



THE SEPTEMBER EVENTS: THE ANTI-GREEK RIOTS OF 1955 IN ISTANBUL

Irini Sarıoğlu

Asst. Prof. Dr.,

Istanbul University, Faculty of Literature,

Department of Greek Language and Literature, İstanbul/ TURKEY

Abstract

In recent history the time between 1954 and 1964 has been recorded as a period of persecutions and extreme nationalistic behavior against the Greek community of Istanbul. In spite of an increase in US contributions towards sustaining the expansion of Turkey's military defense capability throughout 1955, the Turkish government's economic affairs continued to deteriorate. The financial crisis of the time coupled with the anti-minority sentiment that was being stirred up by the Turkish press induced the leadership of Turkey to conceive and design the practical details of the anti-Greek events of 1955 with catastrophic consequences, both material and psychological, primarily for the Greek population but also for Turkey itself. Once again the Greek minority of Istanbul was used as a bargaining chip for the demands of Turkey in Cyprus, but also as leverage in the ongoing talks concerning the Muslim minority of Greek Thrace. During that time the sentiments that were aroused were so strong that the "threats against the 'infidel' continued for a long time after the 'events.'" In addition, according to the British representative in Istanbul, it was "unfortunately true that the recent 'events' had intensified the preexisting religious fanaticism and intolerance of the Turkish nation."

Key words: *Anti-Greek riots, Greek minority of Istanbul, 1955 events*

EYLÜL OLAYLARI: İSTANBUL'DA 1955 ANTI-YUNAN HAREKETLERİ

Özet

Yakın tarihte 1954 - 1964 arasındaki zaman diliminde İstanbul'un Rum toplumuna karşı aşırı milliyetçi tutum kaydedimistir. Türk basını ile hareketlenmiş azınlık karşıtı duygular dönemin siyasi ve ekonomik unsurları ile birleştiğinde Eylül 1955 olaylarının gerçekleşmesine neden olmuştur. Eylül 1955 olayları sadece İstanbul Rum nüfusu için değil Türkiye'nin uluslararası imajını da olumsuz şekilde etkilemiştir. 1955'ten itibaren Demokrat Parti hükümeti gittikçe zorlaşan ekonomik bir durumla karşı karşıya kalmış ve özellikle yüksek enflasyon nedeniyle hayat standardı düşen kesimin güvenini kaybetmiştir; şüpheli metotlarla



muhalefeti susturma çabaları ise basın, aydınların ve öğrencilerin de Demokrat Parti'den soğumasına yol açmıştır. Örneğin Alman Dışişleri'nin bir raporuna göre daha olaylardan 15 gün evvel, muhalefeti kontrol amacıyla 7 Eylül 1955 günü İstanbul, Ankara ve İzmir'de sıkıyönetim ilan edilmesine karar verilmiştir. 1956 yılında muhalefeti baskı altına almak için Basın ve Toplantı Yasası'na getirilen kısıtlamalar da büyük ölçüde 6-7 Eylül olaylarıyla gerekçelendirilmiştir. Menderes hükümetinin azınlıklara karşı baştaki liberal politikası, gittikçe zorlaşan ekonomik koşullarla değişir ve ilişkiler gerginleşmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Eylül 1955 Olayları, İstanbul Rum Azınlığı, 1955 Olayları.*

Background

It has often been stated, and rightly so, that detachment from the facts of the immediate past, which have impinged directly or indirectly on their own lives, always presents a challenge for historians. Mindful of this challenge, the text that follows attempts an objective description of the anti-Greek riots that took place in İstanbul in 1955, and of the political nature of Turkish nationalism at that time.

The time between 1954 and 1964 has been recorded in recent history as a period of persecutions and extreme nationalistic behaviour against the Greek community of İstanbul. In spite of an increase in U.S. contributions toward sustaining the expansion of Turkey's military defense capability throughout 1955, the Turkish government's economic affairs continued to deteriorate¹. This financial crisis², coupled with the anti-minority sentiment that was being stirred up by the Turkish press, induced the leadership of Turkey to conceive and design the practical details of the anti-Greek events of 1955 with catastrophic consequences, both material and psychological, primarily for the Greek population.

Once again, the Greek minority of İstanbul was used as a bargaining chip for the demands of Turkey in Cyprus, but also as leverage in the ongoing talks concerning the Muslim minority of Greek (Western) Thrace. Also, in the early 1950s, contrary to Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras's expectations for a permanent Greco-Turkish friendship and despite diplomatic visits exchanged between Greece and Turkey during this period, the animosities between the two countries re-emerged under the pretext of the Cyprus issue³. By 1954, the Greek minority of

1 A typical example is provided by the fact that the income per capita dropped from 556 liras in 1953 to 490 liras a year later.

2 "The Turkish government lived on spending more than it was collecting. It was spending more than its revenue, and it was importing more than it could afford to pay for," in Bowker to Lloyd, Annual Report on Turkey for 1955, Ankara, 16 January 1956, FO371/123999/RK1011/1. See, also, Bowker to Foreign Office, [Annual Report on Turkey for 1957] Ankara, 4 February 1958, FO371/136450/RK1011/1: "The USA continued to maintain the economy of Turkey, as they did before (the 45% of Turkey's imports were financed—the one way or the other—by the USA) . . . and the Turkish government continued to seek the advise of the American government throughout the whole year."

3 British Chancery to Research Department, Ankara, 10 September 1955, FO371/117743/RK1781/2. The Turkish press, guided by *Cumhuriyet*, *Tercüman*, and *Hürriyet*, blamed the patriarch for not being able to reprimand Archbishop Makarios. See *Tercüman*, 2 July 1955, *Hürriyet*, 18 July 1955, and *Cumhuriyet*, 28 August 1955.



Istanbul found itself at the center of a political storm, as a result of attacks by the Turkish press. This tactic led to the publication of threats against the Greek minority and the patriarchate by the greater part of the Turkish press, which was guided by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Severe criticism was directed against the patriarch, presumably because of his neutral position on the issue of Cyprus. The local Greek press of Istanbul also became the target of a Turkish nationalistic upsurge. *Eleftheri Fwnh* (Free Voice) and *Empros* (Forward) were the only newspapers to raise a voice of protest against the anti-Greek campaign of the Turkish press⁴.

The anti-Greek riots of 1955

On 6–7 September 1955, Istanbul experienced a spontaneous outburst of acts of violence targeting its Greek minority.⁵ The violent anti-Greek riots of 6 September were originally thought to be repercussions of the news published in the special edition of two Turkish newspapers about “attempts to bomb” the house where Atatürk had been born and the Turkish consulate in Thessalonica⁶. Even before the news had time to circulate in Turkey, large crowds of demonstrators, prompted by the organization *Kıbrıs Türktür* (Cyprus is Turkish),⁷ had flooded the streets of Istanbul. Soon, the demonstrations turned into riots, with uncontrollable looting of businesses and houses belonging to the Greek minority which spread “to the entire city and suburbs, to the Asiatic side and to the Princes Islands where there was

4 *Ελευθέρη Φωνή* [*Eleftheri Foni*], 28 August 1955, and [*Embros*] *Εμπρός* of 29 August 1955.

5 Young to Stewart, Foreign Office, 21 November 1955, FO 371/117711/RK10110 and in FO 371/117711/RG1034450. See also Dosdoğru 1993, Ceylan 1996, *Le Soir* 3 October 1955, *Die Welt*, 20 September 1955, *The Times and Cumhuriyet* of 26 October 1960. On the Greek deputy’s speech confirming that the riots were organised well in advance by the government, see *Cumhuriyet*, 2 November 1960. Stewart to Macmillan, British Embassy Residence, Istanbul, 22 September 1955, FO 371/117711/RG1034450.

6 Stewart to Macmillan, British Embassy Residence, Istanbul, 22 September 1955, FO 371/117711/RG1034450. According to the Minister of Northern Greece at 00.10 on 6 September 1955 an explosion occurred in the courtyard of the Turkish Consulate at Thessaloniki, a building located adjacent to Atatürk’s house, ‘which from the basic prerequisite of the preliminary inquiry, everything points in every way to the fact that the author of the explosion ... was a person within the Turkish Consulate...’ Apart from a few windows shattered there was no damage done to either building. See British Chancery to Southern Department, 16 September 1955, FO 371/117711/RG 10344/45. At the time of the explosion the Consulate’s watchman, a Turk who was known to be fanatically anti-Greek, was inside the Consulate and had set off the explosions while inside the building. See Foreign Office Minutes by Thompson, London, 16 September 1955, FO 371/117711/RG10344/39. Towards the end of September a twenty-four-year-old Turkish student of Thessaloniki University, Oktay Engin Faik, was arrested for ‘moral complicity in the dynamite outrage at the Turkish consulate in Thessaloniki, for which the night watchman, Mehmet Oğlu Hasan was also under arrest’. The latter, who was a resident of Komotini at the end of 1952, took advantage of a visit of the Turkish president to Komotini and escaped to Turkey. He then disappeared, only later emerging, when he was sent as an usher to the Turkish Consulate in Thessaloniki. According to the British Foreign Office reports ‘he hates the Greeks and has the confidence of the Turkish authorities, who extend to him their protection.’ in British Embassy, Athens, 16 September 1955, FO 371/117711/RG10344/45.

7 British Consul-General to Foreign Office, Istanbul, 7 September 1955, FO371/117721/RK10110/1, and 8 September 1955, FO371/117721/RK10110/6.



a Greek population.”⁸. Only the Greek consulate of Istanbul was granted protection by the Turkish authorities, as well as all other consulates⁹ and the patriarchate.

Turkish prime minister Adnan Menderes was informed of the “unfore- seen news” about the anti-Greek events upon his arrival at Izmit (Nikomedia) at 22:20 on 6 September 1955 while he was traveling by the fast train Istanbul- Ankara. However, he continued his trip and returned to Istanbul around 2:00 to 2:30 of 7 September, together with the president of the republic, Celal Bayar. On his return, he urgently declared martial law, which was lifted at 7:00 in the morning, and went back into effect around noon.¹⁰

According to the British ambassador in Turkey, Michael Steward, the events had been organized by the Turkish government so as to coincide with the end of the tripartite conference on the issue of Cyprus in London.¹¹ “The (Turkish) government had, indeed, acknowledged this,” said the British diplo- mat in the related memorandum to the British Foreign Office.¹² Neither the Turkish police forces nor the Turkish troops on duty at the time made any ef- fort to hold back the rioting crowds¹³. Hikmet Bil, a leading executive of *Kıbrıs Türktür*, had a meeting and lengthy conversation with Prime Minister Menderes in the afternoon of 5 September 1955. According to reliable information, which became known to Steward, Ankara had consented to an anti-Greek demonstration under the auspices of *Kıbrıs Türktür*, in order to further reinforce Turkey’s position on the issue of Cyprus.¹⁴

Almost all of the Greek neighbourhoods¹⁵ of Istanbul suffered heavy damages, as did the Princes Islands. Similar events took place in Smyrna at the same time. Areas inhabited by Greeks and other foreign nationals¹⁶ also endured assaults. Unable to justify the non-involvement of the Turkish police, Menderes acknowledged in his speech before the National Assembly on 12 September 1955 that he had advance knowledge of the events.

8 Ibid.

9 Nevertheless, the Greek consulate in Smyrna was set on fire (Stewart to Foreign Office, Ankara, 24 September 1955, FO371/117711/RG10344/46), and the Greek officer who was working at the central offices of NATO was assaulted, too.

10 Ibid. While martial law was in force, any publications relevant to the “events” were prohibited, as also were publications related to the prevailing financial situation of the country.

11 The Tripartite Conference for Cyprus between Greece, Turkey, and Britain had started on 29 August 1955, at Lancaster House, London. Stewart to Macmillan, British Embassy, Istanbul, 22 September 1955, FO371/117711/1034450.

12 Ibid.

13 Young to Stewart, Foreign Office, 21 September 1955, FO371/117711/ RK10119 and FO371/117711/RG1034450. The American consul-general in Istanbul, Arthur Richard, who was an eyewitness, maintained that “the destruction had gotten out of every control, and there was no evidence that the Police Force or the Army made any attempt to put it under control. I watched the looting of many stores while the Police was standing idly aside or was applauding the mob.” For the complete report of the American representative, see *Helsinki Human Rights Watch* (March 1992): 7.

14 Stewart to Macmillan, British Consulate, Istanbul, 22 September 1955, FO371/117711/RG1034450.

15 Ibid. Especially in Pera, Tatavla, Psomatheia, Floria, and in other regions of Istanbul that were inhabited by Greeks.

16 Ibid. Likewise, some other non-Muslim communities, such as Armenians, Jews, British, Italians, French, and Austrians were assaulted, as well. About the dam- age that the English property suffered in Smyrna and Istanbul, see British Chancery to Southern Department, Istanbul, 22 September 1955, FO371/117711/ RG10344/53, and Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation to Johnston, London, 15 September 1955, FO371/117721/RK10110/4.



As a consequence, Minister of the Interior Namık Gedik, who was in Istanbul during the events and who, later, after the coup of 1960, took his own life, resigned, as did Minister of Defense Ethem Menderes.¹⁷ Furthermore, the chief of police, Ethem Yetkiner, the prefects of Smyrna, Kemal Hadımlı, and of Ankara, Kemal Aygün, and three other high-ranking officers were removed from their duties. According to the official report of the government, Prime Minister Menderes and Deputy Prime Minister Köprülü attempted to justify the anti-Greek riots, describing them as the spontaneous expression of national feeling inflamed by the report¹⁸ of the intended massacre of Turkish Cypriots on 28 August 1955, and concern for their Cypriot brothers. The Police and Armed Forces were understandably affected by the same “psychology,” which accounted for their hesitation and relative ineffectiveness. But beyond the natural, and to some extent legitimate activities of students and the like, there were dark forces, Red Agents, and ill-disposed individuals who had momentarily succeeded in capitalizing on the feelings of the country, and had brought disgrace and hard to repair material damage, by destroying part of the national wealth.¹⁹

Attributing the riots to “Red Agents” could not possibly be convincing, as there was no threat of communism in Turkey. It would have been more convincing to ascribe the events to *Kıbrıs Türktür*, for it was properly structured to take on the preliminary work of the systematic location and registration of the Greek properties, but also to flawlessly organize the demonstrations, dispatching groups of furious demonstrators even to the remote Greek neighborhoods, and transporting gangs from the provinces to Istanbul.²⁰

In spite of this, according to the British ambassador, this organization could not have been solely responsible for the widespread and methodically executed work of destruction, the total looting and setting ablaze of Greek churches and schools, the desecration of Greek cemeteries, or the assaults on the properties of the minorities.²¹ Additional facts confirm that the representatives of local groups of the Democratic Party were among the instigators of the events at various places in Istanbul and in the Marmara Islands.²²

After the acts of violence came to an end, shortly after midnight on 7 September 1955, martial law was declared, and on 12 September the Turkish National Assembly held a

17 Ibid.

18 According to Stewart, “the Turkish government was responsible about the false news and their propagation.” Stewart to Macmillan, British Consulate, Istanbul, 22 September 1955, FO371/117711/RG1034450.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.



special meeting: the Grand National Assembly (GNA) was summoned for an extraordinary session.²³ Coincidentally, right after the anti-Greek riots, the headquarters of the Security Forces of the Turkish police in Istanbul were destroyed,²⁴ together with all of the official reports accounting for the riots.

Meanwhile, although the government had promised full compensation,²⁵ it did not hesitate to require Greek businessmen who had not suffered damages to pay large sums of money to the state so it could keep this promise. The Vamvacopoulos brothers provide a good example of this. A committee was also set up under the patronage of President Bayar and the chairmanship of Menderes to assist those who had suffered damages during the incidents.²⁶

On 7 September 1955, the first official Turkish statement mentioned that the state would immediately proceed to compensate victims for their losses.²⁷ The following day, President Bayar promised in a public statement that the government would compensate all for their material losses. On 10 September, the second official statement by the government mentioned that “they would proceed to sacrifices in order to cover these material losses.”²⁸ In a different statement on 12 September referring to the losses of the “Turkish nationals,”²⁹ the prime minister emphasized that it was the government’s duty to fully compensate for all the destruction incurred. Soon after, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement by which it called on all those who had suffered material losses in the course of the “events” to submit a petition.³⁰ Three months later, in December 1955, Minister of Foreign Affairs Zorlu estimated that the claims by foreign nationals added up to 41,000,000 Turkish Lira (\$14,642,857), 27,000,000 (\$9,642,857) of which was claimed by Greeks.³¹ Nevertheless, the Turkish authorities decided that the “stolen goods” should not be included in requests for compensation. Two years later, the symbolic amount of 3,000,000 Turkish Lira (\$1,071,428) was considered sufficient for the restitution of material damages that the charitable institutions of the Greek community had suffered. However, according to the estimate of

23 All of the official correspondence by cable was forbidden for many days (ibid.).

24 Report of Michael Richards to the *Daily Telegraph*, 15 October 1955.

25 Stewart to Macmillan, Istanbul, 22 September 1955, FO371/117711/ RG10344/50, and 7 September 1955, FO371/117721/RK10110/1.

26 Ibid. A number of prominent bankers, businessmen, and leading members of the Red Crescent made contributions in order to assist with the task of collecting for the victims of the events.

27 Wyruboff to Falla, London, 15 December 1955, FO371/117721/RK10110/14, and British Chancery to Southern Department, Ankara, 14 September 1955, FO371/ 117721/RG10344/34.

28 Ibid.

29 Mainly of Greeks with Turkish citizenship.

30 *The Times*, 16 September 1955.

31 Stewart to Young, Ankara, 20 September 1955, FO371/117721/RK10110/15. In 1955, \$1 was equivalent to 2.80 Turkish Lira, as per www.kalkinma.gov.tr.



U.S. Senator Homer Capehart, who visited Istanbul three days after the events, the amount of the damage caused exceeded \$300,000,000.³²

In the meantime, while martial law was in force, the Turkish press, following the official line of the Turkish government, continued to ascribe the blame to the —figment of its imagination—“communist and Red Agents.” Furthermore the press refrained from criticizing the government for the way it handled the acts of violence, and only a few times did it make reference to the fact that the events had been carefully organized and premeditated.³³

Shortly thereafter, in a confidential report to his American counterpart, the British Consul General in Istanbul expressed serious reservations regarding the degree of responsibility that the Turkish state and the Democratic Party had officially assumed for the events. On the contrary, the American embassy in Ankara declared that it was fully prepared to accept the official Turkish version about “communist conspiracy and organization,” an interpretation characterized at best as “unrealistic” by the British diplomats. Ironically, Allen Dulles, the head of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, happened to be in Istanbul at the time of the riots, attending a criminology conference.³⁴

According to the Greek press attaché in Istanbul, the Greek community consisted of 80,000 Greeks, of which 25,000 were of Greek nationality; the rest were Turkish citizens.³⁵ The wide area within which the anti-Greek riots took place made it difficult to make an accurate calculation of the damages caused by the Turkish assailants. In spite of this, according to the Greek attaché, three out of five Greek high schools suffered serious damages, and twenty eight of the forty-five primary schools were partially destroyed.³⁶ Of eighty-three Greek Orthodox churches, seventy-two suffered damages. The same happened to many cemeteries, such as the ones at Şişli and Baloukli.³⁷ One thousand stores and businesses belonging to Greek

32 See British Chancery to Southern Department, Athens, 22 September 1955, FO371/117711/RG10344/56.

33 For a complete analysis of the Turkish press in those days, see Stewart to Macmillan, 21 September 1955, FO371/117711/RG10344/51. It should be noted that at the period following the September events certain newspapers (such as *Ulus*, *Tercüman*, and *Hürriyet*) had been put under restriction, and the newspaper of the opposition, *Sabah Postası*, was forced to end its publication.

34 Fuat Köprülü, deputy prime minister at the time of the events, and also one of the accused, in his testimony, on 21 October 1960, declared that the acts of violence had been proposed by Zorlu. Menderes, however, was the one who organized everything. In reality, however, they constituted the “brain child” of the head of the CIA, Allen Dulles. Nevertheless, because Köprülü could not prove his argument, he was obliged to modify his declarations. *New York Times* and *Cumhuriyet*, 21–22 October 1960.

35 British Chancery to Southern Department, Istanbul, 22 September 1955 FO371/117711/RG10344/52.

36 See *Helsinki Human Rights Watch* (March 1992): 45-49.

37 *Ibid.* About ten Greek Orthodox churches, which contained priceless consecrated vessels and many icons, were consumed by fire. In the cemetery of Şişli the original target of the assailants was the area at the center which contained large family



nationals were totally destroyed.³⁸ Likewise, three thousand private properties, which belonged to Greeks with Turkish nationality,³⁹ were destroyed as well, and, according to the head of the Baloukli Hospital, sixty young girls at various places in Istanbul were victims of rape. The same document also reports that the premises of five of the seven Greek newspapers were destroyed during the course of the riots.

Only the Phanar, which was “well protected by a large number of policemen even before the events,” remained intact.

The monuments and the tombs of the Greek Orthodox cemetery of Şişli sustained heavy damages, the church was also set on fire, the graves and charnel houses were robbed and dead bodies and bones were dug up and scattered.⁴⁰

As for the damages done to Greek schools and churches, the British representative in Istanbul gave approximately the same numbers as the Greek attaché. He also mentioned that the Holy Theological School of Chalki was partially destroyed, and that “the Greek Catholic church and the school across from the British General Consulate were looted as well.”⁴¹

While condemning the riots, the general-secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), Visser't Hooft, declared that he could not believe that in this day and age, when human rights are supposedly promoted internationally, it was possible for such criminal incidents to occur.⁴² Also, Maxwell, a member of the service for the refugees of the WCC who visited Istanbul in person, among other things mentioned that more than sixty out of the eighty Greek Orthodox churches at the center, as well as the outskirts of Istanbul have either been totally destroyed, or they have been judged not fit for use . . . The tombstones of the Greek cemeteries have been turned over, and the graves stand wide open . . . the seventy Greek schools in Istanbul have been totally destroyed.⁴³

The international press, and especially the church authorities of Eastern European countries, such as Bulgaria, Romania, and Russia, repeatedly condemned in public

tombs. Many eyewitnesses—among them the grandmother of the author—maintained that the mob was pulling dead bodies out of the coffins and setting them on fire. In-terview with Irini Araytzopoulos, 25 February 1999, Athens.

³⁸ Ibid. The owners estimated the damage at 300 million Turkish liras. The Greek consul, however, was of the opinion that the sum of 100 million Turkish liras was a more accurate estimation.

³⁹ Ibid. According to the aforementioned report, the Greeks with Turkish citizenship sustained damages amounting to 250 million Turkish liras.

⁴⁰ British Consulate General to Southern Department, Istanbul, 22 September 1955, FO371/117711/RG10344/48.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² BBC Monitoring Reports, 29 September 1955, FO371/117711/RG10344/65. Regarding the financial assistance of the WCC and a complete analysis of the events, see British Consulate General, Istanbul, 22 December 1955, FO371/117721/RG10110/16.

⁴³ Foreign Office Minutes, London, 4 October 1955, FO371/117711/RG10344/64.



statements the anti-Greek riots in Istanbul,⁴⁴ and, in his telegram to the ecumenical patriarch, the head of the Anglican Church expressed “his profound sorrow and his abhorrence on the destruction of the Orthodox churches in Constantinople.”⁴⁵ Similar telegrams were sent by the Antiochean patriarch and the secretary-general of the United Nations. The Soviet press condemned the “events,” emphasizing that the United States and NATO were responsible for allowing the furtherance of the interests of those with power at the expense of the weak.⁴⁶

A few days later, Istanbul was getting ready to receive the executives of the International Monetary Fund, who would re-examine the financial progress of Turkey. At the brink of a new financial crisis, the Turkish government believed that the recent “events caused by the communists” would reinforce the need for enhanced American financing.

On 17 September, in his address to his people, Prime Minister Papagos of Greece stated that, based on the Greco-Turkish friendship and the alliance with Turkey, Greece had hoped for a different treatment of Greek nationals by the neighbouring country and that it was now requesting complete and absolute reparations.⁴⁷ The following day, a speech by U.S. secretary of state John Foster Dulles addressing both the Turkish and Greek governments evoked strong dissatisfaction in the latter, and justifiably so, because in the speech victims and perpetrators were put on a par.⁴⁸ Interested solely in the NATO alliance, the U.S. secretary of state in his message to the two countries expressed disbelief that, “in view of the common achievements that have already been recorded, any problem would have the power to hinder the course of the Greco-Turkish friendship in the long-term,” or that “the unfortunate events of the last two weeks would have the power to overturn the policy of cooperation that started twenty-five years ago under the leadership of Eleftherios Venizelos and Kemal Atatürk.” “I am certain” Dulles continued in his address, “that the spirit of close cooperation that you have demonstrated in the past, as members of the United Nations, NATO, and the Balkan Alliance, will help you face your immediate differences for the benefit of the unity of the free world.”⁴⁹

⁴⁴ British Chancery to Southern Department, 30 September 1955, FO371/117711/RG10344/66 and FO371/117711/RG10344/48.

⁴⁵ Foreign Office Minutes, London, 30 September 1955, FO371/117711/RG10344/61.

⁴⁶ The Soviet Press also took a favourable position toward the right of the Cypriot people for self-determination. See British Chancery to Southern Department, Moscow, 22 September 1955, FO371/RG10344/57.

⁴⁷ Foreign Office Minutes, London, 21 September 1955, FO371/117711/RG10344/55.

⁴⁸ Foreign Office Minutes, London, 20 September 1955, FO371/117711/RG10344/43. Unlike the Turkish press, the Greek press strongly criticized the Dulles address.

⁴⁹ Foreign Office Minute by Thompson, London, 20 September 1955, FO371/117711/RG10344/43.



The fact that the secretary of state's message did not make the slightest reference to the recent acts of violence against the Greek minority or express any declaration of sympathy for the victims of those extreme acts was disappointing to the Greek government and the Greek press.⁵⁰ In his reply to the U.S. secretary of state, Menderes emphasized that the friendship and co-operation between his country and Greece would not be affected by the recent "events." The official explanation offered by the Turkish prime minister for the anti-Greek events of 6–7 September was none other than to attribute them to the growing tension on the issue of Cyprus, and, once again, the Turkish press was not allowed to make any comments on these statements.⁵¹ In his address on 28 September 1955, Menderes also declared that "Turkey had made efforts to satisfy Greece's demands. If these efforts had not been fully recognized and they were not satisfactory for Greece, all Turkey could do was to feel sorry."⁵²

A personal message was also sent from Menderes to Greek prime minister Papagos.⁵³ A reply to this message was sent by General Papagos just before his death.⁵⁴ When, on 6 October 1955, the new Greek government assumed its duties under the leadership of Constantinos Karamanlis, it requested that Turkey offer a moral compensation for the acts of violence by raising the Greek flag in Smyrna.

During that time the sentiments that were aroused were so strong that the "threats against the 'infidel' continued for a long time after the 'events.'"⁵⁵ In addition, according to the British representative in Istanbul, it was "unfortunately true that the recent 'events' had intensified the pre-existing religious fanaticism and intolerance of the Turkish nation."⁵⁶

In February 1956, after multiple arrests (among whom were members of the Turkish intelligentsia, such as Aziz Nesin, Hulusi Dosdoğru, and others), the Martial Law Command completed its investigation into the causes of, and the people responsible for, the riots of September 1955. Thus, the blame was laid on *Kıbrıs Türktür* and, to a lesser degree, on the Turkish National Students Federation.⁵⁷ The secretary general of *Kıbrıs Türktür*, Kamil Önal,

⁵⁰ Foreign Office Minute by Thompson, London, 21 September 1955, FO371/117711/RG10344/55. The Greek prime minister, Marshal Papagos, in his response to the Dulles address maintained that "justice and morality should not be ignored. These two considerations are always at the service of the democratic world."

⁵¹ Foreign Office Minute by Thompson, London, 23 September 1955, FO371/117711/RG10344/43A, and Stewart to Foreign Office, Ankara, 23 September 1955, FO371/117711/RG10344/47.

⁵² Stewart to Foreign Office, Ankara, 29 September 1955, FO371/117711/RG10344/58.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Stewart to Foreign Office, Ankara, 7 October 1955, FO371/117711/RG10344/67.

⁵⁵ British Chancery to Southern Department, Ankara, 15 October 1955, FO371/117721/RK10110/10.

⁵⁶ British Chancery to Southern Department, Istanbul, 12 October 1955, FO371/117721/RKG10110/9.

⁵⁷ For the full report and for the accused, see Bowker to Lloyd, Ankara, 21 February 1956, FO371/124003/RK10110/5.



was accused of being the main ringleader of the riots.⁵⁸ In spite of these measures, the Menderes government did not assume any responsibility for the riots, nor did it tolerate any criticism of its handling of the situation. So, it was not surprising that Andreas Lambikis, the daring director and publisher of the news-paper *Eleftheri Fwnh*, who did not hesitate to speak his mind and criticized the Turkish regime for the anti-Greek riots, was arrested and imprisoned for four months. It should be noted that he was the only journalist who dared to protest the day after the acts of violence. In his editorial of 10 September, Lambikis described the night of 6 September as the “Massacre of St. Bartholomew of the Greek Nation,” calling at the same time for an end to the unfair treatment of Turkish citizens of Greek descent.⁵⁹ After the government was overthrown by a military coup on 27 May 1960, the leaders of the Democratic Party were put on trial before a special Supreme Court of the country. From all of the evidence that came to light during the testimony, it became clear that the instigator of the September anti-Greek riots was, without doubt, the government of Menderes.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Extract from the BBC Monitor for the organization Cyprus is Turkish, 11

February 1956, FO371/124003/RK10110/4. In the report of the Committee of the Martial Law which was published in Istanbul, it was mentioned that, as a result of the investigation made with reference to the events of 6–7 September 1955, 2,214 individuals were arrested, and 17 of them found guilty. A few months later, however, they were set free.

⁵⁹ *Eleftheri Fwnh*, 10 September 1955.

⁶⁰ On the last day of the court, 1 May 1961, Prime Minister Menderes, Minister of Foreign Affairs Zorlu, and Minister of Finance Polatkan were sentenced to death, and were then executed, because they were considered responsible for violation of the Constitution and for the distortion of the political system. The extreme penalty, the death sentence, is called for for both of these offenses. As for the September events, the same individuals were considered responsible only for the offense of causing damage to property/private property, on the basis of the Article 517, but not on the basis of Article 141 (racial discrimination against citizens), or of Article 177 (destruction of churches and cemeteries). Hasan Uzar, former employee of the Turkish consulate, and Oktay Engin, a nationalist Turkish student from Thrace, who were among the accused, were found not guilty by the court, despite the conclusive evidence provided by the Greek justice about the reasons/motives of the explosion.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alexandris A., 1992, *The Greek Minority of Istanbul and Greek-Turkish Relations 1918-1974*, Athens.

Alexandris A., 1998, "Religion or Ethnicity: the Lausanne Treaty and the identity issue of the minorities in Greece and Turkey", paper prepared for the presentation at the 'International Conference on the Exchange of Populations between Greece and Turkey', *Refugee Studies Programme*, Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford, 17-20 September 1998.

Berkeş N., 1964, *the development of secularism in turkey*, montréal.

Ceylan F.E., 1996, *The Incidents of September 6/7 1955*, unpublished MA thesis, Bosphorous University, Istanbul.

Constandinidis F., 1984, "Matters Concerning the Education of the Greeks in Turkey from the Lausanne Treaty to the Present", *Thrakiki Epetirida*, vol V, pp. 180-227. (in Greek)

Demir H. & Akar R., 1994, *Istanbul'un Son Sürgünleri, 1964'te Rumların Sınırdışı Edilmesi*, Istanbul.

Divani L., 1995, *Greece and Minorities, The UN System of International Protection*, Athens. (in Greek)

Dosdoğru H., 1993, *6/7 Eylül Olayları*, Istanbul.

Ökte F., 1951, *Varlık Vergisi Faciası*, Istanbul.

Lewis B., 1968, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, London.

Mango A., 1999, *Atatürk*, London.

Millas H., 1988, *Türk- Yunan ilişkilerinde Bir Önsöz*, Ankara.

Özer K., 1995, *Türkiye'de Gayrimüslim Azınlık Basını*, unpublished MA thesis, University of Istanbul.

Poulton H., 1997, *Top Hat, Grey Wolf and Crescent - Turkish Nationalism and the Turkish Republic*, London.

Rustow D. A., 1956, *Politics and Westernization in the Near East*, Princeton.

Rustow D. A., 1956, "Politics and Islam in Turkey, 1920-1955" in *Islam and the West*, R.N. Frye ed., The Hague.

Sarris N., 1992, *Foreign Policy & Political Developments during the First Turkish Republic, the Turkish Military Regime's Rise to Power (1923-1950)*, Athens. (in Greek)



Tuncay M., 1967, *Türkiye'de Sol Akımlar*, Ankara.

Yücel, 1993, *Milli Eğitimle ilgili Söylev ve Demeçler*, Kültür Bakanlığı ed., Ankara.

Yücel, 1994, *Türkiye'de Orta Öğretim*, Kültür Bakanlığı ed., Ankara.

