

The Cypriot Referendums for Union with Greece [Τα Ενωτικά Δημοψηφίσματα στην Κύπρο]

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The significant collective volume, edited by Giorgos Georgis, Christos Kyriakides, and Charalambos Charalambous, and published by Elias Epiphaniou Publications, refers to the Cypriot referendums for union with Greece. Based, inter alia, on contemporary archival research, the various contributions narrate the lasting demand of Greek Cypriots for union with Greece during the British Rule of Cyprus, a demand that was expressed, not only through the well-known referendum of 1950, but also with three previous, mostly unknown, referendums, in 1914, 1921, and 1930. Restructuring the history and the universality of the demand for union with Greece confirms that the Cypriot referendum of 1950 was the culmination of a lengthy procedure of demanding union with Greece that had started from the beginning of the British Rule of Cyprus.

In 1878 the Ottoman Empire still maintained the bare ownership of Cyprus, whereas Britain had acquired the island's possession. The British could therefore argue that they still did not have full 'ownership' of Cyprus until 1914, when they unilaterally annexed the island, as a reaction to the decision of the Ottoman Empire to join the war with the Central Powers. With the Treaty of Lausanne, Britain was recognised as the ruler of Cyprus and the Ottoman Rule officially ended. In 1925 Cyprus was declared as a Crown colony. 1914 marked also the 50th anniversary of the union of the Ionian islands with Greece. Following the Balkan wars, where Cypriots had volunteered, and the military and diplomatic victories of Greece, and with Britain being viewed as a Greek ally, Cypriots felt that the time had come when the Ionian precedent could be adopted, and thus they demanded that Cyprus be ceded to Greece. As Georgis has correctly noted, the Ionian precedent was the guiding narrative of Cypriots for at least the first 50 years of the British Rule.

The General Assembly held in the Archdiocese on 15 May 1914 decided that it was proper to coordinate the efforts for demanding union with Greece through a resolution addressed to the King of England. The people of Cyprus signed a referendum

in towns and villages, which -as all other referendums during the British Rule of Cyprus- was a collection of signatures supporting an official resolution; this was delivered to the British on the anniversary of the cession of the Ionian islands to Greece. It is important to note that the drafting of the resolution was prepared by a committee with the participation of the Metropolitan of Kition, and subsequently Ecumenical Patriarch, Meletios Metaxakis, a close associate of the Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos.

The 1914 referendum is analysed in three separate contributions. Constantine Kouratos explains how contemporary Greek Cypriot press assessed the referendum. Michalis Stavri offers a detailed evaluation of the historical and political context, within which the decision to hold the referendum was reached, the manner in which the decision was implemented, and the perception of the referendum by the Greeks of Cyprus, the British administration, and the Greek press. Following the outbreak of the First World War, the referendum remained incomplete, despite the high participation to it, a fact that caused, inter alia, ironic comments by Nicolaos Katalanos. The views of Katalanos on the 1914 referendum are the topic of the contribution of Kyr-iacos Iacovides. Whereas, Katalanos, who originated from Mani, Greece, was one of the leading figures of the demand for union with Greece, he criticised the organisers of the referendum, i.e. the Committee of Political Struggle, for failing to properly promote the referendum, as well as for being partial against his newspaper, the *Cyprus Guardian* (*Κυπριακός Φύλαξ*). He further argued that the Greek representatives to the Legislative Council should have resigned so as to prove their serious intentions. Katalanos felt that the British would not repeat their Ionian precedent 'generosity' through requests, and that demand could be amplified only through political struggle. He further proposed that an option was to request autonomy under the supervision of the Ottoman Empire, as an interim stage to union with Greece, arguing that the success of the Greek army would unavoidably eventually lead to the desired objective.

The first complete referendum was held in 1921, on the occasion of the 100 years from the Greek Revolution, and pending the -eventually disastrous- Greek military operation in Smyrna. The 1921 referendum was signed on 25 March 1921 by priests, teachers, members of school and village committees, immediately after the completion of the solemn doxology in Greek Orthodox churches. The 500 copies of the signed resolution stressed the 'one, only and unchanged' intention of Cypriots to unite with 'our motherland Greece', and were signed in three identical volumes. The first volume was sent to the Greek Prime Minister, the second to the British Govern-

ment, and the third was kept at the Archdiocese. The British reacted by arresting and deporting from the island Katalanos and Filios Zannetos, two leading figures of the organisation of the referendum. The referendum of 1930 was organised in a similar manner, and coincided with 100 years from the foundation of the Greek state. The British indifference towards it, was one of the factors leading to the 1931 insurrection.

The 1921 referendum is assessed in separate accounts by Christos Kyriakides, and Panayiotis Stefanou, whereas the referendum of 1930 is evaluated by Maria Filaretou, and Charalambos Charalambous. Stefanou and Charalambous illuminate the referendums through the Greek Cypriot press of the era, whereas the contributions of Kyriakides and Filaretou elaborate on the wider historical and political framework in which the referendums took place. The officials of the British Ministry for Colonies, while noting that the wide participation to the referendums was an evidence of the desire of the Greek population to unite with Greece, questioned whether they would be willing to fight in order to succeed in their aim. This was eventually answered in 1955, when the EOKA struggle began.

The referendum of 1950, which followed the failure of the Consultative Assembly (Διασκεπτική, Diaskeptiki), marked the beginning of a new dynamic stage of the efforts of the Greeks of Cyprus to unite with Greece, which culminated with the EOKA struggle. The referendum was organised by the Ethnarchy and was supported by AKEL. Contrary to the 1921 and 1930 referendums, it did not consist of signatures via representatives, but the entirety of the people would sign the resolutions with a single demand: 'union and only union'. There are six separate contributions focusing on the 1950 referendum. Andreas Karyos sets the general framework, and evaluates the procedure for the organisation of the referendum. It is striking that this was the first time that the female population of Cyprus was allowed to participate in general elections, and there was particular interest in informing the women of Cyprus about the referendum. Karyos discusses not only the many successful parts of the organisation of the referendum, but also the least successful, such as the unwillingness of the Ethnarchy to satisfy AKEL's request to participate in the organising committees; this led, in many cases, to the establishment of separate committees by AKEL. Another drawback was that there was no official invitation to smaller minority religious groups to participate in the referendum, although they were allowed to do so.

Kypros Giorgallis based his own contribution on the archives of the Archdiocese of Cyprus, and this is of importance, since the Church organised the referendum, whereas Maria Pantziari discusses the impact of the referendum in the Cypriot and

Greek press. Andreas Christoforou, and Andreas Christofi evaluate AKEL's position in the referendum, and its decision to support the demand for immediate union with Greece, following the (inaccurate) prediction of the General Secretary of the communist party of Greece Nicos Zachariades that the left would win the Greek civil war, and that, accordingly, Cyprus should set union with Greece as an immediate objective. It should, of course, be clarified that the previous position of AKEL also had set union with Greece as the ultimate objective, but differentiated in the manner in which this goal would be achieved, i.e. that this could potentially be achieved with an interim stage of self-administration rather than immediately. Following the change of position, AKEL was at the forefront of the demand for union with Greece, which led to an even more intense effort by the Ethnarchy.

Alexis Alecou further evaluates the referendum within the wider anticolonial movement. He expresses the view that the active participation of the left could associate the referendum with the anti-imperialistic movement and the beginning of the Cold War, whereas this changed when the Ethnarchy assumed the primary role. At any event, my view is that the relationship between the Ethnarchy and AKEL was a missed opportunity for the Greeks of Cyprus during this era. Aliko Georgiou focuses on the narrative of the left party, comparing the articles written in newspapers regarding the 1930 and 1950 referendums.

Whereas newspaper *Neos Anthropos* hosted 11, mainly unsigned, articles on the 1930 referendum, there were multiple signed articles on the 1950 referendum. Of interest is also the smaller contribution of Christos Kyriakides offering a local case study of how the villagers of Omodos reacted to the various referendums organised during the British Rule of Cyprus.

The volume concludes with the contribution of Antonis Klapsis, which elaborates on the referendums that took part in Greece, i.e. the object at the centre of the demand for union. The first referendum took place in 1862 as a result of the revolution that led to the dethronement of King Otto. The great majority supported the candidacy of Prince Alfred, the second son of Queen Victoria of England. The Great Powers, however, considered that the new King of Greece should not hail from either of them, and did not abide by the results of the referendum, opting instead for George I as the new King, despite the fact that he had received only six votes in the 1862 referendum. In 1974, pursuant to another referendum, constitutional monarchy was substituted by a system of presidential democracy, with Constantine II of Greece dethroned (and eventually passing on 10 January 2023). It is, however, striking that the latest Greek

referendum, that of 2015, had a similar ultimate result as the 1862 one, i.e. ignoring the public vote, with then Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras unilaterally changing the 'no' to the agreement with troika he had demanded, to a 'yes'.

To conclude, this is a comprehensive collective volume that contributes in a defining manner to the study of the lasting impact of the demand for union with Greece during the British Rule, and of the manner in which this was exercised through successive referendums. The book confirms that the objective of union with Greece survived in Cyprus irrespective of any encouragement by metropolitan Greece, and that it was continuously and universally supported during the British Rule. Praise is due to the editors of the volume, the authors, and the publisher, for this publication which has now covered an important vacuum, and which shall act as the starting point for any further work on the issue.

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