

Seferis-Averof: the Breach **[Σεφέρης-Αβέρωφ: η Πήξη]**

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Athens, 2017 [pp. 260]

ISBN: 978-960-03-6296-1

The book explores the disagreement between George Seferiadis, ambassador in London, and Evangelos Averof, Minister of Foreign Affairs, during a critical juncture in the history of Cyprus. Their differences and strong disagreements about the Cyprus problem and the discussed plans that led to the Zurich-London agreements between the Greek, Turkish and British governments respectively, resulted in a breach in their relationship. Apart from being a diplomat, Seferiadis was a Nobel Prize laureate and one of the most important poets of Greece, and he is widely known as Seferis. In the book under review Giorgos Georgis, who has a full grasp of the vast literature, besides Seferis' poems in *Logbook III*, which were inspired by the island, as well as his journals and his classified correspondence about Cyprus, makes usage of relevant literature which includes his own books and research work about the poet.

In the first chapter Georgis illustrates, in a nutshell, Seferis' arguments and disappointment over Averof's negotiations and cites the opinions of diplomats who were involved and knew about the issue from within. Alexandros Xydis, press secretary at the embassy in London, was the first to reveal and publicise these arguments. Georgios Pesmazoglou, the Greek ambassador in Turkey, acknowledges the fact that Seferis is excluded from the talks. Challenging the credibility of this view were Angelos Vlachos, the ambassador in Cyprus at the time, and Alexandros Bitsios, who worked in close partnership with the minister. These diplomats catch the interest of the author also in chapter ten, as holding different opinions to Seferis condemning him for being so much in favour of the Cypriots and blaming his lack of objectivity on his close relationship with Makarios.

The author claims that Seferis is by no means an unbiased intermediary as he feels a special affinity for Cyprus and adopts a strongly supporting stance towards a resolution of the Cyprus issue. As it is pointed out in chapter nine, due to the fact that he is rather skeptical about the Cyprus issue, he approached the problem from a philosophical standpoint. Georgis provides an account of his diplomatic course in

chapters three and six. From his post, first in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Greece from 1956 to 1957 and then from 1957 to 1961 as a Greek Ambassador in London, Seferis devoted all his energy and emotion to Cyprus. He felt that the government had conscripted him to serve in the diplomatic corps for his insight into the Cyprus problem and his close relationship with Makarios.

Through the times he had been to Cyprus, Seferis had made many intimate friends, among whom Makarios was the most prominent figure. In order to stress his support, respect and appreciation to the gifted and dynamic archbishop, in chapters two and seven Georgis cites his letters to the exiled archbishop. What the author also indicates is that Seferis discerns a negative political climate when Makarios is released and a great deal of inconvenience and fatigue caused by the Cyprus problem. Furthermore, he worries about the signs of disunity between Athens and Nicosia over the operations of EOKA. Although Averof was a keen opponent of the EOKA struggle, it is he who was actively involved in the secret arms procurement to Grivas, as Georgis states in chapter eight. The author wonders at this ambiguous attitude and puzzles over the fact that high ranked officers like Vlachos and Konstantinos Tsatsos, who were informed about the arms sent, strongly opposed EOKA.

In chapters four, five and eleven, Georgis covers the main points of the Radcliffe and Macmillan constitutional plans, as well as the appeals to the United Nations. Seferis is not only preoccupied, but also disappointed with the ease Averof considers partition as a possible solution. He shows his opposition on the strategy deployed by the latter and the activities undertaken. He vehemently disagrees with any possible involvement of NATO that will divert them from the discussions at the United Nations. The author illustrates that he attributes responsibility to Averof who seems to prioritise the relationship with Turkey and co-opt Turkey's views on the solution. He even provides evidence that the idea of an independent Cyprus belonged to him and Vlachos amongst other contested issues as the concession to the Turkish demands for a final solution. He supports the view that, although the minister undertook some bold initiatives he intended to downplay his own responsibility. On the other hand, as underlined in chapters three and five, Seferis respects Karamanlis' views and approves of his conduct of the Cyprus problem. From his post in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he not only attended the ongoing government discussions and debates, but also knew from within that Karamanlis often disagreed with Averof.

The author states that Seferis did not approve of Averof's negotiations that led to the Zurich-London agreements. The fact that the two men do not endorse the same

point of view is explained in detail, in chapters twelve to eighteen. Averof played a crucial role in the exercise of diplomatic practice, as he was the one who took several initiatives when he embarked on talks with Zorlu, the Turkish Foreign Minister. His initiatives and strategy worry and puzzle Seferis, whose authority is curtailed. With his diplomatic powers depleted, he expresses his opposition through his logbooks and his correspondence. Georgis a diplomat himself, cultural attaché at the Cyprus Embassy in Athens, and cognizant of the functions and conduct of diplomacy, believes that Seferis should have been able to facilitate agreements and offer advice about how Greece could act at negotiations, albeit he was not authorised to do so after all.

In order to establish a clearer picture of the disagreement between the two men, Georgis offers a detailed overview of the correspondence between the two men. Thus, he elaborates on the cited letters or extracts of letters and highlights Seferis' point of view enhancing his arguments. He juxtaposes versions of the same events and shows that there were differences of approach in matters of high policy, like delicate diplomatic relations and strategic considerations. Furthermore, he argues that the points of settlement discussed were much in favour of Turkish Cypriots and emphasises that Seferis is prodigiously industrious in explaining how inconclusive the agreements would be if they were accepted with such unequal concessions. He ruefully points out the dangers involved in accepting a plan which might lead to undiluted tragedy. His letters are filled with skepticism and continual frustration. In attempting to explain the aroused resentment over the agreements, in chapters twelve to sixteen, the author provides a fair account of the diplomat's correspondence, not only with the minister, but also with his wife and his sister. The author chooses to include letters to Tsatsos, the Secretary of State, and also his sister's husband, who confronts Seferis with sternness and aligns with Averof.

Accordingly, the author discerns, in Averof's letters, his efforts to make the plan unassailable and acceptable with the full backing of Karamanlis. Polemics should be avoided and reactions unduly expressed were considered a nuisance. The aggravated climate between the two men became acute. To corroborate the fact that Seferis faced opprobrium from the minister as far as their official correspondence, was concerned, Georgis quotes the letters they exchanged. In chapter seventeen, in particular, the author puts emphasis on the fact that he was rather improperly downgraded and consequently exposed in the eyes of British politicians and foreign diplomats. Although his movements were not circumscribed, the diplomatic actions conducted by

the minister did not include him. It is stressed that, despite the fact that 18 Turkish representatives attended the Zurich talks, only five Greek representatives, with Seferis excluded, were present.

In the last two chapters of the book, it is noted that the relations between the two men are exacerbated to such a degree that it seems they will never be restored. There is no better proof of that than the fact that Seferis never responded to the telegraph Averof sent him when he was awarded the Nobel Prize. Even one year after the Zurich - London agreements, there is a resurgence of their disagreement and there is no sign of an effort to reduce the hostility they feel towards each other. The dispute between the two men intensified when Seferis found out that he was, once again, accused for indiscretion because he registered their correspondence instead of recording it as classified information, though he claimed he had done so.

Overall Georgis achieves his main aim to offer a thorough description of the disagreement between the two men and sheds light on the events which led to a breach in their relationship. Moreover, thoroughly conversant with the great poet's life and work, he devotes himself to the study of a controversial issue and manages to open a constructive dialogue with the existing literature and with scholars who have different perspectives and approaches to the theme of the book. One may wonder why the full text of the letters is provided and not just extracts. By doing so, the author, especially regarding some crucial points, explicitly contrasts Seferis' letters with those of Averof and lets the reader discover contradictions, identify different dimensions and, perhaps, draw conclusions. In such manner, the book adds great value to the better understanding of this period and can be consulted by scholars and students who study the history of Cyprus.

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