

Push to ban pro-Kurdish HDP erodes Turkey's political pluralism further

Thu, 2021-03-25 21:05

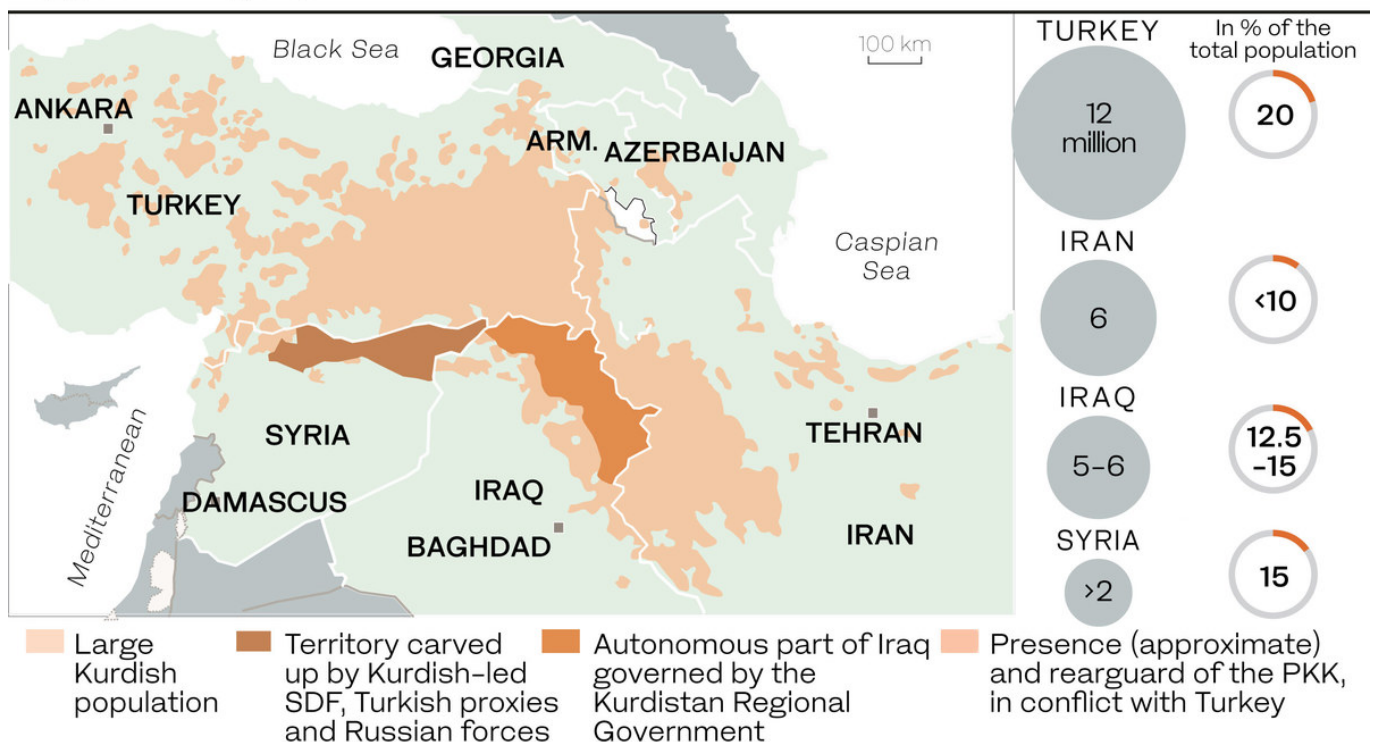
MISSOURI, USA: Every March, Kurds, Persians, Azeris, Tajiks, and others celebrate Newroz, the spring equinox festival of the new year. In the Kurdish version of Newroz, legends surrounding the festival focus on a mythical blacksmith of antiquity named Kawa, who saved normal people from a terrible tyrant. The Kurdish version of Newroz therefore comes replete with connotations of freedom from tyranny, oppression, and injustice.

If ongoing developments in Turkey serve as any indicator, it will take more than a couple of Newroz festivities to undo the Erdogan government's myriad efforts to silence the country's Kurdish population. Erdogan has, in recent years, turned the Turkish judiciary into his praetorian guard. Public prosecutors and sycophantic judges are now deployed to silence any and all dissent in Turkey.

The latest incident involves the country's Court of Appeal, which upheld a two-and-a-half year prison sentence against Parliamentarian Omer Faruk Gergerlioglu. Gergerlioglu, of the pro-Kurdish People's Democracy Party (HDP), was convicted of "making terrorist propaganda" for retweeting a T24 news story in 2016 about the Kurdish conflict and the collapse of the peace process.

KURDS IN TURKEY AND BEYOND

Living mainly in four countries, 25-35 million Kurdish people constitute the region's fourth biggest ethnic group



With his conviction upheld, the Turkish Grand National Assembly – controlled by Erdogan’s party and its far-right ally, the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) – promptly stripped Gergerlioglu of his parliamentary immunity. Gergerlioglu was not even a member of parliament in 2016, he was elected in 2018, and the story he retweeted was never censored by the state or relied upon to punish the T24 news agency.

The story quoted a Kurdistan Workers’ Party leader, who called for a resumption of peace talks with Ankara and Turkey’s then-interior minister, who rejected such calls. To most observers, it would seem completely bizarre to accuse, much less convict, someone of “making terrorist propoganda” for retweeting a story.

The journalist who wrote the piece was not charged with anything, nor was the media company that ran it.

Today’s Turkey functions under different rules, however. Gergerlioglu’s real crime was his frequent criticisms of the Erdogan government and its human rights record. A former pulmonologist fired from his job as part of a broad emergency decree crackdown following the 2016 attempted coup in Turkey, Gergerlioglu also worked as the head of an Islamic human rights association.



Women chant slogans and hold pictures of pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party’s (HDP) co-leader Figen Yuksekdag, who is detained pending a trial on terror charges, on March 5, 2017, at Bakirkoy, in Istanbul. (AFP/File Photo)

As part of his work championing human rights, Gergerlioglu drew attention to the many abuses in Erdogan’s Turkey. His reports and statements regarding the police’s frequent strip-searches of female detainees seems to have

particularly irked Erdogan and his government.

Unsurprisingly, foreign observers reacted negatively to the persecution of Gergerlioglu. Among others, the EU special rapporteur for Turkey stated that “stripping him of his parliamentary immunity was illegal, immoral and a cowardly act.”

Amnesty International issued a statement saying that “the lifting of the immunity of the opposition deputy Gergerlioglu because of his unjust conviction is a moment of shame.”

THENUMBER

97.1% of Turks do not believe the judiciary is independent

Also last week, the government arrested Ozturk Turkdogan, head of the Ankara-based Human Rights Association. Gergerlioglu and Turkdogan are only two of hundreds of peaceful opposition members in Turkey who now face Erdogan’s praetorian legal system.

Most, though not all, of those being imprisoned on trumped-up charges come from the HDP, including most of the HDP’s leaders such as Selahattin Demirtas, who has been imprisoned since 2016. Most recently, Erdogan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) and MHP government began signaling its intention to completely close down and ban the opposition HDP party.

The HDP, after the last couple of elections, has become Turkey’s third-largest party, receiving close to 12 percent of the national vote and holding 55 seats in the Turkish Grand National Assembly. The US State Department spokesman called moves to close the HDP “a decision that would unduly subvert the will of Turkish voters, further undermine democracy in Turkey, and deny millions of Turkish citizens their chosen representation.”



Protesters throws stones towards a water cannon during a demonstration in Diyarbakir on December 22, 2015 to denounce security operations against Kurdish rebels in southeastern Turkey. (AFP/File Photo)

Similarly, Nacho Sanchez Amor, the EU's special rapporteur for Turkey, reacted to the possibility of the HDP's closure negatively: "Unapologetically (moving) towards the end of pluralism. What reaction does Turkey expect now from the EU? A positive agenda?"

Erdogan's government reacted to the criticism by rejecting "foreign interference" in Turkey's domestic political concerns. Turkey's Foreign Ministry said: "Everyone must wait for the ruling the Constitutional Court will make in this process. Commenting on an ongoing judicial process amounts to intervention in the judiciary."

The statement added: "We call upon those who act inconsistently and attempt to interfere with our internal affairs to respect the legal processes conducted by the independent judiciary."

These days, of course, almost no one thinks Turkey's judiciary is actually independent. This includes Turks. A 2016 public opinion poll conducted by the Eurasia Public Opinion Poll Center, conducted before the worst of the Erdogan government's moves to take over the judiciary, showed that "a total of 97.1 percent of Turks do not believe the judiciary in Turkey is independent and have no trust in the court system."



Supporters of pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) cheer around fire during a gathering to celebrate Nowruz, the Persian New Year, in Diyarbakir on March 21, 2021. (AFP)

The irony comes with the fact that in Turkey's previous more secular incarnation before 2002, the courts closed the Islamist political parties that Erdogan belonged to and even imprisoned him in 1998 for a few months when he was the mayor of Istanbul for reading a poem at a rally that was deemed too Islamist.

Back in those days, both Islamists and Kurds suffered the state's repression. A slew of both Islamist and pro-Kurdish political parties faced multiple closures since the 1970s until Erdogan's new AK Party arrived on the political scene, promising to put an end to such repression. After some 20 years in power, that promise now seems long forgotten.

The system has instead become even more repressive while only the names of those running it have changed. Turkey's rankings for civil and political liberties have fallen precipitously in the last several years. Freedom House gives Turkey 16 out of 40 points for "political rights" and 16 out of 60 for "civil rights."

According to Freedom House, "after initially passing some liberalizing reforms, the AKP government showed growing contempt for political rights and civil liberties, and its authoritarian nature was fully consolidated following a 2016 coup attempt that triggered a dramatic crackdown on perceived opponents of the leadership. Constitutional changes adopted in 2017 concentrated power in the hands of the president."

As a system, democracy is meant to promote social stability by giving people peaceful avenues to seek their political preferences. With mass incarcerations of political dissidents and looming closures of major opposition political parties, today's Turkey seems to be eschewing such an arrangement. The current president and his political allies can no longer imagine losing power, and the price for this unwillingness to give the opposition a fair chance at taking over will have to be paid for years to come by Turkey.

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[Israeli-owned ship hit by missile in suspected Iranian attack: Official](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Thu, 2021-03-25 17:07

JERUSALEM: A cargo ship owned by an Israeli company was damaged by a missile in the Arabian Sea on Thursday in what was suspected to be an Iranian attack, an Israeli security official said.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the ship was on its way from Tanzania to India and was able to continue its voyage after the attack.

The official did not provide further details.

According to Israel's Ynet news website, the ship sailing under a Liberian flag did not sustain serious damage and Channel 12 news reported the ship is owned by XT Management, based in the port city of Haifa.

Reuters could not reach officials at the company for comment. Israeli government officials had no official comment.

It comes about a month after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu blamed Iran for an explosion aboard an Israeli-owned ship in the Gulf of Oman.

The vehicle-carrier MV Helios Ray was hit between the night of Feb 25 and morning of Feb. 26 by a blast above the water line that a US official said ripped holes in both sides of its hull. An Israeli official said limpet mines were used.

Iran denied involvement at the time. "We strongly reject this accusation," said Saeed Khatibzadeh, spokesman for the Foreign Ministry in Tehran.



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UN, US, Russia and EU meet virtually on Israel, PalestiniansIsraeli strikes hit Hamas positions in Gaza: military

Turkish police detain 12 at Bogazici university protest, student group says

Author:

Reuters

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1616690640031648400

Thu, 2021-03-25 20:03

ISTANBUL – Turkish police detained 12 students at a top Istanbul university on Thursday during fresh protests, a student group said, nearly three months after they first rallied against the appointment of a rector by President Tayyip Erdogan.

The protests at Bogazici began in January and briefly spread in Istanbul and other cities in February, leading to the detention of 600 people and some clashes with police.

Videos released by the “Bogazici Resistance” student group on Twitter showed dozens of police in riot gear moving in on students trying to enter the campus.

The group said 12 people were detained as they tried to protest against a university investigation into a student for carrying a rainbow flag during the earlier demonstrations.

Seven students stood trial last week on charges of inciting hatred by displaying a picture which combined Islamic images with LGBT rainbow flags. When the image circulated on social media authorities responded with what the United States and the United Nations both described as homophobic rhetoric. Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu repeatedly labelled the students “LGBT deviants” and Erdogan praised his AK Party’s youth wing for not being the “LGBT youth.”

Vigils have continued on campus, with students and academics gathering daily to protest what they say was the undemocratic appointment of Melih Bulu, an academic and former political candidate, as rector.



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HRW: Turkey 'dismantling human rights protections' Turkish mothers' protest group faces trial

[After 200 years, Greek revolution still influences Athens-Ankara ties](#)

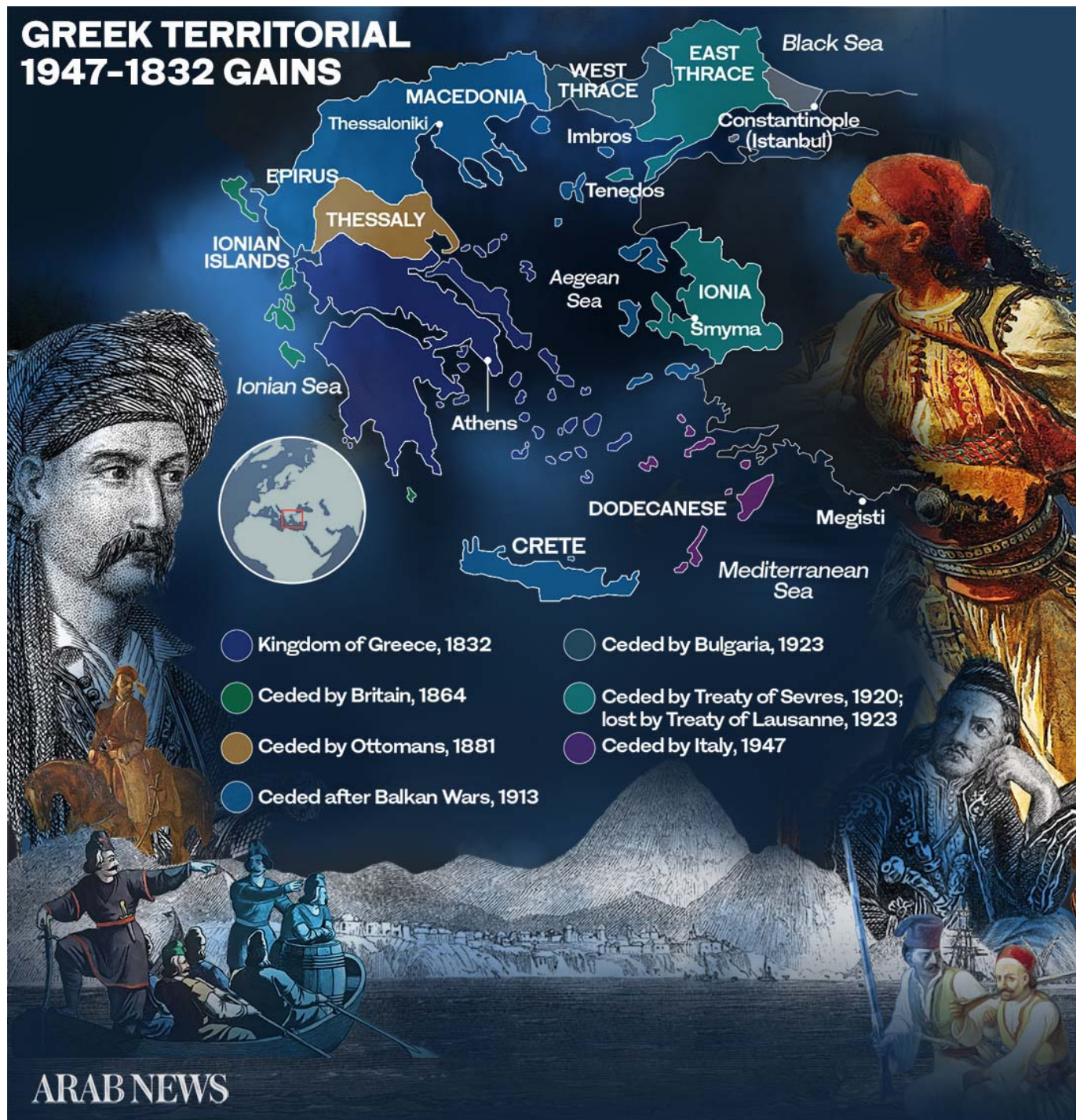
Thu, 2021-03-25 (All day)

WASHINGTON: This year is one of great symbolism for Greece. The country is celebrating the 200th anniversary marking the beginning of a nine-year campaign that led to the establishment of the modern Greek state in 1830.

Hundreds of events are planned mainly under the auspices of the Greece 2021 Committee set up for the occasion.

It aims to shed light on different aspects of the nation's re-birth and the successful campaign to determine its affairs independent of the Ottoman Empire. What was the Greek War of Independence, and how have Greek-Turkish relations been affected by its emergence?

To start with, it is important to stress that the nine-year process that led to the Greek state's modern formation was not a war of independence as conventionally understood. It is more accurate to depict it as a rebellion, indeed a revolution, since the rebels were far from constituting an organized army.



Moreover, no Greek state existed at the time, capable of fighting a conventional armed conflict against the organized Ottoman army and navy. Lastly, the revolution had multiple starting points because Greeks were dispersed in a large geographic area inside and outside of the Ottoman Empire.

To illustrate this point, the start of the Greek Revolution occurred in February 1821, when Alexandros Ypsilantis published a manifesto for a call to

arms in today's Romania. He argued that the time had come for Greeks, wherever they were, to fight "for Faith and Homeland."

Ypsilantis was the head of the Friendly Society (Filiki Eteria), an organization set up by members of the Greek diaspora in Odessa in 1814, that became a focal point to aid the revolution through financial, logistical and political support.

The rebellion Ypsilantis envisioned was suppressed pretty quickly, as the revolutionaries were inadequately prepared and thus easily defeated after the czar's intervention and support of the central government of the Ottomans.

Yet the torch was carried on by rebels further south, in Peloponnesus, as the revolution was eventually crowned with success in 1830 when the full independence of the Greek state was recognized by the then great powers of the UK, France and Russia. In contrast with 1821, Europe's powers realized that Greek autonomy and its eventual independence served their interests better than open suppression.



Greek War of Independence 1821 – 1829, Turkish general Ibrahim Pasha in front of his tent, wood engraving after drawing by Jeanron, circa 1827. (Alamy)

Further, a great wave of sympathy among Western public opinion towards the revolutionaries became widespread by 1825-1826. It had religious connotations as Christians were fighting Muslims (at least in some theaters of conflict), yet was mostly the result of the successful attempt to link ancient Greece's image in the eyes of the west with the modern-day struggle of its successors on the ground.

The link was flimsy in ways more than one, but that counted for little. Philhellenism became a powerful force that ultimately allowed the revolutionaries to reach their cherished objective. By 1832, the Ottoman Empire also accepted the inevitable that Greece was now a member of the community of nations.

Its struggle became a rallying cry for other populations in 19th-century Europe. Poles, Hungarians and many others rightly saw in the Greek Revolution the passionate expression of the ideals of the French and American Revolutions and proceeded with the formation of their own states over time.

The Greek Revolution of 1821 is therefore a momentous event in world history, far bigger in consequences than the small state that was formed. For the revolutionaries and the political class of the emerging state, however, their priorities were more immediate: How to make sure Greece would get bigger and bring under its jurisdiction the majority of Greeks still subject to Ottoman rule.

To do so, they needed to fight the Ottomans, not once but many times over until the boundaries of the country were firmly set in 1947 and after the Dodecanese Islands became part of the state. Two decades earlier, the Lausanne Treaty of 1923 ended the war between Greece and Turkey, setting the boundaries of the latter country.

Turkish leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his comrades-in-arms had earlier rejected the failed Ottoman Empire. Importantly, the nationalist fervor that led to military victory and a new set of diplomatic accords with Greece and other European powers had been originally inspired by the same nationalist zeal that had engulfed their Greek counterparts a century earlier.

Modern observers of Greek-Turkish relations often have difficulty in understanding the intensity of their present-day disputes, unaware of the centrality of the “other” in the historical process that led the two states to come into being.

As I have argued elsewhere, it is precisely their historical state formation, including identity formation and the setup of national consciousness in opposition to the other side (rather than on its own terms) that accounts for the emotional outbursts and limited rationality in sustainable conflict resolution mechanisms characterizing a large part of their conflict-ridden relationship.

How so?



Museum employees unwrap an artwork depicting Greek revolution heroine, Laskarina Boukoulina in the new museum dedicated to the Philhellene foreign

volunteers who fought and died for Greece on March 12, 2021. (AFP/File Photo)

From the 1820s and for an entire century, one side's victory in the battlefield (or, more often, the diplomatic decision-making circles of the great powers, on which the Greek state was clever enough to rely) was the other side's loss. Starting from 1830 and until the Treaty of Lausanne was signed, generations of Greeks were determined, if not always battle-ready, to liberate "enslaved Hellenism" from Turkish rule, or Tourkokratia.

In the process, they also managed to incorporate other parts of today's Greece from countries such as the UK (such as the Ionian Islands in 1863). The next step followed in 1881, when again the great powers convinced the Ottomans to cede Thessaly and a part of Epirus to Greece. By the early 20th century the Ottoman Empire's decline had accelerated and Greece used that to its advantage.

The Balkans Wars of 1912-13 pitted Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria against the Ottomans, as well as each other, over Macedonia and parts of Epirus. The union of Crete with Greece was also completed at that time.

Greece had managed to enlarge its territory by more than 60 percent and its desire to liberate the "enslaved brethren" appeared close to success by 1921. The crumbling Ottoman Empire, combined with the diligent policies pursued by Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos, allowed Greece to reach its peak by 1921.

Yet 10 years of continuous war had taken its toll and the irredentism manifested in the Greek army's march deep into central Anatolia came to a crashing halt once Ataturk launched a devastating counterattack. Lausanne put an end to hostilities but not before Greece and Turkey embarked on a population exchange, with religion the main criterion for the exchange.



Greek Prime Minister Constantin Caramanlis (L) and Turkish Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel (R) talk during the first Greek-Turkish summit since the Cyprus war ended at Palais d'Egmont in Brussels, Belgium, on May 31, 1975, to find a solution between the two countries mainly on the Cyprus problem.
(AFP/File Photo)

Vestiges of Hellenism remained in the new Turkish Republic, as the patriarchate was allowed to remain in Istanbul, and a sizable Greek minority with it, too. In the years that followed and once the war was over, Greek-Turkish relations have been met with ebbs and flows.

Tensions have been high more often than not, especially over Cyprus, which remains divided to this day and overshadows attempts for a normalization of relations. However, it is also important to stress, given the centuries of coexistence between the two peoples, that their relations have also gone through periods of accord and mutual respect.

Immediately after the war, Ataturk and Venizelos established cordial relations, not least due to their genuine desire for lasting peace and Ataturk's revolutionary reforms. In 1934, Venizelos even proposed that the Nobel Peace Prize be given to Ataturk.

Friendly relations turned sour after the passing of the two leaders and did not return until the late 1990s with another period of rapprochement. The long shadow of history, with 1821 at its heart, continues to affect Greek-Turkish relations in multiple ways.

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TIMELINE OF MODERN GREECE



1821-1831

Greece wins independence from the Ottoman Empire.



1912-1913

First Balkan War: Greece gains Epirus, Macedonia, Crete and the North Aegean Islands from the Ottomans. **Second Balkan War:** Greece gains West Thrace from Bulgaria.



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Greece marks 200 years of independence.



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World War I: Greece joins the Allies, Ottomans join Central Powers. Ethnic cleansing of Greeks in Anatolia.



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Greco-Turkish tensions flare over Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean maritime zones.



1919-23

Greco-Turkish War: Greek invasion of Asia Minor defeated by Turkish forces. Greece and Turkey exchange populations.



2010-present

Eurozone debt crisis: Greece granted loans and bailouts in exchange for harsh austerity.



1936

General Ioannis Metaxas establishes dictatorship.



1996

Greece and Turkey in military standoff over Aegean islet Imia/Kardak.



1940-1944

World War II: Fascist Italy launches failed invasion. Nazi Germany occupies Greece. Famine kills tens of thousands. British and Greek forces defeat Nazis.



1981

Greece joins EU.



1952

Greece and Turkey join **NATO**.



1975

New constitution declares Greece a parliamentary republic.



1967

Colonel George Papadopoulos seizes power in military coup.



1974

Turkey invades northern Cyprus after Greek-backed coup. Ioannidis government falls.



1973

Brigadier-General Demetrios Ioannidis overthrows Papadopoulos.

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How preservation of Greek culture made the 1821 revolution inevitableHow the Greek diaspora rallied to defend the 1821 War of Independence

[How the Greek diaspora rallied to defend the 1821 War of Independence](#)

Thu, 2021-03-25 (All day)

WASHINGTON, D.C.: It is difficult, if not impossible, to understand the revolution that led to Greek independence without considering the diaspora's role. Some aspects of its influence are straightforward and direct, reflecting its active involvement in the Greek cause.

The actual call to arms was propagated outside Greek territory by Alexandros Ypsilantis in February 1821. He traveled from the Russian Empire to Ottoman territory, specifically Moldova, where he called for self-determination. The revolution was formally launched in Iasi in eastern Romania on Feb. 24, 1821.

It is noteworthy that Ypsilantis was head of the Friendly Society, a secret organization set up by Greeks abroad with the aim of achieving self-determination. On the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the Greek Revolution, and in recognition of the diaspora's contribution to Greece, a proposal has been tabled to celebrate Feb. 24 as Diaspora Day.

Individual acts of rebellion and representation aside, there are deeper reasons that make the diaspora a protagonist of the Greek Revolution. Over time, elements of the diaspora got exposed, and actively contributed, to the spread of new, radical ideas inspired by the American and French revolutions.

Their prominent economic status in the Ottoman Empire, their trading skills and their advanced educational levels became a rallying cry in support of the Greek cause, both for their countrymen and the high diplomatic courts of foreign powers, especially the likes of Russia and the UK.

But how did the diaspora come to play such a central role in the revolution, and what factors account for its prominence?

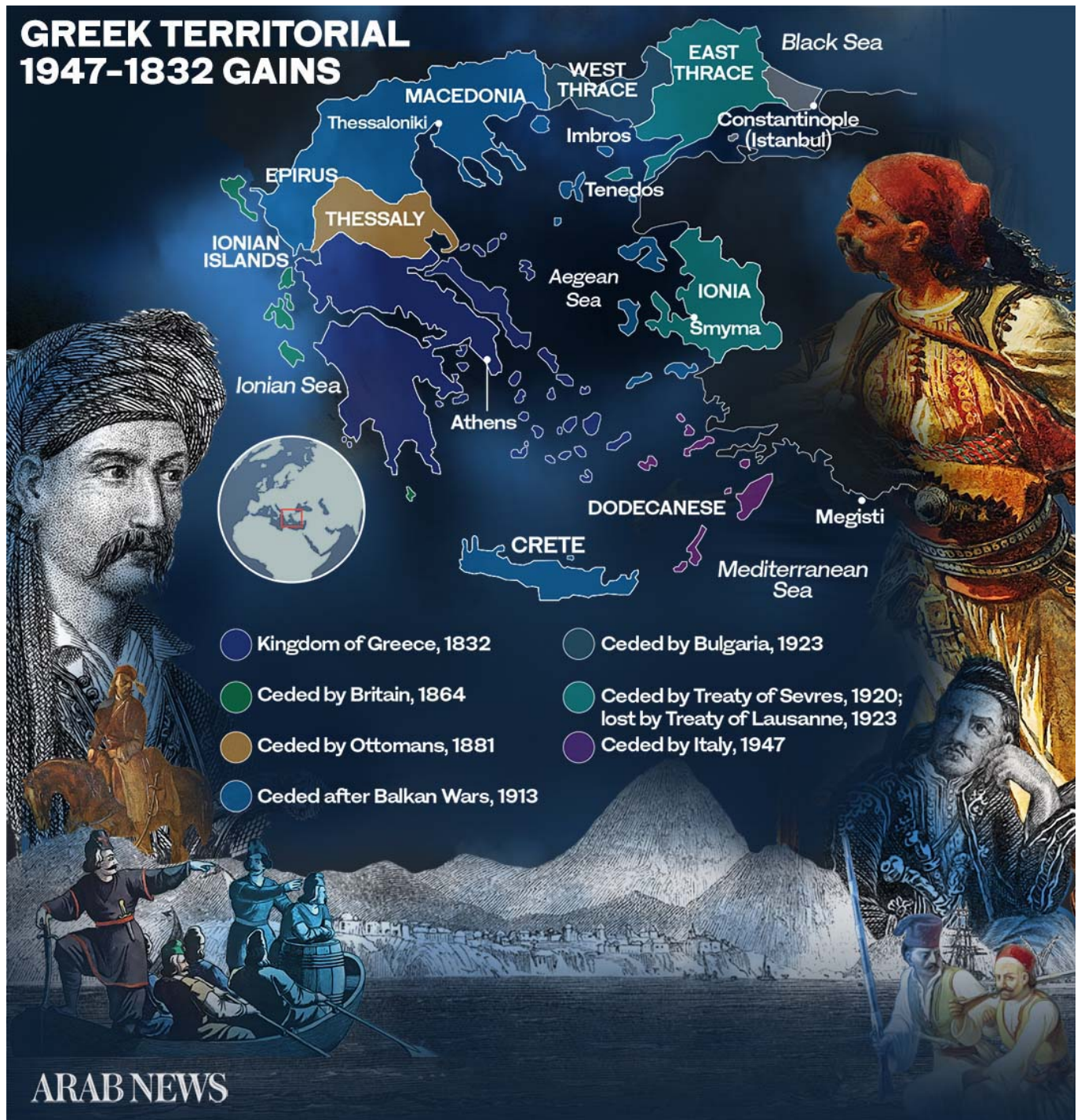


By the 18th century, Greeks residing in the Phanar (Fener) district of Istanbul, the spiritual center of the Orthodox Church, had acquired powerful positions in the Ottoman administration. Well-educated and having adopted a cosmopolitan approach, the Phanariots were able to acquire administrative positions in the empire, particularly in today's Romania and Moldova.

This gave them access to power, which they combined with the tactics of the great powers to undermine the Ottomans and acquire self-determination. A concrete example is the 1770 uprising in Peloponnesus, which the sultan was eventually able to crush.

Known in Greek historiography as the Orlov Affair, this was an attempt to achieve self-determination under the leadership of the Orlov brothers, highly ranked Russian navy officers who sought to implement the Russian plan of revolt against the Ottomans.

Although unsuccessful, the revolt underlined the faith that many Greeks had in Russia as a potential liberator, not least due to the strong religious bond of the two sides and their mutual desire, at least during certain time periods, to weaken the sultan.



Important as the Christian Orthodox faith was in bringing together Christians to revolt against the sultan, the contribution of secular nationalists was equally powerful.

In the 18th century, and especially after the 1774 Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca – which brought an end to the Russian-Ottoman War and allowed for unfettered access to the Bosphorus Strait by Christian ships – Greeks were able to dominate the trade routes of the eastern Mediterranean.

Investing in education, many resided in various European metropolises of the time, such as Paris, Vienna, Marseille and Odessa. Major ports of the empire – especially Izmir, Chios and Thessaloniki – became the movement's center.

Their collective contribution to the pursuit of knowledge and science gave rise to the Modern Greek Enlightenment Movement, a school of thought inspired by the ideals spread by the American and French revolutions.

Normative principles of equality and justice entered their vocabulary and pushed them to translate and print, sometimes in secret, classic works of the antiquity and enlightenment. They admired Ancient Greece and its achievements, seeing them as the result of the creative pursuits of humanity when set free to explore, question and innovate.



Books on Greek Revolution by Samuel Howe, items and articles are displayed at the new museum dedicated to the Philhellene foreign volunteers who fought and died for Greece on March 12, 2021. (AFP/File Photo)

They also emphasized the need for widespread education among the Greek people, and sought to link the desire for cultural excellence with liberty and the freedom to pursue one's ambitions under conditions of equality.

Their approach soon led them to an inescapable conclusion: The Greek people ought to rise against the sultan and achieve self-determination in the name of progress and a desire to overthrow the conservative establishment that kept the masses trapped in prejudice and ignorance.

There is no better example of the Modern Greek Enlightenment and its influence than the works and deeds of Rigas Velestinlis (1757-1798). A

pioneer of the enlightenment, he found himself in Vienna by the time he was 30. He devoted himself to the cause of Greek independence, but did more than any other in brandishing the modern zeitgeist that the enlightenment era called for.

He edited the first modern Greek newspaper called Efimeris from Vienna, where he was able to settle at age 30. His vision of Greece's future was ecumenical and progressive, to the extent that many among the clergy condemned his revolutionary zeal.



Greek revolutionary hero Rigas Velesinlis, painted by Andreas Kriezis.
(Supplied)

Velesinlis called for an uprising of the people against the Ottoman yoke, not on the basis of nationalism – after all, he and countless others identified as Romios, a Greek Orthodox subject of the sultan – but by envisaging a confederation of the Balkan peoples, with Greece at its heart.

He went as far as to publish a draft constitution addressing the peoples of “Rumeli, Asia Minor, the islands of the Aegean and the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia.” In it, he called for a Balkan-wide republic guaranteeing equality and justice for all its citizens.

Going further, he stressed how equality was meant to apply to all, “Christians and Turks,” in a spirit of brotherhood and equality before the

law. Small wonder that the Greek patriarchate condemned Veletinlis as a dangerous utopian, endangering Hellenism – the national character or culture of Greece – and flirting with revolution and resurrection.

He was eventually captured by the Austrians in Trieste, and was killed at the hands of the Ottomans in Belgrade. Yet his vision of self-determination lived on, along with his persistent calls to heed the calls of liberty.

The Greek Revolution, like any major event, was the result of various forces, movements and motives. The struggle for self-determination, however, had begun much earlier than 1821, and was not necessarily expressed through the bayonet.

The role of the Greek diaspora, especially after the mid-18th century, in preparing the ground for the revolution in ideological, organizational and diplomatic terms is undoubtedly a central aspect of that era and a glorious chapter in Greek history.

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