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## KONSTANTINOS KARAMANLIS

1907 - 1998

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**K**ONSTANTINOS KARAMANLIS dominated Greek politics for the larger part of his political career in the second half of the 20th century, during which his prestige and reputation extended to Europe as well. He wielded supreme authority for a total of twenty-four years –fourteen as prime minister and ten as President of the Hellenic Republic. During this time he made a decisive contribution to the economic development and modernisation of Greece, and also to the establishment and smooth functioning of democracy. He was also the first to conceive the idea of Greece’s integration into the European Community, which he did much to promote and ultimately achieve.

Karamanlis was born in 1907 in the town of Serres in Eastern Macedonia, where he received his primary education. He attended high school in Athens and graduated from the Law School of Athens University in 1929. After practicing law in his birthplace, he entered politics for the first time in 1935 and was elected member of parliament for Serres in two successive elections. His political career was interrupted by the imposition of the Metaxas dictatorship on August 4, 1936, and by the Occupation of Greece from 1941 to 1944. It was resumed when the Greek Parliament began to function once more in 1946, and he was elected to it without break for five decades.

Karamanlis's creative work began when he first assumed the office of Minister of State in 1946, serving successively in the Ministries of Labour, Transport, Social Welfare, and National Defence. His tenure of the office of Minister of Public Works from 1952 to 1955 was of historic significance and the scale and importance of his achievements during this period are unrivalled. The experience and authority he acquired at this time led to his election as prime minister in October 1955. He founded the National Radical Union, which was successful in three elections – those of 1956, 1958 and 1961 –, and remained in power until 1963, when he resigned after a dispute with King Paul. The achievements of his term of office are impressive. An impressive economic leap forward was made that removed Greece from ranks of the underdeveloped countries and for the first time rid the country of recession and poverty. He also did everything in his power to achieve the social modernisation and cultural betterment of Greece and guarantee its security, at a time and in a geographical space that was highly sensitive during the Cold War. It was also thanks to Karamanlis's efforts that Cyprus was freed from the bonds of colonial rule and became an independent state in 1960.

After Karamanlis departed voluntarily from the political scene and took up residence in Paris –from 1963 to 1974– the political crisis intensified in Greece, culminating in the imposition of the Colonel's dictatorship on 21 April 1967. Karamanlis had perceived the impending threat to democracy and, after its dissolution, he threw his authority and judgement into the struggle against the junta, anticipating the establishment of democracy on a more secure basis. The confidence enjoyed by the majority of the Greeks in his person was confirmed in celebratory fashion on 24 July 1974, when, after the fall of the dictatorship, the entire Greek people welcomed him as a liberator and a guarantee of freedom and national dignity. Karamanlis became initially the leader of a Government of National Unity and subsequently Prime Minister. The new political party founded by him, Nea Dimokratia, won the support of a large majority and justified its expectations. Its successes include the uninterrupted functioning of democracy since that time, achieved through securing the necessary preconditions, introducing a new Constitution, and resolving the acute constitutional

issue. At the same time, Karamanlis reestablished the reputation of Greece and effectively defended the country's interests at international level. His strong presence on the international stage, combined with his positive contribution to stability at a peripheral level and to peace on a world scale, guaranteed a positive outcome to his efforts in the sphere of foreign policy. These efforts culminated in the acceptance of Greece as a full member of the European Communities.

Karamanlis's steadfast adherence to the idea of a United Europe became apparent at an early date: in 1959 he sought to associate Greece with the EEC. His insistence on a policy of close cooperation within the ranks of the western alliance was combined with his steadfast belief in the need to create a strong, independent Europe. On July 9 1961, Greece became the first Associate Member of the Europe of the Six. After the fall of the dictatorship, he renewed his efforts to secure full integration into the European Communities, and on May 28, 1979, in the Zappeion Hall in Athens, he personally signed the Treaty of Accession of Greece.

Konstantinos Karamanlis's long political career was crowned by his tenure of the office of President of the Republic, which he held for two terms, 1980-1985 and 1990-1995. The main features of his tenure of the high office were a strict adherence to the respect of the constitution, a consistent stance above party disputes, the securing of the smooth succession of the parties in power, an attempt to defuse the passions of politics, and his contribution to the establishment of national unity and the strengthening of Greece's international authority. Though he finally departed the political arena three years before his death in 1998, Konstantinos Karamanlis had the satisfaction of achieving his major ambitions. He nevertheless continued to be concerned at the rate of progress towards European unification and at some of the unanswered questions regarding the future of mankind. "Mankind", he said in a speech delivered on the Pnyx in 1991, "has already entered a new phase of its history. It has entered the century of Democracy. Let us pray and hope that all human beings on earth will enjoy Liberty, and that, when they achieve it, they will use it wisely."