



APPENDIX THE DECLARATION OF THE 2021 NATIONAL YOUTH ASSEMBLY

“The First National Assembly was convoked at Piada (New Epidaurus) of Argolis, Greece, from December 20, 1821 to January 15, 1822. 59 plenipotentiary “parastatai” (i.e. Members of Parliament) participated in it in the capacity of delegates from the Peloponnese, the Western and Eastern Mainland Greece (including Thessaly) and the Islands.

The National Youth Assembly was convoked online in Greece from January 3 to January 4, 2021, and at the end of its proceedings adopted the following document.

The first Metropolitan Centre (Attica and the Cyclades) drew the following conclusions regarding the ideals and the ideology expressed in the Constitution and the Declaration of Epidaurus:

As is apparent both from the preamble to the Provisional Mode of Governance (i.e. Constitution) and from frequent references to the Declaration of Independence, both the fighters and the delegates of the National Assembly were inspired by deep faith in God, who strengthened them in their endeavours. At the same time, many of the “parastatai” of the National Assembly had a broader learning, were aware of the developments in Europe, of the outbreak of the French Revolution and the relevant legal workings for the adoption of a Constitution. With this gear, enviable organization, and firm conviction, imploring the succour of the Divine Providence for the support and prosperity of a state in the process of being founded, they drafted the first provisions and before God and men voted in favour of the Provisional Mode of Governance, the first Constitution, “in the name of the Holy and Consubstantial and Indivisible Trinity”. That Constitution followed the liberal ideas of its time, enshrined the main distinctions regarding the separation and wielding of powers and the adoption of the principle of equity.

As first heading—the first article of the Constitution—was set the Article “Of Religion”, which established the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ as prevailing religion, while at the same time it recognized the right to the freedom of religion and tolerance vis-à-vis any other religion. The dominant part of religion as factor of cohesion for all the Greeks is also highlighted in the matter of the determination of the inhabitants of the territory. In the section regarding the judicial power, it was established that civil and criminal cases would be heard by virtue of the laws of “our late Christian emperors”, until the respective Codes could be adopted and a modern legislative framework could enter into force. The reliance on the effect of the legal framework of the Byzantine Empire demonstrated the shared and firm conviction of the drafters of the Constitution in the uninterrupted continuity of Hellenism and its connection with the state of Constantinople – New Rome. Moreover, in the first phrase of that Declaration we read a reference to the Ancient Greeks, whose descendants and continuators those fighting in 1821 felt they were.

Finally, may we point out the humanist ideals contained in the text of the First Constitution of Greece, such as the prohibition of torture, the social welfare provisions in favour of the widows and orphans of the deceased fighters etc.



The second Metropolitan Centre (of Macedonia and Thrace), always within the framework of the discussions in the “National Youth Assembly” and following a constructive debate which lasted three days, unanimously drew the following conclusions:

- 1. The declaration of the Greek Revolution was launched thanks to —and its fighters were inspired by— lofty values, ideas, and ideals, namely freedom, solidarity, unity and concord, while the national interest was put before everything else;*
- 2. religious freedom and the existence of a prevailing religion were emphasized. More specifically, it was observed that the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ was set as the prevailing religion and that the state was organized on the basis of religious tradition, and society lived in accordance with its assumptions, while, nevertheless, respecting the other religions. In essence, Orthodoxy operated as an element of the Greek nation’s own particularity. The truth of this observation is confirmed by the preamble to the Greek Constitutions, from the first one down to this day, where the invocation to the Holy Trinity figures constantly. In this manner, both the historic continuity of all the Constitutions with that first Constitution as their ‘element of reference’ and the unbreakable relation between Church and State are witnessed. At this point an apt comparison was made with Article 3 para.1a of the current Greek Constitution, where it is stipulated that “The prevailing religion in Greece is that of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ. The Orthodox Church of Greece, acknowledging our Lord Jesus Christ as its head, is inseparably united in doctrine with the Great Church of Christ in Constantinople and with every other Church of Christ of the same doctrine, observing unwaveringly, as they do, the holy apostolic and synodal canons and sacred traditions. [...]”. Similarly, Article 13, para. 1 and 2 thereof, stipulates that “freedom of religious conscience is inviolable. The enjoyment of civil rights and liberties does not depend on the individual’s religious beliefs. All known religions shall be free, and their rites of worship shall be performed unhindered and under the protection of the law. The practice of rites of worship is not allowed to offend public order or the good usages. Proselytism is prohibited”. It is worth thinking that the freedom of religious conscience is still recognized by supranational legislative texts today, such as by the provision of Article 10 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Article 9 of the European Convention of Human Rights, Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as well as Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Moreover, today the European Union “respects and does not prejudice the status under national law of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States” (Article 17, para.1 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union) and also, in the case-law of the European Courts, the respect of the European Union for “the constitutional traditions of member states” is upheld, part of which (i.e. traditions) is Orthodoxy in our country, being deeply rooted in the consciousness of the Greeks.*
- 3. The determination of the national identity of the Greeks was observed, particularly in the definition of “Greek citizen”, who is considered to be he or she who inhabits Greece and is a Christian. However, this was complemented by the following National Assembly with the element of the Greek language. The omission of the Greek language as a precondition, at that time, of obtaining the Greek citizenship was evidently justified by the importance assigned to religion in the first Constitution, in the sense that religious faith was also*



indicative of the identity of a Greek. There again, the bond between Christianity and Hellenism becomes apparent.

4. *It was emphasized that the drafters of the First Greek Constitution proceeded to the separation of powers, so that no power might be concentrated in one person but that this might distributed among different bodies and that reciprocal control might be rendered possible.*
5. *We confirm the description of the Greek historian Constantinos Paparrhegopoulos in his History of the Greek Nation regarding the Declaration of Independence as “the most beautiful work of that Assembly and possibly the most beautiful document issued by a Greek Assembly or Government over the sixty years that followed”.*

On the basis of these facts, we can imagine the following questions being addressed to Alexandros Mavrokordatos as President of that National Assembly, and Theodoros Negris as the Secretary and Framer of the Constitution:

1. *Why was an invocation to the Holy Trinity set in the preamble thereof?*
2. *Why was a “prevailing religion” determined in the Constitution of Epidaurus?*
3. *Why was the aforementioned definition of “Greek citizen” given?*
4. *Why founding members of the “Society of Friends” were not invited to attend that National Assembly as “parastatai”?*

Moreover, we could imagine the following question being addressed to Bishop Ioseph of Androussa, appointed Minister of Religion and subsequently of Justice:

5. *What was your sense of the outcome of the struggle you assumed for the independence and the self-administration of the Church against statist interventions and for the return of the Synodic system to it?*

Finally, we could imagine the following question being addressed to all the “parastatai” (delegates) of the Greeks in that First National Assembly:

6. *How could the liberal spirit of the First Greek Constitution and the values and ideals it adopted on the basis of the principles of natural law, Christianity, and civil freedoms, be applied to today’s era of globalization, multiculturalism, and post-modernity?*

*In the **third Metropolitan Centre (of the Peloponnese and North Aegean)** the following topic was developed:*

“What elements of the Declaration of Epidaurus of 1.1.1822 and of the First Greek Constitution do you believe are still topical today? Can the Greece you envision for the future rely on the ideals of the politicians, chieftains and delegates of the various regions who took part in the First National Assembly of Piada-New Epidaurus?”

We addressed the question whether the values and ideals of the delegates of the First National Assembly may support our vision of the Greece of the present and the future. From the text of that



Constitution and, particularly, from its first Articles and the thoughts expressed by our participants, there clearly arise the principles and elements permeating that text and preserving their diachronic value, since even today they are still included in the current Constitution of Greece and in those of most states governed by good laws. These core elements are none other than national independence and freedom, which constituted the quintessence of the struggle from its inception, as was explicitly emphasized in the document of national independence.

Already in the first Article faith in God and the invocation to the Holy Trinity are set as the pinnacle, as the fundamental elements of our national identity and existence, reiterated verbatim in all subsequent Constitutions down to the current one with only minor modifications.

Furthermore, specific provisions are introduced for the protection of fundamental human rights, such as the rights to individual freedom and the value of the human being, not to be relativized under any circumstances. This is apparent from the first Articles of that Constitution which state the respect for the human being, the protection of personal freedom, property, and dignity, the prohibition of arbitrary arrest, imprisonment, torture, and of the confiscation of property.

A core principle of that Constitution was also found to be equity, in other terms equality before the law, which defends all those permanently or provisionally residing in the Greek territory. Moreover, property, honour, and security, were goods established by the Constitution for all. Meritocracy was also a concern to the drafters, who used the telling expression that the sole precondition of any honour and office was the merit of each Greek. The fair distribution of the funds collected and of state revenues to all Greeks was also a key constitutional principle. The separation of powers and the independence of justice are indeed the main pillars of any democratic state governed by good laws.

As was heard from our dear participants, the diachronic effect of the aforementioned values and ideals of the Epidaurus delegates is beyond doubt. Therefore, having heard the observations above, what could be the elements that mark our vision for the Greece of the future and constitute the foundations upon which we can rely to make our vision real? The answer to this question will be given, if we decide in our minds what it is we dream of for Greece: freedom and national independence, above all; then a country which ensure for its people the rights and freedoms identified with the very human condition, individual personality, and dignity; freedom in all manifestations of thought, word, creation, development of personality, practice, etc.; a country which provide all citizens with equal opportunities, in other terms the core motivation for each person to unfold his or her merit; a country in which equity and justice prevail for all citizens; a country where the three key state powers, legislative, executive, and judicial, operate harmoniously; powers which be separate and refrain one another from any arbitrariness; a justice, in particular, which be independent, impartial, and be a refuge and comfort to all those citizens who appeal to it for a true administration of justice.

All these elements of our vision are comprised in the Constitution of Epidaurus, which, as may be concluded from the foregoing analysis, constituted a landmark in the development of the political consciousness of the Greeks and their expectations of their mode of governance. The Constitution of Epidaurus was a complete and forward-looking text, which was the model for the Constitutions that were to follow. Its key thematic units refer to a democratic mode of governance, which



promote and protect the rights of the human person, recognize the separation of powers, even if it does not ensure it in essence. Concord among the Greeks is emphasized by the drafters as an indispensable need, more lyrically reflected by our national poet in the Hymn to Liberty: “if they hate one another, freedom they do not deserve”. All the above lead us to the conclusion that it is possible to make our dream come true.

*In the **fourth Metropolitan Centre (of the Ionian Islands and Epirus)** of the National Youth Assembly we decided to focus on the following question: “If we at that time had taken part in the drafting of the Declaration and of the Constitution of the First National Assembly, which elements would we have retained, and which points would we possibly have modified?”*

We reaffirmed that both the Constitution and the Declaration of the First National Assembly were great documents: they showed the need for self-determination and for an identity of the Greeks (i) as continuators of the ancient Greek tradition (as indicated by the seal depicting the goddess Athena and the symbol of wisdom) and of the Christian Byzantium (as attested by the references to the laws of the Christian emperors, to God, to a prevailing religion) and (ii) as self-luminous modern Greeks, as is indicated by their willingness to create a nation state which be not anarchic but ruled by good laws, organized in its political life and mode of governance, with clearly separated powers (legislative, executive, judicial), with the relations between state and citizens regulated on the basis of the declarations of the natural rights of the human being and the citizen in accordance with the European standards, with core principles of Enlightenment adopted, and with respect for the long tradition of togetherness between the Orthodox faith and state organization (thence the expression “prevailing religion” as well as the invocation to the Holy Trinity in the preamble of the Constitution).

Moreover, we found out that the First Constitution met the need of Hellenism to declare its political existence and independence, as well as the fact that the Revolution had become established but not completed, something which de facto limited the possibility of providing detailed answers and decisions on matters of naturalization, regulation of the right to vote, or precise delimitation of the new state. This is why we think that there could have been some more specific provisions, which, viewed a posteriori, could have been marked by originality and radicality, just like other provisions could have been avoided, since they became the breeding ground for the malaise of the Greek state in specific aspects of it down to our days.

Particularly, we found no reference to the mode of governance which until that time regulated the enslaved Hellenism, namely the community system, whereby the Greeks would settle local matters democratically through the direct election of their primates, while there was the possibility of direct expression of solidarity in the issues arising.

The need to create a centralized state was preponderant, but this left a vacuum with regard to the local aspect and did not enable the channeling of ambitions in a fertile manner. The creation of a centralized state was akin to the European way and was considered inevitable and necessary by all the fighters, whether of the political or of the military sphere. Besides, Europeanisation was considered a precondition for the rebelling Greeks to enjoy assistance from Europe, which, in that period, was ruled by the Holy Alliance, so opposed to revolutionary movements, a fortiori of an anarchic nature, such as the French Revolution. In practice, however, the Greek-Orthodox



tradition, according to which there should not only be a central state but also local authorities enabling participation, solidarity, shared responsibility, was ignored. Instead, and in lieu of a local authority, the institution of elected delegate is essentially established (the starting point of the ensuing favouritism, cronyism, and corruption, as well as the notion of the spoils system).

On the contrary, the invocation to the Holy Trinity, the adoption of the Eastern Orthodox religion as prevailing, tolerance vis-à-vis other religious community, are signs of continuity of the tradition of Hellenism, progressiveness, love of fellowmen, and respect for their religious rights, features, that is, characteristic of Orthodoxy. Nevertheless, care could also have been taken about the Greeks of Jewish religious identity, as well as about the Muslims who would continue residing in the new state. The issue of the Jews was of course addressed in subsequent Constitutions. However, openness to the prospect of naturalization also of people from other religious origins as Greeks would have been more in accordance with the ultimate proposal of Orthodoxy, which is love for all. Admittedly, this was something difficult to attain at a time when the Greeks were eager to demonstrate their absolute differentiation from the Muslim Ottomans. This is why faith in Christ is emphasized as the basis of naturalization (so that the Greek Roman Catholics and Protestants be not left out of the modern Greek state). The reference to God is a significant element in that Constitution, and something not found in today's Constitutions.

At the same time, in the text of the Constitution there could have been a provision for gender equality, but this would have been too progressive a move for the standards of those times, even though it would have been premature in comparison to European developments.

More generally, there is no reference to “democracy” as springboard for the course of the new state. This absence was conceivably due to the fear lest it cause negative feelings to Europeans.

The second topic debated was “The relation between Church and society” and the following conclusions were drawn:

- 1. We need a more dynamic approach on the part of the Church to the everyday life of our society, with leading personalities to show the way;*
- 2. the ecumenical nature of the Church which transcends the boundaries of the nation without rejecting it should be highlighted;*
- 3. there is a shortfall in the aspect of communication;*
- 4. a more essential contact of the Church with youth is needed, and not only on the level of worship, where, however, the linguistic form used is now a considerable issue;*
- 5. with regard to the relation between state and Church, either there will be cooperation and joint course or a different status should be found;*
- 6. there should be no confusion as to the positions of the Church, as seemed to be the case in the issue of the pandemic, in particular, because this does not inspire confidence, at a moment when unity is needed more than ever;*
- 7. the Church should support financially also those who minister it on a voluntary basis in order to help them dedicate themselves even more to Its works.*

Reference was made to the issue of the pandemic and the position of the Church. It was unanimously pointed out that the Church should always observe the precautionary measures for



the protection of public health and impose them on its staff and on the faithful with no concessions. On the other hand, however, increased vigilance is required so that the observance of these measures may not amount to a prohibition of worship.

*The **fifth Metropolitan Centre (of Thessaly and Mainland Greece)** worked on the topic of “how the relations between the Orthodox Church and the State are determined through the first Greek Constitutional instrument of Epidaurus” and drew the following conclusions:*

A. In the preamble to the Provisional Mode of Governance of Greece it is stated that the “political existence and independence of the Greek Nation” is proclaimed “in the name of the Holy and Indivisible Trinity”, a phrase which, with a few variations, has since accompanied all the constitutional documents of the Greek state to this day. This choice on the part of the drafters of the text was not accidental, as it echoed the positions of the great majority, if not of all the plenipotentiaries in the National Assembly and expressed the consciousness of the people. Throughout the Revolution, faith in the Triune God was what kept the hope and the vision of freedom alive, while it became like a mother’s bosom which nourished the offspring of the Revolution. This faith was a force of unity among the enslaved Greeks during the Turkish Rule and the reason why the Greek identity did not perish in the course of the centuries of servitude. The reference in question may of course produce no legal effects of a religious nature nor is it merely of historical value but implicitly declares that the Greek State is not derived from the outside, like some kind of conventional hybrid of the Great Powers, but the outcome of a radical process with a revolutionary basis and the people as its starting point, with a clear wish regarding the place of the Orthodox Church in the Greek State to be. This is why any attempt to strike this preamble out of the Greek Constitution in the future will de facto amount to a denial of the essential preconditions of our country’s freedom.

B. In the Article of the Provisional Mode of Governance regarding religion as “prevailing religion in the Greek territory” is set “that of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ”. No official state religion is determined but the religion of the majority of the territory is implied. This is exactly why it is clearly stated that “the Administration of Greece tolerates any other Religion, and the ceremonies and sacred acts of each one of them shall be performed unobstructedly”. At this point the right to religious freedom is founded, as a consequence of the liberal spirit, hospitality, and tolerance of the Orthodox faith. What is more, it constitutes a matter of honour for each democratic state ruled by good legislation. It is through religious freedom that faith is consolidated and any barriers to the spirit are lifted. In other terms, religion does not abolish freedom of thought but, on the contrary, enhances it. The specific constitutional reference reveals that its drafters are inspired by magnanimity and respect for everything different, despite having suffered indescribable atrocities, deprivation of elementary rights, Islamization etc. under the Ottoman yoke. They were now able to understand how brutal and inhuman the persecution of faith was. At the same time, the establishment of religious freedom also constitutes an indirect invitation to all people of good will abroad, irrespective of denomination and religion, to move to Greece and contribute to its social and economic progress and growth.

- 1. In Section II of the same title, faith in Christ, independently of denomination, is set as the sole condition of obtaining the Greek citizenship and enjoying all civil rights. This faith, and indeed in its Orthodox version, was the common element which determined the shared*



sense of belonging and what clearly differentiated the rebelling Christians from their Ottoman oppressors. It also was the powerful factor of unity in the new Greek society which was in the process of being formed and became part and parcel of the national identity. Moreover, the reference in question enabled the integration, in the years that followed, of Roman Catholics in the Greek State as native Greeks, since they constituted a respectable and particularly versatile section of the population of the islands of the country, and also of Protestants. It was reasonable and perhaps imposed both by political reasons and for the sake of the preservation of social cohesion that anyone of a different religion should not be considered Greek nor should civil rights be recognized to him or her.

2. *One of the prerogatives that Mehmed the Conqueror ceded to the Church as provisional leader of the nation after the Fall of Constantinople was the exercise of the judicial power and the smoothening out of the legal disputes between the Greek “milliyet” and the Ottoman Empire. This power was exercised by the Patriarch at the highest level and, for secondary matters of a civil nature, by local Bishops or even priests. Through the adoption of the Provisional Mode of Governance of Greece the judicial power passed from the remit of the Church on to the independent judiciary. This was an entirely reasonable decision made within the framework of the distinct functions and the limitation of the involvement of the Church in matters pertaining to the operation of the state.*

E. In conclusion, the constitutional framers were inspired by profound faith in God and recognized that the outcome desired was achieved thanks to His succour and not thanks to the war preparation, which was rudimentary and insufficient. It was with Him they left the fate of Greece, praying that “the Power of the Most High may raise those ruling and those ruled to His wisdom, so that the progress and happiness of the Fatherland be consolidated”.