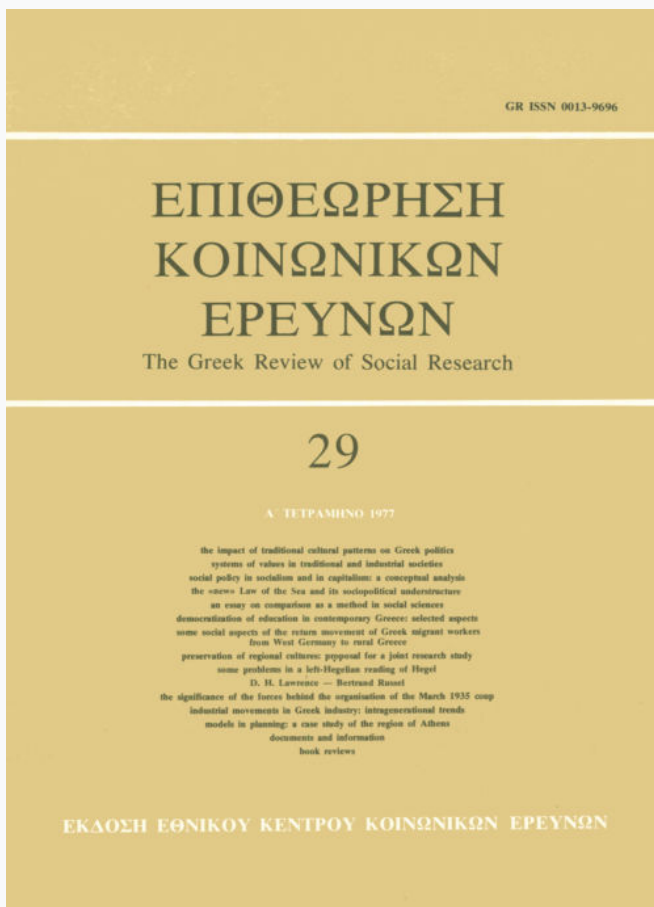


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## The significance of the forces behind the organisation of the March 1935 coup

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**the significance  
of the forces  
behind the organisation  
of the March 1935 coup**

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The Greek military of the interwar period constituted a major source of political instability. A profound transformation of the social make-up of the officer corps resulting from the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) and the subsequent politicisation of the officers due to the clash between Throne and Parliament, had a lasting impact on the conduct of Greek politics. Between 1916 and 1935 there were seven important military upheavals (1916, 1922, 1923, 1925, 1926, 1933, 1935) including a dictatorship under General Pangalos<sup>1</sup> (1925-1926) and countless incidents of pressure exerted on the government by individual officers or military cliques.

The indigenous anomalies that plagued parliamentary life between 1915 and 1926 and the rise of authoritarian ideology in Europe, contributed to the ebb of the fortunes of Democracy in Greece. Although the opposition against the Monarchy mounted after the Asia Minor catastrophe and the coup of 1923, republican fervour among the military was not combined with corresponding respect for parliamentary Democracy. Such military strongmen of the Republic as Kondylis, Pangalos, Plastiras, Othonaios, etc., each savoured a personal version of authoritarian rule.<sup>2</sup>

From the end of 1922, «Dimokratia» with its double meaning of Democracy and Republic, had become a very inclusive term indeed. For Venizelist Liberals «Dimokratia» had been in fact secured with the intervention of the army and the execution of the most prominent Royalist leaders in 1922. To the Republicans in the army between 1923-1924, it signified the expulsion of the Monarchy and its clientele. Only to a few progressive intellectuals, adherents of the Republic, was the term associated with social reform.<sup>3</sup> Attitudes concerning its legitimacy varied, but military anomalies following its foundation earned it the cynical scepticism of many Greeks. Regardless of whether it was favourably inclined to it or not, the public was aware of its partisan character. Friends were complacent, foes outraged. Terminating a brief interlude of cooperation between the major parties (1927), Venizelos' return in active politics (1928) confirmed the impression that the Republic was associated with his party.

Between 1926-1933 the credibility of parliamentary institutions was temporarily restored but the repercussions of economic recession in Europe

1. Biographical notes may be found in Appendix below.

2. S. Maximos, *Parliament or Dictatorship? (Koinovoulia i dictatoria)*, Athens 1975. According to Maximos, parliamentary democracy in Greece between 1922-26 alternated with dictatorship as different solutions for the preservation of the bourgeois system:

3. A. Papanastasiou, *Political Writings (Politika Kimena)*, Vol. A, Athens 1976, pp. 358, 383, 423.

caused serious turbulence. Although it is true that Greek politics had been in the past conducted on a highly personalised level, devoid of sincere adherence to principles of ideology, the cynicism which prevailed in politics after 1933 was quite unprecedented.

In March 1935 a coalition of Republican officers and civilians sought to overthrow the government of Panagis Tsaldaris (a moderate conservative) allegedly to avert an impending reinstatement of the Monarchy in Greece. Of the surviving participants in the coup of March 1935, interviewed between 1969 and 1971, not one admits to have favoured the idea of the insurrection at the time of its outbreak. Some claim to have been drawn into it unwittingly, others halfheartedly, motivated by a sense of solidarity towards their comrades. Ex post facto denunciations are not uncommon in private retrospective accounts. What is interesting to note, however, is that Republicans opposed to the coup chose to be so only on the practical grounds that the action was adjudged untimely. There are two things that make the sincerity of this opposition questionable: a) In view of the favourable Republican position within the army and navy, rational forecasts gave the coup a good chance of success. b) Our observation that most of the Republican sense of outrage is directed against those who implemented the coup rather than against Eleftherios Venizelos, who gave the signal. Had the coup succeeded, sentiments might very well have been affirmative.

Be that as it may, we have yet to hear a single voice from the Republican camp raised against the idea of overthrowing by arms a popularly elected government in order to preserve the Republic. A general inability to abstract principles from their personal perception of their convenience, accounts for the failure of interwar Republicans to realise that they used the term «Dimokratia» in a very partial manner.

It would be necessary to note that a distinction between civilian and military conspirators would not clarify at all the nature of the opposition that existed between the different groupings that made up the loose Republican coalition responsible for the coup of 1935. A more useful distinction would be one between the different categories of the military that were implicated. There were roughly three such categories:

a) The group which played a lesser role in the outbreak of the coup, made up of older retired officers who somehow felt, like Nikolaos Plastiras<sup>1</sup>, that the mission of the officer does not

cease with his career in the service. Generals Neokosmos Grigoriadis and Anastasios Papoulas, both members of the «Republican Defence», were two such cases.

b) Officers who had either been dismissed during the fall of dictator Theodoros Pangalos in 1926, like Napoleon Zervas and Andreas Kolialexis, or after the attempt of Plastiras to seize power in 1933, like Leonidas Spais, Ilias Diamesis and Miltiadis Kimisis, who were primarily moved by their desire to reenter the ranks of the army or navy. These officers formed the radical clique in the «Republican Defence». Their obstinate faith in Plastiras and their impatience in pressing for action soon brought them at odds with

c) the ESO, «Elliniki Stratiotiki Organosis» (Greek Military Organisation), consisting up to 1934 of junior officers, graduates of the Military Academy, with ambitious plans to reform the army into an elitist institution, independent of politics<sup>2</sup>.

Although the coup was initially conceived by Venizelist politicians as a preemptive measure against the Populist government, the active participation of civilians in it was ultimately limited to Venizelos and a few of his close friends. Most of the politicians had made feeble attempts to direct different military groupings and were either ignored by the officers or willingly dropped out at various stages of the organisation. An account of the civilian role in the coup is necessary at this point.

On 29 June 1933 Venizelos was greeted in Thessaloniki by an enthusiastic crowd demonstrating against the government's half-hearted efforts to apprehend the criminals responsible for an attempt against his life.

On 3 July 1933, five prominent Liberals met at Alexandros Zannas' house in Thessaloniki (Venizelos, Alexandros Mylonas, Alexandros Papanastasiou, Ioannis Sophianopoulos, Georgios

after failing to prevent the Populist leader, P. Tsaldaris, from assuming office on the next day of the elections (6 March 1933). A number of his accomplices were dismissed from the army and navy.

T. Veremis, «Unpublished Documents Concerning the Coup of 6 March 1933» (Anekdotia keimena gyro apo to kinima tis 6 Martiou 1933), *Mnimon*, Athens 1975, pp. 81-100.

2. Stephanos Saraphis, who had dominated the ESO by March 1935, had a different view of the role of the military. He felt that the Armed Forces could direct policy from a distance, threatening politicians with strong measures if they failed to adhere to their wishes. His attachment to his patron, General Alexandros Othonaios, for whom he might have envisaged the Presidency of the Republic, brought him into direct collision with Othonaios' rival since 1927, Plastiras, and the «Republican Defence».

S. Saraphis, *Memoirs (Istorikes Anamniseis)*, Vol. I, Athens 1953, p. 385.

1. Plastiras: Venizelist retired officer who fled the country

Kaphandaris). During the meeting, Kaphandaris pointed out that the Republic had been seriously eroded by changes in the Army and the Police, effected by the Minister of Army Affairs, Georgios Kondylis. Fearing a forthcoming Royalist dictatorship, he moved for the formation of a military association to act as a safeguard for the Republic. Both Mylonas and Sophianopoulos agreed but Papanastasiou objected on the grounds that military organisations rarely retained their defensive character and easily assumed the offensive.<sup>1</sup> Kaphandaris' proposition that Zannas should study the matter on behalf of the rest was finally accepted. Venizelos left for France with the assurance that the organisation was under way,<sup>2</sup> while fifteen days later, Kaphandaris, Papanastasiou, Zannas, Maris and Mylonas met at the latter's house in Kifisia. Zannas was officially appointed president of the prospective military organisation and a liaison between officers and politicians was established. In spite of his own doubts, Zannas accepted the position of president on condition that a) total secrecy would be kept concerning the inner core of officers, b) he would be given complete freedom of activity, c) the Republican politicians would actively support the effort.<sup>3</sup>

The first person initiated into the organisation by Zannas was an old hand in naval conspiracies, Captain Andreas Kolialexis. Although dismissed from the Navy after the fall of dictator Pangalos in 1926, he commanded respect among Republican naval officers. Along with Saraphis (whom Zannas persuaded to join), Kolialexis and Zannas formed the first Revolutionary committee. The latter had in the meantime succeeded in bringing together Venizelos and Plastiras after a year of total estrangement. Plastiras, understandably, nursed a grudge against his old patron for having abandoned him while executing his coup of

March 1933—a coup that Venizelos had initially given the impression of encouraging. Venizelos' initiative in asking for a reconciliation did not fail to flatter his client into agreeing to cooperate.

Frequent rumours of a Kondylis-Metaxas dictatorship were in the air from the beginning of 1934 but, by July, the threat of an improvised uprising by the «Republican Defence» was far more serious. Plastiras, who had favoured such a coup, was reluctant to persuade the «Defence» to postpone the date of action but Venizelos finally convinced him of the need for greater coordination. On 1 August 1934, an agreement was signed by Zannas, Venizelos and Plastiras. Reconciliation between the two pillars of the Republic brought no joy to the «Republican Defence» whose plans for an early coup were foiled. The Revolutionary Committee, however, was reshaped to admit the representative of the «Defence», retired General Prassos Vlachos.<sup>4</sup>

Periclis Argyropoulos was the foremost political adviser of the «Republican Defence». In his memoirs he claimed to have originated the idea of preemptive action against the Populist government after the attempt on Venizelos—a suggestion which the latter had not overruled. His insistence on precisely that strategy throughout 1934 caused much discord and confusion in the Republican camp. Zannas, whom he accused of authoritarian tendencies and of satisfying personal ambitions, became his primary target from the outset. He also accused him of trying to persuade Venizelos to assume the leadership of the coup, thus endangering the latter's prestige in case of failure.<sup>5</sup>

The allegation is not altogether sound because, besides Zannas' testimony to the contrary, the latter's mother-in-law, that distinguished lady of Venizelism, Mrs. Penelope Delta, had repeatedly appealed to Venizelos to abstain from official leadership of the conspiracy. Either because he had approached their rival organisation of officers on active duty or because they suspected him of aiming at the leadership of the coup, the «Republican Defence» began to slander Zannas to Plastiras.

Exasperated by the slanderous attitude of the «Defence», Zannas decided to resign from the organisation of the coup. His final break with Argyropoulos came about when it became apparent that the latter had been preparing an uprising without previously consulting the Revolutionary

1. G. Daphnis, *Greece between the Two Wars (I Ellas metaxy Dyo Polemon)*, Vol. II, Athens 1955, p. 295.  
S. Gonatas, *Memoirs (Apominonevmata)*, Athens 1958, pp. 357-358.

2. The Archive of Alexandros Zannas. The owner of the Archive wishes to remain unknown. Newspaper *TO VIMA*, 25 January 1959, «The Fatal Coup which Caused Venizelos' Death» (To Moirion Kinima pou Efero ton Eleftherio Venizelo ston Tafo), by A. Zannas.

3. Interview with Mrs. Virginia Zannas, Kifisia, summer of 1970.

Alexandros Zannas, Venizelos' most respectable supporter in Thessaloniki had been one of the architects of the «National Defence» movement which instigated in 1916 a revolt against the position of the King vis-a-vis the commitment of Greece on the side of the Entente. He later became a successful Minister of Air in a cabinet under Venizelos.

4. E. Kavadias, *The Naval War of 1940 (O Naftikos Polemos tou 1940)*, Athens 1950, p. 36.

4. Newspaper *TO VIMA*, 27 January 1959, p. 1. Article by A. Zannas. The Archive of Zannas.

5. Interview with Mrs. Marie Argyropoulos, Athens, October 1970.

P. Argyropoulos, *Memoirs (Apominonevmata)*, Vol. I, Athens 1970, pp. 478-480.

Committee.<sup>1</sup> Argyropoulos, who was hoping to force the hand of officers on active duty to turn against the government, accused Zannas and Saraphis of foiling his plans. Saraphis, whom he considered a friend of Othonaios and hence opposed to Plastiras, he accused of using Venizelos' prestige in order to manipulate the views of officers on active duty.<sup>2</sup>

In August 1934 Venizelos wrote the following letter to Gonatas:

...our friend Mr. Zannas will bring you minutes of the agreement concluded with General Plastiras after long discussions through which we hope to avoid isolated and hasty uprisings by impatient Republican elements. Choosing you was imperative after the overt enmity of the recalcitrant Republicans against Mr. Zannas. There is no other person who combines the common trust of myself and the Leader (Plastiras).<sup>3</sup>

It was through the enclosed minutes of the agreement that Gonatas discovered he had already been chosen to replace Zannas.<sup>4</sup>

Without bothering to consult him, Venizelos had decided that Gonatas would be the president of the Revolutionary Committee. Gonatas complained in his *Memoirs* that:

...neither Vlachos nor Saraphis ever appeared to me and the signatories of the agreement (Venizelos-Plastiras) kept corre-

1. The Archive of Zannas. Daphnis, Vol. II, p. 284.

2. Argyropoulos, p. 480.

3. Gonatas, pp. 365-366.

4. Gonatas, pp.366-367. Eleftherios Venizelos - Nikolaos

Plastiras

Mr. Zannas had informed us that impatient officers who had been dismissed from the Army owing to the events of 6 March 1933, had decided to stage a coup on a specific day. The operation was postponed because the units of Northern Greece and officers in Athens were informed by Mr. Zannas that Venizelos disapproved of the movement. To avoid similar isolated Republican activities which may lead to disaster the following decisions were reached: 1) The formation of a three-member committee consisting of Capt. Kollalexis, Col. Saraphis and Gonatas—who will be its president and without whose opinion no military action will be taken. 2) Efforts to reach an understanding with the government on the following points: Re-election of Zaimis (President of the Republic), return to the electoral system of proportional representation and general amnesty for members of the coup of 1933. Once the system of proportional representation is established Venizelos will not run for office again... 3) If the Government refuses the plea of the Senate for a joint session and attempts a second voting of its electoral bill only by parliament, the parties of the «National Coalition» will pursue the organisation of demonstrations to protest against the infringement of their rights and will demand that the unconstitutional bill be discarded by the President of the Republic... if all the above are not taken into consideration and the government conducts elections with the unconstitutional electoral system, then the opposition will abstain and will protect the (Republican) system in accordance with the final article of the Constitution, pursuing the fall of the government through any means, including force.

sponding and coming in contact directly with various revolutionary elements.<sup>5</sup>

Saraphis contradicted Gonatas in his own *Memoirs*, stating that he had consulted him on several occasions but that Gonatas had been indecisive.<sup>6</sup> Reluctant to involve himself directly but too timid to refuse Venizelos, Gonatas tried on several occasions to dissuade his leader from carrying out the coup. Unfortunately Venizelos had already been bound by a framework of commitments which even he could not control. Zannas' removal from the Revolutionary Committee plagued the organisation of the coup with lack of efficient coordination.

Venizelos' conviction that the Republican officers were still the servants of his political designs was, by 1935, somewhat outdated. His flight to Crete after friction with members of the government in Parliament, had deprived him of a clear view of budding military associations. Although old allies such as General Othonaios, were still active in the army, it was the General's staff-officer Colonel Saraphis who aimed at the leadership of an organisation made up of junior officers. Contrary to what Venizelos may have thought, the members of the ESO (Greek Military Organisation) had no intention of facilitating the return of officers who had been dismissed for collaborating with Plastiras in his attempt of 1933. Between the members of the ESO and the dismissed officers of the «Republican Defence» there was no point of agreement other than their general desire to overthrow the Populist government. A serious gap separated officers of the Plastiras type, who had little *formal* military education, and the more sophisticated Military Academy graduates of the ESO. Venizelos failed to realise the incompatibility of the goals of the two groups. It was this very rivalry among hypothetical allies that undermined his coup of 1935.

The origins of the ESO can be placed sometime in early 1932 when Venizelos was raising the threat of military intervention against his Populist opponents. With General Othonaios organising a clandestine «Military League», insubordination had again become rampant. Younger officers such as Lieutenants Nikolaos Skanavis and Markos Kladakis, although Venizelists, were indignant about the way political patrons were corrupting the professional ethos of the officers and were shaping them into the familiar «condottieri» of the twenties (Loufas, Karakoufas, Dertilis, and others). By 1932, the

5. Gonatas, p. 366.

6. Saraphis, p. 347.

percentage of Military Academy graduates among junior officers had risen. Graduates from «Evelpidon» with a pronounced degree of professional pride constituted a separate caste within the army. They read literature and psychology, discussed international affairs and looked down on their seniors who had risen from the ranks. Education was at a higher premium than reckless valour and the independence of the army from politics their most treasured goal.<sup>1</sup>

Late in 1932 Lieutenant Nikolaos Skanavis, leader of the class of 1922, met with Lieutenant Georgios Kostopoulos to discuss the formation of an association between junior graduates of the Military Academy. The need for such an association was based on the following reasons: 1) *Grievances of remaining in the same rank indefinitely*. All members of the class of 1922 were in 1932 still Lieutenants. On this issue they reiterated the relevance of the pronouncement of 1909. Retirement of officers who had been kept in the armed forces more than the time limit was necessary. 2) *Officers who had been in the past associated with political action* and whose presence therefore caused controversy, should also be retired. Political bigotry, they felt, had divided the army and made it a prey to aspiring politicians. 3) *No important purchase of arms had been effected since 1925*.<sup>2</sup>

Yannis Tsigantes, leader of the class of 1920, was the first Captain to be initiated into the ESO. He was a dashing young man of thirty five with an air of self-assurance which perhaps betrayed his upper middle class background from Rumania. In 1929, he had published a military manual with far greater pretensions than any army literature up to date.<sup>3</sup> It was a mixture of Logic, Psychology, Sociology and Biology and had the unusual feature of containing very few subjects of military concern. He began the book with a statement that the army had been the foremost school for Democracy and went on to say that officers were entrusted with the task of transmitting national ideals as well as military training. There are chapters that deal with «Reasons for Human Psychological Differences», «The Relationship between Psychology and Physiology» and a note in the bibliography that the author had consulted 500 documents before attempting to write his manual.

1. We have reached that conclusion after examining the attitude of 50 Academy graduates of that period.

2. Interviews with Christ. Tsigantes, London, June 1970 and Athens, August 1970, Nikolaos Skanavis, Athens, August 1970, Markos Kladakis, Athens, December 1970, September 1971 and October 1972.

3. Y. Tsigantes, *The System of Training (I Methodos Ekpedefseos)*, Athens 1929.

This extravagant undertaking might give a good idea of the confusion that reigned in the minds of those who provided ESO with ideological directives. With his mixture of contemporary know-how and worldly arrogance, Yannis Tsigantes had become a model of the modern officer and probably the most prominent member of the ESO.

The founders of the association consisted mainly of Venizelist officers from the class of 1922 who made it a provision of the charter that membership was limited to Republican junior officers possessing no higher than a Captain's rank. Being a graduate of Evelpidon was not explicitly mentioned but was in fact a requirement for admission until 1933. The original charter did not provide for a leader and the position of the Chairman rotated among its members. Meetings were called whenever a member thought it was necessary. Its loose organisation failed to protect the ESO from ambitious strongmen and impeded its original aspiration for a system of democratic participation.

In 1933, Kladakis who was in favour of larger membership suggested that the political position of officers should not be considered among the prerequisites for admission. The majority of members of the ESO agreed and the provision for «confirmed Republicanism» gave way to acceptance «regardless of political conviction». (Kostopoulos disagreed and left the organisation.) An alliance took place between officers of different party loyalties who joined forces to promote their occupational interests. Concern over promotion had temporarily convinced members of the ESO that political conflict did not serve their aims. Therefore, all junior officers who shared a vague notion of reform coupled with a very precise desire to see some of their seniors go, were welcome.<sup>4</sup> It was however a brief honeymoon. In February 1933, shortly before Plastiras' coup in March, the leaders of the classes of 1920, 1921 and 1922 met to discuss the introduction of a clause in the charter requiring members to accept the Republican system regardless of party preferences. The Populist party had already recognised the Republic but some of its supporters in the army had preferred to harbour their Royalist sentiments and leave the ESO. The leader of the class of 1921, Captain Ketses, was the first to go.

The leader of each class was the cadet with the

4. Markos Kladakis' private papers. Interview with Athanasios Tountas, Athens 1970. L. Spais, *Fifty Years a Soldier (Peninta Chronia Stratiotis)* Athens 1970, p. 206.

highest overall average in lessons, conduct and personality. (It is not clear how personality was measured.) He was responsible for every collective activity of his class and, in some cases, even for the individual conduct of his classmates. Class leaders enjoyed considerable prestige and benefits throughout their career because the seniority of officers was not only determined by their year of graduation but also their rank within their own class. Nevertheless, we have noticed that, with few exceptions,<sup>1</sup> there had been no correlation between academic rank and subsequent achievement (or notoriety) in the army.

The ESO was opposed to Plastiras' coup of March 1933. The Tsigantes brothers along with many young Venizelist officers had signed a protocol denouncing the attempt.<sup>2</sup> Whether they were against Plastiras or the coup is not clear; what seems certain however is that the coup had been executed by officers of the variety that the ESO would have been very glad to get rid of. General Kimisis had persuaded Colonels Diamesis, Spais and Bizanis to join. Diamesis was known as the «prince of the Republic» because of his intense concern for its welfare, and L.S. as the «midwife» for his constant involvement in military politics.<sup>3</sup> None of them were Academy graduates.

Plastiras' abortive coup was followed by the dismissal of 40 officers suspected of complicity. From that point up to the outbreak of the March coup of 1935, these officers constantly conspired against the government. After the attempt on Venizelos' life, they joined the «Republican Defence»—the arch-rival of the ESO—and were sarcastically termed by Venizelists the «viastiki», short for «those in a hurry to regain their position».

In 1934, the Minister of Army Affairs, Kondylis, raised the question of reforming the existing seniority in the Army list. Officers who had joined Venizelos on the side of the Entente in 1916 had been rewarded with a bonus of ten months added to their seniority standing. Those who had chosen to remain in their posts in Athens therefore found themselves overtaken in seniority by some of their juniors.<sup>4</sup> The ESO agreed that the ten months bonus be set aside but that the principle of promotion in the field of action should remain. The ESO had obviously no-

thing to lose by Kondylis' proposed change since its oldest members had graduated from the Military Academy in 1920. On the contrary Major Alkimos Bourdaras, a member of the «National Defence» of 1916, had much to lose by the reform and was preparing his own private coup against the government. Yannis Tsigantes immediately suggested cooperation with Bourdaras but was overruled by most officers, including Kladakis and Skanavis. The idea of conspiring simply because Bourdaras' seniority was at stake did not appeal to anyone except for Tsigantes who thought it opportune to annex his organisation. The possible benefit did not seem to be worth all the deceit involved and Tsigantes' prestige suffered a setback.<sup>5</sup>

In February 1934 Yannis Tsigantes proposed amending the charter in favour of admitting senior officers. In spite of initial reaction against the proposition, the decision was adopted, at the expense of the organisation's homogeneity. Along with the elitist junior officers of the Military Academy came officers with little formal military education and very specific political commitments based on past activities. The association was henceforth marked by the very characteristic it was set up to oppose: allegiance to a civilian patron, in this instance, Venizelos. Kladakis complained that Tsigantes had often kept the ESO uninformed about activities he was carrying out while wrongly posing as the leader of the organisation. His practice of taking unauthorised initiatives was furthered by Saraphis who in turn claimed to be in charge. As a result of this influx of middle ranking officers, the founders of ESO were increasingly ignored as a decision-making body and the principles of their charter were ignored and contradicted.<sup>6</sup>

Intensive recruitment of new members was carried out throughout 1934 by most ESO members. Yannis Tsigantes had come into contact with Saraphis and Kladakis initiated Colonel Spyros Giorgoulis into the organisation.<sup>7</sup> The reason for such urgency was a report given to Saraphis by Othonaios that the latter had been approached by

5. Markos Kladakis' private papers.

6. Interview with Christ. Tsigantes, London, June 1970.

7. Officers initiated had to sign a protocol of «honour»: «Faithful to our oath to defend our country and the Republican regime, we, the undersigned, assume the responsibility upon our word of military honour... to resist any attempt at establishing a dictatorship or the Monarchy or any threat against the existing Republican constitution. Keeping secret the content of the present document is also a question of honour for us.»

This particular copy in the possession of General A. T. is dated 24 April 1934 and bears the signatures of fifteen members.

1. Pangalos, who had been the leader of the class of 1918, was such an exception.

2. Information by Christ. Tsigantes.

3. Information by Plastiras' adjutant Col. Mihalīs Minioudakis, December 1971.

4. Daphnis, vol. II, pp. 259-258. L. Paraskevopoulqs, *Memoirs (Anamniseis)*, Vol. 1, p. 310.

an agent of Kondylis and asked if he was interested in participating in a dictatorial triumvirate.

The «Republican Defence» on the other hand was officially authorised in 1932 as an association of retired officers and elderly civilians with strong feelings that the Republic should be preserved. Its first president was a leading officer in Venizelos' secessionist army of Thessaloniki in 1916 and later Senator of the Republic, Neokosmos Grigoriadis. After Plastiras' coup and the attempt against Venizelos, the character of the «Republican Defence» changed from a social gathering of senior citizens into a centre of belligerent propaganda and conspiratorial activity. Its ranks were revitalised by the entry of dismissed officers from the coup of March 1933. Its renaming as «Panhellenic Republican Defence» was meant to emphasise its nation-wide appeal and following.

In May 1934 the presidency of the organisation was assumed by the ex-anti-Venizelist commander of the Greek forces in Asia Minor, Anastasios Papoulas. A phenomenon of complete change of heart matched only by Kondylis and Admiral Hadjikyriakos,<sup>1</sup> Papoulas had been totally rehabilitated from his Royalist past. During the trials of the Gounaris government in 1922, he had appeared as a witness for the prosecution, an act which earned him the everlasting hatred of the anti-Venizelist world. His subsequent volte-face might very well have been an effort to protect himself from his ex-colleagues' revenge.

Towards the end of 1933, Papoulas launched a journalistic onslaught against the government. His article in the first edition of the daily «Republican Struggle» (11 October 1933), began as follows: «The reinstatement of the Monarchy can only bring disaster and destruction». Towards the end of the article he appeals for a socialist regime:

...we have to understand that the countries of the world are going through a crisis and that since the war people have been trying to shape their regimes into Republics with a social context rather than adhering to a collection of dead articles in the hands of an oligarchy of capitalists.

Two weeks later, in an article in the same newspaper, he drew the public's attention to Kondylis' effort to change the Army List.

The well known plan for changing the republican composition of the army has been discussed in the Senate. It is imperative that all Republican leaders and all the Republican people should remain on the alert. The Republican officers should be

ready to defend our Republican regime... These officers who bear the great honour of playing the most important part in establishing the Republic should be aware, and they are aware, that with them lies the responsibility for protecting the Republic... The Republican officers have written with their struggles one of the most brilliant pages of contemporary Greek history. This history they must brighten with new struggles. We should not forget that during the hundred years of our independence the Army has played a very important role for the democratisation of our political regime (1843, 1863, 1909). In 1922 the Republican officers mitigated the Asia Minor disaster... The Greek officers in their large majority belong to the working people... that is why now the people and the Army will defend the Republic and will then march together towards new social struggles...<sup>2</sup>

Most of the newspaper was dominated by pictures of Plastiras, who was generally considered as the leader of the «Republican Defence» in absentia. A reply to the «Republican Struggle» was the pro-government «Popular Struggle» with articles even surpassing its rival in fanaticism:

Greece will never rest until the miserable old man from Halepa (Venizelos) is led like a common criminal to the gallows or to the mad-house.<sup>3</sup>

Venizelos himself tried to keep Papoulas in line:

...You have to try and avoid all misunderstanding about your organisation. Make it clear so that everyone will understand... that your organisation has no other purpose except the defence of the Republic, if endangered. The government may remain in power as long as parliament supports it. Under these terms I will declare that I agree and give my blessing to the «Panhellenic Republican Defence»...<sup>4</sup>

The «National Republican Sentinel of Northern Greece» was founded in August 1933 in Thessaloniki and its charter was approved by a court on 11 November 1933. The stated reasons for its foundation were the following: a) the Senate was threatened with extinction, b) distinguished members of the Populist party had formed Royalist clubs with the sole purpose of restoring the Monarchy, c) the most dangerous of these organisations, the «National Political Association», was blessed by the government itself, d) members of the said organisation paraded in central streets in Athens accompanied by a naval band, e) two ministers were present in one of the organisation's rallies applauding Royalist slogans, f) ministers threatened to exile directors of Republican clubs, g) unconstitutional laws were put into effect that threatened the position of Republican officers in the army, h) there was also the attempt against the life of Venizelos.<sup>5</sup>

2. Newspaper *Dimokratikos Agon*, 25 October 1933.

3. Newspaper *Laikos Agon*, 13 December 1933.

4. Y. Benekos, *The Coup of 1935 (To Kinima tou 1935)*, Athens 1958, p. 70.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 71.



Papoulas established close ties with the «National Republican Sentinel of Northern Greece» which became a branch of the «Republican Defence». In a solemn ceremony in Thessaloniki, he made a clear insinuation about the intentions of the «Defence» while presenting the organisation with a Greek flag, pointing out that «this is a battle standard, not something you hang outside a club».<sup>1</sup> In spite of the second article of its statute stating its intent to observe the law, the organisation had already tasted the success of unauthorised activity. On 25 October 1934 armed members of the «Defence» had apprehended the bandit Karathanasis, who was hired to kill Venizelos, and gave him up to the police. Although Karathanasis was a wanted man, government newspapers protested strongly against the arbitrary action of the «Republican Defence».<sup>2</sup>

As a result of the alarm caused by the election of Kotzias, a Royalist, as Mayor of Athens, officers on active duty gathered at Lt. Col. Christ. Tsigantes' home to decide the battle formation of the ESO. A staff was organised along the lines of the official military model, without deciding however on a chief of that staff. The 1st Bureau was responsible for *organisation and command* and would be directed by Lt. Col. Giorgoulis with the assistance of Lt. Col. Hondros. The 2nd Bureau would deal with *information and intelligence* headed by Col. Petros Grigorakis and Lt. Col. Christ. Tsigantes. The 3rd Bureau was concerned with *operations and communications* and was the responsibility of Col. Saraphis. Captain Yannis Tsigantes would act as general coordinator of all three Bureaus. Representative of the organisation in Thessaloniki: Major Sfetsios, Serres: Lt. Col. Hondros, Veria: Lt. Col. Psarros.

The introduction of high ranking officers into the ESO all but erased the influence of the founding junior officers. Their last independent activity was the planning of a coup in the spring of 1934. General Delagrammatis, Director of the Military Academy, however, exerted his influence and managed to avert the uprising.<sup>3</sup>

The «Republican Defence» meanwhile observed with dismay the growing influence of Saraphis over Venizelos. Advised by Zannas, the latter was increasingly favouring the more useful officers on active duty to the powerless dismissed officers. When Diamesis accused Saraphis of trying to prevent dismissed officers from returning to the army, the latter replied rather vaguely that,

for reasons of security, more than one organisation was necessary. According to Kladakis, Saraphis had purposely exaggerated the numbers of the ESO to Venizelos. By claiming that there were 1,400 members compared to the actual 244 (90% of whom were staff officers), he made the feasibility of a coup seem much greater. What he wanted was the prestigious blessing of a patron of Venizelos' calibre and, simultaneously, to prevent the «Republican Defence» from playing any serious role in a prospective operation against the government.<sup>4</sup>

In July 1934, Saraphis was informed by the Athens Garrison that Diamesis was planning to launch a coup with Zervas (the military adventurer of the Pangalos dictatorship who had been dismissed from the army in 1927).

...I sent a message that no one was to move and that they (officers friendly to Diamesis and Zervas) would only obey orders coming from officers on active duty. I informed Zannas of the events and went to Kifissia to inform George Ventiris and General Skandalis that it was necessary to summon Papanastasiou, Kaphandaris et al. to exert all their influence to prevent such a foolish action. At the same time, I informed them (Diamesis, Zervas) directly that not only did I disagree... but that I would join their opponents to save the Republican officers from the consequences of their failure.<sup>5</sup>

It is interesting to note that politicians still possessed such influence over the military as to dissuade them from carrying out their decision to rise.

When word came that the coup had been approved and blessed by Plastiras (Papathanasopoulos told Saraphis this), Zannas decided to go to France and attempt a reconciliation between the latter and Venizelos in order to secure effective coordination of any future activities. The positive result of that effort has already been discussed.

In August 1934 Venizelos invited members of the ESO to Crete. The Cretan statesman pointed out the danger of restoration of the Monarchy to Saraphis, Giorgoulis and Christ. Tsigantes and urged them to act along the same lines as the officers of the pronunciamiento of 1909.<sup>6</sup> Saraphis replied that if circumstances led to a revolution, they would like to have Venizelos as their leader but without the company of councilors such as Maris and Vourloumis, who had brought disre-

4. Interview with Marcos Kladakis, Athens, November 1971.

5. Saraphis, p. 345.

6. Venizelos hoped that the military would limit their intervention to an overthrow of the existing government and that he would be subsequently summoned to step in. The Archive of Plastiras, Interview with Spyros Giorgoulis, October 1972.

1. Benekos, p. 74.

2. Magazine *Epikaira*, 30 January 1970, pp. 62-63, 72.

3. Kladakis' private papers. Saraphis, p. 341.

pute on the Republican camp. It was the first time that a military protégé of Venizelos dared set conditions to his patron. The significance of the incident unfortunately escaped the old statesman who, since the meeting of July 1933, maintained the illusion that the army was faithful to his biddings.<sup>1</sup>

Unwittingly, the ESO helped to diminish the prestige of the Venizelist political leadership but otherwise achieved little as an organisation. The aspirations of its founders to give it a corporate structure by emphasizing criteria of professional merit rather than relations of patronage, came into conflict with the prevailing system of clientage. The ESO had therefore been condemned by the very pretensions of its founding charter. Since most articles were contrary to the traditional operation of clientage networks, the charter fell in disuse while such active members as Saraphis and

Yannis Tsigantes assumed the initiative of recruiting allies on the basis of their personal grievances and ambitions. Principles, therefore, such as a clear separation between civilian and military authority, professional integrity and meritocracy, were replaced by personal criteria.

The subsequent failure of the coup of March 1935 has been attributed to a variety of reasons the most vital of which appear to be the following: I) Undertakings on such a large scale required the kind of formal organization which was impossible to sustain. Given the competitiveness between factions on all levels of Greek society, Venizelos ought not to have delegated authority to so many participants. II) The absence of strong ideological grounds among the various groups involved was thinly disguised by a common Republican position. Diversity of aims and motives hampered cooperation and impaired the outcome of the uprising. The restoration of George II, which came about partly as a consequence of a purge of Venizelist officers following the coup, had a lasting impact on subsequent Greek affairs.

1. Saraphis, pp. 346-347.

#### APPENDIX

**Argyropoulos, Periclis** (1881-1966). Born in Athens, Prefect of Larissa (1910) and of Thessaloniki (1912). A leading figure in the Thessaloniki revolt of 1916. Governor General of Macedonia (1917-1918). With Kondylis, A. inspired the Venizelist «Amyna» movement in Constantinople (1921-1922). He stood by the «Republican Defence» during the coup of 1935.

**King George II** (1890-1948). Son of King Constantine and Queen Sophia. Graduated from the Military Academy in 1909 and furthered his military studies in Berlin. He followed his father into exile in 1917 because the Entente forces chose his younger brother Alexander to become King. He returned to Greece with his father in 1920 and became King in 1922 after Constantine was exiled once more. In 1923 he was forced to leave Greece being accused of complicity in the abortive coup of November of that year. The Republic was officially proclaimed in 1924 and his return to Greece was thereafter prohibited. Following the coup of 1935 he was recalled to the throne after a plebiscite of dubious legitimacy.

**Giorgoulis, Spyros** (1890-1974). Born in Kalamata. Although he did not study in the Academy he belonged to the group of educated officers having graduated from the Law School. A Venizelist of the less intransigent variety he left the organisation of the coup of 1935 before its outbreak and was one of the few to escape the subsequent purge.

**Gonatas, Stylianos** (1876-1967). Born in Patras of middle class parents. Studied in the Military Academy and entered the Infantry Corps. Took part in the war of 1897 and the Balkan Wars (1912-1913). Became Chief of Staff of the First Army Corps in Asia Minor and was promoted to Divisional Commander during the summer of 1922. Although Gonatas was known for his neutralist position during the «dichasmos», he was called to lead, along with Venizelist Plastiras, the Revolutionary Committee of 1922 which forced King Constantine to abdicate, and executed six Royalist Ministers. He became Prime Minister in the military dictatorship of 1922 until 1924 when he left the army. In 1929 he was elected Senator and remained an agent of Venizelism in politics. His implication in the coup of 1935 was marginal.

**Grigoriadis, Neokosmos** (1897-1967). Born in Constantinople. He rose from the ranks and took part in all Greek campaigns between 1897 and 1922. A Venizelist with a strong political position, he took part in the revolt of 1916 and in the trial of the Royalist Ministers in 1922. He retired in 1923 with the rank of Major General and entered politics initially as a Liberal Nationalist and later as a Socialist.

**Hadjikyriakos, Alexandros** (1874-1958). Born on the island of Syros of prosperous parents. Took active part in the pronunciamiento of 1909 and the revolt of 1916. He was dismissed

from the navy in 1920 because of his strong Venizelist position and was readmitted by the Revolution of 1922 as its representative in the navy. His political influence in that service was dominant for at least a decade. His volatile and unpredictable temper made him many enemies on both political camps. Lacking the aptitude for parliamentary politics like Kondylis, he sought to maintain his influence by shifting allegiances from the Venizelist camp to the Populist party in 1932. The coup of 1935 took him by surprise as Minister for the Navy.

**Kaphandaris, Georgios** (1873-1946). Born in a village of Evrytania he studied law in Athens and practiced in Messolonghi and later in Athens. Deputy in 1905. Although a supporter of progressive measures, he disavowed the pronouncement of 1909 and abstained from the elections of October 1910. Later he made peace with Venizelos and held ministerial positions in most of his governments. In 1923 he emerged as the politician most likely to replace Venizelos in the Liberal party. He became a Minister in January 1924 and Prime Minister after Venizelos resigned in February 1924. He too resigned due to military pressure on 12 March 1924, and formed the Progressive Liberal party. After the fall of Pangalos he played an important part in the «Ikoumeniki» government in which he held the Ministry of Finance. Venizelos' return to active politics caused a rift between the two.

**Karavidas, Ioannis** (1891- ). Born in Nafpaktos, graduated from the Naval Academy in 1911 and studied in England. He was dismissed from the navy in 1935 because of his Venizelist position.

**Kimisis, Miltiadis** (1878-1935). Born in Amfilochia. Fought in the Balkan Wars and in Asia Minor. Member of the Revolutionary Committee of 1922. Was dismissed in 1933 after the Plastiras' coup. Although his actual role in the coup of 1935 was minimal, he was executed for being a member of the «Republican Defence».

**Kladakis, Markos** (1900-1973). Born in Symi, an island of the Dodecanese, into a respectable middle class family. His father was a lawyer and Mayor of the island. He graduated from the Military Academy in 1922 and joined the Republican clique of his class. In 1932 he began organising ESO with the aid of classmates Skanavis and Kostopoulos. His foremost aspiration was to clean the army from officers who had not graduated from the Academy and whose non-professional conduct brought shame to the service. He was dismissed from the army after the failure of the coup of 1935. He claimed that he had been opposed to the coup because he objected to the officers in charge, especially Saraphis.

**Kolialexis, Andreas** (1884-1953). Born in Syros. Graduated from the Naval Academy and studied in Portsmouth, England. A devoted Venizelist, he became Commander in Chief of the fleet in 1926 and was dismissed after the fall of Pangalos for having aided him in his dictatorship. He participated in the coup of 1935.

**Kondylis, Georgios** (1878-1936). Born in Roumeli, he joined the infantry as a volunteer in 1896 rising from the ranks. In 1897 he was in Crete and between 1904 and 1908 fought as a guerrilla in Macedonia and then in Thrace. Served in the Balkan Wars and in the army that was made up by the «National Defence» of Thessaloniki in 1916. Served in the Ukraine in 1918-19, and in Asia Minor as a Colonel in 1919-20. From November 1920 until September 1922, he promoted the anti-Royalist cause as a fugitive in Constantinople. In 1923 he was instrumental in putting down the Gargalidis-Leonardopoulos coup. He retired from the army in that year and became

deeply involved in politics. He changed political camps in 1931, moving from extreme Republicanism to a Royalist position. As Minister of Army Affairs he crushed the coup of 1935 and subsequently restored the Monarchy.

**Othonaios, Alexandros** (1879-1970). Born in Gythion, Laconia, he belonged to a middle class family. His father was a civil servant who had married twice and had 9 sons and 5 daughters. Othonaios abandoned his first year of law studies to enter the Military Academy at the same time as Pangalos, Tsimikalis, K. Manetas, Tseroulis and other future prominent figures of the army. The 13 graduates of the class of 1900 were compelled by regulations to enter the infantry because of the shortage of officers in that corps. He took part in the Macedonian struggle, the Balkan Wars, the «National Defence» of Thessaloniki and was wounded in Asia Minor. He became one of the youngest Lt. Generals and remained a leading figure in the conspiratorial «Military League» until its dissolution in 1932. During the coup of 1935 he chose to sit on the fence and wait for the outcome. He was sacked after the failure of the coup.

**Pangalos, Theodoros** (1878-1952). Studied at the Military Academy and in Paris. He was a leading member of the «Military League» of 1909. In 1916 he joined the revolt in Thessaloniki. In 1917 he was appointed Chief of the Personnel Department at the Ministry of Army Affairs. In 1918-20 he was Chief of Staff to Paraskevopoulos' GHQ in Macedonia and in Asia Minor. An ambitious and able political General, he engineered the trial of the six Royalist Ministers and became dictator in 1925. He was overthrown by Kondylis, Zervas and Dertilis and was imprisoned.

**Papagos, Alexandros** (1883-1955). Born in Athens into a prominent Royalist family. Studied in the Brussels Academy and joined the cavalry in 1906. He stood by the Monarchy throughout its long controversy with Venizelos. He was dismissed from the army in 1917. In 1921 he was given a cavalry command in Asia Minor and in 1923 he was dismissed again this time for aiding the Leonardopoulos-Gargalidis coup. He was readmitted in 1927 by the «Ikoumeniki» government and worked quietly for the restoration of the King. In 1935 with Admiral Ikonomou and the Air Force General Repas, he pressed Tsaldaris to resign, thus assisting Kondylis to assume power.

**Papanastasiou, Alexandros** (1878-1936). Having studied political economy and philosophy in Berlin, Papanastasiou on his return to Athens founded the group of «Sociologists». Champion of land reform in Thessaly. Elected deputy, 1910, and joined the Liberal party with his radical followers. 1917-1920, Minister of Communications and other posts. 1922, he was imprisoned after issuing the «Republican Manifesto». Left the Liberal party to found the Republican Union (Dimokratiki Enosis). In 1924, as Prime Minister, he proclaimed the Republic. The intellectual leader of the liberal Republican wing in Greek politics.

**Papoulas, Anastasios** (1887-1935). Promoted from the ranks. 1904, secret government mission to Macedonia. 1912-13, commanding officer 10th Infantry Regiment in Epirus and Macedonia. 1917, tried for treason and imprisoned in Crete. November 1920, released, promoted Lt. General, Commander in Chief of the Greek Army in Asia Minor. Resigned May 1922. November 1922, key witness at the trial of the Six. Thereafter switched sympathy from the anti-Venizelist to the Venizelist cause. 24 April 1935, executed for alleged involvement in the coup of 1935.

**Plastiras, Nikolaos** (1883-1953). Professional soldier turned politician. After serving in the Balkan Wars and N. Epirus, Plastiras joined the Venizelist movement in 1916, winning rapid promotion for distinguished service in Macedonia and the Ukraine. As a Colonel and Regimental Commander in Asia Minor, he remained in the army at the front after November 1920, despite his known Venizelist loyalties. Leader of the revolution of September 1922, Plastiras pursued thereafter an active political and revolutionary career until his death.

**Saraphis, Stephanos** (1890-1959). Born in Trikala, Thessaly. Graduated from the School for NCOs and fought in the Balkan Wars and on the Macedonian front during World War I. Because of his strong Venizelist sympathies he was put *en disponibilité* after the return of the King in 1920. In 1924 he was sent to France to further his military education. He was a staff officer of Othonaios and his protégé. He was dismissed in 1935 for his role in the abortive Venizelist coup. During the German occupation he was the military commander of the ELAS resistance forces.

**Sophoulis, Themistoclis** (1860-1948). Born in Samos to a prominent family. He studied archaeology in Athens and Germany. His political career began in 1900 when he was elected a member of the parliament of independent Samos. In 1912 he took part in an armed operation to set the island free from the last vestiges of Turkish influence. He participated in the revolt of 1916 on the side of Venizelos and became the Minister of Interior in the government of Thessaloniki. In 1917 he became President of Parliament and in 1924 headed a government that lasted for three months. He assumed the position of President of Parliament between 1926 and 1928 and became Minister of Army Affairs in Venizelos' government of 1928. After the latter's death, he assumed the leadership of the Liberal party.

**Spais, Leonidas** (1892- ). Born in Arta, Epirus into a land-owning family. His original plan was to emigrate to the United States but having to complete his army service he volunteered in 1912 and served as a sergeant in the infantry. He rose from the ranks during the Balkan Wars and was given a regular commission in 1914. In 1916 he joined Venizelos in the Thessaloniki revolt. He was active in most military conspiracies between 1922 and 1935. He was dismissed in 1932 and was imprisoned after the abortive coup of 1935.

**Tsaldaris, Panagis** (1868-1936). Born in Corinth, studied law in Athens, Berlin and Paris. He was Minister of Justice in the Gounaris cabinet of February 1915 and was later exiled for his Royalist stand. He became a Minister of Interior in the Rallis government of November 1920. After the execution of Gounaris in 1922 he became the de facto leader of the anti-Venizelist Populist party. In 1927 he was a Minister of Interior in the «Ikoumeniki» government and became Prime Minister in 1932. His moderate position found him at odds both with the Venizelist and Royalist extremists.

**Tsigantes (Svoronos), Christodoulos** (1897-1971). Born in Rumania. Graduated from the Military Academy in 1916 and furthered his studies in Paris. He was promoted very quickly to the rank of Major (1923) but remained in that rank for many years. A friend of Pangalos, he was assigned to a position in Corfu after the latter's fall. His brother Ioannis initiated him into the organisation of the coup of 1935 which cost him his position in the army. He was reinstated by the Greek government in exile during World War II.

**Tsimicalis, Eftymios** (1879-1943). Born in Agrinion. Graduated from the Military Academy in 1900. He went to France for graduate military studies and became a Captain during the Balkan Wars. As a member of the «National Defence» of Thessaloniki, he commanded the Cretan Division. He was given important commands during the Republican period. He held a Ministry in the government of the Generals in 1933 and in 1935 he was in charge of the 2nd Army Inspection. He was retired after the coup of 1935 although he played no part in it.

**Venizelos, Eleftherios** (1864-1936). Entered Cretan politics in 1889 and became a leading figure in the revolutionary movement for unification with Greece. His opposition to Prince George, High Commissioner of Crete, won him a national reputation. From the moment he arrived in Greece in 1910, at the invitation of the «Military League» of the Goudi revolutionaries, until his death in exile in 1936, he dominated Greek politics. Founder and leader of the Liberal party which became the starting point of many distinguished political figures (Kaphandaris, Papanastasiou, Michalakopoulos, Sophoulis, Papanдреου, Mylonas, S. Venizelos).