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THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND ITS INFLUENCE UPON GREECE

The Great Revolution of 1798 in France may tightly be considered as the crucial point between modern and contemporary history and also as the landmark which separates the period of the theocratic state based on the monarchy "by the Grace of God", from one side, and the era of nationalizm and the acceptance of the principle of people's sovereignty. However at the day in which the rather symbolic prison-castle of Bastille crumbled under way of weath of the Paris revolutionist, thus provoking a painful surprise not only to the ruling class of France but also to the royal circles in other European countries, in the distant Balkan Peninsula there were only a few, who could foresee that this worldwide event was just the beginning of a series of unexpected development, which in turn would decisivly affect the future of the Balkan populations still living under the Ottaman administration.

"Man" -had once declared Robespierre-" is born in order to live in freedom and prosperity; but everywhere he is enslaved, and unhappy. Society which should aim in preserving his rights, still it oppresses and denotes him. It is already time bring him back to his real destiny. It is the evolution of the human logic which prepared the road to this Great Revoluiton". If those words of the prominent French revolutionist became for millions of their hopes to put an end to social inequality, for the Balkan peoples unsuspecting so far-they would cause, slowly but steadily the hasteing of the procedure,

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which eventually led to their national self-consciousness and later to their political independence.

The French Revolution was a synthesis of various factors- social and economic- and may be characterized as the most successful attempt, until that time, of the bourgeois class to claim and obtain the political power, where it already had achieved a serious economic presence. To be sure this class greatly benefited by the revolution, but it is also certain that the whole 19th century which created and formed the cultural frame in several countries and often enforced remarkable reforms on the prevailing socio-economic system in others, was deeply sealed by this great historical event. The new capitalistic social structure, which was based primarily on modern productive relations and was promoted by the economically powerful and ambitious stage within the Balkans, although in a lesser degree in Greece, where, for geopolitical and cultural reasons, the capitalistic productive forces began, albeit slowly, to emerge during the 18th century, mainly through the Greeks of the Diaspora, but also in proper Greece with certain special differentiations..

The new pamphlet doctrines of the Enlightenment which was a phenomenon preceding to the French Revolution, began to be spread throughout Greece, especially after the revolts of the 1770's, which contributed to the strengthening of the Hellenic land and sea-trade as well as to the establishment and growth of several manufacture centres in Greece and in other Balkan areas. The enlightenment as a social movement was to be altered as to its concept following the revolution meanwhile the development of a petty bourgeoisie in the Balkans and mostly in Greece is closely related to the foundation of an impressive number of schools in which, contrary to the practice of the past years, new subjects were taught from the field of natural sciences, while at the same time the teaching of classical and religious studies was accordingly restricted. For obvious reasons these innovations in the education met with strong reaction from the their spiritual establishment, which at that time, was represented by the higher clergy. The main principles of the French Revolution- Liberty, Equality, Fraternity- were officially denounced, while the study of mathematics and other natural sciences was similarly discouraged. But this reaction, which actually should not be surprising- however vigorous it became in the course of the time- had a limited influence, since the new ideology sponsored by the bourgeoisie class began to acquire its first followers among the large masses of the people, slowly but decisively.

Following the conflicts between Russia and the Ottoman Empire in late 18th century and the famous treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, which was crucial for the financial and social development in Balkans, the American war of independence in 1776, in which for the first time were openly proclaimed the rights of the citizens, greatly contributed to the ideological formation of the Hellenic national awakening. However the consequences of the French Revolution, which followed soon afterwards, had an even stranger influence in the intellectual development of the Balkan peoples. The well known text of the "Droits de l'Homme et de citoyen" which was the ideological base of the French revolutionists, offered an additional impulse and certain new orientations in the national liberation movement of the Balkan Peoples, especially of those who had already acquired their national self-consciousness.

Very important was the role of the Greek Enlightenment in order to prepare their compatriots in accepting and assimilating the doctrines of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Already by the second decade of the 18th century we notice the emergence of the first representatives of the Modern Hellenic Enlightenment, who were the "products" of the new social and economic changes, which capitalism had inflicted in Western Europe. The majority of these "Teachers of the Greek Nation", as they are called, wore the clergy cloth, so that their work was facilitated by the Ottoman Empire, which while it had already begun its long but steady course to decline had by large moves hindered the development of education within the Balkans, Their main contribution is mostly concentrated in attempting to reform the their predominant education system, according to the new progressive social principles. At the same time they helped to promote both, the new philosophic theories, firstly expressed by Western European Enlightenment, as well as the natural sciences knowledge -as already mentioned. Also, and contrary to the then existing anachronistic system of education to Greek schools, they introduced the British originated, and widely applied in western Europe, method of mutual instruction or "lancesterian" education system. Meanwhile we should observe that though the odious reaction of the local social and religious establishment against the new progressive ideology. It was concealed a form of class struggle among the traditional ruling class and the emerging bourgeoisie, which at that time, played a rather progressive role and within its ranks had succeeded to gather a considerable part of the Hellenic Intellegentsia. The ethnic ruling class, mostly represent-

ed by the rich landowners was able to foresee the danger which threatened its absolute secular, and in some ways spiritual, domination above the illiterate popular masses, which -to the advantage of the same ruling class- were methodically kept in dark ignorance. The sense of liberty, which was propagated by the French Revolutionists, had been characterized as the devil's work by the "Paternal Teaching" (Patriki Didoskalia) a text with open anti-French contents, which was published in 1798 widely distributed in Southern Balkans, and is attributed to the Patriarch Gregory V. Although these preachings, as well as other similar proceedings could not in no modest the value of the French Revolution or cause a bad fame to the Enlightenment, they had however some negative consequences for the intellectual Greeks who adopted its principles and further attempted to spread them over Greece. Most of them had to face various prosecutions, others were obliged to go abroad, while in the case of Methodius Anthzakitis, a high school teacher in Ioannina-an important cultural centre in Ottoman Greece- the practice of the Spanish inspired auto da je was promptly repeated. Anthzakitis himself was obliged to burn his own books, since according to K. Koumas, another Greek scholar and Enlightener, "the teaching of mathematics was considered as a source of atheism".

However, in spite of the numerous and unceasing persecutions, the efforts of these Greek preachers of the Enlightenment were not without results. Among other, their contribution to the formation of the common people's language (Dimotiki), is considered of high importance, the most prominent on this task were D. Kataziti-Photiadi and Rhigar Phezaos. The latter had once declared that his mind was only dealing with Freedom and the language issue, which often was divided the people, Also, their work to modernize the Hellenic education system helped to the further strengthening of the Greek nations self-consciousness. Although there might exist certain inevitable imperfections, these could certainly not reduce the obviously progressive and regenerating results of their work, which prepared spiritually the Greek in their future national liberating struggle. It was for this aim that they decisively attempted to spread among the Greeks the doctrines inspired by the French Revolution. "The greatest part of the Greeks" -wrote with some exaggeration the Paris newspaper *Gazette de France* in 18.12.1797- "had so gladly accepted the new ideology, that when they try to compare their present condition with that in Liberty and Equality, they became totally abstracted and from ecstasy they are passed to frenzy".

The effects of the French Revolution, while they had decisively influenced in many aspects all nations in the Balkan Peninsula, they had also left their traces in Ottoman administration, and especially among its official elements who favours administrative reforms. It is noteworthy that although France, especially during the troublesome Napoleonic period, was in continuous warfare with almost all European Powers, it maintained friendly relations with the Ottoman empire, it is also remarkable that there were even cases in which the Sultan himself affected by the principles of the French revolution, attempted to dealy the decline of the empire by adopting certain reform issues mainly as far as the strenghtening of central administration was concerned. A typical example is that of Sultan Selim III who concluded an alliance with the French Emperor and on the pretext of a mutiny of the genissaries in Serbia, he tried to abolish this, often dangerous and rather anachronistic, military order although his sincere efforts were fruitless and eventually he was dethroned in 1807. We can possibly consider his reform measures as the first steps to the modernization of the Ottoman state-some how the prelude to Tanzimat- which in turn had positive effects upon its Christian subjects.

The French revolutionary ideology by itself, the well known political and social changes which followed and finally the rise of the impressive personality of Napoleon, had left indelible sings to the Balkan Peninsula. Many Balkanians, mostly Greeks and Serbians were recruited as soldiers in the battalions created by the French, while the latter occupied militarily the seven Ionia Islands. When these battalions were abolished later on, they returned to their respective countries and became, often unvoluntary, the missionaries of the new progressive doctrines, which were diametrically opposed to, until that time, the predominant social order. In addition to these factors we should not disregard the role of the students, Serbian, Romanian, Greek and other Balkanians, who went for higher studies in Western European Universities and having completed their courses. They came back to their motherland to be there after the warmest partisans of the political and social reforms in the west. Last but not least we should not ignore the important, although inadequately investigated role of certain contemporary semi-political societies notably the free masonry, which contributed to the formation of the free thinking and the Balkan intellegenia. Tectonic lodges were freuqently emerged in many Balkan trade centres soon after the breaking of the French revolution.

Besides the indirect circulation of the new ideology in the Balkans, we should also mention the direct contacts between the Balkan peoples and the French. As a result of the French presence in the area, during the occupation of the Ionian Islands which lasted from 1797-1798 and 1807-1814, as well as in the short lived, though important, French supported puppet state, which was created along the Dalmatian coasts at about the same period.

Another note worthy point, which should be an object for further historical research, is the effect of the French revolution in the economic development which appeared at the beginning of the 19th century, especially in the field of the merchant marine. "The French Revolution" -wrote an author contemporary to the first Greek President Kallis Capodistria" reanimated the oppressed souls of the Greeks and gradually contributed to the foundation of their commercial fleet, thus augmenting their trade transactions. From those who had emigrated in the West European countries, some acquired knowledge and others collected money, which both -all of them- they decided to dispose of, when they returned to their motherland, in order to promote their great and permanent wish!". Certainly it is not by chance that the education in Greece had dramatically prospered after 1789, and was almost exclusively financed by the ethnic bourgeois class inspired by the new progressive doctrines.

The Hellenic audience a lesser degree-other Balkan communities in central and Western European countries became an additional channel for the spreading of the revolutionary ideology in the Peninsula, since the various commercial houses retained strong economic and other links with their respective countries. The "Napoleonic Wars" in early 19th century caused the gradual weakening of the West European merchant fleets in Eastern Mediterranean Sea; the gap was promptly and successfully filled by the Greek owned merchant marine which rose to the zenith of its strength during the European coast blockades, imposed alternatively by the belligerent powers, until the final fall of the Napoleonic regime in 1814. The demand of agricultural products from the East-especially from the Southern Balkans where, because of the easy transportation through the sea ports, trade business were increasingly facilitated augmented considerably and was subsequently followed by an equal development in manufacturing. The economic regeneration of Greece before 1821, which is partly or result of the consequences of the French Revolution, brought along other important effects;

it created a new ideological background and stretched the emergence of new progressive social and political elements among the Greek people, which undertook the difficult task to prepare the nation for its political emancipation. The works of Adamentios Kozas From Hios perhaps the greatest Hellenic scholar and thinker before 1821, who lived in Paris during those decisive years, are strongly influenced by the spirit of the French revolution and have immensely contributed both to the formation of Modern Greek Language and to help the Greek people be acquainted to their brilliant classical past.

Another typical and may be more effective example of the influence of the revolution among the progressive part of preindependent Hellenic intelligentsia is Rhigas Phezaios a native of Thessaly & Rhigas was the first to course a concrete and elaborated plan for a democratically based Balkan confederacy, in which all citizens would enjoy equal rights regardless of religious or race. His political constitution was inspired by the principles of the corresponding in France and his proposed anthem (Thourios) derived from popular French revolutionary verses. His plans to organize a multinational revolutionary movement, which would involve the whole of the Balkan peninsula, were connected with the ideological frame and the political powers of revolutionary France. It was not by chance that in the same printing office in Veinna, whose his propaganda pamphlets were printed, the first Hellenic newspaper was also published, the articles of which expressed an open acceptance of the doctrines vowed by the French Revolution. Rhigar himself had repeatedly attempted to get in touch with Napoleon, in order to demand moral and material assistance to his plans, but was failed. The French emperor, however, perhaps within his plans in future military enterprises in the East, attempted some indirect contacts with certain prominent Greeks in Manisouthern Pelopenese- which were also fruitless. It goes without trying that the draft constitution, designed by Rhigar Phezaios was openly condemned by the Greek higher clergy, for it was full of rottenness because of its muddy thoughts which are contrary to the doctrines of our Orthodox faith.

Undoubtedly the founders of the *Philiki Etaizia* (Society of Friends), the secret organization which prepared the Greek Revolution in 1821, were members of the reemerged Hellenic bourgeoisie and most of them had an under the influence of the French Revolution. N. Skonfar was well acquainted with Rhigar Phezaios plans;

among the other leaders E. Xanthos, a free mason himself, direct relations with French Officials during his early stay in the Ionian Islands, while A. Tsakalof, born in Ionnina, had spend much of his early life as a student in Paris. It must also be mentioned that in Tzarist Russia where the *Filiki Etaizia* was founded in 1814- the progressive ideology created by the French Revolution had been weel received by members of the progressive section of the russian mobility, from which the reform movement of the Decabzrists broke out in 1825. Recent historical research in the Soviet Union, has proved that there were frequent and essential contacts between them and leading elements of the *Philiki Etaizia*.

It was mainly due to the lack of adequate comminication and the predominant illiteracy which some how hampered, as already mentioned, the great mass of the Greeks to embrace in a wider degree the new, full of hopes, social reality which the French Revolution directly or indirectly imposed in most parts of Europe. Gradually however from the second decade of the 19th century, and even after the reactionary wave which the notorious holly Alliance imposed in most parts of the European continent in 1815, began to appear within the Balkans the first elements of the influence of the newly formed social concept, which were inspired by the principles of Fraternity, Equality, Liberty and the rights of the free citizen. In this formation of modern political and social teories, the emergence of contemporary literature, the beginning of new economic transactions the spreading of new filosofic ideas, the improvement of the education system and in general all aspects of social life in preindependent Greece were profoundly marked by the French Revolution, rightly Theodoros Kolokotzonis, a prominent leader of the Greek war of Independence, had commented that this great event "had opened up the eyes of the people". Of course on e could observe that the Greek Revolution- and the French in certain ways- failed to fulfill its socio evonomic aims, and this is today widely accepted as possibly unavoidable. However the most important result was that the political anticipation of the Greeks prepared the way for an even harder and painful struggle in order to end the social injustice; in that endless war nothing is -or can be- lost.