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THE SEARCH FOR AN EXIT FROM THE DICTATORSHIP AND
THE TRANSFORMATION OF GREEK CONSERVATISM, 1967-1974

Sotiris Rizas

ABSTRACT: The purpose of this paper is to examine the process of transformation of Greek conservatism that evolved during the dictatorship from a current identified with the restrictive practices of the post-Civil War political system to a tenet of the democratic regime established in 1974. The realization that the military coup was not just the manifestation of anti-communism, the dominant ideology of the post-Civil War period, but also of an anti-parliamentary spirit permeating the armed forces, the prolongation of military rule that led to the crystallization of differences between the military regime and the conservative political class and an apprehension that the dictatorship might fuel uncontrollable social and political polarization are three inter-related factors that explain this transformation.

The collapse of the Greek military regime and the transfer of power by the armed forces to a civilian government under Constantinos Karamanlis, representing the conservative and liberal currents of the pre-junta political spectrum, was the first step in the transition to a genuinely democratic political system. In this process the role of conservatism was crucial and in marked contrast to its pre-dictatorial political practices and inclinations. The purpose of this article is to examine the process of transformation of Greek conservatism that evolved during the dictatorship from a current identified with the restrictive practices of the post-Civil War political system to a tenet of the democratic regime established in 1974.

This transformation can be explained by the confluence of three inter-related factors. The first was the realization that the military coup was not just the manifestation of anti-communism, the dominant ideology in the armed forces and the Greek political setting of the post-Civil War period, but also of an anti-parliamentary spirit permeating the armed forces. The logical conclusion of this was that conservatism, or at least the political class that led it, was a prime target of the junta along with the centre, the centre-left and the communist left who were thought to be the main targets of the military rulers. The second factor was the prolongation of military rule that led to the crystallization of differences between the military regime and the conservative political class. The longer the military remained in power the more difficult it was for those who sought to invent transitory schemes to

reconcile the cleavage between the old parliamentarians and the military rulers. Finally, there was apprehension that the dictatorship might fuel social and political polarization that would eventually lead to an uncontrollable mass mobilization. The conclusion that restricted or guided democracy of the sort experienced after the Civil War was not politically feasible convinced political conservatism that a genuine pluralistic system was the most credible and acceptable alternative to military rule in a society that was undergoing a rapid economic, social and ideological change.

Public documents and correspondence of the most distinguished conservatives, most prominent amongst them Constantinos Karamanlis, founder and leader of the National Radical Union conservative party and prime minister from 1955 through 1963, and his successor and last civilian prime minister in 1967, Panayotis Kanellopoulos, are particularly useful in the reconstruction of this transformation.

Dealing with the Past

Karamanlis' first statement after the coup was in line with the standard post-Civil War conservative discourse. The country had been undergoing an "anomalous" political situation for the previous three years, roughly after the Centre Union's victory in the elections of February 1964. Having said this, he claimed that he had tried to "tame" Greek political manners and provide a modern constitution. However, on the understanding that he acted in vain, he left politics and the country. After his departure many "errors" had been committed, but the main culprit was the leader of the Centre Union, Georgios Papandreou. If the leader of the Centre Union had acted wisely, the country would have avoided this "dangerous adventure". Instead, he "unleashed" a storm of political passion and threatened institutions and individuals, thus creating conditions conducive to the military coup. It cannot escape the attention of the reader that there is not one word about the group of colonels who seized power and called off the elections scheduled for 28 May 1967. In the operative paragraph of his statement Karamanlis urged everyone "responsible" to search for "healthy methods to restore normality for the benefit of security and unity of the nation". These were catchwords resonant to defenders of the post-Civil War parliamentary regime.¹

The emphasis of Panayotis Kanellopoulos' first statement, five months after the coup, was rather different. He castigated the coup plotters on moral

¹ Karamanlis' statement, 23 April 1967, in Constantinos Svolopoulos (ed.), *Κωνσταντίνος Καραμανλής. Αρχείο, γεγονότα και κείμενα* [Constantinos Karamanlis: Archive, facts and texts], Vol. VII, Athens: Ekdotiki Athinon, 1995, p. 19.

as well as factual and political grounds. He admitted that there was a number of citizens who approved or tolerated the coup. It was an implication of conservative opinion, which shared the perception of a threat to the country's security and stability in the case of a Centre Union victory in the election of May 1967. Kanellopoulos was emphatic that citizens were misled: the country neither escaped chaos, nor was an imminent danger prevented by the coup. Moreover, neither was the normal development of the nation secured.²

It was a clear signal that parliamentary conservatism was on the verge of a process of disengagement from the notions of a domestic security threat and internal enemies that provided the pretext for the military coup. It was not yet a complete break, for Kanellopoulos added vaguely that, whatever the outcome of the election, democracy and the parliamentary system would have secured the solutions authoritarianism was deprived of. It is not certain whether he was implying recourse to emergency measures available in the constitution of 1952 or he, to the contrary, was implying a possibility of a parliamentary solution with the cooperation of at least a part of the Centre Union parliamentary group. The issue is not clear, although Kanellopoulos added that whatever peril existed was purposefully magnified by those who had an interest in creating an atmosphere conducive to a military coup.³ Still, it must be taken into account that Kanellopoulos, as prime minister of the conservative government that had undertaken to conduct the elections of 28 May 1967, was agitated by the prospect of a Centre Union victory and the influence enjoyed by Andreas Papandreou, the leader of the Centre Union centre-left wing. The American ambassador of the time had informed Washington that the king would consider the possibility of imposing martial law in mid-May to preempt the takeover of power by an ascendant Centre Union.⁴ Moreover, Georgios Rallis, minister of public order in the Kanellopoulos government, admitted that the cabinet might impose a state of emergency if riots or unspecified disturbances took place during the campaign or right after the election process.⁵

² Kanellopoulos' statement, 27 September 1967, in Dionysios Alikaniotis (ed.), *Κείμενα Παναγιώτη Κανελλόπουλου από τον αγώνα του κατά της δικτατορίας, 1967-1974* [Panayotis Kanellopoulos' texts from his struggle against the dictatorship, 1967-1974], Athens: Society of the Friends of Panayotis Kanellopoulos, 1987, pp. 51-54.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Philips Talbot (US Embassy, Athens) to the State Department, 14 April 1967, in James E. Miller (ed.), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*, Vol. XVI, Washington, DC, 2000, p. 576.

⁵ Interview with Georgios Rallis, Alexis Papachelas, *Το Βήμα* (19 March 2006).

Despite the evidence of tolerance or a degree of relief of conservative opinion over the imposition of the military regime, there is only one remarkable case of cooperation of a conservative politician with the dictatorship. It was Panayotis Pipinellis, who became foreign minister at the request of the king as the Cyprus crisis of November 1967 erupted. Pipinellis was a career diplomat who was closely connected with the crown from the days of King George II. Ultra-conservative even by the standards of post-Civil War Greece, Pipinellis was in fact a supporter of monarchism, which he envisioned accompanied by a tightly guided parliamentary system. His aversion to parliamentary politics was not a secret, and his popularity was low. He failed in his first attempt to enter parliament with the National Radical Union list in the election of 1961. Nonetheless, Karamanlis included him in his cabinet as a minister of commerce, and from June through September 1963 he served as a caretaker prime minister after Karamanlis' falling out with the crown. He was elected deputy in 1963 and 1964 with the National Radical Union and after the eruption of the political crisis of July 1965 he was uninterruptedly advocating an "extra-parliamentary solution", the euphemism for the suspension of parliamentary rule and the imposition of a dictatorship that would suppress the mass support for the Centre Union party and specifically for its centre-left wing under the leadership of Andreas Papandreou. In this context he was critical of the compromise reached in December 1966 among Georgios Papandreou, Panayotis Kanellopoulos and the crown that provided for a caretaker government to conduct elections in May 1967 under proportional representation. Speaking from an ultra-conservative perspective Pipinellis questioned the ability of the caretaker government to contain the political mobilization unfolding from the centre-left. Pipinellis perceived political demands posed by the mobilized masses as a "revolutionary process" which was unleashed by Papandreou's rhetoric at a moment when "social pressures" had accumulated.⁶ This emphasis on a quasi-revolutionary process that threatened the tenets of the social system was a more elaborate though not realistic perception of the situation than the crude invocation of a communist threat that was evidently obsolete. It betrayed a fear of the political ramifications of social change that Greece was undergoing as a result of post-war economic development. This perception led nonetheless to the same political conclusion: that the army had to intervene, prevent elections and suspend the functioning of the parliamentary regime. In early October 1967, Pipinellis, preparing the ground for his participation in the military regime's

⁶ Panayotis Pipinellis' speech at the National Radical Union parliamentary group session, 23 December 1966, in the Panayotis Pipinellis Archive, Box 5, Gennadius Library, Athens.

government, reiterated his conviction that military intervention had been necessary to deal with a situation that was reaching the “revolutionary stage” and leading to a “dynamic challenge”. This state of things was, he added, the culmination of political developments from 1964 onwards.⁷

The Cyprus crisis and the possibility of a Greek–Turkish war motivated Karamanlis to intervene publicly against the junta, which, as it was clear now to the former prime minister, sought to establish a permanent regime. His plan was to encourage the king to ask for the resignation of the military-dominated government and the initiation of a carefully planned return to parliamentary rule. In an interview in *Le Monde* he referred to the French Fifth Republic as an appropriate institutional model for Greece that would have averted the military coup. He was almost dismissive of the alleged communist threat as a pretext of the coup. He pointed out that Greece suffered from something worse, “moral and political anarchy”. Karamanlis retained the views he had expressed in his previous statement, although he was careful to attach responsibility anonymously to those who incited “passion”. He proposed a plan for an exit from the dictatorship which was a reiteration of his programme of 1963. It was urgent, he argued, to remove the junta from power as its continued rule presented dangers of a social and political conflict, but not to return to the same regime. He presented a detailed formula: formation of a “wise”, “honest” and “strong” government that would rule with emergency powers. Among other goals this government, within “reasonable time”, would search for an agreed resolution of the Cyprus Question, restore discipline within the armed forces and implement a programme of fiscal discipline. On top of that the government would present a new constitution that would produce a “ruled”, not a “ruling democracy”. It was an implication that he favoured a disciplined parliament and a strong executive along the lines of the French Fifth Republic. The government would submit the new constitution to the electorate in a referendum and call an election afterwards.⁸

Karamanlis was no doubt disappointed by the fact that the king ignored his proposal and moved to his counter-coup on 13 December 1967. It is not known whether the king had something concrete in mind in case his move was successful. More important, his failure left the military regime in place more powerful than before the eruption of the Cyprus crisis of November 1967. In the spring of 1968 the dictatorship made a lot of a fuss about the

⁷ P. Pipinellis’ article in *Η Βραδυνή* (7 October 1967), Pipinellis Archive, Box 7.

⁸ Interview with Karamanlis in *Le Monde* (28 November 1967), in Svolopoulos (ed.), *Καραμανλής. Αρχείο*, pp. 51-54.

promulgation of a new constitution that was to lay the ground for the establishment of a “purified” parliamentary system. In early April 1968 the crown approached Karamanlis in order to resume contact. Karamanlis was rather cool on this and reiterated his disappointment over the turning-down of his strategy of the previous November. He was certain that if Premier Konstantinos Kollias and Foreign Minister Pipinellis had resigned at the time of the Cyprus crisis the war-mongering junta would have collapsed. He did not however decline to accept the king’s emissary. He was diffident though and he tried to delineate carefully his relations with the crown, which he perceived as a useful symbol of legality but not as a power centre, since he was conscious of his own possibilities and the weakening of royal prestige.⁹ More interesting were Karamanlis’ views on the draft constitution. Betraying an aversion to abstract constructs and a predilection for political empiricism, Karamanlis argued that the draft was contradictory, containing both democratic and authoritarian elements. The key issue nevertheless was who would implement it, not its stipulations. If the junta itself undertook to implement it, the result would be authoritarianism, but, conversely, if the transition process was managed by a “neutral” civilian government the result would be “democratic”. Thus, whereas he did not think it very fruitful to talk about particular clauses of the draft, he acknowledged that a number of them were particularly worrisome. He was concerned by the constitutional court, which was authorized to dissolve parties on grounds of constitutionality. He was also worried by the provision that the first judges of this court would be appointed for life by the military government. Moreover, the armed forces would become institutionally autonomous, impervious to civilian control and responsible for repelling both external and domestic “subversion”.¹⁰ It was a recognition on Karamanlis’ behalf that a genuine democratic system of government was incompatible with the arbitrary decisions of unelected bodies and thus it signified a departure from the practices and assumptions of the post-Civil War parliamentary regime, which was identified with the curtailment of political liberties and the undefined role of the army within the nexus of political institutions.

⁹ Leonidas Papagos, *Σημειώσεις, 1967-1977* [Notes, 1967-1977], Athens: Goulandris Horn Foundation, 1999, pp. 84-85.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 108. On the constitution of 1968 that provided for a guided democracy, institutionally autonomous armed forces and a powerful constitutional court, see Nicos Alivizatos, *Οι πολιτικοί θεσμοί σε κρίση. Όψεις της ελληνικής εμπειρίας, 1922-1974* [Political institutions in crisis: Aspects of Greece’s experience, 1922-1974], Athens: Themelio, 1984, pp. 273-334.

Mapping the Future

Kanellopoulos was much more vocal in criticizing political conservatism's pre-coup analysis and assumptions. In a June 1969 letter to Karamanlis, with whom communication was not necessarily frequent, Kanellopoulos reminded the former prime minister of his suspicion that a series of reports was based on the false premises that communists and centre-leftists had organized armed bands. These reports combined with events that amounted to sheer provocation and were orchestrated so that a false sense of emergency and the consequent necessity of a military intervention was founded in a mindset dominated by the post-Civil War assumptions and stereotypes of red peril. He admitted that he was not aware of the colonels and their planning, although he had indications of similar leanings of the chief of the Army General Staff, Lieutenant-General Grigorios Spantidakis, and two or three other lieutenant-generals. He was adamant that neither he nor the king were in tune with the generals' planning, which was entrusted to the hands of the group of colonels, who were thus found at the heart of developments and were enabled to appropriate crucial functions of the military chain of command to their benefit. Kanellopoulos went back further to remind Karamanlis that the group of mid-ranking officers who actually executed the coup was traced already in 1958 by the then chief of the Army General Staff, Lieutenant-General Nikolopoulos. He was nevertheless prevented from concluding the process of cleansing he had undertaken, since it was the chief of staff that was retired instead of the members of the Georgios Papadopoulos group. Kanellopoulos did not give a hint of the grounds on which the Karamanlis conservative government did not accept Nikolopoulos' request to remain for one more year so that his investigation could be concluded. What historically matters more, however, in this case is that Kanellopoulos implied that the conservative governments of the 1950s and 1960s had tolerated or harboured a situation that was conducive to the coup. The key to Kanellopoulos' thinking was his speculation on the course of events that could have taken place had the military takeover not taken place in April 1967. He was convinced that if the parliamentary way was allowed to follow its "natural" course he would be able, even after "testing" circumstances, to end in a situation comparable to that of France, which after the revolutionary ferment of May 1968 had eventually crystallized in a majority around a "progressive conservative camp".¹¹

¹¹ He must have had in mind the evolution of Gaullism under the presidency of Georges Pompidou and the premiership of Jacques Chaban-Delmas. See Serge Berstein and Jean-Pierre Rioux, *The Cambridge History of Modern France: The Pompidou Years, 1969-1974*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 29-39.

This was the transitory point from the clearing of the past to the assessment of the future. With regard to the future, Kanellopoulos felt that what was feasible and expedient was action of a political nature. He proposed in essence a bloc of the two major pre-coup parties, the conservative National Radical Union and the liberal Centre Union, under the leadership of Karamanlis. He conceded that his predecessor had the advantage of a long absence from Greece and Greek politics. He added a second reason, which was of an apparently personal nature but provided a key that could be useful in interpreting the actual developments that led to the handing over of power to Karamanlis instead of Kanellopoulos five years later: the latter felt that his prestige amongst the junior officers who constituted the backbone of the junta's support in the army was too low from an anti-communist vantage point. Karamanlis, who was prestigious in Western Europe and America as a result of an eventful premiership, was, moreover, spared that kind of treatment, Kanellopoulos added pointedly. Still, Karamanlis had not yet cleared his path as an undisputed leader of the old political class. As Kanellopoulos reiterated, the Centre Union had lost its leader, Georgios Papandreou, and his loyal lieutenant, Nikolaos Bakopoulos. Georgios Mavros was not yet pre-eminent, and Andreas Papandreou's radical rhetoric prevented a sizeable part of the Centre Union from advocating the Karamanlis solution. It is interesting that Andreas Papandreou had relayed to Kanellopoulos his willingness to consider Karamanlis as a leader of a transitional civilian government. His support was qualified though, since he did not envisage Karamanlis as a part of the pact to be concluded between the parties. Kanellopoulos did not undertake any further talks with Andreas Papandreou. His overriding concern was not to recognize him as a leader of the Centre Union at the expense of the more moderate centrists who remained in Greece and were at the moment leaderless and directionless. Kanellopoulos was not opposed in principle against talks with Andreas Papandreou, although he tied any process of dialogue to the cessation of Andreas' strident anti-Americanism. From a strategic point of view Kanellopoulos was adamant that he precluded cooperation with the communist left. His main concern was, he added, that with the passage of time the communists would be enabled to break their isolation and attract "nationally minded" elements, not solely the younger ones, who would search for a dynamic response to authoritarian rule. Kanellopoulos did not think that the communists themselves were capable of attracting sufficient support to undermine social order. The most dangerous possibility was the willingness of left-of-centre elements to join with the far left. To neutralize this trend Kanellopoulos believed in the creation of strong

parties and camps that, although originating from political conservatism, would be progressive in their policy orientation and would decline to cooperate with the communists.¹²

Karamanlis' response was non-committal. He seemed though to have been removed from positions tied to the memory of the pre-dictatorial political ferment. He thought that dictatorships had become "fashionable" again, deriving apparently from the Latin American experience. Democracy was under pressure from both communism and militarism. To survive it needed to adjust to contemporary circumstances following the French model. He must have referred to the institutional set-up of the Fifth Republic, although he did not comment on Kanellopoulos' reference to the political evolution after the May 1968 uprising or to the general proposition on the need of conservatives to reorientate their policies in a progressive direction. He approved of Kanellopoulos' effort to isolate Andreas Papandreou from the mainstream of centrism and he even proposed Georgios Mavros, a moderate centrist, to be supported for the leadership of the Centre Union. Karamanlis' thinking had interestingly evolved, and he even advised for the adoption of tactics of civil disobedience. He refrained from presaging what the transition to democracy would entail in terms of sanctions for the instigators of the coup or the election of a constituent assembly. Everything, he pointed out, would depend on the conditions under which the junta would be removed, peaceful or violent, and would be determined by the transitional government, which should be invested with emergency powers. He was clear nevertheless that he sought to reorganize the Greek political system institutionally. In this context, he was not willing to act within a mandate from Greek political parties but as an agent of his own programme. On the possibilities of the military rule, he thought that the dictatorship lacked the resources, intellectual or structural, to sustain a permanent regime. He was alert to the possibility of an election under the control of the junta or the abdication of the king. He did not seem to be unduly alarmed however on this latter prospect, although the crown had served since the era of the national schism of 1915 as a point of reference for the right. He concluded that the length of the regime would be subject to uncontrollable factors, which, to be taken advantage of, prior preparation should have been undertaken.¹³ Thus, at this stage, although he was non-committal and not particularly definite in his

¹² Kanellopoulos to Karamanlis, 16 June 1969, in Svolopoulos (ed.), *Καραμανλής. Αρχείο*, pp. 102-111.

¹³ Karamanlis to Kanellopoulos, 1 August 1969, in *ibid.*, pp. 111-112.

pronouncements, he was now distanced from his past encounters with the Centre Union and his identification with the post-Civil War practices and he was prepared to adjust his previous elaborations which remained the same but in a new context.

Karamanlis' views were again disclosed on 30 September 1969 in a public statement. Although he expected that he would thus trigger political developments in Greece, the impact of his statement was limited. Still, this declaration is useful to historians as it is a stock-taking of the evolution of conservative thinking. Karamanlis charged the ruling junta with the intention to establish a permanent authoritarian regime. He denigrated the political and ideological foundation of the military in power, dismissing them as "apolitical" and irrelevant from a political theory point of view. He was also derisive of their attachment to "theocratic medievalism" blending an Orthodox tradition with "fatherland" and "family". What concerned Karamanlis more at this stage was the "Sovietization" of the armed forces, a direct reference to the collapse of the chain of command and the weight of mid- and lower-ranking officers in power structures, and the tendency of economic policy to encourage consumption and thus imports, which increased the foreign-exchange liabilities of the country. A new matter of concern was the isolation of Greece from the workings that led to further European integration. It was the first time that this issue was included in his political agenda, and Europeanism would become a key element of a reconstructed conservatism for the post-junta period. Karamanlis' reference to European integration was related directly to the notion of the "national security" of Greece, a clear indication that he saw in European Community membership the means to neutralize permanently the possibility of a lurch to the left that would question Greece's Western orientation. He repeated his thesis for the necessity of an "experienced" emergency government to implement a programme identical to that he had presented in *Le Monde* two years earlier and offered his empiricist view that the Greek people could not withstand authoritarianism. The junta should choose between its voluntary withdrawal or its overthrow, which, though, might be brought about by "uncontrollable" forces, a concern featuring permanently in every public utterance of the former prime minister.¹⁴

Karamanlis was not alone in expressing serious misgivings about the prolongation of the authoritarian regime in terms of Greece's exclusion from the European integration process. On 25 March 1971 Kanellopoulos, along

¹⁴ Karamanlis' statement, 30 September 1969, in *ibid.*

with other political figures, was emphatic on this point in a statement on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Greek Revolution of 1821. Greece belonged to Europe, Kanellopoulos stated, and especially to this particular part of Europe that, to the benefit of humanity, should retain a distinct historical identity and mission. This part of Europe would retain this identity and mission only if it respected democratic principles, freedom of thought and tolerance *vis-à-vis* any political and social ideology. This mission was shared by the United States of America, Kanellopoulos added, since July 1776. It is interesting that the Western world's, and in particular Western Europe's, legitimacy lies in respect of liberty and tolerance not in free enterprise or strategic and balance of power calculations.¹⁵

A policy of blurring the options between cooperation and opposition to the dictatorship was gradually formulated by Evangelos Averoff-Tositsas, former foreign minister of the Karamanlis governments from 1956 to 1963. Averoff was impressed, rather depressed, by the junta's ability to impose its will upon the electorate as demonstrated in the referendum on the draft constitution of September 1968. He did not think that the outcome was truly representative of the will of the people, but he was almost demoralized by the acquiescence of the population to dictatorial rule. Under these circumstances Averoff was certain that if an election was called it would be dominated by pro-military elements since he precluded the possibility of the election to be conducted by an impartial caretaker government. It was in this context that he could anticipate the formation of a party, constituted by conservative and liberal elements, that would voluntarily settle for the role of "loyal" opposition. He hoped that after a long period of adjustment the loyalist opposition party would widen the scope of political action until the prospect of genuinely free elections was secured.¹⁶ Of course this strategy entailed the obvious danger of providing legitimacy to a quasi-parliamentary regime that would in essence constitute a veiled authoritarianism. Averoff was also realizing that he had neither the power nor the influence to drag the conservatives towards his strategy and so he addressed Karamanlis. The latter did not approve of this strategy as he thought that after two or three years the structure of the regime would crumble under pressure from below and conservatives would be

¹⁵ Message of Kanellopoulos and others, 25 March 1971, in Alikaniotis (ed.), *Κείμενα Παναγιώτη Κανελλόπουλου*, pp. 87-89.

¹⁶ Averoff to Karamanlis, 14 October 1968, in Svolopoulos (ed.), *Καραμανλής. Αρχείο*, p. 86.

discredited along with the junta. His strategy was to persuade the junta to withdraw as long as they were powerful enough to do so with dignity.¹⁷

Averoff's strategy was not put to the test for the sheer reason that the junta did not attempt to proceed to an election. Internal dissent and Papadopoulos' hesitant attitude forestalled this move. Averoff would develop his strategy to building a "bridge" towards the politicization of the military regime. A government under the leadership of Papadopoulos should undertake to conduct an election under the constitution of 1968. Papadopoulos himself should abstain from the election, an element that was the key in Averoff's plan, which still, however, was not free of drawbacks, since it was not at all certain that this election would be free and genuine. Averoff assumed that the military regime was well-entrenched in power and that the population was too passive, especially in the provinces, to resist the junta. He was also increasingly apprehensive of the influence of mid-ranking officers who displayed an anti-Western attitude and did not demonstrate unqualified support for Papadopoulos. Although Averoff did not preclude the possibility of an internal showdown that would lead to the collapse of the military regime, he thought this unlikely and was willing to try his bridge-building strategy, which has been interpreted also as an effort to create opportunities for Karamanlis' return.¹⁸ In assessing conservative thinking during the junta, the problem of legitimacy acquires primary importance. Although research or studies discerning popular attitudes towards the military regime are not available, speculation based on an empiricist approach of people's views shows that the parliamentary right was to be the more adversely affected political current by a potential politicization guided by the junta. The military coup was a move planned and executed by a group of officers of ultra-right-wing conviction, identified with the way of thinking and the political exclusion of the post-Civil War era. Their planning had been facilitated not only operationally but also politically by an atmosphere of polarization between conservatism and the centre-left which sought to sideline institutions that were not legitimized by popular vote, such as the monarchy and the army. As this agenda was identified with an imaginary communist advance that pervaded the conservative electorate, it can be guessed that the latter was a reservoir of support for the military regime in its early stages. Of course this should not be over-emphasized. Even observers

¹⁷ Karamanlis to Averoff, 24 November 1968, in *ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁸ Averoff to Karamanlis, 10 February 1971, in *ibid.*, pp. 286-287; Evanthis Hatzivassiliou, *Ο ελληνικός φιλελευθερισμός. Το ριζοσπαστικό ρεύμα, 1932-1979* [Greek liberalism: The radical current, 1932-1979], Athens: Patakis, 2010, pp. 473-474.

not negatively disposed towards authoritarianism did not argue that the junta had secured a mass following. The American ambassador would point out in early September 1967 that good reception in the provinces did not mean that the regime had consolidated a political base, but that the populace in general was acquiescent.¹⁹ The British ambassador, reviewing developments in April 1969 on the second anniversary of the military coup, also concluded that the regime had not secured a mass following.²⁰ Greek observers were more dispirited, although their conclusions were not markedly different. An intelligent journalist of conservative leanings, Vasos Vasiliou spoke about the “apolitical consciousness of masses” and the disheartening of “others”, referring apparently to the opposition, as the basis of a politicization led by Papadopoulos himself.²¹ Averoff estimated that the regime had secured the support of slightly over 10% of the population.²² In October 1971 Georgios Rallis, an experienced electoral strategist of the pre-dictatorial period, calculated that it was 10-15% of the population, mostly originating from the National Radical Union, who were supporters of the junta. A great part of the rest, however, had accepted the status quo, as the income of the middle classes was rising and the belief that only the Americans could alter the situation was widespread.²³ It was indeed a culture of dependency that seemed to be more entrenched than ever.²⁴ A year later Averoff observed that, although the political class retained a shadow existence, its bonds with its electoral base had been weakened. He noticed also that, despite dissatisfaction amongst the middle classes over taxation and the farmers over the prices of their crops, the general atmosphere in the economy was buoyant, although inflationary tendencies might be felt at a later stage.²⁵

¹⁹ Talbot (US Embassy, Athens) to the State Department, 5 September 1967, National Security Files/Country File: Greece, Cables, Vol. III, Box 127, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, TX.

²⁰ Sir Michael Stewart (British Embassy, Athens) to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 24 April 1969, FCO 9/881, National Archives, Kew.

²¹ Vasos Vasiliou to Karamanlis, 20 May 1970, in Svolopoulos (ed.), *Καραμανλής. Αρχείο*, p. 276.

²² Averoff to Karamanlis, 28 May 1970, in *ibid.*, p. 277.

²³ Georgios Rallis to Karamanlis, 25 October 1971, in *ibid.*, p. 293.

²⁴ Theodoros Couloumbis, John Petropoulos and Harry J. Psomiades, *Foreign Interference in Greek Politics: An Historical Perspective*, New York: Pella, 1976.

²⁵ Averoff to Karamanlis, 28 October 1972, in Svolopoulos (ed.), *Καραμανλής. Αρχείο*, pp. 306-307.

To sum up, whereas the junta was not able to secure a solid base sufficient to attempt politicization, the limited extent of the speculated support it enjoyed was mostly at the expense of the conservative following of the pre-junta period.

The Crystallization of the New Conservative Thinking

In 1970-1971 a competition between Kanellopoulos and Karamanlis for the leadership of the anti-dictatorial front of the parties unfolded and almost led to a parting of ways in early 1973. It implied also a potential divergence of strategies and alliances between them. At its origins lay an initiative of Karamanlis' supporters for the signing of a petition by both conservatives and centrists that would designate Karamanlis as the leader of an anti-dictatorial front which would lead to a transitional government under Karamanlis himself. It implied also a struggle for supremacy. Kanellopoulos did not openly challenge Karamanlis' pre-eminence but bided his time and apparently counted on the obvious unwillingness of distinguished Centre Union former deputies to demonstrate a preference for Karamanlis. Kanellopoulos was clear to Constantinos Papaconstantinou, a loyal lieutenant of Karamanlis, that he would undertake an effort to convince the centrists of the intrinsic merit of a Karamanlis' solution. Conventional wisdom at the time held that in case conservative and liberal political forces of the pre-junta period were able to present a united front against the junta, then the notorious "foreign factor", namely the United States, would exert pressure on the military regime to accelerate the process of a return to a constitutional government, since Washington would no longer be apprehensive of a radical departure of a democratic Greece from the tenets of Atlanticism. Therefore it was not an easy thing to denounce the possibility of a united front under Karamanlis, who was impeccably pro-Western. Still, Kanellopoulos was careful to convey his own message of displeasure. He was upset that former deputies of the National Radical Union had moved without his prior knowledge. Raising the stakes, he warned that under these circumstances he would consider resigning from the party leadership and hence without commitments he would undertake the leadership of a broad political coalition that would include the left. It was this reference to the left that made Papaconstantinou's flesh creep. Kanellopoulos was quick to mitigate the blow, making clear that he meant to include in this coalition the "left of the centre". This was not a consolation for Papaconstantinou and the conservative orthodoxy he represented. Kanellopoulos reiterated that Karamanlis enjoyed the trust of the bulk of the military on grounds of anti-communism. He was also certain

nonetheless that he had built a relationship of trust with the mainstream of the Centre Union, who remained lukewarm towards Karamanlis for fear of being outflanked by Andreas Papandreou. It was important though that within the conservative ranks there was a potential divergence between those who favoured a new democratic polity but remained at least reluctant towards the left and the centre-left and those, like Kanellopoulos, who might be willing to explore uncharted waters with currents of the left.²⁶ Of course, it should be borne in mind that Kanellopoulos himself was reluctant to follow this course for he understood that he would altogether be discredited in the eyes of the military and the Americans. It was probably a tactical blackmail in the context of jockeying for position with Karamanlis, who remained a formidable force within conservatism.

The longer the military rule was drawn out, the more discussions for an exit strategy intensified. Karamanlis seemed to be the only one who possessed an elaborate analysis and planning on the process of a transition to democracy. In April 1972 the former prime minister argued that the process of democratization had to be undertaken by a government that would be invested with emergency powers. The mission of this government would be to safeguard the normal transfer of power and prevent mobilized masses, the *πεζοδρόμιον*, from taking control of the situation.²⁷ Moreover, the emergency government would hold firmly as long as new parties could be established, comprised of a mixture of old and new politicians. Elections would follow in an unspecified time, and the drafting of a new constitution would mark the culmination of this process. At this point Karamanlis seemed disappointed by the negligible impact of his previous statements in November 1967 and October 1969. In the first case he had advised the king to replace the prime minister with a “stronger” one, General Thrasyvoulos Tsakalotos being his favourite, and in the second he expected the mobilization of 30 politicians and retired generals. In both cases nothing happened, and Karamanlis had reached the conclusion that it was impossible to remove the junta as long as the people were not longing for the return of the old political class and there was no clear political alternative. What is impressive nevertheless is his firm belief that the United States had the power to overthrow the junta if they so wished. In this sense Karamanlis shared with the common man the generally upheld view that the American factor was

²⁶ Kanellopoulos to Karamanlis, 12 January 1973, and Papaconstantinou to Karamanlis, 25 January 1973, in *ibid.*, pp. 155-158.

²⁷ Constantinos Tsatsos also used the term *πεζοδρόμιο* [pavement]. The “street” would be more accurate in English. In Greek conservative political jargon it implies demonstrations or mass mobilization that lie on the margins of legality. See also note 40 below.

able to determine the course of events in Greece. His belief was based on the assumption that the great majority of the Greek military would be sensitive to NATO displeasure.²⁸ Karamanlis was critical of the US tolerance towards authoritarian regimes all over the world. His analysis was however political in a rather restricted manner, interested only in institutional arrangements, political correlations and techniques, not in the social background of the political game. We understand by implication that he felt that the Americans promoted dictatorships in some cases whereas in other cases they just had to adapt to prevailing national circumstances. It was also of interest that he perceived the postwar dictatorships as “apolitical”, whereas it is impossible to trace a dictatorship that did not arise from developments with a complex socio-political background. This had already been amplified by the work of Samuel Huntington, who was not an ardent opponent of authoritarianism in the Third World. His argument was that dictatorships were the consequence of a gap between economic and social modernization and the difficulty of old political institutions and ruling classes to adapt to a new environment of mass politics.²⁹

Contrary to Karamanlis, Kanellopoulos did not offer a clear exit strategy from the dictatorship. Couloumbis pointed out that he was most concerned by the “pedagogical” aspects of the affairs. If the dictatorship was permitted to be replaced or to continue as a parliamentary regime, the precedent that would thus have been established would be morally and politically flawed. It can as a consequence be concluded that Kanellopoulos was not interested in the implementation of the constitution of 1968 as a transitory phase towards parliamentarism.³⁰ Markezinis would later observe that for Kanellopoulos the only acceptable way to restoration would be the formation of a government by himself as he was the civilian prime minister that was deposed by the coup of 1967.³¹

Nevertheless, Kanellopoulos was working consistently to lay the ground for a front of the main pre-dictatorial political parties, the Centre Union and the National Radical Union. His strategy seemed to pay off, although at a pace that was rather slow and probably not very effective. It was on 25 March 1972 that his effort bore its most impressive result with the issuing of a joint

²⁸ Theodore Couloumbis, ...71 ...74. *Σημειώσεις ενός πανεπιστημιακού* [...71 ...74: Notes of a professor], Athens: Patakis, 2002, pp. 141-142.

²⁹ Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968.

³⁰ Couloumbis, ...71 ...74, pp. 165-166.

³¹ Spyros Markezinis, *Αναμνήσεις, 1972-1974* [Memoirs, 1972-1974], Athens: Spyros Markezinis Publications, 1979, p. 268.

statement of more than 160 former deputies of both parties on the occasion again of the anniversary of the Greek Revolution of 1821. The statement pointed out that liberties were flagrantly violated and that the military regime posed grave dangers for Greece in Cyprus and in the entire nexus of Greece's relations in the world. Greece's inclusion in Europe was a means for the country to deal effectively with its permanent and "organic" imbalances in its economic and social structure. The conclusion of the argument was that the military regime had to be removed from power, as it was the stumbling block of Greece's participation in the European Community. The statement went on to declare that, although the parties fully realized that they had divergent aspirations, as long as parliamentary institutions functioned they now had to work jointly to lead the country to democracy. No strategy of transition to democracy was outlined in the statement. The aim and means to achieve it were indistinguishable. The only implication of a transitory nature was a commitment that the deputies would support a government that would lead the country to democratic normality. The statement was interesting in another sense: a vague commitment was undertaken that in the new democratic system participation would be open to those who had not had the chance to participate in the elections cancelled by the coup and, moreover, to political forces that emerged during military rule. Although this did not amount to an unequivocal commitment for the legalization of the Communist Party, it was nevertheless a statement of intent for the new political system to be genuinely pluralistic and open to competition.³²

To the End of Military Rule

Karamanlis' statement of 23 April 1973 was the hardest assault against the military regime and at the same time a crystallization of the evolution of conservative thinking during the dictatorship. The former premier criticized the dictatorship for intentionally misleading international and domestic public opinion since it had announced the implementation of the constitution of 1968, despite the fact that it retained restrictive practices in public life. He was certain that the people had passed from their initial "tolerance" towards the dictatorship to enmity, with students in the vanguard. He went on to criticize the junta's divisive and dispersive policies within the armed forces and public administration and referred to signs of economic malaise. However, the main theme of his statement was the absence of Greece from

³² Statement of the former deputies, 25 March 1972, in Alikaniotis (ed.), *Κείμενα Παναγιώτη Κανελλόπουλου*, pp. 106-112.

the European integration process, which had been boosted by Britain's accession, along with Ireland's and Denmark's, in the European Economic Community in January 1973. Europeanization, Karamanlis went on, was the new Grand Design (Megali Idea) of the nation, since it would secure the country's economic and social equalization with Europe, coupled with the safeguarding of its national security.

Karamanlis was unusually harsh in his criticism of authoritarianism. The junta had deprived the people of their liberties and provided consumerism as a diversion. However, deprivation of liberties had an incalculable moral impact. Moreover, a reference to the killing of Peisistratos, the tyrant of ancient Athens, was employed as an implicit threat towards the junta if the latter had missed the point. The moral dimension of democracy was eminent in his argument, recalling Kanellopoulos' earlier elaborations. He claimed in particular that farmers, still a numerous and disadvantaged segment of the population, could very well choose the "red" instead of the "white" tyranny if they based their choice on their material circumstances. He proposed a "modern", "progressive" and "serious" democracy that would combine liberty with social justice and order. The emphasis now had been transferred to the ideas of liberty and justice, and order was a somewhat mitigated concept of discipline. Karamanlis endorsed as well "modernity" and "progress"; he was trying to move conservatism forward and disengage his camp from a defensive posture and mentality. In his order of things "seriousness" followed modernity and progress. Karamanlis emphasized that the military rule was deprived of legitimacy and support amongst the population and was also harsh against the business élite that seemed supportive of the regime, referring to this group as the "economic oligarchy" and "opportunists". This passage amounted undoubtedly to a considerable extent to a reappraisal of conservative policies to attract capital and investment in the pre-junta period, heavily criticized then for the concession of excessively favourable terms to interested investors.³³

After Karamanlis' statement the pace of developments accelerated as a consequence of the aborted navy plot. Although the naval officers were not able to initiate their movement in the fleet, the political impact of the affair was not negligible. As it was assumed that the group was pro-royalist, in the sense that the crown was perceived as a symbol of legality, the junta abolished the monarchy. A new constitution was soon promulgated and reserved for

³³ Karamanlis' statement of 23 April 1973, in Svolopoulos (ed.), *Καραμανλής. Αρχείο*, pp. 169-173.

Colonel Papadopoulos, the leader of the junta, an unopposed eight-year term as President of the Republic. His powers were immense as he was exclusively responsible for foreign affairs, defence and public order and was entitled to appoint ministers and determine the budget of the respective ministries. Moreover, he had the right to declare a state of emergency, appoint and dismiss the cabinet and dissolve parliament, one-tenth of which was appointed by him. A constitutional court, whose members were to be appointed by the president, retained the power to dissolve political parties. This institutional setup was almost impossible to be revised since the constitution set unusually high numerical requirements for the modification of various clauses, ranging from seven- to nine-tenths of the total number of deputies.³⁴ The plebiscite of 29 July ratified accordingly Papadopoulos' actions, although it was rather obvious that the outcome was the product of gross manipulation by the authorities. In early October Papadopoulos appointed as prime minister an old hand in Greek politics, Spyros Markezinis, a conservative but not a member of the National Radical Union, and promised an election in early 1974. Although the institutional context was very restrictive and the regime in the making was perceived justifiably as a guided democracy, the prospect of liberalization and elections was tempting for a part of the political élite. The moderate left represented by Elias Eliou was prepared to contemplate participation, although the pro-Moscow wing of the Communist Party and Andreas Papandreou, leader of the Panhellenic Liberation Movement, were strongly opposed to it. The remaining Centre Union, with Georgios Mavros its most eminent representative, was not positively disposed to participation, lining up on this with Kanellopoulos. It was in the conservative camp that dilemmas were more acute. As it was hinted, Kanellopoulos held a principled stance condemning the process as the continuation of the junta.³⁵ In this context he dismissed in advance the political importance of a meeting with Markezinis, which took place at the initiative of the latter.³⁶ Karamanlis did not publicly take part in the debate, but the former minister Georgios Rallis, who was believed to be privy to his thought, would write in the Athens daily *Βραδυνή* on 13 November that the parties should not out of hand disregard the possibilities opened up by liberalization. The parties should submit

³⁴ On the constitution of 1973, see Alivizatos, *Οι πολιτικοί θεσμοί σε κρίση*, pp. 312-331.

³⁵ Interview with Kanellopoulos in *Επτάήμερο* (25 September 1973), in Alikaniotis (ed.), *Κείμενα Παναγιώτη Κανελλόπουλου*, pp. 212-213.

³⁶ Kanellopoulos' statement, 16 October 1973, in *ibid.*, pp. 213-214.

specific terms for the fair conduct of the elections and if these terms were not satisfied the political world should revert to abstention.³⁷

Nevertheless, the issue was resolved by developments beyond the control of the old political class. On 14 November students occupied the premises of the National Technical University of Athens, initiating an uprising that destabilized the regime. Simultaneously a sizeable group of officers, mostly of mid and lower ranks led by Brigadier Dimitrios Ioannidis, was opposed to the regime's liberalization on the grounds that the appointment of Markezinis and the conduct of elections were an admission of the moral bankruptcy of the "revolution of 1967". Papadopoulos' prestige was also low as the officers felt that he sought to establish a personal regime with the cooperation of the corrupted old political world. Ioannidis' following was numerous and held key positions in crucial units. For the mass of officers the student uprising would be an indication that the liberalization process presented dangers of an uncontrolled mobilization leaning to the left.

Thus, the student uprising tested the process undertaken by Papadopoulos and Markezinis and simultaneously presented the conservatives with a serious dilemma. Kanellopoulos was adamant that youth was the avant-garde in the struggle against tyrannical rule. He was also reserved with regard to demands that could be termed as "communist", pointing out that "negative" slogans were incompatible with democracy and were not even shared by the entirety of rebellious youth. However, he reaffirmed his support for the uprising, which he interpreted as a struggle for human and political liberties.³⁸ After the crackdown Kanellopoulos would argue that the suppression of the uprising by the army, proof that the scale of the uprising warranted a military intervention, showed that a government of national unity had to be formed to lay securely the ground for the transition to democratic rule.³⁹

Kanellopoulos' stance was not necessarily representative of conservative opinion. Anti-communist reflex or a more tactical approach prevented other conservative figures from sharing Kanellopoulos' clarity. Constantinos Tsatsos, a distinguished academic, former minister of conservative governments, loyal to Karamanlis, long-acquainted with Kanellopoulos, and future President of the Republic, remarked dryly that when the Technical University's events took place he did not go there nor was he moved. These outbreaks of the "street" did not destabilize the dictatorship but had a communist streak "dangerous" for the

³⁷ Svolopoulos (ed.), *Καραμανλής. Αρχείο*, p. 199.

³⁸ Kanellopoulos' statement, 16 November 1973, in Alikaniotis (ed.), *Κείμενα Παναγιώτη Κανελλόπουλου*, pp. 219-220.

³⁹ Kanellopoulos' statement, 19 November 1973, in *ibid.*, p. 220.

future. The legacy of the occupation during World War II with the Communist Party of Greece seizing the initiative was alive in Tsatsos' thinking.⁴⁰

Karamanlis was reserved and refrained from a public utterance of his views. It is clear from his archive that the information he received on the student uprising was conservative in its approach. A concise note, dated 25 November,⁴¹ with its writer remaining unidentified, pointed out that the atmosphere, as reported in the newspapers, retained "an intense revolutionary character". It was added that apparently the Markezinis government had lost control of the situation, although, rather carefully, there is not a hint of what he should have done in a situation that the same author described as a political flare up.

All in all, in this guarded attitude towards the students' uprising an aversion to mass mobilization is discernible, along with very practical concerns regarding the ability to guide a transition process to democracy. There is no indication of conclusions, if any, that were drawn from this affair with regard to the form and content of a process of transition to democracy. One can only speculate that the conservative leadership had concluded that a democratization process not responding to genuine standards of political and civil liberties would not be successful.

On 25 November 1973 the Ioannidis' group undertook a coup that was executed accurately and prevailed swiftly, bringing to an end the Papadopoulos–Markezinis experiment. The end of the process of controlled liberalization concentrated minds in important circles. This was the case of the American ambassador in Athens. Henry Tasca had met Karamanlis in September 1971. As the American diplomat admitted, he was impressed by Karamanlis' analysis of the "undisciplined" nature of Greek parliamentary institutions, and moreover he felt that it was unfortunate that Karamanlis did not have the chance in 1963 to implement his plans for constitutional reform, which centred upon the enhancement of the executive branch.⁴² In October 1973 Tasca was supportive

⁴⁰ For Tsatsos and his use of the term *πεζοδρόμιο*, see Constantinos Tsatsos, *Λογοδοσία μιας ζωής* [Accounting for a life], Athens: Publications of the Friends, 2000, Vol. II, p. 393.

⁴¹ Note: The events at the Technical University, 25 November 1973, in Svolopoulos (ed.), *Καραμανλής. Αρχείο*, p. 202. Concerning the date, two references contained in the text of the note, one to a Markezinis memorandum and the other to a report of the findings, both produced in the framework of the judicial enquiry that took place in 1975, lead to the conclusion that the note was written or completed well after 25 November 1973, which is stated as the date of the note.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 141-143. On Karamanlis' constitutional plan, see Alivizatos, *Οι πολιτικοί θεσμοί σε κρίση*, pp. 542-554.

of the Markezinis experiment but its demise under the strains of mass mobilization and military dissent convinced him that only Karamanlis could offer a safe exit that would prevent a lurch to the left. On 25 November Tasca would write to the State Department advocating the formation of a government of “national unity” under Karamanlis.⁴³ Tasca and the State Department would suggest during the following months a return to parliamentary institutions as both desirable and safe from an American point of view. Henry Kissinger, though, remained opposed to it until the last moments of the dictatorship.⁴⁴

The military regime collapsed after the coup Ioannidis planned and executed against Archbishop Makarios in Nicosia on 15 July and its failure to prevent the Turkish landing on Cyprus on 20 July 1974. After that the official leadership of the military regime and the armed forces invited the old political élite to form a new government. A request by General Phaedon Gizikis, the Ioannidis-appointed President of the Republic, that the armed forces should retain the control of the ministries of defence and public order was rejected immediately by Mavros.⁴⁵ Although it seemed for a while that Kanellopoulos was to be appointed prime minister, he was not the definite choice of the military, who opted in the last hour for Karamanlis on the assumption that he would handle more successfully the complex and delicate situation with the armed forces. Karamanlis would form a government of national unity along with the Centre Union, but he was the dominant figure of the coalition. It was nonetheless a sign of the times that Kissinger would confide to his State Department associates that he was concerned by the fact that, despite Karamanlis’ return, the army and the crown were unable by the force of events to function as the brakes of the new democratic regime.⁴⁶ The post-Civil War era had come to an end, and political conservatism under Karamanlis was to shape a parliamentary system with genuine pluralism and Europeanism as its tenets.

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⁴³ Sotiris Rizas, *Οι Ηνωμένες Πολιτείες, η δικτατορία των συνταγματαρχών και το Κυπριακό ζήτημα, 1967-1974* [The United States, the dictatorship of the colonels and the Cyprus Question, 1967-1974], Athens: Patakis, 2002, pp. 165-166.

⁴⁴ Minutes of Secretary of State Kissinger’s regional staff meeting, 20 March 1974, in Laurie Van Hook (ed.), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976*, Vol. XXX, Washington, DC, 2000, pp. 47-60.

⁴⁵ Stavros Psycharis, *Τα παρασκήνια της αλλαγής* [The background of change], Athens: Papazisis Publications, 1976, p. 166.

⁴⁶ Memorandum of conversation in Kissinger’s office, 23 July 1974, 2.30 pm, in Van Hook (ed.), *Foreign Relations*, pp. 393-397.