

DISINFORMATION — THE NEGATIVE FACTOR IN TURCO-GREEK RELATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

The current disputes between Turkey and Greece have deep roots in history, and probably go as far back as the conquest of Constantinople (İstanbul), the capital of the Byzantine Empire, by the Ottoman Turks in 1453. Two American researchers, Vamik Volkan (of Turkish Cypriot origin) and Norman Itzkowitz, believe that the conquest has caused a deep trauma among the Greeks and other Christians, and plunged them into mourning, which is still continuing.¹

According to British writer Kenneth Young, the spirit of Greek expansionism, reflected in the *Megali Idea* (Great Idea)², which still dominates the views and sentiments of many Greeks, was the result

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1 Volkan, Vamik C. and Itzkowitz, Norman (1994), *Turks and Greeks, Neighbours in Conflict*, Huntingdon, p. 37.

2 For more information about the *Megali Idéa* see Pollis, Adamantia (1958), *The Megali Idea—A Study in Greek Nationalism*, Ph.D. dissertation, John Hopkins University, and Llewellyn Smith, Michael (1973), *The Ionian Vision*, London, pp. 2-4.

of that trauma that has become part and parcel of Greek legend.³ According to that legend, Byzantine Emperor Constantine Paleologus did not die—he was turned into marble. The ‘marble emperor’ was hidden by an angel, in a cave, which is inaccessible to the Turks. He remains there in hibernation, waiting for the angel to bring him his sword and wake him up. He will then retake İstanbul from the Turks, and re-establish the Byzantine Empire. Many Greeks and Greek Cypriots cherish this myth.⁴

It is interesting to note here that, just before the Greek rebellion in 1821, Bulwer-Lytton, an enthusiastic British philhellene, wrote: “The moment is rapidly approaching for the fulfilment of the prophecy. The white-haired *giaour* is at the gates of Constantinople, and the Crescent only shines over its walls till it is determined who shall erect the Cross.”⁵

It is this myth that has partly contributed to the genesis of the *Megali Idea*, the moving spirit of Greek expansionism, which was nourished by the clerics of the Greek Orthodox Church,⁶ and by the chauvinist Greek educationalists. Since the Greek rebellion it has become the main principle and aim of Greek revolutionary and terrorist organisations such as the *Philiki Eteria*, later the *Ethniki Eteria*, during Turkey’s war of liberation the *Mavri Mira*, and in our times in Cyprus EOKA, and was espoused by the Greek governments after the establishment of the Greek state in 1830 (the Greek Kingdom being established in 1832).⁷

3 Young, Kenneth (1969), *The Greek Passion: A Study in People and Politics*, London, p. 20.

4 *Ethniki* (newspaper), Nicosia, Cyprus, 29 May 1968; see also Stravrinides, Zenon (1975), *The Cyprus Conflict*, Nicosia, pp. 17-19.

5 Bulwer-Lytton (1826), *An Autumn in Greece*, London, p. 21.

6 Runciman, Steven (1968), *The Great Church in Captivity*, Cambridge, p. viii and p. 410.

7 See also Güler, Ali (1988), *Ethniki Eterya: Yunan Gizli Teşkilatları (Ethniki Eteria: Secret Greek Organisations)*, Ankara; Salışık, Selahattin (1968), *Tarih Boyunca Türk-Yunan İlişkileri ve Etniki Eteria (Turco-Greek Relations Throughout History and the Ethniki Eteria)*, İstanbul.

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According to the beliefs underlying the *Megali Idea*, “all the territories mentioned in classical Byzantine folklore are the inheritance of the Hellenic nation, reborne through Greece, and [the Greeks] must reclaim this inheritance.”⁸ This Greek aspiration was clearly expounded by premier John (Ioannis) Kolettis in a speech he delivered in the Greek Parliament (Vouli) in 1844. According to him, Greece would extend her frontiers from Western Anatolia (Ionia) to the Black Sea coast of Turkey (Pontus), to Thrace, the coasts of Anatolia and to all the islands, including Cyprus.⁹

The question was as to how this small Greece, which was established in 1830 with the help of Russia, France and Britain, would bring the *Megali Idea* to realisation. The answer was that she would do so through propaganda, and by exploiting the Turcophobes of Europe. Those Turcophobes had a stake in the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, and they were already persuaded that the modern Greeks were not only Christians, but also the successors of the ancient Hellenes.

The *Megali Idea* would also be passed on to new generations, including children, who were indoctrinated—they still are—with hatred towards the Turks. If one examines the textbooks used today, even in Greek primary schools, one comes across an ingrained perpetuation of hatred towards almost everything that is Turkish. A number of studies carried out in this field indicate that Greek children and youth are being brought up to hate the Turks. For a bellicose, racist and Turcophobic verse in a history textbook used by third-year pupils in Greek primary schools, see Ioannis Kafentzi, *Istoria ton neoteron chronon (History of Modern Times)*, published in Athens in 1974. See also a study carried out on behalf of the

8 Herzfeld, Michael (1986), *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology and the Making of Modern Greece*, New York, p. 119; see also Pipinellis, Panayotis (1959), ‘The Greco-Turkish Feud Revived’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 2, January, p. 307; *Nea Hellas* (newspaper), Athens, 13 November 1918; Public Record Office (British Archives), Foreign Office documents ‘FO 371/3147/199026’; Lord Granville to A.J. Balfour, dispatch No. 272, 17 November 1918, enclosing a report on the Greek press.

9 See also Michalopoulos OBE, Andreas C. (1920), ‘Asia Minor and the Dodecanese’, *The Asiatic Review*, Vol. XVI, January, pp. 154-5.

Education Advisory Committee of the Parliamentary Group for World Government. Its report gives examples from Greek and Turkish history textbooks, and emphasises that Greek history books are worse.¹⁰

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French political writer Jacques Driencourt observes that “propaganda is supreme” and “wins victories”. “Everything is attained through propaganda,” which is “thought-provoking and activating.” The actions of nation-states depend on it. Propaganda is also “shaping the new form of our civilisation. The historiographer of the future will note that the twentieth century is the century of propaganda,” remarks Driencourt.¹¹ Turkish writer Selahattin Salıřık adds the following: “Propaganda is an incessant unarmed combat.”¹²

The Greeks realised the importance of propaganda, or disinformation, even before they established their state. Benefiting from every opportunity, in every period and at every level, they indulged in propaganda campaigns, mainly against the Turks, and were mostly successful. The Greek Orthodox Church under the Phanariot Patriarchate, and the University of Athens, which was established in 1837, became the main centres of Hellenism and Hellenic disinformation. The system of education in Greek institutions of learning symbolised Panhellenism, which was also espoused by Greek governments that aspired and fulfilled their policy of expansionism, mainly against Turkey. Greek politicians benefited from international rivalries, and exploited the periodic crises in the Ottoman Empire where they established so-called ‘cultural and welfare societies’ (*sillogi*), and successfully indulged in overt and covert activities and agitation among the Ottoman Greeks.¹³

10 ‘Cyprus School History Textbooks—A Study in Educational and International Misunderstanding’, *New Cyprus*, Vol. 1, No. 3, April 1985, pp. 24ff.

11 Driencourt, Jacques (1950), *La Propagande, Nouvelle Force Politique*, Paris, p. 18; see also Kitsikis, Dimitris (no date), *Greek Propaganda* (translated from French), p. 13.

12 Salıřık, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

13 ‘Turco-Greek Relations Between 1830 and 1917’, Symposium on Turco-Greek Relations, Atatürk University: Erzurum, 1988, pp. 31-36 (in Turkish).

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Part of the success of this Panhellenic disinformation, according to Turkish writer Yücel Aktar, lies in the fact that “the Europe of today believes that its civilisation has been built upon Graeco-Roman foundations. Therefore Europe adores, to the extent of idolatry, Graeco-Roman values, institutions, and especially Greek culture. Moreover, it defines this so-called ‘Greek culture’ and ‘civilisation’ as a Greek (or Hellenic) miracle. This is the reason why Europe has continuously showed favouritism towards the Greeks.”¹⁴

CHRISTIAN MINORITIES IN TURKEY AND DISINFORMATION

Many primary documents in Western archives, and recently published books, indicate that some of the minorities in the Ottoman Empire, in particular the Greeks and the Armenians, played a vital role in the dismemberment of that Empire.¹⁵ These minorities, and especially the Greeks and the Armenians, co-operated with one another in order to achieve their ambitions. They became aware of the importance of joining forces with the destabilising elements, both inside and outside the Empire, of acting as instruments of the major powers that had a stake in the dissolution of that Empire, of benefiting from any Ottoman crisis, or even creating such a crisis, with the hope that the major powers might intervene on their behalf; and above all, of indulging in a campaign of disinformation against Turkey and the Turkish people. They succeeded in deceiving and obtaining the support of the Christian world, which basically was inimical to Islam. This support took the form of propaganda and disinformation.¹⁶

14 Aktar, Yücel (1986), ‘Yunanistan’ın Osmanlı Devleti ve Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’ne Yönelik Geleneksel Politikasında Temel Yaklaşımlar’ (‘The Basic Approaches of Greece in Her Traditional Politics Towards the Ottoman State and the Turkish Republic’), *Türk-Yunan İlişkileri (Turco-Greek Relations)*, Third Military History Seminar, Ankara, p. 15.

15 Sonyel, Salahi R. (1985), ‘The Role of the Christian Minorities in Efforts to Dismember the Ottoman Empire’, *Belleten*, Vol. XLIX, no. 195, Ankara, December, p. 653.

16 See also Loti, Pierre (1920), *La Mort de Notre Chere France en Orient*, Paris, p. 30.

In the field of propaganda no one could compete with the Ottoman Christians, especially the Greeks and the Armenians. They took advantage of their positions as translators or interpreters at embassies and consulates of the major powers, and many a time they succeeded in convincing those powers, their missionaries and ecclesiastics, of the veracity of their tales and the sanctity of their causes. Frequently a naive Western journalist fell into their trap and publicised their tales, based mostly on rumour and gossip. Moreover, European diplomats and travellers were duped by these people who were their co-religionists and knew foreign languages, and echoed extensively, or exaggerated, their grievances.

According to the Reverend Cyrus Hamlin, who was the first president of the American Robert College in Istanbul, a propaganda bureau was established in London in the 1870s in order to facilitate the dissemination of the anti-Turkish information in foreign countries. Hamlin admits that such "one-sided and unreliable information," which amounts to propaganda, about any people, soon provokes enmity and hatred towards them, which cannot be easily eradicated. Hamlin also observes: "Whenever I pick up a paper of eastern news, I pray, 'Oh Lord, endow me with a suitable sense of unbelief'."¹⁷

As the Turks were righteous and prudent, who did not like idle talk and preferred to suffer in silence rather than to vociferate, the Ottoman Christians and their protectors went unchallenged in their attempts to spread myths and slanders against them. Whenever it was necessary to produce documentary evidence in order to back up their allegations, the Ottoman Turcophobes created fake documents or falsified original ones, without any sense of conscience or responsibility. Their efforts in producing non-existent documents in order to prove that white was black, and their success in such deceit, have been verified from various primary documents preserved in the archives of the states which were often subjected to such brain-

¹⁷ Grinnel Mears, Eliot (ed.) (1924), *Modern Turkey*, New York, pp. 4-5.

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washing.¹⁸ These documents indicate the extent to which the Greeks and the Armenians have gone in the field of disinformation, and to what methods they resorted to, including chicanery, deceit and distortion, without any sense of guilt.

THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND GRECO-ARMENIAN PROPAGANDA

During the First World War, the Greeks, together with the Armenians, began an extensive campaign of propaganda in the West. After 1918, this propaganda became more acute. Greece, in order to appear before the Paris Peace Conference and persuade public opinion in the West to accept an extremely ambitious programme surpassing her own sacrifices during the war, indulged in extensive propaganda, which was personally directed by its Prime Minister, Eleftherios Venizelos, and her Foreign Minister, Nicolas (Nicholas) Polites. The extent of, and methods used in, this propaganda has been thoroughly studied by Greek researcher Dimitris Kitsikis, who published his findings in a book issued in 1963 in Paris, under the title *Propaganda and Coercion in International Politics: Greece and Her Territorial Claims at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919-1920* (in French). It is well-worth reading.

According to Kitsikis, Greek propaganda in 1918 had reached its zenith, and London was selected as its most important centre. It was followed by Paris, Washington and Geneva. British writer Michael Llewellyn Smith observes: “[Greek] Premier Venizelos spent most of October and November 1918 in London, canvassing British statesmen, journalists and philhellenes, and organising

18 See also Sonyel, Salahi R. (1977), ‘How Armenian propaganda tricked the Christian world in connection with the relocation’s and “Massacres”’, *Belleten*, Vol. XLI, No. 161, Ankara, January, pp. 157-175; Sonyel (1975), *Turco-Greek Conflict*, London; Dyer, Gwynne (1976), ‘Turkish “Falsifiers” and Armenian “Deceivers”’: Historiography and the Armenian Massacres’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. XII, No. 1, January, pp. 99-107; Armstrong, Harold (1923), *Turkey in Travail*, London, pp. 168-69; Luke, Sir Harry (1923), *Cities and Men*, Vol. II, London, p. 55; Graves, Sir Robert (1933), *Storm Centres of Near East, Personal Memories, 1869-1929*, London, p. 323; Orel, Şinasi and Yuca, Süreyya (1983), *Ermencerce Talt Paşa’ya Atfedilen Telgrafların Gerçek Yüzü (The Reality About the Telegrams Attributed by the Armenians to Talat Pasha)*, Ankara; Sonyel (1994), ‘Turco-Armenian Relations and British Propaganda During the First World War’, *Belleten*, Vol. LVIII, No. 222, August, pp. 295-8.

Greece's machinery for a prolonged struggle that lay ahead. Propaganda was not a new game for the Balkan states, all of which had experience in pulling the wool over the eyes of innocent Europeans. But the Greeks were perhaps more adept than their opponents in this field, and had more natural advantages. Venizelos fully recognised the importance of the propaganda battle and devoted ample resources to it."¹⁹

There is no doubt that Greek propaganda was very cunning and effective. French writer Leon Rouillon observes: "The Greeks are skilful politicians. To them, every method is allowable. They are well aware that public opinion in France is ignorant of the real situation in the East. Therefore, they exploited this ignorance for their own interests, without any qualms. The Greek bankers spent their gold like water in order to prevent public opinion from learning the true situation."²⁰

Another French writer, Claude Farrère, observes that the opponents of Turkey are continuously writing, speechifying and clamouring, whilst the Turk is keeping quiet. "Is there wonder that the world sees the Turk in the wrong?" he asks. In a lecture he gave in Paris, in February 1922, Farrère added the following: "Think that the enemies of the Turks have money, and money opens every door They are using a language which is easier to understand in the West than Turkish. Moreover, they [the Turks] belong to a non-articulate race. Their enemies, however, are very talkative and skilful in putting their case. What terrible qualities for those who use lies as their main weapon! ... [The enemies of the] Turk poured lies over him. Therefore why should the Turk be right and his enemies wrong in the eyes of the misinformed?"²¹

¹⁹ Llewellyn Smith, Michael, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

²⁰ Rouillon, Leon (no date), *Pour la Turquie, Documents*, Paris, quoted in Akyüz, Yahya (1975), *Türk Kurtuluş Savaşı ve Fransız Kamuoyu, 1919-1922 (Turkey's War of Liberation and Public Opinion in France, 1919-1920)*, Ankara, p. 24.

²¹ Farrère, Claude (1922), 'Les beaux voyages, Stamboul Conferencia', *Journal de l'Université des Annales*, Paris, 1 October, No. 20, p. 360.

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Parallel to the Greek propaganda drive in Europe, an extensive campaign was begun in the USA where the Turcophobes were demanding that the Greeks and the Armenians living within the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire “should be saved from the hands of the savages and enemies of civilisation”, the Turks; that independent Armenian and Greek states should be established on Turkish territories; and that the “Turkish race should be wiped out from history.”²² This campaign was vigorously waged by the Greeks, the Armenians and their indigenous supporters.

The Armenians were in close cooperation with the Greeks at every level. Through the organisations established by Armenian *émigrés* all over the world, and with the help of wealthy Greeks and Armenians, they indulged in a wide campaign and tried to humiliate the Turks in the eyes of world public opinion, particularly of Europe, many a time succeeding in their falsehoods. This Graeco-Armenian cooperation is still continuing in our time, and we have seen examples of it during *EOKA* terrorism in Cyprus in the 1950s, and Armenian terrorism against Turkish diplomats more recently.

In contrast to all these propaganda drives, Turkish publicity and information activities remained very weak and ineffective. Despite the absence of a well-organised Turkish publicity organisation in the West, particularly during Turkey’s War of Liberation, the importance of public opinion was grasped by the deputies in the Grand National Assembly. During a session in May 1920 a deputy remarked: “Venizelos, etc., are defeating us today through propaganda. Despite the fact that the importance of this subject has already been evaluated, why are we not doing it? Because we are a great nation.... This greatness has always created in our soul the mentality of flying high. Because of this, if we open our mouths and move our tongues, we consider this as condescension.”²³

22 Ulagay, Osman (1974), *Amerikan Basınında Türk Kurtuluş Savaşı (Turkey's War of Liberation in the American press)*, March, p. 8.

23 *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi (Minutes of the Grand National Assembly)*, Vol. XXII, p. 213.

CONCLUSION

My own experience on the subject of publicity and disinformation, from more than twenty-five years' research in various archives, has convinced me of the utmost importance of this subject. In this paper I have tried to expose documentarily the disinformation spread against Turkey and its people. I believe that scholars are now becoming more aware of the Turkish case and are eager to see the other side of the coin.

There is no doubt that the campaigns of disinformation directed against the Turkish people throughout history are still continuing. Owing to the Cyprus issue, the Aegean question, current Turco-Greek and Turco-Armenian relations, Armenian militants and Panhellenists are still trying to denigrate the Turkish state and people, and are partly succeeding in their falsehoods, because they already know the importance of propaganda and publicity from their past wicked deeds.

Despite all these negative activities and campaigns which are affecting Turco-Greek and Turco-Armenian relations, unfortunately, the Turks are not doing enough to counter them. They do not seem to attach the necessary importance to information and publicity. Because of this, the negative image of the Turks abroad, especially in Europe and America, has not changed much.²⁴ I believe that the time has come for the Turkish people and government to pick up the gauntlet and to challenge this wicked misinformation through meticulous and co-ordinated efforts which should be based on facts within the bounds of ethics.

²⁴ Taşhan, Seyfi (1990), 'Our Publicity Problems', symposium, Hacettepe University, Ankara, 8-9 March.