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### Philhellenism and party politics in Victorian Britain: the Greek Committee of 1879–1881

*Pandeleimon Hionidis*

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# Articles

## PHILHELLENISM AND PARTY POLITICS IN VICTORIAN BRITAIN: THE GREEK COMMITTEE OF 1879–1881

*Pandeleimon Hionidis*

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**ABSTRACT:** The Greek Committee, a body organised and run by Sir Charles Dilke, was publicly launched in May 1879 and functioned as a pressure group to advance Greek territorial claims during the various phases of the question concerning the rectification of the Greek frontier (1879–1881). The timing of the committee's establishment, its membership and appeal to the British public, and the changes brought about in its operations by the change of government in 1880 form a case study of the interweaving of British party politics with philhellenism. In the late 1870s, British philhellenism, that is, interest in the affairs of modern Greece and the advocacy of the "Greek cause", should be viewed within the framework of liberal and radical concerns for the formation of a "true English policy" in foreign affairs, based on the long-standing British interest in continental nationalities.

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In early 1878, Greece enlisted the support of a small group of British Liberal MPs. Sir Charles W. Dilke, the radical figure who was the prime mover of the group, later described when and how he took the initiative of bringing its members together:

On the 22nd January I started an attempt to get up a Greek Committee, an attempt wh[ich] was successful, for our little meeting of this day, of Fitzmaurice and Lefevre and myself, with adhesion by letter of Fitzmaurice's brother, Lansdowne, and of Rosebery, led to the private formation of a Committee, afterwards made public & much enlarged [...]. On the 23rd January Evelyn Ashley, Chamberlain and I had a meeting with regard to Greek matters at wh[ich] we drew up the public declaration of the friends of Greece.<sup>1</sup>

The course of events related to British perceptions of Greece from 1879 to 1881 will be followed here through the examination of the formation, objectives and activities of the Greek Committee. The committee was publicly launched in May 1879 and functioned as a pressure group to advance Greece's territorial claims. The timing of the committee's establishment, its membership and appeal to the British public, and the changes brought about in its operations by the

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Stephen Gwynn and Gertrude M. Tuckwell, *The Life of the Rt. Hon. Sir Charles Dilke*, London: John Murray, 1917, vol. 1, p. 241.

change of government in 1880 form a case study of the interweaving of British party politics with British images of Greece and the nature and limits of Victorian philhellenism.

The involvement of both Britain and Greece in the Eastern crisis, which, in its various stages, lasted from 1875 to 1881, and the heightened interest of the British public in foreign affairs, of course, render the examination of these years an indispensable part of the study of philhellenism in Britain. Moreover, the domestic implications of the crisis made the interaction between public opinion, party politics and foreign policy in Victorian Britain increasingly apparent. Therefore, the examination of the Greek Committee, as a pressure group that operated within this period, can greatly facilitate the understanding of philhellenism as an integral part of wider British conceptions of civilisation and nationality, as well as of contemporary Liberal anxieties on the principles of an “English” foreign policy.

Moreover, the case of the Greek Committee is directly connected with philhellenism and the broader concerns related to its study. In existing works on British philhellenism after the 1820s, two distinct approaches have emerged. In his *Dream Nation*, Gourgouris assigns to classical learning the canonical role in the imaginative construction of modern Greece; according to his account, “in the language of the ‘West’, Greece’s modernity was never articulated independently of its antiquity”.<sup>2</sup> The tradition of literary philhellenism is also traceable in Roessel’s *In Byron’s Shadow*; in this analysis, radicalism and literary philhellenism blended together during the revolutionary years and, personified by Byron, constituted a powerful legacy, appropriately termed “Byronism”, which designated the boundaries of British and American commentaries from 1833 to 1933.<sup>3</sup> The shortcomings of such a static and monolithic approach are fully exposed when Roessel attempts to explain the fluctuations in British philhellenism or the appropriation of its rhetoric by certain individuals. Dilke apparently “saw the Greeks and the Turks within the ideological framework of the early nineteenth century”, since he quoted from Byron’s poems. But research on the period after the 1820s has presented a convincing challenge to the notion of literary philhellenism as the determinant factor of British interest in the Greeks. By tracing the origins of British philhellenism in the specific political and cultural circumstances of the 1820s, Miliori has treated British understanding of the Greeks as an integral part of a wider framework of ideas and

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<sup>2</sup> Stathis Gourgouris, *Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization, and the Institution of Modern Greece*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996, p. 73.

<sup>3</sup> David E. Roessel, *In Byron’s Shadow: Modern Greece in the English and American Imagination*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 4.

attitudes towards national existence in the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> More recently, Toliaas has pinpointed the three main interpretative lines of argument on the philhellenic movement in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: the “concern with Ancient Greece” was linked after the Greek War of Independence with “European protectionism and military interventionism” and, upon the founding of the Greek state, with “patriotic liberalism”.<sup>5</sup> In addition, he stresses the challenges that philhellenism presents to researchers, as it intermingled with “the world of learning and the world of politics” and had “varied uses in different environments”.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, the phenomenon of philhellenism in Victorian Britain should be approached by focusing not only on its individual actors but also on its organised, public manifestations. This article tries to avoid the danger of reducing British interest in modern Greece from 1879 to 1881 to a series of biographical notes because such an approach fails to grasp aspects of British philhellenism that make it a significant element in the history of political agitation in the Victorian age. The examination of the membership, language and activities of the Greek Committee underlines the ideological, cultural and political functions of philhellenism rather than the specific achievements of individual scholars and statesmen. This reorientation, moreover, recognises the paramount importance of “pressure from without” as a mode of expressing opinion in the 1870s and adds some interesting cases to the study of Victorian pressure groups.<sup>7</sup> Of course, examples of “celebrated philhellenes”, such as Gladstone and Dilke, are also examined here. However, in dealing with these examples, emphasis is placed on the interrelation between expressions of sympathy with Greece and the political context, their own position and wider objectives at the time of their perceived enlistment to the philhellenic cause.

The main argument of this article is that in the late 1870s in Britain, the Greek cause benefited most from the liberal and radical attention to Disraeli’s handling of the Eastern Question and recruited members mainly from the radical and Gladstonian wings of the Liberal party. In the eyes of British philhellenes, the

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<sup>4</sup> Margarita Miliori, “The Greek Nation in British Eyes 1821-1864: Aspects of a British Discourse on Nationality, Politics, History and Europe”, DPhil diss., Oxford: St. Hilda’s College, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> George Toliaas, “The Resilience of Philhellenism”, *The Historical Review/La Revue Historique* 13 (2016), p. 60.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 53, 57.

<sup>7</sup> The Greek Committee of 1879 is not mentioned in Howard LeRoy Malchow, *Agitators and Promoters in the Age of Gladstone and Disraeli: A Biographical Dictionary of the Leaders of British Pressure Groups Founded between 1865 and 1886*, New York: Garland, 1983.

Greeks were “oppressed” not by their king or the Turks but by “Beaconsfieldism”, which violated the very essence of “English” principles and values in foreign policy. The overall ambition of this article is to contribute to the study of British understanding of other nations and British self-images, by showing how British images of modern Greece from 1879 to 1881 reflected wider Victorian conceptions of civilisation, politics and “race”. I also hope that this study, with its emphasis on the interdependence of expressions of sympathy for the Greeks, on the one hand, and contemporary diplomatic and political necessities, on the other, will provide a useful background for students of other aspects of Anglo-Greek contact in the second half of the nineteenth century.

First, British comments on the role of Greece and the Greeks during the initial period of the Eastern crisis (1875–1877) will be discussed briefly, with particular emphasis on Gladstone’s article “The Hellenic Factor in the Eastern Question”. The second part will examine the activities of the Greek Committee during the first year of its existence, posing the question of the ideological and political prerequisites for the display of sympathy with the Greek cause in Britain in the late 1870s. Finally, the presentation of the second year in the committee’s life, which roughly coincided with the first year of the new Liberal government, illustrates the limits of philhellenism, especially in its confrontation with the realities and the expedencies of policy making.

### *Greece and the Eastern Crisis, 1875–1877*

The prolonged crisis of the Eastern Question in the second half of the 1870s was the most serious complication in the East after the Crimean War. Events in the Ottoman Empire had a profound impact on Britain as doctrines and established practices of foreign policy were challenged and domestic politics became immensely polarised. Against this background, remarks on Greece and the Greeks during the first two years of the crisis were rare.

The failure of the European Powers to act jointly and effectively in dealing with the disturbances in the Ottoman provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1875 and in Bulgaria in 1876 led to the outbreak of war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire in the spring of 1877. The decision of the British government to adhere to conditional neutrality failed to obtain the support of the queen and to ensure the unity of the government.<sup>8</sup>

Besides its implications for British foreign policy, the Eastern crisis of 1875–1878 had far-reaching repercussions on domestic affairs. From August

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<sup>8</sup> On the divisions within the cabinet and the Conservative party, see Martin Swartz, *The Politics of British Foreign Policy in the Era of Disraeli and Gladstone*, London: Macmillan,

to December 1876, Britain was convulsed by the agitation against the atrocities committed against Bulgarians, “an expression of an intense moral sensibility in public life”, with political, social, religious and regional dimensions.<sup>9</sup> The Eastern Question continued to stir up division in the country in 1877 and provoked violent clashes between the critics and the supporters of the government’s Eastern policy in the first months of 1878, when the term “jingo” entered English political vocabulary.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, developments in the East and at home brought Gladstone back to the political fore as the ideological and personal rival of Beaconsfield, changing party and inner-party balances.<sup>11</sup>

In a period of frantic publicising activity on the East, the issue of Greece, a fragment on the political map of southeastern Europe, and of the future of the Greek subjects of the Ottoman Empire was the focus of only a handful of pamphlets and periodical articles and featured very irregularly in the columns of the political press. As the disturbances of 1875-1876 and the war of 1877 remained confined to the western and northern European provinces of the Ottoman Empire and as Greece did not participate in either, the country’s relations with Britain were not a major cause for concern.

The portion of the British public that, from August and December 1876, became actively involved in agitating against the atrocities committed against the Bulgarians showed virtually no interest in independent Greece or the neighbouring Ottoman provinces of Thessaly and Epirus. The impressive volume of resolutions and petitions passed by public meetings and addressed to the Foreign Office during the parliamentary recess calling for Britain to apply pressure on the Turkish government in favour of the “Christians in the

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1985, pp. 44-56, 61-75. Disraeli was elevated to the peerage as the earl of Beaconsfield in August 1876.

<sup>9</sup> Richard T. Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation, 1876*, London: Nelson, 1963, p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> For the reactions of the British public towards the Eastern crisis in 1877 and 1878, see Ann Pottinger Saab, *Reluctant Icon: Gladstone, Bulgaria, and the Working Classes, 1856-1878*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991, chaps 8 and 9.

<sup>11</sup> Shannon, *Bulgarian*, pp. 268-277. A Liberal narrative with reference to foreign policy, with its legendary figures and its distinct and inherent “true English values”, was finally presented to the electorate as an integrated system of thought during the Midlothian campaign. By 1879 Gladstone had realised the importance of accommodating all three traditions of foreign policy in order to attract a diverse range of British and, especially, Liberal opinion. He endeavoured to restore his links with Palmerston’s legacy by reinventing Britain’s tradition in foreign policy from Canning to himself and to substitute his “moderate interventionism” for a Whiggish sense of moral obligation towards continental nations and Cobden’s “non-interventionism”.

Ottoman Empire” barely mentions the sultan’s Greek subjects. The resolutions, increasingly standardised in form and content, sought “practical independence for the Christian provinces of Bulgaria, Bosnia, Herzegovina, and, if necessary, Montenegro and Serbia”; in other words, the agitators dealt with those aspects of the Eastern Question that, through insurrection or declaration of war against the Ottoman Empire, had caught the public imagination since the summer of 1875.<sup>12</sup> A mention of “the Island of Crete” alongside “Bulgaria, Herzegovina, Bosnia” as provinces deserving “the severance from Turkish rule” in a single resolution passed in Cardiff and the inclusion of Greece and Crete in the list of places where the Turks had committed crimes in the past, “by the indiscriminate massacre of unarmed people, of every age and both sexes”, presented in a resolution from Sheffield, simply confirms the agitators’ quest for incidents that would arouse moral indignation against Ottoman rule. From 1875 to 1877, the policy of Greece and the relative peace in the adjacent Ottoman provinces did not provide the opportunity to foster similar feelings and reactions in favour of the Greek element in the East.<sup>13</sup> Again, Greece and the issue of the future of the Greek population in the Ottoman Empire failed to attract the attention of the speakers at the National Conference on the Eastern Question at St James’s Hall, the “impressively large and broadly based” meeting on 8 December 1876 that was the culmination of the Bulgarian atrocities campaign.<sup>14</sup> Lord Waveney, whose reference to Greece during the afternoon sitting, constituted the sole exception to the rule and represented the mood of the early nineteenth-century British philhellenism; he opened his brief observations on Greece by recalling himself “as a Harrow boy, cheering to the echo when we heard of Navarino”.<sup>15</sup>

In this climate of virtually non-existent interest in the Greek aspect of the Eastern Question, Gladstone’s article “The Hellenic Factor in the Eastern Problem”

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<sup>12</sup> For an example of the form of resolutions during the agitation period, see FO 78/2551, f. 45 (copy of resolutions passed at a public meeting at Exeter, 4 September 1876). For the political, religious and regional profile of the petitioners in 1876, see Shannon, *Bulgarian*, pp. 148-150.

<sup>13</sup> FO 78/2551, f. 198 (Borough of Cardiff, 7 September 1876); f. 177 (meeting held at the Temperance Hall, Sheffield, 5 September 1876).

<sup>14</sup> Saab, *Reluctant*, p. 117.

<sup>15</sup> *Report of Proceedings of the National Conference at St. James’s Hall, London, December 8th, 1876*, London, 1876, p. 69. On Robert Alexander Shaft Adair, created Baron Waveney in 1873, see the brief entry in Frederic Boase, *Modern English Biography: Containing Many Thousand Concise Memoirs of Persons Who Have Died between the Years 1851-1900*, London: Frank Cass, 1965, vol. 3, p. 1237a.

appeared in the December issue of the *Contemporary Review*.<sup>16</sup> The political weight of its author and his controversial part in the Bulgarian agitation immediately attracted the attention of the press, which, for the first time since the outbreak of the Eastern crisis in 1875, treated Greek affairs at some length.<sup>17</sup> Gladstone's article was at once translated into Greek and elicited complimentary remarks from the Greek government.<sup>18</sup>

Gladstone's treatment of his subject drew heavily on previous traditions of British commentary on Greece. In the introductory paragraph, he discussed a recent public meeting in Athens much in the fashion of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century "literary philhellenism", which dealt with the modern Greeks "against a background of romantic attitudes to the ancient Greeks". He characteristically remarked, with reference to the 1876 demonstration in Athens, that in classical antiquity "such a proceeding would have been regular and familiar in any part of Greece".<sup>19</sup> And in the closing paragraphs of the article, he invoked the Byronic legacy by citing verses from Byron's poems and by praising the "practical good sense, and [...] profound insight" which the poet had displayed in his involvement in the Greek cause.<sup>20</sup>

Although Gladstone dedicated the largest part of his article to apparently championing the Greek nation and carefully endeavoured to associate his initiative with an earlier philhellenic tradition, his philhellenism does not adequately explain his decision to publish the article in the first place. It also tends to obstruct our understanding of his wider reflections on the Eastern crisis.

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<sup>16</sup> William Ewart Gladstone, "The Hellenic Factor in the Eastern Problem", *Contemporary Review* 29 (1876), pp. 1-27.

<sup>17</sup> For the reaction of the press to Gladstone's article, see *Daily News*, 1 December 1876, 4f-5a; *Daily Telegraph*, 15 December 1876, 4de; *Pall Mall Gazette*, 2 December 1876, 1 [1833] ab; *Times*, 1 December 1876, 9ab.

<sup>18</sup> See Stuart to Derby, 18 December 1876, FO 32/467, (No. 296), f. 201. However, Gladstone's actual intention to favour the Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire as a whole, that is, Greeks and Bulgarians, also resulted in cases of mutual dissatisfaction between the British statesman and his Greek audience. In February 1877, Gladstone wrote to Gennadius: "If, as it appears, they [the Greeks] intend to divide the cause of the subject into two or more causes, & thus, so far as lies on them, to defeat it, they & I must part company, & I hope they will find some other & better advocate." (10 February 1877, Gladstone Papers, Add. MS 44453, f. 84).

<sup>19</sup> Gladstone, "Hellenic", p. 1. On "literary philhellenism" before the Greek War of Independence, see Terence Spencer, *Fair Greece! Sad Relic: Literary Philhellenism from Shakespeare to Byron*, Bath: Chivers, 1974, p. 211.

<sup>20</sup> Gladstone, "Hellenic", p. 27. On Byron and philhellenism, see Roderick Beaton, *Byron's War: Romantic Rebellion, Greek Revolution*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.



Gladstone's religious concerns were manifested, in the first half of the 1870s, in his theological interest in ecumenism, which brought him into contact with dignitaries of the Eastern Orthodox Church.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, after his resignation from the leadership of the Liberal party and his subsequent "political semi-retirement", he embarked with greater intensity on his Homeric studies.<sup>22</sup> In the context of Gladstone's literary and theological pursuits, his perception of contemporary Greece, his 1876 article and even his overall sympathy for the "Christian cause" during the Eastern crisis have been translated as a corollary of his non-political interests.<sup>23</sup> But why, then, did Gladstone choose December 1876 as the right moment to introduce the Greek question into the public debate on the Eastern crisis?

Gladstone's article was designed to offer constructive criticism of Beaconsfield's foreign policy in the aftermath of Gladstone's own involvement in the Bulgarian atrocities agitation and on the eve of a critical diplomatic step for peace in the East.<sup>24</sup> The conduct of foreign affairs by his first ministry provided Gladstone's political opponents with an opportunity to constantly

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<sup>21</sup> H. C. G. Matthew (ed.), *The Gladstone Diaries: With Cabinet Minutes and Prime-Ministerial Correspondence*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978-1990, vol. 9, pp. xxxi, 42, 23, 26, 135 (meetings and correspondence with "Dr. Myriantheus", the Orthodox bishop/archimandrites in London from 28 May 1875 and 24 June 1876); D. C. Lathbury (ed.), *Correspondence on Church and Religion of William Ewart Gladstone*, London, 1910, vol. 2, pp. 63-67 (correspondence with Archbishop Alexander Lycurgus of Syra and Tenos). On Archbishop Lycurgus, his mission to Britain and his contacts, see Elisabeth Kontogiorgi, "Religious Innovation or Political Strategy? The Rapprochements of the Archbishop of Syros, Alexandros Lykourgos (1827-1865), towards the Anglican Church", *Innovation in the Orthodox Christian Tradition? The Question of Change in Greek Orthodox Thought and Practice*, ed. Trine Stauning Willert and Lina Molokotos-Liederman, London: Ashgate, 2012, pp. 73-97. The private archive of Archbishop Lycurgus has been published. See Elisabeth Kontogiorgi and Fotini Asimakopoulou (eds.), *Αρχείο Αλεξάνδρου Λυκούργου, Αρχιεπισκόπου Σύρου, Τήνου και Μήλου* [Archive of Alexandros Lykourgos, archbishop of Syros, Tenos and Melos], Athens: Academy of Athens, 2013.

<sup>22</sup> On Gladstone's interest in and writings on Homer, see David Bebbington, "Gladstone and Homer", *Gladstone Centenary Essays*, ed. David Bebbington and Roger Swift, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000, pp. 58-74.

<sup>23</sup> Saab, *Reluctant*, p. 69; Richard T. Shannon, *Gladstone: Heroic Minister 1865-1898*, London: Allen Lane, 1999, p. 190. On Gladstone's article, also see Richard T. Shannon, "Gladstone and the Hellenic Factor in the Eastern Problem", *Actes du Symposium Historique International: La Dernière phase de la crise orientale et l'hellénisme (1878-1881)*, Athens: National Greek Committee of South-East European Studies, 1983.

<sup>24</sup> In December 1876 representatives of the European Powers met in the Ottoman capital to discuss the introduction of reforms in the Ottoman Empire; see R. W. Seton-Watson, *Disraeli*,

criticise his record, a tendency which did not abate during the Eastern crisis. Moreover, Gladstone's participation in the Bulgarian agitation did not enhance his reputation for either pragmatism or disinterestedness in his party. The publication in September 1876 of his famous pamphlet *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East* associated his name with the highly emotional "bag and baggage" policy, while his collaboration with "out-of-doors" agitation puzzled and embarrassed not only the government but also portions of the Liberal party and especially its new leadership.<sup>25</sup> In the "The Hellenic Factor", Gladstone challenged his critics by providing an example of the successful implementation of liberal principles in the conduct of British policy abroad. In justifying his attention on Greece, he remarked that "the history of the proceedings, through which the Kingdom of free Greece was established, affords most interesting precedents, and an admirable guidance for any Government, or representative of a Government, desirous to deal with the great Eastern problem in the spirit of the best traditions of his country".<sup>26</sup>

In Gladstone's narrative, Canning emerged as the archetypal figure of a British statesman, whose handling of the Eastern Question in the 1820s presented the embodiment of "true English principles" in foreign policy. Not surprisingly, Gladstone's hero followed "the boldest and wisest policy", the main elements of which were in opposition to Beaconsfield's reactions while they resembled Gladstone's principles in dealing with the current crisis. Canning's policy "did not consist in empty, but offensive vaunts of the national resources, or loud proclamations of devotion to British interests [...] neither did it rest on those guilty appeals to national fears and animosities"; on the contrary, "its leading characteristic was a generous confidence in the good sense, and love of liberty, which belonged to his countrymen".<sup>27</sup> Now Gladstone drew on the Greek case in order to accommodate Palmerston in the tradition of Liberal foreign policy, which he was trying to construct. In November 1876 Gladstone asked Russell and Granville for their recollections of a cabinet meeting in 1862, when, according to his memories, Palmerston and Russell proposed "that Turkey should be asked to

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*Gladstone and the Eastern Question: A Study in Diplomacy and Party Politics*, London: Cass, 1962, pp. 102-147.

<sup>25</sup> On the reactions of Hartington and Granville to Gladstone's activities in the autumn of 1876, see Shannon, *Bulgarian*, pp. 107-109, 117-119.

<sup>26</sup> Gladstone, "Hellenic", p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11. For Gladstone's "devotion to the memory of George Canning" and the role of his name and legacy in forming his own Eastern policy, see Richard Shannon, "Gladstone and British Balkan Policy", *Der Berliner Kongress von 1878*, ed. Ralph Melville and Hans Jürgen Schroeder, Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1982, pp. 171, 176-177.

give Thessaly and Albania, or Epirus, to Greece, as tributary States".<sup>28</sup> Lady Russell replied that her husband "remembers his own declared opinion in favour of the union of Thessaly with Greece, but has an impression that L[or]d Palmerston did not share it".<sup>29</sup> Granville's response was even more disheartening, as he assured Gladstone that "there is no trace in the public correspondence of any negotiation with Turkey for the cession of Thessaly & Epirus to Greece when we gave up Corfu", attributed any probable suggestion to "Prince Christian of Denmark", the father of the newly elected king of Greece, and warned Gladstone that the tendency of any statement on the issue "would be to advocate the aggrandisement of Greece at the expense of Turkey".<sup>30</sup> Despite the absence of confirmation, Gladstone's article claimed that both Palmerston and Russell contemplated in 1862 "the assignment of Thessaly and Epiros [sic] to Greece, subject to the conditions of sovereignty and tribute."<sup>31</sup> The question at stake – Palmerston's legacy in foreign affairs – possibly justified the risk of being slightly inaccurate. Gladstone emerged through his article as the redeemer of the memory of Canning and Palmerston and as their legitimate heir with respect to the illustrious traditions of Britain's Eastern policy.

Immediately after its publication, Gladstone's "The Hellenic Factor" introduced Greece and the Greeks into British discussions of the Eastern crisis for a short period. However, the interest of the press was roused more by the political weight of the article's author than by the subject as such. Thereafter, Gladstone remained silent on Greek affairs until the summer of 1878. His silence attests to the assumption that he regarded the Greek question within the broader framework of Liberal politics. His observations on the Greek question were further laboured and refined only when, after the signing of the Berlin treaty, he could draw on them in order to denounce Beaconsfield's "Machiavellian morality" and lecture the British public on the traditions of British foreign policy.

However, as Gladstone's interest waned, the Greek cause found a more consistent, if less authoritative, advocate in Dilke and his initiative to set up a philhellenic committee.

### *The Greek Committee and the Politics of Opposition, 1878-1880*

The first months of 1878 were marked by the defeat of the Ottoman resistance, the armistice between the combatants and the San Stefano treaty, which seemed

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<sup>28</sup> Gladstone to Granville, 8 November 1876, in *The Political Correspondence of Mr. Gladstone and Lord Granville, 1876-1886*, ed. Agatha Ramm, London: Royal Historical Society, 1952, p. 18.

<sup>29</sup> Lady Russell to Gladstone, 22 November 1876, Gladstone Papers, Add. MS 44452, f. 153.

<sup>30</sup> 15 and 17 November 1876, *Gladstone and Granville*, p. 20.

<sup>31</sup> Gladstone, "Hellenic", p. 19.

to confirm the worst British fears of Russian domination of the Balkan peninsula. However, secret negotiations between Britain, Russia and the Ottoman Empire settled the main questions between the British and the Russian governments and secured Cyprus for Britain before Beaconsfield's participation in the Berlin congress and his triumphant return from the German capital bringing "peace with honour".<sup>32</sup> That summer, the convocation of the Congress of Berlin and the signing of the Berlin treaty raised considerable optimism in Britain, or, at least, provoked a sense of relief, that a lasting settlement of the Eastern Question, in deadlock since 1875, had been finally reached. At the same time, the Greek aspect of the Eastern crisis, having been largely ignored between 1875 and 1877 and then intensively discussed in early 1878, became increasingly associated with the debate on the guiding principles and the effectiveness of Britain's foreign policy under Beaconsfield's direction. Inevitably, as a consequence of the employment of the issue of the "fate of Greece" as evidence in support of wider arguments on foreign policy, the "Hellenic cause" became embroiled in British party politics and, in the long run, benefited from the willingness of certain sections of the Liberal party to endorse the Greek claims as an integral part of the criticism levelled at Beaconsfield personally and to deduce general conclusions from the particular case on his attitude towards Greece.

The decision of the Berlin congress to recommend a rectification of the frontier between the Ottoman Empire and Greece, which did not satisfy the Greeks' claims to the bordering provinces of Thessaly and Epirus and the island of Crete, provoked the immediate reaction of liberal newspapers, while the conservative organs remained conspicuously silent.<sup>33</sup> Papers that had criticised the government's Eastern policy throughout the crisis used the case of Greece to argue that Beaconsfield's handling of the Greek question contravened basic principles of British foreign policy and to challenge the notion that the Berlin treaty constituted an indisputable personal diplomatic victory:

An English Minister should not have left it to France and Italy, and much less to Austria and Russia, to uphold so worthy a cause. But instead of leading, they have been led. Instead of working out a policy worthy of our most cherished memories and our purest aspirations as a great people, we have actually discouraged others in the work, and so blemished our fame. It is to this complexion we have come

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<sup>32</sup> For a summary of the main provisions of the Berlin treaty, see Seton-Watson, *Disraeli*, pp. 462-490.

<sup>33</sup> Although Greek representatives were not admitted to the Berlin Congress, they were invited to present their case before the assembly; see Evangelos Kofos, *Greece and the Eastern Crisis, 1875-1878*, Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1975, pp. 229-237.

at last, and for this “triumphant success” we are indebted to Lord BEACONSFIELD!<sup>34</sup>

The inclusion of the Greek case in Hartington’s resolutions on the government’s Eastern policy, which he moved in the House of Commons in late July 1878, gave fresh impetus to Liberal interest in Greece and contributed to the association of the party with the Greek cause. Hartington, who before and after his accession to the Liberal leadership claimed for himself “all Palmerston’s principles”, directed his criticism to the constitutional issues involved in some of the government’s decisions during the crisis, to the provisions of the Berlin treaty in regard to Greece and to the acquisition of Cyprus and the equivocal meaning of British protection over Asia Minor.<sup>35</sup> Hartington established first the notion of a “broken promise”, of the government’s ultimate “betrayal” of the Greeks, though he did not deploy this terminology. During the most critical moments of the Eastern crisis, ministers “have been in constant communication with the Greek Government and assurances and promises in considerable numbers have been made to the Greek Government with the view of inducing them to abstain from adding to the difficulties of the Porte”; the government was responsible for giving these promises and for proving unable to keep them.<sup>36</sup> In addition, Hartington charged the government with failing to avert the Russian threat and having compromised Britain’s prestige; that is, he tried to challenge the most conclusive evidence of Beaconsfield’s alleged success. Russia managed to serve the interests of the Slavs “and they are now either absolutely free or else in a very advanced position towards acquiring absolute independence”. On the contrary, the Ottoman provinces of Thessaly and Epirus gained nothing by placing their allegiance and hopes in Britain. Lastly, Hartington denied the accusation “that

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<sup>34</sup> *Echo*, 6 July 1878, 2c.

<sup>35</sup> On Hartington’s Palmerstonian credentials, see Jonathan P. Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993, pp. 260–261.

<sup>36</sup> *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*, 29 July 1878, vol. 242, col. 532. In March 1878, Britain recommended that Greece should take part in the forthcoming congress. The British proposal elevated the country from an atmosphere of diplomatic despair after the Greeks’ abortive invasion of the Ottoman province of Thessaly in February 1878. The interpretation of the proposal as a gesture of British support for Greek claims created “a very strong feeling of gratitude... towards Her Majesty’s Government and towards England” in the Greek kingdom (Hugh Wyndham to Derby, 23 March 1878, FO 32/496, No. 174, f. 88). The brief discussion of the Greek question at the Berlin congress, which called for a “rectification” of frontiers and offered the mediation of the Powers in case the two parties failed to reach an agreement, caused disappointment in Greece and initiated the debate on the “betrayal” of the kingdom in Britain. See Kofos, *Greece and the Eastern Crisis*, pp. 159–161.

in this country there is any Party that for factious purposes is endeavouring to egg on Greece".<sup>37</sup>

Outside parliament, individuals and newspapers that had taken the lead in the crusade against Beaconsfield and his Eastern policy since the Bulgarian agitation lashed out at the prime minister over his role in the Greek case. The focal point of the accusations against Beaconsfield was the concept of "betrayal", of wrapping up an agreement with the Ottoman Empire that bargained away the freedom of the Greek subjects of the Porte and violated assurances given to Greece about its future. Treachery and cunning seemed to put the finishing touches to the image of Beaconsfield as an "anti-Christian", revengeful "alien", which drew largely on Jewish stereotypes.<sup>38</sup> Greece "has been shamefully thrown over by the British plenipotentiaries" at Berlin; Britain "betrayed the cause which she had undertaken to defend" and "a more shameful and withal a more wilfully stupid betrayal of our natural allies could hardly be imagined".<sup>39</sup> By the end of the Eastern crisis, the recantation of "Beaconsfieldism" implied unequivocal sympathy for its "victims".

In this climate, Dilke's initiative to set up a Greek Committee was related to the awkward position in which he found himself during the initial phase of the Eastern crisis from 1875 to 1878. Since the publication of his highly successful *Greater Britain* in 1868, he had gained the reputation of an authority on foreign affairs, which he analysed in the light of "the unusual combination of radicalism, realism and detailed information".<sup>40</sup> His reading of the Eastern Question, which was founded on "a longstanding but still widely-held anti-Russian strand" in British radicalism, and a concern for the balance of power in the East in the event the Ottoman Empire's collapse, alienated Dilke from the "pro-agitation" section of the Liberal party and even from fellow radicals.<sup>41</sup> While Dilke acknowledged that "the end of the Turk" had come, he could not contemplate the replacement of

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, col. 533. Granville, the Liberal leader in the House of Lords, employed a similar reasoning; see *Hansard*, 18 July 1878, vol. 241, cols. 1775-1787.

<sup>38</sup> For the application of "old stereotypes of the Jew" to the analysis of Beaconsfield's stance on the Eastern Question, see Anthony S. Wohl, "Dizzi-Ben-Dizzi: Disraeli as Alien", *Journal of British Studies* 34 (1995), pp. 390-407.

<sup>39</sup> *Scotsman*, 15 July 1878, 4a; *Northern Echo*, 29 August 1878, 3b. On these papers, see Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain. Vol. 1: Nineteenth Century*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1981, pp. 202-203; Shannon, *Bulgarian*, p. 44.

<sup>40</sup> Roy Harris Jenkins, *Sir Charles Dilke: A Victorian Tragedy*, London: Collins, 1968, p. 103.

<sup>41</sup> David Nicholls, *The Lost Prime Minister: A Life of Sir Charles Dilke*, London: Hambledon Press, 1995, p. 76. For Dilke's position in the Liberal ranks during the Eastern crisis, see T. A. Jenkins, *The Liberal Ascendancy, 1830-1886*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994, pp. 62-63; Seton-Watson, *Disraeli*, pp. 176-177.

the Ottoman Empire by Russia, which he denounced in traditional radical terms as “an absolute autocracy of the purest type, the Power which crushed Poland, the Power which crushed Hungary for Austria”.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the importance of “race” in Dilke’s account of international relations and the advance of civilisation deprived his utterances on the Eastern Question of any sympathy for Serbs, Montenegrins and Bulgarians, who, through their “Slavonic origin”, seemed to have inherited all the characteristics of the “uncivilised” Russians.<sup>43</sup> As Dilke himself confessed, the first years of the Eastern crisis were a time of tribulation for him, as he was “anti-Russian without being for that pro-Turk”.<sup>44</sup>

The public discovery of Greece and the Greek “race” at the beginning of 1878 constituted a breakthrough in Dilke’s exertions to crystallise ideas from a radical tradition into a definite and pragmatic scheme on foreign policy, which could unite the Liberals and provide a platform for effective opposition. Since 1876, Dilke had been in constant contact with John Gennadius, a Greek attaché in London. “The Greek” became his friend and provided him with evidence and arguments in favour of the Greek stance on the Eastern crisis.<sup>45</sup> However, it was only on 15 January 1878, at the height of public anxiety over the Turkish capitulation and the Russian advance in the East, that Dilke presented to his constituents an alternative, which defied the obvious dilemma: “I believe in Greece – believe in the ultimate replacement of the Turkish State by powerful and progressive Greece, attached in friendship to France and England, her creators.”<sup>46</sup> Dilke could now lay claim “to the traditional policy of this country... to do our best to protect these young and rising nationalities” and, at the same time, he was able to deal with the perceived Russian threat by quoting the Greeks’ aversion to Russians and Slavs alike.<sup>47</sup>

In 1878, the recipients of Dilke’s initiative to set up a parliamentary Greek Committee came from the Liberal benches. Some of these MPs belonged to its

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<sup>42</sup> Dilke to William Harcourt, September 1876, Dilke Papers, Add. MS 43890, f. 81; Dilke’s speech at Kensington on 8 January 1877 (quoted in Gwynn, *Dilke*, p. 213).

<sup>43</sup> Gwynn, *Dilke*, p. 213. For Dilke’s racial ideas in regard to the Anglo-Saxons, the only “extirpating race on earth”, as he proudly declared, see Jenkins, *Dilke*, p. 35; Richard Faber, *The Vision and the Need: Late Victorian Imperialist Aims*, London: Faber and Faber, 1966, p. 88; Nicholls, *Dilke*, p. 28.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Gwynn, *Dilke*, p. 212.

<sup>45</sup> Marianna Christopoulou, “Ο Ιωάννης Γεννάδιος και η διαμόρφωση της εθνικής πολιτικής της Ελλάδας (1871-1918) [John Gennadius and the formation of the national policy of Greece]”, PhD Thesis, Thessaloniki: Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2012, pp. 101-102.

<sup>46</sup> Sir Charles W Dilke, *The Eastern Question*, London: Robert Bush, 1878, pp. 32-33.

<sup>47</sup> *Hansard*, 9 April 1878, vol. 239, col. 1010.



radical wing, were relatively new to parliament and were already involved in the campaign against Beaconsfield. Besides Joseph Chamberlain, who had made his mark in provincial radicalism prior to his election as an MP, the radical tendencies, which biographers have attributed to members of the group, refer to various degrees and shades of political ideas and activities. Shaw-Lefevre was “a genuine, if moderate, radical”, better known for his role in the preservation of commons movement; Fitzmaurice, Dilke’s friend from their Cambridge days, displayed in parliament “vigorous radical sentiments”; and Rosebery’s “concern for domestic progress... was Radical”.<sup>48</sup> Rosebery was 31 and, according to Dilke, “the most ambitious man I had ever met”; Fitzmaurice was 32, while Evelyn Ashley and Chamberlain, though in their early 40s, had entered parliament only in 1876.<sup>49</sup> Contrary to Dilke’s ambiguous attitude towards Gladstone and the public agitation against the government, Ashley, Chamberlain, Shaw-Lefevre and Rosebery had featured in the Bulgarian movement or had publicly censured Beaconsfield’s government prior to 1878.<sup>50</sup> Dilke recruited supporters for his views on the role of Greece in the East from circles within the Liberal party with whom he was well acquainted and who were young, ambitious and eager to attract notice in a period when foreign affairs dominated the political arena, or, in the case of Chamberlain, radicals who shared in Dilke’s vision of a small but well-organised group that would promote its own, distinct radical agenda within the Liberal ranks.<sup>51</sup>

During the debate on Hartington’s resolutions, Dilke assailed the prime minister and his handling of the Greek question not on moral grounds but

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<sup>48</sup> See respectively Denis Judd, *Radical Joe: A Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993, pp. 58-72; F.M.G. Willson, *A Strong Supporting Cast: The Shaw Lefevres, 1789-1936*, London: Athlone Press, 1993, p. 177; *The Dictionary of National Biography* [hereafter *DNB*], ed. Sir L. Stephen and Sir S. Lee, Oxford University Press, 1921-1922, vol. 1931-1940, entry on Fitzmaurice, pp. 690-692; Nicholls, *Dilke*, p. 41; Faber, *Vision*, p. 69.

<sup>49</sup> Jenkins, *Dilke*, p. 146. Shaw-Lefevre’s career in parliament had started much earlier and had led to his inclusion in Gladstone’s first ministry (1868-1874).

<sup>50</sup> On Ashley, see Shannon, *Bulgarian*, p. 58. Joseph Chamberlain opposed the government’s policy since 1876 in and outside parliament; see Judd, *Radical Joe*, pp. 79, 87-88. In 1880, Shaw-Lefevre reminded Gladstone that “during the last 6 years of Liberal opposition I was one of the few... who supported steadily, and without reserving, the policy which you advocated on the Eastern Question” (21 September 1880, Gladstone Papers, Add. MS 44153, f. 50). On Rosebery, see Robert Rhodes James, *A Biography of Archibald Philip, Fifth Earl of Rosebery*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963, pp. 89-90.

<sup>51</sup> For Chamberlain’s awareness of the need for radical cooperation in parliament, see Judd, *Radical Joe*, p. 78. This parliamentary committee was the predecessor of the Greek Committee, a public body launched in the spring of 1879; see below, p. 18.



as an error of judgment, for backing the wrong horse, and, consequently, for failing to bring about a permanent and satisfactory settlement of the Eastern Question in Britain's interest, a charge repeated in the Commons a few days later by Shaw-Lefevre.<sup>52</sup> The vindication of Greece's progress and the merits of the Greek "race" was a corollary and prerequisite for Dilke's position and he consciously endeavoured to address both issues from early 1878, when he first came forward as the champion of the Greek cause. His vague observations on the condition of Greece disclosed how recent and still superficial his study of Greek affairs was and how it was based on the prevailing image of the kingdom in Britain and on the official Greek statistics furnished to him by Gennadius. Greece had not failed; it was "a force of trade... intensely independent, democratic, maritime".<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, Dilke's understanding of "race" as the source of national strength and the key to world history and politics enabled him to provide a much more original account of the Greeks' descent and national "character". He believed that the modern Greeks had preserved the merits and still suffered from the same vices as the ancient Hellenes, because in its contacts with other "races" the Greek "race" had proved to be an "extirpating race":

if it be true, as ethnologists believe, that there is a large Albanian and a large Sclavonian [sic] element among the Greek people of our day, we have to fall back upon the supposition, even more flattering to the modern Greeks than the theory that their race is pure – namely, that they are of so conquering and predominating a blood as they impose upon inferior races, not only their religion and tongue, but also their love of freedom and their national character.<sup>54</sup>

Dilke's involvement in the Greek question in 1878 turned out to be beneficial to his own political prospects and conducive to a momentary revival of Liberal-radical interest in Greece and, eventually, to the long-term association of Dilke's name with Greek claims. Supporting Greece in the face of Ottoman disintegration and Russian aggression not only helped Dilke out of an embarrassing position but also strengthened his place in the Liberal party as an authority on foreign affairs. Already in April 1878, he received the congratulations of the Greek government and, after the Berlin congress, met the Greek foreign minister, in clear proof of his recognition as the leading advocate of the Greek cause in

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<sup>52</sup> *Hansard*, vol. 242, 1878: 29 July, col. 565 (Dilke); 2 August, col. 1053 (Shaw-Lefevre).

<sup>53</sup> Dilke, *Eastern Question*, p. 50.

<sup>54</sup> *Hansard*, 29 July 1878, vol. 242, cols. 566-567.

Britain.<sup>55</sup> More importantly, the Greek case brought Dilke to an accommodation with the official Liberal leaders, who, as Hartington's conduct throughout the Eastern crisis and in the debate on his resolutions showed, preferred to oppose the government's foreign policy on the grounds of diplomatic pragmatism, free from the moral overtures that the condemnation of "Beaconsfieldism" entailed.

Dilke's parliamentary group and, in general, the links between philhellenism and the Liberals, would form the backbone of organised British support and sympathy for Greece during the prolonged diplomatic activities over the rectification of the Greek frontier from 1879 to 1881.

In 1879 Dilke played the leading part in the formation of the Greek Committee as a public body. The actual timing of its launch suggests that he conceived the committee in the light of Liberal criticism of Beaconsfield's foreign policy. The government's handling of the Eastern crisis was not the last "disaster" abroad that it would face nor the only opportunity for Dilke to exploit in order to increase his reputation in the Liberal camp as an expert on foreign policy.<sup>56</sup> When the negotiations between Greece and the Ottoman Empire broke off in March 1879, Hartington entrusted Dilke with the handling of the question, a choice hardly surprising given Dilke's embrace of the Greek cause in 1878 and the continuous presence of Greece in his public utterances thereafter.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, on 17 April 1879, Dilke spoke in the Commons on a resolution in favour of the Greek claims and attacked the government for disregarding them. He was anxious to prove that the Greek frontier question was not a mere technicality but involved the moral prestige of Britain and the advocacy of the doctrine of nationality. The Greeks justly contested the town of Jannina (Ioannina), "the home of the literature of the Greek race", while the ministry's indifference or even opposition to the rights of Greeks in the region led "the Opposition side of the House" to the conclusion that "there was no more scandalous failure in modern English history than the failure of our Government to maintain the claims of Greece in this matter".<sup>58</sup> Although the resolution was narrowly defeated, the conclusions to be drawn from the debate and its coverage in the press were not altogether

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<sup>55</sup> See Gennadius to Dilke, 10 April 1878, Dilke Papers, Add. MS 43910, f. 218; and Dilke's account of his meeting with Deliyiannis, Add. MS 43933, f. 249.

<sup>56</sup> The deterioration of the situation in Afghanistan in the last months of 1878 led to the formation of an Afghan Committee, in which Whigs and Liberals combined in criticising the government; see John Rossi, "The Liberal Leadership and the Afghan War, August-December 1878", *Canadian Journal of History* 8/2 (1973), pp. 136-138.

<sup>57</sup> On the meeting and the discussion of the Greek problem with Hartington on 30 March 1879, see Dilke's account in Dilke's Memoirs, Dilke Papers, Add. MS 43934, f. 40.

<sup>58</sup> *Hansard*, 17 April 1879, vol. 245, cols. 552-553.

disheartening.<sup>59</sup> The conditions seemed favourable for an attempt to present the Greek issue to British public opinion.

Dilke himself indicated 25 April 1879 as the date when he “formally organised the Greek Committee as a public body after a year of existence as a secret body”.<sup>60</sup> In the following weeks, Dilke invited the other members of the 1878 parliamentary group to participate in the newly founded committee; dealt effectively with a slight difficulty in finding a president, after Lansdowne refused the offer (Rosebery would eventually assume the position); composed “the proposed circular of the Greek Committee” and applied himself to the preparation of the committee’s inaugural meeting.<sup>61</sup> On 15 May, the committee’s appeal to the British public appeared, two days before its inaugural meeting. The spirit of the address was in line with Liberal censure of the treatment of Greece, as expressed in parliament, in April 1879, and earlier, in the summer of 1878. The neglect of the Greek question, which endangered not only “the welfare of the Greek people” but also “the good name and good faith of England”, had provoked the formation of the committee and outlined its objective, “to press upon Her Majesty’s Government the necessity of insisting that the Turkish Government shall not disregard the deliberate judgment of the Great Powers”.<sup>62</sup> The Greek Committee started with a specific object, the realisation of which was consistent with international legality, a fact that was conducive to the committee’s quest for respectability and broad appeal.

At the meeting held at Willis’ Rooms, on 17 May 1879, the speakers covered most of the points raised in connection with Greece and the Greeks since at least 1878. While even critical reports on the gathering conceded that “the

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<sup>59</sup> The resolution was voted down by a majority of 16 (63-47).

<sup>60</sup> Dilke’s Memoirs, Dilke Papers, Add. MS 43934, f. 48.

<sup>61</sup> Rosebery, “after some persuasion”, accepted the role of the committee’s president on 10 May; see Shaw-Lefevre to Dilke, 10 May 1879, Dilke Papers, Add. MS 43934, f. 49. Gladstone, who would seem the obvious choice, “cast himself primarily as a domestic statesman” in the first half of 1879, as a result of his awareness that “floating votes would not be attracted by anything which suggested a weak or unpatriotic attitude in foreign policy” (David Brooks, “Gladstone and Midlothian: The Background to the First Campaign”, *Scottish Historical Review* 64/177 (1985), pp. 50-51, 54-55.) However, he did participate in both debates in the House of Commons on Greek affairs, in April and July 1879, while in the interval he published a signed article in the *Nineteenth Century* under the title “Greece and the Treaty of Berlin”; see respectively *Hansard*, 17 April 1879, vol. 245, cols. 540-546; 22 July 1879, vol. 248, cols. 1061-1077; William Ewart Gladstone, “Greece and the Treaty of Berlin”, *Nineteenth Century* 5 (1879), pp. 1121-1134.

<sup>62</sup> *Times*, 12 May 1879, 14b. Dilke claimed to have written himself the text of the public address; see Dilke’s Memoirs, Dilke Papers, Add. MS 43934, f. 49.

late meeting [...] was respectable in the character as well as in the number of those who attended", the account of a committee member who compared it to the meetings organised during the Anti-Corn Law agitation should be treated more as the exaggerated statement of a partisan.<sup>63</sup> An enlarged, stable and progressive Greek kingdom, as the best guarantee for British interests in the East, was the main theme that ran through Dilke's address. The first resolution, moved by Lansdowne, reiterated that "the increase and development of the Greek Kingdom, would offer a sure guarantee of peace and liberty in the East", while Rosebery, the mover of the second resolution, urged the government "to insist upon the complete fulfillment by the Porte of the stipulations contained in the 13th Protocol of the Berlin Congress". In a third resolution, Prof Richard C. Jebb underlined the meeting's determination to see the rectification of the Greek frontier "at least as far as the line suggested by the Congress". Nikolaos Mavrogordatos, "a Greek gentleman", assured his audience that Greece "had always been in favour of a Western alliance". The inaugural meeting of the committee concluded with a vote of thanks to Dilke for presiding at the event.<sup>64</sup>

The first public action undertaken by the committee to promote the Greek cause presented the main characteristics that would mark its future activities and curtail its appeal to the British public. Party political sympathies swayed the reception of the meeting in the London press. Liberal organs hailed the demonstration as an indication of the fact that "the enthusiasm of fifty years ago is still awake and active once more", while the government's supporters underlined the partisan credentials of "the amiable enthusiasts who were inconveniently crowded at Willis's Rooms" in a gathering where "the speakers were all members of the Liberal party, and friends of any State or Power hostile to the Porte [...] and] ready to applaud any attack which might be made on the present Government".<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, the proceedings of a well-attended public meeting in the capital did succeed in bringing the Greek question to the fore through the medium of the national press. The challenge that lay ahead for Dilke and the committee consisted in keeping the momentum and extending

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<sup>63</sup> *Saturday Review*, 24 May 1879, p. 633a; William Edward Baxter, "New Greece": *An Address Delivered on Thursday 6th November 1879, in the Assembly Hall, Montrose, Edinburgh*, 1879, p. 5. For a list of attendants, compare the reports in *Daily News*, 19 May 1879, 2d; *Times*, 19 May 1879, 13a.

<sup>64</sup> All quotations are contained in the *Daily News* report. Dilke had drawn up and sent in advance the resolutions to the movers; see Dilke's *Memoirs*, Dilke Papers, Add. MS 43934, f. 49.

<sup>65</sup> *Daily News*, 19 May 1879, 4f; *Examiner*, 24 May 1879, 664b; *Daily Telegraph*, 19 May 1879, 4f; *Saturday Review*, 24 May 1879, 633a. Compare the favourable remarks in the Liberal papers with the dismissive comments in *Morning Post*, 19 May 1879, 4de.

the body's membership in a way that would dilute its strong partisan character and enhance its respectability.

The examination of the list of officers and members of the Greek Committee reveals its party-political nature and unveils the main sources of recruiting philhellenes in Britain in the late 1870s.<sup>66</sup> From the original members of the 1878 parliamentary group, Rosebery took the office of president, Dilke became chairman of the executive, Shaw-Lefevre was appointed treasurer and Lansdowne and Chamberlain appeared in the executive committee. The executive included ten more members. Bath, nominally a Conservative peer but since 1876 strongly opposed to Beaconsfield's Eastern policy, was vice-president of the Eastern Question Association and, in 1880, published a work on "Bulgarian affairs".<sup>67</sup> Arthur Arnold, a "staunch radical", was editor of the *Echo* until 1875, sat as Liberal MP for Salford (1880-1885) and had been decorated by the king of Greece for previous favourable remarks on Greece.<sup>68</sup> James Bryce, a "university Liberal", was member of the executive of the Eastern Question Association, played a leading part in the agitation with respect to the Afghan question in 1878, founded and became the first president of the Anglo-Armenian Society and was first elected as a Liberal MP in 1880.<sup>69</sup> Frederick William Chesson, a journalist on the staff of the *Morning Star* until 1869, was secretary of the Aborigines Protection Society, honorary secretary of the Eastern Question Association, the moving force behind the Afghan Committee of 1878 and, not surprisingly, an "ardent Liberal".<sup>70</sup> Peter William Clayden, "an ardent liberal of strong nonconformist leanings", was a Unitarian minister turned journalist and the leading writer

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<sup>66</sup> For a full list of the Greek Committee's members in 1879, see: *Report of the Banquet at Liverpool, June 5th, 1879. Speeches of Sir C. W. Dilke, Bart., M. P., Mr. Arthur Arnold, &c.* Papers of the Greek Committee, No. 2, London, 1879. This list contained the names of 12 members of the executive committee and 276 members of the general committee.

<sup>67</sup> For his views on the Eastern Question, see Shannon, *Bulgarian*, pp. 184-185. After a visit to Bulgaria, he published *Observations on Bulgarian Affairs*, London, 1880. Participation in pressure groups in the case of Bath and the other members of the Greek Committee is identified in Malchow, *Agitators*, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>68</sup> See *DNB Supplement, 1901-1911*, pp. 57-58.

<sup>69</sup> For biographical information on Bryce's long and distinguished political career, see *DNB Supplement 1922-1930*, pp. 127-135. On the question of the general interest shown by "university Liberals" in oppressed nationalities with particular reference to Bryce, see Christopher Harvie, *The Lights of Liberalism: University Liberals and the Challenge of Democracy, 1860-1886*, London: Allen Lane, 1976, p. 100.

<sup>70</sup> On Chesson (1833/34-1888), see Boase, *Modern Biography*, vol. 4, p. 650; Rossi, "Liberal Leadership", p. 138; *The Aborigines Protection Society: Chapters in Its History*, London, 1899, pp. 26-27.

and assistant editor of the Liberal *Daily News*; he unsuccessfully contested three different constituencies in the Liberal interest between 1868 and 1886.<sup>71</sup> George Howard was a Liberal MP and honorary secretary of the Eastern Question Association.<sup>72</sup> Walter Henry James, eldest son of Lord Northbourne, sat as Liberal MP from 1874 to 1893.<sup>73</sup> Peter Rylands, the Cobdenite MP, was “one of the biggest critics of Disraeli’s foreign and imperial policy”.<sup>74</sup> Lastly, Henry Bernhard Samuelson was a Liberal MP from 1868 to 1874 and 1876 to 1885 and, during the Eastern crisis, had criticised the government’s policy and especially the partiality of the British consular agents in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>75</sup> Lewis Sergeant, the author of *New Greece*, occupied the position of honorary secretary. The presence of an earl (Rosebery), two marquess (Lansdowne and Bath), a university professor and seven MPs in the executive of the Greek Committee undoubtedly constituted a noteworthy fact. But this could hardly conceal the almost exclusively Liberal tendencies of the group’s members and their already displayed readiness to enlist themselves in the pursuit of a variety of Liberal “causes”, mostly in relation to the government’s Eastern policy.

The long list of members of the general committee presented a similar picture of political affiliations and extra-parliamentarian activity. The Greek communities in London, Manchester and Liverpool provided an obvious source of recruitment as did the group of “known philhellènes”, individuals who had in the past addressed the British public on aspects of the Greek question.<sup>76</sup> Beyond this narrow circle of committed philhellènes, the names of Karl Blind, the veteran German nationalist, Caroline Stansfeld, Mazzini’s correspondent in the 1840s, William Shaen and George Jacob Holyoake seemed like a hangover from an

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<sup>71</sup> *DNB Supplement 1901-1911*, pp. 370-371.

<sup>72</sup> Michael Stenton (ed.), *Who’s Who of British Members of Parliament: A Biographical Dictionary of the House of Commons Based on Annual Volumes of “Dod’s Parliamentary Companion” and Other Sources*, vol. 2, Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978, p. 201.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 190-191.

<sup>74</sup> Joseph O. Baylen and Norbert J. Gossman (eds.), *Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals*, Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1979-1988, vol. 3, p. 178.

<sup>75</sup> Stenton, *Who’s Who*, vol. 2, p. 318; Gordon L. Iseminger, “The Old Turkish Hands: The British Levantine Consuls, 1856-1876”, *Middle East Journal* 22/3 (1968), p. 314.

<sup>76</sup> The names of 13 Greeks residing in England appeared in the list of the Greek Committee. Gennadius and the Greek consuls at Liverpool and Manchester, Rallis and Ioannides, respectively, were in constant contact with the Greek communities in London, Liverpool and Manchester and called for the organised participation of their members in the Greek Committee and its activities; see Christopoulou, “John Gennadius”, p. 201. As “known philhellènes” would qualify E. A. Freeman, Sir W. H. Gregory, C. Darby Griffith, C. J. Monk, F. W. Newman, Humphry Sandwith, J. E. H. Skinner and Sir C. E. Trevelyan.

earlier day, when British radicalism was closely linked to the national movements in continental Europe.<sup>77</sup> However, it was the more recent and relevant agitation, the crusade against Beaconsfield's Eastern policy, that formed the more obvious source of recruitment for the Greek Committee; in all, 91 members of the committee were among the conveners of the National Conference on the Eastern Question held in December 1876.<sup>78</sup> On the whole, the Greek Committee owed its success, as far as the number of members was concerned, to the world of agitation and patronage in the age of Gladstone and Disraeli; 78 members qualify as "agitators" according to Malchow's work on pressure groups formed between 1865 and 1886. Judging from the party ties of the 67 members, who, at some point of their lives, sat in the House of Commons, the Greek Committee was a decisively Liberal body. With the singular exception of the Conservative William Cotton, the MPs of the Greek Committee spanned the short political range between liberalism and radicalism.<sup>79</sup>

The recitation of plausible sources of recruitment and possible motives in connection with the membership of the committee is not exhaustive and should not disguise the complexity and interrelation of different elements that might have influenced the individuals that lent their support to the Greek cause from 1879 to 1881. To give an example, the Reverend Edward Charles Wickham was among the conveners of the National Conference of 1876 but, at the same time, his position as headmaster of Wellington College placed him in the "academic

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<sup>77</sup> On Karl Blind, see *DNB Supplement, 1901-1911*, pp. 181-183. On Shaen, Holyoake and Stansfeld, see Maura O'Connor, *The Romance of Italy and the English Political Imagination*, London: Macmillan, 1998, pp. 67, 71-72, 98-99. In the early 1860s the national questions in continental Europe were not abstract political or theoretical issues affecting only the traditionally politically literate classes or a small group of "experts" but affected and mobilised wider sections of the middle and the working classes. For Liberal and Radical statesmen and MPs, the defence of political liberty and the promotion of constitutionalism in continental Europe were consistent with Britain's role as an example and promoter of constitutionalism abroad and as the defender of political liberty against political reaction; see Jonathan P. Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993, p. 187.

<sup>78</sup> Compare the lists in *Banquet at Liverpool* and *Report of Proceeding of the National Conference*, pp. vii-xv.

<sup>79</sup> On the basis of Stenton's identifications of party affiliations, the Greek Committee included: 49 "Liberals", 13 "advanced" (or "decided") Liberals, and four "Radicals". Since 1832 pressure groups had served to supplement "the narrow basis of organised party politics by drawing the average citizen into political activity" and were usually dominated by a combination of Liberals and Radicals; see Patricia Auspos, "Radicalism, Pressure Groups, and Party Politics: from the National Education League to the National Liberal Federation", *Journal of British Studies* 20 (1980), p. 200.



group” of the committee, while his “strong Liberal” views and his marriage to one of Gladstone’s daughters, Agnes, provide two additional explanatory factors for his philhellenism.<sup>80</sup> William McArthur, Liberal MP for Lambeth, complemented his business interests in the City with involvement in several philanthropic bodies and pressure groups, “in which foreign merchants [were] particularly prominent”, a fact that may intimate acquaintance with the Greek mercantile and banking presence in the City. On the other hand, McArthur and his brother had been active in the campaign against Beaconsfield’s Eastern policy before the formation of the committee.<sup>81</sup> William Morris, lastly, provides a perfect example, though not necessarily representative in its extreme intricacy, of the combination of private considerations and public roles that could lead to enlistment in the committee. Morris, the romantic artist and poet, was a close friend of Aglaia Coronio of the Greek Ionides family. On the other hand, the Eastern agitation of 1876 and, in particular, his position as treasurer of the Eastern Question Association were decisive moments in the shaping of his public persona as a radical “agitator”. In addition, Morris campaigned in 1880 for Dilke, for whom, as a manufacturer, he also made a carpet.<sup>82</sup> Taking into consideration the wide range of personal, religious or professional reasons, as briefly suggested, a strong undercurrent of Liberalism remains the binding characteristic of the committee’s membership.

Finally, an occupational analysis of the Greek Committee’s membership provides an indication of how it compared with other pressure groups that were formed from 1866 to 1886. Malchow’s analysis of 73 such groups has concluded that the clergy, the world of business and finance, the legal professions and the landowning classes constituted the main quarters from which “agitators” were recruited, with literary, scholarly and academic circles contributing to a considerably lesser degree.<sup>83</sup> This order appears roughly to be the reverse in the

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<sup>80</sup> *DNB Supplement, 1901-1911*, pp. 659-660.

<sup>81</sup> Howard LeRoy Malchow, *Gentlemen Capitalists: The Social and Political World of the Victorian Businessman*, London: Macmillan, 1991, pp. 137, 110.

<sup>82</sup> See Norman Kelvin (ed.), *The Collected Letters of William Morris. Volume 1, 1848-1880*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, pp. lii-liv, 330-331 (correspondence with Faulkner regarding their participation in the Eastern Question Association), pp. 357, 448 (correspondence with James Bryce on the Eastern Question). For Morris’s association with Dilke, see Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for Our Time*, London: Faber and Faber, 1994, pp. 421-422. Morris’s close friend, Charles Faulkner, also joined the Greek Committee.

<sup>83</sup> Malchow, *Gentlemen Capitalists*, p. 388: 22 percent were clergy, 17 percent were businessmen, 12 percent were engaged in the legal profession, 12 percent were landowners, 5 percent were journalists, writers and scholars and 4 percent had an academic affiliation.



case of the Greek Committee, mainly due to the disproportionate presence, for a “non-literary” body, of scholars, teachers and university professors. The organisers of the Committee seemed to appreciate the predictable and almost subconscious association of the “Greek” with education and classical learning in Victorian Britain and the salutary influence of a turn to the circles of British Hellenism on the status of the committee.<sup>84</sup> For academics and scholars interested in Greek civilisation, sympathy with modern Greece was always a matter of choice, which might be influenced by classical readings but did not constitute an indispensable part of it. Therefore, the enlistment of prestigious men-of-letters to the committee should be credited to Dilke. Industry and finance were also well represented, partly as a consequence of the presence of Greek members but mainly through the enlistment of a large number of MPs with business backgrounds.<sup>85</sup> On the contrary, the role of the clergy was numerically marginal and linked in the majority of cases to previous involvement in the Bulgarian atrocities agitation. The strictly political objective of the committee and the lack of any large-scale humanitarian crisis resulting from Greek question, which could raise the issue of philanthropy and humanitarian concerns, might have dissuaded more clergymen and church dignitaries from joining. The presence of only four large landowners – Rosebery, Lansdowne, Bath and the Duke of Westminster – directly points to the cautious stance which the Whig element in the Liberal party adopted on the Eastern Question and the Greek agitations.<sup>86</sup>

Dilke, as the organiser and prime promoter of the Greek Committee in 1879, worked hard to overcome the challenge of recruiting for a pressure group that campaigned against the government’s negative stance towards Greek territorial claims. His project, which since its initial conception in 1878, sought to provide a viable alternative to Beaconsfield’s Eastern policy and to ease the

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<sup>84</sup> Journalists, who in Malchow’s classification appear alongside scholars, were fairly well represented on the executive, and included Arthur Arnold, Frederick Chesson, Peter Clayden and Lewis Sergeant. Among the membership were J. E. Hilary Skinner, George Augustus Sala, James Sime, George Barnett Smith and George Holyoake.

<sup>85</sup> At least 22 of the 67 MPs members of the Greek Committee are described in Stenton’s *Who’s Who* as “merchants”, “manufacturers”, “members of the Stock Exchange”, or bank directors.

<sup>86</sup> See Rossi, “Liberal Leadership”, pp. 128-137, 141. Although the Whigs remained generally detached from popular pressures during the Eastern crisis and were uneasy about public agitation, Hartington, who was a Whig and the Liberal leader, entrusted Dilke with the handling of the Greek question in the Commons (*Pall Mall Gazette*, 5 February 1879, 9a) and also passed on to Dilke the responsibility of dealing with the Zulu question in parliament (T. A. Jenkins, *Gladstone, Whiggery and the Liberal Party, 1874-1886*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, p. 97).

Liberals' discord on the issue in parliament, was carried out on a much larger scale by the launch of the Greek Committee as a public body comprising 291 members. Another apparently remarkable performance of the committee was its ability to impel persons with no previous record of philhellenic feelings to take an interest in the rather humdrum subject of the rectification of the Greek frontier. However, this extension of the committee's appeal also compromised its credibility as it was the result of the association of sympathy for the Greeks with party politics and rivalries. The committee included in its ranks a large number of MPs and "agitators" who had either led or participated in the movement against the Conservative ministry in 1876, agitation that was itself identified with the Gladstonian and radical wings of the Liberal party. Not surprisingly, the professed party proclivities of the members and leaders of the committee raised doubts and provoked cynical comments regarding its real agenda. Dilke's assertion that the committee was a "non-political body" was difficult to sustain and hardly convincing beyond the limits of a favourably disposed audience.<sup>87</sup>

The second challenge confronting Dilke and the committee related to the methods to promote its immediate aim, the offer of British diplomatic support for the Greek claims, which involved bringing pressure to bear upon the government. Unlike the Eastern Question Association, which emanated from and was the culmination of the Bulgarian atrocities agitation, and in common with most pressure groups, the Greek Committee was designed to create an agitation. In the case of the committee, the involvement of large number of MPs, especially Dilke, an "expert" on foreign policy and regular speaker in the Commons, promised a strong presentation of the Greek cause in parliament. In addition, the committee resorted to common methods of rallying support for an agitation – the organising of public meetings and the publication of propaganda – to educate British public opinion on the "realities" of the Greek question.<sup>88</sup>

In parliament, references to the Greek frontier problem divided members strictly on party lines and, consequently, seemed to affirm the suspicion that abrupt sympathy with Greek claims resulted from the opposition's readiness to attack Beaconsfield's government at the first available opportunity. Questions on various aspects of the Eastern Question related to Greek territorial claims

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<sup>87</sup> See, for example, the comment on a meeting held by the committee in Liverpool: *Evening Express* (Liverpool), 6 June 1879, 4a: "notwithstanding the strictly non-political nature which is claimed for the agitation by its promoters, Conservatives were conspicuous in the company by their absence".

<sup>88</sup> Pressure groups in Victorian Britain used a series of means to protest during an agitation, see Patricia Hollis, "Pressure from Without: An Introduction", *Pressure from Without in Early Victorian England*, ed. P. Hollis, London: Edward Arnold, 1974, pp. 14-17.

could bring the problem to the attention of ministers but a proper debate was needed if the efforts of the committee's parliamentary supporters were to be coordinated with its sympathisers outside the House.<sup>89</sup> After failing to persuade Gladstone to raise the issue in the Commons, Dilke himself moved a motion, on 22 July, calling for the prompt execution of all "unfulfilled arrangements" of the Berlin treaty, especially in regard to the Greek frontier.<sup>90</sup> He attacked Salisbury's reluctance to endorse mediation plans put forward by more willing Powers, while Shaw-Lefevre laboured on the conventional topics of Beaconsfield's duplicity, of the philhellenic norm in British foreign policy pursued by "Lord Russell, Lord Palmerston, and Sir James Mackintosh", and concluded with the inevitable homily on the material progress of Greece.<sup>91</sup> Robert Bourke, on behalf of the government, launched a counterattack against "several hon. Gentlemen [who] have to-night treated this rather as a Party question than otherwise", reminding them that in the past Liberal ministers had urged and even coerced the Greek people into renouncing ambitious schemes against the Ottoman Empire.<sup>92</sup> In the London press, the parliamentary advocacy of the Greek cause appealed only to the converted, while papers that supported Beaconsfield perceived the motion as "a covert attack upon the Government [that] met with the fate which it deserved".<sup>93</sup>

Outside parliament, the organising of public meetings under the auspices of the Greek Committee or the attendance of a deputation of members at similar rallies involved preparatory work in finding suitable speakers; providing for a sizeable, respectable and receptive audience; and striking the right balance between the championship of the Greek cause and the politics of the opposition. Dilke, who was in charge of the committee's management and operation, later recalled that he had "tried hard to get Rosebery to make some speeches in the country upon the Greek question, but the attempt was a failure", which he attributed to the fact that "caution was always the predominant element in his

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<sup>89</sup> For the questions raised in parliament by members of the Greek Committee, see: *Hansard*, 22 May 1879, vol. 246, col. 1005 (Laing); 27 May 1879, vol. 246, col. 1360 (Dilke), col. 1362 (Monk); 23 June 1879, vol. 247, cols. 421-422 (Howard); 15 August 1879, vol. 249, col. 1036 (Shaw-Lefevre).

<sup>90</sup> On Dilke's contact with Gladstone on the question and the latter's reply, see *Gladstone and Granville*, vol. 1, p. 97.

<sup>91</sup> *Hansard*, 22 July 1879, vol. 248, cols. 1032-1033 (Dilke), cols. 1041-1045 (Shaw-Lefevre).

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 1084, col. 1089.

<sup>93</sup> *Morning Post*, 23 July 1879, 5a. Also see the articles in the *Liberal Echo* (23 July 1879, 2cd) and the *Conservative Standard* (23 July 1879, 5a).

[Rosebery's] nature".<sup>94</sup> As to the quest for well-attended gatherings, Liverpool and Manchester, which had sizeable Greek communities, presented an obvious choice and indeed were where the committee held meetings outside London. In both incidents, Liberal organisations prepared the events and invited members of the committee to address the meetings.

Dilke spoke at Liverpool on 5 June 1879, "as the guest of the Liverpool Reform Club [...] in my capacity as Chairman of the Greek Committee", while Rosebery headed the committee deputation that addressed a meeting organised by the Manchester Liberal Registration Association at the Free Trade Hall on 21 July 1879.<sup>95</sup> Addressing a mixed audience of "150 gentlemen", Dilke and Arnold endeavoured to satisfy the Greeks in the audience by praising the performance of Greece, while the former outlined the Conservatives' handling of the Greek case through a general survey of the diplomatic developments since 1878, avoiding any personal attacks.<sup>96</sup> In Manchester, although Rosebery reminded his listeners that "no appearance of agitation should be given to any visit that the Committee should pay to the provinces", the speakers engaged in biting criticism of the government's policy or dealt with issues of a strictly Liberal interest.<sup>97</sup> The Manchester meeting degenerated into a party affair, with one of the speakers informing his "philhellenic" audience that "I am now about to enter the path of public life [...] in such a path I shall need [...] all the sympathy that you can possibly bestow upon me." Another spent the largest part of his address in explaining his refusal to stand "as the first Liberal candidate for Northern Lancashire", while Arnold made a special reference to "the great population of the adjacent borough" of Salford, where he successfully contested the 1880 elections.<sup>98</sup>

The experience of the Liverpool and Manchester meetings was rather disappointing with regard to the likelihood of directing the attention of the British public to the Greek question through public demonstrations of sympathy for the

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<sup>94</sup> Dilke's Memoirs, Dilke Papers, Add. MS 43934, f. 50; and: Rosebery to Dilke, 2 June 1879, Dilke Papers, Add. MS 43876, f. 106.

<sup>95</sup> See Dilke's Memoirs, Dilke Papers, Add. MS 43934, f. 49; *Manchester Courier*, 23 July 1879, 5b.

<sup>96</sup> See *Times*, 7 June 1879, 6f; *Banquet at Liverpool*, for Dilke's, Arnold's and Skinner's speeches.

<sup>97</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 22 July 1879, 5g.

<sup>98</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 22 July 1879, 6agf. The first speaker was John Slagg, who sat for Manchester (1880-1885), and the second Henry Yates Thompson, a Liberal, proprietor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* (1880-1882), which he turned into a Liberal paper; on Thompson see *DNB Supplement*, 1922-1930, pp. 836-837.

Greeks. The presence of Greek communities in the two cities promised a secure environment for the display of philhellenism but did not necessarily protect the committee's reputation from reluctant speakers, disingenuous arguments and politically motivated audiences. Moreover, besides local newspapers, the press coverage of the meetings was poor. London papers commented on the Greek question in late July 1879 because of Dilke's motion and not because of Rosebery's speech at Manchester.<sup>99</sup> A meeting at Kennington Park, in December 1879, was the only other public commitment in which a committee deputation was engaged.<sup>100</sup>

The publication of pamphlets and leaflets was the last vehicle at the disposal of the Greek Committee to inform British public opinion on the Greek question. Since the committee defined itself a propaganda organ that aimed "to satisfy the demand for information upon the actual condition of Greece" than as a pressure group, it would be expected that the body would channel all its efforts into its publications. The results, however, were disappointing. In 1879 the committee published seven pamphlets, which consisted entirely of reports on meetings attended and addressed by committee members and of extracts from parliamentary speeches on the Greek question.<sup>101</sup> In addition, the committee issued six "fly-leaves", which were reproduced from newspaper columns and mainly referred to the state of the contested province of Epirus.<sup>102</sup> There is no evidence as to the circulation and effect of these publications, as the only available information simply mentions that the committee "published" 20,000 copies in total.<sup>103</sup> With respect to their content, the committee's publications contributed nothing new to British perceptions of Greece. The fact, moreover,

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<sup>99</sup> The meeting at Manchester was mentioned in leading articles in: *Daily Telegraph*, 23 July 1879, 4gh (alongside the parliamentary debate); *Echo*, 22 July 1879, [1] c. Besides leading articles, members of the Greek Committee wrote letters for the London press, which mainly appeared in the columns of the *Daily News*. The presence in the list of the Greek Committee of journalists, such as Chesson and Sala, further facilitated the presentation of the Committee's views in the press. See Christopoulou, "John Gennadius", p. 203.

<sup>100</sup> *Times*, 10 December 1879, 10ef; George Shaw-Lefevre, *A Vindication of the Claims of Greece: An Address Delivered at the Assembly Rooms, Kensington, December 9th, 1879, Papers of the Greek Committee*, No. 7, London, 1879.

<sup>101</sup> For a full list of the pamphlets published by the Greek Committee in 1879-1882, see *Crete and Greece. Papers of the Greek Committee (New series)*, No. 1, London, 1897, p. 9.

<sup>102</sup> See the titles in *Greece Abandoned; or, Three Years of Diplomacy on the Greek Question. Papers of the Greek Committee*, London, 1880.

<sup>103</sup> The Greek embassy and the Greek communities in England contributed 500 and 300 pounds, respectively, to the committee's activities and especially its publications; see Christopoulou, "John Gennadius", p. 200.

that the committee was unable throughout its existence to commission and bring out any original treatise that would argue extensively and comprehensively the case for the annexation of Thessaly and Epirus by the Greek kingdom attests to the unwillingness of most individuals that it enlisted in support of the Greek cause to become actively and seriously involved in its activities.<sup>104</sup>

The Liberal victory in April 1880 and the return of Gladstone to the party leadership and to the premiership marked a change in British policy in the East, which, in conjunction with the composition of the cabinet, left room for hope as far as the deadlock in the Greek question was concerned.

#### *A "Philhellenic" Ministry, 1880-1881*

Gladstone's pledge to rectify the wrongs of "Beaconsfieldism" seemed to take effect when the British side appealed to the signatory Powers of the Berlin treaty for common action on the unsettled arrangements of the agreement, which included the Greek frontier question. Besides the prompt effort to set up the Concert of Europe to deal collectively with Eastern affairs in general, the composition of Gladstone's second ministry looked very promising regarding the handling of the Greek problem in particular. Gladstone was not the only known philhellene in the administration; Dilke, the prime mover of the Greek Committee, became undersecretary for foreign affairs; Shaw-Lefevre, its treasurer, was appointed first commissioner of works; Lansdowne and Chamberlain, both members of the committee's executive, were named under-secretary of state for India and president of the Board of Trade, respectively. The professed sympathies of the prime minister and of a number of ministers, as well as the cabinet's resolution to implement a policy that was de facto favourable to Greek claims, gave the British government in 1880 the outward appearance of a "philhellenic" ministry.

On the other hand, Dilke's role in the policies on the Greek question in 1880 and 1881 and his frustration with the outcome of British attempts to play a more active role in its settlement attested to the diplomatic difficulties philhellenism faced. Although Dilke's duties at the Foreign Office under Granville were mainly focused on commercial affairs, he assumed responsibility for the Greek frontier question as well. On friendly terms with Gennadius – who in April 1880 had urged him "as a private friend, not to decline the undersecretaryship for Foreign Affairs" on the grounds that "all your Greek friends consider our country's course as dependant from your acceptance" (the Greek attaché then proceeded

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<sup>104</sup> The publications of the Greek Committee compared poorly with those of the Eastern Question Association, which included new editions of older works on the East and studies "written at the request" of the association; see Saab, *Reluctant*, pp. 130-133.

to provide him with information on the ethnography of Epirus), Dilke met the Greek king in June 1880 and “worked with him on maps showing details of the proposed new frontier”.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, during that summer the British government contemplated the means of forcing the Ottoman Empire to accept the provisions of the Berlin treaty and the decisions of the Berlin conference, with Gladstone insisting that all Powers should be consulted about and participate in the task.<sup>106</sup>

When, upon the settlement of the Montenegrin frontier question in September-October 1880, the Greek difficulty became the focal point of the Powers’ activity in the East, Dilke realised at first hand the limitations that the principle of concerted action imposed on the government’s diplomatic latitude. That summer the signatory Powers of the treaty, with the exception of the Ottoman Empire, met in Berlin to discuss the Greek problem in particular. However, the unanimous decision of the Berlin conference, which met most of the Greek government’s territorial claims, was rejected by the Ottoman side. The Powers’ reluctance to resort to coercive measures left the dispute between the two neighbouring countries unsettled. Finally, in March 1881, the Porte came up with a compromise, which satisfied the Powers and was imposed on the Greek government. The convention signed on 24 May 1881 between Greece and the Ottoman Empire transferred Thessaly and a portion of Epirus to the former.<sup>107</sup>

The reluctance of France to collaborate on another series of coercive measures against the Ottoman Empire led to the dropping of Dilke’s suggestions on the subject, despite his insistence that “though certain to fail, we ought to show that we did all that could be done”.<sup>108</sup> In early 1881, as the Concert of Europe made no progress in forcing its decisions on the sultan, Dilke was exasperated at the reluctance of the British government to move alone in the Greek question: “L[or]d G[ranville] has now to decide [...] whether he will disgracefully abandon Greece, or break up the concert of Europe.”<sup>109</sup> Dilke even contemplated resigning from the government, only to realise more clearly his colleagues’ indifference

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<sup>105</sup> Gennadius to Dilke, 27 April 1880, Dilke Papers, Add. MS 43911, f. 12. For Dilke’s contacts with King George, see George Marcopoulos, “King George I and the Expansion of Greece, 1875-1881”, *Balkan Studies* 9 (1968), p. 34.

<sup>106</sup> See for example 30 June 1880, *Gladstone Diaries*, vol. 9, p. 549.

<sup>107</sup> On the course of the negotiations on the frontier question and Britain’s position, see W. N. Medlicott, *Bismarck, Gladstone, and the Concert of Europe*, London: Athlone Press, 1956, pp. 71-88, 95-112 and 190-240.

<sup>108</sup> Dilke to Granville, 17 October 1880, Dilke Papers, Add. MS 43878, ff. 176-177. Dilke had initiated the plan to seize the port and customs of Smyrna; see Marcopoulos, “King George”, p. 36.

<sup>109</sup> Dilke’s Diary, 1 February 1881, Dilke Papers, Add. MS 43924, f. 36.



towards the wearisome and long-protracted Greek difficulty. As Chamberlain, his close political ally, put it to him, "not even Liberal public opinion in England would now support isolated action or Anglo-Italian intervention".<sup>110</sup>

The return of the Liberals to power brought about immediate changes in the rank and file of the Greek Committee, which was accompanied by speculations on its future course of action. During the general election campaign, the committee fulfilled its function as an opposition group by publishing a pamphlet that censured Beaconsfield for abandoning Greece in 1878. It warned voters of the danger of Jannina being left under Turkish control, a possibility that only they could avert in the coming elections.<sup>111</sup> After the formation of the Liberal ministry, which comprised four leading members of the committee, Shaw-Lefevre questioned the advisability of the body's continuous operation and proposed to "square its accounts and to suspend" it.<sup>112</sup> However, Dilke's decision to keep the committee running and "to continue to control [it] through Rosebery and Edmond Fitzmaurice", which may reveal his wish to strengthen his own position within the Liberal party by keeping in touch with an external pressure group, ensured that the committee survived the formation of a "philhellenic" ministry with only some alterations to its list of members.<sup>113</sup> International crises involving Britain, such as the Greek border question, allowed Dilke and Chamberlain to "position Radicalism as a strongly patriotic movement". They saw a "strong foreign policy" as a declaration of national pride, linked with the traditional interest of British radicals in the well-being of continental nationalities. Later that decade, Dilke would turn his interest to the promotion of British commercial interests in Africa in order to pursue patriotic politics.<sup>114</sup>

However, and until December 1880, the Greek Committee showed no sign of public activity, a strange attitude in a period when diplomatic developments

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<sup>110</sup> Dilke's *Memoirs*, Dilke Papers, Add. MS 43935, f. 60. Dilke gave 27 March as the date when "I was in a resigning humour about Greece", a day after the cabinet had instructed Goschen to accept a compromise on the Greek frontier question; see 26 March 1881, *Gladstone Diaries*, vol. 9, p. 39.

<sup>111</sup> *Greece Abandoned*, p. 23.

<sup>112</sup> Shaw-Lefevre to Dilke, 30 April 1880, Dilke Papers, Add. MS 43911, f. 28.

<sup>113</sup> Dilke's *Memoirs*, Dilke Papers, Add MS 43911, f. 28. Arnold and Chesson replaced Dilke and Shaw-Lefevre as chairman of the executive and treasurer, respectively. W. E. Baxter, Humphry Sandwith and H. Yates Thompson joined the executive committee; see Arthur Arnold, *Address on the Claims of Greece, Delivered at Willis's Rooms, March 26th, 1881. Papers of the Greek Committee*, No. 8, London, 1881.

<sup>114</sup> Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, pp. 365-367.



with regard to the Greek frontier problem warranted otherwise. In October 1880, Chesson, now treasurer of the committee, acknowledged in a letter to Rylands the awkward position to which the body had been reduced as a consequence of its inactivity. There was “a general feeling among our friends here [in London] that the Greek Committee should take some public step at the present moment to show its sympathy with the Greek Government in the existing crisis”.<sup>115</sup> In addition to the pressure exercised by its “friends”, possibly a reference to members of the Greek community, critics of the Liberals assailed the committee for remaining inert and for secretly encouraging the Greeks to adopt an intransigent policy on the frontier difficulty. For example, the *Morning Post* doubted “whether the Athenian speculators in aggression are acting entirely on their own calculations” and alluded to “the rumours that the English Radicals continue to urge on the rash enterprise of the annexationists”.<sup>116</sup>

When eventually the Greek Committee sought publicity, during the later phases of the Greek question, it emerged as an apologist for Gladstone’s handling of the frontier negotiations and for its own previous involvement in the matter rather than as an advocate of Greek claims in Britain. In December 1880, Rosebery addressed both demanding “friends” and persistent critics in an attempt to dissipate the former’s illusions and to answer the latter’s suspicions regarding the actual influence of the committee on the course of events and its intentions. Speaking at a meeting organised by the committee at Willis’ Rooms, the first gathering under its auspices in a year, Rosebery gave a succinct but outspoken account of the reasoning behind the formation of the committee, its operation and the state of philhellenism in Britain in the early 1880s:

When we started this Committee we did it at a great crisis of the Greek question, and, moreover, at a time when we had a rooted distrust of those of our representatives who were likely to be called to settle it. (Hear, hear) That Government has passed away, and no friends of Greece regretted it since its fall [...]. The fall of the Conservative Government was followed by the formation of a Government composed largely of this committee, and men on whose past and on whose sympathies we have every confidence in relation to this question [...] now the country is suffering from a series of catastrophes not only in a dependency, but in a vital part of the United Kingdom. I think you will feel how difficult it is for a committee with

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<sup>115</sup> Chesson to Rylands, 23 October 1880, in Gordon L. Rylands, *Correspondence and Speeches of Mr. Peter Rylands, M. P.*, Manchester, 1890, vol. 1, p. 294.

<sup>116</sup> *Morning Post*, 28 October 1880, 4c.

the best intentions, or men with the best intentions, to try to awaken a passionate interest in Greece at this moment when we are threatened by difficulty on our own shores.<sup>117</sup>

The last episode in the life of the Greek Committee consisted in sanctioning the settlement of the Greek question and, in this way, legitimising the tacit acceptance of a compromise by the Liberal government. As the committee had been formed with the purpose of securing the expansion of Greece, it became important for it to confirm that the final solution complied with philhellenic aspirations. The committee exhibited a last glimmer of life in publicly assenting to the arrangement of the Greek question. In the House of Lords, Rosebery, speaking as president of the committee, justified his approval of the ministers' treatment of the frontier problem; "but the Committee over which he presided – the Greek Committee – without acknowledging that the largest possible accession of territory to Greece had been obtained, saw that it was a fear for the consequences to the peace of Europe that led to that decision not being carried out".<sup>118</sup> Moreover, in a pamphlet published "by the Greek Committee", Arnold rejected Salisbury's suggestion that the Liberals in 1881 "forced Greece to accept a great deal less than the Protocol of Berlin agreed to give her" and laid emphasis on his own personal approval of the agreement, coming from a philhellene, as substantial proof of the fairness of the final settlement: "I would be the first to censure Her Majesty's Government if I thought they had been in any degree unmindful of the just claims of Greece."<sup>119</sup> Sergeant attributed the apparent discrepancy between the provisions of the Berlin conference of 1880 and Greece's actual territorial gains in 1881 to "the goodwill of Europe towards a small and energetic State", which in 1880 "carried the plenipotentiaries beyond the mark where a cooler prudence would have caused them to arrest their steps".<sup>120</sup> Having declared its mission accomplished, the committee decided that it "should be dissolved upon the completion of the cession of territory to be given up by Turkey" and that "the cession of Thessaly and the end of the work of the Committee should be celebrated at a banquet to be held in Willis' Rooms".<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> *Times*, 2 December 1880, 11b. Rosebery probably referred to developments in Afghanistan and to "disorder, boycotting and agitation in Ireland" in the early 1880s; see Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, p. 380.

<sup>118</sup> *Hansard*, 30 June 1881, vol. 262, cols. 1632-1633.

<sup>119</sup> Arthur Arnold, *A Few Words on the Greek Settlement*, London: Greek Committee [1881], pp. 3, 6.

<sup>120</sup> Lewis Sergeant, *England's Policy. Its Traditions and Problems*, Edinburgh: MacNiven and Wallace, 1881, p. 272.

<sup>121</sup> Arnold to Gladstone, 28 October 1881, Gladstone Papers, Add. MS 44095, f. 451.

### *Concluding Remarks*

The Greek Committee represented the most convincing example of the channelling of British interest in Greece within the fairly common experience of Victorian pressure groups. The ways in which the committee applied its energies to the promotion of the Greek cause in Britain from 1879 to 1881 represented the closest example of agitation for Greece in the mid-Victorian era. In 1863, the Philhellenic Committee confined its activities to a series of letters to the press and disintegrated amid recriminations about the credibility of this correspondence, while the Candian Refugees' Relief Fund of 1866-1869 insisted on the purely charitable nature of its endeavours.<sup>122</sup> The Greek Committee, on the other hand, functioned as an organised group in and out of parliament that sought an essentially political goal: to persuade the British government to alter its tactics on the Greek question.

The formation of the Greek Committee in the spring of 1879 marked an important moment in the course of British sympathy with Greece and, at the same time, highlighted some of its limitations. The parliamentary group headed by Dilke that turned to the Greek factor in 1878 was the committee's immediate predecessor. However, the ancestry of the committee can be traced to the Afghan Committee of 1878, the Eastern Question Association of 1876, the Bulgarian atrocities campaign and the underlying principle which pervaded these

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<sup>122</sup> The Philhellenic Committee, despite its name, was formed in 1863 by a Greek, Stefanos Xenos, and aimed at diffusing news from Greece furnished by the Greek authorities. Comprising the single greatest group in the committee were MPs of a liberal or radical disposition, many of whom also shared in the advocacy of national movements in Europe and, in particular, supported, in and outside parliament, the Italian, Polish and Hungarian causes. However, even at a time of general condemnation of continental tyranny and sympathy for the plight of oppressed nations, Greece failed to enlist distinguished and devoted supporters among the British public. The Candian Refugees' Relief Fund was a charitable organisation, launched in London during the Cretan insurrection of 1866-1869, that aimed to help Cretan refugees who fled to Greece. Moreover, members of the Greek community in England and their acquaintances in the financial and social circles of the City dominated the fund, while Anglican Church dignitaries, whose names figured on the membership list, represented primarily the philanthropic spirit of Victorian Britain. However, this group of supporters interpreted the Cretan insurrection on religious and humanitarian and not on national grounds, separating the Cretan case from the core of Greek nationalism. On the Philhellenic Committee and the Candian Refugees' Relief Fund, see, respectively Pandeleimon Hionidis, "The Drawbacks of Philhellenism in mid-Victorian Britain: The Case of the Philhellenic Committee of 1863", *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 30/2 (2012), pp. 191-213; Pandeleimon Hionidis, "Mid-Victorian Liberalism and Foreign Affairs: 'Cretan Atrocities' and Liberal Responses", *The Historian* 77/4 (2015), pp. 717-739.

movements, namely that “pressure from without” provided the only effective way to oppose the government’s policies so long as the Conservatives had complete control over parliamentary procedures. The Greek Committee, consequently, recruited a large portion of its members among Liberals and radicals who were active in previous attempts to criticise Beaconsfield’s handling of foreign policy in particular. The committee’s ranks were also characterised by the impressive number of scholars and academics, whose presence, though irrelevant to the events of 1875-1878, mitigated the party-political nature of the body and bolstered its respectability. After its inaugural meeting, the committee promptly applied itself to a sustained effort to raise the Greek question in parliament and through public meetings and the publication of propaganda. Even if the apparent interruption of its public operation after July 1879 did not result from an awareness of its limited appeal to the British public, the committee’s activities presented worrying signs of weakness. Having managed to rally a significant part of the Liberal party, the committee addressed the converted, in parliament, in the press and at Liverpool and Manchester.

The positive outcome of the negotiations on the rectification of the Greek frontier and the Greek Committee’s position that the solution was the best one available for Greece, cannot conceal the limitations of organised philhellenism that were exposed after the return of the Liberal party to power. Ostensibly a pressure group dedicated to the promotion of Greek claims and the enlightenment of British public opinion on the condition of Greece, the committee remained unresponsive to the challenges that emerged from April 1880 to May 1881 – the Liberals’ first year in government – which touched directly on its avowed objects. With a few individual exceptions, the motivation of most of those enlisted to the Greek Committee in 1879 was in part due to their objection, as Liberals, to Beaconsfield and his policies. Gladstone’s presence at the head of a government that also included leading representatives of the pro-Greek camp seemed to ensure Greece would receive a favourable hearing and, therefore, dispensed with the need for an external pressure group. The implicit dependence of the reemergent philhellenism of the late 1870s on Liberalism and domestic party politics provided the movement with vitality in the short term, which was ultimately consumed by political developments and diplomatic expediency. In late 1880 and early 1881, committee members were compelled to clarify this situation to those who misunderstood, overestimated or wilfully misrepresented the motives and strength of British philhellenism.

The reactions of the press, the policy of the Liberal party in power from April 1880 and the limited activity of the Greek Committee in 1880-1881, all illustrate the character and extent of British philhellenism in the late 1870s and early 1880s. The association of the Greek case with the opposition to “Beaconsfieldism”, on

the grounds of defending a liberal cause against a reactionary and essentially “immoral” foreign policy, led from the summer of 1878 to the partial identification of sympathy with Greece with Liberal party politics. However, as interest in the Greek problem in Liberal circles resulted from the search for a “principled” policy, its discovery and final formulation dictated the fate of the frontier issue and of Liberal philhellenism under Gladstone’s government. British policy on the Greek question was determined by the successes, failures and limitations of the Concert of Europe and not by the rumoured affection of the prime minister and some of his colleagues for ancient and modern Greece. In fact, the low profile adopted by Greek Committee in 1880-1881 attested to the fundamental weakness of philhellenic feeling when detached from domestic political considerations in mid-Victorian Britain.

*PhD in International History, LSE*

*Adjunct Academic Staff, Hellenic Open University*