

The Greek tragedy deepens

*Retired Greek diplomat **Leonidas Chrysanthopoulos** spoke at CIB's 2017 rally. This is a translation of an interview he recently gave to Afrique-Asie of France. Ambassador Chrysanthopoulos was the Secretary General of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization from 2000 to 2012. He represented Greece at the UN, was director of the diplomatic cabinet of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Director general of EU affairs. His diplomatic experience extends from Toronto to Warsaw and from Erevan to Beijing. He is fighting today against the policy of reducing the sovereignty of his country by the EU and NATO.*

Afrique-Asie: Last January and February massive demonstrations were held in Greece in support of the return of national sovereignty and the protection of territorial integrity of the country. After almost two centuries from the uprising of Greece against the Ottoman occupation, it seems that your country remains to be decolonised. How have we reached this point?

Ambassador Leonidas Chrysanthopoulos: The issue is that we liberated ourselves from the Ottomans only to find ourselves under the influence of the great Powers of the time. Our first leader of independent Greece was Ioannis Kapodistrias, who as foreign Minister of Russia played an important role in creating the Swiss constitution. However, we assassinated him and he was replaced by a Bavarian king. Our first political parties were called the Frenchofile, the Russianofile and the Englishofile – all under the influence of the country they were named after.

During WWI, Athens and Piraeus were bombed by the French fleet in order to force the pro-German king to abdicate and Greece

to join the allies. Then the fascist pro-German prime minister of Greece Ioannis Metaxas on October 28, 1940 opposed Mussolini when he wanted to march through Greece. Greek armed forces threw the Italians back to the sea from Albania.

All through WWII our resistance was under British domination until the USA took over in 1947. The NATO-supported military dictatorship collapsed after seven years in 1974, but at a tragic cost, since almost half of Cyprus was and still is occupied by Turkey.

In 1976 we opted to join the EEC mainly for political reasons: to protect our fragile democracy and Greece from Turkey. We joined the EEC in 1981 and right after PASOK of Andreas Papandreou came to power, for a few years Greece enjoyed an independence that it never had before. The US bases were removed, Greece became an important actor in international politics respected by the non-aligned movement.

Papandreou had made world headlines by organising in 1983 a meeting between Mitterand and Gadaffi in Crete.

From the 90s onwards a united Germany became gradually the driving force of the EU which from an EEC of the people became the EU of the bankers. And as the EU supported the bankers, Greek politicians became professional liars and were elected on programs that were never kept. George Papandreou was elected in 2009 with the slogan that there were sufficient financial resources to allow the country to progress, only to put Greece under IMF and EU control with the Memorandum of 2010 which never was voted by Parliament and was instrumental in bringing financial and social collapse.

The left party SYRIZA was elected with the slogan we will denounce the Memorandum and thus save Greece. When Brussels started blackmailing the Tsipras government, he called for a referendum which by a large majority – 62% – rejected further austerity measures. During a summit in Brussels right after

the July 2015 referendum, Germany blackmailed Tsipras by telling him that if he did not do what Berlin wanted, then they would create a bank run in Greece and further chaos. Tsipras got scared and instead of cutting off diplomatic relations with Germany for a period, he succumbed, and since then has been following orders from Brussels to the detriment of Greece and its people.

A-A: Why is the Turkish army once again displaying aggression towards the Greek islands of the Aegean? Do you see a link between the Turkish officers that have asked for asylum in Greece and the Greek officers being held in Turkey?

LC: Erdogan is taking advantage of the fact that Greece and its people are exhausted by the austerity measures imposed upon it. Furthermore he is going through a phase of illusions de grandeur and wants to recreate the Ottoman empire. Statements like "We had territories that we lost but that we may get back, we will shed our blood to make Turkey a great country again and if necessary we shall shed the blood of others" are not helpful for consolidating peace and stability. I do not see a link between the Turkish officers who have applied for asylum and the two Greek officers that were apprehended, but I cannot exclude the thought that the Turkish authorities make such a link. The issue of the Greek islands was first raised by Turkey in 1973 when oil was discovered in the Aegean. From 1923 until then it had never been an issue. Now this aggression is within the policy of taking advantage of an exhausted Greece.

A-A: Why is President Erdogan opening the issue of the Lausanne Treaty by threatening directly his Greek neighbour? Is it a simple populist manoeuvre?

LC: I think that my answer to the previous question covers this question. It is not a populist manoeuvre. The Lausanne Treaty has been violated ad nauseam by Turkey mainly as far as the minority issues are concerned. The recent invasion of

Syria also constitutes a violation of this Treaty which defines the eastern borders of Turkey. Turkey thinks that by reopening the Lausanne Treaty it may get a better deal than now. A few islands for example.

A-A: What is the situation of the Greek Armed Forces ten years after the gradual descent of your country to hell? Do you think that they are in a position to defend the integrity of national territory?

LC: It is true that the eight years austerity measures have taken a toll on the Greek armed forces but not to the extent that it cannot fight. Our air force is one of the best of NATO since we have been practicing everyday chasing away Turkish warplanes violating Greek air space and our Navy is in good condition. Overall the Greek Armed forces are in a position to defend the territorial integrity of our country.

A-A: What is NATO doing to help Greece and Turkey, who are both members, to find a peaceful solution to their differences?

LC: Absolutely nothing, since NATO does not deal with differences between its members. It only deals with differences between a NATO member and a non NATO country. We saw that in 1974 when Turkey invaded Cyprus and NATO stayed out of the issue.

A-A: Do you think that the Greek army can play a role so that your country can recover its sovereignty or it might awaken the old demons of the dictatorship of the colonels?

LC: The Greek Armed Forces should remain vigilant to defend our borders against external threats. And when the Greek people attempt to overthrow the Athens régime, the Greek Armed Forces should refrain from following possible orders to defend the regime.

A-A: Returning to relations between Germany and Greece, how

would you describe them today?

LC: I would say that they would fit more to relations between a colony and a colonial power. With one difference, of course. In the colonial period, the colonial power would defend the colony against external threats which is not the case today. But between Greek and German people there are no problems. At least for the moment.

A-A: Where are we on the question of German reparations for the damages inflicted during the German occupation of Greece from 1941 to 1944?

LC: There is no movement there also. Germany considers the issue closed, since Athens did not raise it at reunification. The Athens regime does not want to anger its masters by raising it. There is, however, one item that even Germany has difficulty in avoiding. That is the loan that was imposed upon Greece by Germany and Italy in 1942. According to that, Greece was obliged to pay 1.25 billion drachmas per month for costs of occupation to Germany and Italy. In 1964 it was estimated that the total amount that Germany owed to Greece was about 400 million DM. The loan is something separate from reparations which are still outstanding according to Greece. Yet the Athens regime is not doing anything about it. The value of the loan today, if it were to be repaid by Germany to Greece, would cover the so-called debt amounting to 300 billion euros.

A-A: You write: "At the moment, capitalism without frontiers is crushing everything in its passage and that our leaders have chosen for a 'globalisation' benefiting only the banks and the multinationals, they are presenting the collapse of our countries as a natural phenomena that is unavoidable. At the same time they are constantly repeating to us that the "minorities" (ethnic, national, religious) of Europe "are awakening" and that their claims are legitimate but result in the weakening of the sovereignty of the State to which they

belong.”

Once again the Balkans are on the verge of a war, fomented by a reunited Germany. With the objective to strangle Russia, NATO is advancing its pawns, breaking the engagement made to Gorbachev at the moment of the German reunification. The last pieces of former Yugoslavia are being integrated, one by one into NATO. You condemn the breaking up of the Balkans to non-viable client states, while at the same time pointing your finger at Germany. According to you, what is the interest of Berlin in defending such a policy since the collapse of Yugoslavia in 1991?

LC: It is actually the same policy followed by Hitler before and during WWII, to control energy resources. By controlling the Balkans, Germany has easy access to the energy resources in the Middle East, Eastern Mediterranean and Azerbaijan. Not only that, but it will be easier for Berlin to transfer the oil or gas to Germany.

A-A: Do you think that the Macedonian question is on the way to be solved since the leaders in Skopje agreed to change the name of their international airport and their highway?

LC: No. It is more complicated than that. Already there are problems. Greece insists that the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) changes its Constitution so that all nuances of irredentism are removed. Skopje refuses to do it. The vast majority of the Greek people are against ceding the name Macedonia to Skopje, a name that has belonged to Hellenism for the last three thousand years. Then if you give a country a false history, you create the conditions for a failed state. Also the politicians of FYROM do not believe in their “Macedonian” heritage. I have heard the present President of FYROM Ivano, saying to a Georgian vice president in 2012 that the word Macedonia derives from the Turkish word dunya-which means world!!!!!! Then why should FYROM enter NATO? What is the danger? where is the danger? Of course the West has so

easily forgotten the promises given to Gorbachev in 1991 that NATO will not be enlarged if Germany is allowed to be reunited. And we saw what happened. All the former Warsaw pact countries are today NATO members.

A-A: Is the current Greek Government in a position to defend Cyprus given the ambiguous positions of prime Minister Tsipras on this issue?

LC: Diplomatically it can but militarily it is not easy because of the distance. But that goes for all governments. We saw what happened in 1974. It was the coup d'état against Makarios organised by Athens that provoked the Turkish invasion. When the military regime collapsed the armed forces in Greece were in disarray and in no position to defend Cyprus. However if the circumstances were different it would have been very difficult for the invasion to have successfully taken place, taking into consideration that the Turkish air force sank one of their destroyers.