

## C. SVOLOPOULOS

### ANGLO-HELLENIC TALKS ON CYPRUS DURING THE AXIS CAMPAIGN AGAINST GREECE

In September of 1939, at the outbreak of World War II, the memory of the 1931 national uprising against foreign domination was still fresh in the minds of the Cypriots and the pressures exerted by the British colonial authorities were being felt<sup>1</sup>. The city council elections had been postponed, the Church hierarchy remained without a leader, the teaching of Greek history was forbidden and the state of national emergency was being prolonged without any apparent cause. It is, therefore, not surprising that the news of the Italian attack on Greece, on 28 October 1940, rallied the national conscience and caused the political thermometer of Cyprus to rise. With the passage of time, the gradual increase in intensity and scope of the war coupled with Greece's front-line role against the Axis powers, gave rise to the hope that the pre-war state of affairs would be altered through a generous gesture from Great Britain towards its only true ally in the Eastern Mediterranean area<sup>2</sup>.

After the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne, the successive Greek governments had adopted a low-key stance over the Cyprus issue. Their diplomatic efforts were concentrated in attempting to secure the independence and territorial integrity of the country through a de-

1. G. Georghallides, «British Policy on Cyprus during 1931», *Πρακτικά του Πρώτου Διεθνούς Κυπριολογικού Συνεδρίου*, 3d vol., Nicosia, 1974, pp. 95-104; C. Svolopoulos, «Ἡ στάση τῆς ἐλληνικῆς κυβερνήσεως κατὰ τὴν κυπριακὴ κρίση τοῦ 1931» (Greek Government's attitudes during the Cypriot crisis of 1931), *Ἐπιστημονικὴ Ἑπετηρίδα Π.Α.Σ.Π.Ε. (1976-1977)*, Athens, 1978, pp. 485-511; J. Pikros, «Ὁ Βενιζέλος καὶ τὸ Κυπριακὸ ζήτημα» (Venizelos and the Question of Cyprus), *Μελετήματα γύρω ἀπὸ τὸ Βενιζέλο καὶ τὴν ἐποχὴ του*, Athens, 1980, pp. 173-292. See also, Survey of International Affairs: 1931, pp. 354-394; Sir G. Hill, *A History of Cyprus*, vol. IV: *The Ottoman province. The British Colony, 1571-1948*, ed. by Sir H. Luke, Cambridge, 1952, pp. 539-552; M. Dendias, *La question cypríote aux points de vue historique et de droit international*, Paris, 1934. A general view: G. Ténékidès, *Chypre. Histoire récente et perspectives d'avenir*, Paris-Genève, 1964.

2. The British were obliged to accept the existence of the unionist movement. This movement had been encouraged by some British philhellenes, as well, such as Compton Mackenzie, who in an article in «Rapholds News» maintained that Great Britain should declare her decision to cede Cyprus to Greece (F.O. 371/29902, Mayleu to Nichols, May 27, 1941).

crease in tensions with the neighboring states and balanced cooperation with the major Mediterranean powers. Under these circumstances the escalation of the conflict with Britain would not, on the one hand, serve to resolve the union problem and could, on the other hand, jeopardize both Greece's position on the international scene and certain other issues of national importance. According to this line of reasoning, the resolution of the independence-related issues of Northern Epirus, the Dodecanese and Cyprus was a prerequisite to the strengthening of Greece's international position and the normalization of its relations with the Great Powers<sup>3</sup>. Already, however, the decisive contributions of Greece in the allied struggle and the unavoidable reorientation towards a new, post-war, international situation, provided the foundation for the return of the Cyprus issue to the international scene.

The Greek government did not link the Cyprus issue with the developments of the military activities on the Albanian front. Its first step was taken on the eve of the imminent German invasion, while the country prepared for that final struggle and harsh trial. On 2 March 1941, in Athens, Alexander Korizis told Anthony Eden:

As the Greek people will be required to offer the greatest of sacrifices, they will need, in order to maintain the excellence of their morale, an immediate satisfaction of their demands. I cannot tell you (I said) how impressive, in these hours of crisis, would a British gesture be whereby Cyprus would be ceded to Greece. I am simply putting forth (I was quick to add) a thought which will require further study and am not demanding an answer<sup>4</sup>.

The British Secretary of the Foreign Office hastily declared that he was unable to speak about such a sensitive and complex issue which, in any case, exceeded his «mandate»<sup>5</sup>. Korizis, however, repeated his proposal when, at the end of the same month, Eden returned to Athens for further talks. During this two-day conference, the Greek Prime Minister once again expanded on the «psychological reasons requiring the cessation of Cyprus to Greece for the heightening of the morale of the warring Greek people». At the same time, he was broach-

3. See: C. Svolopoulos, *Ἡ ἐλληνικὴ ἐξωτερικὴ πολιτικὴ μετὰ τὴν Συνθήκην τῆς Λαζάνης. Ἡ κρίσιμος καμπὴ (Ἰούλιος-Δεκέμβριος 1928)* (Greek foreign policy after the Lausanne Treaty. The turning point, July-December 1928), Thessaloniki (Institute of Public International Law and International Relations), 1928, pp. 95-7, 169.

4. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1940-41. *Ἑλληνικὰ Διπλωματικά Ἐγγράφα* (Greek Diplomatic Documents) [abbr.: *E.Δ.Ε.*], A. Korizis (memorandum), 2 March 1941, pp. 123-4.

5. Ibidem.

ing an issue of practical political necessity: the removal of the seat of the Greek government to a secure and free area of Greek soil<sup>6</sup>.

The concentration of strong German forces in the Greco-Bulgarian area had basically preordained, at the end of March 1941, the course of the military conflict on the southern Balkan front. The Greek and British troops which had been placed along the front were arithmetically incapable of definitively blocking the German invasion forces. Thus, the imminent subjugation of continental Greece by the Axis powers required an analysis of the alternatives for the continuation of the struggle from the Greek islands or from abroad. Korizis' opinion, as he presented it to Eden, was as follows:

The government must face as of now the possibility that it may be forced to abandon the capital and remove H.M. the King's seat and its own elsewhere. Naturally, its first thought was to elect to move to the island of Crete. However, due to the island's being in the battle zone and to its proximity to the areas that the enemy will occupy if the Peloponnesus falls, we concluded that H.M. the King's presence on that island would not be satisfactory in terms of his safety. Therefore, we decided that it would be necessary to move him to a safer island [...] only Cyprus [remained]. This solution, however, presents the drawback of the exercise of the royal imperium on free Greek lands from non-Greek lands. Thus (I added), I must once again request that you consider this issue with care and that you propose to the British government that Cyprus be ceded to Greece or, at least, that section which H.M. the King shall inhabit so that the royal imperium may be exercised from Greek soil<sup>7</sup>.

The British Foreign Secretary's reaction, without implying definite rejection of the Greek proposal, did not leave much room for hope. The ensuing conversation, as reported by the Greek Prime Minister, is especially enlightening:

Mr. Eden replied with a smile, that the final victory has yet to come and already we ask to annex lands. I replied that the miracle performed to date by the Greek people surpasses the bounds of a simple victory and justifies any concession. Mr. Eden, agreeing, asked if it would be possible for the King and the government to be moved to the Dodecanese. Naturally, I replied, no, not to Kassos or any other such secondary island but only to Rhodes once it has been liberated. Mr. Eden then replied that the issue of the King's and the government's temporary seat would be considered upon his return to London as well as our Cyprus demands, with all possible goodwill<sup>8</sup>.

6. *E.A.E.*, A. Korizis (note), 1 April 1941, p. 181.

7. *Ibidem.*

8. *Ibidem.*

The developments in the Greek-British talks on Cyprus soon justified the most pessimistic prognostications. As soon as the German invasion began, both the Greek Ambassador to London and the King, the latter meeting with the British Ambassador in Athens, reiterated the demand for the establishment of the Greek government on free Greek soil in Cyprus. Korizis sent Charalambos Simopoulos on a visit to the British Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary with instructions to restate the recent Greek position and to add the following new thoughts:

Even though I have not lost all hope that a gesture of the above-mentioned type is still possible today, I realise that a final solution cannot now be sought, although I understand how much Greece could benefit from this and the extent of eternal Hellenic gratitude toward Great Britain for such an encouragement for new sacrifices. With this in mind, I request, as I have already done of Mr. Eden, that it be considered whether and in what manner it would be possible to cede whatever strip of Cyprus to Greece so that, in case of abandonment of the capital, the King may be safe from the dangers of a war zone and may govern the free part of his country from Greek soil<sup>9</sup>.

In the same telegram, Korizis empowered the Greek Ambassador to make, at his own discretion, one final concession: it would be possible for the Greek demand «to take on a temporary form, giving the British government the prerogative to determine a final solution in the future...»<sup>10</sup>. Two days later, King George reiterated the same positions to Palaret. Already, the confining of the Greek position to a temporary solution was becoming official; it was also being projected by the Greek leaders as a very significant concession<sup>11</sup>.

The initial official reaction from London, as reported by the British Ambassador to Athens and Orme Sargent, Under Secretary of the Foreign Office, was completely negative: the British government was discussing with the Cypriot government the possibility of establishing the King and the Greek government in Cyprus in the same manner as the various allied governments had been temporarily established in London. The British government would not consider ceding any part of Cyprus, even temporarily, to Greece...<sup>12</sup>. Korizis held nothing back in his reply, which expressed his disappointment and disagreement with the British position:

9. *E.A.E.*, A. Korizis to Simopoulos, 9 April 1941, p. 200.

10. *Ibidem.*

11. *E.A.E.*, Korizis to Simopoulos, 12 April 1941, p. 205-6.

12. *E.A.E.*, Korizis to Simopoulos, 13 April 1941, pp. 207-9.

I answered Mr. Palaiet that this reply does not satisfy us. After having stressed that we do not mean to take advantage of this state of crisis to reopen the Cyprus issue, I said that if we ask for a small part of Cyprus to be ceded to us we do so only to secure the King's safety on Greek soil and to enable him properly to exercise the royal imperium. We believe that the King's safety combined with the other reasons we gave totally justify our demand. If the British government refuses, the King will go to one of the Greek islands, regardless of the danger he will face in so doing. However, we believe that the difficult moments Greece is going through justify us in insisting upon our demand, especially since an acceptance will not imply a permanent cession.

The Greek Prime Minister also made his demand known to the high echelons of the British government: Simopoulos was instructed to arrange a meeting with Eden in order to reiterate the demand for the cession of even a part of Cypriot soil<sup>13</sup>.

The Greek Ambassador met with the British Foreign Secretary in London on the following day, April 14, 1941. Simopoulos' account of the meeting is enlightening:

I saw Mr. Eden a short while ago, to whom I announced the disappointment caused by his reply and H. M. the King's decision to go of necessity to a Greek island, and I insistently asked that the government's decision be reconsidered and that our proposal be accepted. Mr. Eden answered that he was sorry his reply was considered unsatisfactory and, referring to two meetings he had with us, told me that he had already made known to us the difficulty of accepting our proposals. He added that he was in a very sad position because it had been his wish to do everything he could for us, and he considered H. M. the King's decision highly dangerous. I insisted that he reconsider this highly critical situation and find a way to satisfy our demands. Mr. Eden told me that he saw no reason why H. M. the King could not exercise his duties from Cyprus in the same manner that any foreign head of state residing there would. I once again insisted that from the point of view of prestige it would be good if, in these difficult times, his government made a gesture. Mr. Eden, apparently ill at ease, replied that he could not give me an answer before consulting with the Cabinet, which would meet that evening and to which he would present this issue; however, he made it clear that I should not be optimistic because this was a complex and sensitive issue<sup>14</sup>.

The discussion of the matter in the Cabinet that evening did not result in the acceptance of the Greek proposal but neither did it put an end to the dialogue on the national issue. The negative stance on the request of jurisdiction was underlined but at the same time the

13. *E.A.E.*, Korizis to Simopoulos, 13 April 1941, pp. 207-8.

14. *E.A.E.*, Simopoulos (London) to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 14 April 1941, p. 209.

possibility of allowing for certain facilities on Cyprus was clarified. This was in keeping with the views expressed by the Defense Committee the previous day and which had already been forwarded to Athens. At this point, however, the Foreign Secretary informed the Cabinet that «a further telegram had been received which made it plain that the Greek government attached great importance to their having a small piece of territory which they could call their own and in which they could exercise jurisdiction». Thus, he said «the next few days might well be very difficult ones for the Greek government and he was anxious not to send a refusal to a request about which the Greek government felt strongly». Categorically negative was the reaction from the Secretary of State for the Colonies: a strong party, in his view, wanted the island to be annexed by Greece; if the King of Greece were allowed to exercise jurisdiction over part of the island, the Governor's position would become an impossible one: «Why could not the King go to Alexandria or Jerusalem?»... After discussion, the Cabinet «agreed that the Foreign Secretary should send a telegram to the effect that we agreed that the right plan was that the Greek government, if they had to leave Greece, should go to Crete in the first instance and that we would be ready to discuss the Cyprus project with them at a later date»<sup>15</sup>.

15. CAB. 65/22 (War Cabinet's proceedings, April 14, 1941). The final negative position of the Foreign Office had been conceived earlier, when from Crete Em. Tsouderos, Korizes' successor to the premiership, had come back to the problem of Cyprus as it was revealed in a telegram by Michael Palairet, dated May 3: «*the President of the Council had sent me personal letter suggesting as encouragement to the Greeks in their present disaster, Cyprus should be granted to the King of Greece «as a personal present». For the duration of the War, His Majesty would govern the island through existing British authorities: after the War it would be governed by Greek officials. Thus if he had to leave Crete he could transfer his residence to territory under his sovereignty.*

2. *I have told the King and President of the Council that the proposal does not seem practical to me and that in any case it had been definitely decided that Cyprus would be no safer than Crete. His Majesty agreed with me as to the impracticability of the idea and I said I would prefer not to transmit it to His Majesty's Government but the President of the Council begged me to do so as personal suggestion»* (F.O. 371/29884, Palairet (Canea) to Eden, 3 May 1941).

Antony Eden underlines his replay:

*«I entirely approve your reply to the King and the President of the Council as reported in paragraph 2. Quite apart from the fact that, as you pointed out, Cyprus would be no safer than Crete as place of residence for the King and Government,*

In fact, the final British reply was given to the Greek government two months later, when Greece was occupied by the German forces. Two memoranda by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State for the Colonies resulted in the War Cabinet's final decision. The future of Cyprus had been considered in the light of Great Britain's strategic, political and economic interests in the Eastern Mediterranean area as well as of an eventual German attack against that island. The text of the Cabinet's decision provided that «the Foreign Secretary should not at this stage initiate discussions with the Greek government on the future of Cyprus: if, however, the matter were raised, he could reply that we were prepared to discuss the future of Cyprus with them after the War, as part of the general peace settlement»<sup>16</sup>.

In order to discover the real motives behind the attitude adopted by London, we must examine analytically the ideas and views exchanged between the Foreign Office's officials. The discussions were in fact based on the well - documented report prepared at the request of the Foreign Office by the Foreign Research Department of the Royal Institute of International Affairs<sup>17</sup>. The writer of the report was H. Beeley; his conclusions were based on an analysis of the political and strategic aspects of the Cypriot issue<sup>18</sup>.

The examination of the political factors tended to support the concession of the island to Greece: the gradual intensification of nationalist feelings amongst the Greek Cypriots did not permit «even the concession of self-governing institutions without immediate deadlock»; in any case «it is contrary to the traditions and in general to the interests of the British Empire to keep in political subjugation a people whose social and cultural level justifies the claim to self-determination». The presence of a dissatisfied and potentially hostile population would be a factor of weakness which could, in a moment of

*the present moment, when Cyprus is likely to be subjected to attack, is obviously quite insuitable «for considering the possibility of handing over the Island to Greece»* (F.O. 371/29884, Eden to Palaret, 6 May 1941).

16. F.O. 371/29846, Extract from War Cabinet conclusions, 2 June 1941.

17. F.O. 371/29846, H. Beeley (Royal Institute of International Affairs) to Nichols, 1941. This memorandum was requested in P. Nichols' (head of Southern Dt) letter of 27 March to Arnold Toynbee (R. 3353/198/19).

18. See the text of the Memorandum by the Royal Institute of International Affairs on Cyprus, above pp. 209-214 (annex I).

crisis, create difficulties for the dominant power or even wipe out the advantages in view of which the island was being held. The constant friction between the British authorities and the Greek population would have an unfortunate effect on Greco-British relations.

In the strategic field, the idea of ceding Cyprus would justify, according to the memorandum's conclusions, more serious reservations. The consequences would have been tied up with the more general developments in the Eastern Mediterranean and the conservation or the loss of other British possessions in this strategic area. However, the British continued to be interested in keeping the island under their control and, on the other hand, in preventing a hostile Power from undermining their position there. Nevertheless, the strategic requirements of the Empire were not in opposition to the cession of Cyprus if the transition of sovereignty to Greece was followed, at the same time, by Greek offers of military facilities to the British, such as naval or air bases on the island, either for a term of years or in perpetuity. A solution along these lines had been suggested by Eleftherios Venizelos, speaking in the Greek Chamber ten years before. «If—the memorandum continued—as seems probable, this solution had as one of its consequences the establishment of friendly relations between the British personnel and the local population, British interests in Cyprus would be more secure than they are at present». It must be pointed out that any proposal to place Cyprus under Greek rule had to take into account the interests of the Moslem minority and the strategic anxieties of the Turkish government. However, any considerations concerning this question, would not affect in any way the international status of the island.

Before presenting his report to the War Cabinet, the British Foreign Secretary studied the memorandum prepared by the Royal Institute of International Affairs; but, at the same time, he seriously considered the comments of the Foreign Office officials. E. R. Warner believed that the cession of Cyprus to Greece before the end of the war or at whatever moment promised the greatest political advantages: «As we are fighting for democracy, it would clearly be extremely difficult for any government in this country to maintain the existing regime in Cyprus after the victory of the democratic cause»; the British government only stood to prejudice its strategic interests by clinging on too long to a political sovereignty which it had very little hope of maintaining after the war. R. J. Bowker also agreed that British interests could best be served by ceding Cyprus to Greece according



to Beeley's conclusion; but, at the same time, he pointed out that the moment was not the most suitable: such a transfer would give the impression that Britain had little hope of retaining the island and preferred to leave to the Greeks the difficult task of defending it and the possible ignominy of having to surrender it to the Germans. P. Dixon, «though much sympathizing with the aspirations of the Greeks», did not consent to tying Britain's hands in any way until the course of the war had shown more clearly what British strategic requirements were likely to be: as a matter of fact through the extension of the air arm in the war and the consequent reduction of distances, Cyprus could become a strong outpost in the extreme Eastern Mediterranean. In the same way, H. Nichols, Head of the Southern Department, repeated the opinion that it was quite impossible to decide on the future of Cyprus before the end of the war. Finally, Orme Sargent, Under Secretary of State, pointed out that it would be «useful to have this memorandum available when the time comes for us to advise as to the future of Cyprus» and excluded any possibility of taking, at present, any decision with regard to this problem<sup>19</sup>.

Anthony Eden's memorandum, seriously influenced by the comments of the Foreign Office services, tended, at the same time, to consider the problem in the light of Beeley's memorandum statements. As a matter of fact, he concurred with its basic conclusions and seemed to agree that the possibility of ceding Cyprus to Greece was in no way in opposition to the security requirements of the Empire. Moreover, Eden's views combined the above with the consideration of German attempts to try to occupy Cyprus and, then, declaring their intention of handing it over to the Quisling government in Athens. Finally, he concluded that there was more than one alternative to a possible German initiative. In this connection, he did not rule out a preliminary agreement between the two governments relating to the conditions under which the sovereignty of the island would, after the war, be transferred from Great Britain to Greece<sup>20</sup>.

However, before these suggestions by the Foreign Office were presented to the War Cabinet, the fate of Cyprus had been sealed by the

19. F.O. 371/29846, [Minutes on Beeley's memorandum].

20. F.O. 371/29846, Memorandum by the Secretary of State of Foreign Affairs, May 31, 1941, above pp. 215-7 (annex II).

intervention of Winston Churchill. In conclusion to all the views and opinions exchanged between the British officials, the Prime Minister emphasized:

It is much better to leave all questions of territorial readjustment to be settled after the war. Once we depart from this principle, many other difficult cases may arise. I do not think we ought to cede an inch of British territory during the war.

It does not follow that Cyprus will immediately be taken. If it is, the Germans will be able, if they choose, to give it nominally to the Greek Quisling government while using it for purposes themselves. This will not make much difference to what happens.

I have followed very closely all that has happened in Cyprus since I visited the island and wrote a memorandum on the Tribute at the end of 1907. I suppose you are aware there is a substantial Moslem population in Cyprus, who have been very loyal to us, and who would much resent being handed over to the Greeks<sup>21</sup>.

21. F.O. 371/29846, Prime Minister's Personal Minute, June 2, 1941.

## ANNEXES

### I

#### *Memorandum by the Royal Institute of International Affairs*

#### CYPRUS

[F.O. 371/29846]

1. The island of Cyprus was assigned «to be occupied and administered by England», under the Anglo-Turkish Convention of the 4th June 1878, in return for an undertaking to join in the defence of the Sultan's remaining Asiatic territories in the event of any future Russian attack upon them. The prevention of Russian penetration into the valleys of the Tigris and the Euphrates was a British as well as an Ottoman interest, and the Russian occupation of Qars and Ardahan with her claim to Batum, all of which, as Her Majesty's Government foresaw at the time of the Cyprus Convention, were accepted by the Congress of Berlin, brought the danger appreciably nearer. Lord Beaconsfield had accordingly called for reports on the possibility of acquiring some base from which further Russian expansion might be effectively counteracted. Among the sites suggested by his advisers were Muhammerah at the head of the Persian Gulf, Stampalia in the Aegean, and Alexandretta; but the Government's choice fell upon Cyprus.

It would seem that, for the purpose of operating against a Russian army based on Armenia, both Cyprus and Alexandretta were at that time less favourably situated than a position either on the Shatt-al-Arab or closer to the Dardanelles; and that Cyprus offered fewer advantages than Alexandretta. But there were other considerations which favoured a site in the Eastern Mediterranean: since the opening of the Suez Canal, nine years previously, the lack of a British base nearer to its northern outlet than Malta had been felt as a weakness; and considerable attention was being paid to projects for a Euphrates Valley railway, to be constructed by British capital, from Alexandretta or some neighbouring point on the coast of northern Syria to the Persian Gulf. It was anticipated that the possession of either Alexandretta or Cyprus would go far to give Great Britain the effective control of both the existing and the projected short route to India, while the building of the railway would add greatly to the value of either base as a check on Russia. Finally, the rejection of Alexandretta was dictated largely by the realisation of the repercussions which its occupation was likely to have upon Anglo-French relations.

2. Great Britain retained Cyprus under the terms of the 1878 Convention for a little over thirty-six years. During that period, the emergency in foresight of which the island had been occupied did not arise; the Baghdad Railway, with which Alexandretta was linked in 1914, was built under German and not under British influence; and the protection of the Suez Canal was far more effectively assured by the occupation of Egypt in 1882. By 1914, therefore, the control of Cyprus had not conferred upon Great Britain any of those advantages which had been anticipated at the time of its occupation. The Admiralty indeed had opposed the occupa-

tion in 1878, and in November 1912 Sir Edward Grey had told the Italian Ambassador that Cyprus was «of now use as a naval base», and that the naval authorities were constantly pressing for a base in the Aegean Islands.

It was thus possible, in October 1915, to offer the island (which had been annexed when Turkey entered the war) to Greece, as a means of inducing her to engage in hostilities on the side of the Entente. Only the unwillingness of the Greek Government to enter the war averted the withdrawal of Great Britain from Cyprus at that time.

After the Peace Treaties of 1919-23, Great Britain's strategic position in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf as vastly stronger than it had been in 1878. Not only was Egypt still in British hands, but Russia had withdrawn from Qars and Ardahan, while Britain was herself established as a mandatory Power in Iraq, Transjordan and Palestine. Both France and Italy, it is true, had in the interval acquired footholds in the eastern basin of the Mediterranean, but the creation of a British sphere of influence stretching from the Libyan desert to the frontier of Iran was more than sufficient to redress the strategic balance.

In these circumstances, the positive contribution which Cyprus could make to the security of British imperial interests was not substantial. Negatively, however, it was desirable that Cyprus should not be controlled by another Great Power, and this possibility would have been brought nearer, but for the previous British occupation, by the final dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. A second factor tending to enhance the value of Cyprus in the period following the war of 1914-18 was the developement of aviation, for the island is topographically better adapted for the construction of an air base than of a naval harbour.

3. Sovereignty over Cyprus was formally transferred to Great Britain by Article 20 of the Treaty of Lausanne, and the island was given the status of a British Colony in 1925. There still remained, however, one restriction upon the freedom of His Majesty's Government to dispose of Cyprus. The French Government had secured the insertion into the «Sykes-Picot Agreement» of 1916 of a stipulation, presumably intended to prevent the effect that France should have a veto upon the cession of Cyprus to a third Power. This undertaking was confirmed by Article 4 of the Franco-British Convention of the 23rd December 1920, which ran as follows:

«In virtue of the geographic and strategic position of the island of Cyprus, off the Gulf of Alexandretta, the British Government agrees not to open any negotiations for the cession or alienation of the said island of Cyprus without the previous consent of the French Government».

4. Another Government which, despite its lack of juridical status in the matter, has followed the fortunes of Cyprus with close attention is that of Greece. Of the total population of the island — 348,000 at the census of 1931 — some four fifths are Greek-speaking Orthodox Christians (the bulk of the remainder being Turkish-speaking Moslems). And the nationalist aspirations of modern Greece have been shared, since 1821 at least, by an increasing number of Greek-speaking Cypriots. At the present time, the desire for the union with Greece is felt by the great majority of Greek priests, school-teachers and lawyers, and by the larger part of the Greek population of the towns, while it is probably making headway in the rural districts.

Between 1878 and 1914 unionist feeling was not a factor of first-class importance in the politics of Cyprus. Since Turkey had not divested herself of suzerainty over the island, the British Administration could not be held responsible for its continued separation from Greece. The situation, furthermore, was in some respects similar to that of the Ionian Islands between 1815 and 1864, when a British Protectorate over Greek islands which had previously formed part of the Venetian Empire had been terminated by their cession to Greece. But when Great Britain, so far from relinquishing Cyprus, asserted and confirmed her sovereignty over it, the demand for self-determination became more insistent and more popular. For many years unionist agitation was treated with great tolerance by the British authorities; until 1929, for instance, the elementary schools were openly used by the Greek nationalists as instruments of propaganda. This policy of toleration was sharply reversed after a sudden outbreak of popular violence in October 1931. The Legislative Council was then abolished, and Cyprus has since been ruled by the Governor with the assistance of an Executive Council consisting mainly of officials.

The Turkish-speaking minority — 64,000 at the census of 1931 — is on the whole content with the existing régime, and would view with apprehension the realisation of Greek hopes.

5. In considering the future of Cyprus after the present war, it is necessary to take into account the following factors:

(a) the strategic requirements of His Majesty's Government. The bearing of the situation in Cyprus upon this interests will depend upon developments in the Eastern Mediterranean generally, and the following paragraphs must therefore be based on certain assumptions as to the British position elsewhere. It will be assumed that the air base at Abu Sueir remains in British hands, and that Great Britain retains a naval base within a short distance of Port Said, either by the maintenance of the arrangements which permit the use of Alexandria or by the substitution for it of Haifa;

(b) the desires and interests of the inhabitants, and the interests of Greece and Turkey so far as they are involved by this factor;

(c) the strategic interests of Turkey; and

(d) the commitment to France of the 23rd December 1920, in so far as it will be possible, when the war is over, to regard this commitment as valid.

In the light of these considerations, there appear to be four policies which it might be possible for His Majesty's Government to adopt,

(a) to maintain the *status quo*;

(b) to retain their sovereignty over the island, while granting certain rights or facilities to one or more interested Powers:

(c) to cede the island to Greece upon conditions designed either to safeguard existing British strategic advantages or to obtain compensation elsewhere; or

(d) to cede the island, without such safeguards or compensation, either in return for guarantees as to its use by Greece in the future or unconditionally.

6. The strongest argument for the first alternative, that of preserving the *status quo*, is that the effective and permanent occupation of Cyprus by Great Britain is the surest guarantee against the eventuality of its use by a hostile Power or combination of Powers. Furthermore, Cyprus is the only territory under British sovereignty in the Eastern Mediterranean. Lastly it has been claimed (contrary to the unfavourable opinions expressed by the Admiralty in 1878 and subsequently) that Famagusta is capable of development as a naval base; and the development of aerial warfare has altered the relative importance of Mediterranean islands, in particular by introducing a need for flat ground suitable for conversion into an airfield. In this respect Cyprus is superior to certain smaller islands which might previously have been preferred to it because of their more promising harbours. If however the assumption mentioned in the previous paragraph (the maintenance of British bases at Abu Sueir and either Alexandria or Haifa) be accepted, these last considerations, particularly in view of the high cost of the suggested development at Famagusta, lose much of their importance.

Against these advantages must be set, in the first place, the probable intensification of Greek nationalist feeling in Cyprus. Whatever view may be taken as to the means by which this feeling is stimulated, as to the reasons for the apparent imperviousness of sections of the Greek population to unionist propaganda, and as to the likely effects of union with Greece on the material welfare of the Cypriots, there seems little reason to doubt that the demand for union will grow rather than diminish. It follows from this that no concession of self-governing institutions can be made without the risk of immediate deadlock, such as was only resolved in the days of the Legislative Council by balancing the official and Turkish deputies against the Greek, by giving the Governor a casting vote, and by frequent resort to Orders in Council. Yet it is contrary to the traditions and in general to the interests of the British Empire to maintain in political subjection a people whose social and cultural level justifies the claim to self-determination. In Cyprus particularly, the presence of a dissatisfied and potentially hostile population would be a factor of weakness which might embarrass the ruling Power in a moment of crisis, or even nullify entirely the advantages in view of which the island was held. Furthermore, constant friction in Cyprus between the British authorities and the Greek population would have an unfortunate effect on Greco-British relations. Finally, the development of a naval base at Famagusta might be resented or viewed with suspicion by the Government of Turkey.

7. The second alternative, that of retaining sovereignty while granting certain rights and facilities to one or more interested Powers, might involve one or both of the following arrangements:

(a) the leasing of a base, at Famagusta or elsewhere, to Turkey. This would remove any objection which the Turkish Government might otherwise have to the continued occupation of Cyprus by Great Britain. But at the same time, by introducing a further obstacle to union with Greece, it would add to the dissatisfaction of the Greek Government and people, unless it were accompanied by

(b) the concession to the Greek Government of some form of protectorate over the Greek-speaking Cypriots.

If the rights of His Majesty's Government in Cyprus were limited by arrange-

ments of this kind, the arguments for retaining the island would be seriously weakened, while the major argument against its retention — the almost certain persistence of the desire of the Cypriot Greek nationalists to substitute Greek for British rule — would not be met by a concession of rights to the Greek Government. Such concessions would stimulate rather than appease the desire for union.

8. If the Anglo-French Convention of the 23rd December 1920 were to retain its validity after the present war, either of the two alternatives already examined could be adopted without the necessity of obtaining French consent. This consent, however, would be necessary before negotiations could be opened for giving effect to either of the remaining suggestions.

9. The first of these is that sovereignty over Cyprus should be transferred to Greece in return for the cession or leasing of sites for naval and air bases. The leasing of bases to outside Powers in territories the sovereignty over which is retained by the leasing Power is a device which is likely, after the precedent set by the Anglo-American Agreement of the 27th March 1941, to be suggested for the solution of many conflicts between the strategic interests of a Great Power and the desires of a local population. The strict application of the Anglo-American analogy, in geographical terms, to Cyprus would dictate the retention of sovereignty by the distant ruling Power, Great Britain, and the leasing of a base to the neighbouring Power, Turkey. But the situation in Cyprus differs in two important respects from that in the British West Indian islands:

(a) even if it could be assumed that the friendly relations of H.M.G. with the Government of Turkey would be as durable as those with the Government of the U.S.A. are likely to be, the security of a Turkish base against seizure by a third Power would not be comparable with that of an American base;

(b) the populations of the British territories affected by the Agreement of the 27th March, unlike the majority in Cyprus, desire to remain under the British flag.

It would seem more natural, therefore, if the device of separating sovereignty from military facilities is to be applied to Cyprus, for H.M.G. to cede the island to Greece in return for such facilities, either for a term of years or in perpetuity. A solution along these lines was suggested by E. Venizelos, speaking in the Greek Chamber, as long ago as November 1931; and there seems to be reason to suppose that the Cypriot Greeks would prefer this solution — as affording them greater security — even to an unconditional assumption of sovereignty by Greece.

If, as seems probable, this solution had as one of its consequences the establishment of friendly relations between the British personnel and the local population, British interests in Cyprus would be more secure than they are at present. Even in the event of Greco-British hostilities at some future date, it is doubtful whether the necessity of defending a land frontier in Cyprus would be a greater liability than a rebellious subject population.

10. It is necessary at this point to notice the close relationship which exists between the problem of Cyprus and the problem of the Dodecanese. If it is proposed, at the cessation of hostilities, to transfer the islands of the Dodecanese, wholly or in part, to Greece, two questions bearing on the future of Cyprus will arise:

(a) Is it possible to recognise the claim of Greece to the Dodecanese without

recognising that her claim to Cyprus is of the same character and of almost equal force?

(b) Is it, at the same time, desirable to obtain for Great Britain, in return for the cession of Cyprus, a base in the Dodecanese?

11. If it were decided in principle to cede Cyprus to Greece while asking for naval and air bases elsewhere on Greek territory, the suggestions which H.M.G. might make as to the location of these bases would depend upon considerations which lie outside the scope of this memorandum. It might be thought desirable on strategic grounds to secure facilities in Suda Bay, in which case the proposal to transfer Cyprus would provide an opportunity to raise this question. If, on the other hand, a smaller island were thought to offer greater security than either Crete or Cyprus, the latter might be exchanged for one of the islands of the Dodecanese. The second course would have the further advantage that the Greek Government would probably be more ready to renounce an island which is not at present in their possession than to relinquish control of Suda Bay.

The same strategic considerations might, however, lead to the conclusion that, if bases are retained in the neighbourhood of Suez, any further territorial outpost in the Eastern Mediterranean would be a liability rather than an asset. If this conclusion were reached, Cyprus could be handed over to Greece without any territorial compensation. It need not follow, however, that the cession should be wholly unconditional; the island might be demilitarised, or Greece might bind herself on the lines of the existing British undertaking to France, not to alienate it to a third Power without British consent. Guarantees of this kind cannot take the place of effective occupation but, on the assumptions made in this paragraph, the policy of abandoning Cyprus would not be determined to any large extent by belief in their adequacy. That being so, it might be thought preferable on political grounds to make the more confident gesture of relinquishing Cyprus without any conditions whatever.

12. Any proposal to place Cyprus under Greek rule would have to take into account the interests of the Turkish-speaking minority and the strategic anxieties of the Turkish Government. The responsibility for inserting adequate safeguards for the former into the Anglo-Greek agreement for the transfer of sovereignty would rest upon H.M.G. The latter issue might be a matter for direct negotiation between the Greek and Turkish Governments, unless, as has been suggested above, the future of Cyprus were considered in relation to the future of the Dodecanese. If the problem of ethnically Greek islands lying near the Turkish coast and now in the possession of other Powers could be dealt with as a whole, the result would presumably be a tripartite agreement which provided substantial satisfaction for the claims of Greek nationalism while meeting the strategic requirements of Turkey and, if any were advanced, of Great Britain. As a last resort, it might be necessary to examine the possibility of a Greco-Turkish exchange of populations, carried out in such a way as to remove both the Turkish minority from Cyprus and the Greek population from one or more of the islands of the Dodecanese; the defect of such solutions — the hardship they impose on individuals — might in this instance, in view of the relatively small numbers affected, be more than offset by the removal of what might otherwise be causes of friction between Greece and Turkey.



## II

War Cabinet

### *Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs*

#### *FUTURE OF CYPRUS*

Secret.

WP (41) 118

May 31st, 1941

[F.O. 371/29846]

If the Germans occupy Cyprus, a probable move on their part will be to represent themselves as liberators who intend to hand over the Island to Greece, or rather to the Quisling Government which they have set up in Athens. It would therefore be prudent at once to consider what our attitude should be in such an eventuality in order not to be taken unawares.

2. The problem should be considered in the light of the fact that, quite apart from the necessities of the present crisis, there is a strong *prima facie* case for ceding Cyprus to Greece, subject to safeguards, after the war. This emerges clearly from a memorandum recently prepared at the request of the Foreign Office by the Foreign Research Department of the Royal Institute of International Affairs. This memorandum which forms the annex to this paper recalls that England occupied Cyprus in 1878 to enable her to guard against an emergency, namely Russian penetration into the Valleys of the Tigris and the Euphrates, which never materialised that since Cyprus became a British colony in 1925 the Island, except in the purely negative sense that it has been denied to any other Great Power, has made no contribution to the security of British Imperial interests; that it was offered to Greece in 1915 as a means of inducing her to enter the war on the side of the Entente; and that some four-fifths of the population of the Island are Greek speaking orthodox Christians, whose already fervent desire for union with Greece may grow rather than diminish. The memorandum further shows that, apart from strategic considerations, the only material obstacles to the cession of the Island to Greece are (1) the stipulation in the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916, confirmed by article 4 of the Franco-British Convention of 1920, to the effect that France should have a veto on the cession of the Island to a third Power, and (2) the interests of Turkey in the Island on strategic grounds and in respect of the Turkish speaking minority. The first of these obstacles can hardly be regarded as serious in present circumstances when France is rapidly losing her position in Syria. As regards the second obstacle, it ought to be possible to devise safeguards to secure Turkey's strategic interests, and to solve the problem of the Turkish minority by transfer of population. As for the strategic interests of Great Britain, these would of course have to be preserved, and this could probably be done by the cession to Great Britain of naval or air bases in Cyprus or another Greek island, e.g. Crete, or in the Dodecanese.

3. To meet the eventuality referred to in paragraph 1 of this paper the following courses are open to us:

(i) We might more or less ignore the matter and let the German propaganda do its worst, in the confident hope that the Greek people will not be taken in by it.

(ii) We might anticipate this German move by at once making a public statement to the effect that after the war we intend to discuss with the Greek Govern-

ment the conditions under which we would be ready to cede the Island to Greece (These conditions would presumably have for their object the retention by ourselves of the necessary naval and air bases in the Island, or the cession of bases elsewhere — see paragraph 2 above).

(iii) We might at once without waiting for any German move take the Greek Government into our confidence and consult them as to what line we should both take to counter this possible German move. We should try to persuade the Greek Government that in the event of the Germans making their offer and the Quisling Government in Athens accepting it, they should repudiate the latter's acceptance and state that they refused to consider any scheme which involved Greece receiving Cyprus at the hands of Germany.

4. As regards (i), this is the line of least resistance. But could we really maintain such a policy of silence? Should we not be forced into a dangerously false position which would embarrass not merely ourselves but also the Greek Government? However much the Greek people may dislike and suspect the Germans, they would be more than human if they did not welcome this offer and use it subsequently against ourselves. In any case, it would make, for the time being, admirable material for German propaganda, not only in Greece but in the Greek colony in Alexandria and elsewhere. Incidentally, it would be represented that we were defending Cyprus for purely selfish motives because we wished to preserve it as a British colony. Moreover if we kept silent it would not follow that the Greek Government would be able to do so, since they would have to consider how best to preserve their authority over the Greek people in competition with the Quisling Government which is operating in Athens, and they might well feel that the only way for them to do this would be by giving out a rival statement.

5. As regards (ii), when I was recently in Athens I was asked whether His Majesty's Government would be prepared to announce now their decision to cede the Island after the war. I deprecated discussion of the question in condition which then existed. It might therefore seem inconsistent now to come forward with a definite offer. But quite apart from that, to the world at large it would look like an act of panic on our part to offer Cyprus to Greece at the present moment and in present circumstances. Moreover, we should be making our offer before the Germans had made theirs, and we should be rather hoist with our own petard if, as it turned out, the Germans never had any intention of making their offer.

6. There remains course (iii), i.e. to take up the matter at once with the Greek Government on the lines of proposing that they should repudiate any German offer of Cyprus, if and when made. It may be difficult to pursue this course to a satisfactory conclusion, but I feel that it is the one which we ought at any rate to explore.

7. In order to induce the Greek Government to repudiate a German offer publicly we should probably have to allow them to say publicly that they intend to discuss the problem of Cyprus's future with His Majesty's Government in due course. Even so the Greek Government might feel that, having regard to the strength of Greek public opinion on the subject, they must be able to say something more definite than this. If so, we might have to agree that if the Greek Government would repudiate the German offer, if and when made, we, for our part, would agree to a joint statement to the effect that our two Governments were already agreed to discuss conditions under which the sovereignty of the Island should, after the war,

be transferred from Great Britain to Greece. I realise that this would be open to the same objections as course (ii), i.e. we should appear to be acting inconsistently and under panic. But on the whole it might be worth while in present circumstances to risk these accusations, especially in view of the considerations advanced in paragraph 2 above.

#### *8. Conclusion*

That we should at once take the Greek Government into our confidence and consult them as to the line which we should adopt in the event of the Germans occupying Cyprus and declaring their intention of handing it over to the Quisling Government at Athens;

That we should try to persuade the Greek Government that, in the event of the Germans making their offer and the Quisling Government in Athens accepting it, they should repudiate the latter's acceptance and state that they refused to consider any scheme which involved Greece receiving Cyprus at the hands of the Germans;

That, if the Greek Government agreed to this, we should be prepared to allow them to say publicly that they intend to discuss the problem of Cyprus's future with His Majesty's Government in due course, and

that if pressed by the Greek Government we should be prepared to agree to a joint statement to the effect that our two Governments were already agreed to discuss conditions under which the sovereignty of the Island should, after the war, be transferred from Great Britain to Greece.

Foreign Office  
May 31st, 1941