in his diary on October 13. In his proposal he outlined:

Over and above our general insistence on the need for sending large forces to the Balkans, I suggested, and Seton-Watson approved, a plan for raising public opinion in Greece.

The Governor of Cyprus was to be instructed to inform the Archbishop and the Greek members of the Legislative Council

47. B.D.F.A., vol. 6, p. 102; Woodhouse, *op.cit.*, p. 87.

48. Woodhouse, *op.cit.*, p. 87.

49. Cab 42/4/21 para. 256; Woodhouse, *op.cit.*, p. 87.

50. Woodhouse, *op.cit.*, p. 88.

that we were ready to give Cyprus to Greece, and to guarantee for ten years the territories Greece won by the Treaty of Bucharest, on the one condition that Greece should enter the war immediately on our side. The Governor was to be further instructed to enable the Archbishop and his friends to go to Athens without delay and appeal to the King and Parliament, informing them that the offer now made would never be repeated.

The British Minister in Athens was also to be instructed to consult Venizelos throughout, and to secure that our offer was published in the Venizelist press before the Government was able to give its answer.

Danger of loss of prestige to England in case of refusal was to be avoided by our offer being expressly made not for our own sake, but for that of Serbia; a corollary to this offer to Greece was to be suggestion to Russia that she also might make the sacrifice of Bessarabia here and now to Roumania on similar condition⁵¹.

It is interesting that Burrows suggestion was communicated the same day to Asquith's private secretary who arranged an interview at the House of Commons between Burrows, Seton-Watson and Lord Robert Cecil. At this meeting Burrows proceeded to outline his plan. Cecil made notes of this conversation promising to bring it before the Cabinet⁵². On October 14 Cecil drafted a minute which in effect altered Burrows scheme⁵³.

When examining the Cecil minute and Burrows scheme there are similarities and differences in both proposals. On two points do we find agreement in that both supported ceding Cyprus to Greece. They also favoured bringing in Roumania into the war, with Cecil suggesting that Barclay buy Roumanian corn and Burrows suggesting that Russia cede Bessarabia to her. On other counts the Burrows scheme is more comprehensive in its scope and detail than Cecil's proposal. The former sugge-

51. B.D.F.A., vol. 6, p. 98.

52. *Ibid.*, pp. 98-9.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 99. The Cecil minute has been cited earlier and there is no need to repeat here.

sted the Archbishop of Cyprus be despatched immediately to Athens by appealing Constantine and the Greek Parliament that the Cyprus offer would never be repeated.

Maybe the idea of the Archbishop appearing unannounced in Athens might have been construed by Constantine as a Venizelist ploy to force him to abandon Greece's neutral policy. Moreover it was important to consult Venizelos and to utilise the Venizelist press in making the offer known before the Zaimis cabinet could give an answer. Burrows might have favoured the return of Venizelos to power. Cecil suggested that Southern Thrace and Smyrna with its hinterland be offered to Greece; whereas Burrows believed that Britain should guarantee for ten years the territories Greece had won under the Treaty of Bucharest, providing she entered the war immediately on the side of the *Entente*⁵⁴.

On October 16 a further conversation had taken place between Burrows and Cecil and in their subsequent discussion, Burrows wrote out a cable to Sir John Clausen, Governor of Cyprus, and that he wrote a note to Bonar Law to cable and send it by special messenger to him in Cyprus.

The text of the telegram continued:

His Majesty's Government feel that in the present emergency no effort must be spared to induce Greece to go to the help of Serbia in accordance with her treaty obligations. They have therefore offered to give Cyprus to Greece on condition that Greece gives immediate and full support with her army to Serbia.

Please communicate this fact to the Archbishop or leading personages in Cyprus, and suggest to them that if they wish to take advantage of this opportunity for securing the union of Cyprus with Greece, which is unlikely to recur, they should immediately proceed to Athens and press their demands on the king and Parliament. You are authorised to give them any assistance in your power with this object⁵⁵.

When Clausen received this rather puzzling cable, he immediately

54. B.D.F.A., vol. 6, p. 98; Woodhouse, *op.cit.*, p. 91.

55. B.D.F.A., vol. 6, p. 100.

telegraphed on October 17, stating that such an offer would arouse the indignation of the Moslem population of the island. After all the Moslems had been loyal British subjects since 1878 and had no desire to be placed under Greek administration.

Clausen suggested that Britain provide protection for them in Cyprus or provide facilities for emigration elsewhere under the British flag. There is possibility that Clausen feared an outbreak of communal violence between the Greek and Moslem speaking elements⁵⁶.

The British Governor made a further a suggestion that an "alternative course would be to make no official communication here, but if considered advisable to publish report of offer elsewhere. I will await instructions. Next ordinary steamer is on 24th October to Egypt transshipping here"⁵⁷. Sir Edward Grey minuted thus "I should leave it alone now till we get a reply from Greece"⁵⁸.

On the same day, Bonar Law telegraphed to Sir Robert Clausen that "...The report of offer to Greece may become known here tomorrow. You should, therefore, if you think it advisable, when news reaches Cyprus, give Moslems general assurances that their loyalty is recognised and that in any event every step will be taken to guard their material and spiritual interests"⁵⁹.

The purpose of the telegram above was to assuage Moslem feelings when news of the offer reached Cyprus. It was important for Britain to protect the material and spiritual interests of its Moslem subjects.

In the end the Burrows scheme was never implemented. The offer of Cyprus was reported in the English speaking press and would cause Grey some embarrassment both in Cabinet and in the Commons.

Anglo-Saxon press reports and Grey's woes

The *Manchester Guardian*, *London Times*, and *New York Times* newspapers accurately reported the Cyprus offer. The *Manchester Guardian* editorial "The reported offer of Cyprus to Greece" of October 22 was certainly in favour of ceding the island to Greece. There are three

56. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

59. *Ibid.*

reasons given in the editorial supporting this view. In the first place, the handing over of Cyprus to Greece would not threaten land operations. The editorial, however, does not mention the land operations in question, but one can only surmise it to mean the various war theatres involving Britain. Second, it offered the Greek Kingdom an opportunity to partially fulfil some of its territorial desiderata and the islands population was predominately Greek-speaking. Finally, while the island lacked suitable harbour facilities. Its strategic position in the eastern Mediterranean (that is its close proximity off the coast of Asia Minor and Syria) made it a valuable asset in establishing a future naval base⁶⁰.

Another British newspaper which supported the cession was the London *Times*. Its editorial "Greece and Cyprus" stated that "No clearer proof could be given of the desire of the British Government to act up to its professions in regard to a Balkan settlement in accordance with the principle of nationality, than the news of its offer to cede Cyprus to Greece on condition that Greece fulfil her Treaty obligations towards Serbia". The tone in the rest of the editorial is somewhat critical of Zaimis's attitude towards the Serbian treaty, calling it a "disingenuous subterfuge". A Greek rejection of the Cypriot offer would clearly reveal the intentions of the Greek Government *vis-à-vis* the *Entente*⁶¹.

The *New York Times* quoted the editorial opinions of two London journals "*The Chronicle*" and "*Daily Telegraph*" on its front page. The former used the noun "goodwill" and adjective "splendid" to describe its support of Britain's cession of Cyprus. It made it clear that a Greek rejection of the Cyprus offer must lead to the *Entente* revising "its views of the seriousness of Hellenic aspirations" and should Greece fail to honour its obligation to Serbia then "[it] will forfeit [its] national honour which no nation forfeits with impunity". The latter editorial described the offer as a "tangible concession" to ensure Greek participation in the war. It was cynical over the Cyprus issue in that the offer was not made out of "sentiment" and the notion of "purely chivalrous motives" did not exist in Balkan politics with each nation seeking to advance its own national interest at the expense of another⁶². In a letter to the

60. *Manchester Guardian*, October 22, 1915, p. 6.

61. *London Times*, October 22, 1915, p. 8.

62. *New York Times*, October 21, 1: 8, 1915.

editor of *New York Times* published on October 24, the author Aristotle M. Machelas criticised Britain for failing to honour its past promises in ceding Cyprus and now hoped that enosis would become a reality⁶³.

Even in far away Melbourne, Australia the Cyprus offer was published in *The Age* and *Argus* newspapers. In a letter to the editor of *The Age* which appeared on October 23 titled "the Cyprus bribe to Greece", the author regarded the surrender of Cyprus as a deplorable policy in which Germany would take possession or purchase it from the Greek government. He pointed out that Cyprus was the "key to the Levant" and raised the question of the Australasian colonies protesting to Britain⁶⁴. After rejecting the British offer for Cyprus, Melbourne's small Greek community had agreed to cable Athens urging the Greek government to join the Entente in order to fulfil "the aspirations of Hellenism"⁶⁵. With the press making the Cyprus proposition public, Grey had to explain his actions both in Cabinet and the Commons.

On October 21 Grey wrote a note to the cabinet explaining his position in which Lord Crewe took the hand-written note for the information of the King. He read the offer of Cyprus:

It was next asked how it came about that the cession of Greece of Cyprus, an integral part of Your Majesty's Dominions had been promised in certain contingencies without the previous knowledge of consent of the Cabinet. Sir Edward Grey stated on behalf of the foreign Office that he desired to take the whole burden of any blame that might attach to the proceeding. The matter had come urgently to the front on Saturday last, and it had only been possible to obtain the concurrence of the Prime Minister, Lord Kitchener, and one or two other Ministers, before dispatching the telegram.

Sir Edward Grey fully recognised the irregularity that had been committed, and could only plead necessity. The Cabinet admitted the force of this plea, while laying great stress on the

63. "Coveted islands" Letter to *New York Times* signed by Machelas on October 21 and appeared in same on October 24, 16:5, 1915.

64. *The Age*, October 23, 1915, p. 11. Letter signed "Futurist".

65. *The Age*, October 25, 1915, p. 9 and *Argus*, October 25, 1915.

necessity of united action and of general consent in such cases⁶⁶.

Sir Philip Magnus, M.P., in a question addressed to Sir Edward Grey in the Commons on October 26 asked how the offer was made to Greece. Grey proceeded to explain to the House the condition that was attached to the offer. With the Greek rejection, the offer had, therefore, lapsed⁶⁷. Further criticism was levelled against Grey on November 15 by Mr Molteno M.P. in the Commons who stated that "It certainly struck me as a very serious matter that the question of giving portions of the British Empire should be a departmental matter"⁶⁸. As the offer of Cyprus quickly appeared on the political stage, it vanished equally as fast off the diplomatic horizon.

Conclusion

When evaluating the entire episode of Britain's offer to cede Cyprus to Greece a number of key issues emerge from the evidence presented. There is no doubt that the offer was made under the exigencies of war and was further compounded by the political and military problems faced by Britain in the various theatres of war. Britain also had to contend with France's determination to pursue the Salonika mission.

The idea of a Greek-Cypriot enosis in October 1915 was never a lost opportunity, in fact it had no chance of success. The neutral policy of King Constantine and the fear of the central Powers made sure of a Greek rejection to the British proposal. Further to this, the author could not find evidence of communication and dialogue between Greece and Greek-speaking Cypriots, as the island was under British colonial administration.

It's strange that only a handful of ministers knew of the Cyprus offer which raises the question of Grey's ulterior motive in this matter. With the offer not being discussed in Cabinet and Parliament beforehand, Grey might have faced some serious opposition for such a proposal. Therefore, the British offer does not appear to be a genuine one.

66. Quoted in Woodhouse, *op.cit.*, p. 86.

67. House of Commons, Parliamentary debates, Fifth series, vol. LXXV, 1915, col. 5.

68. *Ibid.*, col. 1614.