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The Greek Freedom Fighters of 1821

and their Status under International Law
The views expressed in this article are those of the author

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The Greek Freedom Fighters of 1821

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We are in 1821 in the Ottoman Empire, an empire which consisted of many nations under the Turkish yoke. Subject people, especially Greeks, were not pleased with the existing regime and for this reason many unlucky risings aiming to national independence, took place. The final and successful uprising started that year. The Greek State symbolically celebrates it on 25 March, the same date that Orthodox celebrate Annunciation. The two celebrations share a common point for the Orthodox Greeks: the beginning of the rebellion betokened the freedom of the nation, and Annunciation announces the coming of Sava Christ.

The 1821 rebellion was clearly a national insurrection of the Greeks. Despite the fact that its moving spirits tried to raise many subject nations only the Greek nation finally responded. Rigas Fereos verses in Thourios (war song) which had been sung for almost thirty years before the rebellion and set the fire that led to the 1821 explosion describe the situation: “Bulgarians and Albanians, Serbs and Greeks, islanders and inlanders with a common urge for freedom, lets take our swords.” Another feature of the revolt was that it was an overall rebellion with no social elements. All Greeks, poor or rich, revolted. Especially at the sea the rebellion started from rich islands, such as Hydra and Spetses where their inhabitants lived in luxury, and islands which were enjoying great profits from the Ottoman state such as Chios, Samos and Symi. It is worth mentioning that the rich Greek ship-owners of the time, gladly offered their ships to the fight and headed the revolt as Admirals, although after the liberation they were totally destroyed financially.

The 1821 Rebellion didn’t start at a favourable period. International circumstances were against such movements. The Great Forces were dominated by the spirit of the Holy Alliance which favored the Ottoman Empire although it was not their interest. Some governments, like France, hoped through the Greeks, for the fall of Napoleon. Metternich, having the participants’ tolerance at the conference, addressed Kapodistrias – the first governor of Greece – who was at that point representing Russia and told him:

“Europe doesn’t know Greeks! It recognizes only the Ottoman state, under the sway of which are the Greeks who...”

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...the Alliance decided to support the Turkish positions. A General Makryannis also expressed the same beliefs in his memories by stating:

...More and more states with the exception of course of the Ottoman Empire to fight for national independence. Finally, the Geneva Convention of 12th year later, on 18 January 1823, Great Britain recognised it, while later, on 25 March, it recognised Greeks as...the rebellion and the starting-point of the contemporary Greek State. Greek people recognise it and are thankful to the...“.

...The news of the Greek rebellion reached the representatives of the Great Forces, while conferring in Ljubljana (Laibach...its success would mean the subversion of the status quo and possibly the breaking of the Ottoman Empire with unexpected...live in Greece…

...The Greek Freedom Fighters of 1821. In order though to be more objective, we should not ignore although it is unpleasant, the fact that a few declensions from the rules took place. Rarely the local elderly notables or...interpreted the existing laws as they liked and made the relevant decisions...the Administration would not be in a position to give public guarantee (garantie publique) to the foreign states as a base for all diplomatic bonds”...without ever bending to the Ottoman State. The folk songs of the time prove that all Greeks admired them; they were...appearance differed from other Greeks. When the Revolt started many patriots joined them. Their leaders were called...– military leader - and were enjoying their partners' respect. Their post was mainly inherited from father to son, if the...local law. His comrades killed him! There was iron discipline and the respect of the customary law was very strict...of the customary legislation on the sea war law dedicated to Admiral Andreas Miaoulis, by count Alerino Palma di Gesnola...of prize was also instructed to be exclusively restricted to the cargo which had a proven hostile...of the law of armed conflicts during the fight against the Turks, is...of the Greek territory, emphasised to the Minister for Interior the direct need to secure “rule of law” otherwise...
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Nowadays, law of armed conflicts is well-known and without being an obstacle to the enforcement of the principles of the Geneva Conventions. It is right to consider that this constitutes the most obvious progress of international law. Throughout the years, faith to it was a common feature of all brave soldiers and civilised people. Its approved respect was a sign of the justice and of the culture of the fighting sides. It is unwritten simply because everybody believed so strongly in it that there was no need for registering it. Dion Cassious, referring to Greek antiquity, mentioned that it was not necessary to write the law of the war as it is respected even in time when other peoples' ferocity was out of question. The fighters of the Greek Regenerations have set the same example.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Approximately seventy unsuccessful revolts took place. The most important ones were in 1463 when Sparta and Arcadia ... in 1808 Thessaly revolted again. VOUKALIS D., Synoptic Political and Constitutional History of Modern Greece, page 19.


Before the Revolt, maritime commerce had gradually passed to the Greek hands. See ALEXANDRIS K.A., The Renaissance of our Maritime Force during the Turkish Occupation, p. 113-26, 159 et seq.

ROUKOUNAS E., Diplomatic History 19th Century, p. 40.
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Vienna Congress with the participation of the diplomatic representatives of the European states apart from the Ottoman Empire. NIKOLAOU CH. International Political and Military Treaties – Agreements and Conventions, p. 59 (ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΥ Χ. Διεθνείς Πολιτικές και Στρατιωτικές Συνθήκες – Συμφωνίες και Συμβάσεις, σελ. 59).


Convention on Laws and Customs of the War on Land and Regulation Attached, article 2 of Regulation, See PERRAKIS S., MAROUDA M. – N. Armed Conflicts and International Humanitarian Law, p. 311 (ΠΕΡΡΑΚΗΣ Σ., ΜΑΡΟΥΔΑ Μ. – Ένοπλες Συρράξεις και Διεθνές Ανθρωπιστικό Δίκαιο, σελ. 311 (ΒΔ. 21-12-1900, ΦΕΚ Α’ 223/1901)).


See PAPADATOU P., Terrorism, p. 23-31 (Βλ. ΠΑΠΑΔΑΤΟΥ Π., Η Τρομοκρατία, σελ. 23-31).


U.N. General Assembly, Res. 3114 (XXIX), 14 Dec. 1974


Naval blockades of the Turks on 2 May and 23 August 1821 were officially recognised. See IOANNOU K., External Policy and International Law in ‘21, p. 61-4 (ΙΩΑΝΝΟΥ Κ., Εξωτερική Πολιτική και Διεθνές Δίκαιο στο Εικοστό, σελ. 61-4).

See: KOKINOS D., Greek Revolution, vol 2, pp 444-6, (ΚΟΚΙΝΟΥ Δ., Ελληνική Επανάστασις τόμος 2, σελ. 444-6), MICHAILIDIS Ch., “Greece's Obligation to Haiti” Newspapers Eletherotypia, 14 January Athens 2010 (ΜΙΧΑΗΛΙΔΗ Χ., «Το Χρέος της Ελλάδας προς την Αϊτή». Εφημερίδα Ελευθεροτυπία, 14 Ιανουαρίου, Αθήνα 2010.)
During the Revolt, Turks considered Greeks as armed insurgents, subjects of the Ottoman State. While trying to put down the resistance, the Turks treated the Greeks with utmost cruelty. According to a Greek contemporary account, the Turks would sentence all the adult males to death, should be killed, children and women enslaved, their belongings distributed to the Muslims and their houses burnt.

See IOANNOU, op.cit. supra. footnote 15, p. 60-1.

Even the operation in Lebanon (1826), far away from the national territory which was to become free, was included to them. The operation also of setting fire to the Turkish ships in Alexandria, Egypt from Kanaris was also part of them.


The distinguished legist and politician Count Palma (1776-1851) was a philellenist and member of the Greek Committee in 1821. He was a member of the Greek delegation which attended the International Peace Congress in the Dutch city of The Hague in 1829. In the Congress, he argued for Greek independence and against the Turkish dominance in the Balkans. Palma was also a member of the Greek Constituent Assembly of 1828-29, which declared Greek independence and drafted a constitution for the future Greek state.


It refers to the important book of Swiss Emmerich de Vattel (1714-1767) entitled Droit des Gens ou Principes de la loi Naturelle Appliques a la Conduite et aux Affaires des Nations et des Souverains (1758).

Verse from "Thourios" Rigas Fereos.

PAPARRIGOPOULOS, op.cit., footnote 2 p. 453-62

ALEXANDRIS, op.cit., footnote 3, p. 210-302


ΔΕΝ ΕΙΝΑΙ ΑΠΟΚΑΛΛΟΜΕΝΟΣ ΟΛΟΚΛΗΡΩΤΙΚΑ ΜΑΘΗΜΑΤΙΚΑ ΚΑΙ ΔΕΝ ΕΙΝΑΙ ΑΠΟΚΑΛΛΟΜΕΝΟΣ ΟΛΟΚΛΗΡΩΤΙΚΑ ΒΙΒΛΙΑ.
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See KONSTANTINIDIS T., "Piracy and Raid and the Greeks" (ΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΙΔΗ Τ., Η «Πειρατεία και Καταδρομή και οι Έλληνες», σελ. 102).

CF. Bluntschli, Das Vokerrecht der zivilisierten Staaten als Rechtsbuch dargestellt, Einleitung S. 9 und 10, from XATZILOUKA, op. cit. supra, footnote 5, p. 17.

Dion Cassius, a Greek istorian, born at Nicæa, in Bithynia, about A.D. 155; went to Rome, and served under a succession of emperors; wrote a "History of Rome" from Αέneas to Alexander Severus in 80 books, of which only 18 survive entire.