

**Images of Germany
and Visions of State-Building
in the Venizelist Press:
The Case of *Nea Hellas*, 1914-1918**

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Abstract

This working paper explores the representations of Germany as formulated within the Venizelist camp focusing on the newspaper Nea Hellas. The material is analyzed with reference to perceptions of the role of the Monarchy, the implications of the 'Great War' and Greece's relationship to the European Great Powers. The discourse of the Press during the period 1914-1918 is revealing for the evolving and complex perceptions of Europe in the Greek public debate which are structured upon different, and at times, contradicting temporalities, and images. The latter are interwoven with the founding myths of the Greek nation state. The working paper argues that ideas on state-building -with the vision of territorial expansion as its main component- can provide an interpretive key for the ambiguous perception of the German Empire in the Greek public debate during the period of WWI.

Keywords: National Schism, Image of Germany, Venizelism, Press, State-building, Europe

Introduction

The working paper seeks to explore aspects of the ideological trends and the cultural predispositions that developed in Greece during the Great War focusing on the representations of Germany as formulated within the Venizelist camp. The following analysis is based on the newspaper *Nea Hellas* [translates into ‘New Greece’], which was an ardent supporter of Eleftherios Venizelos and of the Liberal Party founded by Venizelos in 1910. *Nea Hellas* was among the first publications to raise criticism against King Constantine when his disagreement with Venizelos became public in February 1915.¹ *Nea Hellas* was also among the Greek newspapers that were subsidized by British propaganda during the war as has been documented in the work of Sanders and Taylor.² Thus, its discourse is simultaneously ideological and propaganda material. The working paper builds on the assumption that the ideas on state-building -with the vision of territorial expansion as its main component- can provide an interpretive key for the ambiguous perception of the German Empire in the Greek public debate. Moreover, it attempts to reconstruct the discourse of an influential newspaper acknowledging that the Press can function both as a source for mass perceptions and for elite discursive strategies and formulations. It should also be noted that, in the early 20th century, the Press had an important role in shaping the political and the public debate and in mediating political struggles and party competition.

Visions of state-building and images of Germany in the discourse of *Nea Hellas*

Even though, from 1915 onwards, *Nea Hellas* constructs a consistent anti-German argument as far as the War and Greece’s orientation are concerned, nevertheless, the achievements of the German state and German culture remain important positive elements in the German image even within the Venizelist camp. The same argument applies, to an extent, for the attitude of the Venizelist camp towards the Monarchy before the emergence of the 1915 Schism. The articles of Georgios Ventiris, one of the most prominent supporters of Eleftherios Venizelos and a chief editor in *Nea Hellas*, are revealing for the strong ties between royalism and national ideology as perceived by the Liberals before the National Schism.

The tasks of government and military modernization to serve the goal of territorial expansion had been central to Venizelos’ political agenda since his arrival in the Greek capital in 1909.³ In parallel, the myth of King Constantine as a military leader and heir of the Byzantine

¹ Despina Papadimitriou, *Ο Τύπος και ο Διχασμός*, PhD Thesis, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens 1990, p. 31.

² Michael Sanders and Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda during the First World War, 1914-1918*, Macmillan, London 1982, p. 117.

³ Sotiris Rizas, *Βενιζελισμός και αντιβενιζελισμός*, Psychogios, Athens 2019, pp. 53-55; Georgios Mavrogordatos, *1915. Ο Εθνικός Διχασμός*, Patakis, Athens 2015, pp. 29-33.

emperors had been constructed before his accession to the throne, but was significantly reinforced by his role in the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) as the arch-general of the Greek army.⁴

At the beginning of 1914, Greek liberals seemed caught up in national optimism as the Greek territory had doubled after the most successful military endeavor in Greek history. Ventiris idealized the '*militant Greek people*' and argued that the success of the military campaigns of 1912-1913 was evidence for the '*moral strength of Hellenism*'. In the military achievements of the Greek people, Ventiris discovered a '*Neo-Hellenic Virtue*'.⁵ The latter was mainly associated with specific population groups such as the peasants, the villagers of mountainous Greece and the small ship owners and fishermen, while he noted that the upper bourgeoisie was of '*secondary importance*' to the war achievements. As a debate had been raised on the French and German influence in the reorganization of the Greek army and the conduct of the military operations, Ventiris took pains to prove that victory was solely the result of the '*neohellenic mind*' that was manifested by King Constantine. The myth of Constantine was thus central to the conceptualization of national identity and national ideology. In this vein, Ventiris celebrated as legacy of the year 1913 that it had provided the Greek people with a '*general-King*'.⁶

A year later, in February 1915, as the disagreement between Constantine and Venizelos emerged, *Nea Hellas* stressed that the fulfillment of the national desires of the Greek nation depended on its Monarch more than in any other nation. As Greek public opinion waited for the King's decision on the prime minister's proposal that Greece should join the Entente in the Dardanelles campaign, *Nea Hellas* argued that the King and the Army could not opt for '*inaction*' whereas '*the politicians opted for action*'.⁷ At this point, the focus of the argumentation is not on the Monarch's constitutional role and on the status of democratic liberties, but on the King's ability to incarnate the will of the nation.

After the outbreak of the National Schism, *Nea Hellas* supported the formation of an alliance with France, Russia and Britain. This argument betrayed a certain idea of Europe: "*We identify our fortunes with the most chivalrous people in Europe and also with the State that regulates the fortunes of the world for a very long time, the State of wealth, of sea domination, of high diplomacy, and, finally, with the Nation to which Byron, Codrington and Gladstone belong to*".⁸ This argument is based on different layers of the idea of Europe which revolve around the notions of civilization, state power and philhellenism. It is worth noting that the three persons who are associated with the British nation (a poet, an admiral and a politician) are either linked to the Greek War of Independence (Byron and Codrington) -and thus with the founding of the modern Greek state- or with Greece's territorial expansion, as

⁴ Mavrogordatos, pp. 34-35.

⁵ Georgios Ventiris, "1913: A year of two wars", *Nea Hellas*, 1/1/1914, p. 3.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *Nea Hellas*, "With God's Help and the Will of the King", 21/2/1915, p. 1.

⁸ Ibid.

Gladstone had supported the annexation of the Ionian islands to the Greek state but also that of Cyprus.

The most important conceptualization regarding Europe is that of ‘Protector Powers’. Even though the term ‘Protector Powers’ had no substance in terms of international law and diplomatic documents, it became a powerful political concept and an integral part of the relationship between Greece and the Great European Powers that was instrumentalized in many different ways throughout the 19th and the early 20th centuries.⁹ In the Greek public debate, the term Protector Powers was mostly employed with reference to Greece’s aspirations for territorial expansion. The naval battle of Navarino (1827) was the most common reference point for the Protector Powers. Navarino was the founding myth that associated Greek freedom with Europe. Moreover, this political myth entailed the idea that Europe was obliged to protect or to secure Greece’s freedom as the latter was perceived throughout the long 19th century. Thus, Navarino, a historical event of the early 19th century, was connected to the Great War cementing the link between Europe and Greek freedom.

In the context of the National Schism, the term was also associated with the perceived legitimacy of the political regime by each rival camp. For the Venizelist camp, the Entente coalition was identified with the Protective Powers and the safeguarding of Greek freedom, mostly perceived as an anti-royalist stance. Venizelos himself as well as his associates framed French and British military intervention in neutral Greece as “*fulfillment of their parental role*” and as a “*new liberation of Greece by the Protector Powers*”.¹⁰

As the anti-German discourse began to emerge in the Venizelist press, Germany’s absence from the group of Protector Power was often underlined in contrast to the British role. Thus, England not only had contributed to Greece’s “*Liberation*” but was also now willing to “*make (Greece) great and strong*”.¹¹ Despite some references to the hostile attitude of the German Empire to Greece since the late 19th century, the idea of a historically rooted enmity between Greece and Germany was not put forth; this was substituted through Germany’s association to Austria and through repeated references to Austria’s negative role in the cause of Greek Liberation. In this vein, Austro-Germanism could appear as a historical enemy to Hellenism. Thus, according to *Nea Hellas*, Greece owed to the generosity of Britain “*the Ionian Islands, the Navarino Battle, the Berlin Congress, the doubling of the Greek territory, whereas she owed to Germany’s ally, Austria, the Holy Alliance, the struggling of Rigas Feraios and hostility to every Greek cause*”.¹²

The same effect was also promoted through Germany’s association with Bulgaria and Turkey, the “*two natural enemies of Hellenism*”. Thus, a German victory in the Great War, and the

⁹ Katerina Gardika, *Προστασία και εγγυήσεις. Στάδια και μύθοι της ελληνικής εθνικής ολοκλήρωσης (1821–1920)*, Vania, Thessaloniki 1999.

¹⁰ Cited in Gardika, p. 105.

¹¹ *Nea Hellas*, “England and Greece”, 31/3/1915, p. 1.

¹² *Nea Hellas*, 29/3/1915, p. 3.

subsequent strengthening of Turkey and Bulgaria, would entail a direct security threat for Greece.¹³

In the spring of 1915, *Nea Hellas* sought to identify the cause of permanent neutrality with Germanophilia,¹⁴ but was obliged to acknowledge that the Greek Nation was torn by two opposite propensities, a Pro-British and a Pro-German one.¹⁵ In the spring of 1916, *Nea Hellas* warned that the Protector Powers waited for the results of the Greek parliamentary elections to draw their conclusions on the “*genuine feelings*” of the Greek people towards the Great Powers and to define whether there were significant pro-German trends among them. From that perspective, the elections were critical for the future of Greece and its relationship to the Protector Powers.¹⁶

However, the key to understanding the perception of Europe is that Greek notions of freedom were inextricably linked to visions of territorial expansion. Thus, Greek freedom was perceived as incomplete as long as ‘unredeemed’ Greek populations continued to exist outside the borders of the Greek nation state. In this line of thinking, ideas about state formation and structure were very important as they were perceived as integral parts of achieving the goal of expanding Greek territory. Under this prism, the Great European Powers provided different models for state-building. The French Revolution and the French national state for one and the German state for another are the object of admiration for liberals and royalists alike.

The views of German intellectuals were often commented on in the columns of *Nea Hellas*. In January 1915 the paper’s editorial by George Papandreou commented extensively on Heinrich von Treitschke’s distinction between smaller and greater states and his thesis that the former would eventually give way to the latter. Even though Papandreou found elements of truth in Treitschke’s analysis for the smaller states that could interpret the pathology of the Greek state and society, he raised the criticism that the German historian failed to include the nation as a distinct component in his argumentation.¹⁷ For Papandreou, “*the liberation of Nations was in harmony with the rhythm of historical development and was the real foundation for the construction of a new international civilization*”. He also stressed that Treitschke’s views had been inspired by the German “*blind faith to the value of Power*”. And he concluded that “*liberty of individuals and nations was the true foundation of a superior culture*” and was the only one compatible with “*the spirit of historical development*”. If Germany opposed this principle, then, despite some “*temporary success*”, she would eventually be crashed.¹⁸

¹³ *Nea Hellas*, 24/2/1915, p. 1.

¹⁴ *Nea Hellas*, 7/4/1915, p. 1.

¹⁵ *Nea Hellas*, 5/4/1915, p. 1.

¹⁶ *Nea Hellas*, “After the French, the British and the Russians”, 4/7/1916, p. 1.

¹⁷ George Papandreou, “Small and great states”, *Nea Hellas*, 10/1/1915, p. 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Despite the anti-German arguments raised in *Nea Hellas* after the dispute between Venizelos and Constantine became public, the views expressed by German intellectuals continued to attract attention and positive reception by the paper. For instance, in March 1915, *Nea Hellas* published a lengthy interview with Gustav Adolf Deissmann and praised German contributions in the study of Greek history and culture, stressing that in “*no other part of the world such a serious attempt to reconstruct and interpret Greek intellectual production takes place*”, and argued that if the fortunes of Hellenism depended on the will of “*German savants*”, then Hellenism would have thrived. Nevertheless, German policies were not guided by its intellectuals but by the “*absurdities of the Kaiser*” and its military establishment, concluded *Nea Hellas*.¹⁹

As *Nea Hellas* sought to convince its readers that German militarism, despite its successes, would undermine the appeal of Germany across the world thus provoking its ultimate defeat, she also raised the argument that the real foundation of the “*greatness of the German nation*” lay in its cultural and intellectual achievements, in its “*wisdom*” and its “*method*”, to conclude that more valuable than the German army were the “*German universities and their professors*”.²⁰

Since 1915, *Nea Hellas* had been militant in challenging the main theme of German propaganda, that of German military superiority that ensured a German victory in the War. As early as March 1915, *Nea Hellas* appeared certain that the trend of a German defeat had emerged in terms of military and economic capabilities but also in terms of moral strength. Moreover, the paper argued that the principal danger for the entire civilized world was pan-Germanism and not pan-Slavism. Towards the threat of Pan-Germanism, the editor urged for the safeguarding of “*the moral, economic, and political independence of the Greek people*”, and warned against Pro-German propaganda as a lethal threat to the Greek nation.²¹ Since February 1915, the paper had raised the issue of German submarine warfare towards neutral countries, which had also been an important theme in British anti-German propaganda.²²

As far as the framing of the War was concerned, *Nea Hellas* shared the view expressed also in the royalist Press that the War was in essence a European civil war and that it was mainly relevant to the great European countries and not smaller nation states such as Greece. However, the paper was very systematic in putting the blame for the War on Germany.²³ In this respect, its efforts to construct a link between German national character and the causes of the War are worth commenting on. For instance, Ventiris traced the destructive origins of German foreign policy to Bismarck and his “*ruthlessly conservative*” approach to international affairs as well as to the philosophical influence of Nietzsche and Treitschke.

¹⁹ *Nea Hellas*, 29/3/1915, p. 3.

²⁰ *Nea Hellas*, 23/2/1915, p. 1.

²¹ M. Kepetis, “Germany is bending”, *Nea Hellas*, 28/3/1915, p. 1.

²² Sanders and Taylor, pp. 131-133, 173-177.

²³ G. Ventiris, “The Year of the Global War”, *Nea Hellas*, 1/1/1915, p. 1.

Thus, according to Ventiris, “*German conscience since 1870*” had been shaped by the belief that “*the future of the world lay in (German) power*”. He also argued that German diplomacy failed to create the conditions for the promotion of German world policy in a realistic way. Ventiris concluded that Germany “*possesses vitality*” but indisputably lacked the method in promoting its objectives. Nevertheless, despite his critique on the German role, Ventiris also argues that the attempt to attribute a moral content in the War, either by the Entente or by the Central Powers, was only “*invented*” a posteriori and should not be associated with the true causes of the War.²⁴

Despite the negative perception of Bismarck’s legacy that appears in Ventiris’ comments, the German Chancellor seems to attract the interest and fascination of the Venizelist Press. Repeated articles tried to provide an assessment of Bismarck’s personality and contribution; the resulting image was ambiguous involving positive and negative elements, but a central element in the fascination about Bismarck is centered upon the creation of a great nation state. The articles of Kostas Ouranis, who worked as a Paris-based correspondent for *Nea Hellas* are typical examples of this trend. For Ouranis, Bismarck’s “*gigantic work*”, that had been the creation of the German Empire, was about to be shuttered. The inherent flaw in the German Empire was, according to Ouranis, that Bismarck had made Prussia, and then Germany, strong “*beyond measure*”. Thus, he perceived “*Excessive power*” to be the source of disaster.²⁵ Bismarck, his virtuousness and his flaws, are perceived to be the incarnation of the German national character.

A similar pattern appears in relation to the German Emperor. But the portraits of the Kaiser are definitely more negative than those of Bismarck. According to Kostas Ouranis, for the French who had first-hand experience from German brutality, the Kaiser was nothing more than the first among his compatriots.²⁶ Kostas Ouranis also painted the picture of German war prisoners in France, with an emphasis on the group of German officers of higher social status, emphasizing the elements of cruelty, ignorance, decadent behavior, and arrogance. Especially with reference to their occupation of French territory, Ouranis commented that the Germans were “*identical to all the barbarous conquerors of civilized nations*”.²⁷

As far as Greece was concerned, the King’s failure to become the champion of the national cause during the War was condemned as treasonous and delegitimized the Monarchy. As soon as the Schism emerged, *Nea Hellas* invoked different temporalities in the narration of the national past; in this line of reasoning, the Greek state lacked a concrete political plan in the first eighty years of its existence; the Greek state had since 1912 began to fulfill the national desires that dated five centuries back, but the King, who belonged to a dynasty present only for fifty years in Greece, had interrupted the national course.²⁸ According to *Nea*

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Kostas Ouranis, “Bismarck’s centenary”, *Nea Hellas*, 1/4/1915, p. 1.

²⁶ *Nea Hellas*, “The Kaiser”, 28/3/1915, p. 1.

²⁷ Kostas Ouranis, “German Officers”, *Nea Hellas*, 27/3/1915, p. 1.

²⁸ *Nea Hellas*, 22/2/1915, p. 1.

Hellas, during Constantine's regime, Greece had reached the ultimate national humiliation forgetting "her origins and history" as the royal couple had preferred "subjugation to the slayer of humanity than the glory of Greek monarchy".²⁹

In July 1917, after the King's forced exile, *Nea Hellas* argued that Greece's last fearful enemy was the Kaiser as he represented the last hope for the Royalists to see Constantine restored to the throne. The defeat of Germany was the only option for Greece to secure her national interest, not only because that would entail the crash of Greece's "eternal" enemies (Bulgaria and Ottoman Empire), but also because it was a precondition for safeguarding Greek freedom against the absolutism of Constantine. In this phase, *Nea Hellas* adopted an ecumenic antimonarchism and perceived the abolition of Monarchy across the world as the ultimate legacy of the War. Despite the sufferings that had been brought up by the War, the paper was optimistic that it had offered the greatest possible service to mankind by bringing down not only the "tyrants", but the "very idea of tyranny". *Nea Hellas* prophesized that the Monarchy was about to be defeated not merely as an institution but as an idea:

"After the Czar, Constantine and after him the Kaiser; and not just them, but also their successors. Whether victors, or defeated, or neutrals the tyrants cannot survive the ongoing world struggle. They will be swept forever; their memory will be erased in the darkness of the past as the memory of all evils that tormented humanity throughout the centuries."³⁰

The new Europe emerging from the ruins would be a continent of Republics.

However, as soon as the War was over, *Nea Hellas* distinguished between the Eastern and Western world, raising criticism against the Victors' designs for the post-war order. The criterion for the distinction between East and West was not based on their respective political regimes or on cultural differences, but on the resolution of national questions. From that perspective, Greece was indisputably part of the Eastern world as her national question was far from being resolved with unredeemed Greeks left outside the territory of the nation-state. For as long as Greek lands in Europe and Asia were not united, Greece would be unable to focus on its internal political questions. Thus, any debate on conservatism or reformism or radicalism as was the case in the Western world was and would remain irrelevant to the Greek case as the national question was the sole focus of elite and popular attention. Moreover, as the Eastern question remained open, the East would be a place of incessant turmoil and violence. In this respect, state restructuring, political transformation and social prosperity were a privilege reserved to the Western world from which Greece was excluded.³¹

²⁹ *Nea Hellas*, "Within a Year", 1/1/1918, p. 1.

³⁰ *Nea Hellas*, "Greece's fearful enemy", 3/7/1917, p. 1.

³¹ *Nea Hellas*, "Western and Eastern (worlds)", 14/11/1918, p. 1.

Concluding remarks

The discourse of *Nea Hellas* as reconstructed in the present analysis is revealing for the evolving and complex perceptions of Europe in the Greek public debate which are structured upon different, and at times, contradicting temporalities, and images. The latter are interwoven with the founding myths of the Greek nation state. The working paper has traced representations of Germany in relation to the following axes: first, the Monarchy in relation to the implications of the Great War; and second, Greece's relationship to the European Great Powers. Under this prism, the image of Germany in the Venizelist camp is shaped both by ideological and cultural elements,³² and is far more ambiguous than one would expect based on the dichotomy that emerged from the 1915 National Schism, that is Venizelists/pro-Entente vs. Anti-Venizelists (royalists)/pro-German. Even though the negative components in the German image are an important part of the pro-Entente Venizelist campaign, this image cannot be disassociated from notions of power and culture involved in the image of Europe nor the historical development of the German Empire as a model for state-building can be ignored.

³² On the subject, see also Basil Gounaris and Marianna Christopoulos, "Reassessing the Greek National Schism of World War I: The Ideological Parameters", *The Historical Review/La Revue Historique*, 15(1), 2019, pp. 234-268.