

ABSTRACT
IMPACT OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION ON GREECE

Apostolos Ziros
Kennesaw State College

Greece, already in turmoil since the 1770s, became the first country to revolt successfully in the 1820s, with the coming of the Liberal Age. The French Revolution and the period of the Enlightenment which preceded it had a great impact on Greece.

First, there was an intellectual impact. The Greek Enlightenment preceded the Greek Revolution as in the case of the French. This was a period of the awakening of national consciousness among the Greek scholars. In the case of Greece, where there was no Renaissance movement as in the West, this period was of the utmost importance. The quick development of the urban commercial centers in the Greek Islands and the coastal areas around the Aegean created wealthy merchants who began challenging the leadership role of the established leaders.

The goals of the Greek Enlightenment were educational and political. In the educational sphere, scientific-oriented disciplines were introduced in Greek schools and the Greek language was purified. In the political area, the principles of benevolent despotism were applied in the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia by their Greek rulers. In sum, the Greek Enlightenment brought changes in the intellectual pursuits, the ways of life, the mores, and the aspirations in Greece.

Second, the military impact of the French Revolution upon Greece was equally strong. Greek ships were breaking the British blockade of the French ports during the early years of the French Revolution. In addition, not only contacts between Bonaparte, conqueror of Italy in 1797, and Rhexas, but also the actual presence of French troops in the Ionian Islands for more than a decade helped in bringing the ideals of the French Revolution very close to the Greek mainland. Furthermore, Greeks enlisted under the banner of General Bonaparte in Egypt and in Corfu. After their demobilization they propagandized the need for liberty and independence in Ottoman-controlled Greece.

Third, the French Revolution gave the Greeks political lessons as well. Rhexas Pheraios issued in 1793 his charter to the Greeks, based on the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. Rhexas and also Korais wrote martial songs which, like the *Marseillaise*, became the clarion call for freedom sung enthusiastically by all Greeks for thirty years.

The *Philiki Etaireia* (Society of Friends) was organized in 1814 as an underground to promote and prepare for a Greek Revolution. Their name

resembled with the official name of the Jacobins, Society of Friends of the Constitution. The membership in the Greek underground increased as a result of the economic recession following the end of the Napoleonic era in 1815.

The Greeks formed their first National Assembly in 1822 shortly after they declared independence. They did try to increase the importance of the legislative branch at the expense of the executive, with the French constitution of 1793 and 1795 serving as a model. This resulted in internal squabbles which eventually weakened the revolutionary struggle. Finally, in the judicial system the first independent Greek government decided to establish a centralized judiciary based on the French code of 1802.